MONASH University

(*Social Work's Intervention into Rural Women's Empowerment in Australia and China)*

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Abstract

Countries differ in terms of their political, economic, social, and cultural structures. These differences generate the knowledge, value systems, and power networks of the local social work profession, which is demonstrated in complex social work practices. Through research exploring social worker's empowerment practices with rural women in Australia and China, discourses of social worker's professionalization, indigenization, internationalization, and feminist practices have been identified.

In China, interviews with social service practitioners in non-profit organizations, social enterprises, Civil Affairs Bureaus, and social work agencies present well-recognized altruism values. Practitioners in these organizations, who do not have professional social work education, are regarded as indigenized social workers. They actively engage in empowerment practices with rural women. Through participating in cultural recreational and educational activities, rural women service users feel satisfied and being empowered. However, the 'empowerment' practice that lacks a transformative and political view will create new inequalities. The workers in organizations that work specifically with women have stronger gender sensitivity than those in other organizations. Tensions, or paradoxes, identified by Chinese social work practitioners include: strong political promotion to the development of social work versus the autonomy of the social work profession; working for women versus working with women, the need of expanding services versus a lack of resources, and care versus control.

In Australia, rural social workers with professional social work educational qualifications, who are accredited by AASW, note that their pursuit of social work values such as social equality, justice, human rights, and empowerment result in an aim of transforming unequal societal structures. These values developed during their personal growth process, and were strengthened during qualified social work education. Some rural social workers who specifically serve rural women noted that their personal experiences and the feminist movements from the 1970s to the 1990s significantly influenced their gender perspectives and sensitivities, while others who engage in general social work practices did not demonstrate clear gender awareness. All Australian interviewees referred that empowerment relates to informing, educating, having an equal relationship with rural women service users, and policy advocacy. However, empowerment practices with rural women are also constrained by discourses of neoliberalism and managerialism, which often showed as the main paradox—care versus control.

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Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

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Social Work's Intervention into Rural Women's Empowerment in Australia and China

Contents

Introduction

Introduction to the study

This thesis explores the practices adopted by social workers in Australia and China to empower rural women. The research underpinning this thesis consists of an analysis of individual social workers, organizations, local area contexts, and the political, economic, and sociocultural structures within Australia and China – all of which interact to shape both the social work profession and culturally embedded empowerment practices. The focus on this complex area of practice necessitates the integration of knowledge from the fields of philosophy, sociology, anthropology, psychology, and history. The theoretical framework of structural constructivism, especially that developed by Pierre Bourdieu, is adopted in this research to systematically demonstrate the empowering practices engaged in by social workers which are themselves shaped by very different national contexts.

This research was undertaken over three and a half years, from 2015 to 2018. Firstly I conducted the fieldwork in China and then the fieldwork in Australia. In total I interviewed 27 social workers, and visited 7 organizations. In addition to the semi-structured interviews and fieldwork observations, my observations and reflections of studying in Australia as a Chinese student also provide significant research data. The research process has provided a magnificent journey for me to build self-understanding and to move through a period of self-transformation in a totally unfamiliar context. The PhD journey has been a process of continually learning, reassessing taken-for-granted ideas, reflecting on my identity and subjectivity, balancing my physical, emotional and intellectual development, and building my own logical understanding of my profession.

Before coming to Australia, I undertook a Masters and Bachelor's degree in social welfare in China. However I was unsatisfied with merely studying social welfare systems at policy level. I wanted to understand complex power relationships inherent in social welfare service delivery. I applied for PhD study specializing in social work and fortunately was accepted by Professor Margaret Alston to be one of her PhD students in the Department of Social Work at Monash University.

I grew up in a small town near the yellow river in Inner Mongolia Province in China. The close connection with nature resulted in my keen interest in rural society. As my supervisor Margaret Alston is an expert in gender study in rural contexts, I determined to research the empowering practices adopted by social workers in working with rural women. At that time, I was confused about the various discourses relating to social work's professionalization and indigenization and the cultural differences between nations that shaped not only the modern welfare system but also social work practice within

those systems. For this reason I determined to research and contrast social work practices in Australia and China, and to focus this study on an analysis of the practices adopted by social workers to empower rural women. Thus the title of my thesis is *Social Work's Intervention into Rural Women's Empowerment in Australia and China*.

In summary, the main research question is:

- How do social workers in Australia and China construct empowerment for rural women?
- Aiming at exploring, describing, analysing, and interpreting social work's empowering practices for rural women, the sub-questions are:
- What are social workers doing in these typical cases to empower rural women?
- What methods do they use?
- What are the outcomes of those empowering practices?
- What are the constraining factors to those empowering practices?
- What factors are enabling for social workers engaging in those empowerment practices?

This thesis is based on gender research in relation to social work and rural women's empowerment. To prepare this thesis I investigated feminist analysis and built my understanding of feminist standpoint theory. At first I focused heavily on feminist theories and built my understanding of societal gender structures through my observations from my daily life and work experience as a female and from viewing my female friends' experiences.

The reason for focusing on the concept of empowerment is based on my interest in how disadvantaged people could be empowered to make a better life under current economic and political structures in diverse modernization systems. Australia and China are both heavily invested in the economic competitiveness of globalization in order to pursue further modernization.[1] Thus part of my interest in undertaking this research has been to examine how different economic, political, sociocultural conditions within China and Australia influence the empowering practices adopted by social workers and to ascertain how social workers in Australia and China actively empower disadvantaged people under diverse the social conditions in China and Australia.

Findings of this research suggest that social workers in Australia are more influenced by their accredited social work qualifications, while those in China are more influenced by the organization they work in, and their attempts to empower women are restricted by the barriers inherent in government control underpinned by the belief in the overwhelming power of institutions, and the patriarchal culture. Therefore it appears that from a holistic perspective, empowerment is a cultural

[1] The detailed definition of modernization and modernity is included in Chapter 3 Theoretical Framework.

production and reproduction process, in which social workers are limited by the current economic, political and patriarchal structures, but also by variable acceptance of social equality, justice and human rights.

The main research theme—empowerment

As a contested concept, empowerment has complex and inherently paradoxical aspects. In terms of pursuing emancipation for marginalised groups such as women, minority ethnic groups, and poor and so on, empowering practices aim to transform unequal societal structures of gender, race, and economy (Gutierrez, 1990; Parsloe, 1996; Weissberg, 1999; Lee, 2001; Fook, 2002; Carr, 2003; Payne, 2005; Adams, 2013; Turner & Maschi, 2014). However, the dominance of neoliberal ideals in both countries facilitates an alternative emphasis on self-help, self-determination, and self-control (Parsloe, 1996; Cnaan, 1996; Fook, 2002; Parpart et al., 2002). These aspects are evident in organizations such as mainstream development agencies, neoliberal promoters, and other market-based experts who focus on the capacity of individuals to overcome their own difficulties within a status quo (Cnaan, 1996; Weissberg, 1999; Parpart et al., 2002; Ife, 2016).

At its strongest, empowerment focuses on raising the consciousness of individuals about unjust social structures and their interactions with these structures, and encourage individuals to take actions to strive for a better life by working for social reforms (Carroll, 1994; Lee, 2001; Carr, 2003; Adams, 2013) . At its weakest, empowerment is unquestionably used by very different institutions such as banks, semi-government organizations, and some non-government organizations to target the responsibility of individuals for their own life difficulties (Parsloe, 1996; Cnaan, 1996; Parpart et al., 2002) Thus, empowerment can easy become a tokenistic technique may not make a difference for people who are marginalized.

With respect to empowerment's early development in the 1970s, Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's work about critical consciousness, group dialogue, grassroots participation, and community work is concerned with empowering marginalized people by inspiring them to reflect on the oppressive social structures, engage in 'real' dialogues or communications, and participate in collective actions to challenge their unequal status (Freire, 1998, 2000; Parpart et al., 2002; Carr, 2003; Turner & Maschi, 2014). By virtue of his incisive understanding of widespread poverty during the economic depression period in 1930s in Brazil, Freire created the well-renowned *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Adams, 2013, p.62, Gu et al., 2014). The concept 'conscientization' was developed by Freire with regard to helping impoverished adult learners to better understand how they are posited and influenced by the economic-political context in which they live in (Freire, 2000; Lee, 2001, p.35; Adams, 2013, p.62; Carr, 2003; Payne, 2005, p.305; Turner & Maschi, 2014). Along with raising critical consciousness of the self

and the environment, the empowerment of powerless groups occurs across multiple dimensions: personal, interpersonal, organizational, and social-political (Gutierrez, 1990, p.149; Adams, 2013, p.87).

Barbara Solomon's ground breaking work relating to black women's empowerment is deemed as another origin of empowerment theory (Payne, 2005, p.296; Adams, 2013, p.61). Solomon emphasises that the aim of empowerment is to reduce the powerlessness experienced by stigmatized groups (Lee, 2001, p.33-34; Carr,2003; Adams, 2013, p.61). Empowerment is deemed as a process, and also an outcome of achieving socio-political liberation for marginalized groups (Gutierrez, 1990; Lee, 2001, pp.1-30; Carr, 2003; Adams, 2013, pp.1-60; Turner & Mascghi, 2014). Associated with the social movements in the 1970s such as women's liberation, the African-American civil rights movement, and students' protests aimed at achieving participatory democracy, empowerment theory progressed by absorbing and integrating ideas from feminism, critical theory, anti-oppressive and anti-discrimination theories. As Parpart, Rai, and Staudt (2002) point out: 'empowerment was initially associated with alternative approaches to development, with concern for local, grassroots community-based movements and initiatives, and their growing disenchantment with mainstream, top-down approaches to development.'

Nonetheless, there is no universal definition of empowerment. Empowerment is based on reflections and explanations of the phenomena of 'person-in-environment', which is a very complex concept within social work (Lee, 2001). The theoretical or conceptual approach to empowerment then is less predictable and determinative than a traditional formal theory (Lee, 2001, p.31). Given the vague and weak combination between personal and socio-political transformation, empowerment practices may be limited to only enabling powerless groups to improve their adaption to current society despite society being riven with unjust economic, political, and sociocultural structures.

Thus, indicating how radical concepts can be co-opted by oppressive systems, empowerment was adopted prominently by mainstream development agencies and neo-conservatives in the 1990s to emphasize its potential to improve productivity rather than to focus on its transformative and emancipatory aims (Parpart et al, 2002; Payne, 2005, p.299). In the 1990s, 'empowerment' was criticized as being a refinement of domination, taken as a rhetorical gesture by those in powerful position; and using a top-down approach in its adoption (Pease, 2002; Adams, 2003, p.18; Payne, 2005, p.302).

Thus a more complex understanding of empowerment and power, and a broader structural analysis is required to better empower and liberate marginalized groups (Healy, 2000; Fook, 2002, p.48; Allan, Pease & Briskman, 2003). Postmodern and post-structural perspectives have been adopted by various

social work theorists to examine power as being exercised rather than possessed, as both productive and repressive, and as coming from the bottom up (Healy, 2000, p.43; Fook, 2002, p.52; Ife, 2016). Fook (2002, p.54) especially praised the postmodern perspectives as providing a way to critically reflect on and analyse current power relationships between different interest groups and individuals, and to create a space to allow negotiations between different stakeholders, that may lead to changes in power relations and structures to empower all parties.

As described above, it can be seen that empowerment theory has gradually evolved by way of modern and postmodern theories that critically examine structural inequalities and oppressions experienced by individuals living in poverty, women, minorities, elders, disabled people and so on. However, a gap always exists between theories and practices. In empowering praxis, various factors such as practitioners, organizations, service users, and the economic-political context where practitioners and service users live, all shape the way theoretical conceptions of empowerment are interpreted and applied. Empowerment is a core value highlighted in the global definition of the social work profession (International Federation of Social Workers, 2014). Social workers believe in and adopt empowerment to challenge power and to address inequalities in societal systems (Ife, 2016; Kenny & Connors, 2017; Ledwith, 2011). In a similar way, attempting to empower powerless groups by following rules from powerful parties such as governments results in social workers having to deal with the tensions between whether their focus is on 'care' or 'control'. This tension also emanates from the power relationship between social workers as expert providers and service users as subordinate recipients.

When theoretical constructs of empowerment/disempowerment, care/control, and professionalization/indigenization interweave together, we can see the complexities inherent in the application of empowerment practices by professional or indigenous social workers in different economic-political and cultural contexts. Given this interest, I decided my PhD research would explore differences and similarities between how professional or indigenous social workers empower rural women in Australia and China.

Other core concepts of the research

It is of considerable importance to clearly list and define several core concepts of this research. As I have included explanations of these concepts in the research literature review, here I simply clarify their definitions and introduce how I define them.

Social worker

The social work profession developed in different ways in Australia and China. Thus, the two countries have a different understanding about what the social work profession is and who social workers are. Since 2008, workers who have more than two years' working experience of serving the public can sit

for the national social work examination in China.[2] If they pass that examination, they are awarded social worker accreditation by the nation. In addition, those who do not have social worker accreditation, but work in governmental institutions and civil organizations to serve people, are recognized as indigenous social workers in China. Because I have included indigenous social workers in China among my research participants, the broad definition of human service workers is used for social workers in China.

Social workers in Australia, however, who have professional certification from the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW), have all graduated with a bachelor or master degree in social work. I interviewed professional social workers to compare the differences and similarities between them and Chinese indigenous social workers. This is because, compared with China, the social work profession in Australia is assumed to be more advanced, having evolved over more than a century. In this research, social workers in Australia are defined as those who have graduated with a bachelor's or master's degree in social work. As they do not necessarily need professional certification from the AASW to work, they may or may not have that certification.

In this thesis, the terms social worker and social work practitioner are used interchangeably. These two terms only differ by comparison and in certain contexts. For example, Chinese social work practitioners are contrasted with Australian social workers who have graduated with a bachelor or master degree in social work; Chinese social workers who have social work bachelor degrees are contrasted with indigenous Chinese social work practitioners with or without national social work accreditation; 'social workers' working in social work agencies in China are contrasted with social work practitioners in Chinese governments.

Rural

In this research, rural is taken as a socially constructed term within a nation's pursuit of modernization, industrialization, and urbanization. Usually, people make distinction between rural and urban to understand what rural looks like. In the modern system, the distinction between rural and urban is also a basic structure. Therefore, in this research, rural is defined by referring to Australia and China's national demarcation of rural areas and is described in relation to its distinction from urban.

[2] The social work national examination (national examination) started in 2008 in China. The Ministry of Civil Affairs set up the Social Work Accreditation Office to decide social work accreditation policies and manage the national examination. The Ministry of Civil Affairs also set up the social work professional committee to design the content of the examination. Some social work professors from universities are members of that committee. Basically, there are three levels of accreditation: junior social worker, social worker, and senior social worker. The text for junior social worker has two subjects: Social Work Comprehensive Ability (primary) and Social Work Practice (primary). The text for social worker has three subjects: Social Work Comprehensive Ability (middle level), Social Work Practice (middle level), and Social Work Legislation and Policy. The text for senior social worker has one subject: Social Work Practice (high level).

Rural women

In a broad sense, the term 'rural women' in this research refers to women who have experienced living in rural areas in China or Australia and are impacted by the current rural restructuring of Australia or China. Like the term rural, the 'universal category' of rural women also has symbolic meanings. I do not intend to ignore the wide diversity of rural women, but it is difficult to cover all aspects of this diversity, so in this research I begin with rural women's common experiences of the current rural restructuring in Australia and China and explore how organizations serve different groups of them in local contexts.

Outline of the thesis

Chapter 1

Social workers are regarded as active agents in this research. Chapter 1 examines who are considered to be social workers in China and Australia and how the social work profession has developed in China and Australia. Chapter 1 is written according to an historical timeline relating to the introduction of social work practices' within China and Australia and their emergence from Britain and America. I demonstrate how social work is embedded in the welfare service delivery system in China and Australia.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 presents rural women's empowerment as a symbolic field. China and Australia share the commonalities of industrialization, market economy, urbanization, and patriarchal culture, and rural women in China and Australia face similar difficulties resulting from the fragility of rural economies, the geographical isolation of rural communities, the loose social connections within rural communities, and the patriarchal dominance in rural communities. Chapter 2 explores the structuring and restructuring of 'rural' inherent in China's and Australia's pursuit of modernization and the kinds of services that have been implemented by different types of institutions for rural women.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 specifically explains Bourdieu's theoretical tools of habitus, field, capital, doxa, practice as a cultural production and reproduction process, and introduces the concept of reflexivity. In addition, the particular utilization of these theoretical tools and concepts of power and structural discourse in this thesis is closely examined in Chapter 3. This is a significant chapter as it informs the structural framework of this thesis. Chapter 3 introduces the theoretical umbrella that overarches the literature review and the findings and discussions of the research.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 illustrates the methods used in this research in detail. It presents the research journey including the determination of research titles, aims, and questions; the research design including sampling, research interviews and the process of fieldwork. I outline relevant theories and Bourdieu's theoretical tools of structural constructivism; the methods of summarizing the literature review and the process of data analysis.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 presents the data on two Australian organizations where a number of social workers form the basis of the workforce —Votes for Indi (V4I) and the Centre for Non-Violence (CNV). These two organisations are used as cases in this research. Data analysis is based on four themes—what is empowerment; how to empower; enabling factors emerging from empowerment; and barriers to empowerment. The exploration of these four themes facilitates attention to four sub-research questions. The discussion section in Chapter 5 contrasts the similarities and differences of social workers' empowering practices in V4I and CNV, and links these similarities and differences with V4I and CNV's organizational structures, social work's development in Australia, and social conditions in Australia.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 introduces data from five Chinese organizations. As it is argued that most indigenous social work practitioners in China are not familiar with the concept of empowerment, the practices adopted by social workers in those five Chinese organizations are contrasted with the empowering practices of the two Australian organizations. Qualified Australian social workers are considered in this research to understand the nature of empowerment and to work to empower service users. In Chapter 6, I demonstrate that Chinese social work practitioners use similar empowering skills as qualified Australian social workers. The discussion section of Chapter 6 illustrates the similarities and differences between the empowering practices adopted by social workers in those five Chinese organizations, and examines these similarities and differences within organizational structures, social work's development in China, and social conditions in China.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 provides a discussion of the important issues raised by this thesis. In Chapter 7, the overall similarities and differences of social workers' empowering practices in Australia and China are systematically reviewed and explained according to the economic, political, and sociocultural structures of Australia and China. An ideal empowerment model is explored based on organizational and social worker professionalism to provide suggestions for social workers to better empower

disadvantaged people – especially women. Empowerment practices in Australia and China occur within a cultural production and reproduction process, with contradictory understandings of care and control within the current social-economic systems adopted within Australia and China.

Chapter 1: Social work's development in China and Australia

Introduction

This chapter aims to introduce the development of social work as a profession in China and Australia. Social workers are considered as active agents in practices of empowering powerless groups (Parsloe, 1996; Lee, 2001; Fook, 2002; Ledwith, 2011). Empowering practices are associated with theoretical constructs of power, care/control, and professionalization/indigenization. Therefore, it is important to explore how these concepts are progressed during the development of the social work profession in China and Australia and their influence social workers' empowering practices in these two countries.

At first, the focus of this chapter is on explaining the development of conceptions of empowerment/disempowerment, power, care/control, and professionalization/indigenization in the social work field, and introducing how these concepts are adopted in this thesis. Thereafter, the development processes of the social work profession in both China and Australia are examined in detail to uncover specific power dynamic in relation to empowerment/disempowerment, care/control, and professionalization/indigenization.

Critical Social Theory

In the social work field, substantial explanations and reflections of the dichotomy of conceptions of care/control, empowerment/disempowerment, and professionalization/indigenization are addressed by critical social theories (Healy, 2000; Fook, 2002; Allan, Pease & Briskman, 2003; Mullaly, 2003; Ferguson & Woodward, 2009; Pease, 2017). Critical theory is generally considered as coming from the thoughts of a school of Western Marxism known as the Frankfurt School and has evolved with radical theory and feminism since the 1960s (Mullaly, 1997; Healy, 2000; Fook, 2002; Allan, Pease & Briskman, 2003; Payne, 2005). Closely linking with Marxism, critical social theories adopt a radical lens towards problematic societal structures such as capitalism, patriarchy, racism, colonism and imperialism that cause exploitation and oppression to disadvantaged groups such as women, people in poverty, disabled individuals and other minorities groups (Allan, Pease & Briskman, 2003; Payne, 2005; Ferguson & Woodward, 2009). According to Payne (2005, p.227), 'radical and critical theory are transformational, proposing that social work should seek to change the way societies create social problems; they are also emancipatory, being concerned with freeing people from the restrictions imposed by the existing social order.'

Since the late of the nineteenth century, social work has developed its critical or radical tradition of understanding the influence of social environments in individuals' lives (Midgley, 2001; Ferguson & Woodward, 2009; Fook, 2016). The vigorous Settlement Movements in Britain and America at that time, is an example of early critical social work practice that focuses on working with disadvantaged groups in communities to challenge unjust social structures (Ferguson & Woodward, 2009; Fook, 2016). From 1960s, a distinct body of critical theories emerged and were largely promoted in social work practices (Healy, 2000; Fook, 2002; Allan, Pease & Briskman, 2003; Mullaly, 2003; Ferguson & Woodward, 2009; Pease, 2017). This is associated with the emerging welfare states after World War II, and worldwide radical social movements targeting the liberation of people from poverty, discrimination, and oppression (Healy, 2000; Fook, 2002; Ferguson & Woodward, 2009; Dillon, 2017). From 1960s to 1970s, there were student protests against war and authoritarian government, black American's rebellion towards racism and women, gay people and other minority groups' movements against societal inequalities and oppression (Ferguson & Woodward, 2009). From the 1960s to the 1980s, social work theories and practices were especially influenced by the vigorous feminism that significantly challenged the patriarchal structure viewing men as dominant and women as subordinate (Collins, 2000; Healy, 2000; Fook, 2002; Carr, 2003; Ferguson & Woodward, 2009; Turner & Maschi, 2014).

The distinct body of radical and critical practice theories from 1960s to 1980s raised radical critiques of social work (Healy, 2000; Ferguson & Woodward, 2009). Radical and critical theory reject the interpretation of social problems as personal faults. Therefore, they criticize the focus of traditional social work practice is on individual culpability (Healy, 2000). In addition, the main emphasis of radical and critical theory is to challenge and transform oppressive societal structures such as imperialism, racism, patriarchy, and social discrimination and exclusion (Healy, 2000; Fook, 2002; Allan, Pease & Briskman, 2003). Thus social workers were criticized as 'controllers' employed by states to ensure compliance with often unfair laws (Ife, 1997; 2016; Healy, 2000; Allan, Pease & Briskman, 2003; Payne, 2005). Furthermore, when social workers as experts or professionals to determine how clients solve personal problems, they are criticized as using expert power to disempower clients (Healy, 2000; Lee, 2001; Fook, 2002; Ife, 2016).

Along with those radical critiques, anti-oppression, anti-discrimination, empowerment, and advocacy theories and approaches are developed and used by social workers (Collins, 2000; Fook, 2002; Allan, Pease & Briskman, 2003; Payne, 2005; Ferguson & Woodward, 2009; Turner & Machi, 2014). Inspired by many of those social movements that developed in the 1960s and 1970s, social work built an overall orientation to liberate powerless groups through seeking to change oppressive social orders. In social work education, critical reflection or consciousness raising of oppressive social structures was given

significant attention, which was linked to Freire's well-known work in 1970 *The Pedagogy of the oppressed* (Lee, 2001; Adams, 2013; Nobe, 2017; Pease, 2017). Furthermore, collective approaches including group work and community work, became well presented in social work education and practices (Ferguson & Woodward, 2009). Values of empowerment, social justice, and social equalities significantly inspired social workers to understand the powerless groups' disadvantage in the economic, political and social contexts in which they live (Gutierrex, 1990; Lee, 2001; Fook, 2002).

Nevertheless, in the 1980s, along with the decline of radical social movements, radical social work faded. This is associated with economic rationalism or neoliberal ideology that was increasingly adopted by governments in the 1980s (Ife, 1997; Healy, 2000; Ferguson & Woodward, 2009; Nobe, 2017; Alston et al., 2018). Neoliberal governments reduced welfare spending and introduced a market system to manage the supply of welfare services. They believe that less government intervention can free the market, and thus bring economic growth (Ife, 1997; 2016; Healy, 2000; Alston et al., 2018). As a part of the welfare structure, social workers have to deal with significantly limited resources to help disadvantaged groups (Ife, 1997; Alston, et al., 2018). Given such limits, there was a decline of the radical approach of taking collective actions to resist oppressive power relations to substantially empower marginalized groups. Currently, along with nation states' ongoing pursuit of modernization, growth and economic prosperity in the competitive globalized system, nation states promote the ideology of economic rationalism and the power of the professions (Ife, 1997, 2016; Ledwith, 2011; Alston et al., 2018). Therefore, social workers continue to face tension in their roles as being in 'care' or in 'control' of disadvantaged groups.

Empowerment/disempowerment, care/control, professionalization/indigenization

As discussed above, empowerment is rooted in social work's radical and critical tradition that was evident in the 1960s and the 1970s. Empowerment occurs when unequal structural orders in relation to race, gender, and class are challenged and transformed (Lee, 2001; Fook, 2002; Turner & Maschi, 2014). Thus empowerment is different from enabing that only allows for limited personal development in adapting to the current social environment (Adams, 2013). Empowerment is a holistic approach that aims at achieving personal, interpersonal and social-political developments (Gutierrez, 1999; Parsloe, 1996; Robert, 1999; Payne, 2005). Social Workers regard empowerment as a value, an aim, and an approach to challenge inequalities in systems of power (Ife 2016; Kenny & Connors 2017; Ledwith 2011). Nevertheless, in the competitive globalized system, nation states adopt neoliberal ideology, prioritize economy over society and thus prefer a residual welfare system rather than a universal welfare system aimed at maximizing the social-welfare benefits of citizens (Lenard, 1997; Ife,

1997; 2016; Alston, 2018). As a consequence, social workers in many nation states, work with restrictive state regulations and resources and find it difficult to promote social changes to empower powerless groups. As a part of the welfare structure in capitalist system, social work thus inherently hold contradictions between care and control and empowerment and disempowerment.

Professionalism is another controversial topic in social work. The general critique of critical theory to professionalism relates to the unequal power hierarchy between social workers as experts dominating resources and determining the way of solving clients' personal issues and clients as subordinate (Healy, 2000; Lee, 2001; Fook, 2002). In a broader sense, social work has always dealt with arguments about whether it is a profession (Flexner, 1915; Greenwood, 1957), how it built professional power during the evolution of welfare system in nation states (Connor, 1995; Lenard, 1997; Ife, 1997), and what is the professional discourse in social work education and how this is adopted in multicultural and local contexts (Dominelli, 2008; Gray & Coats, 2008). Viewing indigenization as an adaptation process when external elements enter into diverse local contexts (Gray & Goates, 2008; Wang, 2001; Wei, 2015, p.8), it can be understood that the dichotomy between professionalization and indigenization exists in the relations between professional social work education and multicultural practices in local contexts, between professional social workers and local service practitioners, between the ideology and approach of social work as a profession that originated in Western countries such as Britain and America and the welfare provision ideology and approach in developing countries such as China. To summarize, the professional discourse of social work is changeable according to the context in which we use it. Usually when we discuss social work's development in developing countries such as China from a macro perspective, social work's professional discourse is contrasted to its indigenization process, i.e., how professional social work model, mainly from Britain and America, survives and plays a role in the different political and sociocultural environments in developing countries (Gray and Coates, 2008; Wang, 2001; Wei, 2014; 2015) Nevertheless, in practice, the conceptual construct between professionalization and indigenization is more likely to exist in different understandings of different groups such as social work academia in Western and Eastern countries, national and local governments, and social work practitioners and other human service practitioners in local areas.

The development of social work in Australia and China

The development of social work in China and Australia has been shaped by social workers operating within the differing economic, political and sociocultural systems and structures. I have therefore adopted a constructivist structuralism framework as the main ideological base for this research. Thus I have used a range of theoretical tools such as habitus, fields, doxa, capital, symbolic practice, and cultural reproduction drawn from the work of Pierre Bourdieu, a self-declared constructivist (Flecha

et al., 2001) who attempted to explain the interaction between human agency and structures. Generally speaking, I describe how social work professionals and practitioners have constructed social work practices in China and Australia. Therefore, the examination of the concept constructs of empowerment/disempowerment and care/control is mainly presented in interactions between social workers and states, and in the values and aims underpinning social work services at different times.

The use of concepts of professionalization and indigenization in this thesis, is based on the specific context in which they are understood. For example, social work can be viewed as a 'foreign profession' for both China and Australia because it is usually understood to have begun as a profession in Britain and America. China and Australia have their own indigenous historical, economic, political and sociocultural structures, and these have shaped the development of indigenous forms of social work. However, by contrast to China, Australia as a Western developed country, is deemed as sharing 'professional social work ideology and practices' with Britain and America (Yin, 2011). Furthermore, for instance in China, there are also contrasts between local government officials as indigenous social workers, social work graduates as professional social workers, the human service practitioners who attain social work accreditation as professional social workers from passing the national social work examination and those who do not have social work accreditation as indigenous social workers.

To conclude, this chapter explores who are social workers in China and Australia, what kinds of social work practices are implemented by them and how they are engaged in developing social work as a profession in the changing political, economic, and social cultural structures of Australia and China.

Development of social work in China

Introduction—the end of the nineteenth century

The introduction of professional social work to China can be traced back to the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, that is, the end of the Qing Feudal Empire and the beginning of the Republic of China (1912–1949). During that period, Chinese people suffered heavily from both external invasions and internal class conflicts, and this was accompanied by the collapse of traditional agricultural society and the emergence of an industrial society (Dong, 2005). Systematically, the democratic republic replaced the feudal empire; a commodity economy overtook the agricultural economy and became dominant; complex social differentiation developed between various social groups including industrialists and businessmen, intellectuals, soldiers, workers, migrants, landowners, peasants, beggars, gangsters, bandits, rural tyrants; and ideologies of democracy, science, and communism spread widely. Dramatic transformations of social structures, social identity, public value, and public lifestyle brought major social problems that facilitated the introduction of professional social work from Western countries (Wei, 2015, p.88).

Western missionaries

At that time, in order to promote their religion, Western missionaries were involved largely in providing social services and social education to Chinese people. John Stewart Burgess obtained a master's degree in sociology from Columbia University in America in 1909 and came to China in the same year as a Christian missionary to work in the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in Peking. The YMCA actively carried out charity activities such as adopting orphans and opening a porridge house; they advocated for changing bad social habits such as gambling, superstition, and foot-binding of girls; and engaged in social education such as setting up schools and providing various types of community education (Lin, 2013).

In 1912, Burgess launched the Student Social Service Club to organize young students to conduct social services and social reform. This is the start of the development of professional social work in China (Wang et al., 2014, p.7) because Burgess attempted to normalize and systematize the provision of social services and the training of service practitioners through reference to temporary social work practice and training in America. In 1922, Burgess advocated for Peking University to set up a faculty to foster a group of professional social service practitioners for American institutions in China (Wang et al., 2014, p.8). In 1925, the Sociology and Social Service Faculty was launched at Peking University, with courses in Social Work Methods, Social Work History, Social Work for Male Children and Young Females, Medical Social Service, Work with Criminals, Sociology Research, Community Problems, Social Organization, Social Service Practice in Parish, and so on (Wang et al., 2014, pp. 8-9). Burgess made significant contributions to the development of social work practice, education, and research in China. He is deemed by today's Chinese scholars to have been a social work professional (Lin, 2013).

Idea Puritt is as famous as Burgess in the Chinese social work field. Puritt's parents were Chinese Southern Baptist missionaries. She grew up in a coastal town in China. After Puritt gained her bachelor's degree from Columbia University Teachers' College, she returned to China in 1912 and worked as a teacher until 1918. She then went back to America and studied social work in Boston. Thereafter, she was hired by the Rockefeller Foundation as the head of the Department of Social Services at Peking Union Medical College Hospital (PUMCH) where she remained until 1938. Led by Puritt, workers in PUMCH established social history records for patients, dealt with patients' problems from the perspective of people-in-environment, and utilized ecological system theory and casework skills to deliver services (Wei, 2015, p.97). In 1925, Puritt accepted social work students from Peking University on placement in PUMCH (Wang et al., 2014; Wei, 2015). She also taught the subject Medical Social Service at Peking University (Wang et al., 2014). As a professional social worker trained in America, Puritt made important efforts to spread contemporary social work theories, skills, and values from America to China.

Chinese practitioners

Explorations in urban areas

Like Western missionaries, there were Chinese pioneers who participated in launching social institutions and providing social services for vulnerable Chinese people in the beginning of twentieth century. Because their practice contained some characteristics of professional social work practices, today's Chinese scholars recognize it as Chinese indigenous social work (Wang, 2013).

In the early twentieth century, Xilin Xiong was the premier of the Republic of China. After he was forced to resign his government position, he founded Xiangshan Loving Comprehensive School (XLCS) in 1920 to adopt orphans and poor children (Wang, 2013). Xiong advocated for a comprehensive education model rather than a simple charitable model (Meng & He, 2012). Therefore, there was not only a kindergarten, a primary school, a high school and a college in XLCS, but also small factories and farms for students to learn working skills to meet society's needs (Wang, 2013). Xiong and workers in XLCS endeavoured to help children in an interactive system including family, school, and society to achieve children's integrated development (Meng & He, 2012). In addition, Xiong worked together with several social work professionals and opened XLCS as a placement place for social work students from Peking University (Wang et al.,2014).

The Rural Construction Movement from the 1920s to the 1930s

In contrast with urban practitioners, some Chinese intellectuals and industrialists made a vigorous attempt at social reform in rural communities. Their efforts are known as the Rural Construction Movement from the 1920s to the 1930s. Characteristics of a professional social work service can be identified in their practices, and today's Chinese scholars deem their practices to be Chinese indigenous social work practice (Meng & He, 2012; Lin 2013; Wang et al., 2014; Wei, 2015).

Y.C. James Yen

Y.C. James Yen gained his bachelor's degree in politics and economics from Yale University in America. In 1920, Yen went back to China and worked for the YMCA in Shanghai to promote folk education in China. In 1926, together with a group of sociology and social work professionals from universities and other social activists, Yen introduced the Folk Education Movement (FEM) in Ding Prefecture in Hebei Province (Wang et al., 2014; Wei, 2015). He suggested that Chinese rural society had four main 'illnesses': ignorance, poverty, weakness, and a lack of public spirt (Lin, 2013; Wang et al., 2014; Wei, 2014; 2015). Thus, he made four 'prescriptions': literature education, livelihood education, health education, and citizenship education (Wei, 2014,p.198) to revive politics, education, the economy, health care, and ritual in rural communities (Wang, 2013). Yen spoke about the principles of the FEM (Wang et al, 2014, p.10):

People should be taken as the centre of achieving the country's prosperity; practitioners need to go to local communities to make investigations and engage with local people to solve issues in communities; practitioners need to build trust relationships with local people; practitioners need to work with and learn from local people; practitioners should not be prejudiced against local people; our aim is to change the society rather than adapt to it; rural construction is a way to help people improve their capacities to make better lives; practitioners should take responsibility for what they say.

It can be seen that the principles and methods of the FEM are similar to the ethics and approaches of the Settlement Movements that spread in Britain and America in the 1920s. Nowadays, Yen's folk education is still promoted by many scholars in China, and also well received by many developing countries such as the Philippines, Columbia, and Ghana.

Suming Liang

In contrast to Y.C. James Yen, Suming Liang was educated traditionally in China. Liang's father was a worker employed by the Qing Feudal Empire to write, translate, and revise files. Thus, Liang grew up in an environment of traditional Chinese culture, and was edified by the philosophies of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism (Meng & He, 2012; Lin, 2013; Wang, 2013).

At the end of the nineteenth century, Chinese intellectuals were involved in a fierce debate about whether to deny or apply Western culture in China. Rather than totally denying or accepting Western culture, Suming Liang attempted to reconcile Chinese traditional culture with Western culture (Chai, 2003; Meng & Lin, 2015). This type of ideology is recognized as the New Confucianism in China (Chai, 2003). As a representative of New Confucianism, Liang deemed that culture was the basis of social structures (Wei, 2014; 2015). Therefore, he was committed to rebuilding the collapsed Chinese social structures by reforming Chinese culture (Wang, 2013; Want et al., 2014; Meng & Lin, 2015). Liang proposed the construction of an ideal modern culture—the 'reasonability culture' that he believed was better than the Western 'rationality culture' (Meng & Lin, 2015). Liang pointed out that the Western 'rationality culture' focuses too much on pursuing objectivity and maximum economic benefits without considering 'emotional reasons' (Meng & Lin, 2015). Liang considered that 'reasonability' is more like a capacity to judge between right and wrong within a framework of moral values. In comparison with industrialized civilization, or 'rationality culture', he believed Chinese traditional culture such as Confucianism and Taoism has the advantage of placing a high priority on moral values to achieve 'reasonability civilization' (Lin 2013; Wang et al., 2014; Wei, 2014, 2015; Meng & Lin, 2015). He very much admired, however, the Western ideology of democracy and science (Lin,

2013; Wei, 2014; 2015). Thus, he made many efforts to construct grassroots organizations in rural communities to pursue community democracy (Wang, et al., 2014; Wei, 2014; 2015).

In order to put his ideology into practice, Liang worked with a group of Chinese intellectuals to conduct a rural construction movement in Zhouping Prefecture in Shandong Province from 1931 to 1937. They tried to provide education for rural people to improve their 'reasonability'; they assisted rural people to build grassroots organizations to achieve democracy; and they taught rural people scientific agricultural techniques (Lin 2013; Wang et al., 2014; Wei, 2014, 2015; Meng & Lin, 2015). Nevertheless, Liang said in a lecture in 1935 (Meng & Lin, 2015, p.10):

> *We have two big difficulties for our rural construction: one is that we aimed at reforming social structures but depended on the current system; another one is that we tried to engage a rural social movement but rural communities were not active at all.*

It seems that Liang's social reform practices in rural communities share similarities with the social work practices of the Settlement Movement. Today's Chinese social work professionals believe that Suming Liang provided an important way of understanding the social work values of social equality, justice, empowerment, and human rights, and a way of practising these values in Chinese indigenous environments (Meng & He, 2012; Lin 2013; Wang et al., 2014; Wei, 2014, 2015; Meng & Lin, 2015).

Placements for university social work students

All the above-mentioned practitioners were involved in providing practice placements for social work university students (Wang et al., 2014). At that time, there were dozens of universities, such as Peking University, Jinling College, and Fukien Christian University, offering social work courses (Dong, 2005; Wang et al., 2014; Wei, 2014; 2015). Some universities launched organizations or started social reform movements in urban or rural communities to satisfy their students' practice needs. Many social work students who graduated from these universities made contributions to the development of social work in China. Zhiang Jiang is one of them, and is well known by Chinese social work academics because of his book—*Social Work Guide Book*. Initially, most of the teachers who taught social work courses were foreigners (Wang et al., 2014, p.14), but the Republic of China (RC) government gradually took back power in the education field, and many Chinese sociology scholars started taking charge of teaching social work courses after 1928 (Wang et al., 2014, p.14). They added courses such as Sociology, Social Psychology, Anthropology, Philosophy History, Social Systems, and Chinese Histories to help students understand the structural issues within contemporary Chinese society (Wang et al., 2014, p.14). During this period, sociology theories and social work techniques were integrated in the training of professional social service practitioners.

Public services conducted by the government of the Republic of China (RC) and the Chinese Communist Party

In the 1930s, the RC government strengthened its dominant power and aimed to involve civil institutions in its social welfare system (Lin, 2013). From 1941, the Social Department of the RC actively encouraged civil institutions to register under its scheme and issued policies relating to social service, social service practitioner training, and the establishment of social organizations (Meng & He, 2012; Lin, 2013). In 1945, the first social work journal in China—*Social Work Communicating Monthly Journal*—was merged with The *Social Construction*, which was managed by the Social Department (Meng & He, 2012). In addition, the Social Department also engaged in designing social work accreditation examinations and training its workers in psychology and casework skills (Lin, 2013). The RC government regarded social work as an applied science to promote its social management.

At the same time, the Chinese Communist Party conducted works such as public education, health care, disaster relief, women and children's protection, and social reform in its revolutionary bases. These works were called civil affairs works (Meng & Luan, 2016) and were viewed as similar to the social work practice undertaken by Western missionaries in contemporary China. Nowadays, the civil affairs work implemented by Chinese governments is still recognized as a type of social work practice in China. Like the RC government, the current Chinese government led by the Chinese Communist Party incorporates professional social work in its administrative welfare system, to use social work to improve its social management, and to stabilize society.

Comparison with the development of social work in Britain and America

It can be seen that the development of social work in China in the early part of the twentieth century shares similarities with that of Britain and America. In the nineteenth century, in most Western countries, rapid industrialization and urbanization brought serious problems such as poverty, unemployment, crime, homelessness, pollution, drug addiction, illness, frequent work injuries, and intense conflict between workers and employers. As most Western nations had not established systematic welfare systems to deal with these problems, various social groups, including Christians, middle-class women, and professionals such as doctors or teachers, worked in the charitable sector and social education to help the disadvantaged. In 1869 and 1877, the Charity Organization Society (COS) was established in London in Britain and in Buffalo in America to holistically coordinate various charitable organizations' services to vulnerable people. In contrast with the COS, the Settlement Movement was more focused on challenging unequal structures, such as social discrimination and severe class division, through community education and community reform (Fook, 2002, Ferguson & Woodward, 2009). During the Settlement Movement, service practitioners and service users lived in

the same community. Thereafter, professional training was provided by schools for service practitioners in charitable organizations. In 1910, Columbia University and Chicago University opened social work courses. In 1917, Mary Richmond proposed the definition of social work, and the theory of and approach to casework. In the 1920s and the 1930s, professional social work education and praxis based on theories of psychological analysis and ecological systems were introduced (Wei, 2014; 2015; Wang, 2014). From the 1930s, along with the establishment and development of a modern welfare system, governments and capital markets in Britain and America became dominant forces in the development of the social work profession.

To summarize, the history of the development of social work in China from the late nineteenth century to 1949 basically was synchronous with that of Britain and America. At first, there were various original types of social work services such as charitable aid, social education, and social reform to help vulnerable groups deal with problems brought by dramatic social transitions. The charitable values of Christianity and the ideologies of democracy and human rights also spread to China at that time.

In both Western countries and China, there was not only casework, but also community reform movements such as the Settlement Movement and the Rural Construction Movement. Practices that developed with these movements were extracted and normalized and integrated with psychoanalysis and structuralism theories in professional social work training and education. In both, governments intervened in the development of the social work profession in order to use social work to improve their social management.

It can be seen that the early social work practices in China and Western countries such as Britain and America, included both empowerment and disempowerment. For example, in the beginning of 20th century, the charity aid engaged by Christian missionaries or Chinese elites, included showing mercy to and educating the powerless groups in a top-down way. This is considered as blaming vulnerable groups for lacking abilities to make a living, and of lacking compliance to societal moral values (Dickey, 1987; Ferguson & Woodward, 2009). From another perspective, in the early twentieth century, the Settlement Movement in Britain and America, and the social reform movements such as the Rural Construction Movement in China, all aimed at understanding how social environments caused the difficulties experienced by disadvantaged people and link personal development with social-political development (Fook, 2002; Ferguson & Woodward, 2009). This corresponds to the aim of empowerment to address social issues and challenge social orders to liberate powerless people. In addition, in early social work practices in Britain, America, and China, the tension between care and control also showed in the fact that governments provided resources for social work practitioners to

help vulnerable groups mainly because they wanted to improve the management of those groups as they created social chaos (Leung et al., 2012).

The suspension of social work in China from the 1950s to 1987

The establishment of the socialist People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 significantly reduced Western influences in China. Due to ideological differences between capitalism and socialism, the study and practice of social science, including sociology and social work, were suspended in China in the 1950s (Wang et al., 2014; Wei, 2014; 2015). The Chinese government completely took over social service provision and developed a state-owned welfare system that functioned in concert with the planned economy system (Wang, 2013).

In urban areas, state-owned industries and government institutions depended on the resources gained from the whole nation to provide welfare such as medical care, education, and accommodation for their workers. Peasants who were members of their rural community's collective labour commune, however, relied on their collective gain to support each other in medical care and to assist the community's elders and children who did not have any family to depend on. Whether in urban or rural areas, individuals received welfare not only in terms of their labour contributions and achievements, but also according to their 'political performances' (Wei, 2015, p.103). The Chinese Communist Party launched its party branches in every urban unit and rural commune, and required its party branches to lead the branches of different mass organizations such as the All-China Women's Federation, the All-China Youth Federation, the All-China Federation of Labour Unions, the All-China Aged Committee, and the All-China Disabled People Committee to engage in ideological education and apply political evaluation to every individual.

Individuals were required to act on 'socialist moral values' such as actively helping collective members, taking care of families, and sacrificing individuals' benefits to the collective need. It is hard to say whether people at that time provided assistance or services to others because they believed in the 'socialist moral values' or because they wanted to prove that they had good political performance. Either way, this kind of serving work is recognized as a type of social work by some Chinese scholars and an American social worker, Margaret Hope Bacon. In her article, 'Social Work in China', published in the journal of *Social Work* in 1975, she writes:

> *As I and a group from the American Friends Service Committee travelled through China in 1972, visiting communes, factories…I was able to identify social work functions performed either by individuals or basic neighbourhood units and to see a pattern of neighbourhood supportive service (Bacon, 1975, p.13)*

During China's planned-economy period from the 1950s to the 1980s, the accumulated social work practice experiences in the early twentieth century became redundant. Because of the ideological confrontation between capitalism and socialism, the knowledge exchange between China and Western countries such as Britain and America was significantly interrupted. The various social services engaged by civil organizations and Chinese elites in the beginning of twentieth century, were merged in the state-welfare system during the planned-economy period in China (Qian, 2011). In the 1960s and 1970s, social work theories and practices emanated from the widespread critical social theory and radical social movements in Western countries such as America, Britain, and Australia, while China was isolated from the Western world at that time, and experienced the dark Cultural Revolution period (1967-1977) in which education and educators were regarded as holding capitalist ideologies and needed to be strictly controlled by 'socialist governments' (Li, 2004). In consequence, critical social work theories and practices did not spread to China in the 1960s and 1970s. In addition, during China's planned-economy period, nearly all organizations belonged to the government, thus governments took charge of almost all welfare service supplies (Qian, 2011). Through more than three decades, Chinese people had already become accustomed to depending on government officials to provide welfare services. Even now, most Chinese people still do not know what professional social work is and only consider governments as legitimate welfare providers (Wang & Xu, 2018).

Reinstitution of social work in China from 1987

In the 1980s, China largely moved away from a planned economy, and was ready to further pursue modernization through the development of a market economy. During the collapse of the state-owned welfare system and the decentralization of urban industries and rural collective communes, significant social problems emerged, including poverty, unemployment, increased crime, and inadequate care for the disadvantaged such as elders, children, and the disabled (Wei, 2014; 2015). Chinese society urgently needed a 'modern' social welfare system to address these emerging social problems, and required talented people with advanced social management and service skills. As China's former paramount leader Deng Xiaoping pointed out in 1979: 'China has largely fallen behind the Western world, not only in the natural science field, but also in the social science field…thus social science needs to quickly make up the missed lessons' (Wang et al., 2014, p.19). This appeal to reconstruct the field social science, gave social work the impetus to develop.

At that time, some sociologists who had participated in social work education and practices before 1949 dedicated themselves to reinstating social work in university curricula. They deemed that it was necessary for social work, as an applied social science, to be rebuilt, along with the re-establishment of sociology (Wang et al., 2014; Wei, 2014; 2015). During China's educational reforms in 1985, these

dedicated scholars lobbied the National Educational Committee to develop social work as soon as possible. In 1988, social work was re-established as a pilot course at Peking University, People's University, and Jilin University (Wang et al., 2014, p.23). This usually took the form of Social Work and Management courses and was subordinate to the discipline of sociology (Qian, 2011; Wang et al., 2014). Accordingly, the sociological focus on addressing problematic social orders to deal with social issues such as unemployment and poverty, was incorporated in social work education in China. After 1994 when the China Association of Social Work Education was established, there were more corporations between Chinese mainland social work educators and Hong Kong social work academia (Wang, 2014). This has contributed to the installation of ten basic courses of social work education in mainland China: Introduction to Social Work; Introduction to Sociology; Social Research Methods; Social Psychology; Case Work; Group Work; Community Work, Social Policy; Social Security; and Social Welfare Ideology (Wang et al., 2014, p. 96). Therefore, it can be seen that professional social work theories and approaches developed in Western countries were incorporated in social work education in mainland China in the 1990s. However, even though critical structural lenses were included in social work education in mainland China, the dominant government discourse and the lack of social work practice for many years resulted in social work practices that significantly lagged behind social work education.

Because the ideological confrontation between capitalism and socialism still remained oppressive in Chinese society in the 1980s, many Chinese scholars defined social work under a framework of Chinese socialist values to gain the trust and approval of the Chinese government. For example, in Lu Mouhua's book *Social Work*, published in 1989, the social work definition is (Zhang, 2006, p.12):

> *Whether it is looked at from the aspect of social legislation, social policy, or social administration, China's social work is the one with socialism characteristics. It utilizes Marxist theory to adjust social relationships, provide social services, manage social life, and solve social problems in order to perfect the socialist system. It is a professional task to prevent social problems and improve society's members' social functions. It not only includes social welfare work such as social insurance and social relief, but also includes socialist public work and administrative work such as poverty alleviation, eliminating feudalist factors and capitalist corruptions, constructing socialist material and spiritual civilization.*

In 1991, the China Association of Social Workers was established, and, in 1992, it joined the International Social Work Association. In 1994, the China Association of Social Work Education was launched. By 1996, there were nineteen universities offering bachelor's degrees in social work (Wang et al., 2014). During the same period, the attention of government and the public gradually shifted

away from the ideological confrontation between socialism and capitalism and mainly focused on pursuing economic development. After a decade of social work education, Chinese scholars further accepted the ethics, theories, methods, and aims of professional social work derived from Western countries, and started to highlight these elements in the definition of social work. For example, in Sibin Wang's book *Introduction of Social Work*, issued in 1998, social work is defined as follows (Wang, 1998, p.5):

> *Social work is a helping activity that takes altruism as its guidelines, takes improving people's social function and solving social problems as principles, takes scientific knowledge as its basis, and utilizes professional skills and methods.*

In order to promote social work in China's all-powerful political system, Chinese scholars attempted to categorize the administrative welfare work conducted by Chinese governments as a type of Chinese indigenous social work (Wang 2011; 2013; Wei, 2014; 2015). Nevertheless, in the 1990s, the social work profession only obtained growth in education rather than practice (Qain, 2011; Shi, 2011). This was due to the highly centralized welfare provision of Chinese governments, the absence of civil societies in welfare provision, the overwhelming discourse of economic development, and the functioning informal support networks in China.

Promotion of social work from 2006

Beginning from 2006

By the beginning of the twenty-first century, China's rapid economic growth from the 1980s had resulted in severe social problems such as excessive wealth disparities, an enormous urban–rural gap, unemployment, soaring prices of commodities and housing, heavy environmental pollution, widespread consumerist culture and increasing corruption in governments (Iris, 2005; Qian, 2011; Wei, 2014; 2015). During China's rapid marketization and urbanization, China's residual, unitary, and rigid administrative welfare system became more and more incapable of meeting the needs of a large number of disadvantaged people (Qian, 2011; Wei, 2014; 2015). This also posed a political risk to the state. The Chinese Communist Party reacted with enough concern to reform China's administrative management and welfare system. In September 2004, the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCCP, 2004) proposed to strengthen its governing ability during the fourth session of its sixteenth conference. And on the sixth session of its sixteenth conference in 2006, the CCCP made a formal plan that aimed to construct a harmonious socialist society by improving its social management or governing skills (CCCP, 2006). Social work is applied by most nation states as an applied science to deal with societal problems (Payne, 2006). Thus, the CCCP proposed to have a large qualified social worker team in government departments to improve its managing ability. Since then,

social work has become a high-level political innovation technology promoted by government to improve the management of, and services to, citizens.

According to the social worker accreditation policy issued by the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA) in 2006, practitioners who do not have a degree in social work should have more than two years' experience working in the human services field to be eligible to attend the national examination of social work accreditation (China Social Work Association, 2006). In 2009, the MCA published policies for the registration of social workers, continuing training for social workers, and the establishment of civil social work agencies (MCA, 2009a, 2009b; 2009c). As it was the first time that a governing party anywhere in the world had formulated national-level strategies to develop social work, Chinese social work academia was delighted. With a legitimate discourse of political innovation and societal progress, the social work profession started developing rapidly. During this process, Chinese social work scholars who entered into the field of social work education from 1987[3] actively interpreted government policies (Iris, 2005; Wang, 2006; 2011b; Guo, 2007; Chen, 2011; Chen & Chen, 2014), researched how to apply Western social work knowledge in China (Wang, 2006; 2007; 2009; 2011a; 2011b; Hutchings & Taylor, 2007; Li, 2008; Yan & Tsui; 2007), and embedded professional social work in the Chinese administrative welfare system (Wang, 2006; 2007; 2009; 2011a; 2011b; Hutchings & Taylor, 2007; Li, 2008; Yan & Tsui; 2007; Zhang, 2008). They also noted the danger of government using social work to fill the gaps caused by lack of government planning (Yan & Tsui, 2007; Tang, 2010a; 2010b; Wang, 2011a; Leung & Huang, 2012). When the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake happened, a lot of Chinese social work scholars went together with their students to help the people in disaster areas. They believed in the professional social work values of equality, justice, empowerment, and human rights, and applied methods of casework, group support, and community cooperation to provide relief work (Liu & Zhang, 2012). During that time, Chinese social work scholars were able to put social work theories and methods into practice, and to advertise social work nationwide. They also experienced how governments utilized them to provide relief work and then excluded them when the emergency was lifted (Zhu & Han, 2014).

Rapid expansion from 2012

In 2012, the CCCP and MCA, together with 19 other government departments and semi-government institutions, issued the Long-Term Plan of Building Professional Social Worker Teams (2011–2020) (The Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China [CPG], 2012a). This plan contains

3 From 1987, many Chinese sociologists entered into the field of social work education. Most of them admired the values, theories, and methods of the social work profession. Many of them went to Hong Kong and completed a master's degree in social work. These Chinese social work scholars are the main agents for promoting social work as a profession in China. The following description is about how they responded to government promotion of social work.

strategies for the employment of professional social workers and the establishment of social work agencies, the assignment of 1000 social workers per year to serve remote minority areas, and the goal of having 0.5 million professional social workers by 2015 and 1.45 million by 2020 (CPG, 2012a). Millions of workers in government welfare departments, semi-governmental institutions, communities, and villages are regarded by Chinese governments as ready to become professional social workers specializing in using scientific serving techniques (Shi, 2010). In order to convince government to continually promote social work, Chinese social work scholars assert administrative welfare work's applicability to the Chinese context (Li, 2008; Qian, 2011; Wang, 2011a; 2012), highlight professional social work's serving function in constructing a harmonious society (Wang, 2009; 2011a; Qian, 2011; Liu & Zhang, 2012), and commend the coherence between professional social work's role of activating civil society's participation in social management and government's goal of improving the efficiency of social management (Wang, 2006; 2009; Zhu & Chen, 2013) . They propose to gradually incorporate professional social work in China's administrative welfare system (Wang, 2006; 2007; 2009; 2011a; 2011b; Hutchings & Taylor, 2007; Yan & Tsui; 2007; Li 2008; Zhang, 2008; Qian, 2011; Zhu & Chen, 2013) explore what social work's professionalization and indigenization are in China (Wang, 2006; 2007a; 200b; 2009; 2011a; 2011b; Hutchings & Taylor, 2007; Xiong & Wang, 2007; Yan & Tsui; 2007; Li, 2008; Zhang, 2008; Qian, 2011; Zhu & Chen, 2013), reflect on how social work functions in other countries (Li, 2008; Chen, 2011), and critique government control of the social work profession (Tang, 2010a; 2010b, Leung & Huang; 2012; Zhu & Chen, 2013) .

In 2012 and 2013, the MCA and the Ministry of Finance (MF) issued policies that encouraged their local bureaus to purchase social work services from civil organizations and to promote community social work (MCA, 2012). When local governments actively complied with the Chinese central government's directive to promote social work practices, Chinese social work scholars grasped the opportunity to launch social work agencies and lead social work students to deliver services for the disadvantaged (Tang, 2010b). As governments favour community social work, Chinese social work scholars endeavoured to embed professional social work in community administrative welfare systems (Ma et al., 2011; Li & Zhang, 2012; Zhu & Chen, 2013). Notably, in some communities in Shenzhen, social work practices are bound up with the community democracy movement, in which community members make community development plans and request funding from government to achieve their plans (Zhu & Chen, 2013).

As far as the purchase of social work services is concerned, governments can directly select and fund a trusted non-profit organization, or let many eligible non-profit organizations compete (Tang, 2010a; 2010b; Zhang et al., 2013; Chen, 2014). Social work agencies suffer from both government control and market competition. Governments are employers of social workers, use social workers to fulfil their

administrative tasks, and select compliant social workers to follow their directives (Tang, 2010a; 2010b; Zhang et al., 2013; Zhu & Chen, 2013; Chen, 2014). As well, in the context of market competition, governments prefer employing agencies with low budgets. As a result, some agencies have replaced professional social workers with volunteers or have decreased services to reduce costs (Tang, 2010a; 2010b; Zhang et al., 2013; Zhu & Chen, 2013; Chen, 2014). Not all local governments have abundant resources to develop social work. Thus, social work has grown unevenly in China, most markedly between rural communities and cities and between China's eastern advanced areas and western backward areas. Working in such complex situations, young Chinese social work graduates are confused about what their professional identity, professional role, and professional aims are (Shi, 2011; Yin, 2011). They struggle with how to uphold their professional values and how to have more autonomy from government and the forces of market competition to better help the disadvantaged (Zhang, 2008). With this as a background, Chinese social work scholars continue to research social work's professionalization and indigenization in China (Wang, 2007b; 2013; Yin, 2011; Yong & Xiong, 2012; Zhang, 2012; Wang & Jiang, 2013; Xu & Hou, 2013; Zhu & Chen, 2014; Wen, 2014), and start to uncover the complex power relationships between governments, social work agencies, other non-profit organizations, social workers, government officials, and service users (Wang, 2007b; 2013; Yin, 2011; Yong & Xiong, 2012; Zhang, 2012; Wang & Jiang, 2013; Xu & Hou, 2013; Zhu & Chen, 2014; Wen, 2014).

From 2013 to 2017, MCA continued issuing policies that promoted social work's role in assisting the poor and the people affected by disasters (MCA, 2013a), serving the left-behind children in rural areas (MCA, 2013b; 2014a; 2014c; 2015d; 2015e; 2016b; 2016e), helping people with mental health problems (MCA, 2017c), and supporting adolescents and drug users (MCA, 2014c; 2017a; 2017d). According to the 2016 Social Service Statistic Report issued by the MCA (MCA, 2016a), by the end of 2016, there were almost 1.745 million social service institutions with over 12 million workers, 361,000 non-profit organizations, 288,000 accredited social workers, and around 544.02 billion CNY (3.4 per cent of China's fiscal expenditure in 2016) spent on social services. The year 2017 was the ten-year anniversary of the CCCP's decision to have a large qualified social work team as part of constructing a harmonious society. Most Chinese social work scholars believe social work will achieve more in the future. There is more empirical social work research, some of which is about whether a social work theory or approach is adaptable to Chinese contexts (Ma & Zhou, 2011; Zhang, 2012; Zhu & Chen, 2013; Chen, 2013; Zhu & Chen, 2014). Many scholars place a strong emphasis on the role of social work in the innovation of China's social management system and in providing effective scientific services (Wang, 2009; 2011a, 2011b; 2016a; 2016b; Qian, 2011; Shi, 2011; Li & Yuan, 2015; Li & Xu, 2016). Some social work scholars, however, have noted the danger of significantly relating pragmatic

scientific techniques, quantitative standards, and efficient management to the construction of the social work profession (Ge, 2015; Lei & Huang, 2016; Xu, 2016; Chen, 2017; Li & Zhang, 2017; Xu, 2017; Wang & Peng, 2017; Zhang, 2017).

According to the above description, the construction of the social work profession in China is accompanied by different, even contradictory, discourses of rational governing, modernization, scientific management with low costs, human rights, community democracy, professionalization, and indigenization. Social work practices in China are very diverse and complex. The history of social work's development in China after 1987 describes how the ideal agent, Chinese social work scholars, constructed the social work profession under China's political, economic, and social contexts. This is because from the social work academic literature in China, it is difficult to find voices of Chinese indigenous social workers such as government officials and other human service practitioners. Therefore, in this research, I conducted interviews of various social work practitioners in China such as workers in non-profit organizations and social enterprises, government officials in civil affair bureaus, and consumer practitioners in social work agencies.

Development of social work in China with the discourse of professionalization and indigenization

I describe social work's development in China by chronologically demonstrating who social work practitioners are in China, what Chinese indigenous political, economic, and sociocultural structures are, and how social work practitioners act in response to Chinese indigenous structures. Social work practitioners are agents who construct social work practices under macro political, economic, and cultural structures of a nation.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, social work had evolved in Britain and America from being a largely philanthropic endeavour to a systematic helping profession grounded in academia. In China, Western missionaries, Chinese intellectuals, and other warm-hearted people were agents engaging in social work services. Some of them, such as Burgess, Puritt, and Chinese sociologists who taught social work courses and supervised social work placements, were regarded as social work professionals because they acknowledged and applied the theories, methods, and ethics of the social work profession of contemporary Britain and America. Some of them, such as James Yen, Suming Liang, Xilin Xiong, service workers of the government of Kuomingtang Party and those of the Chinese Communist Party, were deemed to be indigenous social workers because their practices were similar to several professional social work practices such as the Settlement Movement and casework based on psychological theories of contemporary Britain and America. At that time, social work was considered to be beneficial for enabling Chinese people and saving China from that crisis period.

Before 1949, social work's development in China was similar to that of Britain and America. It had three main stages: charity and social education—systematic training and professional education—being devolved into government welfare systems. And this process was from the bottom to top, which is the opposite of social work's development since 2006.

In socialist China from the 1950s to the 1980s, every individual could be regarded as an 'amateur social worker'. In the 1980s, Chinese indigenous political, economic, social, and cultural contexts were characterized by an extremely powerful government, a weak market, a voiceless civil society, and an influential socialist culture. Therefore, as the main agent of rebuilding the social work profession, Chinese social work scholars strove for government approval by categorizing government service work as indigenous social work practices. Government service workers were deemed to be indigenous social workers. Social work scholars have to mainly depend on the Chinese government to largely promote the development of professional social work. This occurs when Chinese governments issue various policies that grant legitimacy for social work agencies to provide welfare services, hire professional social workers in government departments and purchase services from social work agencies. However, they also criticize Chinese governments' significant controlling, and promote change in unequal social structures such as rural-urban dual system, consumerism and patriarchal culture in order to empower powerless people and groups. Thus, the dichotomies between empowerment and disempowerment, care and control, are clearly presented in relationships between Chinese governments, professional social workers, and service users. This is closely associated with the paradox of how social workers empower powerless groups when they (social workers are based in and rely on the systems in which inequalities and injustice largely exist.

In the late 1990s, with the deepening of China's reform, social work education in China further absorbed professional social work ethics, theories, and methods from the West, especially America and Hong Kong. Chinese governments did not, however, open much space for society to participate in welfare service provision. Government service workers, as indigenous social workers, performed nearly all service practices. When it entered into the twenty-first century, the all-powerful Chinese administrative welfare system became incapable of dealing with more and more vulnerable people influenced by various social problems. Thus, in order to improve their management of and services to the public, Chinese governments encouraged administrative service workers become professional social workers who are good at using scientific and efficient serving techniques. In 2008, 137, 800 service practitioners attended the national social work accreditation examination, and 24,840 of them gained the social work accreditation (MCA, 2009b). Administrative service workers made up 50 per cent of those who gained the social work accreditation. Grasping this opportunity, Chinese social work

scholars strongly promoted social work in legitimate discourses of societal progress and government management innovation.

From 2006 to 2017, the social work profession in China experienced rapid development under the Chinese Communist Party. Meanwhile, the social work profession had been developing in Western countries such as Britain, America, and Australia for a century. In these countries, there are diverse social work practices such as counselling casework, policy advocacy, movements against unequal structures including patriarchy, racism, bureaucracy, and market exploitation, and intervention to deal with issues such as violence and drug and alcohol addiction (Ife, 1997). Under the discourses of neoliberalism, rational governing, patriarchy, and racism, however, the social work profession increasingly focused on technological rationality to control the disadvantaged rather than really empower them (Markiewicz, 1996; McMahon, 2000, p.8; Chenoweth et al., 2005; McDonald &nChenoweth, 2007; Alston et al., 2018).

China aims to pursue modernization, and takes advanced Western countries as models. Social work practices in Western countries are deemed to be professional. Nevertheless, it should be noted that there are different, even contradictory, social work practices in Western countries. For example it is controversial to describe a type of social work practice as scientific and professional, such as the casework model promoted in America.

Beyond the distinction discourse between professionalization and indigenization of social work, it is a holistic goal for social work to achieve an equal and just world that empowers people and respects nature. This empowerment aim often meets hindrance from systems of governments' control, economic rationalism, patriarchy and racism in both Western and Eastern countries.

Development of social work in Australia

The development of social work in Australia has been an evolving process. From an international view, the social work profession mainly spread from Britain and America to other parts of the world. Nevertheless, compared to its counterpart in China, the social work profession in Australia is not a totally foreign product. Because Australia was a colony of Britain, the Australian people share the same Christian and modern cultural background with that of Britain. Generally, modernity is mainly based on industrialization, marketization, scientization, and ideologies from the Enlightenment, such as rationality, democracy, and human rights (Giddens, 1990; Lenard, 1997; Ife, 1997). The social work profession derived from Western nation states is deemed to be an applied modern social science based on the ideologies of justice, equality, and human rights, to help nation states deal with social problems brought about by industrialization, marketization, and urbanization (Wei, 2014; 2015). It can

be seen as one part of the political structure of modern nation states, with the contradictory nature of care and control. As Australia inherited the culture of Christianity and modernity from Britain, the development of social work in Australia is not about introducing or adapting a totally foreign product to Australian indigenous environments. As Australia has its own economic, social, demographic, and cultural structures which are different from those of Britain, however, the development of social work in Australia is an construction initiated by Australian social work practitioners and professionals, rather than a duplication of the British model.

I will describe the construction process initiated by the social work profession under Australia's changing economic, social, demographic, cultural and political structures since the nineteenth century. This description will also include an international view of how the world's overall economic, political and cultural structures influence Australian society and how the social work model of Britain and America impact Australian social work.

Colonial period of the nineteenth century—class division and the 'deserving poor'

Early colonial period

As America won its independence from Britain in 1787, Britain decided to colonize the 'southern continent' to steady its position of imperial hegemony in the world, and to rid itself of its internal social problems such as the poverty and crime brought by rapid industrial development (Micinnis, 2013; Zhang, 2014). In 1788, the first group of criminals, including thieves, orphans, prostitutes, frauds and Irish political prisoners, made up the initial labour force that built Australia as a colony of Britain (Zhang, 1994, p.45).

With sovereign power, the governor granted lands to the marines, free immigrants, and some time-expired convicts to encourage them develop agriculture (Mcinnis, 2013, p.37; Zhang, 1994, p.41; Connell & Irving, 1980, p.37). Most convicts were compulsorily 'assigned' as unpaid labourers to those who were granted land. If married, women's life situation was differentiated by their husbands' social positions. Wives of the marines had the resources to educate girl prisoners or orphans, assist poor working-class women, and help poor female convicts (Dickey, 1987, p.10).

In the early Australian colonization period, on one hand, the main task for every colonial resident was basic survival in Australia. On the other hand, each person's class came with them from Britain to Australia, and they thus enjoyed different resources. Colonial governors attempted to duplicate British society in Australia. Therefore, social relief in early colonial Australia, conducted by colonial governments and Christian groups or organizations, was all based on the 'deserving principle' from the old British Poor Law. The people who could work, and who had Christian morals, were thought to be deserving of assistance (Dickey, 1987, p.10).

History of cruelty to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

During the construction of Australia as a British colony, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents, who had lived in Australia for tens of thousands of years before British colonists came, were slaughtered or died because of diseases brought by the colonists, or they were expelled to other regions. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (1988), there were around 300,000 to over one million Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in Australia in 1788, the number of which had decreased to 93,000 by 1901 when the Commonwealth of Australia was founded. The evidence of the colonists' brutal treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was clearly shown in Van Diemen's Land (now Tasmania) in 1876, when the last full-blooded Aboriginal person, Truganini, died (Mcinnis, 2013, p.41).

By 1967, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people had gained voting rights and were regarded as Australian citizens (Australian Museum, 2019). Nevertheless, they still experience discrimination in every aspect of work and life. As Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were brutally treated and excluded by the Australian white society for such a long time, class division and social care in Australia's colonial period mainly existed between Australian 'white groups'.

Pastoral capitalism

In the 1830s, the colonial population of Australia reached 70,000 people, and the agricultural economy was thriving along with the population growth (Zhang, 1994, p.54). From the 1820s to the 1840s, Britain imported a great amount of wool from Australia (Zhang, 1994, p.54) and rich pastoralists became a dominant bourgeoisie. Interest conflicts existed between farmers, pastoralists, old and new immigrants, and the British government, who actually held the ownership of all Australian lands at that time (Zhang, 1994, p.79; Connell & Irving, 1980, p.51).

The abolition of the land grant system in the 1830s, and the arrival of more and more free immigrants, significantly caused the abandonment of the forced exile system[4] that held back economic growth. The working class cooperated with urban bourgeoisies and participated in the fight against the forced exile system (Connell & Irving, 1980; Mcinnis, 2013; Zhang, 1994). From an international view, this fight was influenced by ideological trends of striving for national independence, asking for civil and political rights, and anti-racism. These ideological trends were present in Chartism in England, in Irish and Canadian independence movements, and in anti-slavery movements in America. Thereafter, a representative democracy system was built in Australia colonial states.

[4] The forced exile system refers to the history that Britain sent out criminals to Australia and those criminals as main labours of developing Australia as a colony of Britain (Zhang, 2014).

In the 1840s, there were pastoralist capitalists, mercantile bourgeoisies, the working class, and the destitute. Among the destitute, there were weak families whose male breadwinners were not able to work because of uncontrollable factors such as illness, work injuries, or other accidents, women and children who did not have male breadwinners, orphaned and deserted children, the aged, condemned convicts, and the mentally ill. Because the main goal of the colonial states was to ensure the growth of the capitalist economy, dominated by pastoralists and mercantile bourgeoisies at that time, they valued restoring the health of weak labourers and fostered children to be a potential labour force, while objecting to caring for other poor people (Dickey, 1987, pp.24). Local voluntary groups and religious organizations were encouraged, subsidized, or given annual grants by the state to provide health services and education to the deserving poor (weak labourers or potential labourers), while being constrained by the state to reduce or withdraw services from people with chronic diseases or infections, pregnant women, the mentally ill, and the aged (Dickey, 1987, pp.24-32). Local voluntary groups (people who had extra time, resources, or morals that required them to support charitable activities), especially religious organizations, on one hand, consciously selected the deserving poor for their indoor and outdoor aid; on the other hand, they argued on humanitarian grounds for more support from the state government (Dickey, 1987, pp.32-42).

As for women's participation in providing relief services in the middle of the nineteenth century in Australia, Catholic nuns played a significant role (MaMahon, 2002; Hughes, 2010). They were more likely to take a social justice stance on social questions such as immigrants' franchise, religious freedom, and the exploitation of women (MaMahon, 2002). This was because as Irish immigrants, they had experienced British oppression; as Catholics, they strived for their religious positions in the dominating sphere of Anglicans and Protestants; as Irish women, they experienced oppression both from the British and from men. As well, because of their religious roots, they enjoyed the privilege of being active in providing welfare services, compared with other working women.

Gold rush and the working class

The gold rush, beginning in the 1850s, was a turning point in Australian demographic, economic, political, and cultural structures. Between 1851 and 1860, more than 600,000 people reached Australia, with most of them ending up in Victoria (Mcinnis, 2013, p.74). The power dynamic was made up of pastoral 'monopolists', commercial bourgeoisies, and the 'rebellious' working class, including sheep shearers, miners, railroad workers, Chinese goldminers, natives of South Sea islands, and Aboriginal people, who were not regarded as 'civilized' (Connell & Irving, 1980, p.120).

As representatives in government, pastoralists and commercial bourgeoisies had the power to draw up social policies according to their interests. When there were more and more 'rebellious' workers,

the government had to modify its strong control measures to a more rhetorically placatory management, such as providing some support to the most 'radical' and largest group—white abled labourers (Connell & Irving, 1980; Mcinnis, 2013; Zhang, 1994). The 'undeserving disadvantaged', however, such as the mentally ill and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, suffered more government control than government support.

Along with economic prosperity, the managing power of the colonial states was enhanced. Class differences and social issues, however, also increased during the process of industrialization and urbanization. From the 1850s to the establishment of the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901, workers launched labour unions and initiated movements to strive for the legitimacy of labour unions, better working environments, a standard eight-hour working day, and voting rights (Mcinnis, 2013, p.89; Zhang, 1994, p.96).

When serious social problems, such as poverty, crime, violence, and sickness, become more and more obvious and the disadvantaged groups gets bigger and strive more actively for a better life, this is usually the time at which various social welfare provided by the civil society integrate, and governments build an administrative welfare system, merging the social welfare provided by the civil society. In the late part of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century in Britain, this process can be seen in the initiation of the Charity Organization Society and the Settlement Movement, and the passing of legislation such as the 1870 Education Act, the 1872 Public Health Act, the 1906 Work Injury Insurance Act, and the 1911 National Insurance Act (Tonge, 2016). Whether in Australia or Britain, however, different groups within the working classes, such as skilled worker, unskilled worker, male labourer, child labourer, female labourer, the aged, the minorities such as the Irish, Chinese, Aboriginal people or Torres Strait Islanders gained different levels of welfare benefits at different times.

Summary

In colonial Australia, class division determined the providers and receivers of social welfare. The principle of 'deserving' and 'underserving' was determined according to the interests of the dominant classes, that is, the people who held seats in government and made the decisions, and the dominant religion, Christianity. Basically, in the discourse of the development of industrialization, the 'deserving poor' were people who had the potential and will to work. Care and control were therefore basic characteristics of the social welfare system of colonial Australia. Some early social welfare providers, such as Catholic nuns, are deemed to be the first social workers in Australia (Gleeson, 2000; MaMahon, 2002; Burley, 2005; Hughes, 2010). As with the first social welfare workers, today's social workers in Australia are also seen to be playing the roles of both carers and controllers of the disadvantaged

(Chenoweth et al., 2005; Mcdonald & Chenoweth, 2009; Markiewicz, 1996). It is worth noting that even though the dominant class manipulated others, such as exiled criminals and workers, for their own benefit, there were always some among them who engaged in protecting and caring for the disadvantaged, such as child labourers, the disabled, and single mothers. To some extent, these pioneers promoted the progress of social welfare and the development of the social work profession.

The Commonwealth of Australia and the welfare system

Economic prosperity also drove the independence of Australia. In 1901, the British Parliament passed legislation allowing the six Australian colonies to govern in their own right as part of the Commonwealth of Australia (Australian Government, 2018). Thus, achievements of labour movements were ensured as national welfare policies. One of the significant outcomes for women was that the Commonwealth of Australia gave them voting rights in 1902 (Australian Electoral Commission, 2015). The workers and disadvantaged, however, were classified as 'deserving and undeserving' or 'eligible and ineligible' to receive welfare. For example, the 1901 Immigration Restriction Act clearly set out to secure a 'white Australia' with strict control of Asian and African immigrants (McMahon, 2000, p.144). The 1907 Harvester Judgement mainly focused on regulating the minimum wage for the 'working man'—the breadwinner of a 'normal' family, and ensuring skilled workers earned a higher minimum wage than unskilled workers (McMahon, 2000, p.39). The 1908 Old Age Pension Act considered Asiatic, Aboriginal, and African people, Torres Strait Islanders, the islanders of the Pacific or New Zealand, and the women married to them, to be disqualified from receiving a pension (McMahon, 2000, p.172). Clearly, the people who were incapable of work, single mothers, and people who were not 'white', did not benefit from Australian national welfare policies in the beginning of the twentieth century.

Australia actively supported Britain when the First World War began in 1914. When the men went to the front, women started to work in the food, clothing, and printing industries, and joined voluntary organizations such as the Australian Red Cross, the Country Women's Association, and the Australian Women's National League to undertake charity work (Australian Government, 2017). Led by women, welfare services were quite vigorous in early of the twentieth century.

The social work profession

Social work training and hospital almoners

By the beginning of the twentieth century, social work had progressively developed as a profession in the academia of Britain and America. In Australia, the expansion of philanthropy services also created a need to train service providers. Some pioneers, including medical practitioners, philanthropists, and philosophers, actively advocated for promoting social work training by referring to Britain and America

(Miller, 2016, p.18). In the 1920s, the teaching of social work as a specific occupation started in Australia (Lawrence, 1965). As the war had created a need for rehabilitation and mental health services, hospital almoners were the first to accept social work training in Australia (Ife, 1997). Many large hospitals launched social work departments in the 1930s. In 1940, the University of Sydney opened the first social work course (Lawrence, 1965).

Globally, after the great economic depression from 1929 to 1933, incompatible interest conflicts among nations resulted in the Second World War (1939 to 1945). Two world wars in the twentieth century caused huge casualties around the world, and the people were exhausted. At that time, Keynesian economic principles were adopted by Western nations to strengthen the state's control of the market and guarantee basic living conditions. In Britain, William Beveridge published the Report on Social Insurance in 1942, which was the ideological base on which Britain built a welfare system to protect its citizens from the cradle to the grave. Nordic countries, such as Sweden and Norway especially, put in place a universal welfare system to pursue a just and fair society. As well, countries including Germany and America, established complex social insurance systems based on the ideology of responsibility and obligation.

Influenced by Keynesianism and the Western welfare trend, Australia also built a welfare system from the 1930s to the 1940s. In 1938, the National Health and Pensions Insurance Act was passed to help people against the risk of sickness, disability, and the poverty of aging (McMahon, 2000, p.176). The Child Endowment Act in 1941 gave an endowment to all children under the age of sixteen years in families with more than one child (McMahon, 2000, p.72). In 1945, the White Paper on Full Employment was issued which outlined the need for government to guarantee full employment for all workers to share the benefits of economic growth (Thomson, 2000). Through a critical lens, however, the Australian welfare model does not have the clear philosophical basis of the Beveridge report; it mainly relies on means testing and provides residual support for selected groups (Ife, 1997).

Social work education

In Australia, social workers largely work in government institutions, and are involved in works including child protection, corrective services, rehabilitation, aged and youth services, and community development (Ife, 1997). In Australia, the federal government is usually responsible for income security, such as pensions and medical care and funding of welfare services; state governments are mainly responsible for delivering welfare services in relation to health, child protection, housing, and education; while local governments play a relatively small role in Australia's welfare system (Ife, 1997). State governments, therefore, are the largest employer of social workers (Lawrence, 1965; Ife, 1997). State governments receive funding from the federal government, offer funding themselves and

manage welfare service delivery. Accepting funding from federal and state governments, non-profit organizations and some active local governments are also involved in delivering detailed services.

The social work profession grew in both the academic and practical fields from the 1940s onwards. In 1946, various state social work associations merged to become the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW). According to the AASW, social work education is undertaken in universities, not in colleges or technical and further education schools. There is a four-year program for university undergraduates, and a two-year program for students who have already completed at least two years of an undergraduate degree (Ife, 1997). The AASW plays a crucial role in regulating the standard of social work education, but lacks engagement with social action and policy advocacy (Lawrence, 1965; Ife, 1997; Mendes, 2008).

The theory underpinning social work education is basically rooted in psychology and sociology. This is associated with social work's original aim of helping individuals improve their living capacities and challenging unequal societal structures. When social work developed as a profession in the early twentieth century, it referred to prevailing psychology theories and critical social theories. In Australia, there were fierce arguments between social work academics who believed in psychology and those favouring social reform (Lawrence, 1965; Miller, 2016). This kind of argument is intertwined with the contradictory politics of care and control in modern welfare states. Therefore, influenced by an organization's characteristics, social work practices are quite diverse, and even contradictory.

Thriving welfare state

The period from the 1950s to the 1970s is considered to be the time when welfare in Australia grew the most. It was also a time of significant economic prosperity. In 1960, Australia was the sixth richest country in the world (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2000). The 1972–75 Whitlam Labor government in particular took a social democratic approach to constructing the welfare system, which opened huge opportunities for social workers to influence policies (Pease, 2017; Alston et al, 2018). For instance, the Child Care Act was passed in 1972 to promote child care support for families and improve child care facilities and services in communities where many mothers were entering the labour market; the 1974 Equal Pay decision awarded the same minimum wage to adult men and women; the 1975 Racial Discrimination Act asserted that any form of discrimination was unlawful; and the 1975 Commission of Inquiry into Poverty proposed the granting of concessional deductions for tax purposes to guarantee the poor had enough income and services.

Along with the vigorous social movements initiated in many Western countries during the 1960s and 1970s, including the anti-war movement, the feminist movement challenging gender inequality, the labour movement promoting workers' rights and welfare, and the African-American People's

Movement striving for citizen rights, the social work profession had the unprecedented opportunity of taking on theories of empowerment, feminist intersectionality, anti-oppression, and so on, and to work to transform unequal structures (Weissberg, 1999; Healy, 2000; Fook, 2002; Pease, 2002; 2017; Ife, 2016). In Australia, social workers work in government and non-governmental organizations, and are involved in works such as community development, policy development, research, management, counselling, group work, and social education (Ife, 2016; 2017; Moore, 2017; Noble, 2017; Rees, 2017; Weeks, 2017). Since the 1960s, inspired by the worldwide social movements, the radical critique to systems of power inequalities has become a feature in social work education in Australia (Moore, 2017; Noble, 2017; Pease, 2017). There were many Australian social workers, at that time, who became very active in challenging unequal social orders such as patriarchy, social discrimination toward minority groups, and opposed to the top-down professional discourse based in traditional case work (Ife, 2016; 2017; Moore, 2017; Noble, 2017; Pease, 2017 Rees, 2017; Weeks, 2017). Some of them, including Bob Pease, Jim Ife, Carolyn Noble, Wendy Weeks, Sharon Moore, significantly contribute to develop critical theories and approaches in Australian social work education and practices (Ife, 2016; 2017; Moore, 2017; Noble, 2017; Pease, 2017 Rees, 2017; Weeks, 2017). A critically understanding of people's disadvantage in the contexts in which they live is still an important part of social work education in Australia (Healy, 2000; Fook, 2002; Pease, 2009; 2017; Ife, 2016; Alston et al., 2018).

Notably, in practices, social workers select jobs where they think they can practise social work values, even though those jobs are not necessarily called 'social worker jobs'. As well, people with other qualifications, such as 'welfare officer', 'community worker' or 'youth worker' also have access to social work jobs (Ife, 1997). Different from Australia, some countries may also recognize these workers as social workers.

Neoliberal trend

When economic stagnation occurred in many Western countries in the late 1970s, governments stopped intervening in the economic and welfare fields and started relying on the omnipotent market to solve social problems and help individuals gain freedom. Keynesianism lost popularity and the neoliberalism proposed by Milton Friedman was widely accepted (Alston et al., 2018). As Western welfare states, including Australia, declined from the late 1970s, some socialist countries, including China, started adopting a market economy to release the economy from rigid bureaucracies.

The Howard Coalition government in Australia, elected in 1996 and re-elected in 1998, 2001 and 2004, especially believed in the power of the market to bring social prosperity and therefore retreated from the welfare field (Pease, 2017; Alston et al., 2018). For example, the Work for the Dole Act, passed in 1998, requires the unemployed to participate in certain work programs in return for unemployment

payments offered by the government. In addition, the 1990s also witnessed a trend to contract out the welfare services of governments (Ife, 1997; Alston et al., 2018). Non-profit organizations became bidders and competed for shrinking welfare grants from governments (Markiewicz, 1996; Ife 1997; McMahon, 2000; Chenoweth et al., 2005). The new managerialism is expected to improve service efficiency with complex cost–benefit calculations (Markiewicz, 1996; Ife 1997; McMahon, 2000; Chenoweth et al., 2005). Thus, big organizations are more likely to win funding bids, while small organizations, especially those in rural areas, are incapable of squeezing costs and providing many services. Under this trend, social workers are required to be good managers. Sometimes they lose the holistic picture and critical lens through which to see unequal structures because they are very busy dealing with a large number of cases (Markiewicz, 1996; McMahon, 2000; Chenoweth et al, 2005; McDonald & Chenoweth, 2007; Alston et al., 2018).

In addition, consumer rights are emphasized in the care for the aged and disabled (Ife 1997; Fook, 2002; McDonald & Chenoweth, 2007; Alston et al., 2018). For example, the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), which began in 2013, provides information, referrals and support to the disabled to purchase a range of services from various service providers. The NDIS 'has no impact on income support such as Disability Support Pension and Carers Allowance' (NDIS, 2019). Service users have more power to decide which service they want. Nevertheless, the outcome of this welfare consuming trend of empowering service users as rational economic beings needs to be cautiously managed. Many social work scholars in Australia propose that in the neoliberal context social workers pay too much attention to individual service users' responsibility to change their disadvantaged situation rather than acting to empower individuals by challenging structural inequalities (Markiewicz, 1996; McMahon, 2000; Chenoweth et al., 2005; McDonald & Chenoweth, 2007; Alston et al., 2018).

Advocate for focusing on society and nature

More recently, the ecology lens is highly recommended for the social work profession to use to reconnect to the human world and the natural world (Besthorn, 2004; 2012; Boetto, 2017; Betto & McKinnon, 2018). The ecology lens provides the social work profession with another philosophical view of the position and disposition of human beings outside the modern world that promotes ideologies of fiercely competing resources, consuming and conquering nature (Besthorn, 2004; 2012; Boetto, 2017; Betto & McKinnon, 2018). Ecological social work views social issues from a broader perspective, connecting the inside world of human beings, the social world created by human beings, and the natural world. This may help the social work profession escape the trap of the contradiction of modernization.

Social work's development in Australia in the discourse of modernization and the welfare state

Through the process of modernization, the welfare system of nation states has a contradictory nature of care and control, which is usually presented through class division. Industrialization and urbanization are essential components of modernization (Giddens, 1990). During the initial process of industrialization and urbanization, different classes clearly had different levels of citizenship rights. The dominant class had the power to determine what kinds of obligations the disadvantaged needed to take on to gain certain rights. Thus, under the discourse of industrialization, working is an imperative criterion for survival, or for basic assistance to survive. In Australia, during the rise of the capitalist economy and industrialization, the deserving disadvantaged were viewed as those who were diligent, and who had potentials to work. Civil organizations, especially Christian churches, mainly undertook the work of providing basic survival assistance and education to the disadvantaged. State governments offered support to civil organizations and built facilities including hospitals, schools, and asylums. Nevertheless, the ideology of government in providing care was clearly with the aim of control.

Australia became an independent nation state when the Commonwealth of Australia was established in 1901. Since then, the discourse of providing care for the disadvantaged has been embedded in the framework of the development of national welfare systems. Professional social work training was introduced from Britain and America to Australia in the 1920s. Previous service deliverers such as almoners started undertaking social work training. From the beginning of the national welfare system in Australia from the 1930s, the social work profession grew, especially in government welfare delivery such as child protection, income security, medical care, and aged care. The vast majority of Australian social workers are employed by governments (Ife, 1997; Chenoweth et al., 2005; McDonald & Chenoweth, 2007; Alston et al., 2018). As the residual approach of means testing is largely adopted in Australian welfare provision, social workers are critiqued as being instruments of the states to keep the powerless groups compliant with laws that are unfair (Ife, 1997; Chenoweth et al., 2005; McDonald & Chenoweth, 2007; Alston et al., 2018). Although class division does not present in an intense way, it seems that the welfare provision in Australia is still premised on the ideology of deserving and underserving, and contains the paradox of care and control.

Summary

The social work profession was developed as an applied science utilized by modern states to deal with social issues brought about by industrialization and urbanization. This can be seen in the development

process of social work as a profession in Britain, America, Australia, and China. The social work profession was introduced to both China and Australia in the beginning of the twentieth century from Britain and America. A capitalist economic structure is the main characteristic of current modern states (Giddens, 1990; Ife, 1997). It can be seen from the development history of China from 1978 and that of Australia as an independent modern nation that welfare provision is mainly determined by the economic situation. Economic changes resulted in political reforms and ideological changes in welfare provision. The intense economic competition between nation states during the development of globalization from the 1990s, resulted in the popularity of the ideology of neoliberalism. Thus, welfare states declined. China is part of the global capitalist economic system. Although Chinese governments have recently promoted welfare provision, the ideology of class difference, especially between rural people and urban people, and that of controlling social instability are still clear in the Chinese welfare system. In comparison with China, Australia has a good and 'universal' welfare system and a flexible political structure. Social work practices in both Australia and China, however, have a contradictory nature of care and control rooted in modernization and the pursuit of economic growth.

Chapter 2: Rural Women in Context

Introduction

In this research, I examine social workers' empowerment practices with rural women in China and Australia. Rurality provides the context, a context that is embedded in the different economic, political, welfare, and cultural structures of Australia and China. The rural context contains a range of discourses, including a dominant rural economic development discourse that pervades and shapes rural policies, welfare delivery for rural communities, and social interactions in rural communities. In practice, these discourses are promoted by various power relationships among governments at different levels, service organizations, social workers, and rural service users. Furthermore, these diverse power relationships can enable or constrain social workers' empowerment practices.

In this thesis, enabling and constraining factors shaping social workers' empowerment practices emerged from research findings in Chapter 5 and 6. By presenting the findings based on these two themes, different power relationships among governments, service organizations, social workers, and service users are revealed. In order to explain why there are different kinds of power relationships, I have employed Bourdieu's concepts of symbolic fields, doxa, cultural capital, habitus, and distinction. By addressing how these different power relationships enable or constrain social workers' empowerment practices, I will examine the structural discourses of rurality in Australia and China. This is in keeping with Bourdieu's theory of structural constructivism. Australia and China have very different and, at times, similar rural economic, political, welfare, cultural, and gender structural discourses, which interrelate with the professional discourse of social work. This results in different and similar empowerment constructions being adopted by social workers in their work with rural women.

Rurality as a context, combined with different structural discourses, is therefore explicitly illustrated in this research. I define rural, highlighting that rural is broadly identified as different from urban in both Australia and China. The differences between rural and urban are simply explained in forms of geographic and demographic factors, and are further determined by factors such as the dominant economic activity, political ideologies, welfare deliveries, and people's interactions.

In order to clearly present rural structural factors, that is, structural discourses[5] which can enable or constrain empowering rural communities and rural people, I separate them into four main categories:

[5] The term structure and structural discourse are explained in detail in Chapter 3 Theory: Bourdieu, structural constructivism, cultural production, and reproduction.

rural economy, rural policy, rural welfare, and rural culture. In the rural economy section, I demonstrate the development and change process of the dominant economic industry in rural areas—agriculture—during the industrialization, urbanization, and modernization process of a nation. This is associated with changing rural demographic structures and rural people's livelihood status in relation to job categories, income source, and income security.

In both Australia and China, rural policies change according to the dominant rural economic activity, which is agriculture. Agriculture has held a strategic position at each different stage of the industrialization, urbanization, and modernization process of the two nations. Rural polices are policies oriented to agriculture and to the wellbeing of rural communities and rural people. The direction, ideology, and criticism of rural policies in both Australia and China will be introduced later in this chapter in sections on rural policy and rural welfare.

In China and Australia, how social workers empower rural service users accords with the latter's needs, which are influenced by the current development trend of the dominant rural economic industry—agriculture—and the policy arrangements adopted to address the wellbeing of people and their rural communities. Again, these are structural discourses developed and enacted in a rural context, which can enable or constrain social workers' empowerment practices.

In both countries, rural is defined as different from urban because it has different geographic, demographic, economic, political, and welfare structures. Therefore, rural culture represents the nature of rural society with certain types of geographic, demographic, and economic characteristics. However, this type of identification of the nature of rural society, contains qualitative dimensions such as imagination and homogenization. When addressing rural culture, I examine the nature of rural societies and their dominant geographical, demographic, and economic structures, and how these factors may be utilized or opposed by social workers to empower disadvantaged rural people. Critically, rural cultural discourses can constrain or enable social workers' empowerment practices. In practice, these cultural discourses are represented in the way people interact in rural communities.

After describing the economic, political, welfare, and cultural discourses of rural Australia and China, I will focus on the way rural women's lives are shaped by structural discourses heavily influenced by discursive constructions of gender. This will then lead to a discussion of the types of social services required to empower women and the kinds of empowerment projects, including their overt gender components, adopted by social workers to empower women.

Defining rural

Attempts to define 'rural' have led to constant debate worldwide. Rural definitions consist of different geographic, demographic, economic, and sociocultural factors, and thus differ between nation states. Because the focus on rurality differs according to which of these factors are given priority, governments, economists, agriculturalists, environmentalists, anthropologists, and sociologists may use different definitions. In addition, people who live in the same area may not all identify themselves as living in a rural or urban area, but may focus on other aspects of their life circumstances. Thus, 'rural' is a social and ideological construction adopted by different agents under different structures. Nevertheless, in both Australia and China, 'rural' can be generally defined as those spatial areas, other than urban areas, that are relatively marginalised in an increasingly urbanized and industrialized world (Zhang, 2008; Cheers, 1998).

Australia

According to the 2016 Census issued by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2016a), there were just over 23 million people living in Australia. In 2016, almost 80 per cent of them lived in the eastern mainland states including New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory (ABS, 2016a). Australia is a highly urbanized country, with two-thirds of its population living in capital cities in 2016 (ABS, 2016a). The urbanized population distribution in Australia has been adopted as an important indicator by government planners and some researchers to broadly define rural as non-metropolitan or non-capital-city areas (Dunn, 1989; Cheers, 1998; Mason, 2004, Howard, 2016). For instance, Peter Dunn (1989, p.13), defined rural Australia as:

> *….basically all areas outside the metropolitan conglomeration of Brisbane, Gold Coast, Newcastle, Sydney, Melbourne, Geelong, Hobart, Adelaide and Perth. This definition also includes Canberra.*

Three classifications are commonly cited by researchers (Hegney, 1997; Cheers, 1998; Lockie & Bourke, 2001; Black, 2005; Alston, 2009; Howard et al., 2016) to provide a physical geographic profile of rural Australia: the RRMA (Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Areas), the ARIA (Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia), and the ASGC (Australian Standard Geographic Classification).

The RRMA is a classic measure developed by the Department of Primary Industries and Energy (DPIE), and the then Department of Human Services and Health (DHSH) in 1994 to distinguish metropolitan, rural, and remote areas in terms of the size of the population (see Table 1 and Figure 1)(citied from Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], 2004). The RRMA, however, does not include area differences in relation to service and infrastructure provision, economic base, land use, natural

resources, demography, and social structure to identify remoteness levels (DPIE & DHSH 1994, citied from Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], 2004; Alston, 2009). Therefore, the ARIA classification (Accessibility and Remoteness Index of Australia) developed by the then Department of Health and Aged Care in 1997) relies on the road distance of an area to the nearest service centre (four categories, with populations of more than 5000 persons) to distinguish how remote this area is from services and goods (AIHW, 2004; Alston, 2009). The ASGC (Australian Standard Geographical Classification) is the updated form of the ARIA, and adds a fifth type of service centre with populations of 1000 persons to 4999 persons (AIHW, 2004).

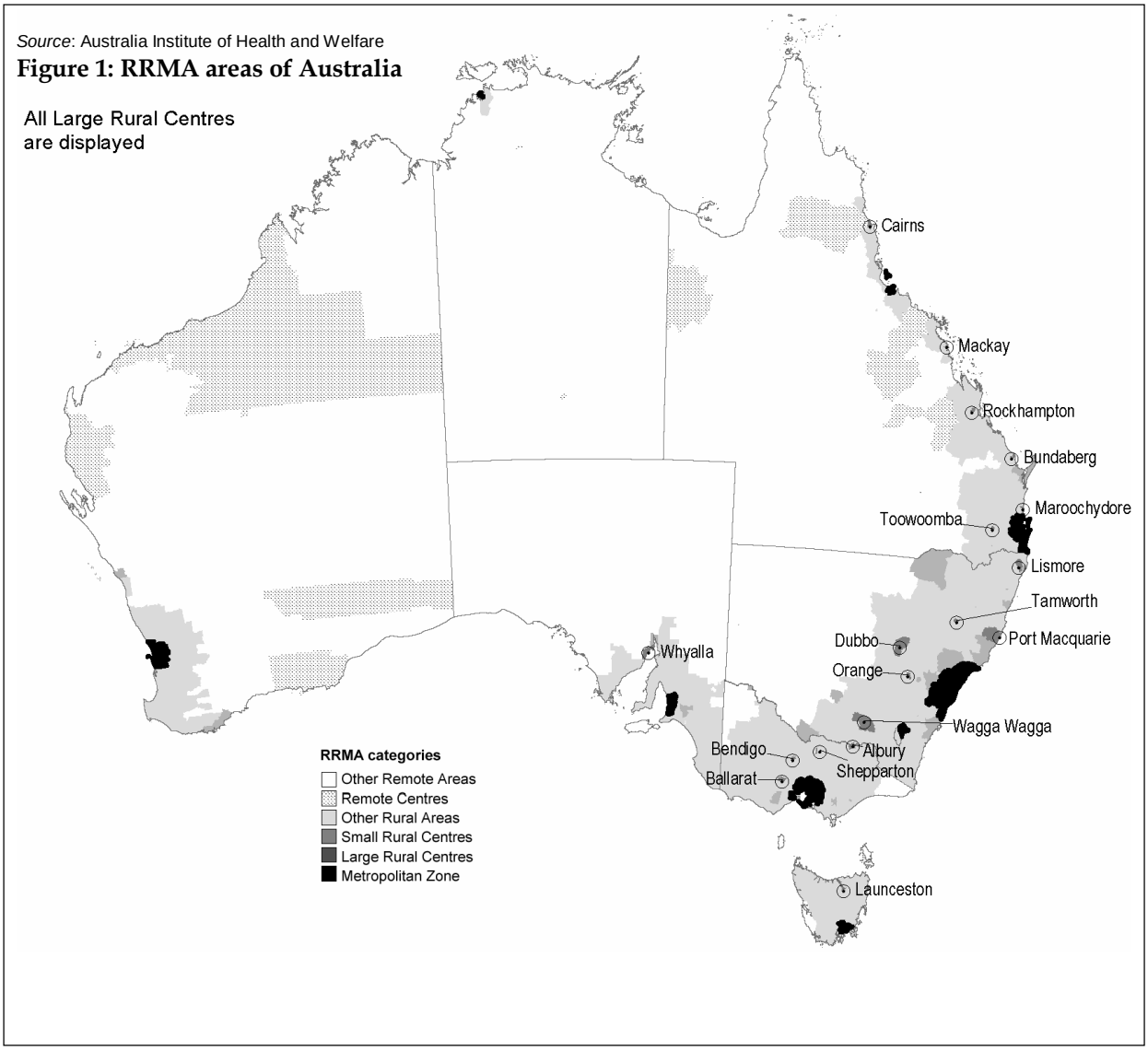
Table 1: Structure of Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Areas (RRMA) classification

Zone	Class Abbreviation
Metropolitan zone	Capital cities M1
	Other metropolitan centres (urban centre population ≥ 100,000) M2
Rural zone	Large rural centres (urban centre population 25,000–99,999) R1
	Small rural centres (urban centre population 10,000–24,999) R2
	Other rural areas (urban centre population < 10,000) R3
Remote zone	Remote centres (urban centre population ≥ 5,000) Rem1
	Other remote areas (urban centre population < 5,000) Rem2

Source: Australia Institute of Health and Welfare, 2004.

Source: Australia Institute of Health and Welfare

Figure 1: RRMA areas of Australia



Critiques of the RRMA, ARIA, and AGSC classifications argue that they cannot reflect the changing economic and sociocultural factors of rural communities (Maidment, 2012; Alston, 2009). For example, they cannot address who live in the communities, what types of economic activities they are engaged in, what values those community members have, and how they define themselves. Therefore, some researchers have summarized various rural definitions into three main types: spatial/geographical/ecological definitions, economic activity/occupational definitions, and sociocultural definitions (Lockie and Bourke, 2001, pp.5-10; Black, 2005, pp.22-24; Alston, 2009, pp.4-9).

For instance, the economic definition of 'rural' highlights the leading position of primary industries such as farming, forestry, fishing, hunting, and mining (Lockie and Bourke, 2001, p.6; Alston, 2009, p.6; Black, 2005, p.22). In contrast with the busy and personalised 'urban', the sociocultural definition of

'rural' tends to define it as being associated with features of a peaceful idyll, with intimate neighbours, strong male farmers, and virtuous female wives (Lockie & Bourke, 2001, p.6; Alston, 2009, p.6; Black, 2005, p.22).

None of the definitional types, however, can cover the heterogeneity, diversity, and variability of rural communities. In other words, there is no universal definition of 'rural'. Therefore, some researchers in the social science field propose focusing on a community's particular context of being rural and how its members perceive it as rural (Pawar & McClinton, 2000, p.3; Howard et al., 2016, p.1).

For the purposes of this research, two indicators are considered to identify what 'rural' means. First, 'rural' is a context that is different from urban and contains certain economic, political, welfare, cultural, and gender structural discourses. In terms of Australia's geographic and demographic situation, I will define 'rural' as all areas other than Australia's metropolitan cities. Second, 'rural' is within a perceived service context understood by the participants in this research who chose to answer questions about their interventions to address rural women's empowerment. It is important to note that my Australian participants' understanding of what 'rural' is matches the broad definition of rural as non-metropolitan.

China

In China, 'rural' also generally refers to non-city areas. Despite significant attention to Chinese literature[6], however, there are few scholars that have developed a clear definition of 'rural' in China. For the purpose of this research, I summarize the meaning of 'rural' implied by this literature.

Arguably the 'rural' in China is much more complicated by historical, economic, political, social, and cultural aspects than the 'rural' in recorded post-colonial Australian history. While in Australia there is evidence of agricultural production practices adopted by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for many tens of thousands of years, there is a limited record of the structure of agricultural communities prior to European settlement. Thus this research is focused on post-colonial Australia. China is one of the five places in the world where agricultural civilization originated. From the Xia Empire established around 2000 BC to the Republic of China constituted in 1912, the main economic activity was based on agricultural production. Systems were created by the power dynamic between state institutions and autonomous rural collectives, the class stratification around land ownership, and the cultures of Confucianism, Taoism, folklore belief, and patriarchy, all part of Chinese rural societies.

[6] Most Chinese literature I consulted consisted of journal articles cited from the China Academic Journals Full-Text Database. The source is limited for me to access Chinese books in Australia.

From 1912 to the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, 'rural' was used in relation to discourses including the commercialization of agricultural products, the reform of grassroots governance and Confucianism (Wen et al., 2003; Wei, 2014, p.198; Meng & Lin, 2015), the competition between warlords, and the Chinese Communist Party's revolution (Wu & Wu, 2010). From 1949 to the 1970s, 'rural' was taken to be a system with elements of land, food, labour, raw materials, and mining resources to help China achieve industrialisation (Lin & Yang, 2000; Wen, 2001; Li, 2006; Wen & Song, 2012; Lu & Yang, 2013). The 1958 Household Registration System issued by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC), was the legal basis utilized by state institutions to limit rural-to-urban migration (Lu, 2002). Since then, rural and urban areas and people were compulsorily separated by the state. Rural people were those whose households were registered in rural communes (NPC, 1958). In 1958, there were just over 547 million persons in rural areas, accounting for 82.8 per cent of the total population (Lu, 2004). During China's planned economy period, from 1949 to 1978, rural communes were a basic unit of Chinese socialist society, with economic, social, and political functions.

In 1978, China opened to the world and adopted a market economy. In the early 1980s, approximately almost 140 million hectares of arable land belonged to rural collectives (previously known as rural communes) and were available to be leased and managed by rural people (Feng et al., 2005). In 1998, rural collective committees were legally entitled by the 11th NPC to self-govern all affairs of rural communities, including the committee's election, and the education and welfare of the people (NPC, 1998). One rural collective committee governs an administrative rural community (Baidu encyclopaedia, 2012)[7]. Nonetheless, traditional Chinese rural communities that formed on the basis of lineage are usually viewed as the 'natural' rural community. An administrative rural community may consist of several 'natural' rural communities, or be one part of a big 'natural' rural community.

To summarize, defining rural people is determined by the urban–rural dual household registration system in China. And because rural autonomy is an administrative issue in China, rural communities are broadly identified as those that have self-governing rights. According to the the National Bureau of Statistics of the People's Republic of China (NBS, 2017a), the number of urban residents in China in 2016 was around 793 million people (just over 57 per cent of the total population), while rural residents numbered more than 589 million people (just over 42 per cent of the population). Including the more than 281 million rural migrants who worked in cities in 2016 (NBS, 2017b), there were nearly 870 million people who held rural identification. Given that there is nearly 135 million hectare of arable land (Ministry of the Natural Resources of the People's Republic of China [MNR], 2015), it can

[7] I have not found a Chinese journal article defining the administrative rural community.

be roughly calculated that one rural person might be able to lease 0.16 of a hectare of arable land in 2015.

Rural communities were economically vulnerable during China's rapid marketization, industrialisation, and urbanization. Rural people struggled to sell their products in the 1990s, at the same time as they were burdened by taxes and fees required from them by expanded town governments (Wen, 2001). This led some researchers and government planners to propose that the issues of agriculture, rural communities, and rural people should be analysed together (Lu, 2004). Since then, the 'three rural issues'—very poor rural people, very poor rural communities, and very dangerous agricultural practices—were commonly adopted by Chinese researchers and governments who noted that these three rural issues were associated with China's modernization and the need for sustainable development (Wen, 2001; Lu, 2006; Wen & Song, 2012).

In addition, using the framework of the three rural issues, different agents such as government departments, agriculturalists, economists, environmentalists, sociologists, and anthropologists attempted to understand 'rural' in a comprehensive way. Like the 'rural' in Australia, the 'rural' in China can be interpreted from four perspectives: geographical/ecological, economic/agricultural, political, and sociocultural. The following section illustrates rurality according to these aspects.

As with Australia, there is no universal definition of 'rural' in China. It is most likely to be taken as a complicated conceptual amalgamation which varies under different circumstances. In order to clearly analyse social workers' practices in the two countries, I will emphasize the similarities between the 'rural' in Australia and the 'rural' in China.

'Rural' in China can be defined as non-city areas. In addition, because of the collective ownership of rural lands in China and the autonomous rights of rural collectives, rural communities are named and listed in the Chinese administrative management system. Research for this thesis involved visiting five Chinese organizations, all of which serve administrative rural communities. Two of them are located in prefectures, which are listed as 'urban' in China's administrative management. Nonetheless, the practitioners perceive that their whole service areas (including the prefecture) is rural. For this reason, I have adopted the broad definition of 'rural' as non-city areas in China.

Rural context

This research examines social workers' empowerment practices with rural women under the different economic, political, social, and cultural structures of Australia and China. The macro structures of a nation make up the broad context. 'Rural' is also a context, whose demographic, economic, political,

social, and cultural structures are impacted by the macro structures of the nation. In both Australia and China, rural areas are vulnerable as a result of industrialization, marketization, and urbanization.

I apply the broad definition of 'rural' as non-metropolitan areas in Australia and as non-city areas in China. This broad definition of 'rural' is matched by the perception and actions of my interviewees and by China's dual registration system for urban and rural citizens discussed above. In the following section, I will illustrate how the rural context differs from the urban, and what kinds of economic, political, welfare, and cultural structures constitute the rural context.

'Rural' as a context

As explained above, 'rural' differs from 'urban', because of the historical, economic, geographic, demographic, political, social, and cultural structures of a nation. The rurality implied from different definitions of 'rural' not only indicates how rural structures are constituted in national structures, but also how people conceptualize 'rural'. In other words, rurality refers to the kinds of structural factors in rural society, and how those factors relate to a nation's pursuit of urbanization, industrialization, and modernization. I will illustrate Australian and Chinese rural contexts from four aspects: economic, political, welfare and cultural structural discourses.

Australia

Rural economy

The Australian post-colonial agricultural economy evolved from British colonization. In early years, land was granted and pastoralism developed. Squatters leased land. After Australia achieved independence, land was privatized and family farms evolved. More recently there has been a growth of industrial production and corporatized management. Undoubtedly, the rural economy rests on land ownership, economic activity in rural areas, the way production and management units are set up, and agricultural policies (especially finance and trade policies). It is important to note, however, that agriculture is but one type of economic activity in a broader rural economy. In rural areas, there are other important types of economic industries such as mining, tourism, food processing, and manufacturing industries. The various characteristics of different elements of the rural economic system means that every rural community is a unique economic unit.

Nevertheless, I chose to focus on agriculture to depict the general rural economy context in Australia. Partly, this is due to agriculture still being the most significant inland industry in Australia. By contrast, there were 304,200 people directly engaged in Australian agriculture in 2016–17 (ABS, 2016b), and 173,388 persons directly employed in mining in 2014–15 (ABS, 2016c). As well, my Australian social worker interviewees have an agriculture background and focus and some of them directly mentioned

that they served farmers[8]. Therefore, in the following section, I attempt to explore how the changes in agriculture during recent decades impact on most people in rural (including remote) communities.

Australian agriculture, including farming and grazing, led the prosperity of the Australian economy from the 1840s to the 1950s (Benard, 2008). In 1861, pastoral and other rural commodities underpinned the growth of the Australian economy, respectively sharing 16.1 per cent and 12.4 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) of Australia (Bernard, 2008). Well known as a country 'riding on the sheep's back', Australia exported a large amount of wool, which accounted for 54.1 per cent of the total value of Australian exports from 1881–90 (Bernard, 2008).The contribution of agriculture to Australian export earnings was 80 per cent in the 1950s (Cheers and Taylor, 2005).

As a result of industrialisation, the global market economy, and synthetic fabric technology, however, Australia's agricultural fortune declined markedly in the 1990s. In the early 1990s, agriculture was only earning 20.6 per cent of all export dollars, dropping nearly 60 per cent from 1950 (Cheers, 1998). According to the ABS (2001, p.3), the gross farm product (GFP) reached $17.6 billion in 1999–2000, but was just under 3 per cent of GDP. Although Australian farmers supply 93 per cent of food consumed by Australians (National Farmers' Federation, 2017), and continue exporting their products, they experience hardship economically, socially, and psychologically when the agricultural economy declines.

In 1999–2000, agricultural activities occupied 456 million hectares or 59 per cent of Australia's land mass (ABS, 2000, p.58). According to Garnaut and Lim-Applegate (1998, cited in Alston, 2009, p.6), over 90 per cent of 140,000 Australian farm enterprises were run by families. The Australian agricultural industry contributed 5 per cent to total employment in 1998–99, and this has fallen to 2.7 per cent in 2017 (The World Bank, 2017). According to the 2016 Census, the number of Australian farming businesses decreased to 85,681 in 2016 (ABS, 2016b). This shows that there is a movement of land ownership from smaller family farms to larger, often global, or at least capital-based, companies (Howard et al, 2016, p.35). Many families have left farming and a large number of young people have moved to regional and capital cities to search for work and education. Thus, along with the population decline in rural communities, the farming population is aging. The 2016 Census shows that the average age of farm producers is 56 years (ABS, 2016b). According to the statistics on agricultural commodities in Australia from 2015–16 (ABS, 2016b), male providers and female providers respectively account for 78 per cent and 22 per cent of farm managers. Women undertake

[8] In this research, women on farms are regarded as farmers.

the triple tasks of farm work, off-farm work, and domestic work to maintain the operation of their family farms (Alston, 1995, p.29; Cheers & Taylor, 2005; Alston, 2009, p.25).

To summarize, along with the restructuring of the rural economy and demographic changes, the following characteristics are evident:

- Agriculture has declined in importance to the national economy of Australia. It has been significantly identified as having incalculable potential to meet the needs of a global market, and thus has been reshaped by capital and the competitive global market rather than having its use determined by its natural resources and the prosperity of its communities (Cheers, 1998, pp.45-9; McMichael & Lawrence, 2001; Lawrence, 2005; Cheers & Taylor, 2005; Alston, 2009, p.25; Howard et al., 2016, p.35).
- Transnational corporations have entered into agricultural industries and have supplanted many small farm holders. They have started to control the price of agricultural inputs such as seeds and fertilisers. They are attempting to develop an advanced industrial production chain including the utilization of machinery and biotechnology, food preservation, transportation and marketing; they apply economic rationalism to organize the processing and distribution of agriculture production on a world-wide basis; they contract with farmers and trigger competition between farmers; they interfere with the decision-making of governments and local communities; they focus on the commercial value of natural resources and ignore communities' sustainable development (Cheers, 1998, p.45; Alston, 2009, p.25; McMichael & Lawrence, 2001; Burch & Rickson, 2001; Lawrence, 2005; Stayner, 2005; Howard et al., 2016, p.35).
- Many families have left farming; many young people have moved to urban areas to search for work and education; the farming labour force is aging; women have shouldered farm, off-farm, and domestic tasks to maintain the survival of their family farms (Alston, 1995, p.29; Cheers, 1998, p.49; Lawrence, 2005; Stayner, 2005; Cheers & Taylor, 2005; Alston, 2009, pp.24-5;).
- Most small towns are suffering from economic decline and population loss; many regional cities are expanding because of the influx of an urban retiree population and the centralisation of resources from nearby smaller communities; some rural communities have thrived because of the mining industry; some rural communities are building their resilience by developing tourism and eco-agriculture (Alston, 2009, p.13; Cheers & Taylor, 2005; Lawrence, 2005).

The downturn of agriculture has led to a series of follow-on effects in rural Australia (Cheers, 1998, pp.30-45; Alston, 2009, pp.12-29; Stayner, 2005; Alston, 2000; Pawar & McClinton, 2000, pp.5-6; Cheers & Taylor, 2005; Howard et al., p3):

- Downsizing of and loss of essential infrastructure
- the withdrawal of public institutions such as hospitals and schools, of private enterprises such as banks and stores, and of non-profit organizations
- high unemployment rate and poverty levels
- poor health and wellbeing of rural people.

Furthermore, in recent years, frequent climate events such as droughts and floods have exacerbated the rural crisis and made rural people very disadvantaged. In the next section, I discuss how Australian governments have responded to the economic, demographic, social, and ecological restructuring of rural communities.

Rural Policy

During the first half of the twentieth century, agriculture still played an important role in Australia's economic growth, contributing more than two-thirds of its export earnings. In order to maintain agricultural development, Australian governments committed to develop infrastructure such as railways and irrigation systems, improve the application of technology in agriculture, and establish agricultural colleges (Higgins & Lockie, 2001). Moreover, Australian national policies such as import restrictions, tax concessions, subsidised prices, low interest credit, and bounties protected agriculture from the volatility of global market, and further boosted agricultural productivity (Higgins & Lockie, 2001). Before the 1970s, Keynesian theory was the underpinning ideology for Australian governments to provide this agricultural policy support. In the 1970s, however, along with the world economic turmoil, Britain's participation in the European Economic Community, and agricultural overproduction in Europe and North America (Tonts, 2005), the Australian agricultural industry faced falling prices, shrunken overseas markets, and rising overseas competition.

With an intensified global market, from the 1980s, Australian governments chose to apply a new ideology, making agricultural fortunes dependent on the omnipotent free market in order to make Australian agriculture more competitive internationally. This ideology is commonly known as neoliberalism, and is a belief in the dominating force of the free market for economic growth, and non-intervention of governments. Given investments and productivity are core aspects of the neoliberal policies such as the Rural Adjustment Scheme and the National Competition Policy (both introduced in the 1990s), many farm families were encouraged to expand their operations, invest in technology, upgrade facilities, and further exploit natural resources to increase agricultural productivity. This required the borrowing of large amounts of money from banks (Higgins & Lockie, 2001; Tonts, 2005). In the 1980s and 1990s, many small and medium-sized farms were trapped in a debt crisis and were bought and amalgamated by large and capital-based farms. Many farm families

who were not financially powerful left agriculture. In order to keep their farms, many farmers had to over-exploit their lands, adopting practices such as the use of large amounts of fertilisers and pesticides, overstocking paddocks or clearing more vegetation (Tonts, 2005).

These trends show clearly that government policy has been a significant force, interacting with economic and ecological factors and resulting in the structuring and restructuring of Australian rural communities. Since the 1980s, most Australian rural policies have been criticized by many social science scholars as having one or more of the following characteristics:

- An urban-centric focus (Cheers, 1998, p.93; Cheers & Taylor, 2005; Maidment, 2012; Alston, 2012; Howard et al., 2016, p.79): An urban-centric focus has been incorporated into economic and social policies for rural Australia. This means that rural issues are usually analyzed and dealt with by governments and expertise located in urban areas; rural services are contracted to large organisations also located in urban areas; rural communities are utilized as a buffer for urban problems such as crowding, pollution, poverty, and increasing crime. With an urban-centric focus, rural polices ignore the special and diverse economic, ecological, social, and cultural environments of rural communities, and neglect the voices of rural communities, families, and individuals.
- An economic perspective (Cheers, 1998, pp.93-102; Cheers & Taylor, 2005; Tonts, 2005; Alston, 2009, pp.18-36; Howard et al., 2016, P.80): Economic growth is prioritized in rural policies. It is considered to be the basis of poverty alleviation because it has the potential to increase employment. Economic efficiency is taken as the principle of distributing resources and allocating funding to rural communities. Natural, human, and social resources of rural Australia are recognised as economic capital with the potential to promote the development of the national economy of Australia. Therefore, social, individual, and ecological problems are considered to be economic problems. More funding from governments does not equal better support, however, because the community's social, ecological, and economic sustainable development has not been considered in an integrated way.
- A problem-solving approach rather than capacity-building (Cheers, 1998, p.93; Cheers & Taylor, 2005; Pawar & McClinton, 2000, p.6-7; Alston, 2009, p.20; Maidment & Bay, 2012): Governments are usually driven by economic, social, and natural events when constructing rural policies. This type of decision-making process is hasty and reactive and aimed at minimising political damage. For example, the severe hardship of farm families in the lengthy millennium drought led to the issue of the Exceptional Circumstances Relief Payment and the Exceptional Circumstances Interest Rate Subsidy. Polices should centre on capacity-building

and empowerment of people and communities in a proactive way, rather than being designed to calm down issues.

- An approach that strengthens the self-reliance of local communities, farm families, and individuals (Alston, 2000; Higgins & Lockie, 2001; Cheers & Taylor, 2005; Tonts, 2005; Alston, 2009, p18; Alston, 2012; Bay; 2012; Wendt, 2012): In the neoliberal environment, rural policies tend to highlight the responsibility of individuals, families, and communities to deal with economic hardship, welfare decline, and natural disasters. Individuals are required to be rational enough to make proper economic decisions; families are encouraged to rely on each other as much as possible; communities are pressured to take the initiative and to be vigorous in handling structural changes. Unsurprisingly, frequent droughts and floods are viewed by governments to be business risks that need to be 'managed' by farmers, and women's caring and volunteering roles are highly 'praised' by governments for maintaining the family and the community.
- A market-style operation based on competition (Cheers, 1998, p.93; Cheers & Taylor, 2005; Howard et al., 2016, P.79): The free market is a belief and a technique utilized by governments to deliver rural policies. Market competition is the principle by which agriculture is restructured, welfare provision is made more efficient, and services such as transport, telecommunications, and the internet are arranged. For instance, the trend of farm amalgamations and the tendering of welfare services and infrastructure mentioned above, are all based on the principle of market competition. In general, the result is that large capital-based farms, organisations, and companies benefit from the market competition, while those smaller farms with a local focus are not valued and are left unsupported.
- A strategy of regionalization (Cheers, 1998, p.93; Alston, 2009, p.20): Regionalization is a comprehensively considered strategy used in concert with all the factors mentioned above. Regional centres are becoming bigger by attracting agricultural-based industries, taking rural migrants, and absorbing public and private services from nearby rural communities. Those services include government institutions, schools, hospitals, post offices, banks, and stores. For example, there were over 130 rural birthing centres in Australia until the late 1990s when they were consolidated into larger regional centres (Alston, 2009, p.20). It is difficult to identify, however, how effectively regional cities offer these services back to the nearby rural communities.

Complex interactions between economic volatility, government policy, and social and ecological change resulted in the restructuring of rural Australia. From the 1980s, Australian governments have attempted to reverse the downturn of agriculture by adopting the ideology of neoliberalism. It seems,

however, that market optimization has further exacerbated the disadvantage of Australian rural communities. Overall, policies with the characteristics listed above have further aggravated the negative effects of declining agricultural production. These effects can be viewed from a broad welfare perspective to reflect how rural people's wellbeing is affected by the restructuring of the economy and a reshaped policy environment in rural Australia.

Rural welfare

Broadly, welfare is a type of supply from governments, through taxation redistribution in the form of cash and service support, to guarantee the basic survival of citizens and eligible residents. In most circumstances, analysis of welfare is done in relation to public or formal welfare delivered from governments and does not include much about the informal welfare provided by the private sector, non-profit organizations, local communities, and individuals (Cheers, 1998, pp.15-8; McMahon, 2000, p.8; Greve, 2008). But welfare is also about an individual's or a community's wellbeing, happiness, health, and prosperity (Australia Institute of Health and Welfare, 2017).

Therefore, in a broad sense, welfare is associated with factors such as the quality of the natural environment (air, soil, water), the accessibility of infrastructure (roads, tunnels, water supply, sewers, electrical grids, telecommunications), the availability of essential public and private services (transport, telephone and postal services, radio and television, hospitals, clinics, schools, banks, retail outlets, repair and maintenance services), the reliability of the public 'social welfare' system (income security payments for the aging, the poor, the disabled, single parents, the unemployed, and people living in hardship), the vitality of local-based non-profit organizations, and the cohesion of local communities (recreation, entertainment, and support). From a holistic view, it is important to note how these factors change under the restructuring of the rural economy and policy, and how the change in these factors impact on the wellbeing of rural people, especially women.

Generally viewed, the downturn of agriculture and neoliberal rural polices made the rural sector more disadvantaged in the broadly defined welfare provision system in Australia. From the late 1970s, Australian governments gave priority to the dominance of a free market to 'reverse' stagflation (concurrent rises in unemployment and inflation) and intentionally withdrew interventions from many sectors, including agriculture and social welfare (Cheers and Taylor, 2005). During that time, this type of economic rationalism was well known as the Thatcherism of Britain and the Reaganism of America.

In Australia, the Rural Adjustment Scheme, introduced in 1977, emphasized 'the need to improve farm productivity and farm business', rather than protecting the family farm (Cockfield, 2000). This caused many small family farms that were incapable of managing market risks to fail. The National Competition Policy, which spanned 1995 to 2005, aimed at 'promoting competitive forces to increase

efficiency and community welfare' (Commonwealth of Australia, 1993, n.p.). This robbed inland rural areas of services and infrastructure (Alston, 2005b). Discourses of welfare delivery are about market competition, efficiency, managerialism, privatization, quality assurance, mutual obligation, and self-reliance. This has further widened the gap between Australian rural and urban communities, largely harming the wellbeing of rural communities and rural people.

When small farms were amalgamated by large capital-based farms or companies, many farm families emigrated. As the rural population decreased, infrastructure and services were removed to comply with the market principle of allocating resources efficiently. For example, public transport was reduced, removed, or made more expensive; communication infrastructure such as adequate internet and broadband access, and mobile telephone coverage were not provided to rural families; public services such as post offices, hospitals, and schools, and private services such as banks, stores, and restaurants were closed (Alston, 2005b; Tonts, 2005; Howard et al., 2016, pp.91-102).

Clearly, the closure of government services and businesses led to the decrease of employment opportunities. A critical mass of young people moved out from rural communities to regional cities or capital cities to look for jobs. As the rural employment market became insecure, seasonal, and casual, issues of unemployment and poverty occurred. Undoubtedly, economic pressure and hardship has been a direct contributor to the mental health problems affecting rural people, especially young men (Bourke, 2001). For rural people suffering mental and physical disorders, the lack of local health or medical practitioners, and the long distances required to travel to reach services limits their access to proper care (Alston, 2005b; Howard, 2016 et al., p.91-102).

Economic, policy, social, and ecological problems do not exist in isolation. In response to economic pressure, farmers may use large amounts of fertilizers and pesticides, overstock their paddocks or clear more vegetation to help their farms survive (Tonts, 2005). Although governments actively supported the Landcare movement from the 1990s, the main tone of their support is about how to motivate local communities and farm families to take responsibility for rehabilitating land (Tonts, 2005). Furthermore, frequent climate change related events such as drought and flood are identified by governments as inevitable farming risks that need to be predicted and managed by farmers. During the period of drought, many farmers sold their irrigation water licences, curtailed farm labour, were trapped into a debt crisis, and, at worst, lost their farms.

In these circumstances, rural populations in general may experience difficult situations and those who are aged, disabled, sick, unemployed, mentally ill, single parents, from non-English speaking backgrounds, or are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may be worse off. The Liberal-National government in Australia, elected in the mid-1990s under John Howard, however, largely

adopted residual approaches to welfare, including means testing in welfare provision, which further distinguished the 'deserving' from the 'undeserving' (Alston, 2000; Alston, 2005a; Alston, 2005b; Chenoweth et al., 2005; McDonald & Chenoweth, 2007; McMahon, 2000). In the competitive environment, large non-profit or private organizations won funds from governments to provide services for rural communities, while those small in size and with a local focus lost out.

It is important to identify how practitioners in the social welfare sector, especially professional social workers, act in the general rural context, with less population, deficient infrastructure, fewer public and private services, and frequent climate change events, to try to empower the rural disadvantaged including rural women. Rural communities are, however, heterogeneous, diversely structured, and not all disadvantaged. Because social workers' services are embedded in cultural contexts, in the next section, I will demonstrate what kinds of cultural features of rural Australia are formed or constructed in relation to rural historical, geographical, demographical, economic, political, and welfare contexts.

Rural culture

Simply speaking, in the social science field, culture means the arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively, and the ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular people or society (cited from the Oxford Dictionary). Partly, culture is formed or constructed in terms of certain historical, geographical, economic, demographic, and political contexts. Therefore, culture represents the potential nature of the Australian rural society. Culture is also reproduced by people through images and contrasts (Flinkelstein & Bourke, 2001; Gray & Phillips, 2001). Culture relates to imagination, assimilation and normalization, distinction and discipline.

Historically, the prosperity of the agricultural economy underpinned the development of Australian industrialization and modernization. This links rural Australia to the national identity of Australia (Cheers, 1998, p.29; Flinkelstein & Bourke, 2001; Gray & Phillips, 2001). Well known then as a country 'riding on the sheep's back', Australia was symbolised by vast lands, spread-out farmers, herds of sheep and cows, strong sunshine, and abundant milk and wool. Obviously, an image like this creates feelings of peace, harmony, and satisfaction (Mason, 2004, p.9; Flinkelstein & Bourke, 2001; Alston, 2009, p.7). Considering that two-thirds of the Australian population lived in capital cities in 2016 (ABS, 2016a), other images such as modern cities, people with multicultural backgrounds, fashionable and busy life, and the homeless and poor, also constitute the identity of Australia. As Finkelstein and Bourke (2001) pointed out, the contrast between 'the urban jungle and the rural outback, reflects and reinforces this as an enduring and successful element in the formation of Australian culture and identity'.

Based on the differentiations of rural from urban Australia, two terms—'countrymindness' and rural idyll—are commonly pointed to as the 'most pervasive ideological feature of rural culture across space and time' (Cheers, 1998, pp.68-73; Gray & Phillips, 2001; Alston, 2009, p.7). Concepts of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft provide useful explanations for the cultural features of rural and urban society in a contrastive way (Alston, 2009, p.7). Simply, Gemeinschaft describes a society that is centred on informal social relationships such as kinship, friendship, and neighbourhood and is regulated through commonly recognized moral obligations (Cheers, 1998, pp.68-73; Alston, 2009, p.7). Gemeinschaftlich social structural divisions 'based on class, occupation, gender, and length of residence are fairly strong and stable' (Cheers, 1998, p. 71). In contrast to that of Gemeinschaft, interactions in Gesellschaftlich society are based on formal exchanges and contractual obligations, and are characterised by high heterogeneity and changeability (Cheers, 1998, pp.68-73; Alston, 2009, p.7).

Clearly, culture is the result or process of the interactions between subjective and objective factors. It contains reality and myth. For instance, the commonly acknowledged Gemeinschaft lifestyle within Australian rural areas, is largely generated by similar geographic features (vast lands and spread-out populations) and economic activities (agriculture). Based on close informal social networks, the Gemeinschaft lifestyle of sharing in a community, further strengthens certain roles and expectations in relation to people's gender, class, race, and length of residence (Cheers, 1998, pp.68-73; Gray & Phillips, 2001; Alston, 2009, p.7; Pugh & Cheers, 2010, pp.34-40). When some individuals cannot meet certain roles and expectations demanded by their communities, they may experience cultural discipline or discrimination. The feeling of shame makes it difficult for them to ask for help. This type of cultural discrimination plus high social visibility are significant barriers for social workers who are working to empower the disadvantaged such as people who have mental health problems, women who have experienced domestic violence, LGBT groups, or people who are infected with HIV. From another perspective, however, if social workers are able to utilize the close informal social networks in rural communities to organize community participation or movements, they may efficiently change unequal cultural structures such as patriarchy.

Culture is diverse and dynamic. Rural communities also differ culturally from each other because of their different historical developments and economic frameworks (Flinkelstein & Bourke,2001; Gray & Phillips, 2001). As well, people who live in the same community may have different understandings about what their community is and how they belong or attach to the community (Pugh & Cheers, 2010, p.22). Moreover, external structural changes relating to markets, policies, and climate significantly influence how people interact with the outside world and with each other in the rural community to which they belong (Cheers, 1998, p.85; Gray & Phillips, 2001; Alston, 2009, p.7).

In this research, I attempt to discover what kinds of rural cultural characteristics are mentioned by social worker interviewees, and how they value, utilize, or resist those cultural characteristics to empower rural women. In the next section, rural economic, political, welfare, and cultural structural discourses in China, will be explained.

China

Rural economy

Rural economy is associated with the ownership of land, the primary economic activity such as agriculture or mining, the production unit such as peasant families, rural collectives or cooperatives, and companies, and the relevant finance and trade policies of the nation. It is a system based on geographical, historical, and demographical rural contexts. In the following section, I will describe the evolution of the rural economy in China. Similar to the description of the Australian rural background, the explanation below unfolds in terms of the dominant economic activity—agriculture—in Chinese rural areas. One of the reasons for this is that agriculture is still the most important economic industry in Chinese rural areas. For example, there are nearly 300 million rural labourers engaged in agriculture to satisfy the food needs of more than 1.3 billion people in China (National Bureau of Statistics, 2014, cited in Cai, 2017). According to the Ministry of Natural Resources of the People's Republic of China (PRC) (MNR, 2015), there were nearly 135 million hectares of arable land and just over 219 million hectares of pasturelands in China at the end of 2015, while only around 31 million hectares of land was occupied by mining. Also, I chose to focus on agriculture because my Chinese interviewees pointed out that their practices are carried out in the context of agriculture or their service users used to, or still work in agriculture. This does not mean, however, that the diversity and heterogeneity of rural communities should be ignored. Every rural community is special, with different economic structures consisting of agriculture, mining, tourism, food processing, mineral industries, and ecommerce. Nevertheless, according to research interviews and the research aim of comparing rural social work practices of two countries, I chose to profile the general rural context centred on agriculture.

In China, from the Xia Empire established around 2000 BC to the Republic of China constituted in 1912, agriculture was the first and foremost economic activity. From 216 BC, during the Qin Empire, owner-peasants and tenant-peasants became the main body who were directly engaged in agriculture production (Wu & Wu, 2010; Guo, 2016; Liu, 2017). At first, they farmed, grazed animals, or fished to satisfy their own needs. And then, depending on their surplus, tenant-peasants paid rents to landlords, and owner-peasants paid taxes to the state (Cheng, 2004; Guo, 2016). Rents and taxes were not only

paid in currency, they could be paid in food, meat, and labour (Liu, 2017). This system is called the small-scale, self-subsistence agricultural economy in China.

During the period of the Republic of China (1912–49), although agricultural products were commercialized, the small-scale, self-subsistence agricultural economy was still the main form of the rural economy (Wen, 1999; Wu, 2002). After the establishment of the PRC in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party caused arable lands to be distributed equally to peasants in every natural rural community. By 1953, peasants could exchange their land for shares to join the Primary Agricultural Producer's Cooperative (PARC). Thus, they gained life necessities and money through how many shares they had (according to the quality of the land) and how much labour they contributed (Wang & Wang, 1996; Wang & Xu, 1996; Gao, 2013). At that time, land still belonged to peasant families, but was managed by collectives (the PARC). In China, this was regarded as a type of cooperative rural economy.

By 1958, the land owned by peasants had been allocated to rural collectives without payment to further enhance agricultural production efficiencies in order to support rapid industrialization (Wen, 1999; Wen & Song, 2012; Gao,2013). The PARC had become he Advanced Agricultural Producer's Cooperative, which provided remuneration to peasants according to the amount of labour they contributed. The rural commune was the basic institution in that collective agricultural economy system, with both economic and political functions. This 'socialist' or 'communist' agricultural economy system, however, mandatorily regulated the peasants' contribution of labour to collectives, while fettering their freedom in many ways. Linked with the 1958 Household Registration System, industries and workers in cities enjoyed contributions (including food, raw materials, and labour) from the whole nation, while agriculture and peasants were responsible for providing what industries and workers needed (Jiang, 2012; Qiao & Gong, 2014). The result of the mandatory urban–rural dual system was the decline or stagnation of agriculture, and disorder in society (Lin & Lin, 2000; Li, 2006; Zhang, 2012).

In 1978, China moved away from the planned economy and started adopting market economy policies and opening up to the world. Rural people whose households were registered in rural communes gained the right to lease and manage the arable land of the collectives. Currently, the ownership of rural land is still held by rural collectives, and peasant families own the leasing and managing rights. From the 1980s to the 1990s, along with peasants' rising enthusiasm for producing, agricultural yields kept soaring (Cao, 2002; Lu, 2004; Lu & Yang, 2013; Liu, 2017). Correspondingly, rural communes collapsed, rural people were allowed to migrate to cities and to work there (Lu, 2002), and rural people were encouraged and supported by governments to open industries in rural communities (NBS, 1999).

Based on nearly 129 million hectares of arable lands in 1998 (Song, 2011), there were more than 0.5 trillion kilos of agriculture yields (Lu, 2004). Among more than 800 million rural people in 1998 (NBS, 1998), almost 65 million migrated to cities to work. As well, in 1998, industries invested in by rural collectives and individuals, that were located in rural areas (including towns and villages), contributed nearly 28 per cent of GDP for the nation (NBS, 1999). Because of the development of agriculture, and the increasing opportunities for rural people to work in industries, the income gap between rural and urban people was relatively narrow from the 1980s to the middle of the 1990s (Lu & Zhu, 2015).

From the end of the 1990s, however, agriculture, rural communities, and rural people were caught up in difficulties again (Cao, 2002, Lu, 2004; Zhang, 2012). The main reasons for rural vulnerability are very complicated. At the end of the 1990s, ill-conceived foreign trade, foreign exchange, and agricultural product circulation policies, and inadequate finance arrangements, led to the overstocking of agricultural products (Wen, 1997; Cao, 2002; Lu, 2004). It was then difficult for peasants to sell their products and increasing agricultural outputs did not bring them income growth. As well, during the process of marketization, and under the discourse of modernization, town governments swelled with multiple functions and levied various fees and taxes on peasants (Lu, 2004; Zhang, 2004). Peasants suffered from poverty. In addition, the utilization of pesticides and chemical fertilisers increased agricultural outputs but harmed the soil and polluted rivers. Thus, agricultural practices were dangerous. Furthermore, rural communities were very poor because of the lack of adequate infrastructure such as roads, water supplies, electricity grids, and telecommunications, and available public services such as transport, schools, and hospitals (Lu, 2004; Jia & Ge, 2013). That is how the 'three rural issues'—very poor rural people, very dangerous agricultural practices, and very poor rural communities—became a concept commonly used by Chinese researchers and governments.

In the twenty-first century, rapid industrialization and urbanization are increasing the complexity and severity of the 'three rural issues'. As is generally known, urbanization means that there are more and more people living and working in cities that become bigger and bigger. According to the Land Administration Law of the PRC (second amendment in 2004), only the lands owned by the nation are available to be used by individuals and institutions (private and public) for construction (The Central People's Government of the PRC [CPG], 2005). Thus, only governments have the right to expropriate or buy lands from rural collectives. The land compensation fee and resettlement subsidy provided by governments in total, however, is no more than thirty times the average production value (in the preceding three years) of the levied rural lands (CPG, 2005). As land prices are soaring under rapid urbanization and industrialization, local governments make huge amounts of money by levying rural lands cheaply and selling those lands at high prices to individuals and institutions in the marketplace (Qian and Mou, 2015; Wen et al, 2015). According to the statistics of the MNR (2008, 2016), over 6

million hectares of arable land was levied for construction use from 2008 to 2016. Correspondingly, the number of rural peasants whose contracting lands were levied, reached approximately 50 million persons in 2011 (Ma, 2015, p.5). The above statistics, however, only include the 'legal' levy behaviours of governments. Many local governments made huge profits by levying more rural lands than were approved, or illegally 'rented' or occupied rural lands that were not approved to be levied (MNR, 2008). Therefore, there is a great amount of conflict between governments and 'land-lost' peasants who rarely have guarantees (job, pension, medical insurance, and so on) for their future life.

Urbanization and industrialization's excessive appropriation of rural labour and land caused economic and social disorder in most Chinese rural communities, which in turn threatened China's social stability and pursuit of modernization. Along with over 281 million rural migrants working in cities in 2016 (NBS, 2017b), there were 40 million women, 50 million elders, and 60 million children left behind in rural areas (Yan, 2016). It is not hard to imagine that many rural communities in China face decline and destitution. For China, with a population base of more than 1.3 billion, agriculture indeed needs to be protected and developed. From 2004 until now, the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party keeps issuing its first 'rural policy' at the beginning of every year, to strategically plan how to achieve an increase in agricultural output, peasants' income, and the stability of rural communities (The State Council of the PRC, 2012-13; 2014a-d; 2015a-c; 2016a; 2017). The agricultural tax was cancelled nationwide in 2006 (CPG, 2006) and subsidies for purchasing good seeds (or breeds) and machinery have been increasingly offered by governments since 2004. As well, the MNR (2008) required that the amount of arable land in China must be no less than nearly 120 million hectares. All these protection policies, plus trade protection arrangements and agricultural technology improvements, led to a twelve-year increase in agricultural output from 2004 to 2017 (The State Council, 2017).

During recent decades, the Chinese central government has increasingly strengthened the support for professional farmers (successful in agriculture), family farms (engaging in agriculture in an industrialized and commercialized way), rural cooperatives (underpinned by rural collectives), and leading companies (based on or invested in agriculture) (Wen et al., 2003; Zhong et al., 2012; The State Council, 2013; 2014b; 2017). On the one hand, like many Western countries including Australia, China also intends to pursue large-scale production and management, industrialization and commercialization of agriculture, which makes small peasants or farm families retreat from agriculture (Wen et al., 2003; Lu, 2006; Wen et al., 2010; Wen & Song, 2012; Zhong et al., 2012; The State Council, 2013; 2015b, 2016a; 2017; 2018; Chen, 2018). On the other hand, unlike countries such as Australia, Canada, and America, it is impossible for Chinese cities to absorb most of the Chinese rural population (800 million) that would migrate as a result of the pursuit of large-scale production and

industrialization of agriculture (Wen, 2009; Wen et al., 2010). Therefore, Chinese governments encourage rural collectives to revive the cooperative rural economy, with the focus on sustainable development of the rural community (Wen & Song, 2012; Zhong et al., 2012; The State Council, 2013; 2014a-d, 2015a-c, 2016a; 2018; Chen, 2018). The government means to help peasants to stay in agriculture and in the rural communities they belong to by depending on the collective's power of negotiating with the market, resisting market risk, and providing mutual help.

The rural economy system in China, and how it relates to the lives of rural people, is quite complex. I focus on agriculture because it is still the dominant economic type in rural China, and significantly relevant to China's social stability. Agriculture is the centre of the Chinese rural economy system and strategically positioned in Chinese policies. The ideologies and aims of those polices are the most important factors that led to the economic, demographic, social, and cultural changes in rural communities. Discourses of the small-scale, self-sufficiency agriculture economy, the industrialization and mechanisation of agriculture, the difficult situations of rural migrants and left-behind rural groups, the revival of the rural cooperative economy, all emerged in my Chinese research interviews. Those discourses relate to what the life of rural people looks like, and how social work practitioners interact with governments and markets to empower rural people, especially women. In the following section, I will analyse the trend of the agricultural economy and rural polices in China, and compare them with their Australian counterparts.

Rural policy

From 1949 to 1978, during the planned economy period in China, the urban–rural dual system was built. To satisfy China's goal of achieving industrialization rapidly, rural people and rural communities were regulated by Chinese governments to provide 'abundant' food, lands, raw materials, and mining resources for urban workers and industries (Wen, 1999; Lin & Lin, 2000; Lu, 2002; Li, 2006; Zhang, 2012; Lu, 2013). Urban workers, cities, and industries were prioritized by Chinese governments, while rural people, rural communities, and agriculture were placed in an inferior position. In the then socialist China, cities, industries, and government institutions enjoyed contributions from the whole nation and supplied a wide range of welfare including food, clothing, accommodation, medical care, and education to their workers (Cheng, 2008; Song, 2009; Yu & He, 2010). Rural communities and agriculture, however, shouldered the task of supporting industrialization and urbanization; rural people depended on collective support within their communities to deal with aging, illness, disability, or a family death.

When a market economy was adopted in China from 1978, it was believed that the free market would be able to relieve the constraints of strong government. Indeed, to meet the needs of the free market,

mandatory production units such as many state-owned industries and rural communes disintegrated and the Household Registration policy loosened its limitation on rural-to-urban migration (Lu, 2002; Zhao, 2006; Zhao, 2009; Song et al., 2011). Rural people were able to manage agricultural production in a free market, to open their own industries, and to go to cities to work. It seemed that rural polices aimed to liberate rural people from coercive collectives and encourage them to use their personal knowledge and ability. Nevertheless, by comparison with cities, rural people were not able to enjoy the many benefits of marketization, industrialization, and urbanization. When strong Chinese governments ambiguously made concessions to the market, it was not hard to predict that rural communities and rural people would suffer from the conflicts of interest between strong governments and the free market. The evidence is the overstocking of agricultural products and the disorder of rural society in the 1990s (Cao, 2002; Lu, 2004; Jia & Ge, 2013). When the market became a global one, that is, when China participated in the World Trade Organization at the beginning of twenty-first century, rural China became much more likely to suffer from intense power interactions between governments and the market.

Like Australia, China is embedded in the modernization system within the capitalist market economy. In the modernization system, industrialization and urbanization are regarded as initiations and also as results (Giddens, 1990). It is therefore unsurprising to see that rural policies in both Australia and China have the following characteristics: an urban-centric focus; an economic perspective; a problem-solving approach rather than a capacity-building approach; and an aim of strengthening the self-reliance of local communities, farm families, and individuals. Nevertheless, China and Australia have different demographical and geographical situations. Because of its large population base and limited land resources, it is impossible for China to imitate Australia and other Western countries such as America and Canada in the pursuit of large-scale production, management, and industrialization of agriculture (Wen, 2009; Wen et al., 2010). Thus, a further feature of Chinese rural policies is that they aim to increase the responsibility of government to promote agricultural development at the same time as supporting rural people and rural communities (The State Council, 2012-13; 2014a-d, 2015a-d, 2016a-b; 2017; 2018).

There are complex contradictions or paradoxes. On the one hand, Chinese governments sacrifice rural communities and rural people's benefit to pursue industrialization, urbanization, and marketization. This is based on the unequal urban–rural dual system, and was evident in forms of the Household Registration policy, the rural land levy policy, rural people's land contracting rights as non-mortgage, and so on (Cao, 2008; Lu & Yang, 2013; Chen, 204; Qian & Mou, 2015). On the other hand, the Chinese government continually makes efforts to guarantee that rural people own the nearly life-long term of land contracting rights (The State Council, 2016a); to ensure the supply of basic welfare (such as living

subsidies, medical care, aged care, accommodation, and education) to rural residents and rural migrants (The State Council, 2012; 2014c-d; 2017); to regulate land levy behaviours; to build infrastructure (such as roads, water supplies, and electricity grids) in rural communities (The State Council, 2013; 2014b; 2015a-c; 2018); to clarify land ownership, land contracting rights, and land managing rights (The State Council, 2016a); to develop agricultural technology and promote green agriculture (The State Council, 2014b; 2015b-c; 2017); to alleviate rural poverty (The State Council, 2014a); to support rural collectives in the development of the rural cooperative economy; and to develop policy-based and cooperative rural finance (The State Council, 2018).

In practice, sometimes governments excessively pursue economic benefits (Ye & Yang, 2006; Lu, 2007; Wen et al., 2015); sometimes they efficiently guarantee the supply of public services (such as transport, electricity and water supply, telephone coverage, and schools) (Fan, 2002; Qu, 2012; Yang & Chen, 2014). As Chinese governments are both performers and monitors, sometimes their behaviours in providing public services are rash, fickle, image-focused, and homogenized (Lu, 2007; Ye & Yang, 2007; Zhang, 2012; Peng, 2013; Zhang & Li, 2016; Kong, 2016). For instance, some local governments incautiously encourage peasants in one or several rural communities to grow a certain type of food or raise a particular type of livestock to alleviate poverty or promote the rural economy but which turns out to be an inappropriate type (Ye & Yang, 2006; Cao, 2008; Zhang, 2012); some local governments rapidly build bituminous roads and new apartments, clean up rubbish in rural communities or paint walls for rural people to beautify rural environments without really considering how to look after these facilities and whether they suit rural communities. In many situations, rural people's voices are not heard and their needs are overlooked (Ye & Yang, 2006; Lu, 2007; Kong, 2016; Zhang & Li, 2016).

To summarize, the ideologies and practices of Chinese rural policies are quite complex. Like Australia, China marginalises the rural in the pursuit of industrialization and urbanization. Unlike Australia, China utilizes its strong power to take responsibility for promoting agricultural development and supporting rural people and rural communities. Because China has a large population base and limited land resources, rural arrangements and strategies cannot only be applied in terms of marketization and privatization. The different economic and political structures of Australia and China cause the difference between their welfare structures relating to rural people's wellbeing. Social work practices are a part of welfare services or welfare supply in Australia and China, embedded in and influenced by broadly defined welfare structures. In the following section, I will illustrate the construction of the rural 'social welfare' system in China, and profile how Chinese rural economic and political structures influence the wellbeing of rural communities and individuals.

Rural welfare

In China, both the public social welfare of income security payments, and welfare arrangements about individuals' health and education, are differentiated by the urban–rural dichotomy. In China's planned economy period (1949-78), people who held urban identification enjoyed different types of welfare that came from the government departments or industries they worked for (Cheng, 2008; Song, 2009; Yu & He, 2010) and covered them from birth to death. Rural people, however, relied on each other's help to deal with issues such as aging, sickness, disability, and family death. China adopted the market economy in 1978 and, in the 1990s, successively issued policies of maternity insurance (the then Ministry of Labour, 1994), working injury insurance (the then Ministry of Labour, 1996), pension insurance (the then Ministry of Labour and Social Security [MLSS], 1997), medical insurance (the then MLSS, 1998), and unemployment insurance (the then MLSS; 1999) for urban workers employed by companies. At this first stage, the public social welfare system in China was centred on and benefited urban employees. Thereafter, the minimum living subsidy policy for poor urban residents (CPG , 1997), and the pension and medical insurance plan for self-employed urban residents (The State Council, 2007a) were published.

Once the rural communes disintegrated, the rural collective mutual-help model of aged care and medical care became invalid. Taking care of the disadvantaged such as elders, the disabled, orphans, and widows was no longer the responsibility of rural collectives. In 1994, the State Council of the People's Republic of China (1994) proposed an assistance policy to meet the basic living needs (food, clothing, accommodation, medical care, education, and funeral expenses) of the very poor elders, disabled people, and others under the age of sixteen (including orphans) in rural communities. Nevertheless, it took the Chinese government another ten years to establish formal medical care (The State Council, 2003a) and pension systems (The State Council, 2009) targeting rural residents and rural migrant workers in cities.

As China entered the twenty-first century, the 'three rural issues' became more severe and dangerous. At that time, several intense social events and social phenomena, such as the spread of severe acute respiratory syndromes (SARS)[9], the difficult survival situation of the 'land-lost' peasants, high rates of work injury and occupational disease (especially pneumoconiosis) in rural migrant workers, and intense disagreements and struggles between rural people and local governments over the levy of land, directly drove Chinese governments to construct the rural social welfare system as rapidly as they could. Chinese governments started selecting pilot projects to implement the New Rural Cooperative Medical Insurance (NRCM) from 2003 (The State Council, 2003a) and the New Rural

[9] SARS is a terrible infectious disease spread in 2003 in China.

Cooperative Pension Insurance (NRCP) from 2009 (the State Council, 2009), and issued the Working Injury Insurance legislation in 2004 (The State Council, 2003b) and the Rural Minimum Living Subsidy policy in 2007 (The State Council, 2007b). Because different places in China have different economic situations and enjoy different subsidies from the central government, the proportions of contributions from the central government, local government, and rural individuals for the NRCM and NRCP is very complex and difficult to summarize. Simply speaking, the contribution from the central government and local governments for the NRCM was expected to reach to 450 CNY (nearly 80 AUD) by 2017 (Xinhua News, 2017); and that for the NRCP was regulated to raise to 88 CNY monthly (nearly 17 AUD) by 2018 for rural individuals who were more than sixty years old (Ministry of Human Resource and Social Security of the People's Republic of China, 2018).

Compared with urban employees, rural people are quite disadvantaged in China's public social welfare system. This can be showed in forms of the backward construction of the rural social welfare system, the minimum guarantee for aging and sick rural people, and the NRCM and NRCP's inconvenient payment and collection process for rural people, especially for rural migrant workers in cities. Australian rural residents, however, are treated equally to urban residents in welfare provision. In Australia, the public social welfare system is based on general revenue rather than on contributions from different bodies (Department of Social Service-DSS, 2017). As far as the aged pension is concerned, the maximum base rate in 2018 for a single Australian is 826 AUD per fortnight, and 1,245 AUD for an Australian couple (Department of Human Service-DHS, 2018a-b). To receive the aged pension, Australians need to be more than sixty-five years old, meet income and asset tests, and have lived in Australia for at least ten years (DHS, 2018a-b). If their income and assets exceed the amount regulated by the Australian government, their pension is reduced from the maximum base rate or is cancelled. Although it took a while to adapt asset test rules for farmers (Voyce, 1993; DHS, 2018c), supply of the Australian aged pension is fair for both rural residents and urban residents. In addition, the generous Australian Medicare provides free or low-cost medical services for all citizens and permanent residents (DHS, 2018d), no matter whether they live in urban or rural areas. Clearly, in terms of public social welfare systems, Australia's is much fairer than China's. Undoubtedly, this is associated with the wealth of Australia.

The description above mainly covers the design of the public social welfare system in China and Australia. For welfare service delivery, the provision of funds and the responsibility of different levels of governments need to be clarified. In Australia, the Commonwealth collects the main taxes (such as individual income tax, corporate income tax, consumption tax, and customs duties), and is therefore mainly responsible for 'income security through the various pensions and benefits and for Medicare' (Ife, 1997). Six state governments and two territory governments have the responsibility for providing

services in the health, housing, and education fields (Ife, 1997) and have the right to collect taxes such as stamp (duty) tax, land tax, and payroll tax (Australian Future Tax System, 2006; ABS, 2018a-b; Australian Taxation Office, 2018) They also receive grants from the federal government for specific programs such as accommodation and community care for the aged. There are 546 local governing bodies across Australia that rely on receiving fees from water, electricity and so on to gain income (ABS, 2018a-b; Australian Taxation Office, 2018); they therefore play a relatively small role in the Australia welfare system. Sometimes local governing bodies are involved in the administration of welfare programs; sometimes they support non-profit organizations to provide services; sometimes they choose not to be involved (Ife, 1997). From 2015 to 2016, the proportion of total taxation revenue received by the federal government, state governments, and local governments were respectively 79.6 per cent, 17 per cent, and 3.4 per cent (ABS, 2018a). Clearly, the Australian federal government has the dominant power in fiscal expenditure. State and territory governments, however, undertake most of the welfare work that relates to people's daily lives. In most circumstances, they have to depend on taxation revenue transferred from the federal government to maintain financial balance. According to the ABS (2018a-b), the proportion of the federal government's taxation revenue transferred to state governments fluctuated between 25 per cent and 27 per cent from 2001 to 2015.

In recent decades, however, it has been strongly argued that the neoliberal trend of Australian governments has led to a residual welfare system in Australia (Voyce, 1993; McMahon et al., 2000, pp.8-9; Alston, 2000; Alston, 2005a; Alston, 2005b; Chenoweth et al., 2005; McDonald and Chenoweth, 2007). Regardless of the basic pension and Medicare system supported by the federal government, or the health and education arrangements supplied by state governments, social welfare provision has tended to become narrow and privatized, and competition and economic-efficient management has increase (Alston, 2005a, 2005b; Chenoweth et al., 2005; Chenoweth, 2008; McDonald & Chenoweth, 2009). In the earlier section on Australian rural welfare, I discussed how those changes to Australian welfare structures, interrelated with rural economic and demographic changes, have largely disadvantaged the wellbeing of most rural communities and rural people. Unsurprisingly, this type of welfare environment has substantial impacts on the empowerment practices of social workers. Through analysing the research data, I will further explore how the power relationships between different levels of government, between government and non-profit organizations, and between governments and the market, impact the practices of social workers as they work to empower rural women. Moreover, it is interesting to identify the similarities and differences between Australia and China by presenting those power relationships.

As with Australia, levels of government in China can be divided into three categories: the central government, governments of municipalities and provincial and autonomous regions[10] and local governments (including city, prefecture, and town governments). With respect to the supply of welfare, there is always an argument that the central government in China should concede more taxation powers to local governments who have the burden of delivering most of the welfare that affects people's daily lives (Tang & Tan, 2012; Yang, 2015; Wen et al., 2015). The Chinese central government takes most types of tax, such as tariffs, consumption tax, taxes from the headquarters of banks, insurance companies, and railway institutions, taxes from government industries, 75 per cent of added-value tax, 97 per cent of stamp tax, 60 per cent of corporate income tax, and 60 per cent of individual income tax (NBS, 2017), while local governments take the remaining parts of shared taxes and receive land tax (NBS, 2017). According to the 12th Five-Year Plan of the National Basic Public Service issued by the State Council in 2012, however, local governments not only need to cover parts of the pension and medical insurance payment for rural people, but also bear the main responsibility for offering all other welfare benefits such as employment training and subsidy, minimum living and medical subsidy, and various health and education benefits (The State Council, 2012). It seems that local governments in China have similar welfare delivery responsibilities to Australian state and territory governments.

Because the relationship between different levels of governments in China is subordinate, Chinese local governments treat welfare delivery as an imperative political task. Therefore, in the discourse of stabilizing and developing rural communities, Chinese local governments engage in building infrastructure for rural communities[11], guaranteeing the provision of public services[12], and ensuring the availability of the public social welfare system (income security payments such as the pension, medical insurance, and the minimum living subsidy) for rural people. Sometimes, local governments excessively pursue GDP growth within the process of industrialization and urbanization, while sacrificing rural communities' benefits. Sometimes, because of having limited financial power, they pursue economic growth in order to get more money to satisfy rural people's welfare needs. Sometimes, they implement welfare arrangements in a rash, fickle, image-focused, and homogenized way to meet their political tasks rather than to give rural people what they want.

In broadly defined welfare fields, rural geographic, demographic, economic, and political structures interact with each other and determine the discourses that social workers experience in their practices.

[10] The governments of municipalities and provincial and autonomous regions are briefly described as provincial governments in the following sections.
[11] Infrastructure includes roads, water supply, electricity grid and so on.
[12] Public services include transport, telecommunication, radio and television, hospitals, libraries.

For Australia, the discourses are about a fair and universal welfare system, neoliberalism with its issues of privatization, competition, and managerialism, the agreements and disagreements between federal and state governments, and the rural decline and decreasing population. For China, the discourses are about the urban–rural dual welfare system, the industrialization and collective cooperation of the rural dominant industry, agriculture, the subordination of Chinese local governments to the Chinese central government, the importance of rural stability to the whole of China's development, and rural decline in the process of industrialization and urbanization. These discourses include different types of power relationships that are implied in social workers' empowerment practices. In the process of pursuing empowerment as a core value of the social work profession, social workers interpret and utilize different power relationships to negotiate with different stakeholders at different times.

Rural culture

The rural–urban dichotomy is adopted in this research in order to highlight how 'rural' is specifically positioned in the process of industrialization, urbanization, and modernization of the nation. This dichotomy is based on the different geographic and demographic characteristics and the dominant economic activities of rural and urban. As the rural–urban dichotomy presents the basic modes of how rural and urban society operate, it implies the different ideas, customs, and social behaviours of rural and urban society, that is, the distinction between rural and urban culture. For instance, Australia builds its national identity through two contrasting elements: pastoralist and highly urbanized. This contrast (dichotomy) results in the clear distinction between rural and urban culture, which is generally explained by the concepts of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft (Cheers, 1998, pp.68-73; Gray & Phillips, 2001; Alston, 2009, p.7; Pugh & Cheers, 2010, pp.34-40).

Although the rural–urban cultural distinction contains myth, it is a significant way to understand the basic mode of how rural and urban societies operate. The concepts of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft, which are used to describe the cultural differences between rural and urban in Australia, are usually adopted in China to explain the cultural differences between China and Western countries (Liang, 1999, pp. 50-55; Fei, 2008, p.6; Li, 2008; Chen, 2011). Clearly, this is associated with the difference between agricultural civilization and industrial civilization. From the Xia Empire established around 2000 BC to the Republic of China constituted in 1912, agricultural production was the dominant economic activity in China. During this long history, villages (rural communities) based on kinship were the primary social-economic unit in China. Therefore, the basic ideas, customs, and social behaviours of Chinese society are deemed to have spread from numerous villages (rural communities). Certainly, the commonly acknowledged Chinese culture of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, are embodied in Chinese rural societies.

The complex discussion of Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and even Christianity will not be the main focus of this research. Because the interviews of this research are about how social workers interact with rural service users and how they empower them, I choose to emphasise the basic social interactions of rural Australia and China, which are based on the particular geographic, demographic, and economic characteristics of 'rural'. Like most Australian rural communities, rural communities in China can also be explained by using the concept of Gemeinschaft. As described in the section on the rural culture of Australia, Gemeinschaft is a type of society that is centred on informal social relationships such as kinship, friendship, and neighbourhood, and is regulated through commonly recognized moral obligations (Cheers, 1998, pp.68-73; Gray & Phillips, 2001; Alston, 2009, p.7; Pugh and Cheers, 2010, pp.34-40). The traditions or customs generated in Gemeinschaft play a role in maintaining the stability of social behaviour based on class, gender, occupation, and length of residence. Therefore, rural social workers are commonly confronted by the homogenization and discipline in highly visible rural communities. The validity of rural social workers' empowerment practices depends on their understanding of the informal relationships, customs, and social divisions of rural communities. In order to better empower rural women, they need to know how to utilize or resist the cultural discourses of rural societies.

Unlike Australia's rural population, most of the rural population in China is closely settled because farming was on small-scale arable lands. During China's 5000-year history of agricultural civilization, most villages formed based on kinship (Fei, 2008, n.p.)[13]. In compact villages based on kinship, the nets of social relationships centre on and weave around different individuals (Fei, 2008, n.p.). This means that different individuals rely on the proximity of kinship and geographic distance to deal with their relationships with others (Fei, 2008, n.p.). Different kinship networks interweave with each other and are more complex than the relationship networks that are mainly based on occupation and geographic distance in rural Australia. Both of those relationship networks weaving from different individuals may expand or narrow because of individuals' class status.

For an individual, the closest people are his or her family members, including parents, spouse, and children. In the environment of the small-scale, subsistence agricultural economy in Chinese rural society, the most important task for every individual is to maintain the safety and survival of their families (Fei, 2008. n.p.). In most circumstances, individual behaviour of pursuing interests happens inside the rural communities they belong to (Fei, 2008; n.p.), rather than starting as small groups in

[13] Xiaotong Fei is one of the most famous sociologists in China. His book *Peasants' Life in China*, first published in 1947, was used by the majority of Chinese scholars to understand the basic type of social interaction in Chinese rural societies. I have read some books and journal articles introducing the culture of Chinese rural societies. Most of them are based on Fei's theory. Thus, I mainly adopt Fei's theory to introduce the basic type of social interaction of Chinese rural societies.

local areas and expanding to bigger ones nationally. In Australia, as agriculture has been developing in a commercialized way, farm families generally join organizations that are based on common economic interests and can be expanded to the national level. This can give rise to vigorous policy advocacy and social movements in rural Australia.

Summary

In this section on rural context, I have introduced the economic, political, welfare, and cultural structural discourses that are embedded in 'rural' in Australia and China's industrialization, urbanization, and modernization process. In Australia, the dominant rural economy industry—agriculture—has been declining and becoming industrialized and capitalized in the global market, which has led to the retreat of many farm families and the stagnation of most small rural communities. At the same time, the dominant ideology of rural policies—economic rationalism (neoliberalism)—has aggravated the disadvantaged situation of many farm families and most small rural communities. The broad welfare arrangements in rural Australia, therefore, tend to be provided under the discourse of market competition, efficiency, managerialism, privatization, quality assurance, mutual obligation, and self-reliance. In Australia, however, an inclusive democratic political structure, a universal public welfare system, and a vigorous civil society still play an important role in benefiting the wellbeing of rural communities and rural people.

In order to simplify the description of rural structural discourses in China, it is useful to take the government and the market as two players in China's industrialization, urbanization, and modernization process. The agricultural economy is protected by Chinese governments because it is the main way most rural people survive. The agricultural industry, however, is required by the free market to be further industrialized and capitalized. In order to pursue industrialization and urbanization, Chinese governments have developed restrictive policies which maintain the unequal urban–dual system. To some extent, the free market is helpful in relieving the restraints of the Chinese government. However, when strong Chinese governments and the free market contend for power, or conspire for their own interests, rural people and rural communities have few chances to participate in making decisions and to strive for what they want. The broad welfare services to rural China are efficiently delivered by the all-powerful governments. In the complex power interactions between the government and the market, however whether those welfare services are qualified and adapted to satisfy rural people's needs is questionable. The wellbeing of rural communities and rural people can benefit from the all-powerful government and prosperous market in China, but can also be easily harmed because of the controlling and rigid government and the volatile and untrustworthy market.

Chapter 2: Rural women in context

Introduction

In this section, I profile the life situation of rural women in Australia and China. Based on the definition of 'rural' adopted in this research, rural women in Australia are women who live in non-metropolitan areas while rural women in China are those who hold rural household registrations, whether they live in rural areas or have migrated to and work in cities. Chinese rural women's lives are all influenced by the structural discourses of rural economy, politics, welfare, and culture. With the focus on rural women, the gender discourse in Australian and Chinese rural societies will be particularly considered in the description of rural women's life situations and service needs.

Rural women's life in Australia

Who are they?

Spatial and gender factors are considered to identify rural women in Australia. From a spatial perspective, Australian rural women in this research are identified as women who live in non-metropolitan areas. The term 'gender' refers to the socially constructed difference between women and men (Alston, 1995, p.15; Alston 2005; Shortall, 2006a; Alston, 2018). It is different from the term 'sex' which biologically determines female and male. Because men and women are biologically different in terms of physical strength and reproduction, there have been gendered labour divisions at different stages of the history of societal evolution. Gendered labour division does not, however, directly cause hierarchical power relations between men and women. By and large, gendered power relations result from the societal attitude to the social contributions of women and men (Alston, 1995, p.15; Alston 2005; Gorman, 206). In other words, it is formed from how society identifies the importance of the social contributions of men and women (including production and reproduction). At the macro level, the historically structured power relations between men and women are described by Connell (1987, 2002) as the gender order (cited in Alston, 2005, p.16). At the micro level, the interactions between individual women and men in small units such as family, institutions, or community may conform to or differ from the gender order.

In Australian rural societies, agriculture is the dominant economic activity and the farm family is the main economic production unit. Therefore, gendered labour divisions in rural areas are mainly determined by the intense physical labour required by agriculture and embodied in individual farm families. In general, men are responsible for most agricultural work, and work in relation to stock, machinery, and sale agricultural products; women help men in agricultural production, care for family members, educate children, and undertake domestic work including cooking, washing and cleaning (Alston, 1995, pp. 86-96; Alston, 1998; Shortfall, 2006a; Warner-Smith et al., 2014). It seems that the

labour contribution of men and women is equally distributed in maintaining the operation of family farms. Nevertheless, the gender order in this industrial capitalist world prioritizes men's power, contribution, and influence, while subordinating women's (Hearn, 2004; Alston, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Shortfall, 2006). Under the structural gender order, rural women's contributions to their farm families are deemed to be less important than men's contributions that can directly bring economic profits. Entering the agriculture industry through marriage, women are usually regarded as the wife of farmers, or 'farmers' helpers', rather than farmers themselves who participate in running family farms (Alston, 1998; Alston, 1999, pp. 1-10; Bock, 2006).

Women in rural areas may work in fields other than farming, such as education, medicine, welfare, business, and government. They can be teachers, nurses, social workers, community welfare workers, accountants, receptionists, sales assistants, waitresses, small-business owners or managers, or officials. No matter which field they work in, however, rural women experience the gender expectation of being good carers for their husbands, children, elders, siblings, and the community (Gould, 1990; Ken, 1990; Alston, 2005; Bock, 2006). Caring is very important, but it is largely devalued because of the lack of direct economic return, and it can be very restrictive or even oppressive for women in their career development and leisure arrangements (Ken, 1990; Alston, 2009, p. 165). This is in concert with the macro-level gender order in society and is reflected in gender relations in families, workplaces, and rural communities. In summary, women's identity tends to be 'helpers', 'carers', 'servers' 'service users' in rural communities, rather than 'farmers', 'owners', 'managers', 'professionals', and 'board members' (Alston, 1998; Alston, 2003; Alston, 2009, p.165). This can be shown by the evidence of patrilineal heritage, and the low representation of women in general practice (around 30 per cent in seven different states) (Australian Department of Health, 2007), as local council members (less than 30 per cent) (Australian Local Government Association, 2009), and as board members in publicly listed agricultural companies (7 per cent) (ABS, 2002).

The term 'hegemonic masculinity' is adopted to explain this type of gender discourse in Australian rural communities (Connell, 1995, 2002; Alston, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity highly values and protects men's superordinate position of holding and exerting power, and normalizes this process by solidifying people's consciousness that women should be subordinate (Connell, 1995, 2002; Alston, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Taking the main gender discourse—hegemonic masculinity—into account, it is important to explore women's life situations and service needs under the current rural restructuring described above in the section on the Australian rural context.

Life situation and service needs

The downturn in agriculture and the trend to industrialization has pushed many small farm families into hardship. Women have responded to this crisis by undertaking off-farm work to supplement their farm family incomes (Alston, 2005; Alston & Whittenbury, 2013). According to statistics from the ABS (2002), 81 per cent of off-farm work is done by women to help their family farms function, especially during periods of drought. This means that many rural women shoulder the triple tasks of farm work, family and household care, and off-farm work. In addition, the agricultural decline has resulted in the withdrawal of public, private, and non-profit welfare services. Rural women, both as service workers and users, have difficulty finding a job because many institutions such as local government departments, hospitals, schools, banks, stores, and non-profit service organizations have relocated to regional centres or capital cities, and they cannot easily access necessary services such as effective public transport, communication and postal services, obstetric services, general and specialist health services, and financial services (Alston, 2005; Cheers & Taylor, 2005; Alston, 2009, pp. 164-180; Warner-Smith et al., 2014; Alston, 2018).

Latter-day neoliberal policies favouring omnipotent market power further exacerbated the decline of most rural communities. Many farm families have been weeded out from the agricultural industry; young people are leaving for better education and employment opportunities. The rural population is declining, and its profile is aging. The women who stay in rural communities have to respond to the increasing care needs not only of their family members, but also of other disadvantaged community members (such as the aged, the disabled, and the sick) (Alston, 2005; Cheers & Taylor, 2005; Alston, 2009, pp. 164-180; Penny et al., 014; Alston, 2018). Rural policies have had an urban-centric focus, a problem-solving orientation, and an economic efficiency motivation. Policy strategy has been to encourage market competition and regionalisation and to strengthen the self-reliance of local communities, farm families, and individuals. These policies have ignored and even aggravated the gendered impact on women of the stagnant rural situation.

Climate variabilities have made the rural situation more dangerous and have further damaged the wellbeing of women. High stress levels have been caused by intense competition in the global agricultural market, especially when hazardous climate change events such as drought or flood occur. When male farmers suffer from mental health problems such as depression and anxiety, domestic violence against women may increase (Alston, 2005; Owen & Carrington, 2015). On one hand, rural women struggle with stress and isolation and find it difficult to access mental health services because of the long distances involved and the male profile of health professionals (Penny et al., 2014); on the other hand, it is their role to care for and help family members to cope with stress (Alston, 2005; Alston & Whittenbury, 2013). In response to rural restructuring, women make efforts to deal with

changes and sometimes take this opportunity to resist hegemonic masculinity. When issues are mounting up, it can be an opportunity to make women's efforts and contributions visible, to get them together, and let their voices be heard. It is possible, therefore, to alter the gender structure of rural communities, break the passive model of asking for help, and change the discriminatory attitude to mentally ill people (Alston, 2005). It should be noted, however, that the restrictive rural gender order and traditional cultural bias still exist and may be very hard to change during rural restructuring because of the lack of economic, institutional, human, and social capital and resources (Alston, 2002; Alston, 2005; Howard, 2016, pp.91-106).

Rural women's service needs emerge from the difficulties they meet in their daily life. According to the description above, rural women need services such as economic support, flexible transport service, employment training, education providing professional qualifications, child care, aged care services, general and specialist health services, anti-domestic violence services, maternity care, and assistance to facilitate political participation. Although every woman is different because of characteristics such as age, race, physical ability, class, education, and residency, I chose to describe their daily life in general in order to explore empowerment services for them under the rural context embedded in a nation's pursuit of industrialization, urbanization, and modernization. In the following section, I will illustrate the life of Chinese rural women, and describe the similarities and differences they share with Australian rural women.

Rural women's life in China

Who are they?

Political, spatial, and gender factors are considered to identify rural women in China. According to the Household Registration System in China, people who registered their households in rural collectives are recognized by the society as rural citizens. Thus, rural women are women who have rural household registrations. After China's adoption of market economy and opening up to the world in 1978, rural-to-urban migration was permitted. Rural women can be divided into two groups according to where they work and live: rural women who work and mostly live in cities; and rural women who stay and live in rural areas. Because of the dual urban–rural household registration, they are all influenced by the rural structural discourses in China. Their identity as rural women is a type of symbol with political, spatial, and gender meanings.

As described earlier, agriculture is the main economic activity of Chinese rural societies, and small farm families are the primary economic production units. Agriculture's strong physical labour requirement has therefore engendered a gendered labour division in rural China similar to that in rural Australia. Men mainly work in agriculture production fields and as 'producers', while women mostly

engage in the family life field and as 'helpers' (Zhou, 2013; Xiong & Li, 2016; Wang, 2017). Under the gender order that values men's power, that type of gendered labour division is interpreted to be in the nature of women's natural subordinate position. The subjection of women, however, is actually because society gives different value to the labour contributions of women and men. Therefore, because of the hegemonic masculinity in rural societies, women are relegated to being obedient wives, helpers, family carers, and even materialized as a type of property of men (Zheng & Wang, 2000; Xiao & Yang, 2005; Zhou, 2013; Wei & Xu, 2015; Xiong & Li, 2016; Wang, 2017).

It is important to note that the Marxist feminist theory of communist China largely helped women gain equal 'socialist labourer' status to men, even with most women working in the family field (Song, 2012; Liu, 2015; Yan et al., 2017). Especially during the planned economic period (1949-1978), the compulsory political requirement to treat women equally with men and position women in party committees, and the socialist moral standards of respecting women, altered women's subordinate position to a large extent (Wang, 2001; Liu, 2010; Song, 2012; Yan et al., 2017). Urban women and rural women both benefited from this. But the equal 'socialist labourer' identity of women who mostly engage in the family field, has been lost during the overwhelming marketization process.

In summary, like Australian rural women, Chinese rural women face a restrictive and oppressive gender structure. No matter where they work, such as in the family or in institutions (such as governments, hospitals, schools, and stores), they are more likely to be helpers, carers, and service users, rather than owners, managers, professionals, and board members (including party committee members). For example, female directors of village committees only accounted for 11.5 per cent of the total in 2015, and female village committee members only accounted for 22.9 per cent of the total in 2013 (NBS, 2016).

Life situation and service needs

Dramatic societal changes have occurred since the market economy system replaced the planned economy system in China. Especially when agriculture was required to be more and more commercialised and industrialized during marketization, rural society was placed in a difficult situation with unbalanced attention to human capital, natural capital, social capital, and economic capital. With the decline of the small-scale agricultural economy, many rural people migrated to and worked in cities to help their farm families survive. There were about 80 million rural migrants by 2002 (Li & Tang, 2002), and over 281 million by 2016 (NBS, 2017b). As well, according to the NBS, male rural migrants were the majority of overall rural migrants from 2009 to 2016, making up around 65 per cent of the total, while female rural migrants made up less than 35 per cent of the total (NBS, 2017b). This is a

result of the strong physical labour requirements of most 'urban' works such as construction, mining and transport (Xiao, 2005; Li et al., 2007).

Because of the downturn in the small-scale agriculture economy, the women who still farm with their husbands in rural areas may engage in off-farm work in nearby towns to support their families (Su & Liu, 2003; Xiao, 2005; Wang, 2017). Clearly, like many Australian rural women, these women have to deal with the heavy burden of the triple tasks of farm work, off-farm work, and domestic work (Zhang, 2006; NBS, 2016; Zhou,2013; Xiong & Li, 2016). The women whose husbands left rural areas to work in cities have had to take responsibility for all agricultural production work, family care, and even care for other disadvantaged community members such as elders, the disabled, and children (Ye, 2009; Li & Yang, 2008; Chen & He, 2015; Miao et al., 2016). By 2016, in Chinese rural societies, there were almost 40 million left-behind rural women (where the husband has left to work in the city), with 50 million left-behind elders (where all the children have left to work in cities) and 60 million left-behind children (where one parent has left to work in the city) (Yan, 2016). Nearly all left-behind women suffer from mental health problems such as depression and anxiety, struggle with unsatisfied sex needs, and have to deal with sexual assaults, safety issues, and restrictive economic situations (Ye, 2009; Ren & Yang, 2014; Chen & He, 2015; Miao et al., 2016; Yang et al., 2017).

The women who migrate to cities, whether with a husband or not, experience structural barriers to finding a job in a labour market that prefers physical strength, live in dirty and messy environments, face physical and mental health problems, experience domestic violence, and feel lonely and unaccepted in big concreted cities (Xiao, 2005; Zhang et al., 2012; Wang, 2012). Some of the women who come with their husbands and bring their children to cities are mainly responsible for caring for children without working outside. For rural women who migrate to and work in cities by themselves, sexual assaults and violence are major dangers (Zhang et al., 2012; Wang, 2012). They may find a male partner or several male lovers to protect them against those dangers, but also experience violence from these males (Wang, 2012).

Although the effects of rural restructuring in China are different for men and women, most of the relevant policies are gender-blind. The good 'communist tradition' of awarding the identity of 'socialist labour' to women no matter whether they work full time in families or not, was devalued in the new economic rationalist governing period. Like Australian rural polices, rural policies in China are criticized as having an urban-centric focus, a problem-solving orientation an economic efficiency motivation, and hold an aim to strengthen the self-reliance of local communities, farm families, and individuals. Rural women are therefore further ignored or pressurized. Nowadays, however, because of how important the security of agriculture is to China's social stability, Chinese governments have to pay

more attention to rural women who now undertake more than 70 per cent of agricultural production work (The State Council, 2015d). Unsurprisingly, on the one hand, women's agency is highlighted by governments in participating in decision-making, enjoying abundant physical and mental health services, having access to convenient public services, and gaining more opportunities to take on education and training (Zhang, 2006; Guo & Fan, 2010; Jiao et al., 2010; Yan et al., 2017). On the other hand, those proposals are mainly implemented in a general way in practice, rather than a gender-specific way.

Clearly, Chinese rural women and their Australian counterparts experience the same restrictive gender order prioritizing men's power. As well, they all face economic, employment, physical, mental, and educational hardships because of the restructuring of rural communities, which occurs as a result of Australia and China's pursuit of economic growth, industrialization, urbanization, and modernization. They therefore need similar services, including economic support, convenient public services, employment training, education providing professional qualifications, legal aid, child care, aged care services, general and specialist health services, anti-domestic violence services, maternity care, and active facilitation for political participation. It can be shown by my research analysis that social workers in both Australia and China engage in similar service projects of empowering rural women. Nevertheless, it is important to note that there may be differences in how Australian and Chinese social workers empower women because of the differences in interactions and rural women's gender consciousness in Australia and China. For example, political participation as a way of empowerment is very common for Australian rural women but may not be popular for Chinese rural women. This is because of China's top-down feminist history, family-centred culture, and rigid political structure. In the following sections, I will introduce current services for rural women in fields of government, non-profit institutions, and communities. Furthermore, I will briefly illustrate social workers' roles in those service fields.

Rural women's services

Introduction

In this research, 'women's services' refers to support and assistance that can help women have more choices, make decisions, and take action to have a better life. It is an action process, based on current circumstances. Services provided by governments, non-profit organizations, or communities can be provided generally for both men and women, or be specific for only women or for only men. Services for rural women, including intersecting factors of gender and rural, are delivered from different organizations based in welfare fields such as government organizations, formally registered non-profit

organizations, and community groups[14]. Those different welfare fields are recognized as having different ideologies and motivations in delivering services for women. The substantial fields in this research—organizations—are deemed to be mainly positioned in a certain welfare field. Therefore, it is important to explore women's services from different welfare fields, the features of which are further reflected in the practices of different organizations.

It is important to note, however, that the introduction of rural women's services from different welfare fields is a simple approach. It is possible to demonstrate rural women's lives and service needs in a comprehensive way based on rural structural discourses. Nevertheless, services are usually implemented from one aspect, or designed according to a certain need of a certain group. Clearly, literature with the key words of 'rural women' and 'service' are mostly about practices in one specific area such as domestic violence, mental health, or obstetric services. In specific practices, services may include diverse details that reflect structural discourses. It is too complicated to explore the whole range of current services for women and for rural women from different welfare fields, and research how the details of those services reflect current structural discourses of a nation. As this research focuses on the methods that social workers use to help or empower rural women under the structural discourses of two nations—Australia and China—I briefly review how the main welfare bodies serve women and rural women in order to present a broad view of how professional social workers are positioned in those bodies. In addition, this approach is determined by the difficulty of comprehensively summarizing professional social workers' services for women and for rural women from a handful of literature focusing on specific practices.[15] However, before examining how social workers are posited in different welfare bodies such as government, non-profit organizations, and community groups to empower women particularly those based in rural contexts, it is important to explore the feminist ideologies that are promoted by social workers in Australia and China to empower women and the current literatures that demonstrate social workers' empowerment services to women in Australia and China.

Social work and feminism in Australia and China

With the values or objectives of altruism, social justice, equality, and human rights, social work has been involved in women-centred services for a long period. In Australia, social work's beginning is related to the social reform movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly women's activism from the first wave of feminism (McMahon, 2003). Middle-class and influential

[14] Community is one part of the civil society. But considering community as a place where residents are relatively familiar with each other in a rural context, I regard it as a particular welfare field oriented by the ideology of mutual help, without formal personnel and financial structures in contrast to formally registered non-profit organisations.

women were active before friendly visitors and hospital almoners, who pre-date professional social work (McMahon, 2003). The second-wave feminism of the late 1960s, accompanied by the rationalist and structuralist movement and influenced by critical social theories, repositioned the social work profession with the role of making links between the personal and the social order, and acting on structural change collectively rather than on personal adjustment (Marchant & Wearing, 1986; Healy; 2000; Lee, 2001; Fook, 2002; Carr, 2003; Alston, 2005; Adams, 2013; Weeks, 2017). According to feminist principles, social workers need to build egalitarian relationships with service users, develop gender consciousness in the social work process and challenge oppressive gender orders as hegemonic masculinity (Carr, 2003; Alston, 2005; Adams, 2013; Walters, 2013). In addition, the gendering of the client base is matched by the gendered profile of the social work profession (Gutierrez, 1990; Alston, 2005; Turner & Maschi, 2014). Social work has a strong historical relationship with feminism in Australia, in which the theories, principles, and practice approaches of social work have progressed and been promoted according to feminist ideas (Fook, 2002; Orme, 2013; Noble, 2017; Pease, 2017; Moore, 2017).

However, in contrast to the substantial pool of literature regarding feminist theories and approaches in social work practices to Australia, there is very little relevant literature in China.[16] This relates to the development of feminism in China as top-down and the interruption between feminism and social work in China. Social work education in China was suspended in the 1960s and 1970s, a period during when feminism significantly integrated with critical social theories and was adopted in the social work space in Western countries.

The emancipation of Chinese women, termed the first wave of feminism in China, commenced at the beginning of the twentieth century, when male elites first began to advocate for women's liberation (Xia, 1995; Meng & Dai, 2004; He & Wang, 2008). Interwoven with discourses including national liberation, anti-Confucianism, and promoting humanism, the activist movement for women's rights contained large paradoxes. There are strong arguments that male leaders did not give up their dominant position in the patriarchal culture (Meng & Dai, 2004; He & Wang, 2008). As 'supervisors', they just assigned women an extended social participation in response to the social and political revolution in a national period of crisis (Meng & Dai, 2004; He & Wang, 2008; Chen & Zhao, 2015; Liu, 2017). The social work profession also emerged in this period, introduced by Western missionaries, but there is no research exploring how social work in China related to the first wave of feminism.

[16] In the full-test databases of China's Academic Journals, when searching for 'social work in China' and 'feminism' as the subject, there were no more than 20 relevant articles and dissertations that explore how to use feminist theories and approaches in social work practices in China. When searched the terms 'social work in China' and 'feminism' as key words and in abstracts, no relevant articles emerged.

Thereafter, guided by Marxist theories, the People's Republic of China (since 1949) has endeavoured to ensure women's rights at every level of political, economic, social (education, health), and cultural life (Zhang, 2017). But, arguably, women's voices are still suppressed, as before, by male, mass media, and state discourses (Chen & Zhao, 2015; Liu, 2017). Clearly, in the 1960s and 1970s, feminism in Western countries was also significantly influenced by Marxist theories. However, differing from China, feminism in Western countries developed in a bottom-up way, which took a more critical lens towards oppressive patriarchal culture and state control. In China, the discourse of women's liberation is still largely dominated by the Chinese government that extracts women's potential as workers while simultaneously being family carers, yet it fails to assist women to address the cultural and structural barriers that subordinate women to men, family and the state. (Zhang, 2017). The social work profession has been promoted by governments in China since 2006. As radically inspired actions addressing unjust social orders are not likely in Chinese social work contexts, it is difficult to determine critical feminism's contributions to social work theories and practices in China.

To conclude, critical feminism significantly influenced the development of the social work profession in Australia, but not in China. Empowerment is the main conceptual focus in this research. As described in the Introduction to this thesis, empowerment theory has benefited from the critical feminist theories and movements in the 1960s and 1970s. In order to empower women, the system of power inequalities especially gender must be addressed. Thus, as critical feminist and empowerment theories reach the social work fields in different ways in China and Australia, it is useful to explore how they are actually interpreted and applied in social work practices in local contexts in China and Australia. This is the aim of this research study. In the following section, the literature exploring social work services to rural women in China and Australia is discussed.

'Social work', 'women' and 'empowerment' in China and Australia[17]

Different combinations between terms of 'social work', 'rural women', 'empowerment', 'China', 'Australia' are utilized to search relevant researches and studies about social work's intervention into rural women's empowerment in Australia and China. I mainly examine literatures presenting social work services of rural women in China and Australia, no matter whether the term 'empowerment' is presented in the body of that literature or not. This is because that empowerment doesn't have a fixed

[17] Different combinations of the terms 'social work', 'rural women', 'empowerment', 'China' and 'Australia' were used to search relevant research databases exploring social work's intervention into rural women's empowerment in Australia and China. I examined literature pertaining to social work services to rural women in China and Australia, whether or not the term 'empowerment' was present. This is because empowerment does not have a uniform definition. Empowerment is interpreted in diverse ways and social work practices reflect this diversity.

definition and criteria. Empowerment is interpreted in diverse practices, which is how this research examine it in various local practices in China and Australia.

Relevant studies in China highlight social work's important role in empowering rural women in the economic, political, education, health, community development, land heritage rights, family relationship, social support, safety, and psychological fields (Xiao & Wang, 2007; Han, 2008; Li,2010; Cheng & He, 2015). During China's continued industrialization and urbanization process, many rural male labours go to cities to work, many women then are left behind in rural areas to operate farms and care for family members. Thus, the difficulties experienced by a large number of 'left-behind' rural women (nearly 40 million) receive significant attention in China's social work field[18] (Liu & Liu, 2012; Chen & He, 2015; Chen & Li, 2015; He & Tian, 2015; Jiang & Dai, 2015; Wang & Zhang, 2016; Li & Li, 2017; Ma; 2017; Yao & Yang, 2018). Basically, group work and community work considered to be appropriate social work methods of helping rural left-behind women to build social network, address mental health issues, improve self-confidence and abilities in participating in community development, and constructing mutual help in family care and child education (Liu & Liu, 2012; Chen & He, 2015; Chen & Li, 2015; He & Tian, 2015; Jiang & Dai, 2015; Wang & Zhang, 2016; Li & Li, 2017; Ma; 2017; Yao & Yang, 2018). As many rural women live in poverty, there are substantial empirical social work studies that promote working with rural women collectively to create incomes (Gu et al., 2007; Liu, 2014; Yan et al., 2017; Yue & Yu, 2018; Jiang et al., 2018). In these social work studies, education and training in relation to policy, health, finance, gender, and marketing are highlighted as very important to help rural women to improve self-confidence and skills to make a better life (Gu et al., 2007; Liu & Liu, 2012; Liu, 2014; Chen & He, 2015; Chen & Li, 2015; He & Tian, 2015; Jiang & Dai, 2015; Wang & Zhang, 2016; Li & Li, 2017; Ma; 2017; Yan et al., 2017; Jiang et al., 2018; Yao & Yang, 2018).

However, it is not known if social workers raise rural women's consciousness about injustice and oppression emanating from economic-political and cultural structures. Perhaps rural women realize structural inequities and injustice, but have no avenues to challenge that. In addition, it should be noted that China considers itself to be a good example of implementing gender mainstreaming or liberating women (from top to bottom) as the Chinese Communist Party significantly adopted Marxist theories of equality and empowerment (see China's achievement of women's emancipation in the Gender Report of Chinese State Council, 2015). Nevertheless, as the ideology of liberating women is interpreted by the upper administrative level, it presents a social control aspect of demanding women

[18] As I introduced in the above section to women's life and service needs in China, By 2016, in Chinese rural societies, there were almost 40 million left-behind rural women (where the husband has left to work in the city), with 50 million left-behind elders (where all the children have left to work in cities) and 60 million left-behind children (where one parent has left to work in the city) (Yan, 2016).

to be both submissive working labourers and family carers (Ma, 2014; Chen & Zhao, 2015). Therefore, a paradox exists between whether to depend on the omnipotent Chinese governments to empower women, or to resist Chinese governments' control of women. Specifically, there is a question for the social work profession in China of how it deals with the complex tensions between social control and their professional beliefs in social justice, equality, and human rights in contradictory empowering practices. Little research examines such power interactions in social work's intervention into rural women's empowerment. Taking rural women's empowerment as a discourse, it is illuminating for this research to explore the complex power interactions in social work practices in China.

This research attempts to explore social workers' intervention into rural women's empowerment in Australia and China. The title 'social worker' in Australia belongs to a certain group that obtained qualified social work education in Australia. There are also other professional groups such as community workers and welfare workers that are engaged in providing services for rural women. The profession of social work, community work, and welfare work are highly relevant, but clearly distinguished by having their own accredited association and education. For example, the AASW (Australian Association of Social Work) assesses the universities that provide social work education, and issues social work accreditation to eligible persons (mainly those who are social work bachelor and master graduates from the AASW accredited universities). In a similar vein, ACWA (Australian Community Workers Association) issues accreditation of community worker and welfare worker to individuals who meet their criteria. Nevertheless, in practices, 'social worker', 'community worker', and 'welfare worker' freely select and engage in jobs with titles of community work, welfare work, and social work.

Nowadays, social work is highly promoted to develop as a particular profession in China. Nevertheless, the scale of the social work profession in China is broader than that in Australia. In China, community workers and welfare workers in governments and civil organizations, can sit the national examination of social work to gain social work accreditation if they have more than two-year's relevant work experience. They are recognized as indigenous social workers in China, and viewed by Chinese governments to be the ready-force to become professional social workers (with social work accreditation and understanding of social work knowledge). Because of the construction of the professional discourse of social work in China, there is substantial literature emphasizing the role of social work as a profession in serving rural women. Nevertheless, in Australia, the concept of professional social work is complexly embedded in diverse practices. Social workers may write many articles and books in relation to services for rural women, but not emphasize the professionalism of social work in serving rural women.

Simply speaking, social work's professionalism is highly promoted in China, while critically and cautiously examined in Australia. Nevertheless, as social work is considered to originate from Western countries, the dichotomy of professionalization and indigenization is widely utilized to compare social work practices in Western developed countries and Eastern countries. This comparison is thought to be a form of cultural imperialism of Western countries such as America to export professionalization ideas of social work to Eastern countries (Midgley, 2011; 2018; Gray & Coats, 2018). Given this backdrop, this research started from exploring what are the differences between qualified professional Australian social workers and Chinese indigenous social work practitioners, and aims to uncover the mysterious veil of social work professionalization and clarify what is the essence of professional social work. Because qualified Australian social workers are deemed as professional in benefiting from feminism, empowerment, and other critical theories, I examine relevant literature that highlights the professional role of Australian social workers in serving (working with) rural women.

Margaret Alston (2002) highly emphasized that social work has a role 'questioning the neo-liberal assumptions on which rural decline is based', and urged social workers to 'develop a rural empowerment movement joining with social movements such as the women in agricultural movements, the reconciliation movement, grey power and community action groups to assert a different version of rural Australia'. Robyn Mason (2007), as an Australian rural women and a social worker, proposed a feminist citizenship framework, through researching women-specific services in rural Australia, which emphasises recognizing women's diversity, bridging the public-private divide, addressing women's oppression, acknowledging women's agency, and facilitating women's active participation in social, political, and community life.

Australian researchers of social workers working with rural women argue for the focus of social work to be on understanding rural women's challenges in current economic-political, cultural and gender structures (Moyle & Dollard, 2008; Went, 2008, 2010; Alston et al., 2012; Boetto & McKinnon, 2013; Harvey, 2014; Humphreys, 2018). This radial lens is clearly evident in the empowerment theory and approaches articulated by these social work researchers. In contrast with literature in Australia, Chinese relevant literature focuses on how social workers build initiatives of rural women' services through responding to Chinese governments' policies of poverty alleviation and women's services. Given this comparison, it is informative to explore what kinds of services are undertaken by social workers in different types of organizations in Australia and China, and whether Australian social workers take more critical action challenging structural injustices and inequalities than Chinese social workers.

Services for women and rural women in Australia

Governmental

No matter at which level, federal, state or local, government departments in various fields, such as education, health, agriculture, human services, environment, regional development, social services, jobs, small businesses, and infrastructure, all provide certain types of services for women and men in general, and sometimes for women specifically. In most circumstances, general service practices rarely consider gender, which is critiqued as to be ignoring women's special needs under the gender order of hegemonic masculinity. Therefore, it is of interest to explore current specific services delivered by governments for women, especially for rural women. I have selected and researched several government departments at the Commonwealth level as examples.[19]

Department of Human Services

The Australian Department of Human Services (DHS) 'offers a range of health, social, and welfare payments and services through programs of Medicare, Centrelink, and Child Support' (DHS, 2017). It is the primary government department in the Australian welfare system. It develops service delivery policies and works with other government, private, and non-profit agencies to provide services (DHS, 2017). As an important part of DHS, Centrelink is responsible for delivering social security payments and services to 'retirees, the unemployed, carers, families, Indigenous Australians, people with disabilities, rural and remote Australians, students, people from culturally and linguistically different backgrounds, and people who suffer from disasters (DHS, 2016)'. Medicare offers free or low-cost medical and health services for users (DHS, 2018d-e). Child Support includes services and financial support for separated parents, and provides information, resources, and service referrals for people affected by domestic violence (DHS, 2018f).

From reading the annual reports of DHS and the information on its website, it seems that its policies and service programs are quite gender neutral. Like men, women are general service users of DHS. They may have a high profile in service programs for carers and for people who suffer from domestic violence. From the DHS website, however, it is difficult to find information about gender differences in designing service programs and in accepting services. In addition, there is no record to show that rural women are considered specifically in service programs for rural and remote Australians.

[19] I selected governments departments at the Commonwealth level in Australia and at the Central level in Chin as examples for researching their services for women and rural women. Australian and Chinese governments' ideologies of providing services for women are evident in practices and policies of national-level government departments in Australia and China. Comparing with diverse local governments, or state or province government institutions, national-level government departments in Australia and China are more conducive to research the main ideology of serving women of the government in Australia and China.

In recent years although it is the biggest employer of social workers in Australia (750 persons in 2017) (DHS, 2017), DHS is criticized as focusing more and more on economic efficiency and require users to be economically rational beings (Chenoweth et al, 2005; Chenoweth, 2008; McDonald and Chenoweth, 2009). This is associated with the Australian government's adoption of neoliberal ideology since the 1980s. In DHS, social workers are assigned to primarily serve the people who are at risk of suicide or self-harm, young people without adequate support, and people affected by family and domestic violence (DHS, 2017). In the current neoliberal (managerial) environment, social workers in DHS are criticized as being mainly gatekeepers who assess users' eligibility for receiving services, rather than professionals who work to better empower users through resisting structural inequalities and advocating for policy change (McDonald & Chenoweth, 2009; John & Bob, 2011; Gray et al., 2015). Therefore, although most social workers are women, under DHS's gender-neutral policies and programs, it is hard to identify whether they are gender aware enough to take female users' subordinate gender position into account in daily practices. Again, although the identities of rural women embody both factors of gender and rural, they are just placed as general service users among rural and remote Australians. Australia is a welfare state, however; many social workers still have the space to juggle with the 'economy-centric' governing of governments, and strive for more opportunities and better services for the disadvantaged (McDonald & Chenoweth, 2009; John & Bob, 2011; Gray et al., 2015).

Other departments and the Office for Women

In contrast to DHS's gender neutral policies and programs, there are several gender specific projects for women and for rural women in the departments of agriculture and water resources, health, education and training, and social services. This relates to the women's or rural women's roles and positions in the specific field for which those departments are responsible. Sometimes, departments initiate projects targeting certain female groups; often, they make practical plans respectively for different genders in order to efficiently achieve the goal of a specific act or project of the Commonwealth government. As their service areas are interrelated with each other, their gender-guided service projects are usually implemented cooperatively. Of course, non-profit organizations are recruited and funded by government departments to deliver services.

With support from the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources (DAWR), the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC) sets up an award for leading rural women and helps them connect with each other by building national networks (DAWR, 2018). Relying on the biological difference between men and women, the Department of Health (DH) has national health policies and reports for both men and women. Notably, the Rural Women's GP Services (RWGPS), supervised by the DH and managed by the organization of the Royal Flying Doctor Service, has increased rural

women's opportunities to consult female doctors who are assisted to run clinics and provide other health services in rural (including remote) communities (DH, 2007). The Department of Education and Training (DET 2017) provides funding for research in relation to women's career development and access to education, and manages scholarship programs in particular for female students (for example, the National Research Internships Program). There is no record to show a specific program for rural women on the DET website, however. The Department of Social Services (DSS, 2017), with its mission of improving the lifetime wellbeing of people and families in Australia, is directly involved in the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022 (the National Plan) to improve the status and wellbeing of women in Australia. This is based on the statistics that 'one in three Australian women have experienced physical violence since the age of 15, and almost one in five have experienced sexual violence' (The Council of Australian Government, 2010, n.p.). As the leading government agency that advances gender equality across Australia, the Office for Women also works as one of the main promoters of the National Plan. It is recognized as the 'gender-mainstreaming' government body that offers grants and funding for organizations to deliver gender equality, provides policy advice to government ministers and to other departments to enhance gender equality, and engages in various national and international plans to promote women's leadership, economic security, and safety (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2018).

Government departments at the state level also support different service projects for women, or for rural women at some times (for example, the Rural Women's Network). It can be seen that gender has been considered by Australian governments to help them fulfil their responsibilities and deliver services. While gender mainstreaming is the primary goal of the government department that has been set up for women, the Office for Women, it is easily ignored in the practices of other government institutions. Rural women are more likely to get particular attention from governments in the agricultural field because their occupations are linked to agriculture. More often, in service projects for all women, rural women are categorized as a certain group of women who have to deal with the difficulties of long-distance travel and scarce resources to access services.

Of course, social workers work in the service projects of Australian governments. There are four intersecting sectors relating to how social workers participate in services for women: directly working in government departments; working in non-governmental organizations funded by governments to deliver services; engaging in gender-neutral projects; engaging in gender-specific projects for women. In the following section, I attempt to introduce non-profit organizations' and community's services for women and explore their serving ideologies.

Non-profit organizations and community

The word 'organization' refers to 'an organized group of people with particular purpose, such as business or government department (Oxford Dictionary, 2018). As well as government organizations, there are organizations operating to gain profit for their individual members and non-profit organizations that have no commitment to primarily make profit for their members, all participating in offering services for women. Non-profit organizations, because of their charitable nature, are where most social workers work. In the Australian welfare state, the main funder of non-profit organizations is the government. The non-profit organisations comply with governments' goal of delivering services, but also interpret policies according to their serving principles and construct serving practices in terms of local or micro contexts.

Some non-profit organisations are based on religion and developed in the Australian tradition of Christian charity (Hughes, 2010); some flourished in the prosperous social movements of the 1960s and the 1970s (McDonald & Marston, 2002). Some non-profit organizations provide gender-specific services for women, some do not. Sometimes, comprehensive non-profit organizations such as the religious ones, offer services for women who can be classified into certain groups, such as homeless women or refugee women. Sometimes, specialised non-profit organizations initiate gender-specific services for a certain group of women, such as girls who have experienced sexual assault, women affected by domestic violence or single mothers. Notably, some of the specialised non-profit organizations only target women. Regarding rural women, the fact that they live in rural areas, are active in agriculture and are female, should be all considered in specific service practices for them.

In order to compete for government funding, many non-profit organizations are questionably losing their critical or radical spirit against structural inequalities (McDonald & Marson, 2002; Isabel et al., 2004; Micheli & Kennerley, 2007; Mark et al., 2017). They become compliant in order to gain resources in the current political environment of economic rationalism. Governments pay more attention to economic efficiency, economic benefits, and rational management, while ignoring the negative effects of assessing everything (even human rights) by an economic standard (Payne, 2012). Non-profit organizations make improvements in management and try to achieve more visible or quantitative service outcomes to survive in the marketized welfare system, while struggling with how to engage in sustainable empowerment practice for service users and how to challenge unequal structures (McDonald & Marson, 2002; Isabel et al., 2004; Micheli & Kennerley, 2007; Payne, 2012; Gray et al., 2015; Mark et al., 2017). Non-profit organizations are deemed to be more flexible and caring than governments, but their serving methods rely on what kinds of ideology, aim, leadership, personnel structure, and resources (include funding and external connections) they have. Therefore, embedded in diverse non-profit organizations, social workers' practices present various differences.

Clearly, like non-profit organizations, various groups in different communities practice according to their areas of interest, beliefs, leadership, membership, and resources. In comparison with organizations, however, groups are deemed to not have clear goals, compact management and schedules, and stable resources (Salamon & Anheier, 1992). Therefore, most often, groups in different communities (in the sense of place) are motivated by the ideology of mutual help to engage with serving practices. Women are the majority who are active in community service (Alston, 2005; 2018). They usually help each other in various community groups. Sometimes, these groups are quite gender-aware because, all being women, they understand each other. Sometimes, they may strengthen the unequal gender order because they have already internalized and normalized some oppressive gendered ideas, such as women's roles of obedient wives, fully devoted mothers, and constant carers for families and communities. There are also social workers involved in groups in their communities. Be they women or men, whether they have clear gender awareness is determined by how they understand the gender structure through their personal gender experiences.

Services for women and rural women in China

Governmental

As with my treatment of Australian government services, I have selected several Chinese government departments from the central level to explore the specific services they have for women and rural women. From the website of the Central People's Government of the PRC (CPG), there are many descriptions of a certain province, city, or prefecture's service project for women, for example, craft training for poor women in Rongshui Prefecture in Guangxi Province (CPG, 2017a), free antenatal care for pregnant women in Shanxi Province (CPG, 2018), and free screening for breast cancer and cervical cancer in Gansu Province (CPG, 2017b). Service projects for rural women are mainly about poverty alleviation, promotion of employment with skill training and financial support (micro loans), and free screening for breast cancer and cervical cancer (summarized from the CPG website). It seems that gender has been taken into governments' consideration. The Chinese government's understanding of gender equality and its strategies for achieving it, however, need to be further investigated.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of the PRC (MARA) largely promotes the New Rural Construction movement, in which rural women are encouraged to participate and contribute. But gender-specific consideration is not included in its projects, such as the project of skills training for rural people to work in industries other than agriculture (MARA, 2007), and the project of fostering rural technicians in agricultural machineries (MARA, 2009). The Ministry of Health, Department of Women and Children's Health of the PRC (MHWC) has divided health projects for men and women in terms of their biological differences. Women's reproduction function is paid significant attention.

Because rural women are obstructed by long distances, few resources, and financial difficulties from accessing health services easily, the NHC implements several health service projects including free screening for breast cancer and cervical cancer (MHWC, 2009), and provides hospitalized birth subsidies for them (MHWC, 2012). The Ministry of Education of the PRC has statistics about the proportion of women accessing different levels of education. But it lacks records about the opportunities for women, especially those who live in rural areas, to access different levels of education, and about how to increase those opportunities. The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security of the PRC (MHS) is in charge of the social insurance system and labour market in China. As there are separate social insurance arrangements for urban workers, rural migrants, rural residents, and urban residents, gender seems not to be considered within different groups. Although many female rural migrants have contributed greatly to the development of cities, the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development (MHUR) is slow to offer special care and awards for them. Like DHS in Australia, the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA) of the PRC manages income security payments and welfare services for the most disadvantaged people, such as elders and children who have no families to depend on, the disabled, the poor, and people who suffer from natural disasters (MCA, 2018). In addition, the MCA is the primary government institution in China that supervises non-profit organizations, civil groups, and foundations, and promotes the development of the social work profession (MCA, 2018). Most often, women are just part of the overall service users in service projects of the MCA. Sometimes, the MCA specifically caters for the needs of a particular group of women such as left-behind women in rural areas and female rural migrants in cities (MCA, 2015e; 2016b). To sum up, it can be seen that gender is highlighted by Chinese governments as a factor in service delivery. But gender equality is more likely to be understood by Chinese governments as granting men and women the same opportunity, rather than offering them ways of enjoying equal benefits.

Achieving gender equality and protecting women's rights are essential tasks of the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF), which was established as a mass organization (by the government) in April 1949 (ACWF, 2018). The ACWF is under the leadership of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. In the same way, Chinese Communist Party's Committees at different government levels such as province, city, and prefecture, administer different levels of Women's Federations. Different levels of Women's Federations implement service projects for women by following the ACWF's plans, and receive funding allocated from the finance budgets of different levels of government (ACWF, 2018). Women's Federations have the power to impel governments to satisfy women's special needs because their leaders are based in the Chinese Communist Party's Committees and these Committees lead and direct government agenda. From 1949 until now, the ACWF has initiated sixteen specific projects for women, among which five particularly target rural women (ACWF, 2018). As well, it is

interesting to note that the government departments illustrated above more or less cooperate with Women's Federations to implement service projects including poverty alleviation for women, supporting women to start businesses, micro loans for rural women, including rural women in village committees, free screening for breast and cervical cancers, and establishing 'women's homes' in communities. Like the Office for Women in Australia, gender mainstreaming is primarily adopted by Women's Federations in China while overlooked by other government departments. Being actually a part of governments in China, however, Women's Federations should also be questioned as to whether they just provide what are thought by governments to be good for women.

Government officials are regarded as indigenous social workers in China and are allowed by the Chinese central government to sit the social work national examination if they have more than two years of working experience serving the public (China Social Work Association, 2006). They are seen as ready to become professional social workers (Shi, 2011). Among all government departments, civil affairs bureaus have the most staff that have achieved social work accreditation through passing the national examination. They may, however, have the formal title of social worker but continue to work in the same way as before. There are young graduates who majored in social work in universities and colleges and are currently hired by governments. They feel it is very hard to clarify the aim of professional social work, or how to be a professional social worker, under rigid administrative management (Tang, 2010a; 2010b). As government policies and services are quite gender neutral, social workers who came from being government officials lack awareness about the unequal gender order.

Non-profit organizations and community groups

Because of the Chinese government's dominant role in public service, the civil society has little opportunity to perform vigorously. It took China nearly twenty years to develop the registration system for civil organizations after the opening up in 1978. In 1995, the fourth United Nation's World Conference on Women was held in Beijing. Inspired by this conference, some pioneers began founding non-profit organizations to help women. In 1998, the State Council of the PRC published the ordinances of the registration and management of non-profit organizations and social groups (MCA, 1998a; 1998b). Most of the first-generation non-profit organizations in China, such as Rural Women, the Maple Women's Psychological Counselling Centre, the Women's Legal Research and Service Centre of the Law Faculty of Peking University (the affiliation was cancelled by the Peking University in 2010), the Shanxi Research Association for Women and Family, the Henan Community Education Research Centre, and the Psychology Counselling and Legal Centre for Women and Children in Xishuanbanna in Yunnan, are engaged in service practices for women. They are welcomed because they compensate for the service vacancy in society, but constrained because they accept overseas

funding and ideologies that challenge the status quo (Zhu, 2014). One of the formal registration requirements for non-profit organizations is to find a government institution to be its supervisor in service practices and finance (MCA, 1998a).

Under this restricted environment, non-profit organizations have made many efforts to provide more caring and flexible services for the disadvantaged. Once Chinese governments began to purchase services in society and develop the social work profession from 2006, non-profit organizations had more chance of gaining government funding to provide services. Along with the government's goal of having 1.5 million social workers by 2020, newly emerging social work agencies initiated by social work teachers from universities and colleges obtained more benefits than other non-profit organizations. In any case, there are now more civil organizations offering services for women generally and rural women specifically. According to the MCA (2017c), there were 336,000 non-profit organizations, 702,000 social groups and 5,559 foundations formally registered in 2016. Again, non-profit organizations, whether in Australia or China, can be divided into those that primarily provide services for a specific gender, and those with mixed-gender practices. Specifically targeting women generally, there are services working in domestic violence, psychological counselling, family relationships, and education. For rural women, experiencing rural as a place and a political identity, having agriculture as a background, and being female should be considered in specific service practices for them.

Because of the powerful Chinese government, civil organizations may be well facilitated to engage in services in local contexts, or may be closely monitored so that they cannot challenge unequal structures (Yan, 2010; Guo & Nie, 2013; Lu & Liang, 2014). While Australian civil organizations struggle with the overwhelming power of the market, their Chinese counterparts are dealing with an unchallengeable government as well as the booming and chaotic market. The workers who have a tertiary social work education background are recognized as professional social workers and mainly employed by the different non-profit organizations to deliver services. As well, there are the community workers, consumer practitioners who are regarded as Chinese indigenous social workers with or without social work accreditation, also working in non-profit organizations. It can be deduced that Chinese social workers' methods of serving women or rural women are largely impacted by the ideology, aim, leadership, relationship with government, resources, and the serving area of the non-profit organization they work in. When the non-profit organization serves women specifically, their 'social workers' are possibly more aware of gender inequality. When they mainly target rural women, they should note rural women's disadvantage is associated with the factors of rural as a place and a political identity, having an agricultural background, and being of female gender. It is deemed that non-profit organizations offer more caring, flexible, and fair services than governments. But if non-profit organizations rarely talk about transforming unequal structures because of strong government

control, there should be questions about whether their practices stabilize the status quo to some extent.

Groups in communities also participate in public service delivery, mainly by way of mutual help. Many of them have not registered formally with Chinese civil affair bureaus under the category of social groups. Their areas of interest, leadership, beliefs, membership, and resources decide how they operate. Women are active in community groups (Zhou & He, 2016). Sometimes, the practices of community groups particularly take note of women's gender roles and positions in society because the majority of their members are women. Their practices, however, accord to the current unequal gender order, and they may not be aware enough to challenge it. When community groups cooperate with local governments and non-profit organizations, the leading members in the community who sustainably insist on practising services are deemed to be indigenous social workers in this research. Different from government staff and non-profit organizations' workers those whose occupation is public service, experienced leaders in community groups develop their service methods through personal life experiences. Therefore, when they participate in a particular service project for women, they develop their gender consciousness by accepting the cooperating organization's gender ideology and understanding their own gender experiences.

In summary, professional social workers and indigenous social workers in China are based in government institutions, non-profit organizations, and community groups to serve women generally and rural women specifically. Because social work education is not the essential factor identifying social workers in China, the substantial practical field—organization—becomes the main factor determining how the identified professional social workers and indigenous social workers practice. Organizations in different welfare fields in China are guided by different ideologies and motivations. Furthermore, those welfare fields are impacted by China's economic, political, and cultural structures. It can be seen that a strong controlling political system, an inflated market economy, and a culture of pursuing 'advanced modernization' all influence the service practices from different welfare fields. Gender might be largely considered in the services specifically for women. But whether those practices can be challenged to transform the current unequal gender order needs to be questioned. Women who have a rural identity and an agricultural background, need specific considerations in service practices because their disadvantage is associated with the intersecting factors of rural as a place and a political identity, having an agricultural background, and being of female gender. How those intersecting factors are understood in service practices for rural women needs to be further investigated.

Summary and conclusion

Rural is different from urban in the process of a nation's pursuit of industrialization, urbanization, and modernization. It is an acknowledged context with certain geographic, demographic, economic, and sociocultural features. In this literature review chapter, I demonstrated the dynamic rural economic, political, welfare, and cultural structures, that is, the rural structural discourses underlying Australia and China's pursuit of economic growth, industrialization, urbanization, and modernization. Different and similar rural structural discourses in China and Australia determine rural women's life situations and service needs and can enable or constrain social workers' empowerment practices. Under Australia and China's rural structural discourses, different welfare fields such as government organizations, formally registered non-profit organizations, and community groups present different ideologies and motivations in providing services for women generally and rural women specifically. Based in different welfare fields, certain organizations or groups with particular aims, principles, leadership, personnel, and resources engage in services specifically for women, or in services for both women and men. When rural women are specific service users, their intersecting characteristics of being female, living in rural areas, and being linked with agriculture need to be considered by organizations. Whether professional or indigenous, social workers bring their own personalities, knowledge, and life experiences (including gender experiences) into their practices. This literature review in part profiled the macro and meso contexts, in which social workers' empowerment practices for rural women occur.

Chapter 3: Theory: Bourdieu, structural constructivism, cultural production, and reproduction

Structural constructivism

Using well-planned methods to find the objective truth is deemed to be the epistemological ground of Western science (Crotty, 1998, p.42). In terms of objectivism, 'objective social structures such as those relating to class, ethnicity, gender and language, determine people's attitudes and actions' (Webb et al, 2002, p. 6). From an opposite position, subjectivism refers to the idea that 'social reality is produced through the thoughts, decisions, and actions of individual agents (Webb et al, 2002, p. 5). On one hand, the structuralist attempts to untangle objective functions of the society by finding and analysing the relationship of different events. Therefore, those who are recognized as structuralists, such as Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913), Emile Durkheim (1858–1917), and Talcott Parsons (1902–79), are criticized as being too deterministic about the meaning embodied in the 'objectified structures' while disregarding of people's agency to structures (Crotty, 1998, pp.195-203; Whittenbury, 2003, p.121). On the other hand, structuralism is inclined to be subjective because a structuralist (subject) tries to impose meaning on their deemed objective structures (object) (Crotty, 1998, p.201). Mediating between objectivism and subjectivism, constructivism views the social reality in interactive relationships between people and their world, which is constructed in certain contexts and is tangible and transposable (Crotty, 1998, p.42; Flecha et al., 2001). Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) claimed himself to be a constructivist (Flecha et al., 2001); he sought explanations of the interactive social structures and human agency, and rejected the ruinous dichotomy between objectivism and subjectivism. The useful explanatory conceptual tool of Bourdieu is adopted in this research with regard to the construction of empowerment practices of social workers as agents in two different societies (structured and structuring)—Australia and China.

Theory of practice

Bourdieu never explicitly packaged his theoretical tools, nor did he grant them a 'grand name'. In fact, he was opposed to setting up 'grand theories' as overarching explanatory frameworks and proposed instead to explore 'a set of thinking tools' based on and to further guide empirical studies (Wacquant,

1989, cited in Whittenbury, 2003, p. 122). Habitus, field, and capital are three fundamental concepts developed by Bourdieu. Generally speaking, practice occurs when individual agents interact with the environment around them. For Bourdieu, practice is associated with individuals' personalities, life experiences, knowledge base (including educational background), and their positions in the action context; it is impacted by the different forms of capital (economic/material, social, cultural, and symbolic) in the field where the action disseminates; and is further constrained by current structures of a society.

As Bourdieu attempts to reconcile objectivism and subjectivism (structure and agency), the term 'structure' in Bourdieu's usage includes, at least (Porpora, 1989, cited in Nash, 2008, p.44):

> *(i) the 'pure' structural principles of classical variety (raw/cooked, clarity/obscurity, restricted/ elaborated, and so on), (ii) taken-for-granted categories of every day life (high/low, male/female, theoretical/practical, and so on), (iii) principles of action, from those of traditional, folk culture, ('neither a borrower nor a lender be', 'a stitch in time', 'too many cooks', and the like) through to the politicised slogans of contemporary life ('user pays', 'transparency', 'accountability', and so on), and (iv) the structures of the labour market, the distribution of educational credentials, and such like, abstracted by sociological analysis.*

Bourdieu views practice from relations between structure and human agency (the ability to understand and control our own actions) (Flecha et al., 2001; Webb et al., 2002; Whittenbury, 2003). Structure and individual agents are both active and passive in the process of generating practices. They impact each other. Individuals strive for survival under certain natural and social conditions (economic, political, and sociocultural). They absorb ideas about how to survive according to their positions in the field containing certain social conditions. They may feel comfortable or uncomfortable about those ideas. Therefore, their actions may support or change those taken-for-granted ideas. How these ideas form relates to how social conditions change over histories. In the field with changing social conditions, different individuals compete for more resources or capital to better their lives. As there is a competition, there are winners. Winners can remodify the rules of 'games' to maintain their gains. In the long process of the accumulation and exchange of capital, some rules are kept and fixed. Therefore, players, without consciousness to some extent, help maintain the established rules. Along with the change of different players' position and disposition in the 'game' (field), however, new understandings are built.

Practice is a complex process. It implies histories, present, and future. Bourdieu specifically mentioned that the complexities of practice cannot be accurately described by languages (Gao, 2004, n.p.). Thus,

he utilized the term 'symbolic' to bridge the gap between complex practices and limited language description (Gao, 2004, n.p.). According to Xuanyang Gao (2004,n.p.):

> *The term 'symbolic' mentioned by Bourdieu, represents the dual structure and quite complex functional logic of society and individual agents ….. includes complex power allocation and reallocation process, includes the reproducing process of social structures and social position networks ….. presents society's dual profiles of reality and possibility, and refers to society's history, present, and future in times and spaces.*

In practices, people show their abilities and motivations for survival. Meanings are constructed in the process of survival. The presentations of meanings are regarded as the culture. Therefore, from Bourdieu's perspective, culture production and reproduction is the essential representation form of practice (Webb et al., 2002, p. 146; Browitt, 2004). Again, culture is 'symbolic'. For Bourdieu, culture is not only the product created by the initiative of human beings, but also a condition in everyday life to determine what human beings should be (Browitt, 2004).

Culture is 'the representation form of human beings' survival abilities and motivations in everyday life' (Gao, 2004, n.p.). It is not just a static product with 'forms of knowledge, beliefs, arts, law, customs in human beings' world' (Taylor, 1903, cited in Gao, 2004, n.p.). It in turn, becomes vigorous in its repeating and remoulding process, regulating or controlling how people think and act. Therefore, Bourdieu advocates for research that is more about the process of culture reproduction rather than focusing too much on culture as a produced product.

In this research, the practice is about how social workers empower rural women in Australia and China. Practice happens in relationships between agents and structures. Social workers are agents who are engaged in empowering rural women. They are located in different organizations. They act in local rural areas. It can be noted that there are multilevel 'structures'. Those 'structures' are embodied in various fields such as different organizations, local rural contexts, social work's development as a profession, and the society of Australia and China with particular social conditions (economic, political, and sociocultural).

To summarize, from the constructivist perspective, this research attempts to explore social workers' practices of empowering rural women by relating their individual dispositions and positions with the 'multiple structures' they interact with. Bourdieu's concepts are useful in explaining such complexities. Structure, agent, field, and practice are all 'symbolic'. This means that they are not based on the dualistic demarcation, such as object/subject, active/passive, tangible/virtual and so on. In addition, they contain history, present, and future.

In order to clarify my descriptions, I simply divide Australia and China's societal structures into four categories: economic structures, political structures, welfare structures, and cultural structures. 'Rural', as the base for producing food and raw materials, has a significant position in maintaining the survival of human beings. In this modern world that pursues industrialization and urbanization, the symbolic meaning of 'rural' is produced according to its distinction from 'urban', but also in the process of assimilating it with 'urban' (bringing it within the industrialization and marketization process, and detaching it from nature). In this research, I profile 'rural' as a way of distinguishing it from 'urban'. Nevertheless, it does not mean 'rural' and 'urban' are dichotomized as black and white.[20]

Therefore, I use the term 'structural discourse' to highlight:

- the interweaving of and interrelation between the societal structures classified as economy, politic, welfare, and culture
- the symbolic meaning of these structures
- the embodiment of societal structures in the space of 'rural'
- the relative stability and definite variation of structures
- the relationship between the history, present, and future of structures.

As social conditions for social workers to take action, rural 'structural discourses' are detailed in Chapter 2 Rural Women in Context. They are described in four categories: rural economy, politics, welfare, and culture. According to Bourdieu, practice is a form of cultural production and reproduction. Under structural discourses, social workers' practices of empowering rural women are deemed to be a culture production and reproduction in this thesis. In order to present and explain this culture production and reproduction process, Bourdieu's core concepts are adopted.

Habitus

In Bourdieu's usage, habitus is the core concept that brings together structure and agency, objective and subjective, and past, present, and future. Simply put, habitus focuses on (Malton, 2008, p.52):

> *Our ways of acting, feeling, thinking and being. It captures how we carry with us our history, how we bring this history into our present circumstances, and how we then make choices to act in certain way and not others.*

In other words, habitus refers to (Whittenbury, 2003, p.124):

[20] For the purpose of explaining research concepts and findings, I demarcated distinctions of rural/urban and four structures of rural economy, policy, welfare, and culture in Chapter 2. Nevertheless, demarcating these distinctions mainly aims to clarify the description. In reality, rural and urban and different structures of rural are not exclusively separate from each other. There are complexities and areas where these categories overlap.

A set of values and predispositions that individuals internalise through their cultural history. The habitus is therefore learned and is shaped by the interaction of individual action and objective structures. The habitus is therefore both durable and transposable; it remains with an individual across cultural contexts or fields.

Individuals build their knowledge, beliefs, and habits according to the environment in which they live. As human beings are gregarious animals, different individuals have different positions in groups. Living in groups, individuals internalise the idea of how to act according to their positions. When a group gets bigger and bigger, various subgroups emerge. As survival is a 'natural-designed' competition game, differences between various subgroups become clear in relation to their accumulation of survival capital (economic, social, cultural, symbolic) (Moore, 2008). Different groups or individuals have different power because they own a different volume of capital (Browitt, 2004). The ones that gain a lot of capital, have more power. They will gain more capital and power through repeating how the competition functions.

Xuanyang Gao (2004, n.p.) describes Bourdieu's interpretation of power as follows:

- *Power presents as general social relationships and social forces. Wherever social relationships and social force exist, power exists and takes effects.*
- *Power is decided by the volume of capital held by individual agents who are positioned differently in their relationship networks.*

During the process of people's competition for power, social structure is engendered (Bourdieu, 1994, p.55, cited in Gao, 2004, n.p.). People actively participate in constructing social structures. How people think and act is largely impacted by social structures through power allocation. Habitus is the product of this dialectic and dual process. In order to better understand habitus, interrelated factors need to be noted: an individual's life experience (childhood, knowledge base, crucial personal and social events experienced); main fields where an individual acts (place of living, area of expertise, workplace, the place of engaging in practice); the symbolic meaning of those fields that are structured and structuring in time and space.

The Body is also a product of habitus (Webb et al., 2002, p. 37). The Body is the carrier of the relationship between structure and individual agents. Through the body, individuals experience the environment they live in. When individuals stay in an environment for a long time, their bodies directly respond to the situations they always meet. Bourdieu especially mentioned that the body remembers the functioning rules (structures) of the social world where people live (Bourdieu, 2000, p.141, cited in Wang, 2013, n.p.). The body experiences the forces or powers of

the field where individual agents act. Emotions, such as happiness, sadness, anxiety, shame, and anger, are usually felt along with the body's response to the external environment. Relatively speaking, consciousness more reflects the agency of people. The relationships between body, emotion, and consciousness are embodied in habitus. Habitus is the result of repeated responses of an individual agent's body and emotions to the external social world. Therefore, habitus is sometimes constructed in an unconscious way. Because habitus is built in power relationships, however, it is associated with how different groups or individuals consciously interact with each other.

Fields, capital, and doxa

Bourdieu defined a field as (Bourdieu, 1998, cited in Thomson, 2008, p.74):

> *A structured social space, a field of forces, a force field. It contains people who dominate and who are dominated.*

According to Thomson (2008, p.75):

> *Bourdieu's own explication of field often involved four semiautonomous levels: the field of power, the broad field under consideration, the specific field, and social agents in the field as a field in themselves.*

Field is tangible and transferrable. There are various power relations in a field. A field is where different forces compete. Different individuals, groups, and institutions participate in competition in certain fields. At the same time, Individuals, groups, and institutions themselves are fields (Webb et al, 2002, p.21). Given its complexity, field itself is symbolic. Field is where symbolic practices occur. The interaction between different fields generates symbolic practices. Because Bourdieu's concept of field is quite abstract, I attempt to categorize the multilevel fields in this research:

- in this globalised world, a nation's pursuit of modernization during the process of industrialization, marketization, and urbanization
- the structuring and structured process of 'rural' during a nation's pursuit of modernization
- the field constituted by various institutions that deliver services for rural women
- the position of the social work profession in the field of rural women's service relating to the structuring and structured process of the social work profession in a nation
- individual institutions participating in the field of rural women's service, subfields in this research
- social workers themselves

Multilevel fields contain diverse ideologies, which in turn determine the way that fields operate. As mentioned above, the power allocation of different social agents (individuals, groups, or institutions) are quite uneven in a field. Therefore, the main ideology that drives a field to operate is largely from the dominant social agents who have considerable power in a field (Moore, 2008; Deer, 2008a). In Bourdieu's usage, evaluating capital is a way to understand the power allocation in a field.

> *Bourdieu nominated four forms of capital: economic (money and assets); cultural (e.g. forms of knowledge; taste, aesthetic and cultural preferences; language, narrative and voice); social (e.g. affiliations and networks; family, religious and cultural heritage) and symbolic (things which stand for all of the other forms of capital and can be 'exchanged' in other fields, e.g. credentials (Thomson, 2008, p.80).*

In a field, 'conflict is involved when groups or individuals attempt to determine what constitutes capital within that field, and how that capital is to be distributed (Webb, 2002, p.22)'. Therefore, capital can be understood as the "energy" that drives the development of a field through time (Moore, 2008)'. During the process of accumulating, exchanging, and competing for capital in a field, social agents show their agency of designing or influencing the rules of the field. Doxa is the specific logic or rules and unquestioned belief of a field. Although agency and changes exist in a field, doxa especially shows a structure's arbitrariness in deciding what the 'natural practice' is (Deer, 2008a). Acting in a field for a certain time, social agents internalise that field's doxa. Therefore, according to Deer (2008a, p.121):

> *In the field, the doxa takes the form of a misrecognized unconditional allegiance to the 'rules of the game' on the part of social agents with a similar habitus. Doxa, as a symbolic form of power, requires that those subjected to it do not question its legitimacy and the legitimacy of those who exert it.*

In summary, in terms of Bourdieu's theoretical tools such as field, capital, and doxa, the following points need to be noted in this thesis:

- Understanding how rural is structured in the field of a nation's pursuit of modernization and the doxa of structuring rural in the field of a nation's pursuit of modernization.
- In the large field of rural women's service, homologous institutions can constitute a subfield (either governmental, non-profit, or community) that contains dominant functional ideology to be its doxa. In addition, the power of those subfields relies on the capital they have.

- Given the adoption of qualitative analysis in this research, every individual institution is regarded as a unique tangible field with specific capital and functional ways (doxa). It should be noted, however, that their capital and doxa are influenced by which subfield in the large field of rural women's service they are located in.

Reflexivity

Compared with the theoretical concepts of habitus, symbolic practice, culture production and reproduction, field, capital, and doxa, in Bourdieu's work, reflexivity is a methodological concept.

> *For Bourdieu, reflexivity means that all knowledge producers should strive to recognize their own objective position within the intellectual and academic field …. Bourdieu discusses how observers and analysts in these fields project their own vision of the world onto their understanding of the social practices that are the object of their studies. Thereby, they unconsciously attribute to the object of their own observations characteristics that are inherently theirs and those of their own perception and comprehension of the world (Deer, 2008b, p.200).*

Reflexivity is a way to interrogate the habitus of self. As habitus links a field's structures with individuals' agency, reflexivity requires individuals to break through their taken-for-granted beliefs by recognizing how they are positioned in their action field (Barnard, 1990). Bourdieu suggested that a struggle to overcome academic intellectualism or intellectuality is necessary, especially for researchers or scholars (Bourdieu, 2000, p.7, cited in Webb et al, 2002, p.17). It is important to use a reflexive method to understand history because what exists in the present and what should exist in the future have already become unquestionable to a large extent. In a field, people easily reflect on their similarities with and differences from others, rather than reflect on how they became their present selves and what they want to change in themselves. As reflexivity involves questioning the doxa of the field where people have been acting for a long time, it brings uncomfortable feelings. It is a constant process of breaking through the self. Certainty, however, is also constructed in a constant process of reflexivity. As this research is undertaken in a cross-cultural context, I make efforts to constantly reflect on my identity of growing up in China, undertaking PhD study in Australia, and as a researcher in an academic field. With the critical discourse, a reflexive method is very important in undertaking research and reaching research conclusions.

Analysis of practice—a culture production and reproduction process

Bourdieu developed a range of concepts to explain complex practice. Bourdieu's concepts have symbolic characteristics. They cannot be accurately described by language. Besides, language itself is symbolic (Snook, 1990).

> *People's dialogue or language application is a type of language game, which presents different speakers' social status, ability, capital, and knowledge. Those factors are all associated with power (Gao, 2004, n.p.).*

Analysis of practices is begun by analyzing languages. In a field, language is taken as a strategy by social agents for striving for benefit and power (Snook, 1990). Thus, various power relations are embodied in language. Analysing power relations is the basis for understanding complex practice. Therefore, in this research, I will not only focus on how my interviewees talk about their service practices, but also try to figure out why they speak and act in that way by referring to Bourdieu's method of uncovering complex power relations. There are some important points that need to be noted when I analyse research data to uncover social workers' practices of empowering rural women in Australia and China:

- interviewees' description about how they understand empowerment, what they are doing to provide services to rural women, and what kinds of supportive factors or barriers they meet when providing services to rural women
- descriptions of various relationships (or relations) between different social workers, social workers and service users, service organizations and government, different service organizations, service users and governments, different levels of government
- the difference of how interviewees use language
- the observation of interviewees' feelings (or expression of emotions) when they speak and act.

In this research, the analysis of complex practice is from micro to macro. The analysis crosses social workers, service organizations, the rural service context, and Australia and China's social conditions. Practice occurs in a complex way because the interactions between those sectors are complex. According to Bourdieu, their complex interactions can be viewed as a culture production and reproduction process. Therefore, I study these factors and attempt to explain their interaction as a culture production and reproduction process.

Bourdieu and feminism

As this research is a gender study, feminist theories and approaches are utilized to understand the service context, collect data and analyse data. Feminism has variations developed in historically different periods. Although they all view the world as masculine and characterized by domination, oppression, and control, different variations (or versions) of feminisms argue for different ways of achieving women's liberation (Payne, 2005; Walter, 2005; Ife, 2016). For example, liberal feminism seeks equal opportunity for women to pursue their ability to gain social-economic achievements, which is accompanied with competing along with men (Payne, 2005; Ife, 2016). Thus, belonging to the first-wave feminism, liberal feminism is critiqued as it encourages women to accept the existing social order and make self-changes rather than challenge the unequal power systems inherent in competing with men (Payne, 2005; Walter, 2005; Ife, 2016). In contrast, radical feminism, and socialist or Marxist feminism, significantly promote the liberation of women from oppression by transforming unequal and unjust structures in relation to class, race, and gender (Healy, 2000; Payne, 2005; Adams, 2013; Weeks, 2017; Moore, 2017). In addition, black feminism paticularly concern women's diverse situations in relation to their race, and how this interacts with body status, class positions, age and so on to understand how these diversities result in differences in oppressions experienced by women (Collins, 2000; Healy, 2000; Lee, 2001; Payne, 2005; Adams, 2013; Weeks, 2017; Moore, 2017). Regarding to the social work profession, feminists opposes to elitism and promotes social workers to construct egalitarian relationship with service users and work with them to address unjust social orders (Lee, 2001; Fook, 2002). The critical lens of radical feminism, Marxist feminism, and black feminism are significantly represented in empowerment theory, which is the main feminist focus that is considered in this research.

Most of Bourdieu's work, however, focuses on the issue of class and rarely mentions women and gender (Adkins, 2004). Bourdieu, together with other key contemporary social theorists such as Foucault and Habermas, are criticized by feminists as lacking a deep understanding of women's gender experience (Adkins, 2004). Bourdieu published his book *La Domination Masculine* in 1998, his way of describing male domination as an overwhelming and inevitable outcome in this 'assimilated world', and his view of women's automatic biological contribution to men's domination, were largely criticized (Zhu, 2009). Such criticism does not however prevent feminists using Bourdieu's social theory to enrich contemporary feminist theories. Feminists theorists do not intend to simply place the historical objects of Feminism within a Bourdieusian frame, but to explore gender in different practical contexts with the notion of relationships between structure and agency, nature and culture, body, emotion, and consciousness (Adkins, 2004). The structural constructivist approaches of Bourdieu can assist modern critical feminists such as radical and Marxist feminists to focus more on women's agency

and complex power relations in micro contexts rather than mainly emphasize macro structural barriers that may seem insurmountable.

Gender is simultaneously a biological identity, a field, a structured social condition, a symbolic social experience, and a cultural production and reproduction. Gender exists in relation to social structures (such as the market economy and the democratic political system), and single individuals, family, church, and other social institutions. According to McNay (2004, p.180):

> *Gender can never be understood as an abstract position but as an always lived social relation which will always involve conflict, negotiation and tension.*

In this research, gender is also explored in various relationships, for example:

- the relation between social workers' personal gender experience and their practices of serving or empowering women
- the relation between female service users' needs and their 'structured gender roles' in society
- the relation between the structuring and structured rural and women's gender experience
- the relation between the service projects for women and women's gender status in society
- the relation between the feminist movement and services for women in society
- the relation between women as general service users and women as specific service users.

These relationships will be noted in the analysis of the research data. Gender is not analysed as a discrete separate system. It is embedded in every part of complex practice. It is a significant factor in habitus, field, and doxa. It is a structural product of culture production and reproduction. It can be used as a form of capital. It gives power in relationships between women and men. A gender study requires researchers not only to reflect and explain gender from different aspects of practice, but also to reflect on their own genders. This research is a gender study. In this research, gender is included in multilevel explanations of complex practice. I also try to be reflexive about my own gender identity as a woman and my gender experience of growing up as a girl in China and studying in Australia as a feminist.

Empowerment theory and Bourdieu's theoretical tools of structural constructivism

As noted in the Introduction to this thesis, empowerment theory includes aspects of personal development, interpersonal development, and social-political development (Gutierrez, 1990; Lee, 2001; Payne, 2005; Adams, 2013). From the aspect of personal development, empowerment theory concern individuals' consciousness-raising with regard to how structural inequalities result in their

oppression (Freire, 1998, 2000; Parpart et al., 2002; Carr, 2003; Turner & Maschi, 2014). It is a process for individuals to reduce self-blame, improve self-confidence and self-help, and take responsibility of their decisions and actions (Freire, 1998; 2000; Gutierrez, 1990; Carr, 2003; Adams, 2013; Turner & Maschi, 2014). According to empowerment theory, personal development is based on individuals' understanding of structural oppressions and actions to address structural inequalities. However, the personal development of empowerment is usually interpreted by powerful parties such as governments, banks, and experts as a personal responsibility for individuals' situations or outcomes (Parpart et al., 2002; Pease, 2002; Adams, 2003; Payne, 2005).

Therefore, from the perspective of empowerment theory, powerless individuals are encouraged to form groups and collectives to resist structural oppressions and inequality (Freire, 1998, 2000; Healy, 2000; Lee, 2001; Fook, 2002; Parpart et al., 2002; Carr, 2003; Adams, 2013; Turner & Maschi, 2014). Groups or collectives nurture vulnerable individuals from creating a sense of belonging and providing mutual helps. Furthermore, when individuals share similar experiences of being oppressed, they deepen their understandings of the social-political and economic context they live in, and feel more powerful to address unjust structural inequalities (Healy, 2000; Lee, 2001, Pease 2002; Adams, 2013; Turner & Maschi, 2014). In this way individuals build interpersonal development in groups or collectives as a form of empowerment.

Substantial empowerment happens when collectives take actions to address unequal structural orders (Lee, 2001; Adams, 2013). This is at the level of social-political development. The collective action or movement usually is associated with advocacy that 'presents people in two ways: speaking for them and interpreting and presenting them to those with power' (Payne, 2005, p.295). Empowerment occurs when personal development, interpersonal development, and social-political development integrate with each other (Lee, 2001). Thus, in order to achieve empowerment in a holistic way, it is important to note the complex power relations that occur at each level (personal, interpersonal and social-political) and between these levels (Healy, 2000; Fook, 2002). This is in correspond to Bourdieu's theory of practice. As a theory of practice, empowerment is influenced by, and presents in individuals' habitus, doxa of fields, interactions between different fields with different capitals or power, and the cultural production and reproduction processes in society.

Empowerment is multi-faceted

In order to clearly examine empowerment, in this research, I identify empowerment from multiple levels. Empowerment is a word, a concept and an approach, a theory and a praxis, and a core value or culture of the social work profession. My understanding of empowerment is based on my repetitive reflection during the whole research process. In order to deal with the complexities of empowerment,

Bourdieu's theory of practice (structured and constructed) underpins my research (Deer 2008a; 2008b).

Empowerment is a word

This relates to how different practitioners understand this word, no matter what kinds of education background they have, and what kinds of organizations they work in. However, the premise is that they know this word.

Empowerment is a concept and an approach

Because as a concept or ideology, empowerment is abstract, it is embedded and constructed in different practitioners' helping or serving practices, no matter whether these practitioners know this word or not. What kinds of 'empowerment concept' practitioners have, determines what kinds of generated 'empowerment approaches' they will use.

Empowerment is a theory and a praxis

The welfare provision field, in which an organization is mainly located, has a main theoretical (ideological) underpinning which shows its main interest motivation. For example, the theoretical underpinning of governmental welfare provision may be social stability/rational governing. That of commercial welfare provision may be economic rationalism/economic rational being. The communal welfare provision may be based on mutual help. In religious welfare provision fields, it mostly depends on how the organization's leaders interpret their religious beliefs, which is not a theoretical base. For other non-profit organizations, they bring different pieces of social theories to their practices. In practice, empowerment is much more like a concept and an approach. It contains complex or even contradictory elements from different theories. In practice, it is not generated from one core theory. In summary, as my research focuses on practices, my research analysis mostly uncovers empowerment as a concept and an approach, which is embedded and constructed in different organizations (as substantial fields in my research).

Empowerment is a culture, and a process of culture production

Social workers are agents in my research. Empowerment is one of the principles claimed in the international definition of social work. As one of the core values of the social work profession, empowerment is intimately associated with values of equality, justice, and human rights. Therefore, empowerment represents a value that is embedded in the social work profession's culture of pursuing human rights, equality, and justice.

This culture production process contains all the above levels. As a word, a concept, an approach, a practice, a theory, and a praxis, empowerment shows in all welfare provision fields with different ideological underpinning and doxas. In this research, empowerment is a core concept that represents

a core value of the social work profession. Thus, what is the speciality of social workers to construct empowerment for rural women? There are not only differences, but also similarities between Australian social workers and Chinese social work practitioners. If we focus on their complementarities in achieving empowerment, justice, equality, and human rights, we must pay attention to how they intervene or participate in shaping rural women's empowerment as culture production under Australia or China's political, economic, welfare, and cultural structures. Maybe it is not only about the social work profession, it is about human being's liberation or civilization processes.

Other conceptual definitions

Modernity and modernization

This research is about understanding and comparing social workers' practices of empowering women within Australian and Chinese structures of economy, politic, and culture. China and Australia are both embedded in the current system of modernity that prioritizes economic growth. This research regards modernity as the most substantial macro structure that influences social work practices in China and Australia. In this thesis, the structural discourses of modernity in China and Australia are presented in their history of developing social work as a profession and in their way of structuring rural in the process of industrialization and urbanization.

According to Whittenbury (2003, p.145), modernity 'generally refers to the historical period, which began in Western societies toward the end of the eighteenth century with what is generally referred to as the Enlightenment'. Giddens (1990, pp.55-60) proposed that modernity has four main institutional dimensions: 'capitalism (capital accumulation in the context of competitive labour and product markets), industrialism (the use of inanimate sources of material power in the production of goods), surveillance (control of information and social supervision), and military power (control of the means of violence in the context of the industrialisation of war)'. The spread of those dimensions around the world means that 'modernity is inherently globalising' (Giddens, 1990, p.63). Due to being derived from the Enlightenment period, modernity implies concepts such as objective reality, rationality, scientific methods, progress, freedom, democracy, human rights, and liberation. During the development of critical social theories and movements, the paradoxical nature of modernity is examined. Its care dimensions, democracy, human rights, liberation and so on are embraced by feminists, Marxists, anti-oppression and anti-racism theorists and practitioners. Its control dimensions, economic rationalism, professionalism, excessive industrial development at the cost of natural environment and consumerism are highly criticized by critical theorists. The paradoxical natures of care and control in modernity are a process of cultural production and reproduction, demonstrated in the literature reviewed and in the findings of this thesis.

In terms of the four institutional dimensions of modernity proposed by Giddens (1990), the world is deemed to be in the modern era. Implying the ideology of 'progress', modernity presents in the relative comparison between history, present, and future. In addition, containing the ideologies of human rights and liberation, modernity is also a commonly acknowledged goal to be pursued by nation states (including Australia and China) around the world. The pursuit of modernity can be described by the term 'modernization'. As modernity is largely viewed as a process without a clear ending in this competitive global system, in this research, the terms of modernity and modernization are used interchangeably. [21]

Industrialization and urbanization

Industrialism is an institutional dimension in the modernity system. Using the same logic, industrialization means the pursuit of industrialism. Giddens' definition of industrialism, mentioned above, is used in this research. Again, the terms 'industrialism' and 'industrialization' are used interchangeably in this research. Urbanization is a global phenomenon that began alongside industrialization in Europe in the late eighteenth century. Simply put, urbanization refers to more and more people moving from rural areas to urban areas, causing cities to become much larger. Clearly, industrialization, urbanization, and modernization depend on and interrelate with each other.

Economic rationalism, neoliberalism and managerialism

Some developed countries such as Australia, are deemed as having completed the process of modernization and now mainly pursue economic growth. As argued above, the pursuit of economic growth is also driven by the global modern capitalist system that is an institutional dimension of modernity. Thus, in this thesis, Australia and other developed countries' behaviour of maximizing economic growth is also considered as continued pursuit of modernization. The preferred ideology of developing (or growing) the economies of developed countries such as Australia is neoliberalism, which is also known as economic rationalism in Australia. The term 'economic rationalism' is generally known as 'the new right', 'neo-conservatism', 'Thatcherism', 'Reaganomics' (Ife, 1997, p.13), which has been adopted by many developed countries since the 1980s. As Saunders (1994, cited in Ife, 1997, p.13) pointed out 'the essence of economic rationalism is that good policy is policy which makes good economic sense, and if the economy is 'healthy' all will benefit'. In concert with economic rationalism,

[21] In China and many developing countries, the pursuit of modernity is associated with developing industries, creating economic growth, constructing social welfare system, promoting legal and educational system and so on. Because developed countries and developing countries have different levels of accesses to resources and ways of utilizing resources, developing countries may learn from developed countries to gain more autonomy in the globalization system. As developed countries are generally regarded as modern countries, developing countries imitate developed countries to pursue modernization. While in Australia and other developed countries, they pursue more autonomy through promoting economic growth in the globalization system.

managerialism is another discourse influencing the social work profession. Managerialism 'can be summarized as a belief that good management is able to solve the problems of human service organizations, and will make them more effective and efficient' (Ife, 1997, p.16).

Summary

In this theoretical chapter of this research thesis, Bourdieu's social theory of practice was systematically introduced. Bourdieu contributes concepts of habitus, field, doxa, capital and culture production and reproduction to explain the complex interactions between structure and social agents. From his perspective, dichotomies between object and subject, structure and agency, nature and culture, and so on are dangerous. The dual nature of practice is well embodied in the habitus of people who act in a certain field for a period of time. There is not only compliance but also resistance to the doxa of a field. Power is determined by how much capital the social agent has in a field. Simply speaking, as actions contain meanings, the entire practice can be regarded as a culture production and reproduction process. As well as developing these theoretical tools, Bourdieu advocates a reflexive method for researchers to break through their 'academic habitus'. These conceptual tools are used in this research to explain social workers' practices of empowering rural women in China and Australia. In the next chapter—Methodology—I illustrate how Bourdieu's concepts are used in undertaking the processes of research and analysis.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Introduction

In this chapter, I outline the process involved in developing and conducting this research. Undertaking PhD was a circular process involving: literature review, research aims, research questions, theoretical framework, determining research methods, data analysis, presentation of research findings and their interpretation. Methodology refers to the suite of research methods used, such as how I determined the research title, how I selected research samples, how I undertook my fieldwork in Australia and China, what kinds of information was collected as research data, what methods were used for structuring interviews and analysing data, how I brought together the literature review and findings, how I chose a guiding theory for the research, how I engaged in the whole research process in a reflexive way, and what I considered to be ethical issues. Outlining these research methods provides transparency and clarity about the entire research and adds to the credibility of the research findings.

Research title, aims, and questions

Australia is a modern, urbanized country, where the social work profession reflects its development during the rise of the welfare state after the Second World War. There is also a growing internationalization and globalization of social work. The Chinese government's current drive to employ approximately 1.5 million social workers by 2020 is significant and shows social work's rapid growth (Ministry of Civil Affairs, 2012). Therefore, for me (a Chinese national), it was an appropriate time to come to Australia to study social work. I undertook my bachelor and master degrees in social security (social welfare) in China. As I sought more understanding than the 'dry' policy focus of my bachelor and masters studies, I endeavoured to study something applied and practical. After working as a community worker in my hometown for a year, I enrolled in Monash University's Department of Social Work to commence my PhD study in 2015.

My research interests included women and women's empowerment as well as rural communities in both Australian and Chinese contexts. I wanted to undertake research exploring how social workers help rural women. Further refining of my research focus resulted in my research topic, which aimed to compare how social workers in Australia and China empower rural women.

The differences between social work's current conditions in Australia and China opens a research space to compare how such differences are manifest, or how they generate different types of knowledge, value, and power in social work's practices of helping women. Rural women in both

Australia and China play a vital role in agriculture and rural communities, but at the same time face inequalities and injustices that not only result from the current political, economic and social structures, but also from hegemonic culture such as patriarchy and consumerism. It is therefore important to research how social work participates in these complex and contradictory power interactions to empower rural women in particular local contexts that are influenced by the different macro environments in Australia and China.

This research does not intend to simply show or directly research the important role of rural women and social work. By exploring and analysing the 'empowerment discourse' of rural women, it will inform social workers of the complex and contradictory nature of empowerment in practice, which may open an inclusive way for them to refine their working methods. As well, this research can provide a valuable comparison and promote mutual understanding and learning between Australia and China.

In summary, the main research question is:

- How do social workers in Australia and China construct empowerment for rural women?

Aiming at exploring, describing, analysing and interpreting social work's empowering practices for rural women, the sub-questions are:

- What are social workers doing in these contexts to empower rural women?
- What methods do they use?
- What are the outcomes of those empowering practices?
- What are the barriers to those empowering practices?
- What factors are beneficial for social workers engaging in those empowerment practices?

Qualitative research

The dichotomy between qualitative and quantitative research is mainly built on their different philosophical bases: subjectivism and objectivism (Whittenbury, 2003, p.134). As two forms of research method, they both include ratiocination, sufficient data collection, and data comparison (Neuman & Kreuger, 2007, p.531). Quantitative study usually refers to 'counting and measuring, involves numbers and uses tests of statistical significance' (Flynn et al, 2016., p.190). Qualitative research 'is concerned with the systematic collection, ordering, description, and interpretation of textual data generated from talk, observation or documentation' (Kitto et al., 2008). Qualitative methods are adopted in this research because qualitative methods, being largely inductive, are well

as suited to exploratory research. In addition, in contrast with numbers, language is more likely to embrace practitioners' understanding about practice, and the context in which practice happens.

There are various data sources can be used in qualitative research: interviews, focus groups, informal conversations, researcher's observations and feelings in the field, relevant documentation and so on (Grinnell & Unrau, 2005, p.81). During qualitative research, researchers reflect on how their position and disposition in the field influences interactions with research participants (Alston & Bowles, 2012, p.13). Given these features, using qualitative research methods is helpful in this research to understand social workers' thoughts and actions of empowering rural women in local contexts in Australia and China.

Data collection

Identify research samples

Initially, through searching relevant literature, the social work organization Lvgeng, (official website: www.lvgeng.org) in China was selected to be one research sample. Lvgeng focuses on rural social work practice with specific programs for rural women. In terms of the limited resources I had for this cross-cultural research, I was planning to thoroughly research one case in China and one case in Australia. After I formally contacted a leader of Lvgeng, however, I was advised that it was not possible for me to engage in ethnographic research their organization. Thus, I amended my research plan and approached my networks in China to recommend organizations that work with rural women. In China people who have more than two years' working experience in the government and community welfare factor can obtain social work accreditation by passing the national social work examination so I decided to broaden the research scope and include those indigenous Chinese social workers in my research.

Facilitated purposive sampling is used in this research. As David and Sutton (2011, p.232) clarify: 'in purposive or theoretical sampling, the units are selected according to the researcher's own knowledge and opinion about which ones they think will be appropriated to the topic area'. The non-profit organizations that specifically serve rural women are considered as typical examples of this research study. Through my network I was referred to a non-profit organization that belongs to the first-generation of non-profit organizations in China and has been particularly engaged in serving or helping rural women since the 1990s. I interviewed three practitioners in this organization. Thereafter, the workers there referred me to another non-profit organization that is also a first-generation non-profit organization in China and the first one that set up services for women who experience domestic violence. Another referral through my network was to a social enterprise in China that is the largest of its type providing micro credit loans for rural people, with more than 90 per cent of its service users

being rural women. As I discussed in the literature review of empowerment in Introduction, the 'empowerment' method of providing rural women credit loans of the mainstream development agencies such as governments and banks, is significantly critiqued by critical theorists. Given this interest, I interviewed two practitioners in that social enterprise. Furthermore, I wanted to visit social work agencies that offer services for communities. I was referred to the leader of a social work agency that is based on local governments' support to engage in developing social work service projects in rural communities. I conducted a field work trip to its rural site where I interviewed four practitioners and one service users.[22] A further referral was to a Social Work professor of the China Youth University of Political Science, who founded a social work agency. The practitioners of this agency are local female service users who attempt to help themselves at the same time help other vulnerable community members. I was keen to explore this self-empowerment model and conducted two interviews and a focus group with six consumer practitioners involved in the agency.

After I completed my Chinese fieldwork, I transcribed and translated the research data and undertook preliminary data analysis that generated emerging themes and concepts. As this research is a comparative study, the Chinese themes were useful in developing concepts to be explored during fieldwork in Australia. In order to undertake comparison with Chinese indigenous social workers, I intended to recruit qualified Australian social workers to the research. Again, facilitated by the networks of my supervisors and colleagues in the Department of Social Work at Monash University, I interviewed ten qualified Australian social workers. Those social workers were all engaged in working for rural communities. Some of these interviewees, specifically regarded themselves as 'rural women' and participated in movements or projects aimed to empower rural women. Six of them were involved in a community-based organization called Voice for Indi based in Albury; the other four were part of an organization called the Centre for Non-Violence located in Bendigo.

Research interviews and focus group

In qualitative research, interviews and focus groups are the two core methods of collecting research data. As Flynn and McDermott (2016, p.123) defined: 'conducting an interview generally means that the researcher and the participant speak directly to one another, either in person or via telephone or video'. Sometimes, asking questions to a group of people and observing how they answering and interacting with each other leads to the exploration of multi-layered understanding of practice (David & Sutton, 2011, p.132). This is known as a focus group interview/discussion.

[22] I conducted a field work trip to its rural site and interviewed four practitioners. One of them asked me whether I wanted to talk with service users during our interviews. I thought it was a good opportunity to observe the power relations between practitioners and service users and to collect service users' opinions. Thus, I interviewed one service user in the service site of that local government.

For this research, twenty-three interviews and one focus group were completed face-to-face during fieldwork. Two interviews (with two workers in the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation) were by telephone. By face-to-face interviews, interviewees' emotions and physical reactions while answering interview questions were observed and taken as a basis for me to reflect on their practice ideologies or beliefs. In China, I conducted interviews with most research participants. Nevertheless, when I undertook fieldwork in Hanwang town, the site of Qinghong social work agency, I found that the conversations and interactions between its consumer practitioners yielded interesting and useful insights into their multi-layered understandings of social work practice. Thus, I conducted a focus group with Qinghong consumer practitioners through asking several questions and observing how they discuss and interact. During the process of the focus group, I did not intervene into their conversations to a large extent, but rather cast questions such as 'what kinds of projects you are engaged in? How do you feel about Qinghong? Do you want to attain social work accreditation? What are your expectations of Qinghong? What are the difficulties you meet? Do you get support from local governments?'. Six consumer practitioners in Qinghong participated in this focus group. Integrating with in-depth interviews, the focus group with Qinghong practitioners provides further information about the power dynamic between Qinghong practitioners in relation to their gender and positions in the agency. This is in accordance with Bourdieu's theoretical understanding of how agents' habitus are influenced by their positions and dispositions in the field.

Because a range of differences exist between Chinese indigenous social workers and Australian professional social workers, semi-structured interviews were preferred in this research to structured interviews. According to Flynn and McDermott (2016, p.125), the method of conducting semi-structured interviews 'typically uses a small number of interview topics, although they are not necessarily worded the same or presented in the same order for all participants'. It is a flexible method and useful to explore knowledge that is rarely recorded in a formal way. Main topics or themes of semi-structured interviews in this research are based on the five research sub-questions. Because of the differences between my research interviewees, I made efforts to imitate how they spoke, or to use the language they were familiar with, to draw out their answers to the five research sub-questions. Inspired by these answers, during interviews, I further explored areas such as their personal growth and educational background, why they were engaged in women's services, how they entered the current working field of serving people (as indigenous or professional social workers), and their feelings about engaging in current practices.

Fieldwork location

Where I undertook the interviews depended on the location and preference of the interviewees. Most Chinese interviews were undertaken in the interviewee's workplace. As my research was about how

they engage in the work of empowering rural women, it was helpful to observe their 'natural response' in their workplace. Two Chinese organizations I visited are located where they implement their services. The other three are located in Beijing and offer services in different areas in China. Thus, I visited Beijing, Wanzai Prefecture in Jiangxi Province and Hanwang Town in Mianzhu City in Sichuan Province. When I visited the two organizations in Wanzai and Hanwang, I spent almost my entire time with the workers, which was one week in each site. We ate together, walked, chatted, and took trips together. I closely interacted with them in the place in which they lived and practised. My observations and feelings are considered to be a type of research data, which provide depth and further context to the interview data. Empathy and trust were built when I interacted with those practitioners. Nevertheless, it is important to reflect on my emotions and feelings while interacting with them, and then to reflect on whether I involved too much of my subjective judgement in that process. For example, I was very uncomfortable with local government's top-to-bottom practice attitude and method. Nevertheless, I attempted to be more open to observe more and build understanding during data collection process. The process of repetitively listening to interview records during transcription and translation as well as reflecting my interactions with interviewees during fieldwork led to further useful information be generated during data analysis process.[23]

In Australia, I interviewed six professional social workers in Albury and four in Bendigo. The six professional social workers in Albury each work for different organizations, but are all involved in Voice for Indi[24]. Five of them came from 'their rural home' to meet me in the city of Albury. Thus, interviews with them took place in the Albury library and local cafes. After we finished interviews, we walked and had lunch or dinner together. Thus, my observations on their emotions and behaviours, my feelings of being with them, and our informal conversations are all considered in the research analysis. In contrast, I interviewed all but one of the Bendigo interviewees in their offices (the other took place in the interviewee's home). Offices are formal places. Again, it was helpful to observe their 'working statuses'.

Research ethics

Simply put, human research ethics are about whether the research brings physical and mental harm to the researched and whether the research process and outcome will cause harmful effects on the public. Having an ethical approval from an ethical assessment committee does not mean a research

[23] The clarification of my reflections regarding my interactions with interviewees is included in the section on data analysis in this chapter.

[24] Voice 4 Indi (V4I) began in 2012, as 'a response to the need for re-energized but respectful political debate' Simply put, it is an organization organizes people living in the Division of Indi to express their opinions, communicate with each other, and negotiate about how to develop Indi communities.

project is ethical. The most important aspect is how the research is conducted. Generally, human research ethics refer to several aspects: consent; confidentiality; avoidance of physical and mental harm for the researched; awareness of power and inequality during the entire research process; anonymization of data presentation; and consideration of the effects of data presentation (Neuman & Kreuger, 2007, pp.116-133; Flynn & Mcdermott, 2016, pp.25-41).

As this is a cross-cultural study, several ethical issues need to be noted. First, it is hard for research participants in China to give consent in written form.[25] I did not want to cause discomfort by insisting they sign the consent form. When they said that they preferred not to sign the consent form, I asked their oral approval to engage in the research. In general, I first introduced my research to them and asked them whether they would like to be interviewed and recorded. Their approval of the recording represents their approval of participating in the research. Second, because Australia and China have different political systems, I was sensitive to these differences during the interviews and in how I have presented the data. I encouraged my interviewees to speak about their stories of how they become a social work practitioner, how they deliver practices, what kinds of barriers they met and what kinds of advantages they have. Sometimes, I felt my identity of being a 'western social work expert' intimidated some Chinese interviewees because they are not qualified social workers. They might think that I held the 'critical Western scholarly assumption' and had limited understanding of complex practices. I then attempted to show my aim of learning from them about the complexities of practices. In some circumstances, my identity of being 'a social work scholar' was helpful for me to gain approval to interview some Chinese practitioners. I then needed to think about the power hierarchy between me and them and tried to show more respect and trust to them.

Sometimes, I interviewed practitioners in a public place where others observed our conversations. I felt uncomfortable about this, especially because the 'others' were in senior positions to my interviewees in their work institutions. As this might be 'natural' for my interviewees, I took it as an opportunity to explore those power relations. Third, as some organizations are very well known in the social work field, it was hard to maintain confidentiality as to who I interviewed in those organizations. I developed my research findings according to my commitment to the values of equality, justice, and the human rights of the social work profession, with those values being considered from a holistic view.

[25] In China, people are not comfortable to offer their signatures to strangers because they are afraid that their signatures may be imitated or otherwise utilized by those strangers in the circumstance that will harm their interests. In China, people generally think the legal system is complex and difficult to approach. Thus, people are very careful in protecting their interests and very cautious to offer their signatures.

The 2008 Sichuan earthquake brought severe physical and mental harm to some of my interviewees in Hanwang (Qinghong social work agency). When I interviewed them, I focused on exploring their experiences of and feelings about accessing and participating in social work services after the earthquake. Their descriptions of accessing social work services brought back memories of the earthquake. So, I let them finish talking about that dark time and then attempted to guide them to recall the memory of experiencing social work services (at least this process included hope).

Although I needed to adjust how I acted according to the different interviewees, I reflected on how power and inequality was generated from doing that. In summary, the above mentioned aspects relating to human ethical research are all considered carefully in this research thesis.

Research literature review

After determining my research title was 'Social work's intervention in rural women's empowerment in Australia and China', all keywords in the title, and those extended from the title, were used to find relevant literature. For example, the following keywords were used: social work, empowerment, rural, rural women, women's services, feminism, Australia, China. Different constitutions of those keywords led to reviews of different literature such as social work's development in Australia and China, women's services in Australia and China, history of feminism in Australia and China, rural context in Australia and China, empowerment of women and rural women, and social work with empowerment. Knowledge of this research topic was built in a scattered way. As there is little literature about how social work empowers rural women in Australia and China, this research is clearly an exploratory study.

Notably, the lack of directly relevant literature led to questions about the meaning of conducting this research and how to design this research. First, sometimes it is very important to research a topic that has not previously been researched. Second, I needed to present this research by following a good theoretical framework. It is a circular process of reviewing literature in the entire research process. For this research, literature reviews are more likely to be a complex exploration and explanation of the multilevel contexts where practices occur. In order to integrate the complex literature review with my research findings, I used Bourdieu's theory of structural constructivism. Bourdieu's theoretical tools of field, doxa, habitus, cultural capital, and cultural production and reproduction are useful to explain the complexities of practice in relation to multilevel contexts or fields, ideologies and operational rules of fields, and individuals' actions and thoughts in fields. Therefore, I classified several fields to frame the literature review of this research: social work's development in Australia and China, rural structuring and restructuring under Australia and China's pursuit of modernization, or economic development, rural women's life, services for women generally and rural women specifically, and the participation of social workers in serving, or helping, women generally and rural women specifically.

Feminist research

As this research focuses on the empowerment of rural women, it is a gender study. According to Neuman and Kreuger (2007, p.108), feminist research 'is usually engaged in by researchers who agree with feminist ideology and adopt feminist views; most of whom are females and prefer using multiple research techniques.' There are, of cause, various different feminist views, 'in characterising the world it experiences as a patriarchal world and the culture it inherits as a masculinity culture (Crotty, 1998, p.161)'. Along with feminism's long evolution, many commonalities are also shared by feminists. For example, feminists highlight equality, empathy, consciousness raising, act for social transformation, and advocate for policy change.

For example, feminist researchers make efforts to uncover gender inequality in society and raise people's consciousness to bring social transformation for gender equality. Most feminist researchers are women. By reflecting on their own gender experiences and expressing their emotions openly, female researchers try to build trust in conversations with their female research participants who share the same structural position with them (Flynn & McDermott, 2016, p.124). They are more cautious about the power relations of gender in social life and try to avoid making gender-biased assumptions (Neuman & Kreuger, 2007, p.108). Especially during research fieldwork, they attempt to raise participants' consciousness about pervasive gender inequality in every part of social life (Flynn & McDermott, 2016, p.124; Neuman & Kreuger, 2007, p.108).

During this research process, I was constantly building my understanding about what feminism is. As well as complying with the principles of feminist research, I also attempted to empower myself in a feminist way. This meant that I tried to understand my experiences of and my physical sensations and emotions about being a woman in this society and to ensure that what I wanted and wanted to do was irrespective of societal gender norms for women. During interviews, I let my research participants explore their gender relationships and gender labour divisions in daily life rather than telling them what the hierarchical power relations between men and women were and pushing them to change them. Importantly, this research focuses on rural women's status, attempts to let society understand their situation, and aims to promote further empowerment practices for rural women.

Data Analysis

I conducted twenty-three interviews, thirteen in China and ten in Australia, and one focus group based in a Chinese rural site with six local practitioners. All interviews and the focus group were audio-recorded. I transcribed the twenty-three and focus group. I also translated the thirteen Chinese interviews and the focus group into English. I used NVIVO to analyse research data because it allows both inductive and deductive approach and clearly present qualitative data (Edhlund, 2017).

Thematic analysis

Braun and Clark (2006, p.77) offer a comprehensive explanation of thematic analysis:

> *Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data…. A theme brings together core ideas and patterns in the data; a theme should relate to the study's research question and point to something important about the phenomenon….. It also can be a 'contextualist' method, sitting between the two poles of essentialism and constructionism, and characterized by theories, such as critical realism, which acknowledge the way individuals make meaning of their experience, and, in turn, the ways the broader social context impinges on those meanings, while retaining focus on the material and other limits of 'reality'.*

Thematic analysis focuses on both 'the obvious content of data and the latent meaning behind what is explicitly stated (Broun & Clarke, 2012)', and does not specifically depend on the repetition of words/ideas to identify the importance of those words/ideas to the research (Flynn & Mcdermott, 2016, p.179). In this research, different patterns of words/languages are used to interview various participants who use different words/languages. There are meanings implied from the way they construct languages to answer research questions. Thematic analysis is adopted in this research to draw core ideas from diverse research data and to consider the social context of how different individuals make meaning of their practices.

Analysis of research data occurs in both deductive and inductive ways. As Theophilus Azungah (2018, p.391) suggests: 'the deductive approach uses an organizing framework comprising of themes for the coding process'. The framework is a starting point to seek certain core themes during the data analysis. In this research, qualitative interviews, which are semi-structured in accordance with five research sub-questions, are the main data source. Thus, in data analysis, anticipated core themes are derived from five research sub-questions. In the inductive approach the raw data is viewed in detail in order to derive concepts and themes (Thomas, 2006, p.238). During the inductive analysis process, based on the understanding of literature reviews and theories, researchers make meaning out of emerging concepts and themes from the raw data (Azungah, 2018). In this research, I identified similar contents/ideas proposed by research participants positioned in a specific organization, linked these ideas with literature reviews in Chapter 1 and 2 and theories in Chapter 3 and concluded them to be sub-themes in the analysis of each organization. Therefore, in the analysis of each organization, there are five main themes ensured from the five research sub-questions, and several sub-themes engendered from the raw data, literature reviewed, and theory in a recursive way.

As discussed in Chapter 3, Bourdieu's theory of practice is conducive to bridge the gap between structuralism and constructionism and to explain how agents construct realities or meanings in different contexts. Therefore, in the analysis of each organization, Bourdieu's theoretical tools such as habitus, fields, doxa, and cultural capital are used to explain the latent meaning behind and the relation between the sub-themes. In order to compare practices of different organizations, Bourdieu's theoretical tools are utilized to analyse the differences and similarities between the main themes in the analysis of different organizations. Furthermore, different organizations are influenced by different economic, political and cultural structures of Australia and China. This research aims to compare social work's intervention into rural women's empowerment in Australia and China. Thus, Bourdieu's theory of practice is employed as a research tool to associate literature reviewed regrading the introduction of economic, political and cultural structures of Australia and China in Chapter 1 and 2 with the overall practice similarities and differences between Chinese organizations and Australian organizations.

Exploratory research and comparison

Given there is little scholarly research in the area of comparing social work practices between the two countries, this is exploratory research (Flynn & McDermott, 2016, p.88). As exploring new information and knowledge, exploratory research allows for flexible data collection and analysis methods. In general, qualitative methods are used in exploratory research because of its focus on developing in-depth knowledge with living experts about various factors pertaining to the research topic (Flynn & Mcdermott, 2016, pp.88-89). This research is identified as exploratory research, adopted flexible purposive sampling and qualitative interviews and a focus group, and aims to explore diverse empowering practices implemented by social workers in China and Australia.

In order to clarify diverse research data, I classify each organization as a tangible field to be analyzed. As empowerment is a term derived from Western contexts, many of the Chinese practitioners I interviewed were not familiar with this term. My main research question is about empowerment: How do social workers in Australia and China construct empowerment for rural women? If the Chinese participants do not know of or talk about the word 'empowerment', how do I identify that they are constructing empowerment practices for rural women in China? As I explained in the Introduction to this thesis, empowerment is polysemic. Empowerment is a word, a concept and an approach, a theory and a practice, and a principle of the social work profession. I assume that professional Australian social workers know what empowerment is and in their practices try to empower service users. In this research, the professional Australian social workers are grouped in two organizations. I will extract the similarities between these two groups in how they empower service users. Then I will contrast those similarities with how my Chinese research participants serve, or assist, people in each

organization I visited in China. This will show whether the empowerment practices implemented by qualified Australian social workers are similar with the helping practices conducted by various Chinese social work practitioners who did not received qualified social work education. If there are overlaps, it means that my Chinese participants also construct empowerment practices, even though they do not know the term. Thereafter, I compare the similarities between the Australian organizations I visited with the similarities between those Chinese organizations I visited. This comparison, in fact, relates to the structural differences between Australia and China. Thus, Bourdieu's theoretical tools are used to highlight Australia and China's structural discourses that explain the practice differences shown in my research.

Reflections during data analysis

As discussed above in the data collection section, I attempted to imitate the way my Chinese interviewees act and speak to gain their trust and explore more useful information. Nevertheless, my personal position and disposition significantly influenced my interactions with them. During the process of transcribing and translating interviews, I reflected on my different interactions with different interviewees and considered whether this would cause biases in research analysis. For example, during my interactions with non-profit organization practitioners in China, I tried to gain their trust by showing my aim to learn practice complexities from them rather than evaluating their practices as a 'Western researcher'. When I listened to the interview records with those practitioners, I clearly noted my anxiety of gaining trust from them and collecting complex details of their practices. When I visited the rural site where a group of local government officials implement social work projects, I was uncomfortable with the situation that I needed to rely on several leaders to refer interviewees. From listening to the recordings of interviews with those local government officials, I found that I attempted to please them so as to conduct interviews. In contrast, when I visited a rural site where a group of consumer practitioners engaged in social work practices, I felt very comfortable and tried to integrate into their groups.

During the data analysis process, I listened repetitively to interview records and reflected how different certain contexts led me to have different interactions with different interviewees. My identity of being a 'Western PhD student' was taken into account. I also considered my interviewees' positions and dispositions in their organizations and different organizations' capitals and power in the field of welfare provision. This then becomes useful research data that are associated with the literature review described in Chapter 1 and 2 and the theory explained in Chapter 3. Moreover, based on the understanding of the different power relations with interviewees, I developed a focus on presenting different interviewees' voices in an unbiased way in the finding chapters (Chapter 5 and 6).

Ideal empowerment model

Research conclusions are embedded in every step of analysing each organization as tangible field. In order to further advocate for better empowerment services for rural women, an ideal empowerment model is built based on two parts: service organization and social work as a profession. The ideal model developed by Max Weber is utilized by many researchers undertaking qualitative research (Neuman & Kreuger, 2007, p.547). The term 'ideal model' refers to a 'perfect standard' that is used as a contrast for the 'fact' in the real world. It is very useful to inform further studies by checking the degree of match between each individual case and the ideal model (Neuman & Kreuger, 2007, p.547). Using an ideal model requires the researcher to highlight the specificity of practice contexts. Researchers can also depend on the specificities of practice contexts to draw an 'ideal' context to explain research topics. Therefore, in terms of the capital of different organizations and the social work profession to empower rural women in Australia and China, an ideal model is proposed.

Research limitations

There is no doubt that the general criticisms of qualitative research methods and thematic analysis are associated with the limitations of this research project. From a dialectical philosophical perspective, advantages of those methods may sometimes become their disadvantages in use. For example, thematic analysis is flexible enough to include 'a wide range of analytic options, but makes developing specific guidelines for higher-phase analysis difficult' (Braun & Clark, 2006). Qualitative research involves researchers' participation and observation in research analysis. This may, however, result in a new power distribution in the field.

I use Bourdieu's theory of structural constructivism to guide how I use different research methods. In addition, I try to ensure that different research methods complement each other, to be a proper 'methodology umbrella' for this research. From a critical view, however, some limitations need to be noted and discussed. For example, I did not have the opportunity to interview practitioners in China who have graduated with a bachelor's or master's degree in Social Work. I try to be open to diverse practitioners' different views of social work practice, but may not be active enough to raise their consciousness about some structural inequalities. I try to contrast the social workers' empowerment practices for rural women in Australia with that of China, but the small sample size associated with this exploratory research does not enable me to claim wider scale applicability of my findings.

Summary

In this chapter, I introduced the whole package of methods to be used in engaging in this research. This is a qualitative study. Given the cross-cultural background of recruiting research participants, a

facilitated purposive sampling method was used. Research participants have diverse backgrounds. They may or may not have university level social work qualifications. Thus, my interviews with them are semi-structured. The interviews, focus group, observations, and my reflections during fieldwork are considered as sources of research data. Aiming at engaging in this research in an ethical way, typical ethical issues were taken into consideration from the beginning to the end of the research. Guided by Bourdieu's theoretical framework, thematic analysis, and the ideal model method are used for data analysis and making research conclusions. This research is a feminist research project aiming at improving empowering services for women.

Chapter 5: Social Work's Intervention in Rural Women's Empowerment in Australia

Introduction

In this chapter, two civil organizations in Australia—Voice 4 Indi (V4I) and the Centre for Non-Violence (CNV) are taken as substantive fields to be researched. How social workers understand empowerment and try to empower people is largely influenced by the organization's type, principle, leadership, aim, structure, and resources. In contrasting social workers' empowerment practices in two countries, using organizations as substantive fields allows a demonstration of practices from micro to macro levels.

Organizational location, especially within rural contexts, is particularly important to social workers' empowerment practices. Interview and observational data show how these practices are influenced by a community's cohesion and vitality, social movement history, development history, and economic situation. I briefly introduce the demographic and geographic situation, development history, and economy of the Albury-Wodonga and Bendigo regions, where V4I and the CNV are respectively located. In addition, I introduce the history, personnel, leadership, funding sources, projects, aim, principles, and values of V41 and the CNV.

Four main themes based on the research questions will be used as frameworks to demonstrate research data. In the discussion section of this chapter, I will explain the similarities and differences in the empowerment practices between V4I and CNV.

Voice for Indi in the Albury-Wodonga Region (V4I)

In Chapter 4 Methodology, I described the purposive method used to recruit Australian social workers who were interested in sharing experiences of empowering women living in rural areas. Australian rural areas are defined as non-metropolitan areas in this research. The Australian social workers who accepted my interviews spontaneously identified that some of their work was undertaken in rural areas. Six social workers who work in the Albury-Wodonga region were recruited.

Albury-Wodonga Region

Albury is a major regional city in New South Wales, with a population of 51,076, according to the 2016 Census (ABS, 2016). Women and men respectively account for 51.7 per cent and 48.3 per cent of the total population in Albury (Local Government Areas)[26] (ABS, 2016). According to the ABS (2016), the most common ancestries in Albury (Local Government Areas) are English (28.8 per cent) and Australian (28.5 per cent). Albury is separated from its twin city in Victoria, Wodonga[27], by the Murray River. Albury and Wodonga are all in the federal Division of Indi.[28] In the post-colonial period (after the 1820s), 'white squatters' took up grazing on the rich flatlands nourished by the Murray River (cited in http://www.albury-wodonga.com/docs/history.htm). Many agricultural communities formed and are now served by the administrative centres of Albury and Wodonga. In 1972, 'the Federal Labor Whitlam government (1972–1975) and the States of Victoria and New South Wales established the Albury-Wodonga Growth Centre (AWGC) and appointed the Albury-Wodonga Development Cooperation (AWDC) to plan and develop the project' (Stein, 2012, p.1). That plan aimed at reducing overpopulation pressures in large cities such as Sydney and Melbourne, and directed investment in housing, employment, education, and recreational facilities (Clara Stein, 2012, p.1). Between 1975 and 1995 the AWDC spent $5.8 million on economic development and promotion programs, which significantly impacted the service industry in Albury-Wodonga (Clara Stein, 2012, p.387). According to Cities of Albury and Wodonga (2016), the industry of health care and social assistance was the number one employer in Albury-Wodonga from 2011 (it employed 13.3 per cent of the total employed persons aged fifteen and over) to 2016 (15 per cent).

Voice for Indi

Six social workers I interviewed joined the organization Voice for Indi. Five of them live and work in the Albury-Wodonga region. Voice for Indi (V4I) began in 2012, as 'a response to the need for re-energized but respectful political debate'. It 'provides a process to connect the community's voice to our elected representatives' (cited from http://www.voicesforindi.com/about). Simply put, it is an organization that organizes people living in the Division of Indi to express their opinions, communicate with each other, and negotiate about how to develop Indi communities. The founding members of V4I energetically made efforts to bring Indi community members together to elect their own political representative to the federal parliament. During that process, Cathy McGowan was selected and

[26] The **City of Albury** is a local government area in the Riverina region of New South Wales, Australia. The area covers 305.9 square kilometres to the north of the Murray River (cited in Wikipedia).
[27] The **City of Wodonga** is a local government area in the Hume region of Victoria, Australia. It covers an area of 433 square kilometres and at the 2016 Census had a population of over 3900 people (cited in Wikipedia).
[28] The **Division of Indi** is an Australian Electoral Division in north-eastern Victoria. The largest settlements in the division are the regional cities of Wodonga, Wangaratta, and Benalla. Wodonga serves as a regional hub for much of the more heavily populated northern part of the electorate. The current member for Indi since the 2013 election is **independent Cathy McGowan** (cited in Wikipedia).

supported by V4I as an independent political candidate (not belonging to any political party) for the seat of Indi in the 2013 election for the House of Representatives. Cathy McGowan won the election and has held the seat from that time. Since then, V4I members have vigorously attempted to promote community participation in politics and have helped deliver people's messages about Indi community development to McGowan for her to advocate on their behalf in the federal parliament. It is important to note that V4I is not a campaign team, but a community democracy movement. V4I focuses on people, attempts to let the government hear the people's voice and assists people to realize their community development plans. Community democracy is V4I's principle; community participation is V4I's method. As well, V4I 'is committed to being honest and respectful, to being well informed when making statements (cited in http://www.voicesforindi.com/value).

Six Australian social workers I interviewed are all involved in the Voice 4 Indi. From V4I's core staff profiles on its website, they are all expert in certain fields and have undertaken leadership roles before. They have all lived in Indi for many years, thus have a great commitment to making their rural communities better. V4I is not an organization with formal structures and full-time staff with formal wages. The main funding source of V4I comes from donations from the community. V4I has organized many activities to bring the community together to talk about politics, express their needs and opinions for community planning, make decisions about elections, and act in community development projects. With the goal and principle of democracy, V4I successfully attracted attention from governments. With Cathy McGowan's assistance, V4I built close connections with governments. In next section, I will present the research data extracted from interviews with social workers involving in Voice for Indi, according to four main themes: what is empowerment (empowerment as a concept); how to empower (empowerment practices/projects; empowerment skills/strategies); enabling structural that assist empowerment; and constraining factors that hinder empowerment.

Defining empowerment

Empowerment is a principle claimed in the international definition of the social work profession. All Australian social workers I interviewed had graduated with a bachelor's or master's degree in social work, thus I directly asked them about their understanding of empowerment. All social workers involved in V4I considered that the empowerment of individuals is related to the advocacy of changing inequalities created by external institutions (systems). Because the societal system has many problems, working in the system to achieve empowerment by transforming system inequalities has limited success. A number of V41 social workers relate empowerment to capacity building in a person. As one of them mentioned:

So I think maybe the social worker's role is time limited… It's helpful that the client situation is changing and the client becomes stronger. And clients are enabled to take more responsibility for what they learned for the factors of crisis, and to have a voice and supports. This is what empowerment is for me. We should support our clients to become stronger and have more sense of control. (Australian Participant 3: AP3)

Clearly, as one V4I social worker reflected, empowerment involves two aspects: 'internal and external'. As well, this social worker is the only one who, when answering a question the definition of empowerment, mentioned the unequal power status of men and women:

I think empowerment has two parts. Internally, for an individual being empowered, they have a sense of decision-making in their life and some control over their life…..Externally, empowerment for women is when all the institutions of the society including government, community, legislation, and medical system act in a way that treats women as having equal rights to men. It is not just for them to treat women like men, but to cater for what women want. (AP1)

How to empower

Empowerment practices and projects

During interviews, I asked V4I social workers about what kinds of practices or projects they had engaged in that could be related to empowering people. As they had worked in different types of institutions beforehand, I decided to place their empowerment practices into two categories: empowerment practices from civil organizations or groups, and empowerment practices from governments.

From civil organizations or groups

Community movements are often mentioned as a type of empowerment practice. Community movements are initiated on the basis of an acknowledgement of some unfair phenomena and the specific needs of community groups. For example, Rural Women's Gathering and the community democracy movement promoted by V4I, are highlighted by many V4I social workers:

Lasting for twenty-four years, the Women on Farm Gathering every year is still happening…….We would talk about how to understand the farm finances, domestic violence, child care, and how we get access to child care when we were working on a farm. We ended up organizing things like mobile child care. Lots and lots of things happened because these women came together and decided and made things happen. (AP1)

What happened in Indi is the same with what happened in the rural women's movement. It brings people and says: 'Your voices are important.' if we speak loudly together, then people would take notice of us. Once we are heard, it makes sense to say: 'This is what we want, we want to work for you.' /laugh/, it was an empowerment exercise. (AP3)

A number of V4I social workers shared their experiences of identifying gender inequalities and advocating for women to get the same rights as men. Usually, they began women groups to work against those inequalities. For example, one V4I social worker referred to how she was involved in the movement of Women on the Farm challenging the policy that only a man could get superannuation because he was the 'farmer'. They successfully garnered the government's attention and changed the policy. Also, in the 1980s, a state-wide representative body for farmers, the Victorian Farmers' Federation (VFF), only offered one vote for a farm family to participate in decision-making, which was obviously for the man. Women's groups challenged the VFF and finally won two votes for a family. Another V4I social worker challenged unfair payment for women.

When talking about empowerment projects, a V4I social worker mentioned an organization called Zonta.[29] It has projects to encourage young women to engage in public affairs. They hold competitions to select young female representatives from local districts, and give them national or international platforms (such as the United Nations) to express opinions about public affairs.

In terms of empowerment practices initiated by civil organizations or groups, several important factors in relation to empowerment emerge. Most importantly, empowerment is closely associated with advocacy from collectives to make structural transformations[30]. People, especially those who are disadvantaged, suffer from unfair structures. They try to obtain the rights they are entitled to and make their situations better through transforming unequal structures. It is an empowerment process for them. According to a number of V4I social workers, women's collective action to change the unequal superannuation policy and VFF's vote policy in the 1980s, and the Indi community's action to change the political election process and make it more democratic, are all examples of empowerment practices.

[29] Zonta International is a leading global organization of professionals empowering women worldwide through service and advocacy (cited in http://www.zonta.org.au/Zonta_in_Australia/Home_to_3_Districts_of_Zonta_International.html).

[30] The definition of structural can be found in Chapter 3Theoretical framework, in the section on Theory of practice.

Under the collective advocacy framework, several factors are considered to be empowering. First, if collective members feel respected and well informed in the collective, they feel empowered. V4I welcomes open political debate and makes the debate transparent to members:

> *Since the connection, over time, there is more power. But it is not in the sense of control. That's what's happening in Indi, people feel more empowered even if their representative doesn't vote the way they want them to because they know there is a transparent culture. They feel they are being represented in the [Indi] election. (AP3)*

Second, having a clear goal better guides the advocacy process. From interviews with V4I social workers, examples of clear goals are women groups' efforts to change unequal gender policies (such as the unequal superannuation policy and VFF's vote policy in the 1980s) and gender discrimination. They were highly motivated to achieve a specific goal:

> *In 1991, we formed the start of Victoria Rural Women's Network. We wanted to show the Department of Agriculture that women on farm were just as important as men. Up until that time, it was the man that was considered as farmers and women were just farmers' wives… Many women were involved in farming and wanted to be recognized and treated as equal to their partner. (AP1)*

Third, playing a leadership role and experiencing the empowerment from a leader are significant for collective members. Zonta was praised by a V4I social worker because it fosters young female leaders to run for future government. Cathy McGowan[31] was admired by many V4I social workers because she 'takes an empowering approach of assisting people to do what they want to do rather than telling people what they should do.'

As well as collective advocacy to make structural transformation, diverse collective activities are also associated with empowerment. Empowerment also occurs when people feel good from doing collective activities:

> *We celebrated what we got. It is not always about the problems. There are some good things going on, which are not particularly implemented by social workers. Because you can change the feel, it might be music, art, sport, and so on that people can feel good about. That's part*

[31] Cathy McGowan (born in 1953) is an Australian politician and independent member of parliament for the rural Victorian seat of Indi since the 2013 federal election. Her biography is included in the website of the Parliament of Australia: https://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members/Parliamentarian?MPID=123674.

of social community as well, isn't it? People feel that they are enjoying where they live, have a party. (AP3)

In addition, diverse collective activities can cater for different individuals' needs:

For some people, they want to organize solar panels. Other people try to make their local supermarket plastic bag free. For others, it was about getting together and creating sustainability groups. So it's about recognizing empowerment might not look the same at all for each rural woman. (AP2)

Most V4I social workers reported that women are quite vigorous in initiating or participating in collective advocacies and diverse collective activities. Women have a stronger voice and empower each other:

In Voices for Indi, I do think rural women have become much stronger in their voice. Often these women are old and living in their rural communities. Men used to be in charge. The women just keep feeding them food and make sure it's okay. That's a role model. That's all changed. Now, there are lots of programs to support women and rural women specifically, to become stronger and know more skills of how to make things happen around them. (AP3)

From government

Most V4I social workers have had experience working in government institutions. They mentioned that government is powerful with abundant resources and able to make transformations on a broader scale:

Back in the 1970s, with the Supporting Parents Pension or Supporting Parent Benefit, women actually got financial support for the first time to raise kids on their own…Until then, if you were living on the farm in a terrible relationship, you couldn't leave because you had no financial security. In terms of empowerment for women, that pension policy made a big difference to all women especially rural women. (AP1)

Governments have advantages in linking and providing resources and supports. They are capable of holistically coordinating services by analysing the big data relating to people's needs, and monitoring whether service organizations are delivering credible services to users. Some V4I social workers reported that it was empowering when government involved people or organizations in making decisions about what they need and what they can do:

Based on the NDIS[32], we provide what they want to achieve in their life, whether it's education, work, independent living skills, accommodation, social community recognition… This really changes power. This is very much empowering the person with disability because the funds go to them, not to the service organization. (AP5)

It is service system level work [in DHS]…We are looking at how to bring the voice of those service organizations that are not heard, not seen, or not engaged. (AP6)

I think in some part, governments actually work with communities even though the government got to finally make the final decision. For example, in South Australia, there is a big debate going on right now as to whether they will put a nuclear waste dump in the desert. Basically it means they randomly found 350 people from the community to get together and spend sixty hours over a period of six months, working together for this issue: What should we do about this decision? (AP3)

The empowerment process at a system level is quite complex, however. It is associated with the governing ideology of government, the power distribution of different levels of government, how policies or projects are managed, and the skills of government workers. Some V4I social workers pointed out the differences between government institutions and civil organizations in engaging in service practices. Government is more likely to provide services in a governing or controlling way, rather than a creative and caring way:

After many years, I actually didn't want to work for government anymore because it can be very constraining. As government paid, you as a social worker, you have a choice to simply enforce the policy. The policy tended to inform carers, women: 'Unless you behave yourself or you do this to meet our government requirements, your children will be taken.' It is very much a statutory kind of role. (AP2)

I was a social worker in Centrelink. What we could do depended on who was the government at that time…. It started to become quite constrained when the neoliberal government came in…. I was a social worker in a non-government social work agency with a huge number of

[32] The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is the new way of providing support for Australians with disability, their families, and carers. The NDIS will provide about 460,000 Australians under the age of sixty-five with a permanent and significant disability with the reasonable and necessary supports they need to live an ordinary life (cited in https://www.ndis.gov.au/about-us/what-ndis.html).

programs. That was a regional setting and they had more flexibility…The framework of what you were allowed to do was quite broad, non-specific, and creative. (AP4)

Empowerment skills

In terms of various empowerment practices or projects engaged in by civil organizations and governments, interviews with V4I social workers show a range of empowerment skills. Empowerment is closely associated with advocacy from collectives for structural transformation. A number of V4I social workers have acted as initiators of several collective advocacies challenging inequality.

Utilizing social networks and fostering local leaders

All V4I social workers have lived and worked in rural areas for many years. They have built up social networks with rural community members and with welfare professionals and politicians at all levels of government. Initiators' social networks are the core capital with which to start collective advocacies. For example:

Our [social workers'] core skill sets should probably be networking and collaboration, and establishing good practice and partnerships. That's one of my core strengths. (AP6)

When AIDS first started, they were extremely stigmatised people. People were frightened by this mysterious disease. We as social workers ran the group and actually did the physical labour [for people with Aids]. (AP4)

With more and more members, the social networks of each collective keep expanding. In the expanding collectives, some V4I social workers encouraged competent members to be leaders in local communities. In addition, some V4I social workers noted the importance of empowering people through people's networks:

To actually empower rural women, a social worker tries to support them through their local networks and local services. (AP2)

Negotiating with different stakeholders by using 'different language'

A person is part of the system. When social workers attempt to empower service users, they communicate and negotiate with different stakeholders such as governments, banks, associations, their own organizations and colleagues, other service organizations, other welfare professionals (doctors, lawyers, psychologists, and so on), the community, and family members of service users. Because social workers understand different stakeholders' positions within the system, they can put arguments to different stakeholders by using the 'language' those stakeholders normally use:

When saying to the government or the business, you reframe the narrative: 'It will cost you a lot of money if you don't do it, how do you feel about that.'…It's actually do the analysis and measurement of the impact of not doing things…It's often government, politicians like to find the cost of doing something, but not the cost of not doing something. That's the argument for change. Isn't it? (AP3)

It's sort of like doing a 360 degree to consider what's in it for me and my regional director and my minister, the clinician, and the client. It is about reflecting what's in it for me as a government employee to administer this and how I can influence the people I am working with to do it differently. It is a marketing tool to undertake business talk by using different languages. We think from somebody else's shoes and make sense of it. (AP6)

Working with and across systems

Making transformations to let a person have more control about her or his life is a long process, which involves constant negotiation and cooperation with different stakeholders in the system. A person's disadvantaged situation largely results from unequal structures. Empowerment is bound up with the radical social work of changing structural inequalities. As a number of V4I social workers acknowledged:

It's not revolution…You don't need revolutions if society allows people to come together and make decisions about what needs to happen. It is actually [about] going to communities and creating big changes in communities. (AP1)

Under most circumstances, radically advocating for service users requires the constant influencing of different stakeholders in the system:

You'll always have to work under the government of the day. I think that's the opportunity of the future because of the complexities of many health, social, economic systems. If we can't work with the business sector, all layers of government, lawyers on the ground, and different people, how do we have better outcomes? (AP6)

It requires creativity to work with and across systems:

The dynamic way we solve problems has changed…and that's what our profession is about. We can present a new way forward, and new opportunity to change society. (AP3)

Acknowledging diversity

Three dimensions of diversity are deduced from the interviews with V4I social workers: diverse needs of service users to make a better life; diverse practices or projects to satisfy different people's different needs; and negotiation and cooperation with diverse stakeholders. For instance, as a V4I social worker mentioned, within the NDIS program people with disability can be given a service package covering various services such as 'education, employment, independent living skills, accommodation, or social community recognition' (AP5), thereby catering for diverse needs. There are diverse activities to cater for different women. Different organizations usually cooperate to offer diverse services. Governments plan services from a holistic perspective, arranging and coordinating diverse services from different organizations.

Working with people

V4I social workers referred to many specific techniques that are empowering for individual service users or collective members. The most important principle of using those techniques is to work with people, rather than to work for people. All V4I social workers highlighted the importance of working with people:

> *I think social work's empowerment model, like what the rural women's movement did, was saying: 'We're not going do things for women, we're going do things with women because that actually creates opportunities for everybody. (AP1)*

> *It's important that you just don't have their solutions. You talk to people to work with them over time, not be the main person who is doing the right thing. (AP3)*

Working with people is about building relationships. If people in relatively powerful positions such as politicians, bankers, and professionals (social workers, doctors, lawyers) attempt to understand service users' disadvantaged situations, listen carefully to their opinions, encourage them to make decisions and take action, and accompany them as they make changes, service users will feel empowered:

> *Sometimes small activities would make differences to somebody's life. Because they are quite isolated, it's extremely important to have someone interested in what's happening for them. (AP4)*

> *If you want to be heard. Nobody doesn't want to be heard. If you are heard well, you will feel good. (AP3)*

At that meeting, we have people from the Country Fire Authority, the Department of Community Services. There were government people listening to what the women said. Later on, the government decided to develop community foundations in each fire affected community and to provide funding based on what the community decided it needed. (AP2)

All V4I social workers agreed that empowerment is associated with a person's 'internal' change (feeling stronger and building capacity) and external unequal structure transformations. Based on those two aims, therefore, V4I social workers built up their methods of working with people. Providing information and education is thought to be very important in raising service users' consciousness about self and current structures:

For me, empowering people is often about giving them information. The knowledge is power… it's to inform you where the information is. You understand from the information provided and make your own judgements. It is not just what I or [our local member] tell you is the information… You are much more empowered because you are actually making sense of it yourself. (AP2)

You give knowledge and share knowledge with someone and then see where they want to through go with that knowledge. (AP3)

How does your action and belief fit in the way the world works? It is not just you. It is the collective consciousness of women's liberation. The personal is the political. You would link personal stories to the political world of structural inequality. (AP2)

According to all V4I social workers, services users need to be encouraged to share ideas (knowledge) about themselves, their lives under current structures, and their plans for making a better life. When people share those ideas in collectives, on public platforms, or with politicians, they not only feel stronger in themselves but also assist in transforming unequal structures.

So I think the rural women's movement had four parts. The first part was bringing women together so they could talk, question, and challenge what they were meant to accept. So this is the consciousness raising. (AP1)

Many women get politically to speak on their own behalf….That confidence to speak, confidence to take action, that's come out of that. (AP2)

As some V4I social workers pointed out, however, life is not always about problems. Collective activities, especially those relating to art, can bring hope and a sense of belonging, which brings empowerment:

> *We will be singing, playing games in the recovery [for cancer patients]. We explore people's recreation and leisure options, and connect people. (AP5)*

> *They built from scratch, every process, they got to the end, and they have this amazing dragon boat. My film script is based on their story of supporting each other. (AP5)*

> *[community member] has now put together a website with quilts from women who created quilts after disasters. They provided quilts to other areas that suffered disasters. They want to support other women affected by disasters. (AP2)*

Social workers as professionals in empowering people

The V4I social workers I interviewed were all qualified social workers. Their identity as professional social workers is related to how they empower people. As demonstrated above, a significant factor for V4I social workers in empowering people is to advocate for change in structural inequalities:

> *I think, the many [in V4I] have a social work background, so there are strong advocates amongst the team. (AP1)*

> *It's an activist role, which I think social workers are good for. (AP4)*

According to all V4I social workers, advocacy is based on a good understanding of and constant reflections about systems:

> *Social work training offers you a broad and useful background in policy…Some of the things we do best is understanding the system view of work. (AP4)*

All V4I social workers highlighted that they treat each service user as central and work with them to strive for a better life:

> *You treat the person with difficulty as the centre, and understand the context for how the world looks for them. (AP3)*

All of them undertook both casework (with individuals and families) and community work. Some of them clearly suggested that social workers should integrate individual work with the work of transforming unequal structures:

Do you do the social justice work as well as do the family and support work for the clients? Not enough social workers do both, in my mind. (AP1)

All V4I social workers work with and across systems to try to empower service users. They listen carefully to individual service users' opinions and encourage and accompany them as they make decisions and take action. As individual service users live in the system, they negotiate and cooperate with different stakeholders including governments, banks, associations, their own organizations and colleagues, other organizations and community groups, and family members of service users. This is based on their understanding of the system and the skill of applying 'different languages' to talk with different people in the system. In addition, they all agreed that helping service users feel good or be optimistic and positive is empowering for the service user.

Most importantly, all V4I social workers reported that the kinds of empowerment practices they engage in are determined by the values they hold as professional social workers:

You are a social worker. The values you believe in about individual's rights, equality, justice. I think what social works do is to believe everybody should have some extent of control in their lives. (AP1)

Most V4I social workers stated that regardless of whether they were engaged in a job described as social work or not, they brought their social work skills into everyday work practices. The values and skills of the social work profession have been integrated into their everyday lives:

I've worked for thirty-five years. Social worker has being my main identity. The philosophy of social work training has run through different jobs I've done. (AP3)

V4I social workers, however, are all different individuals, with different backgrounds, personalities, work, and gender experiences. The empowerment practices they choose to engage in are also determined by their different habitus.

Social workers as agents with different habitus

V4I social workers have the commonality of playing an activist role in making transformations to empower service users. They are active and interested in making changes. Five out of the six V4I social workers were all born and grew up in rural areas. Because they have their roots in rural areas, they passionately apply their social work skills to developing rural communities:

I think often in Australia, when farming has been in your family for a very long time, there is something in your soul. (AP1)

All V4I social workers participate in diverse community movements (with features of advocacy) and activities (usually in the form of art). For example, one of is involved in the Landcare movement; one takes volunteer roles in civil organizations such as Zonta and Rotary to serve communities; and three performed in a community festival. The five female social workers all participated in different women's groups such as breast-feeding groups, support groups for women who are diagnosed with lymphedema or cancer, women's groups striving for equal pay, rural new mothers' groups, and women's gatherings. They chose to be involved in different community movements and activities based on their different interests. With the same logic, they undertook different social work job roles and had different service users such as people with mental health problems, disabled people, farmers with debt loads, patients in hospitals, women on farms, women who have experienced domestic violence, and people suffering from the effects of disasters.

V4I social workers share similarities because of their rural roots, social work beliefs and training, and similar ages. Interviews with them clearly show, however, that they have different levels of gender awareness in their practices. This is associated with their different gender experiences. Two female V4I social workers mainly worked with women during their careers and have strong consciousness about gender differences in every aspect of life. For example, as one of them clearly said:

> *I think I had a consciousness very early when women were meant to live and be happy in very small lives. ...We were from a Catholic family. In that time [1960s], contraception was not allowed by the Catholic Church. Women not only had no choice about how many children they had, they also had no economic security. (AP1)*

Two female social workers stated that they treat both male and female service users equally in their practice. Nevertheless, when they as women experienced situations such as giving birth or raising a child, gender-biased payment, or getting sick, they actively started or joined women groups against gender inequality or to support other women.

One female social worker worked mostly with male clients. She stated that 'there is no difference in serving females and males'. She was very moved, however, by other women's support when she experienced breast cancer. She thought because she was a woman she could understand other women's experiences. But perhaps she did not have a clear understanding of structural gender inequalities, as evidenced by her comment that Hillary Clinton attempted to play the 'women's card' to win the 2016 American presidential election.

One male social worker said:

I think men see themselves as being strong, independent, and resisting help… I worked with women way more than men… I think women can be seen as good leaders. That was why only women could undertake the V4I movement because their feminist voice was strong. (AP3)

Enabling factors for empowerment

V4I social workers mentioned several features of the Albury-Wodonga community that were deemed to be enabling, or helpful for their empowerment practices. According to all V4I social workers, Albury-Wodonga is a vigorous and inclusive community with diverse community movements and activities. Community members are very positive about making their communities better. They get together to develop communities and actively support each other. As some V4I social workers said:

I think our region particularly has had a strong history of community development and leadership development. It has been community level groups that have been very active in developing leaderships. (AP1)

We have thousands of people attend that national festival [Yackandandah]. We had a particular commitment to green environmental sustainable society policy. (AP5)

Some V4I social workers especially pointed out that universities located in rural areas play a quite empowering role:

La Trobe, Charles Sturt University, and Melbourne University have allowed the development of local rural people. (AP5)

On my email, I got 172 [social worker] members, some of them are students. Wodonga and Albury had hardly anybody [in the past]. Now, there are so many. (AP4)

Women especially have contributed a lot in developing communities and supporting disadvantaged community members. They share their life stories or experiences with each other, get together to strive for their rights or a better life, and also provide assistance to other disadvantaged groups in communities.

Obviously, along with many other social movements happening in the Albury-Wodonga region, feminist movements strengthen women's practice of empowering themselves and empowering the whole community. As one V4I social worker articulated:

I really do think social movements are the greatest way to social change…In the past forty years, Black rights, gay rights, workers' rights, women's rights are all achieved by people's movements, not by governments. (AP1)

We now consider a period of time, probably from the mid-1980s to the end of the 1990s as the rural women's movement in Australia. And it's sort of being studied as a historical part of Australia's development. (AP1)

All V4I social workers reported that governments really empower people if they fulfil the ideology of working with citizens to pursue equal, just, and sustainable systems or structures:

Actually it's very important for government to understand what citizens are thinking, not what the Liberal voters or Labor voters are thinking. The citizen is thinking about the community, the society, and the future, environment, economics. (AP3)

Some V4I social workers praised the Labor Party's values of empowering people:

The Labor government is a more socialist government, and the Liberal is more conservative. Community-driven work is often more supported by Labor governments. (AP2)

Some government policies and projects are thought to be very powerful in empowering people:

I was there at university because the Whitlam government, for the first time in Australia's history, made university education free. So many girls from farms in the middle of 1970 got to the university. They returned to rural towns and changed the society in a very short time. (AP1)

This Victoria government said to the people who did the interviews: we want half women on water boards. (AP1)

Four V4I social workers said that having high-profile female leaders in governments especially means and motivates empowerment for women:

Julia Gillard, who was the most prominent feminist in Australia, she was sort of leading the movement [feminist movement] across the world. (AP3)

A number of V4I social workers stated that working in rural areas is enabling for their empowerment practices. For instance, rural areas have close social networks, which is convenient for social workers in linking resources, building support networks, and organizing community movements and activities. People in rural communities are more likely to understand each other because they share similar life

experiences. People who grew up on farms have a strong affinity with farming communities. As mentioned above, five V4I social workers built their careers in rural areas because of their inseparable ties with rural locations.

A V4I social worker particularly stated that Australia has the best health system in the world (AP6), which brings significant benefits for workers to deliver services.

Constraining factors for empowerment

All V4I social workers reported that some social workers may not really understand and practise the values of social justice, social equality, human rights, and empowerment:

> *Social workers may in fact place responsibility on that person to change their life circumstances, without helping that person to recognize some of the system influences disempowering them. (AP4)*

Some V4I social workers mentioned that it was difficult to empower someone who 'doesn't feel he or she has any control of the factors shaping their life' (AP3).

The interviews with V4I social workers show that there are five interrelating factors within rural contexts that obstruct their empowerment practices: the downturn of the rural economy, isolation, the patriarchal culture, discrimination towards people with mental health problems, and the 'no secrets' community environment. As they said:

> *Some of this money came from responses to downturns of the economy in rural areas. During a long drought period, the stress built up and debts grew. (AP4)*

> *I guess probably the biggest thing for them [rural social workers] would be the rural isolation.*

> *When you live in a small community for a long time, it can be challenging sometimes, that personal–profession boundary. (AP5)*

> *People used to think people with brain damage were like psychos, which is a ridiculous term. (AP3)*

> *Agriculture, the only voice that [is] really listened to is[that of] man. Many rural women who know a lot about farming are all 'partners of farmers'. (AP2)*

Rural communities are especially fragile during climate events such as floods or long-term drought. According to some V4I social workers, drought especially made the situation harder for them to garner resources and empower rural people.

All V4I social workers criticized governments following the ideology of economic rationalism or neoliberalism. With a neoliberal belief in less government intervention and more control by market forces, governments are more and more concerned about the economic efficiency of public welfare services. Organizations are therefore encouraged to compete for constrained government funding. There are many 'standards' for organizations to meet. Organizations also need to adopt 'rational management' to decrease costs and be competitive in gaining funding. Thus, social workers in these organizations are more likely to take an administrative and controlling role, rather than a caring and empowering role. For instance:

> *When the Liberal Party came into power, they started to constrain social workers to play just an administrative role. (AP4)*

> *The health systems can be quite doubting. Social workers always get these roles. (AP5)*

Governments usually develop policies according to what they think their supporters want, not to really work with people to pursue fairer and more sustainable social systems.

> *Governments took the 'pat me on the head' approach: 'We know best for everybody.' It is capitalist. It is just like mum and dad in a traditional relationship. (AP6)*

How welfare services are delivered depends on the ideologies of the government of the day and those of their support base, and new governments can be formed every three to four years. Constant change in the way services are delivered is very disruptive for social workers endeavouring to deliver timely and sustainable services:

> *Politicians used to fight. They were sitting and talking and all thinking they are right. It doesn't go anywhere. (AP3)*

> *When a new government came in, old projects were locked out or reviewed…That new project might work very well in the urban locations, but not in rural areas. (AP6)*

The Centre for Non-Violence in Bendigo (CNV)

Bendigo

The Centre for Non-Violence is located in Bendigo, nearly 150 kilometres from the Victorian state capital, Melbourne. Bendigo is the administrative centre of the City of Greater Bendigo (CGB) which 'encompasses both the urban area and outlying towns spanning an area of approximately 3,000 square kilometres' (cited in Wikipedia). According to the ABS (2016), there was a

population of 153,092 in the Bendigo region (governed by the CGB) in 2016, 48.8 per cent of that total were men and 51.2 per cent were women. The top two common ancestries in Bendigo region are English and Australian (ABS, 2016). In the 1830s, the Bendigo region was developed as large sheep farms by white settlers. In the 1850s, along with the discovery of gold, vast numbers of migrants flooded into the Bendigo region, many of whom came from the United Kingdom, Germany, America, and China (Victorian Places, 2012). From the 1850s to the 1950s, the gold mining industry, the engineering defence industry, and the relevant manufacturing industries that made steel, trains, and rubber were very significant employers in Bendigo. In the latter half of the twentieth century, the industry constitution of Bendigo region changed. According to the CGB (2018), the top four industries mostly providing employment are health care and social assistance (18.15 per cent), retail trade (12.07 per cent), construction (9.49 per cent), and education and training (9.22 per cent). With 73 per cent of land used for agricultural purposes, the rural communities surrounding Bendigo are still profiled as agricultural (CGB, 2017). It seems that the suburbs of Bendigo have experienced uneven development, as 'recent growth has been highly concentrated in areas such as Epsom, Kangaroo Flat and Strathfieldsaye' (CGB, 2017).

Centre for Non-Violence

The Centre for Non-Violence (CNV) was established as a young women's housing service by local women in 1990 (CNV, 2017). In 1994, CNV got its first grant funding of Domestic Violence Outreach to the region. Up until now, CNV has built a great reputation in the delivery of anti-domestic violence services in the Loddon Campaspe Region (including the Bendigo region). CNV's vision is to achieve gender and social equality in a violence free world.[33]From its official website, CNV describes its mission as 'to promote policy and community action to end violence, bullying and abuse in the community'. According to its mission, CNV has detailed goals of transforming community attitudes to violence, engaging in violence-prevention programs across all schools, offering quality support to victims of violence, and implementing men's behaviour-change programs. According to CNV's annual report from 2016 to 2017, it runs more than thirty programs, has more than eight hundred participants and fifty-one formal staff.

CNV's services cover aspects relating to prevention of domestic violence, and protection and support for victims of domestic violence. It has counselling and financial support services for women and children who are experiencing family violence, and men's behaviour-change

[33] Most of the information of this paragraph is referred from CNV's website https://www.cnv.org.au/our-beliefs/.

programs, which are managed in the form of individual cases and group work. Client services account for the largest proportion of CNV's work. As CNV's chief executive officer notes, there is limited government investment in programs such as training and community capacity-building to prevent domestic violence, so CNV engages in those programs alongside other funded client programs. In order to expand services in regions such as Echuca, Maryborough, and Kyneton, CNV has built cooperation with other organizations such as Anglicare Victoria, Maryborough District Health Services, and Cobaw Community Health Services in those regions, and locates its staff there. As well as working with civil organizations and community groups, CNV has built strong links with governments, especially the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to implement anti-violence and child-protection programs. In 2017, its total funding reached 6,496,228 AUD, nearly all of which came from governments.

Defining empowerment

I interviewed four qualified social workers employed at CNV who had been reffered to me by a lecturer in the Department of social work at Monash University. Two of them are full-time staff. One provides supervising training for CNV workers. The fourth is the treasurer of CNV and offers advice to the CNV decision-making committee. As they are all qualified social workers, I asked them directly about their understanding of empowerment.

All four CNV social workers acknowledge that empowerment practice is undertaken under certain structural conditions. They all advocated for creating empowerment through pursuing fair and just social structures:

> *Empowerment is as much about how we give women a voice or self-agency to be able to mainly control their lives. So part of that is about how we can help individuals. The other thing is about creating social structures that prioritize equality and opportunity for a person to become a full human being. (AP8)*

The interviewees all stated different individuals in the system have different interpretations of empowerment. Undoubtedly, empowerment is bound up with power. The complexity of power is not only evident in obvious structural inequalities, but is also reflected in how different people understand power.

> *When I think about empowerment, some of the power imbalance is due to some structure and political inequalities relating to gender, class, race, disability, sexuality. (AP7)*

[Sometimes] people's use [of] empowerment is as a simplified process of changing around: 'I've given you these options and you chose one option.' Power is incredibly complicated…. It's in our bodies and our belief system. (AP10)

As interviewees mentioned that it is quite complex when social workers try to empower someone who is not aware that he or she lives under unequal structures, or faces unfair situations. Those people may make decisions that could bring harm to themselves and others:

Some workers would say empowerment is enabling a woman to do what she wants to do. But what happens is what the woman wants to do is something that is harmful for her and her kids…. This doesn't mean everyone is able to fully realize their own beliefs and values, and potential…. For me, empowerment really is only possible if social and structural (factors) facilitate the full realization of your potential as a human being. (AP8)

All V4I and CNV social workers I interviewed considered empowerment to be transformations of individuals (consciousness of making decisions and ability to take action) and unequal structures. CNV social workers especially reported that it is complex and hard to help people understand how they are positioned in current structures and determine what they really want.

How to empower

Empowerment practices and projects

The CNV social workers I interviewed mentioned various projects or practices that they thought were empowering. Most of those practices and projects were initiated and managed by civil organizations. Under some circumstances, governments developed policies to support those civil organizations in empowering the disadvantaged.

From civil organizations or groups

From the interviews with four social workers involved in CNV, it is evident that the empowerment practices or projects undertaken by civil organizations or groups can be simply divided into two categories: individual and group casework, and community work. CNV has integrated those two types of empowerment practices in its version of achieving gender and social equality in a violence free world. For individuals, CNV offers counselling and financial support, provides information and training, and links them with other professionals such as lawyers or doctors:

In rural areas and here, we go to the court every week and approach women who are there because of domestic violence. We support them to understand the law and their rights, and help them represent themselves in family violence matters. We advocate for them in the

system with police, courts, and lawyers and other workers….We have money to support women to rebuild their lives, such as getting a new house, buying furniture, getting education and medical treatment. (AP7)

CNV's community training and development programs aim to raise the community's consciousness about domestic violence and prevention of domestic violence. They have organized an activity called candle night to call community members together in front of court to commemorate women who have died from domestic violence. They have also made banners and marched on White Ribbon Day to protest against violence. They use social media posts, and cooperate with community groups to advertise their services in communities:

We post pictures on Facebook about women's strength against violence….We put posters in toilets with our services on it… Sometimes community group are helping raising awareness about our services. (AP7)

Two social workers I interviewed are also involved in other civil organizations. The interviewees did not clearly state whether those organizations covered both individual and community work, but they appear to engage in either individual work or community work.

All of the work the social workers do relates to building communication and negotiation with different stakeholders.

Most women firstly tell their friend and family… The next person they tell is their doctor… Doctors use data bases. So we've been trying to work on doctors for many years so that they can do basic risk assessment and refer women to our service. But most doctors are not interested. (AP7)

If government was reviewing a piece of legislation like the Family Violence Act, we would participate in consultations and write submissions to influence them. (AP7)

In terms of awareness raising, sometimes we are partners with the football club. We train their players about domestic violence. They may put messages about domestic violence on the back of their jumper. (AP7)

Compared with the empowerment practices of civil organizations or groups spoken about by V4I social workers, CNV's empowerment practices cover much more detail in their work with individuals. In addition, CNV social workers are cautious about organizing community movements against domestic violence because they think different individuals understand it differently at different times, while V4I social workers are keen to initiate community movement to promote democracy and gender equality.

From government

Like V4I social workers, CNV social workers largely stated that it is empowering when governments, especially at federal level, deliver policies and offer funding to transform structural inequalities:

> *The Department of Premier and Cabinet, Office for Women are in Victoria now overseeing all the reform around gender equality and preventing violence against women…They are informing other government departments broad strategies in achieving gender equality. These programs might be implemented through the Department of Health and Human Services, Justice, Education. (AP8)*

> *This was the first sort of announcement from governments about granting 572 million dollars over two years….When the sector and worker hear that, they start to feel that they are doing good work and want to do better. (AP8)*

In addition, CNV social workers all pointed out that governments are capable of coordinating services from a holistic perspective. For example:

> *We have a higher risk assessment panel now called RAMP. In Victoria now, every area has this RAMP panel…On the panel, we have police, courts, child protection, housing services, alcohol and drug services, mental health services, women and men's domestic services, children's services… if we think that women are at higher risk, don't consent or can't consent, we can take a case there anyway and what that would mean is the system will do what it can to try and protect her from him. (AP7)*

Some CNV social workers especially mentioned that governments play an empowering role when they work with civil organizations to find out what communities really want and need, and then issue proper policies:

> *The Victoria State government released a ten-year plan around ending violence against women. The government held many consultations across the state to help inform that policy. Many community organizations and NGOs had a say to others about what is important and what should happen, which has been listened to. (AP8)*

Noted by most CNV social workers, having strong leaders who value social justice and empowerment is very important to guide both government and civil organizations to engage in empowerment practices:

Governments have a lot of power in their lives. When you've got a state premier that stands up and says: 'Violence against women is wrong, we need to work towards women having an equal and valued role in society, women and children deserve safety, men should stop using violence' …. I think the power of that can be underestimated. I think it is very important to have leadership. (AP8)

As two CNV social workers reported, however, in contrast with civil organizations, governments tend to take an easy way of putting responsibilities on disadvantaged individuals, rather than empowering them:

I worked for the government about ten years. To protect the children, mostly what they are doing is to encourage the woman to leave the man. If the women are in a relationship with a man who uses violence towards her, she is disempowered compared to him…The child protection authority has no way to really control him other than to threaten to take the children. If he doesn't care about that threat, they will end up pushing her to leave him. (AP8)

Empowerment skills

Consciousness-raising about structural inequalities

CNV social workers associate empowerment with changing structural inequalities. As individuals live in the system, advocacy for change happens both with individuals and structures. All CNV social workers referred often to assisting individuals to understand the system they live in and their rights as human beings in the system:

It is to understand what a woman's experience is, what her beliefs are, what her hopes are for her future, and how we can support her to even think about that. It's about consciousness raising through a feminist and critical social theory lens. (AP9)

The role as a direct service worker is to work with women towards their safety in realizing their own potential as a human being…The individual social work strategy we use is to give women strong messages that they have a right to safety, self-determination, and happiness. (AP8)

All CNV social workers realized that it can be a long process to accompany service users as they gain understanding of how they are positioned in the structure and what kinds of rights they have:

You work with people who are living in life-threatening situations and don't want to leave. You want to work from a feminist perspective and social justice and empowerment principle.

On one hand, it is helpful because you are trying. On the other hand, you have to sit and wait for women to say: 'I can't do this anymore, I want out.' (AP10)

Listening and encouraging in a respectful way

CNV social workers reported several important skills of working with people in the long process of empowering service users. People need to be heard and respected. They encourage service users to share their stories with other people who have similar experiences, or advocate for service users in front of other professionals such as doctors, lawyers, or government officials. For instance:

We empower people in different ways depending on the context and what they need. Sometimes it's directly by advocating on behalf of someone. Other times we empower people by mentoring them and helping them to have a voice and be heard. (AP9)

The male farmer, his wife, and I were looking at their financial situation. He talked but she didn't. I said to her: 'I want to hear what you want to say.' (AP10)

Women are experts in their lives. We create space for women to share their experiences, rather than judge their experiences…We might say 'women who have experienced violence or homelessness' rather than say: 'You are homeless'. (AP8)

It can be seen that social workers and service users build mutual understanding with each other during interactions. According to some CNV social workers, believing service users and assisting them to make decisions are crucial steps in empowerment practices:

All of our interventions are designed really to give a very strong message to women about their right to dignity and respect. It's about believing women when they say: 'This occurred to me.' (AP8)

As all CNV social workers noted, empowerment occurs under the framework of working with people, rather than working for people:

We work with concepts of empowerment, women's rights, and self-determination. Women are exercising their own agency. We are not making decisions on behalf of women. (AP8)

I think some service workers use their empathy to get the information and solve the problem. While a social worker would say: 'I use empathy to understand another human being, I listen to their language and their interpretation.' (AP10)

Negotiating with different stakeholders

Whether in individual work or community advocacy work, negotiating with different stakeholders is essential. Social Workers, service users, and other stakeholders all think and act in a social system. Negotiating with stakeholders is the most essential part of working across and within systems. All CVN workers highlighted that it is hard work to consistently influence and negotiate with different stakeholders to empower service users. It requires an understanding of the position and disposition of different stakeholders in the system. CNV social workers proposed that language needs to be used as a technique to negotiate with different stakeholders such as doctors, lawyers, police, governments, courts, other civil organizations, and community groups. They referred to techniques such as using statistical data, framing terms appropriately, and utilizing the language that is familiar to stakeholders:

> *Generally speaking, it's quite difficult to work with anyone who has a very different world view than yourself….We have to navigate that consistently…It has to be explicit that we have some common agreement if something is really going to succeed….Sometimes the common understanding might be: 'Okay, I accept that the data tells this about women's experience of violence but I am not sure I believe it.' So you might be: 'Okay, I am prepared to concede, the data is indisputable, yeah?' That's not an agreed basis. But sometimes it's an important point. (AP8)*

> *It is how you frame words now…So concepts like patriarchy, oppression, male privilege are not wrong. But our sophistication of how we talk about what we do now is developed…It's a journey for others as well, so our role is to help others on that journey and to not let them feel bad about where they are. It's like: Do you have a problem with the concept of gender equality? People often don't. (AP8)*

> *I think the difference is how other professions respond. The lawyer uses legislation and law to interpret human rights. Working with them is quite hard to not let them solve the problem because they are paid to be competent problem solvers. We get them to feel there are a number of perspectives to understand the problem, and allow them time to reflect. (AP10)*

Acknowledging diversity

From interviews with CNV social workers, diversity emerges as important. Individual service users have diverse needs for counselling, education or training, financial support, legal support, and so on. Various projects are created to meet these diverse needs and cater for different service user groups. Social workers negotiate with different stakeholders and utilize various networks to advertise their

services. They creatively play diverse roles to intervene at the individual, organizational, policy, and social level. For example:

> *We have crisis accommodation if they need to leave home to be safe. We have money for hotels. We can assist women to travel to family, to other parts of Australia…We can advocate for them for the men to move home. We assist her to change the locks and put in security cameras; work with the police and court to protect her and her children…We have men's behaviour change programs. (AP7)*

> *We can intervene in various places in the system. We have really direct practice with the person who's looking for support. We can intervene at a policy level, practice level, or social level. (AP9)*

Social workers as professionals in empowering people

The CNV social workers I interviewed are all qualified social workers. As professional social workers, they share many similarities in how they go about empowering people. At first, according to all CNV social workers, understanding the system and assisting people with a systematic view are essential steps in practising empowerment:

> *I think social workers should try to see individuals' struggles in a social and political context. They should take into account the social and political environment that person is in. (AP7)*

> *Generally social workers are able to think from a big picture framework, and understand how social systems and structures impact on individuals' choices and decision-making. (AP8)*

All CNV social workers mentioned that broad social work training equips social workers with broad understanding of social structures and systems and various intervention skills. For instance:

> *I think the social work training is very broad. The social workers are equipped with lots of skills when they work in a time of uncertainty. The real strength of the profession is that we have broad skills and can use them in different ways. (AP9)*

Based on their broad understanding of systems and their broad skills, all CNV social workers played different roles to intervene at an individual, policy, and community level in empowerment practices. They are activists who consistently insist on negotiating with different stakeholders and advocating:

> *I've been a social worker for nearly twenty-five years. It has been a very good profession for me because I've been able to do lots of different things. I have done casework, group work, counselling, policy, managing, advocacy, research. (AP7)*

I think it was Jim Ife who did some writing about social work role, advocating role, intermediary role and enabler…I think it was really important that we don't have one role. (AP9)

When that doesn't work with these police, then we call the inspector. If the police inspector doesn't listen, we go up to the commissioner…We will then go up until we're satisfied. (AP7)

According to all CNV social workers, it is the social workers' values that determine their practices of empowering disadvantaged people:

The Australian Association of Social Work has the ethical values. We would be concerned about things like social justice, self-determination, and that people have their right to have a say about what happened to them. I don't think all other professions in their mission seriously have that in their main part. (AP10)

In order to empower people under systems, all CNV social workers reported the importance of noting the complex power distributions and variations in different contexts:

A lot of people would say: 'We commit to equality'. But if you've already got other oppressions or disadvantages, sometimes equality is not enough. There is equality that everyone is on boxes with same height, but it doesn't recognize that the different social positions that we are at. (AP8)

All CNV social workers emphasized that social workers need to keep critically reflecting on the power complexities in empowerment practices:

I think it's important to understand what you mean as an individual social worker about empowerment and what that actually means for you. It takes reflection and commitment to your own process. (AP10)

I think opportunities for professional development and learning about other approaches and models of other practices are helpful….Critical reflection activities I think is crucial, and I think you need to be really careful about how you do that because you can't be expected to know everything and not everything you do is going to be the right choice. (AP8)

It was pointed out by a CNV social worker that half of all CNV employees are qualified social workers. CNV has a good reputation in serving people, especially women who experience domestic violence, and plans to hire more professional social workers. According to all CNV social workers I interviewed, CNV especially empowers its own social workers through having a clear mission and principles to guide

their practices, providing good supervision, and creating a supporting rather than a punishing environment:

> *We make mistakes because we don't know them better or we feel limited in the choices to us as a worker. Training, reflection, good supervision, good support, opportunity to talk openly are important. We are creating this supportive environment. (AP8)*

Social workers as agents with different habitus

The CNV social workers I interviewed are of a similar age, received their social work education in the late 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, and experienced the vigorous social movements of the 1970s and 1980s. They all showed strong determination to challenge unequal structures to empower the disadvantaged. Two of them especially mentioned that the social movements and social work training of that time largely guided them to challenge unequal structures:

> *It would be in the 1970s in Australia, there were marches on the street to advocate for Australian soldiers out of Vietnam, for workers and women to have more rights. I just become more politicized as times goes on… In the late 1980s and early 1990s, when I studied, if I used a feminist, socialist analysis, it would be rewarded. (AP7)*

The interviewees all grew up in rural areas. Two of them particularly clarified that their rural background drove them to be a social worker in rural areas. They all participated in work at individual, group, and community level. Compared with V4I social workers, CNV social workers spoke more about complex power variation and distribution in individual casework. They associated the complexities of empowerment with the beliefs and values of social workers and service users. For example:

> *The concept of empowerment is often associate with our own understanding of ethics, values, and personal beliefs. If you have a belief system that supports certain things, your concept of empowerment may be different to others'. (AP8)*

Two of the CNV social workers clearly talked about their experiences in working in government institutions. One of them criticized the child protection work she did in government as quite constraining and unfair to women, while another one felt comfortable and good about undertaking financial support work in Centrelink. With different personal interests, CNV social workers worked in different fields such as child protection, youth work, farm family consulting, community health, community participation, and anti-domestic violence, and thus had different service users. Although they are all women, the main distinction between them is that they have different levels of desire to

serve women and different levels of sensitivity towards gender differences in practices. This relates to their different gender experiences and experiences of working with women.

CNV mainly offers services for women. All CNV social workers I interviewed strongly pointed out the difficult situation of women under the current interrelating structures of economy, gender, race, and culture. Two of the social workers are full-time workers in CNV. They seemed to be more sensitive to the gender differences in practices and explained it more than the other two. They particularly linked their gender awareness with the family environment they grew up in:

> *I think a lot of people were exposed to feminist ideas but they didn't necessarily take them up. It makes sense to me because I was brought up in a family with six children, four boys, two girls. And my mother was a teacher who valued education. She was influential to me. I could also see disadvantages of being a woman. (AP7)*

> *My experience was growing up as a child of Greek immigrants. My parents had come to Australia with very few opportunities themselves…I know my mum's opportunities were limited because she was a woman. I saw racism, sexism, and how poverty impacted on our lives. Mum told two things to me: never be reliant on a man for money; education is the pathway out of poverty. I was very motivated. (AP8)*

Enabling factors for empowerment

La Trobe University has a campus located in Bendigo. Two CNV social workers gained their social work degrees at La Trobe University. All of them participate in social work teaching at the university. That the university is located in a rural area and offers degrees in social work is empowering for them and helps in promoting their practices.

All CNV social workers I interviewed advocate for transforming structural inequalities to empower disadvantaged people. They all highly praised the critical social work education they received:

> *I knew all about the structural feminist approach when I came out from universities. We can't look at a woman's experience in isolation to her social status…How does being a woman impact your experience and also being poor? How does being a woman from an Aboriginal background who is poor and has a disability? (AP8)*

Notably, various social movements spread from the 1970s to the 1990s in Australia, significantly influencing social work education at that time and promoting structural transformation. As two CNV social workers in particular pointed out, the women's movement at that time had a very strong voice and achieved significant improvements for women.

All CNV social workers highlighted that governments play an empowering role when they work with people, civil organizations, and community groups to pursue social justice and equality. Particularly, federal governments have the power to develop holistic strategies to promote empowerment practices. In addition, the Labor Party is approved of by all CNV social workers because it provides more support for disadvantaged people.

Most importantly, and this came from all the interviews with CNV social workers, having diverse civil organizations and community groups in communities is more likely to mean there is a strong collective voice. This is helpful to achieve the transformation of structural inequalities. When civil organizations and community groups build cooperation with each other, there are more comprehensive services for community members:

> *We work with quite a lot voluntary groups. Rotary Club is quite influential, raising money and building campaigns. Zonta is a women's empowerment group. They support us. The CWA [Country Women's Association] raise awareness in their club and raise money for us. We have a lot of groups that give us things, food, gifts, and a lot of donations. CFA [Country Fire Authority] also raise awareness in their community. (AP7)*

Women are more vigorous in participating in community development. As a CNV social worker said:

> *It is more empowering for organizations to let community have a say in what services they need and have a voice about what they want…We did a research project and we went to six communities. It was women who would come to the meetings and have a say. We couldn't get any men. I don't know why. (AP9)*

In addition, some CNV social workers acknowledged that having an influential leader in the organization, who is active in national and international platforms, is very helpful for promoting their empowerment practices.

All CNV social workers I interviewed chose to work in rural areas because of their rural backgrounds. One of them particularly mentioned that, working in rural areas, social workers have 'the freedom to do a range of different things and better opportunities to develop skills' (AP10).

Constraining factors for empowerment

Most CNV social workers reported that some social workers rarely advocate for transforming structural inequalities because they are too busy with large amounts of casework, or they are scared to lose their job for being critical or radical:

The opportunity for work is smaller and usually in the city. So people are very mindful and probably scared about doing anything to upset their organization or the funding organization. (AP10)

A direct service worker's role is to work with women towards their safety in realizing their own potential as a human being. What I noticed the most is our direct social workers are so busy doing the daily work that they have very little opportunity to think about what this [the big picture] all means. (AP8)

They relate this to the current conservative social work training and political environment:

I think the way we teach social workers has changed. There is much more emphasis on getting people to go out to work rather than to identify what needs to be changed to change it…We are kind of like little psychologists. (AP10)

There was a period of time of 1970s, 80s, 90s when there was a strong focus on women and gender, on social movement and social change. It started changing from the year 2000. I think there is growing conservativism internationally. (AP8)

The current Liberal federal government is criticized by all four CNV social workers as conservative and putting the responsibility on disadvantaged people rather than empowering them:

When it was a Liberal government in power, the client work would be to get people off Centrelink payments. We try to find ways not to pay people and force people, or put benefits into different programs. Federal Liberal government is closing down funding. (AP9)

Conservative governments have tried to put limits on what the community of non-profit organizations can do and say…if you say this is wrong, they're going to cut our funding. (AP8)

From interviews with CNV social workers, governments' limits are shown by the redundant bureaucracy or managerialism experienced by civil organizations and social workers:

If you don't do certain things, and there's problems because the department has particular standards. Those standards are quantitative such as assessing two hundred cases….Workers are overburdened with bureaucracy, form filling, meeting standards, ticking boxes. Then they forget the human element. (AP8)

Some CNV social workers also mentioned that the constant internal conflicts or changes as government change also harm the continuity and sustainability of social workers' empowerment practices.

Most importantly, all four CNV social workers noted the complexities and difficulties of empowerment associated with the complex interactions between structures and different individuals. Every individual lives within structures. The functional models or ideologies of structures such as gender, class, race, and economy, have been internalized by individuals. CNV social workers used examples of how the patriarchal culture interweaves with other structures, influencing people's beliefs and making empowering women challenging:

> *When men abuse women, a lot of woman will think that is his right to do that… I think it is a strong belief about children need their father. Thus, it doesn't matter that the man beats a woman because he's a good father… …Everywhere people, including women themselves, child protection, court, police, family mediation services, and psychologists have this belief.… Women leave [male perpetrators] and go back to them later. Maybe one day they leave and stay away. But then she gets a new one. (AP7)*

> *In the Australia culture, it is the woman who stays at home to look after children. They may have two or three babies. Maybe it's about eight or five years when she's back to work, the man has been promoted two or three times…When they retire, men have much more superannuation. If their relationship separates, women are in the vulnerable position. They've got less income and have generally got children to look after. (AP9)*

> *We got two thousand police referrals. Maybe half of the women do not want our service. (AP7)*

Different social workers, service users, and stakeholders do not take the same journey to understand and reflect on their ideologies and beliefs under current structures. Empowerment is a very complex process that requires people to negotiate and understand themselves, others, and structures.

Regarding the constraining factors to empowerment for rural women, most CNV social workers mentioned that rural areas are very isolated. Compared with cities, there are not many services available. Women have to travel long distances to obtain to services in regional cities such as Bendigo. Many rural women do not know there is a service to help them if they suffer from domestic violence. They have few choices in isolated rural communities.

Analysis

In this section I will list and discuss the similarities and differences between V4I and CNV in terms of the four main themes, using Bourdieu's theoretical tools such as habitus, fields, capital, doxa, and culture production.

I do not intend to simply adopt Bourdieu's theory to explain the research findings. It is a two-way process. It is both inductive and deductive. I interviewed social workers in both Australia and China by following the five research sub-questions. As they are diverse groups in different organizations, areas, and countries, I explore their answers, the language they use, their behaviours, and the context in which they work. Of course, during that process, I have followed and tried to understand critical theory, feminist structural theory, the theory of empowerment and power in relationships. From my early findings, I started to explore again which theory would be best to systematically present my findings from micro to macro level. I found that empowerment practices are associated with the following: social workers' dispositions and positions; the organizations' type, aim, principle, leadership, relationship with government, local reputation, and personnel structure; and structures of a country (including the position of the social work profession in a country's welfare structure). In order to encapsulate all these factors, I found Bourdieu's theoretical tools helpful to provide the framework for explaining my findings. All aspects of this thesis, including the literature review, methodology, the presentation of findings, and discussion, are framed according to Bourdieu's theory of structural constructivism, thus presenting the thesis in a systematic and logical way and belying the fact that the real research is much more complex.

Thematic analysis is utilized to present research findings. Bourdieu's theoretical tools are used to further explain and make conclusions about the research findings, and to relate research findings to existing literature. This findings chapter and the following one both conclude with a simple discussion. The overall discussion, utilising Bourdieu's theoretical tools, is in the last chapter of this thesis.

Similarities

Defining empowerment (empowerment as a concept)

Social workers in both CNV and V4I associate empowerment with transforming structural inequalities and assisting service users to have more control over their lives. The reason lies in the social work education each social worker received in Australia, which usually linked empowerment with critical theory and interpreted it from a structural viewpoint. Therefore, no matter which organization the Australian interviewees worked in, their understanding of empowerment was similar.

How to empower (empowerment practices/projects; empowerment skills/strategies)

Organizations as subfields

CNV and V4I both have projects that aim to raise community consciousness about current structural inequalities. They both organize community activities to open discussions and connect community members. They both cooperate with other civil organizations and community groups to advertise and expand their services. They both frequently interact with governments to advocate for or gain more support. They both follow the practice principle of working with people, rather than working for people. Their similarities are due to their aims of challenging structural barriers such as the short-term 'sloganeering' political election cycle and gender inequalities, and their personnel structure of employing many professional social workers.

Social workers as agents

Professional social workers are main groups within V4I and CNV; they apply similar empowering strategies or skills, including listening and encouraging people in a respectful way, building trusting relationships with service users and building support networks for them, accompanying people as their understanding of their entitled rights within structures grows, being patient and assisting people to make decisions, setting up platforms to let people to be heard, noting different stakeholders' position and disposition in the system, and negotiating with stakeholders by using the language they are familiar with. In terms of their similar understanding of empowerment, professional social workers work within and across systems to empower the disadvantaged.

Enabling factors for empowerment

The similar enabling factors for empowerment experienced by V4I and CNV are explained by linking the organizations' similar capital and doxa, the social workers' similar habitus (disposition and position), and the similar structurally enabling, or helpful, factors identified in interviews.

From organizations

V4I and CNV both have professional social workers as their personnel. They are both located in the areas they serve. Their personnel have lived and worked in the local areas for a long time, with broad established social networks. V4I and CNV have good local reputations and build cooperation with governments and local organizations or community groups. They have clear missions and principles, and good leadership. All of those characteristics are the capital of both V4I and CNV that allows them to better engage in empowerment practices. Based on their capital, V4I and CNV further develop their doxa of achieving their goals of pursuing equal and sustainable social structures, which significantly influences their individual practitioners' understanding and method of empowerment.

From social workers as agents

Professional social workers in V4I and CNV share the common values of social equality, justice, human rights, and empowerment, understand how the broad system functions, and try to transform structural inequalities. They have strong motivation to empower people and actively negotiate with different stakeholders. They all have rural personal backgrounds and are devoted to developing rural communities. They are familiar with rural communities' culture, economic and political situations. They build broad social networks in communities. Clearly, professional social work education and rural background are two main factors that are helpful to social workers in empowering rural people.

From structures

When governments work with organizations, community groups, and individuals to pursue equal, just, and sustainable structures, it is a powerful empowerment process from top to the bottom. Labor governments are approved of for undertaking more empowerment practices. It is empowering when governments provide more opportunities for organizations, community groups, and individuals to participate in decision-making, and to play a role in holistically measuring and coordinating services.

The vigorous social movements that happened from the 1970s to the 1990s in Australia, especially feminist movements, largely inspired social work education and social workers to challenge unequal structures. This significantly influential empowerment practice occurred from bottom to top and then further delivered the empowerment message from collectives (top) to individuals (bottom).

When there are many civil organizations and community groups in local communities, the community is more vigorous. When communities have good cohesion and vitality, it is easier for organizations to undertake empowerment practices. Community members, especially those who are disadvantaged, feel more empowered when there are diverse services and activities to meet their different needs and to let them have a sense of belonging in collectives. Women in particular expend a great amount of effort to empower each other and develop communities.

Constraining factors for empowerment

The barriers to empowerment practices experienced by V4I and CNV are similar and come mainly from structures.

From structures

Governments disempower practices when they use the ideology of neoliberalism, reduce funding and support to civil organizations, and adopt managerialism to supervise 'service efficiency'. Nearly all V4I and CNV social workers interviewed pointed out many social workers have lost the broad view of challenging structural inequalities under constraints from neoliberal governments. Therefore, those social workers are more likely to put the responsibility for change on the disadvantaged individual

without empowering disadvantaged people to change their position in society. Furthermore, it is very difficult to empower some service users when they have internalized the ideology from unequal structures such as patriarchy, and cannot feel they have the right and power to change difficult situations. Moreover, all V4I and CNV social workers reported that isolation and the lack of resources in rural communities are substantial barriers for them in empowering rural people.

Differences

Defining empowerment (Empowerment as a concept)

Compared to V4I social workers, those in CNV spoke more about the complexities of empowerment practices when individuals have already internalized the doxa from current unequal structures. For example, CNV social workers considered it was very complex to empower a woman who thinks her husband has the right to use violence towards her. This may be because CNV social workers work in the domestic violence field and frequently see how patriarchal culture has been internalized by both individual men and individual women.

How to empower (empowerment practices/projects; empowerment skills/strategies)

From organizations

V4I and CNV have different goals and target different service users. They have different specific empowerment projects. V4I mainly focuses on the community democracy movement. V4I is not an organization with formal structures and full-time staff with formal wages. Its main funding source is donations from the community. Therefore, all of V4I's projects are engaged in at community level.

CNV's main task is opposing domestic violence. Based on this main task, its vision is the achievement of gender equality. Since CNV's establishment in 1990, it has specialized in working with women. CNV is mostly funded by government, especially the Victorian state government. Therefore, CNV engages in practices at individual, group, and community levels.

From social workers as agents

As well as joining V4I and CNV, social workers are also involved in other organizations or community groups according to their interests. As this research is a gender study focusing on rural women's empowerment, the main distinction between social workers is how aware practitioners are of gender differences in their practices. CNV provides gender-specific projects for women. All CNV workers are sensitive about gender differences. In addition, the social workers who have clearly witnessed gender inequalities affecting their mothers, or deeply remember and reflect on the gender inequalities they have experienced, are more likely to be strongly aware of the gender inequalities in structures and gender differences in practices.

Enabling and constraining factors for empowerment

From organizations

The different forms of capital held by organizations determine the advantages and disadvantages organizations have in engaging empowerment practices. CNV has a clear aim of challenging domestic violence and its roots in gender inequality. It has constant funding from governments and employs full-time professionals such as social workers and community workers. Therefore, CNV devolves its aims into multiple tasks and coordinates resources to achieve those tasks at individual, group, and community level. CNV's chief executive officer reported, however, that governments do not offer many resources for them to undertake community projects. Being funded by government, they have to find ways to balance many bureaucratic requirements and be careful about using funding to advocate at the community level. Due to its leadership and well-structured operation, CNV has built its reputation for providing anti-domestic violence services at the local, national, and international level. Thus, CNV uses the discourse of being professional in the delivery of anti-domestic violence services to negotiate with governments to gain more support.

Compared to CNV, V4I has more freedom to engage in community work. Most of its funding is from public donations. It was established based on the community's desire to promote democracy at a community level. Thus, V4I itself is a community movement with close community ties. Without its core members' active contributions, however, V4I could stagnate.

As this research focuses on rural women's empowerment, it is a gender study. CNV has specialized in empowering women who live in rural areas and experience domestic violence, which helps to promote its social workers' gender awareness.

From social workers as agents

Different social workers of CNV and V4I have different levels of gender awareness. If they are able to acknowledge gender differences in their practices, and reflect on structures and their positions and dispositions within structures, they are likely to better empower people, especially women.

From local contexts

V4I social workers often mentioned farming communities struggling due to the economic downturn, climate change, isolation, the withdrawal of resources, and insufficient services (including transport, internet, and health services). This can be related to the Albury-Wodonga region being further from the state capital Melbourne than the Bendigo region. Active social movements, and the regionalization plan engaged in in the Albury-Wodonga region, can be regarded as two reasons for increasing the social services and community movements there.

Chapter 6: Social Work's Intervention in Rural Women's Empowerment in China

Introduction

In this chapter, five organizations in China—Rural Women (RW), the Maple Women's Psychological Counselling Centre (MWPC), the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation (CFPA) Microfinance, the Social Work Leading Team in Waizai Prefecture Government (Wanzai SW), and the Qinghong Social Work Agency (Qinghong) are presented as substantive fields that were researched. I undertook the research fieldwork in China in 2016. Before I commenced fieldwork in China, I had recruited two workers of RW as research interviewees. These two interviewees provided referrals to other potential interviewees and I was able to draw on my own networks that include social work professors for further referrals. I interviewed a total of sixteen social work practitioners in China. Organizations were not treated as research units initially. I discovered, however, that the delivery of services by Chinese social work practitioners is mainly based on their organization's type, leadership, principles, and aims. By studying these organizations as substantive fields, I could clearly present the diversity and complexity of Chinese indigenous social work practices.

RW, MWPC, and CFPA are located in Beijing. Wanzai SW and Qinghong are located in towns, which are deemed to be rural areas in this research. The demographic, geographic, economic, and cultural situations of Wanzai and Hanwang where Qinghong is based are briefly introduced.

Presentations of the findings of each case are framed in terms of four main themes: defining empowerment, how to empower, enabling factors for empowerment, and constraining factors for empowerment. As explained in the Chapter 4 Methodology, empowerment is polysemic. It is a word, concept, approach, theory, praxis, and a cultural production process. As most of the Chinese practitioners I interviewed did not know the word 'empowerment', I will contrast their serving practices in each Chinese organization with the similarities in empowerment practices between the two Australian oragnizations. In this research, based on empowerment as a basic principle of the social work profession, I have assumed that professional Australian social workers understand empowerment and engage in empowering disadvantaged people. If the empowerment practices undertaken by Chinese social work practitioners are similar to those engaged in by professional Australian social workers, it will demonstrate that Chinese social work practitioners are constructing empowerment to some extent, even though they are not familiar with the word itself.

In the discussion section of this chapter, I present the similarities and differences between five Chinese organizations.

Rural Women

Rural Women

In 1993, the Rural Women Magazine (RWM) was launched with Lihua Xie as its chief editor (Baidu Wikipedia, 2000). Exposed to the issues met by rural women readers, Xie launched a reader club called the Migrant Sister's Home in 1996 and a training school in 1998 to help those readers. In 2001, the Rural Women Cultural Development Centre (simplified as Rural Women in this research) was registered as a small business. This is because it was difficult for RW initiators to find a government institution to be RW's supervisor to register RW as a non-profit organization. According to the introduction to RW[34], its mission is to explore rural women's potential, to protect rural women's rights, to foster rural women leaders, and to organize rural women groups. There are various projects in RW, such as poverty alleviation and illiteracy elimination for rural women, education and recreation for rural women and left-behind girls in rural areas, mental health and suicide prevention services for rural women, and services and political advocacy for rural migrant women.

I interviewed three practitioners working for Rural Women. All of them are women. One has a bachelor degree in sociology and has worked for RW for seven years. She is in charge of all projects implemented in rural communities. One worked for RW for thirteen years, mainly delivering services for rural female migrants who had migrated from rural communities to Beijing to work. When I interviewed her, she had left RW several months before and was subsequently working in an aged-care organization. One was a female farmer. She knew of RW from reading the Rural Women Magazine. In 2009, she was supported by RW to launch a reading club in her rural community. In 2014, she came to Beijing and became a full-time member of the staff of RW.

Defining empowerment

Two RW workers I interviewed had bachelor's degrees, one in sociology and the other in law. I directly asked them how they understood empowerment. They thought that empowerment was a 'professional' word introduced from overseas. They both pointed out that empowerment is a principle of RW. RW practitioners all relate empowerment to raising service users' consciousness about what

[34] The information of introducing RW in this paragraph is from its website http://se.dila.edu.tw/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/%E8%AB%96%E5%A3%872-%E8%BE%B2%E5%AE%B6%E5%A5%B3%E7%9A%84NGO-PPT-%E2%80%93-%E5%90%B3%E6%B2%BB%E5%B9%B3.pdf.

kinds of rights they have as citizens and assisting service users to improve their capacity to strive for their rights:

> *Initially, we had lots of Hong Kong friends to engage in projects with us. They used to mention the word—empowerment. Sometimes, I think it is capacity-building. That is, letting her [the service user]know what kinds of rights they have and how to use these rights…to help her to know what kinds of methods or ways can be used to achieve her rights, what she is going to do if her rights are infringed. (RW3)*

Because the word 'empowerment' embodies the complexities and political sensitivities of rights and power, RW practitioners said they do not normally use it:

> *I think it is 'right', not 'power'. We can't distinguish….According to English, the word empower contains both 'power', and 'right'…usually we don't use that [kind of] professional word. (RW1)*

> *It is sensitive for the government. Thus we don't mention it when we work with them [service users]. Yes. We know it in our heart. We actually are doing such things [empowerment] to raise everyone's consciousness about it. (RW3)*

How to empower

Empowerment practices and projects

RW was registered in 2001, but the founder of RW—Lihua Xie—had started organizing services for rural women from the early 1990s. When Xie was the associate editor-in-chief of the China Women's News Daily (a semi-governmental institution) and responsible for managing the Rural Women Magazine (RWM), she corresponded with many rural women readers who experienced difficult situations such as domestic violence and divorce. Xie attempted to provide counselling for those readers. Some rural women readers came to Beijing because of divorce or domestic violence. They went to the editorial office of RWM and asked for help. Because there was no clear legislation covering registration of a non-profit organization, Xie launched a reader's club called Migrant Sister's Home (MSH) to help those rural women. MSH provided legal aid and training for those rural women to learn how to speak and write Mandarin. Six years after MSH's establishment, one of my RW interviewees joined the organization as a volunteer providing legal aid:

> *If [a female] migrant worker's rights were infringed during working, her future and her whole family would be affected….She doesn't have the relevant legal knowledge, and doesn't even*

know where the Labour Department is. She doesn't know how to protect her rights. Therefore, we insist on providing legal aid for them. (RW3)

Thereafter, as they felt it was not enough to assist migrant workers individually, they made many efforts to advocate for policies or legislation to protect migrant workers' rights:

The first generation of rural migrant 'sisters' were mainly involved in domestic work. After China's reform and opening up, most urban residents including women all went out to work. There was nobody to take care of kids at home…At that time, it [this phenomenon] was called the female babysitters' flow to Beijing…We pay more attention to domestic workers because we think they are not protected by the Labour Law…For example, in 2007, the government was promoting the labour contract template. Thus they asked for help from the Domestic Workers' Association (DWA) in Beijing. We are a member of the DWA in Beijing…I got the task of providing suggestions for the government, I called in domestic workers. We discussed together… For example, they pointed out the compensation issue when they broke something of the employer's, the issue of having rest and holidays. They also worried about what would happen if they were injured accidently. So we detailed these proposals and submitted them to governments. We proposed that sexual harassment needed to be understood…Most of our proposals were accepted. (RW3)

In 1998, RW workers initiated a training school providing training in hair dressing, computer application, stenography, and so on for rural women. As well, RW launched service centres in the community in which rural migrant workers lived[35]. They provide maternal health services and training in employment and health. RW also organizes support groups for single mothers. As well, it established the Didinghua—a drama group for female domestic workers whose interests are dancing, singing, and performing.

RW also has projects for women in rural communities working on illiteracy, political participation, education, and recreation, and sex education for left-behind rural girls.

Since RW's establishment, it has had a classic project called the Reading Club. It has found active female readers to manage this project in rural communities.

As RW workers pointed out, they initiate projects according to the needs of their targeted service users—rural women—and according to the organization's limited resources. It seems that their

[35] This was called 'village in city' because these communities were like rural villages but with an inferior environment.

projects mainly comply with the principle of mutual help and capacity-building. Rural women gained a strong sense of belonging from participating in RW's projects.

> *It depends on organization's orientation. For many years, we have engaged in projects in the culture [education and recreation] field…They [rural women] wish us to provide them with opportunities to go outside or to make income…We made some attempts. We helped them establish performance groups to make money…We supported women to open 'happy farmhouses' [like a small hotel]…Actually, this does not confirm to our organization's orientation very much. We might waste resources and be unsuccessful if we do the things that we are not good at doing. (RW1)*

In addition, according to RW workers, the sustainability of their projects relies on their long-term cooperation (as the first-generation NGO in China) with foundations who agree with RW's values, and the rural female leaders they selected who strongly believe in the ideology of mutual help or care.

Compared to governments who have powers to implement service projects on a large scale, RW workers thought that they provide more detailed services by building close relationships with service users. Regarding social work agencies established by university teachers after 2006[36], RW workers thought:

> *Their operations are relatively loose. Their teachers have work in universities. Those teachers use their spare time to engage in social work. The only advantage of those agencies is that there are many students to be their volunteers. (RW3)*

Empowerment skills

Capacity-building for service users

RW social work practitioners mostly relate empowerment to the transformation of individual service users. They largely focus on providing education and training for rural women to raise consciousness about their rights as citizens, setting up groups for rural women to support each other, and creating opportunities for rural women to speak out and reveal their abilities:

> *They [rural women] didn't know how to protect themselves and their rights. Thus we need to raise their legal consciousness and citizen consciousness. They are equal to everyone. There is also the consciousness about gender equality, gender justice, and so on. We undertook a great deal of gender training to inform them about what psychological gender is, what social gender is, how society treats women and men. Through our training, they*

[36] Chinese governments started largely promoting the development of social work profession from 2006.

become more confident, independent, less self-deprecating, and less dependent on families. Some of them started a business after accepting training. (RW3)

We also established the Didinghua—a drama group for domestic workers whose interests are dancing, singing, and performing. Some of them cannot even talk smoothly at the beginning. But they need to keep talking in front of the public, to recite their lines, and to perform in an professional way. They also need to write scripts, to decide their roles, and attend various stage performances. I think they improve themselves very quickly. (RW3)

From interviews with RW social work practitioners, it is clear that they build close relationships with rural women, encourage them to speak out, respect their opinions, and accompany them as they make changes. It can be showed that rural women became more confident through involvement in RW's activities. For example:

They couldn't understand [our working method] at the beginning. But after she finished the lawsuit, she had significant improvement. She can help others to protect rights. It is how we help her to improve her capability for self-development. We continually empower them through raising their consciousness, and developing their capacities. (RW3)

By participating in the activities of the Reading Club, these rural women have gained the courage to go out…It is capacity-building. My friend is very introverted. After joining the Reading Club, she and her friend opened a car-wash. By joining the Reading Club and participating in the club's activities, they are praised by other people. People said that they are capable, which motivates them. (RW2)

Making collective or structural transformations from group work

According to RW social work practitioners, when rural women act in women's organizations or groups valuing mutual help and harmony, it becomes possible to make collective or structural transformations:

If women have such a group in rural communities and have such organization there [Rural Women], they have more of a chance to change the current status. Depending on only their personal change does not make them more likely [to change the current status]. (RW1)

We try to conciliate differences between wives and their mothers-in-law. We encourage the wife to pay for a trip to travel with her mother-in-law every Mother's Day. During this process, the relationship between wives and their mothers-in-law become better…As long as

we have some activities in the Reading Club, husbands encourage their wives to participate. In addition, by reading, women become models for their children. (RW2)

Utilize authorities

Notably, RW social work practitioners stated that they utilize authorities such as governments, professionals such as lawyers or teachers in universities, and teachers in local communities to reach consensus with different stakeholders or service users. For example, they asked a foundation (comprised of professionals) to persuade the Henan government to let them focus on rural women to engage in the Nutrition Health project. They asked the China Women's Federation (CWF) to introduce them to CWF's local branches and thus get the local community's attention. In order to prevent left-behind rural children being sexually assaulted, they put much effort into training rural teachers who could not even speak the word sex at first, and then let those teachers provide sex education for children and their guardians.

Foster local leaders

The main method used by RW to engage in community works is to foster local leaders in rural communities. They provide training for the rural women who are actively willing to undertake RW's projects, and assist them to make management plans and solve problems:

We thought the local strength is the most important [element] to promote rural communities' development. Thus we pay more attention to fostering local grassroots. We depend on local rural people to promote [our projects]. (RW1)

Acknowledge diversity

From interviews with RW social work practitioners, it is evident that individual rural women have different needs at different life stages, and different rural women have different personal status and needs. They felt there should be diverse projects catering for those various needs. As well, the social workers considered whether their projects were appropriate for communities with specific situations. For example:

I held various activities in order to satisfy different needs of different people of different ages…Through different activities, different people show different talents. For example, some women showed their artistic specialities when we held recreational activities; some women demonstrated their great language expression abilities when we held debating competitions. It is about reaching everybody's potential through various activities. (RW2)

Social work practitioners as different agents

The three RW social work practitioners I interviewed have different educational backgrounds, life experiences and gender experiences. Thus, their focuses are slightly different. The one who has a bachelor's degree in law, especially focused on rural women's legal rights and advocated for better legislation to protect women's rights. The one with a bachelor's degree in sociology mainly focused on education with capacity-building for rural women. The one who manages the Reading Club project in her community mainly emphasized mutual help between rural women and encouraged rural women to read more to be 'good models' for their children.

They all chose to join RW because they shared its values. They were involved in RW for seven, ten, and thirteen years. They all believe in RW's value of mutual help and comply with the principle of capacity-building. It seems as if in all the years of being part of RW have led them to internalize the values of equality and mutual help and they attempt to apply these values in daily practices. For example, the Reading Club manager avoids using her authority as manager to make decisions without the approval of other members:

> *I put things in the WeChat group so that people can discuss it. I can avoid them saying that I decide things by myself. For example, if there is a training opportunity, I let them discuss it. Then, I make the final decisions. Actually, they had the same opinion as me. (RW2)*

All three social workers believe rural women have great potential to achieve social goals. Importantly, they all note that rural women meet many difficulties under unequal gender structures. For example:

> *It is all women's [responsibility] to care for family members….Because women don't have much opportunity in many areas including receiving education and obtaining employment. Women also need to deal with various relationships after they marry and live together with the husband's family. Some of them even experience domestic violence. These all relate to gender. (RW1)*

Two of the RW social workers have studied social work. One of them passed the national examination and achieved national accreditation as a social worker.[37] From interviews with them, however, they

[37] I have introduced the national social work accreditation in China in the first footnote of the methodology chapter. The introduction is as follows:

> *The social work national examination (national examination) started in 2008 in China. The Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA) set up the Social Work Accreditation Office to decide social work accreditation policies and manage the national examination. The MCA also set up the social work professional committee to design the content of the examinations. Some social work professors from universities are members of that committee. Basically, there are three levels of accreditation: junior social worker,*

seem to simply link social work's professionalism with approaches introduced from Western countries such as case evaluation and the participatory approach:

> *Before we learnt social work, we didn't focus much on how to gradually achieve our goals and evaluate the achievements of projects. We know how to describe service users' change through qualitative and quantitative methods after learning about social work. (RW3)*

Enabling factors for empowerment

Having worked in RW for many years, the RW practitioners have internalised RW's values of gender equality, mutual help and human rights, and keep practising those values in their daily work. They have built long-term relationships with many rural women service users. Thus, they understand well how rural women think and act, and the difficult situations they face. RW is an organization established by women for rural women. All RW practitioners I interviewed noted that rural women have fewer opportunities to gain education than men, are required to take the responsibility of caring for family members and educating children, and have fewer opportunities to speak out and use their abilities.

Leaders are models for organization workers or members. The founder of RW was mentioned many times in interviews and highly praised for helping rural women to use their potential and strive for a better life. In addition, leadership is also evident in the organizing role played by one of my interviewees with other rural women members of the Reading Club in her community.

RW's founder worked for China Women's Magazine (a semi-governmental institution). Her close relationships with government and some professionals is important capital for RW in the delivery of services. One of my RW interviewees specifically stated that:

> *Because we know some professionals and scholars who are members of CPPC [Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference], or members of NPC [National People's Congress], they have 'channels' to submit policy recommendations. We can write [policy recommendations] together with these professionals and scholars. (RW3)*

RW's sustainable relationships with some foundations guarantee its funding, which is beneficial to them, allowing them to engage in projects in a sustainable way. As well as the organization itself, there

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social worker, and senior social worker. The text for junior social worker has two subjects: Social Work Comprehensive Ability (primary) and Social Work Practice (primary). The text for social worker has three subjects: Social Work Comprehensive Ability (middle level), Social Work Practice (middle level), and Social Work Legislation and Policy. The text for senior social worker has one subject: Social Work Practice (high level). I list examples of these texts in the Appendix.

are several enabling factors from external structures. For example, RW social work practitioners said that rural women have more options to engage in work other than farming when society's economic situation is good. Moreover, when the rural community is close to prefectures or cities, it is convenient for rural people to commute for work and services. When local governments implemented projects similar to RW, they provided support for RW.

Most importantly, international social movements targeting gender equality and human rights are very significant in persuading Chinese governments to issue policies that are enabling for empowering disadvantaged people. From interviews with RW social work practitioners, it is evident that the 1995 International Women's Conference held in Beijing inspired RW's founder—Lihua Xie—to register a non-profit organization to specifically serve rural women. This drew the Chinese governments' attention to non-profit organizations such as RW. Moreover:

> *Especially in 2010, the International Labour Organization published the Domestic Workers' Convention. We participated in this process because the Chinese government needed to show its attitude and submitted a report. After that, the Central Committee of the Communist Party released the 43 File and several relevant policies to protect domestic workers' rights, to provide them with social insurance [pension, medical insurance and so on], and to ensure they have standard labour contracts. (RW3)*

Furthermore, RW's projects especially the Reading Club are helpful for promoting community cohesion. Good community cohesion further enhances a sense of belonging and mutual help between community members:

> *In fact, there are not many changes in our economic situations. People feel that they have more passion for life when we have the Reading Club. The Reading Club brings people a sense of belonging. They feel very proud to be core members of the Reading Club. The people in nearby villages are very jealous of us. When we have activities, the people who live in those five or six villages nearby all come and have a look. (RW2)*

Convenient internet services are also enabling for RW's rural women practitioners, allowing them to use social media to connect with each other and deliver services.

Constraining factors for empowerment

According to RW practitioners, there are few supports and little funding from governments. Recently, governments have become more willing to fund the social work agencies established by academics. Most first-generation NGOs received funding from overseas, which 'was very sensitive for Chinese

governments because they felt it was out of their control (RW3)'. In addition, regarding support for rural women:

> *Nowadays, the nation's agricultural subsidies are mainly for those families who have lots of land. We are normal rural women. Those policies are not for us. (RW2)*

RW is not located in local rural communities. Thus, as RW practitioners said, they cannot 'accurately recognize rural women's needs (RW1)'. They try to find and foster local female leaders to manage projects in rural communities. Sometimes it is hard to find people who are willing and able to manage projects. Moreover, RW does not have enough resources to cater for rural women's diverse needs such as education, health, and income generation:

> *One difficulty comes from their diverse needs. What we can provide for them depends on the organization's capacity. When I first started my work, I was confused because we could not solve the problems they mentioned. (RW3)*

As well, according to a RW practitioner:

> *Actually among NGOs, we usually talk about cooperating. But I don't know why we have less cooperation in this industry. (RW3)*

All RW practitioners pointed out that rural women experienced many hardships created by unequal gender structures, or the patriarchal culture:

> *We mentioned that rural women are unexplored mines. It is mainly because they don't have opportunities. My village is better than the villages in remote areas. They prefer giving educational opportunities to boys rather than girls. Boys can change their lives through going to school. If there were such chances for girls, girls could also achieve their values by being educated. (RW2)*

> *Through letters, lots of readers consulted Lihua Xie about what to do when they were experiencing domestic violence, assault, and divorce…Some divorced rural women wanted to work outside the area because it was very hard for them to stay in rural areas. (RW3)*

It seems, however, that social workers still work within the current structural framework to serve women. This may strengthen the gender stereotypes of women as 'good' wives and mothers, and the ideology of having 'rational' beings with hard-working abilities to 'adapt' to current structures:

Rural women have low educational levels. They have fewer employment choices. …..The project we discussed with other non-profit organizations today is about improving the health situation in rural communities. We chose to contact rural women first to implement this project. Because in rural areas, men usually take charge of outside things while women are responsible for their family members' health. (RW2)

Currently, the projects we are running are associated with gender status in China. For example, aged care is women's responsibility. In order to assist women, we launched an aged care centre in a rural community. (RW1)

Comparison with the empowerment practices of Australian organizations

Like the Australian social workers I interviewed, RW practitioners relate empowerment to the promotion of people's ability to strive for a better life. RW practitioners, however, did not speak much about transforming unequal structures to better empower individuals.

Like CNV and V4I, RW organizes women's groups and implements educational and recreational projects in rural communities. But by contrast with CNV and V4I, RW has less interaction with governments. Compared with professional social workers in CNV and V4I, RW practitioners spoke less about the values of social justice, social equality, and gender equality.

Most importantly, when trying to serve rural women, RW practitioners use similar methods as professional Australian social workers do, such as listening and encouraging rural women in a respectful way, building trust relationships with rural women, assisting rural women to recognize the rights they have, providing opportunities or building platforms for women to speak out and use their abilities, organizing educational and recreational activities for rural women, and negotiating and cooperating with different stakeholders.

In this research, professional Australian social workers are assumed to understand empowerment and empower service users. As the methods applied by RW practitioners are similar to the empowering strategies utilized by professional Australian social workers, it can be concluded that RW practitioners are also constructing empowerment practices in a technical sense, even though they are not familiar with the word itself.

Maple Women's Psychological Counselling Centre (MWPC)

RW and Maple Women's Psychological Counselling Centre (MWPC) are both first-generation non-profit organizations in China. They were established by women for women. Like RW, MWPC is registered as a small business but operates as a non-profit organization. The founder of MWPC,

Xingjuan Wang, initiated the first hotline for women in China in 1992 and launched MWPC in 1996. From MWPC's official website, [38]its values are 'to influence life with life, to love people, life, and society'. By providing counselling and social support, MWPC aims to promote women's physical and mental health and help women to achieve a dignified life. MWPC has eight hotlines now, and its projects include a single parents service, counselling for rural migrant families, anti-domestic violence services for women, and counselling services for parents who have lost their only child.

I interviewed a female practitioner in MWPC. She had worked in the media industry before joining MWPC and has been working for MWPC for more than ten years. I met the founder of MWPC—Xingjuan Wang—when I interviewed the MWPC practitioner and was able to ask her some questions. Like RW's founder, Xie, Wang had been an editor and journalist of the China Youth Magazine that is affiliated with the China Youth Committee. Even though she is eighty-eight years old, Wang is still active in encouraging MWPC to deliver more services for women.

Defining empowerment

Because of the length of time the MWPC practitioner had worked as a social work practitioner, I directly asked her how she understood empowerment. She pointed out that the difference between MWPC and other psychological counselling organizations is that 'MWPC is specifically devoted to empowering women (MWPC1)'. Empowerment is a goal that is embedded in every individual case of MWPC. Because women are socially constrained by the gender roles of being wives and mothers, the MWPC practitioner aimed to empower women as independent persons who have citizenship rights:

> *It is a big topic about the concept—empowerment. Society treats women as second-class citizens. Women should be 'good girls' in the family before they get married. After they get married, they need to be subordinate to their husbands. When their husbands die, they need to be subordinate to their sons. She doesn't have equal and independent individual value and rights… She is a human being. The key point is that she should have a choice. (MWPC1)*

Therefore, according to the MWPC practitioner, empowerment is associated with women's consciousness raising about their citizenship rights and women's capacity-building through striving for a better life:

> *We have psychological counselling principles for anti-domestic violence: warmth, accompaniment, empowerment. It is easy for people to think that empowerment is from top to bottom. In order to make it easy for counsellors to help women, we changed*

[38] The information of introducing MWPC is from its website http://www.maple.org.cn/.

empowerment ['fuquan'—'give power'] to 'funeng' ['improve capacity']. It is to let them raise their consciousness of their rights and have substantial rights for a new life. (MWPC1)

How to empower

Empowerment practices and projects

The MWPC practitioner mostly mentioned two projects: the Women's Hotline and Migrant Family Education. The Women's Hotline was opened in 1992 and was the first hotline for women in China. Before the establishment of MWPC in 1996, Wang had launched a women's research association in 1988 and attempted to engage in gender studies in China to let the society raise its consciousness about women's status. The biggest difficulty Wang met was the lack of research funds. During that time, grassroots organizations received little attention from Chinese governments. Gaining grants from oversea foundations, Wang decided to combine research and service practice, thus opening the first hotline for women in China in 1992. In 1995, along with the convening of the International Women's Conference in Beijing (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 1995), Wang launched the workshop of Assistance for Women and utilized her network in the media industry to advertise their services. This attracted the attention of foreign journalists, researchers, organizations, and even politicians. It was, however, 'politically sensitive' to have too much attention from foreign countries. Therefore, the affiliation between Wang's research institution and its sponsoring government institution was broken. In 1996, Wang registered the MWPC as a small business and continued running it as if it were a non-profit organization[39].

As Wang mentioned:

In the early time, we helped women to release the psychological pressure they were under and tried to improve their quality of life…At first, our values were love, sincerity, being caring, being kind…You [service users] told us your concerns. We tried to help you deal with your concerns…The principle was that women research women, women educate women, and women help women. At that time, I thought, I am a woman and I wanted to help them. (MWPC 2)

At that time, there were not many people with telephones at home. Therefore, women who asked for help through the women's hotline, were financially well off and living in urban areas. The MWPC has eight hotlines now with different concerns such as anti-domestic violence and relationship counselling.

[39] In China, according to the registration legislation for civil non-profit organizations (Ministry of Civil Affairs, 1998, cited in http://www.mca.gov.cn/article/gk/fg/shzzgl/201507/20150715847908.shtml), an organization has to find a government department or institution to be its 'supervisor' in order to register as a non-profit organization.

Nowadays, many rural migrant women in Beijing have access to MWPC's services. According to the MWPC practitioner, they now have 600 to 700 volunteers. They need seven volunteers to work every day except Saturdays from 9:00am to 8:00pm. Volunteers need to 'be married and open-minded, kind and to speak clearly and logically (MWPC1)'. MWPC provides volunteers with training in 'marriage and family, anti-domestic violence, women and children's health, sex education, legislation, mental health, and the basic principles of psychological counselling (MWPC1)'. The hotline project was the first project of MWPC, which offered a chance for women to be respectfully heard by other women and to be given information about how to access more services.

The MWPC practitioners I interviewed particularly described the project of Migrant Family Education. At the beginning in 2006, MWPC planned to start a project for rural migrant women. So Wang and the MWPC team went to many suburbs in Beijing and interviewed many rural migrant women working in Beijing:

> *The results of our investigations really surprised us. These [migrant] women mainly focused on three issues that were not about themselves: children's education, their relationship with their children, and the safety of girls…..As we know, the majority of migrant rural women just stay home and take care of children…..When it is winter, they (the migrant family) live in those places (shanties) without enough room for eating and sitting, and even without toilets…Some children have been in Beijing for three years but never been to Tiananmen Square. Beijing means a very dusty road from their home to school…When rural women migrate to cities, they don't understand their husbands as much as before. Many husbands lived with other women before the wife came. Therefore, there are many women who have become depressed since they came…But when you investigate, they care more about their children's education…Children do not adapt to this environment because parents do not adapt to the environment…Since we had this project, we went into their homes to provide counselling, and undertook classes for parents and workshops for teachers. (MWPC1)*

Empowerment skills

Respect, love, build relationships, educate

The MWPC practitioner has been engaged in the Migrant Family Education project since 2006. She describes their serving method as cognitive behaviour analysis. It seems that the social workers use their own life and working experiences to creatively deliver services in terms of the values of care or love, respect, mutual understanding, and help. They design projects according to the needs of rural migrant women, build trust with these women, respect them, and care for them. They attempt to understand the thoughts and behaviour of rural migrant women and also provide education for rural

women to help them acknowledge how they can change themselves to make the situation better. For instance:

> *Actually we don't need to be that professional [as a psychologist]. You respect them and ask what kinds of help they want to have…They said that they wanted us to help their children and let their children study hard. A young rural migrant woman cried when we were talking…She said that she has been in Beijing about three years but no one, especially a professional, has treated her so kindly…Loving people and the society, and respecting every life. You need to provide counselling by loving others. (MWPC1)*

> *There is a thirty-minute class or counselling to teach them to communicate with children with love…When children come back home after school, [parents should] ask: 'How was today in school; did you have any problems; was there anything that makes you happy; were there any interesting people?'….We teach her [the mother] some methods to let her educate children with such ideologies…. Actually when you are asking and talking, the child is thinking how to become a better [person]. (MWPC1)*

MWPC social work practitioners mainly focus on respecting and caring for women to help women feel better and have the motivation to strive for a better life. They referred to that process as the psychological transformation of individual women.

Cooperating with governments, schools, and other non-profit organizations

As MWPC practitioners mentioned, they built cooperation with other non-profit organizations such as Rural Women and an organization supporting same sex attracted people to advertise and promote their services of anti-domestic violence. As well, depending on the close connection with the China Youth Committee (CYC), MWPC practitioners gained the chance to help 'problematic' children of rural migrant families. Thus, they can easily approach service users through local branches of CYC and schools.

Social work practitioners as different agents

I interviewed an MWPC practitioner and asked a few questions of MWPC's founder—Xingjuan Wang. Clearly, they both strongly believe that it is important for women to recognise their rights as independent people and take action to change bad situations. Wang specially profiled a picture about how they kept improving their ideologies of serving women and spoke about combining social work methods with psychological counselling:

Our most distinctive characteristic is that we combine psychology with social work…..Actually we are using a method called psychological-society treatment introduced from overseas. It is a treatment method of social work. We don't even have books here. It would be great if you could get these kinds of books from Australia. (MWPC2)

Enabling factors for empowerment

In MWPC, research and practice are combined. This is because of MWPC's history of transforming from a research institution to a service organization. Using its close connection with many universities and overseas organizations, MWPC continues engaging in research and advocating for governments to amend policies and legislation such as the Marriage Law and Anti-Domestic Violence Law. Furthermore, Wang's persistence in supporting women, significantly inspired MWPC's practitioners. Because MWPC specifically provides services for women, its practitioners are well aware of the patriarchal oppression of women.

In addition, according to the MWPC practitioner, once MWPC made an agreement with government, government did not intervene too much in how they engaged in projects:

Then once you provide a plan, they admire your plans. Then you make a report according to this project's budget. They just let you do it and they will not change. (MWPC1)

Constraining factors for empowerment

MWPC practitioners mainly focus on the transformation of women's psychology. Except for mentioning patriarchal culture, they did not point out how unequal structures such as the rural–urban dual system in China result in difficult situations for the disadvantaged. The problem here is that focusing too much on changing individuals or making individuals adapt to current structures, may 'legitimize' structural inequalities.

Nevertheless, MWPC practitioners described the poor living situations of rural migrant families in cities. The families live in small shanties that do not have enough space for eating and sleeping and are very cold in winter. Women especially in those families face many issues such as their children's education, the family's financial stress, and their relationship with their husband. According to the MWPC practitioner, many rural migrant women suffer from depression. In addition, sometimes they experience discrimination from 'privileged urban citizens'.

Moreover, the MWPC practitioner particularly reported that many women have internalized the patriarchal culture, which makes it very hard for them to assist those women:

They can't live without a man. The culture has already come into her heart and become one of her consciousnesses…In order to provide the child with a 'complete home', they don't want to divorce even though they don't feel happy in the marriage, even though they are in pain, even though they are experiencing domestic violence. (MWPC2)

As well, according to MWPC practitioners, they cannot obtain much attention from governments because governments are more focused on the current urgent issues, such as aging. Sometimes, service users recommended by governments or schools are not the ones who need the services most, but the ones who 'have a good relationship with governments (MWPC1)'.

Comparison with the empowerment practices of Australian organizations

Like the Australian professional social workers I interviewed, MWPC practitioners also link empowerment to the transformation of individuals to have more understanding about their rights and a greater capacity to strive for a better life. Nevertheless, MWPC practitioners seem to mainly talk about the phenomenon of domestic violence, rather than explain patriarchal oppression in depth. MWPC seems to mainly focus on women's transformation, rather than work on strategies to change the patriarchal culture.

Like the Australian professional social workers, MWPC practitioners respect women service users, listen carefully to what they say, accompany them as they go through difficult times, assist them to make decisions and take action, and help them to understand their rights. Therefore, it can be concluded that MWPC practitioners are also constructing empowerment practices in a technical sense even though they are not familiar with the word itself.

China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation (CFPA) Microfinance

In 1996, the World Bank began a poverty alleviation project in the Qingba Mountain area in China. One part of this project was to provide microcredit for poor people there. The CFPA then took charge of managing the provision of microcredit. In 2006, CFPA Microfinance was transformed from a microcredit department of CFPA to an independent social enterprise.[40] CFPA Microfinance's mission is to provide microcredit, insurance, finance management, and ecommerce services for poor rural

[40] There is no agreed definition for social enterprise. I use the definition of social enterprise cited on the website of Social Traders (https://www.socialtraders.com.au/about-social-enterprise/what-is-a-social-enterprise/social-enterprise-definition/): 'Social enterprises are businesses that trade to intentionally tackle social problems, improve communities, provide people [with] access to employment and training, or help the environment. [They] … are driven by a public or a community cause, … derive most of their income from trade, not donations or grants [and] use the majority … of their profits to work towards their social mission'.

groups and to help them start businesses and increase incomes.[41] In 2017, CFPA Microfinance launched 276 local branches in twenty-one provinces in China, had 362,753 clients, and offered around 8.6 billion yuan in loans.

As well as offering loans for poor rural people, CFPA Microfinance provides them with free training in agricultural techniques, environment protection, and finance management. It founded a foundation in 2001 to particularly assist rural people who have met with difficulties. It has also developed application tools for mobile phones to help rural cooperatives manage their finances and to provide a platform for well-off people to lend money to poor people.

According to the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation (CFPA) Microfinance (2017), 92.7 per cent of its clients are rural residents (hold rural identification in China), of which 82.9 per cent are women. I interviewed two practitioners from the CFPA Microfinance. The female practitioner I interviewed has a bachelor's degree in economics and works in the Social Performance Department of CFPA Microfinance. The male practitioner I interviewed has a bachelor's degree in law. He joined CFPA Microfinance in 2013, and works in the Risk Management Department.

Defining empowerment

The practitioners I interviewed have worked in the social service field for more than two years, thus are eligible to attend the national social work examination. After I told them that that this research focuses on rural women's empowerment, however, they did not respond from this perspective. It seems that they are not familiar with the word. Therefore, I did not directly ask them what their understandings of empowerment were.

How to empower

Empowerment project

CFPA Microfinance practitioners described its history of transforming from a poverty alleviation project of CFPA to a successful social enterprise. Clearly, the main aim of CFPA Microfinance is to provide microcredit to poor rural people. The model of group loans comes from Muhammad Yunus's microcredit model for rural women in Bangladesh. I asked CFPA Microfinance practitioners why they mainly offer microcredit to rural women. They answered:

[41] The information of introducing CFPA Microfinance is from its website (http://www.cfpamf.org.cn/company.html).

Women are relatively stable in a family. If the woman stays at home, the family has its core…..Thus, we can help women improve their family status because men need to get their wives' approval if the men want to borrow from us. (CPFA Microfinance1)

Because in a family, a woman's desire for development is stronger than man's. Because women usually take care of the whole family, she needs to feed all the family members… In a family, women are usually in charge of arranging the finances…We tell them how to spend the loan when they get it. (CPFA Microfinance2)

Interviews with the CFPA Microfinance practitioners show that their key value is to make microcredit available to poor rural people. Pursuing that value drove the CFPA Microfinance transformation to a social enterprise. The transformation is market-oriented. It could therefore be argued that CPFA Microfinance may more and more focus on profits rather than people. I asked the practitioners whether they intended to offer loans to well-off rural families. They answered:

We just want to guarantee that we always serve the poor people. It is a universal value [of ours]…Some organizations changed completely to companies because of high costs and fewer benefits…Even though our enterprise has a commercial operating model, our principle is the same as before. (CFPA Microfinance1)

CFPA runs like a large cooperate chain with well-functioning structures of obtaining funding or loans from governments and banks, building local branches, improving risk management, participating in the financial market, developing new financial management tools, and so on. Although running like a corporate chain, CFPA Microfinance practitioners distinguished their practices of serving rural people from banks and governments:

Definitely we have high costs. From a finance aspect, fewer services and less cost can achieve higher values and profits. We need to cover all the travelling costs of our staff to offer loans and collect payment from rural people…. Sometimes we need to drive about four hours to offer loans to remote rural communities…..In terms of their nature of pursuing profits, banks cannot do such things like us (CFPA Microfinance2)

Farmers know whether the management project they chose can earn money or not. Actually they make decisions according to their long-time experiences…We only need to provide help when they are ready…Some local governments encourage rural people to raise rabbits. Governments gave rabbits to them directly. But rural people killed and ate these rabbits because they did not know where to sell them. This is not useful. (CPFA Microfinance2)

As well as providing microcredit to rural people, CFPA Microfinance launched a Social Performance Department that is in charge of providing free training for rural people to learn agriculture techniques and how to protect the environment. CFPA Microfinance practitioners also mentioned that their local workers who offer loans to rural people build supportive relationships with rural service users. They show trust to their rural service users. They need to provide enough information about the loan contract to rural people and sometimes teach illiterate clients to sign their names on the contract. In addition, rural women choose the members who apply for the group loan together. This may consolidate the trust relationship between those women and improve community cohesion.

Empowerment skills

Respect, trust, build relationships, educate

Providing economic support is the main way for CFPA Microfinance to help poor rural people, especially women. From interviews with CFPA Microfinance practitioners, it is clear that they respect rural people, attempt to build trust with them, listen their opinions about what they want to engage in to alleviate poverty, provide advice for them, assist them to make decisions, and offer them loans to take action. For example:

> *They know best what they want to do. We only need to provide our help when they are ready. She [the client)] wants to do something but she feels that she doesn't have the capability. We provide training for her to improve her capability…. If she thinks our method is good, she will use it…When we provide training for her, we don't make choices for her. (CFPA Microfinance2)*

Poor rural people are not able to apply for loans from banks because they do not qualify for normal loans. They feel very frustrated at being excluded from the credit system of banks. As well, governments' coercive intervention usually results in causing harm to rural people. The respect and trust they receive from CFPA Microfinance practitioners, however, help rural people have more confidence in themselves.

Local workers serve in person

CFPA Microfinance practitioners also said that they selected local people as their workers. Their local workers are familiar with the local situation and the local people. Local workers provide loans to rural service users in person, which means that rural people do not need to travel long distances to cities to get and repay loans. For instance:

> *Because our loan officers and our supervisors are also local people, it is easy for them to collect clients' information including personality, current work, and reputation…It is usual*

for them to drive about five or six hours to offer loans and collect repayments…After signing the contract, we give the client money directly or we transfer money to their bank account….Because it is difficult for rural people to repay even ten thousand yuan, we let them to repay parts of the loan per month. (CFPA Microfinance2)

Simply providing economic support for disadvantaged rural people, however, may still be treating them as 'rational beings' in the current unequal economic system. This may put the responsibility on disadvantaged rural people to move out of poverty, without considering that individuals' difficult situations are largely caused by structural inequalities. When mainly working within the framework of risk management to deliver services, the human focus may be lost. In addition, although 82.9 per cent of CFPA Microfinance's clients are rural women, it seems that CFPA Microfinance simply uses women's group loans as a model of credit rather than clearly aiming at promoting women's gender status in rural areas. In practice, might be the man who takes the power of managing loans. There are doubts, therefore, whether CFPA Microfinance is playing a role in challenging unequal gender structures.

Social work practitioners as different agents

The two CFPA Microfinance social work practitioners work in different departments of CFPA. From interviews with them, the practitioner who works in the risk management department has more experience of working with rural people and more understanding of the ideology and method of how they serve poor rural people.

Enabling factors for empowerment

CFPA Microfinance was a poverty alleviation project of CFPA, which was funded by the World Bank. Thus, because of its history as a project implemented by government, CFPA Microfinance obtained approval from the China Development Bank (as a governmental financial institution supervised by the Chinese Central Government) to offer loans:

It is illegal for financial institutions such as banks to offer loans to an organization that then tries to use these loans from banks as capital to provide loans for others. We got approval from the nation to do this. (CFPA Microfinance2)

Furthermore, having a close relationship with the World Bank helps CFPA Microfinance build cooperation with other international financial institutions such as the International Finance Corporation and two other financial institutions – Responsibility, and Symbiotics. The investments from those financial institutions are very helpful to CFPA Microfinance for expanding its services commercially. Its successful commercial management model underpins its survival to a large extent:

Actually it is not fair to us to only acknowledging us as a social enterprise. If you offer such a number of loans every year, you would already be very rich as a normal microfinance company….Our enterprise has had such a rapid expansion because we have accumulated enough experience, because we know enough about our clients. (CFPA Microfinance2)

In addition, due to certain policies relating to poverty alleviation, CFPA Microfinance is entitled to enjoy particular tax deductions.

Constraining factors for empowerment

CFPA Microfinance borrows money from banks. It needs to repay both principle and interest to those banks. Thus, a loan from CFPA Microfinance has a high interest rate:

We cannot solve the issue of the high interest rates of loans…We must repay the principle and high interest for the money we borrow from banks. (CPFA Microfinance2)

Moreover, CFPA Microfinance is registered a social enterprise, not a financial institution. It is tax free for financial institution to provide microcredit.

The nation prefers providing funding and support for government banks such as the Rural Credit Cooperative:

I can't see support from the nation for us. It just lets you survive by yourself. It doesn't inform us that our project should be ended or not. After all, we have 180 local branches in twenty-one provinces in China. (CFPA Microfinance2)

The lack of support and funding from governments is always the main difficulty for CFPA Microfinance, and its rapid expansion since 2006 has increased its needs for funding.

Comparison with the empowerment practices of Australian organizations

CFPA Microfinance practitioners attempt to assist service users to improve their capacity to make a better life. This is similar to Australian professional social workers' understanding that empowerment is about assisting service users to have more control in their lives. CFPA Microfinance, however, mainly focuses on providing economic support for rural individuals to help them escape poverty, which may overlook how the unequal economic system causes poverty for poor rural people.

Nevertheless, CFPA Microfinance practitioners spoke about respecting and trusting service users, listening to their opinions, acknowledging their strengths, encouraging them to make plans and use their abilities, and providing them with training. Those serving methods are similar to some of the

empowering methods used by Australian professional social workers. Thus, it can be concluded that CFPA Microfinance practitioners apply empowering methods to some extent.

Wanzai Social Worker Team (WSW)

Wanzai Social Worker Team (WSW)

Wanzai Prefecture

Waizai Prefecture is administratively managed by Yibin City of Jiangxi Province. It is located in south-east China, and occupies 1719.63 square kilometres. By 2016, there were 571,364 people whose households were registered in the Wanzai Prefecture, among which 413,540 had rural household registration (rural ID).[42]The majority of the Wanzai population have Han ethnicity (Dai, 2009)[43]. There are 181 administrative rural communities in Wanzai (Dai, 2009). Of its population, 72 per cent are rural people, making the agricultural industry greatly important to Wanzai's economy. Wanzai is well known for its agricultural products, including lily, chilli, green soy bean, and peanuts. The food industry is therefore thriving in Wanzai. Making fireworks is a famous traditional art in Wanzai, which creates huge profits for its approximately five hundred firework factories (Baidu Encyclopadia, 2016). By 2007, the average rural person's income per year was only around 3500 yuan (around 700 AUD) (MCA, 2008). With its large rural population and associated agricultural tradition, Wanzai was chosen by the Ministry of Civil Affairs of PRC (MCA) in a 2007 pilot to foster rural social worker teams. In 2007, Wanzai and Fenghuang were only two 'rural pilots' of seventy-five pilot places in total (Dai, 2009).

The history of promoting social work in Wanzai

The Chinese central government issued the Decision to Build a Harmonious Society in 2006 in which it promoted a grand social worker team for improving the governing ability of the Chinese Communist Party. Since the issue of the 2006 Decision, all province governments began planning to implement what it proposed. The Civil Affairs Department of Jiangxi Province (CADJ) decided to carry out social work pilot projects in Wanzai. This is because Wanzai has a long-term reputation of engaging in civil affairs works. The secretary of Wazai Prefecture Communist Party Committee, Xiaoping Chen, supported the decision to promote social work in Wanzai. His former work as a teacher and a visiting scholar in the United States of America for one year influenced his attitude towards endorsing social work.

[42] The information is cited from the official website of Wanzai Prefecture government （http://xxgk.wanzai.gov.cn/wzxtjj/zfxxgk_29183/gzdt_29186/tjsj_29190/201709/t20170914_394547.html）.

[43] According to the National Bureau of Statistics in China, 91.5% of Chinese population are Han (cited in http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/tjgb/rkpcgb/qgrkpcgb/201104/t20110428_30327.html).

Wanzai social work model

Based on cooperation with social work teachers and students from several universities in Jiangxi Province, the Wanzai government explored how to engage in social work in Luzhou Village, Kangle Community, and Wanzai Aged Care Centre in 2007. In 2008, the Wanzai Prefecture government issued a range of policies on practising social work in rural and urban communities, in semi-governmental institutions including schools and hospitals, and in enterprises (Dai, 2009). Basically, social work was embedded into every part of the administrative system of Waizai government. There were social work leading teams, social work stations, and social worker groups launched at different levels of government. Social work students were organized by the Wanzai government to lead government officials to undertake social work practices. The cost of developing social work was included in the financial budget of the Wanzai government—basically 200,000 yuan and 30 per cent of lottery foundation earnings every year (Wanzai Civil Affairs Bureau, 2009). Based on the initial investigation undertaken by government officials from the CADJ and Wanzai Civil Affairs Bureau and social work teachers and students, there were social work projects designed for left-behind groups, poor rural people, and elders in aged care centres. Simply summarized, Wanzai social worker teams attempted to link material resources with poor people, organize educational and recreational activities for left-behind groups and elders in aged care centres, help rural women in Baishui village rebuild their agricultural cooperative, find appropriate people (mainly government officials) to build caring relationships with left-behind children, and organize groups based on hobbies such as dancing and singing in rural communities.

Lily Social Work Agency in Wanzai

When the Wanzai Prefecture government decided to develop social work in 2006, they assigned a female teacher from the local school to be the director of the Wanzai Civil Affairs Bureau (WCA) to take charge of social work practices in Wanzai. She established the Lily Social Work Agency (LSW) in 2008. The LSW is affiliated with the WCA. As a social worker (having passed the national examination and having been awarded social worker accreditation), she is seen as the professional leader of the promotion of social work's development in Wanzai. She hired a group of young people to work for LSW. Also, being a government official, she obtained funding for LSW's social work services. Interview information from an LSW practitioner says that the agency employs six young people as full-time practitioners. These young people have had some training in social work and some of them have attained their social worker accreditation. Many government officials, especially those who have social worker accreditation, have joined LSW as volunteers or as 'associate social workers'.

Research experience in Wanzai

Most information on the practice of social work in Wanzai comes from the years between 2007 and 2009. I undertook research fieldwork in Wanzai in June 2016 and interviewed four social work practitioners in Wanzai. All of them are government officials working in Wanzai Civil Affairs Bureau (WCA), town government, the rural administrative committee, and the local women's federation, respectively. Two of them are women and two of them are men. One female and one male practitioner have obtained their social worker accreditation by passing the national examination. I also interviewed an elderly service user who was involved in the Lily Social Work Agency's (LSW) social work project for left-behind elders in Jiaohu Village.

When I undertook my fieldwork in Wanzai, the social work practitioners treated me very well. They took me to different pilot places, including towns and villages, and provided me with lovely meals. Their behaviour was part of the traditional Chinese culture of hospitality and also because of my identity as a 'professional social work researcher'. When I went to pilot places, I was with a group of officials from WCA. This was part of the reason for local town or village governments agreeing to my interviews. Most often, I engaged in my interviews with a practitioner with other government officials around us. In order to engage in research, I needed to comply with Wanzai practitioners' arrangements. This type of information can also be included as research data.

Defining empowerment

Most of my interviewees in Wanzai are local government officials. They seemed unfamiliar with the word 'empowerment' which has been introduced from Western countries. Therefore, I did not directly ask them about their understanding of the word.

How to empower

Empowerment projects

Social work project for left-behind children in Liaohang Village

There is a social work project for left-behind children in Liaohang Village, and a social work project for left-behind elders in Jiaohu Village. According to interviews, the social work project in Liaohang is funded by the Wanzai Prefecture government, and that in Jiaohu is funded by the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA) of the People's Republic of China (PRC).

In Liaohang, the project utilized an old government building from which to serve the left-behind children. The left-behind children, whose mother or father, or both, go to cities to work, can come to the building to read, play games, and access counselling services. Other community members are also welcome to organize activities there. Recently, WCA hired another young social worker to mainly

manage social work practices in Liaohang Village. In Liaohang, I interviewed a male government official of the Liaohang Village government, who had attended the national examination in 2008 and was awarded junior social worker accreditation. As he described:

> *Essentially, it is our job, our responsibility to help them. Generally, the Wanzai Civil Affair Bureau offers funds to us….We mainly provide services for the children whose parents go out to work…Some of these children's families are very poor… We provide them with material assistance. We bring those children together and provide counselling for them…At the beginning, they didn't want to come here. But once they have come here several times, they feel good when they play with other children. Then they like to come. (WSW1)*

In addition, he also spoke about how they helped poor left-behind elders:

> *A left-behind elder was sick…His neighbour told us that he had difficulty making a living. We called some of our social workers [village officials] and some volunteers to help him. We organized resources and brought the village doctor to his home and provided him with free treatment. (WSW1)*

When I asked him about women's circumstances, he mentioned that there were around 300 to 400 women working for two fireworks factories located in Liaohang Village. They can earn about 1000 CNY per month. Women are mainly responsible for domestic work. Because the fireworks factories are near their homes, it is convenient for them to look after their children. According to this male social work practitioner, those women have a relatively good life so their children do not have as many issues as other left-behind children whose parents go out to work or whose families are poor. As well, their children do not show as much interest in in participating in the social work project in Liaohang.

Social work project for left-behind elders in Jiaohu Village

In Jiaohu, I interviewed a male practitioner who was involved in the social work project for left-behind elders in Jiaohu. He was an accountant and had worked for several decades for the Jiaohu Village government. Like Liaohang, the project also utilized a government building from which to offer their social work services. This project is funded by the MCA of the PRC, and is undertaken by the social work practitioners employed by LSW. Thus, this male practitioner (a previous government official) identified himself as a volunteer for that project.

Due to knowing local people and the local situation well, he and another two volunteers (all retired government officials) are responsible for informing the left-behind elders of the kinds of activities being organized, and when and where to participate in those activities. LSW pays their telephone bills.

According to this male practitioner, they organize three or four activities every month. Generally, there are sixty to seventy elders who join in each activity.

The activities are designed by LSW social work practitioners. In order to attract elders, they offer gifts to everyone who attends. The activities include teaching left-behind elders to dance, sing, draw, and write, and they even organize day trips for them. During interviews, this practitioner and an elderly service user highlighted how social work service benefits left-behind elders:

> *We hold activities such as teaching elders singing, dancing, and taking exercise. We also give them some small gifts and souvenirs such as a vest, a T-shirt…They are all satisfied and happy with our activities… We have many left-behind elders here….Others complained when they saw the left-behind elders were having fun by participating in activities and getting souvenirs. (WSW2)*

> *I attended all the activities. They taught me how to play Tai-Chi boxing and writing, drawing, and singing songs…We appreciate them very much…They also gave us gifts such as an electric kettle, an electric fan, washing powder, soap….The government gave us so many things. I appreciate the government from my heart. (An elderly service user in Jiaohu)*

In Jiaohu, I also interviewed a social worker from LSW. All Jiaohu interviewees mentioned the popularity of the social work project for left-behind elders in Jiaohu:

> *At the beginning, some people questioned that it must have been another example of the government only paying lip service. After participating in our project for one month, they thought that our work is really different from government work. (WSW3)*

One of my interviewees in Jiaohu works in the women's federation (the local branch of the China Women's Federation). She has worked there for more than twenty years. She spoke about how it was really hard for her and other workers in the local women's federation when it was their task to persuade women in rural areas to only have one child. Now, practitioners in the local women's federation are more relaxed than before.[44] They help women to build good relationships with their husbands and mothers-in-law. They have a belief that people should attempt to understand each other. In a family, the husband and wife should negotiate and try to understand each other. When the women did not listen to their suggestions, they felt very angry and disappointed. The interviewee mentioned that men usually make the important decisions in a family and women take care of family

[44] Since the twenty-first century, the Chinese central government relaxed the implementation of the One Child Policy.

members. She also said that practitioners in the local women's federation depend on the policies of upper-level governments to provide support for rural people and there are few specific policies to support rural women.

Social work project for left-behind women in Baihe Village

Baihe Village is located in the mountains. The quality of the road to Baihe is not good. Due to constant rain and the associated safety issues, WSW practitioners did not take me to Baihe. As the social work project for women in Baihe is conducted by LSW social workers, I discussed it with the leader of LSW. At the beginning of 2008, they used the funds of LSW to help a hundred Baishui women rebuild their cooperative. Thereafter, they applied a 50,000 CNY fund specifically to assist thirty left-behind women. They provided counselling services for them, held activities for them and their children to build good relationships, and linked them into resources. Encouraged by LSW social workers, some of their women service users in Baishui organized singing or performing groups and earned some money from performing to others.

Empowerment skills

Mutual help in collectives, caring, listening carefully, and respecting

Social work practices in Wanzai are mainly involved in organizing educational and recreational activities for left-behind groups. Mutual help in collectives is highly valued. Left-behind people feel cared for and supported, and have a sense of belonging in collectives. Interviews highlighted that Wanzai social work practitioners, especially those involved in LSW, care for and respect service users, and listen carefully to what their needs are. In comparison to the usual government work of offering basic material assistances to the disadvantaged, the findings show that this social work practice is more interactive with service users as well as more caring and respectful of them. This is shown in the following two extracts from the interviews:

> *This is what the life of left-behind elders looks like… This is a house made of mud. There is a dog beside them. The dog is their only companion…They are very poor and lonely… As that male participant said to you, we taught him writing. We taught him writing because we want him to feel that he is important/valuable. He said that he has hopes for his life and he feels that he can do something. (WSW3)*

> *My children work outside. My wife and I stay at home. We are left-behind elders. We are boring. After finishing farming, we look at the skies at night. We have nothing to do. Since there are activities here, we have learnt much knowledge that we didn't know before…When they had such activities, I felt it is novel. (The elderly service user in Jiaohu)*

Utilizing governments' resources

The development of social work is primarily promoted by the Wanzai Prefecture government. There are a social worker leading team, social work stations, and social worker groups launched at different levels of government in Wanzai. Having the double identity of being government officials and social work practitioners, Wanzai social work practitioners utilize government resources to engage in social work projects funded by the Wanzai Prefecture government.

In addition, the founder of LSW is the director of WCA and is responsible for managing social work practices in Wanzai. Therefore, when LSW gained funds to implement specific social work projects, the founder of LSW utilized her networks and resources in government to commence those projects. For example, as social work is included as a type of government work in Wanzai, she asked a driver of WCA to drive LSW social work practitioners to visit rural people. In Jiaohu, she called on three village government officials to volunteer for LSW, and arranged with the local government for a building to be used for service delivery. She also asked the local government to refer people to them.

Notably, service users mostly deem all Wanzai social work practices, including those engaged in by LSW social workers (six young people with or without social worker accreditation), to be government workers. Usually, people in China respect authorities such as professionals, skilful workers, knowledgeable elders, and government officials. Therefore, when rural service users feel that 'the government' cares about them and tries to provide more support for them, they feel valued and good:

> *Some young people taught us to write. We learn something from them. I very much appreciate all our governments for their kind care of us. (The elderly service user in Jiaohu)*

Cooperating with universities

Social work teachers and students of universities made important contributions to promoting social work practices in Wanzai. From the interview with an LSW social worker, it is clear that LSW helped social work students undertake placements in Wanzai. Because the 'Wanzai social work model' is very famous, many social work teachers come to LSW and provide training for LSW workers. This helps improve the social work practices engaged in by LSW. LSW also cooperates with media and with other governments. Clearly, attention from universities, media, and other governments is helpful in motivating the Wanzai government to keep promoting social work practices.

Social work practitioners as different agents

There are government officials in Wanzai who have obtained social worker accreditation and work as volunteers for LSW. Compared to other government officials, they have more understanding of social

work as a profession. They may, however, simply relate the professionalism of social work with case writing and evaluation methods:

> *Through learning social work, we know various professional methods…Previously we didn't take [case] notes. But now if we receive a message that someone needs help, we need to make some previous evaluation. (MSW1)*

LSW is a social work agency. The interview with an LSW practitioner demonstrates that they give more care, show more respect to rural service users, and make more substantial efforts to deliver services for rural people than governments:

> *I think that rural social workers should have 'three hearts': love heart, patient heart, and responsive heart…. Some rural people only have a low level of education. They can't understand you at all. We need to love them and be patient…In our agency, even if you don't have social work education or training, I can teach you only if you have those 'three hearts'…If you don't focus on implementing the social work project well, your service users will not trust you…Therefore, it can be seen that our government's credibility is weakening [government usually only pay 'lip service']. (WSW3)*

If government officials were to work according to the values described by the LSW practitioner, they could be good social workers.

In interviews with a male Wanzai practitioner, a female worker in a local women's federation, and an LSW practitioner, none mentioned the kinds of gender inequalities experienced by women in rural areas. Therefore, there is not much difference between the social work project for left-behind women and that for left-behind elders.

Enabling factors for empowerment

Most importantly, the Wanzai Prefecture government made significant efforts to promote social work practices in Wanzai. There are available funds and facilities, including places and transportation, and job-ready practitioners and volunteers for engaging in social work practices. When I undertook fieldwork in Wanzai, a group of government workers warmly welcomed me. I felt that they indeed had great passion for social work practices and felt creative and vigorous in their practice. Due to the Chinese central government encouraging local governments to develop social work practices, government workers may have a bigger passion for engaging in social work practices because they feel that their work is valued by upper-level governments. Therefore, when local governments promote social work practices, it helps motivate the local community to pay more attention to improving the current administrative system of service and enhancing mutual help.

In addition, LSW's leader plays a crucial role in sustaining the operation of social work practices in Wanzai:

> *As I said, I have the advantage of being a government official employed to develop social work. I have worked in rural areas before and built connections with many people there…. I have a perseverance personality. If the Wanzai Prefecture government doesn't give us funding, I will take that policy file [45] to ask for funding from them…Some people don't take this [promoting social work] as the obligation I do, they will not visit leaders and ask for funding from leaders. (WSW3)*

Whether they are government officials in Wanzai, or social work practitioners of LSW, they are all local people who are familiar with local situations and service users, and can speak with local accents.

Constraining factors for empowerment

The Wanzai Prefecture government is very powerful in the promotion of social work practices but it also has the power to restrict how social work practice is implemented in Wanzai:

> *We are workers for non-profit organizations. We do not only pay lip service like governments…We are lucky nowadays. We don't have the opportunity to undertake social work practices if we don't have government approval. (WSW3)*

> *Village officials recommend their friends and relatives as potential service users to us. They think that we are from the WCA and want to get some benefits. That's why I require our agency workers to visit or investigate every person that they recommended. (WSW3)*

Social work practices in Wanzai are most likely to be an expansion of current administrative services. Debatably, they might be part of a government strategy to calm the complaints of disadvantaged groups. That is to say, governments may not really attempt to understand the social work profession and how it champions social equality, justice, and empowerment. It can be seen from the interviews with Wanzai social work practitioners that their understanding of the social work profession is that it mainly concerns providing more help to disadvantaged people. Largely relying on governments' willingness to fund and promote social work means that the social work practice lacks sustainability. In addition, if LSW does not have a leader who has a social work professional knowledge base and who insists on promoting social work practices in Wanzai, LSW may not function as well, or may discontinue.

[45] The Wanzai Prefecture government issued a policy to develop social work, which regulates itself to provide a certain amount of funding every year to promote social work practices.

As all of Wanzai social work practitioners do not have a clear awareness of the gender inequalities experienced by rural women, their practices may strengthen the current gender stereotypes of women.

Moreover, as the Wanzai social work practitioners said, some rural people live very far from the town village centre. They have to travel long distances to participate in social work activities that are held in those centres.

Comparison with the empowerment practices of Australian organizations

Wanzai social work practitioners mainly provide educational and recreational services for rural people. They pay more attention to the mental health of service users. They did not speak about the capacity of individuals to make a better life, or of the transformation of unequal structures.

They do attempt, however, to respect and care more about service users, listen to service users' needs and opinions, build trust and relationships with service users, provide poor service users material support, and organize service users to support each other. Therefore, it can be seen that they use empowering methods to some extent.

Qinghong Social Work Agency (Qinghong)

Hanwang town

Hangwang Town is located in the north-west of Sichuan Province and in the south-west of China. It occupies 54.3 square kilometres, and is 105 kilometres away from Chengdu—the capital city of Sichuan Province. According to the 6th National Census, there were 32,373 people living in Hangwang Town in 2010; 50.3 per cent of them were men and 49.7 per cent were women (City Population, 2010). Because of abundant mineral resources such as coal, phosphorate, and iron, heavy industries underpinned the economic prosperity of Hanwang Town before 2008. Most of those heavy industries belonged to the nation (government industries). The two most important industrial sites were the Dongfang Steam Turbine Factory and the Tianchi Coalmine. Most Hangwang people worked in those factories. Two of the Qinghong practitioners I interviewed had worked in those two factories. They are managers of Qinghong's projects now. When we talked about those factories, my interviewees in Hanwang reflected on their easy lives before 2008.

At 2:28pm on 12 May in 2008, a catastrophic earthquake occurred. In Hanwang, more than half of the buildings collapsed and nearly all were damaged (CCTV, 2008). Hanwang Town is 30 kilometres away from the epicentre in Wenchuan Prefecture. The local governments, however, including Mianzhu Prefecture of Deyang City (which administratively governs Hanwang) deliberately concealed the

devastating situation of Hanwang and other towns from the Chinese central government.[46] The local governments reported that the people in Hanwang could rescue themselves. Therefore, national rescue teams did not arrive in Hanwang until several days later. After an earthquake, buried people are more likely to survive if they are rescued quickly. Most Hanwang people did not get this chance. According to information from the Hanwang earthquake memory centre, more than 10,000 people died and countless people were injured.[47] Most of my interviewees were disabled by the earthquake. And because the children had just started their afternoon classes when the earthquake happened, many of them lost their lives when school buildings collapsed. Two of my interviewees in Hanwang lost their children in the earthquake.

In total in China, the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake caused 69,227 deaths, 374,643 people were injured, and 17,923 people were lost. It was a huge catastrophe that shocked the whole world. Chinese people united together and helped each other. Many civil organizations helped the people affected. Many social work agencies were launched afterwards. Social work services were delivered to disaster areas, and were commended by governments and the media. Qinghong Social Work Agency (Qinghong) was established by a social work professor of the China Youth University for Political Sciences (YUPS). His hometown is Mianzhu Prefecture.

In Hanwang, most heavy industries were destroyed by the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake. As well, the mineral resources were depleted after many years of exploitation. Therefore, since Hanwang's rebuilding, organic agriculture and tourism have become the new emerging industries. After the earthquake, some of the land was not able to be used for agricultural production. Thus, some rural people were given urban identification by governments. A female interviewee in Hanwang lost her land and became an 'urban citizen' after that earthquake.

Many people left Hanwang after the earthquake. The prosperity brought by industry had vanished. During my fieldwork in Hanwang, I saw traces of past prosperity in the destroyed old Hanwang centre. I also felt that the new Hanwang town was somewhat cheerless. As mentioned above, my interviewees in Hanwang missed the past prosperity of Hanwang very much.

Qinghong Social Work Agency

Qinghong does not have an official website. There is a blog titled as: Qinghong Social Work Agency in Mianzhu,[48] with eighty diaries dated from 2009 to 2012. The first diary is about the Red Cross Society

[46] Cited from several news sources, here is a blog with relatively unabridged information: http://bbs.tianya.cn/m/post-free-1252984-1.shtml. More importantly, all of my interviewees in Hanwang told me this information. They had many complaints of the local governments.
[47] I took pictures of the information on the wall of the Hanwang earthquake centre.
[48] The Qinghong blog's website address is: http://qhsgfwz.blog.163.com/.

of China funding the establishment of Qinghong in April 2009. A social work professor of the China Youth University of Political Science (YUPS) is the initiator of Qinghong. Qinghong is affiliated to the Social Work Research Centre of YUPS

After the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake, Qinghong's founder and a group of social work students came to Hanwang and provided counselling services and organized group activities for people. In 2009, after Qinghong's establishment, they started to organize a small group of people who were disabled or had lost children in that earthquake to help them find ways to make a living. Ten people joined Qinghong's Livelihood Group at first. Two group members were selected by the whole group to be group leaders. I interviewed both of them. One of them launched the Chunyan Craft Workshop in 2011 and gathered six women to make crafted beadwork to make a living.

In 2012, Qinghong received funding for poverty alleviation from the CFPA. They established a rural cooperative to plant ginkgo in Tianchi village. A male service user in Qinghong was selected to manage that rural cooperative project.

Until now, regular social work practitioners in Qinghong have been first-generation service users of Qinghong. Qinghong's projects are based on the theme of helping the disadvantaged to make a better living. Service users are encouraged to manage and implement Qinghong's projects. It is Qinghong's empowerment ideology of supporting service users to make decisions and take action by themselves.[49] When I undertook fieldwork in Hanwang, I was very warmly welcomed by Qinghong's practitioners. I felt very relax and supported.

I was able to visit Qinghong because a social work professor from my network referred me to Qinghong's funder. I conducted a focus group of five practitioners in Qinghong. There was only one man among them. I also interviewed two female Qinghong practitioners in person. One of them is a group leader of the Livelihood Group and the founder of the Chunyan Craft Workshop.

Defining empowerment

Because some Qinghong practitioners were previously Qinghong's service users, it seems that they are not familiar with the word 'empowerment' that has come from Western countries. I did not directly ask them what they understood empowerment to be.

[49] Referred from a diary of the blog.

How to empower

Empowerment project

Counselling group

At the beginning, after the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake, Qinghong's founder and a group of social work teachers and students provided group counselling services for the people who were disabled due to the earthquake:

> *Qinghong provided psychological rehabilitation services for the disabled people at that time. Disabled friends got together and chatted with each other…Teachers and [social work] students are very kind and nice. They are not like government officials…. If you have any suffering or interesting things, you can talk or chat with them. If you want to sing, you can sing in front of them. I felt their activities were very good. (Qinghong1)*

> *They tried to help us feel better…My child died in that earthquake. I was very fragile at that time. I felt that I came out from that earthquake's shadow to some extent through getting together with students and teachers in Qinghong. (Qinghong 2)*

From the interviews with Qinghong practitioners, it is evident that there were ten members in Qinghong's counselling group at first. They had become disabled or had lost children because of the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake. There were social workers, psychologists, and physiotherapists delivering services for them. This occurred six times a week, and continued for three months.

Livelihood Group

Most industries in Hanwang collapsed during the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake. The vast majority of Hanwang people lost their means of making a living. During the rebuilding of new Hanwang, service users of Qinghong raised this problem and in response the Livelihood Group was initiated by Qinghong:

> *We thought about what we want to do and what we can do. There were people who wanted to sell clothes. There were some people from rural areas who wanted to farm or raise chickens or sell seeds. The social workers wrote down what we said and linked us to resources. They helped us to figure out where we could rent a shop front and what we could do. They also helped us connect to resources from government…..Actually, they did not provide much material help. However, I felt that they really helped me. (Qinghong1)*

Chunyan Craft Workshop

The project of Livelihood Group is still operating. Some practitioners started small businesses at that time. Because the population of Hanwang decreased significantly after the earthquake, business was stagnant. Qinghong's founder made a suggestion:

> *At that time, we talked about how it was very hard to run businesses. Teacher Tao suggested that we [a group of female practitioners] could group together to do something. It was not about making much money. We just wanted to be together and to chat with each other. (Qinghong1)*

As suggested by Qinghong's founder, a group of women service users visited an embroidery shop launched by a person who had lost both legs and their left hand during the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake. The women could not afford either the length of time it would take to learn embroidery or its cost. So they found a teacher who knew how to craft beadwork. They paid the teacher with the support of Qinghong's founder and started learning the craft:

> *Teachers in Qinghong paid all the money. We learnt to make a zodiac by using string beads in a day. We were exhausted. We dismantled our zodiacs and remade them after that craft teacher left…After one year, we finally figured out how to make the tiger zodiac…. We bought books about crafting beadwork. We sat in the office all day to do the research…Now, we can make more than one hundred types of crafted beadwork. (Qinghong1)*

Chunyan Craft Workshop (CCW) is separate from Qinghong. Five female practitioners in CCW spent a whole year learning to craft beadwork by themselves without any income. Now, they sell their beadwork on streets, in parks, and at events. Sometimes, the Disabled People Committee (a government institution) buys products from them. They can earn several hundred yuan per month. Although they have difficulty selling the beadwork and running CCW, they still organize free training for other community members to make beadwork:

> *Our training classes are free. People are happy every time when they attend our classes. They say that our crafts are beautiful. (Qinghong1)*

Rural cooperative

In 2012, Qinghong applied for a poverty alleviation project from the CFPA. A male practitioner in Qinghong negotiated with the Tianchi Village Committee and cheaply rented some abandoned arable land from them. Qinghong practitioners discussed recruiting a number of poor people to grow gingko trees because gingko trees benefit Tianchi's environment and had good a market price at that time:

After the earthquake, there was nothing on the mountain. We went there and saw grasses that were taller than a person…. We talked with farmers in those places. We searched for information on the internet. When spring arrived, we planted those small trees and started weeding…We invested thousands of yuan a year. We needed to weed and fertilize our lands. We must continue. All our members discussed and agreed we should continue. It needs us to take risks together…. Our farming cooperative will not only focus on one project. We plan to plant bamboo and raise livestock. (Qinghong3)

Values and project characteristics of Qinghong

Because of limited funding and resources, Qinghong's projects are mainly based on service users' mutual help. A group of service users are the core practitioners of Qinghong. They are united in terms of the values of caring for others, and being grateful and dedicated. They feel valued and needed in collectives. Whether Qinghong obtains funds or not, they continue to supporting each other and other community members:

Whether with money or without money, we do things for Qinghong…self-help and helping others. It is a value of the social work profession. In the past, we didn't understand what this means. Now, we understand. (Qinghong1)

After the 2008 earthquake, there were many volunteers who came here. But they left soon after. We did not receive any information from them once they left. Qinghong has been here for eight years /chokes (sobs)/. This social work agency is really great. (Qinghong2)

The vast majority of Qinghong practitioners are women. They treat each other as real family members. They said that they can understand each other quite well and talk about a lot of things with each other. They feel relaxed and usually make jokes about the only one core male practitioner in Qinghong. Although Qinghong's projects are not specifically designed for women, women account for most of the service users and practitioners. The Qinghong practitioners I interviewed, however, did not mention the unequal gender structures met by women in general. All Qinghong female practitioners I interviewed said that their husbands support their involvement with Qinghong. They are happy to take care of the family and children while their husbands work to make money for the family. A female practitioner said that after the earthquake, women in Hanwang cherish life a lot if their husband and children are healthy.

Empowerment skills

Become positive and optimistic about life by staying in supportive collectives

The 2008 Wenchuan earthquake caused huge trauma to service users in Qinghong. The group counselling service initiated by Qinghong helped service users to feel there was love and positivity in life. Service users were motivated to pick up their lives again. The Qinghong practitioners I interviewed are also service users of Qinghong. As they mentioned, staying in the 'Qinghong family' helped them feel that life was meaningful:

> *Before I joined Qinghong, I felt life was meaningless. The temporary housing we lived in was a poor living environment. It was hard to use a wheelchair on a gravel road…I hadn't suffered like that. I was so frustrated at that time. I cried every day. I felt that it was so tragic for disabled people. Nevertheless, I feel happier now. I drive my moto tricycle every day… I am really happy. We are like a family in Qinghong. We play cards and drink tea. We do many things when we are together…I managed our home's decoration work by myself…. My friends said to me that no one treats me as a disabled person. (Qinghong1)*

> *I wanted to kill myself at that time…I lost everything because of the earthquake. My child died. Our house was broken…. I just felt that I was relieved by getting along with social workers and other service users in Qinghong. I felt that my heart was open. Some people can also pick up hope for life again even though they are disabled because of the earthquake…. I feel that we are like sisters. We have no secrets between each other. I feel happy. I gave birth to twins, a boy and a girl. /laugh/ (Qinghong2)*

Be valued by being respected, supported, and loved

Qinghong's service users are also practitioners. They build trusting relationships with each other. Whether they are managing committee members of Qinghong or general members, they treat each other equally. The respect, care, and support between them makes them feel valued and gives them the motivation to live happily.

Moreover, as a social work professor in YUPS, Qinghong's founder very much appreciates the work undertaken by Qinghong's practitioners. Qinghong's practitioners therefore feel that they are able to undertake social work practices. Based on the social connections of Qinghong's founder, many social work teachers recognize the practices engaged in by Qinghong's practitioners. One professor has written a book about them. They feel great to be valued and treated equally by outstanding social work teachers in universities.

The teachers' help is really significant for me so that I feel happy and have a chance to give birth to babies again. (Qinghong2)

We are very close to the teachers. They are so nice and trustworthy…They are professionals who have the same authority as government officials. They served water for us during an activity. (Qinghong1)

In addition, because Qinghong practitioners made outstanding efforts to pick up their lives after the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake, their practices are well recognized by some government institutions. Qinghong practitioners are proud of themselves. It is pleasing to them to be valued by governments:

A healthy person suddenly became a badly damaged disabled person. There are huge physical and psychological traumas. Without Qinghong, I couldn't live so happily and get such a sense of achievement. It feels good to do something for other disabled people. I gain a sense of achievement by helping them and influencing them. Governments highly praise us because we are active and influential. I attended a conference held by the Disabled People Committee. I was awarded as a moral model in Deyang city in 2015. I also was awarded as the 'self-improvement person' in Sichuan Province…I get people's approval because of Qinghong. Therefore, I am happy even though I feel it is toilsome work. (Qinghong1)

Once, an evaluator of CFPA came here. He is a director of the Ministry of Civil Affairs. He said that he must go to the Tianchi Village to see our gingko trees. I came with him and crossed that rope bridge by myself. I was very scared. I made it. I was happy. He said that it is worthy to provide us with money. He said: 'What you are doing is quite beneficial to the community'. (Qinghong3)

Furthermore, Qinghong practitioners also attempt to help other community members. They gain a great sense of achievement when community members admire and praise their work:

We provide services for community people such as elders and children. I hope we can keep getting one project a year to guarantee our organization's survival….Although we are disabled, we can serve healthy people…We get praise from both disabled and healthy people, and governments. We are doing good things. We want to do better. (Qinghong2)

Supporting and influencing other community members

From interviews with Qinghong practitioners, it is clear that they try to provide comprehensive information to service users, encourage service users to express their opinions, and let service users understand Qinghong's role in supporting them:

There are twenty-one families in our livelihood team. We get together if there is something, or some projects need to be done. We inform our members and encourage them to participate in our activities. If they have any requirements, we could do what they want us to do. If their family members have requirements, we encourage them to talk to us….We are trying our best to expand our sales. But Qinghong cannot guarantee that rural cooperative members will get a certain income. (Qinghong3)

Although they have very limited funding and resources, Qinghong practitioners attempt to help other disadvantaged community members by requesting resources from governments and organizing free training. For instance:

The president of the Disabled People Committee (DPC) of Mianzhu City visited us during the spring festival last year. I told him that there is a [needy] family in our livelihood team. Because of Qinghong's limited resources, I asked that government director whether DPC could provide them with some material aid. (Qinghong3)

According to Qinghong practitioners, their works influence other community members. There are many community members who want to be volunteers for the activities held by Qinghong. Community people trust them and have a great passion to participate in their activities. Nowadays, many community people advertise Qinghong's practices to the people they know outside of Hanwang.

Negotiating and cooperating with different stakeholders

In order to obtain more resources, Qinghong practitioners made many efforts to negotiate and cooperate with different stakeholders such as governments, teachers and students in universities, local hospitals, doctors, and urban people. Qinghong practitioners considered how Qinghong's practices could benefit those stakeholders and persuade them to cooperate with Qinghong. The cooperation had to be based on those stakeholders' agreement with Qinghong's values and principles. For example:

We advertised our project of growing gingko trees in Tianchi. If the teachers' friends want, they can bring their children to Tianchi to enjoy nature and learn how trees grow …Government is very interested in our project because they want to build a tourism park in Tianchi. We need to widely advertise our project to all those people so that we can cooperate with them… Because local government institutions or hospitals also need to achieve their goals, we can work together. Our cooperation can help both of us. (Qinghong3)

Fostering local leaders

In 2009, when social work teachers and students were not available to continually stay in Hanwang to deliver services, a group of service users were encouraged by Qinghong's founder to be Qinghong's general practitioners. This group of practitioners continue to implement Qinghong's projects and regard themselves as local social workers:

> *I came there and participated in the Livelihood Team in Qinghong. I acquired some knowledge about social work and understood how social workers serve the disabled groups. They let us elect the managing committee member. We considered what resources we had to help other disabled people. I had broad resource links. I had friends who are lawyers, doctors, tailors…I have difficulty walking. However, I am optimistic. Therefore, they recommended me to be a member of the managing committee. (Qinghong2)*

Social work practitioners as agents

As Qinghong's practitioners pointed out, the founder of Qinghong significantly affects their values and beliefs. Basically, Qinghong's founder is the model for its practitioners. Qinghong's practitioners imitate Qinghong's founder to implement practices in Qinghong:

> *Especially teacher Tao is very influential. He is very easy-going. We are easy-going…We are assigned by teachers to develop local social work in Hanwang. We try our best to do this. (Qinghong2)*

Qinghong's practitioners also mentioned that they know the local community well and they are more experienced than social work students to deal with issues in practices. They regarded themselves as local social workers. Qinghong's founder encouraged Qinghong practitioners to attend the national social work examination to attain social worker accreditation. During the focus group, on one hand, they showed the confidence to pass the national examination of social work. They would feel happy if they could transfer to being 'professional social workers'. On the other hand, they were confused about what the real professionalism of social work is. They thought that professional social workers needed to write a lot about cases and evaluate cases. They complained that Qinghong's founder provided much social work training for other institutions, but not for them.

Among Qinghong's practitioners, two women and one man are members of Qinghong's managing committee. By comparison with other Qinghong practitioners, they take more responsibility for maintaining Qinghong's operation:

We never haggle over who did more and who did less, or you got more money than I got. We think that we need to understand each other…They said that I am the leader. But I am like a handywoman who works harder than them. I need to do everything, take photos and update photos [of our crafts] on Taobao website and WeChat e-shop. I am very tired this year. (Qinghong2)

Most of Qinghong's practitioners are women. From fieldwork observations, female Qinghong practitioners build very good relationships with the male practitioner who is responsible for the Rural Cooperative project in Qinghong. Nevertheless, during focus groups, the male practitioner talked much more than the Qinghong female practitioners. As well, the female practitioner who is the project manager of the Livelihood Team and Chunyan Craft Workshop expressed more opinions than other female practitioners in the focus group.

Enabling factors for empowerment

Qinghong's founder is a social work professor at YUCS. Using his social network, he strove for a great deal of support for Qinghong. For example, there have been social work teachers and students engaged in voluntary works in Qinghong, or conducting studies or research into Qinghong, with the result that Qinghong's practices are well known in the social work academic field in China. Sometimes, recommended by Qinghong's founder, Qinghong practitioners are able to train with social work teachers and to visit other social work agencies or social work faculties in universities.

Qinghong's general practitioners are local community members. They are familiar with local people and local situations. They prefer to live in Hanwang. Thus, they continue to engage in practices in Qinghong. They build trust with local people who then offer support for Qinghong. For example, a community director who works in Hanwang town government allows the Chunyan Craft Workshop exemption from paying rent. A worker in the National Tax Bureau of Hanwang explained how to ask for tax exemption. Some local villagers in Tianchi rent their land very cheaply to the Qinghong Rural Cooperative.

As well, Qinghong practitioners mentioned that governments considered that the practices of Qinghong are enabling for promoting mutual support between disabled people and the community. As some government institutions such as civil affairs bureaus, the Disabled People Committee, and the Women's Federation have the funds and tasks to support the disadvantaged, they offered support to Qinghong:

We received the funding from the Disabled People Committee today. I told them our stories. They are nice. They gave us 10,000 yuan for our livelihood team…Governments have given

us proper support during these two years. Governments have budgets to support the disadvantaged. They bought some products from Chunyan and praised us. (Qinghong3)

Constraining factors for empowerment

Qinghong lacks funds and resources. On many occasions, Qinghong's founder has donated his own money to support Qinghong practitioners. In addition, as Qinghong's founder is busy with his research and teaching works at YUCS, he does not have enough time to manage Qinghong's practices and promote Qinghong's development:

Qinghong did not have projects at the beginning. Teachers used their own money to hold service activities in Qinghong. Qinghong has operated for eight years. We have only got projects in the past three years…Teacher [Qinghong's founder] is very busy. Usually we just chat with him, rather than report on the work. (Qinghong2)

Most of Qinghong's general practitioners are disabled because of the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake. The disability usually limits their action. Sometimes, they feel it is difficult to undertake practices and deliver services. In addition, most people they serve are also disabled. Thus, Qinghong practitioners need to consider carefully whether it is convenient for disabled people to take part in their services. When Qinghong provides counselling services for disabled people, it costs a great deal for transportation to transport them.

The industrial economic structure of Hanwang town was broken down in the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake. Many people left. The resultant stagnant economic situation made it difficult for Qinghong practitioners to run small businesses. There are many people who need to find a new way of living in Hanwang. But Qinghong does not have available resources to help those people.

A group of Qinghong female practitioners create craft beadwork in Chunyan Craft Workshop to try to make a better living. First, it is hard for them to carry on business in Hanwang. Second, even though they make the beadwork by hand, their products cannot be sold at a good price because the market mainly focuses on the cost of craft materials rather than the cost of labour. Moreover, they do not have many avenues to enable more people hear their stories and then increase the sales of their beadwork:

Teachers are busy, governments are busy, only we are not busy…I feel very frustrated so that I can't fall to sleep. I really wish teachers and governments could help us to sell our craftwork. It takes us a lot of effort to make this beautiful craftwork. I do not want our craftwork to be wasted…..It is really difficult for us to find ways to advertise our craftwork and sell them….People may see our crafts, but don't hear our stories. (Qinghong2)

Most notably, Qinghong practitioners are very frustrated by the way governments pay lip services to people and by the complexities of bureaucratic management, the unclear tax exemption policy for non-profit organizations, and the lack of recognition of social work services and other requirements:

> *Sometimes governments think Qinghong steals their achievements because we serve these people very well. For many years, governments have been accustomed to pay only lip service to social work. Governments are friendly to Qinghong when they need us. They don't care about us when they don't need us. Qinghong is different from governments. We insist on caring for people. We are trusted by people…. People think governments are liars… Especially small town governments like Hanwang, more than 90 per cent of local government staff don't know what social work is. (Qinghong2)*

> *Sometimes, governments even oppress us because they think what we are doing is overlapping with their work…people asked for help from us, not governments… Government workers feel it is very tiring to visit people and investigate. They just want to sit in offices and finish their tasks in a simple way…. The upper-level government lets local government set up social work positions. They just assign these 'social work' tasks to their current staff. They don't really give someone power to engage in social work practices…If we don't get approval from governments, they will let us go in a minute. If they let us go, we cannot survive here. It is so easy for them. We had experiences of this. (Qinghong3)*

> *I went to the Local Tax Bureau and visited the vice director there. I said: 'The Civil Affairs Bureau made rules, our organization is non-profit, it should be duty free.' He said: 'We don't have rules here, if you want to be exempt from taxes, you need to take vouchers from the Finance Bureau.' Then, I went to the Civil Affairs Bureau. But they didn't know how to do that either…In the end, we submitted the 5.9 per cent business tax. We do not make any profit. Qinghong is a non-profit organization. (Qinghong3)*

Comparison with the empowerment practices of Australian cases

Qinghong practitioners highly praised the 'social work value' of self-help and helping others. They talked about their transformation to being positive, optimistic, and confident from having been involved in Qinghong's practices. They also reported how they used their abilities of implementing practices in Qinghong. They particularly complained that local governments did not really value social work practice and sometimes tried to control what they were doing. But Qinghong practitioners did not talk about how that structural inequality could be challenged and transformed.

Qinghong practitioners respect each other and other service users of Qinghong. The general methods used by Qinghong practitioners include listening to people carefully, building trust with people, valuing people's opinions and work, negotiating with different stakeholders to help the disadvantaged, and encouraging people to use their abilities. These methods are similar to the empowerment methods used by Australian professional social workers. Therefore, Qinghong practitioners are constructing empowerment practices even though they are not familiar with the word itself.

Analysis

In this analysis section, I list the similarities and differences between five Chinese organizations in terms of the four main themes.

Similarities

Defining empowerment (empowerment as a concept)

I asked some practitioners in RW and MWPC about their understanding of empowerment. They all attempted to interpret empowerment from the perspective of power and right. They all linked empowerment with assisting service users to recognize their rights as citizens and to improve their capacity to make a better life. In addition, according to the interviews and my observations, all my Chinese interviewees highlighted the value of helping service users improve their capacity to make a good life. Notably, this enabling or empowering value is well regarded by Chinese social work academia as a basic principle of social work practice.[50] From another perspective, according to the interviews and my observations, my Chinese interviewees consider that enabling or empowering others is also a way for them to enable or empower themselves. It seems that these acts of altruism lead my Chinese interviewees to feel that life is meaningful.

How to empower (empowerment practices/projects; empowerment skills/strategies)

Organization as subfields

All five organizations I visited in China implement recreational and educational group activities for rural people. Rural service users gain knowledge and skills through participating in educational activities, and feel supported and a sense of belonging in collectives. In most circumstances in China, rural people's disadvantaged situation is interpreted in the discourse of poverty, so organizations including RW, CFPA, WSW, and Qinghong, all have projects to try to help rural people make more income. Furthermore, all those five Chinese organizations built cooperation with and obtained some

[50] This enabling or empowering value is clarified as a basic principle of social work practice in the national social work examination text book—Social Work Practice—edited by the national editorial group of the social work examination.

support from governments to deliver services. Nevertheless, few of them advocated to challenge structural barriers such as the neoliberal economic policies adopted by governments. This is associated with the power disparity between powerful Chinese governments and small non-profit organizations.

Social workers as agents

Not all my Chinese interviewees had social worker accreditation. Nevertheless, according to their interviews and my observations, they all attempt to respect and care for service users, listen to service users' opinions carefully, encourage and assist service users to make decisions and take action, build trust with service users, set up platforms to let service users speak out, and negotiate with different stakeholders to obtain more support. These methods are similar to the empowerment methods used by the Australian professional social workers I interviewed. Therefore, even though Chinese social work practitioners do not have a theoretical understanding of empowerment, they use empowering methods and construct empowerment practices to some extent.

Enabling factors for empowerment

From organizations

The leaders of the five Chinese organizations I visited are of substantial importance in promoting the organization's development. They are models for the organization's practitioners. When organization leaders are caring, respectful, and support people in daily practices, organization practitioners are more likely to continue to act in ways that empower people. In addition, these five organizations had ties with government when they were established. They obtained approval and support from governments to implement projects.

From social workers as agents

Social work practitioners in the five Chinese organizations are all motivated to provide substantial services for people. They care for disadvantaged people and try to negotiate with different stakeholders to better help them. All the organizations except for MWPC have practitioners living in local areas. Those local practitioners know the local people and the cultural, economic, and political situation of the local community well. They use their local social networks to gain more support.

From structures

When governments attempt to implement social welfare projects such as poverty alleviation, illiteracy elimination, sex education for rural left-behind children, mental health care for rural elders, health care for rural communities, and assistance for disabled citizens, civil organizations have more of an opportunity to engage in these projects and more support from governments. Importantly, the

Chinese central government's promotion of social work practice since 2006 is a legitimate discourse for civil organizations to be able to participate in welfare provision.

According to RW and MWPC practitioners, the international women's conference held in Beijing in 1995 was very empowering for civil organizations in China. Since then, Chinese governments have given more recognition to the services delivered by civil organizations and have relaxed their control of them. Because the Beijing women's conference was part of the worldwide feminist movement in the 1990s, the organizations specifically delivering services for women gained more praise and support.

All the organizations except for MWPC provide services in rural communities. From interview information, when rural communities are close to cities, it is more convenient for them to access services and more possible to achieve economic growth.

Constraining factors for empowerment

From organizations and from social workers as agents

According to the interviews, all the organizations' practitioners reported that their organizations lack funding. Except for WSW, all the organizations' practitioners said that they have little support from government. Because CFPA Microfinance mainly focuses on financially supporting rural people, and Qinghong and WSW do not specifically provide services for women, they do not have a clear understanding of gender inequalities and analysis. Because all five organizations do not clarify how structural inequalities cause individuals' disadvantage, they may place responsibility on individuals to change their own disadvantaged situations.

From structures

Governments have strong power in China, delivering nearly all social welfare services. If governments do not concede space for civil organizations to participate in delivering services, it is hard for civil organizations to survive and develop. Government restriction can be seen in the registration policy for non-profit organizations.[51] Nearly all practitioners complained that governments only pay lip service to their needs, rather than really support them to provide substantial services for people.

Furthermore, organizations also suffer from the market environment that highly values economic profits while overlooking people's needs. For example, banks pursue profit and lend to CFPA Microfinance with high interest rates without supporting its aim of helping more poor rural people. The craft products of Qinghong practitioners are not given a high price because the market only focuses on the cost of materials rather than on their efforts in creating their products.

[51] Organizations have to find a government institution to be their supervisors to register as non-profit organizations.

Nearly all practitioners mentioned women's stereotypical role as good wives and carers in families. It can be shown that the gender stereotype for women largely exists as a type of gender inequality or as part of the culture of patriarchy.

Most practitioners reported that the isolation and the lack of resources of rural areas, caused difficulties in delivering services.

Differences

Defining empowerment (empowerment as a concept)

Even though all my Chinese interviewees emphasized the value of helping service users improve their capacity to make a better a life, the five Chinese organizations understand this enabling or empowering value from different viewpoints. For example, RW considers education and training to be crucial in assisting rural women to strive for a better life. MWPC values counselling and educational activity as ways of helping women manage a better life. CFPA focuses on helping rural people to use their ability as rational economic people. WSW aims at promoting social stability and harmony through caring more about disadvantaged people. Qinghong pays more attention to promoting mutual help in local communities.

How to empower (empowerment practices/projects; empowerment skills/strategies)

From organizations

The organizations' leadership, relationship with government, history, type, resources (including funding), aim, principles, and relationship with local communities differentiate their serving practices. This was described in detail for each of the organizations (see above).

From social workers as agents

My Chinese interviewees have different educational backgrounds, personalities, life experiences, and gender experiences. Their understanding and methods of serving people are mainly determined by their organization's type, leadership, aim, principle, and resources. As RW and MWPC specifically provide services for women, their practitioners mentioned the patriarchal oppression of women more than the other organisations' practitioners.

Enabling factors for, and barriers to, empowerment

From organizations

Organizations have different capitals and doxas. RW and MWPC are first-generation 'non-profit organizations' in China.[52] CFPA is a social enterprise. WSW is a governmental pilot project of social

[52] Although RW and MWPC are registered as small businesses, they operate in a non-profit way.

work practice. Qinghong is a social work agency initiated by a social work professor at YUCS.RW and MWPC receive more funding from oversea foundations while attracting less attention from governments than the social work agency established by social work teachers. CFPA operates like a very successful large company, but cannot enjoy the tax exemption for providing microcredit to rural people that banks do. WSW enjoys significant promotion from local governments, but is also largely restricted by local governments. Qinghong is well managed by local service users, but lacks full-time leadership and development strategies.

From social workers as agents

Social work practitioners in different types of organizations have different positions and dispositions. If they have a degree in sociology or law, they are more likely to understand societal structures. If they live in the local community, they have more understanding of the local people and the local situation. If they work in organizations specifically serving women, they notice more of the gender inequality experienced by women. If they are government officials, they have more available resources to deliver services. In comparison with other practitioners, Qinghong practitioners face more difficulties because of their physical disabilities.

From local contexts

Qinghong and Wanzai Social Work Team implement services in specific local areas: Hanwang town and Wanzai prefecture. It can be seen from interviews and field observations, local economic, demographic, and political contexts make a difference for social workers to provide services. The whole Hanwang community suffered huge trauma from the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake. In contrast with Wanzai, Hanwang is somewhat stagnant, which causes it to be difficult to implement social work practices there. The next chapter provides a final analysis of these complex issues.

Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusion—From Micro to Macro: Empowerment is a Cultural Reproduction Process

Introduction

In this discussion chapter, I draw together and discuss my research findings. My research data includes interviews with qualified Australian social workers and Chinese social work practitioners, information from two Australian organizations and five Chinese organizations, discussion of the local areas where my interviewees live and work, and my observations and self-reflections during field work. Drawing on this research data, I revisit the concepts of empowerment, gender, professionalism, and modernization.

Furthermore, I illustrate how Bourdieu's theoretical concepts of habitus, field, capital, doxa, distinction, and cultural production and reproduction relate to my research findings. The contribution of this thesis is that it interrogates professional social work interventions into rural women's empowerment in two very different nation states that are nonetheless similar in the way they have adopted modernity. The chapter concludes with some suggestions for further research.

Empowerment

Understanding empowerment

The influence of critical theories to social work education

Empowerment is interpreted differently by qualified Australian social workers and Chinese social work practitioners. Empowerment theory has been influenced by feminism and critical social theories that were widespread in the 1960s and 1970s, and thus takes a critical lens to addressing unequal and unjust social orders (Healy, 2000; Lee, 2001; Fook, 2002; Adams, 2013). All my Australian interviewees undertook their social work education in the 1970s and 1980s and adopted the critical ideas of that time. They consider empowerment to involve changing structural inequalities.

However, the development of social work in China led to social work education being suspended by Chinese governments in the 1960s and 1970s and the communication between China and other Western countries ceased as did the spread of more radical ideas. This continued until the late 1980s when Chinese governments started reintroducing social work education and considering it as including community work and welfare work. The social work profession only grew substantially in practice through government promotion from 2006. Some human service practitioners have been able to gain

social work accreditation by passing the national social work examination, even though they have not had specific social work education. None of my Chinese interviewees obtained the equivalent of the Australian qualifying level social work education. Other than the funder of MWPC, they were not influenced by the critical social movements in the 1960s and 1970s. It can be seen that the social work profession is in its early stages of development in China. Helping individuals improve their capacity to make a better life is the guiding philosophy adopted by various Chinese social work practitioners including all of my interviewees.

Personal development, interpersonal development, socio-political empowerment

Empowerment integrates developments at personal, interpersonal, and socio-political levels (Gutierrez, 1990; Lee, 2001; Payne, 2005; Adams, 2013). Australian social workers and Chinese social work practitioners all emphasized the importance of assisting an individual to feel positive, make decisions, and take action to strive for a better life. Power exists in relationships and individuals live within a system. Empowering individuals means assisting them to adjust their relationship with themselves, others, the social society and the natural world. When a person feels strong and positive about his or her life, he or she builds power to transform their disadvantaged situation and the structural inequalities that disadvantage them. This process involves both service users and social workers. Social workers and service users also build relationships when they interact. When social workers try to empower service users, they share the journey of building power by interacting with themselves, service users, other stakeholders, societal structures, and the natural world.

However, if social workers focus too much on helping individuals to make a better life, they are critiqued for ignoring structural oppressions and blaming vulnerable individuals as responsible for their difficulties (Healy, 2000; Fook, 2002; Ife 2016). Thus, as Chinese social work practitioners mainly emphasize individuals' personal development and interpersonal development, they may strengthen current structural inequalities. For example, RW assists women to run libraries and aged care centres in the rural area in which they live, however, this further strengthens the gender stereotype of women as carers of families and communities and as educators for children. CFPA depends on the market to provide microfinance for more rural people, however, its belief in economic rationalism hinders its understanding of the structural causes of poverty in rural areas.

Qualified Australian social worker interviewees all spoke of challenging unequal social-political structures in order to empower disadvantaged groups. Yet most of them are engaged in case work, which has a lower possibility of changing existing social orders. According to some of my Australian interviewees, few social workers integrate case work, group work, and community work. This is associated with the neo-liberal ideology adopted by Australian governments in welfare provision. The changing Australian welfare system from the 1980s (noted in Chapter 1), informs the intense

competition between civil organizations participating in welfare provision. Agencies fear losing government funding and social workers are afraid of losing jobs. Thus, they may comply with government regulations even those they perceive to be unfair. Arguably Australian social workers are similar to Chinese social work practitioners in neglecting the socio-political dimensions of empowerment.

Paradox of empowerment

Power is the key focus of empowerment. As power is complex and is both productive and repressive, empowerment practices contain characteristics of care and control. In both Australia and China, social workers have the professional and political mission of assisting and caring for vulnerable groups. However, social workers also work in systems with discriminatory and exploitative cultures. Thus, they can become part of political structures to help governments control the powerless groups by regulating people to follow the rules made by governments. To understand the complexities of empowerment practice, we need to understand the nature of power.

Complexities and sensitivities of power

Power

Liberal and revolutionary theories view power as 'the possession of individuals and a force that is imposed' (Healy, 2000, p.43). Foucault admits the repressive character of power emerging from superstructures such as capitalism and patriarchy, but also emphasizes that power is creative and productive in diverse relations in local contexts (Healy, 2000). In line with Foucault, postmodern and post-structural theorists examine power as 'being excised rather than possessed, as both productive and repressive, and as coming from the bottom up' (Healy, 2000, p.43; Fook, 2002, p.52).

In relation to the social service professions, the social control dimension of their practices emerges from the way power is exerted by states to subordinate disadvantaged groups and to reinforce existing unequal social orders (Healy, 2000; Lee, 2001; Fook, 2002; Adams, 2013; Ife 2016). However, power exists and runs through multiple relationships between social service practitioners, service users, organizations, community members, and local governments. Thus, in local contexts, there are multiple possibilities for transforming power in societal structures (Healy, 2000; Fook, 2002; Ife, 2016). Social workers and other social service professionals can work with disadvantaged groups to take action to make a better life in local communities.

Complexities of power

Power is understood differently by different theorists and is interpreted by different agents in different ways in practice. Thus, diverse agents undertake different methods of 'empowering' powerless groups.

Yet critical empowerment theory does not always translate well into practice (Fook, 2002). For example, the empowerment projects implemented by mainstream development agencies such as governments and banks from the 1990s, are criticized as having a neo-liberal focus on productivity rather than on its transformative and emancipatory aims (Parpart et al., 2002; Payne, 2005, p.299). Further, the provision of micro credit loans to rural people to address poverty, is an example of the way underlying ideologies can place responsibility for their difficulties on individuals.

Different practitioners have different aims and interests, and this hinders them from having a holistic comprehension of the complexities of power. Even my Australian interviewees who have been educated about systems of power, noted that they are confused about concepts of power and empowerment in complex practices.

In addition, powerless groups normalize and internalize unequal power hierarchies such as hegemonic masculinity, elitism, and bureaucracy. This habitus helps to reproduce power inequalities. For example, CNV social workers reported the complexities of empowerment when women have already internalized patriarchal oppression and view domestic violence as normal and tolerable. CNV specifically serves women and clearly opposes domestic violence. By contrast to other organizations I visited, CNV made more mention about influencing different individuals such as doctors, lawyers, women who experienced domestic violence, teachers, men who perpetrated domestic violence, and community members to reflect and change their habitus which has been cultivated in unequal and unjust structures.

Sensitivities of power

If viewing power as a property and a competitive force, both oppressors and the oppressed are desperate to gain power at the same time as they feel threatened. Powerful parties attempt to control powerless groups in order to stabilize their power; powerless groups try to show compliance to powerful groups because they need resources and are afraid of tighter controls. As part of the political structure, social workers depend on governments' approval and resources to participate in welfare provision. Thus, social workers comply with governments' preferences and the welfare discourse in their country in order to engage in welfare provision. For example, social work practitioners in China, largely undertook poverty-alleviation and community recreational and educational work because those are favoured by Chinese governments. Australian social workers implement case work most of the time because governments provide more funding for case work. In addition, when discussing empowerment, Chinese social work practitioners interpreted it as pursuing deserved citizenship rights (right and power have same pronunciation in Chinese) for service users. They discuss citizenship rights as in accordance with the Chinese government's discourse of pursuing modernization by learning from developed Western countries with adequate legal and welfare systems.

Furthermore, talking about challenging existing unequal systems of power can be dangerous in both Australia and China. My Chinese interviewees specifically pointed out that power is a very 'sensitive' topic for them to mention because governments especially control rebellious groups. In the same way, Australian interviewees mentioned that many Australian social workers are very scared of being critical of structural inequalities because they may lose their job in the current neo-liberal policy environments.

Empowerment skills

Anti-professionalism and equal relationships

Both my Australian and Chinese interviewees work with people in a respectful way, listen to people's opinions carefully, and encourage people to speak out. To be respected, heard, trusted, and cared about are basic needs of human beings. This involves having empathy for others. During this process, social workers need to reflect on their habitus and understand and balance their emotions and those of the service users.

Building an egalitarian relationship with service users is critical to empowering practices implemented by social work practitioners. This is in line with feminist theories and approaches described in earlier chapters. Feminists promote that social workers should resist unequal power hierarchies between professionals who provide services and the disadvantaged groups who receive services (Healy, 2000; Lee, 2001; Fook, 2002). Anti-professionalism or anti-elitism is often praised by feminists and other critical theorists to be the first step of empowering the disadvantaged (Healy, 2000; Lee, 2001; Fook, 2002; Payne, 2005; Adams, 2013; Ife, 2016).

Chinese social work practitioners I interviewed were not significantly influenced by feminism and critical theories and movements, but show respect, care, and trust to service users and work with vulnerable people to make a better life. The Australian social workers I interviewed note that empowering practice with vulnerable groups occurs by way of mutual respect, careful listening, and trust, but they also reported that some social workers and other powerful parties treat people as problematic.

Advocacy

From interviews, it is clear that social workers advocate for their clients with various authorities. As pointed out by Payne (2005, p.295), 'advocacy represents people in two different ways: speaking for them, and interpreting and presenting to those with power'. From the findings of the research, advocacy is used as a way of empowering people. For example, Australian social workers noted that they organized meetings between services users and stakeholders such as governments, hospitals, farming cooperatives, companies, courts, and police to encourage service users to give their opinions

and to be heard. Chinese social work practitioners also connect service users with governments, universities, companies, professional groups such as teachers and psychologists. Services users feel empowered when those authorities understand their issues and plan to help them. When social workers respect, trust, actively work with service users to make a better life, and represents service users' needs to different stakeholders, service users are empowered.

Acknowledging Diversity

Australian social workers and Chinese social work practitioners are all aware of the importance of acknowledging diversity in their practice. They attempt to understand service users' diverse needs, organize diverse projects for different service users, and negotiate with various stakeholders. This diversity is associated with the various life stages people experience and the different contexts in which people live.

As examined in the earlier chapters, postmodern and post structural theorists especially emphasize building a comprehensive understanding of individuals in relation to gender, body, race, class, age and so on, and of complex power relationships between different interest groups in local contexts. Acknowledging the diversity of individuals allows social workers to develop more targeted and inclusive empowering practices. Understanding the diverse power relationships in local contexts can lead social workers to better negotiations with different stakeholders, thus facilitating empowerment.

Connection to, and support for, collectives/social movements

Organizations in both Australia and China advocate for collective activities and community movements to assist individuals to gain a sense of belonging. Various collective activities not only cater for different individuals' diverse needs, but also contribute to improved community cohesion and vitality. Social workers use this to transform structures from community level.

Clearly, constructing connection with self, others, and the society is of great significance for people to achieve personal, interpersonal, and social-political development. This is connected with self-help, mutual help, and critical collective action in addressing societal issues. According to both Australian and Chinese interviewees, they organized collective recreational and educational activities to improve connections between people. Especially in China, recreational and educational group work and community work are popular. People establish self-help and mutual help through these activities. However, compared to Australia, there are few collective advocacy movements launched by social work practitioners in China. This is linked with China having stricter political structures of management. China does not have a tradition, like Australia, to have bottom-to-top social movements in relation to gender, class, and race.

Changing power relations in and between micro- and meso-contexts

Summarizing research findings and observations, Australian and Chinese social workers mainly act to change power relations in and between micro- and meso-contexts such as organizations and communities to substantially empower service users. For example, V4I set up a community movement between various local communities that constitute the Division of Indi to let the government hear the people's voice and assist people to realize their community development plans. They started changing people's beliefs of political advocacy through sharing and discussing information in a respectful and transparent way in collectives. CNV exerts influences on lawyers, policies, teachers, doctors, police, women who experience domestic violence, men who perpetrate domestic violence, and other community organizations and community members to challenge the patriarchal culture. In order to transform this culture, RW organized local teachers to provide sex education to rural parents and children, harmonized the relationship between women and their husbands and mothers-in-law, provided gender training to rural women, and promoted mutual help between rural women. MWPC took a strength-based view to help women and to promote family education with rural women who had migrated to cities. This changed women's beliefs about seeing themselves as subordinate persons to their husbands and children. CFPA provide micro credit loans to rural people, which breaks the financial rules of banks that rural people must have a mortgage to apply for a loan. WSW made efforts in providing more care to left-behind rural elders, women, and children in a respectful way, and thus influenced local government officials to pay more attention to rural people's potential in developing communities. Qinghong fosters local service users to be social work practitioners to help themselves and others in the community in which they live. Through insisting on conducting practices in the community, the practitioners in Qinghong earned the praise of local governments and community members for their culture of mutual help leading to an acceptance of social work as a profession that helps people.

Whether in Australia or China, the transformation of structures depends on gradually aligning different agents. Australian social workers and Chinese social work practitioners negotiate with different stakeholders by using the language with which these stakeholders are familiar. They work towards social reform, to gradually transform different individuals in the system and to transform structures. They base their work on the understanding of different individuals' positions in the system and use the language these individuals are familiar with to make them understand more about achieving citizenship rights such as equality under current structures.

Under the complex modern system, power is very complicated. The power distribution between different classes seems to be less dynamic and transposable, and more fixed. Therefore, living and

working under current structures, social workers explore spaces to transform different individuals and to reform unequal structures.

Community is a basic unit of society, consists of individuals based on common interests and identifications and generally linked with geographical and kinship ties (Ferdin &Tonnies, 1887, pp. 1-15). Mutual help, social connections, and social cooperation in communities are basic elements in caring for disadvantaged individuals and transforming unequal structures. Individuals act in basic societal units—communities. Geographical ties between people are especially close in rural communities. Australian social workers and Chinese social work practitioners largely utilize or build local networks and foster local leaders to empower rural community members. From research interviews, sustainable empowerment practices in rural communities rely on dependable local networks and local leaders.

From research findings illustrated in Chapter 5 and 6, organizations are also a basic societal unit that significantly influences individuals' habitus (the way individuals interact with structures). From the research findings and observations, individuals adjust their beliefs and behaviours in accordance with the culture of organizations and communities. Especially in China, social work practitioners comply with their organizations' values, aim, mission, and leaders to engage in service practices. Australian social workers have obtained social work education, regardless of their organization, insist on social work values of social equality, social justice, and human rights and attempt to translate these values in practice. Nevertheless, Australian social workers worked in different organizations such as governments, non-profit organizations and profit organizations, and also reported that they were largely influenced by the organizations' aim, leadership, personnel, mission, practice model and so on. Several Australian social workers left government positions because governments are very restrictive, conservative, and controlling of vulnerable groups. Australian social workers noted that they enjoy working in non-profit organizations that are more flexible and creative in empowering disadvantaged groups.

As described above, changing power relations in and between micro contexts such as communities and organizations, is an important empowerment method adopted by both qualified Australian social workers and Chinese social work practitioners.

Gender

Feminism influenced Australia and China in different ways

As noted in earlier chapters, feminism influenced Australia and China in different ways. Critical feminist theory and feminist and other social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, significantly shaped the Australian welfare system and social work education at that time. While in China, since the

twentieth century, women's rights are usually referred to in the context of state emancipation and class emancipation and were initially advocated for by male supervisors and the state. Thus, Chinese interviewees did not clearly examine or work against the patriarchal culture.

The Chinese interviewees who talked about their understanding of empowering women did not clearly examine or work against the patriarchal culture. Their focus on empowering women is mainly around education and women's mutual support. The Australian interviewees who particularly reported their practices of empowering women showed clear understanding of feminism and were actively engaged against the patriarchal culture. These Australian social workers clearly advocated for women's movements to work against the patriarchal culture, or hegemonic masculinity.

Gender awareness and specific services for women

Gender is socially constructed at the macro- level, and also is experienced by individuals in the micro-context of families, organizations, and communities. Some Australian interviewees showed clearer and more holistic understanding of gender inequality than others because they strongly witnessed or experienced the many barriers of the patriarchal structure affecting women. Those Australian interviewees particularly discussed how they viewed their mothers' experiences with gender oppression and how they experienced difficulties of managing an equal relationship with men or of achieving career success as a woman.

Social workers are more gender aware if they specifically provide services for women, in both Australia and China. Comparing different organizations I visited in China and Australia, those that provide women-specific services improve their practitioners' gender awareness and awareness of patriarchal culture. Most social work practitioners are women. When they share similar experiences with their female service users, they improve their gender sensitivity in practice.

Women's Resilience

In terms of research findings illustrated in Chapter 5 and 6, in both Australian and Chinese communities, women are more vigorous and active than men in collective activities and in providing care to other community members. From one perspective, this is associated with women's traditional role of carer. From another perspective, women are resilient and creative when they, their families, or communities experience difficulties (Zhang, 2006; Alston & Whittenbury, 2013).

Nearly all the Australian and Chinese social work practitioners I interviewed are women (25 of the total 27). They actively participated in helping vulnerable groups and challenging structural barriers. Many of them noted that when they organized community activities or collective advocacies, it is women who are most likely to join. Most Australian social workers, especially, pointed out that rural women lead the current community movements and care for family and community members when

their community is in difficulty during economic downturn, drought, and flood. The resilience of rural women is also evidenced in the relevant literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

Habitus and the internalization of patriarchal culture

As discussed in Chapter 2 and presented from research findings in Chapter 5 and 6, patriarchal culture is a huge barrier to empowering women. In terms of earlier literature reviewed in Chapter 2, interviews, and experiences during this research, the oppression of women caused by patriarchal culture is clearly demonstrated. This oppression is evidenced by the phenomena of domestic violence against women, poor living conditions for divorced women, gender discrimination against women in the labour market, sexual assaults on women in rural areas and rural migrant women in China, requirements for women to do the same amount of work as men and also take care of their families, poor pensions for women who leave work and look after children full time, women's responsibility for domestic work, and the gender stereotype of women being obedient, and good wives and carers.

No matter where service practitioners, or service users live and work in current structural contexts, individuals may already have internalized the doxa of those current structures. For example, the patriarchal culture has been internalized by many people because of their experiences, beliefs and a lack of exposure to alternative discourses. Evidenced in research data, even some qualified Australian social workers, are not sensitive enough to identify gendered oppressive discourses concerning women. For example, the discourse of blaming women as playing a gender card to gain a decision-making seat in the political system is mentioned. Chinese social work practitioners I interviewed did not have qualified social work education, and were not significantly influenced by critical feminism. Chinese social work practitioners are more likely to accept the liberal gender discourse that emphasizes granting women the same opportunities as men and improving women's ability to work at the same time as they are caring for their family.

The tokenism of gender policies

It is a very hard and long journey to transform gender inequalities because individuals internalize current unequal gender structures. Governments in both Australia and China translate gender inequality in micro gender relationships, especially with respect to domestic violence. This can be seen from the preference of governments for funding case work in dealing with domestic violence in both Australia and China. At policy level, as illustrated in the literature review of services for women in Chapter 2, both Australian and Chinese governments pursue gender equality mainly through the provision of the same opportunities for men and women and paying more attention to the gender difference in micro gender relationships.

Governments do not specifically consider how gender differences are embodied in every part of every structure such as education, career development, leadership, decision-making, family care, and the access to superannuation and so on. For example, many Australian social workers told me that women receive less superannuation than men because their careers are interrupted several times when they gave birth to children and take care of young children. 53

Gender equality is not pursued vigorously in either China or Australia. However, current policies are tokenistic as governments mainly focus on giving women equal opportunities with men rather than pursuing gender equality through addressing gender inequality in social structures.

Professionalism

Autonomy, gaining power as a profession

As indicated in Chapter 1 regarding social work's development in Australia and China, social work developed as a profession in conjunction with welfare provision. The power of the profession arises from its autonomy in social and political context, and knowledge and experience. 54

Social work was initially regarded as an applied science developed to help solve social issues brought about by industrialization and urbanization. In the context of industrialization and modernization, the discourse of 'scientific', 'rational', and 'objective' is highly valued. Technological rationality is taken as a standard to assess the social work profession. From my research findings, most Chinese social work practitioners associated professional social work with the 'scientific technique' of case evaluation and intervention. As a developing country, China absorbs the ideology of developing scientific techniques to pursue modernization as have advanced Western countries. Along with the Chinese governments' discourse of pursuing modernization, Chinese social work groups develop professionalism through knowledge building of the 'serving science of social work'. However, another important reason is that Western countries, and especially America, export the knowledge of social work as a technique mainly focusing on fixing problematic individuals. As discussed in chapter 1, professionalizing social work from Western countries such as America to other cultural contexts is a type of cultural imperialism. As Gray

[53] It is a well-know phenomenon in Australia, while not in China. China is exposed to the political image of gender equality of Western countries. Chinese people think that in 'advanced Western countries', women have gained equality in relation to education and career success with men.

[54] The power here has multiple interpretations: legitimacy, autonomy in social and political context, and knowledge and experience. Simply speaking, it is about gaining rights from governments to pursue the interests of social work and having means to be an equal member of the community of welfare provision.

and Coates (2008, p.13) noted 'the globalising or internalizing thrust has more to do with social work's professionalizing interests than its concern for people in local culture and contexts'.

According to research data, Australian social workers linked the professionalism of social work with transforming structural inequalities. Influenced by critical theories, Australian social workers oppose the professionalism of social work as being scientific and rational and inadequate in dealing with individuals' difficulties. Furthermore, another critique of critical theory of professionalism relates to the unequal power hierarchy between social workers as experts dominating resources and determining the way of solving clients' personal issues and clients being subordinated (Healy, 2000; Lee, 2001; Fook, 2002).

Clearly, Australia and China are at different stages of modernization. In China, the recognition of a profession is generally based on its scientific knowledge. China has not experienced the critical social movements that were widely spread in the world in 1960s and 1970s. Thus, the radical critique was not experienced by Chinese social workers. Therefore, when social workers in Australia largely opposes professionalism, social workers in China attempt to gain professional power to have an authoritative position in the field of welfare provision.

Building professionalism is a way of gaining power or creating limitations

In China, social work accreditation is granted by the nation. In Australia, social work accreditation is issued by a professional association of social work—Australian Association of Social Work (AASW). According to literature reviews in Chapter 1 and research interviews with various social work practitioners, social work accreditation in China is more open, which encourages various frontline practitioners to learn and understand the social work profession and undertake empowerment practices. Social work accreditation approved by the nation in China especially inspires consumer practitioners to adopt local social worker roles, to engage in community development, and empower themselves and others in their communities. Nevertheless, many of the qualified Australian social workers I interviewed chose not to join the AASW. They think the AASW is inflexible and has restrictive rules, takes membership fees but does not provide enough supports for its members, adopts a perceived preference for case work, and takes a conservative attitude towards political advocacy. AASW is the professional body of social work in Australia, but arguably has moved away from its professional agenda to make changes in unequal systems (Lawrence, 1965; Ife, 1997; Mendes, 2008). Being a radical alternative to the AASW, the Australian Social Welfare Union (ASWU) was established by a group of radical social workers in 1976 and represented social workers' critique of the conservative social polices until the 1990s (Moore, 2017, p.332).

As Chinese governments promoted the development of the social work profession, they granted more funds to the social work agencies initiated by social work teachers in universities. Due to the history of ideological differences between capitalism and socialism, the non-profit organizations who accepted funding from overseas did not get as much government support as newly established social work agencies. The research interviews with RW and MWPC practitioners indicate that the first-generation non-profit organizations in China launched in the 1990s, benefited from the global feminist movement of the 1990s. Those non-profit organizations strived very hard to gain approval from Chinese governments and carried the critical tradition of challenging unequal social orders. They are quite experienced in empowering vulnerable groups and adopting policy advocacy. Therefore, the current raising of the professionalism of social work actually limits the access of those non-profit organizations to governments' funding.

Professional discourse, what should be praised?

Social work is also a part of the system that must address and implement unfair laws (Fook, 2002; Ife, 2016). Thus, it is very hard for social workers to challenge systems of inequalities of power in a radical way. Thus, it raises the question of what professional discourses should be praised and promoted in the social work field.

Modernization

Scientific and rational discourse

In both Australia and China, the discourse of science and rationality are emphasised in the education of the social work professional. Current social work education is criticized as focusing overly on casework techniques and losing in-depth examination of societal structures and humanity from a holistic perspective (Ge, 2015; Lei & Huang, 2016; Ife, 2016).

As discussed in the earlier theoretical framework Chapter 3, modernity derived from the Enlightenment movement (originated in Europe in the 17th and 18th century) opposed the despotism of feudal and religious systems and advocated rationalism in every domain of natural science, pedagogy, literature, politics, economics, historiography, ethics, philosophy and so on. During the enlightenment period, it was deemed that thinking and behaving rationally liberates human beings from the oppression of rigid religion and feudal systems. This is an important aspect of the culture of modernity. Australia and China are both based in the macro modernization system with structures of industrialization, market economy, and urbanization. As a profession of social science, social work is required in both Australia and China to build rational knowledge to help the nation solve the problems caused by industrialization, urbanization, and market economy.

In addition, as described above, China and Australia are at different stages of modernization. The rationality culture of modernization is critiqued by Australian social workers as lacking attention to unequal power structures and social inequality. At the same time, evidenced in literature reviews in Chapter 1 and research interviews, China is still working to catch up to the 'advanced' modernized Western countries.

Binary Distinctions

In the system of modernity, agents are identified as taking different positions and capitals in the various fields. There are distinctions between central (federal) governments and other (state and local) governments, governments and non-governmental organizations, non-profit organizations and social work agencies (mainly in China), profit organizations (such as banks) and non-profit organizations, social enterprises and profit organizations, social enterprises and non-profit organizations, non-profit organizations and community groups, government departments managing social welfare and other government departments, professional social workers and other human service workers, practitioners in non-government organizations and government workers, case workers and community workers, and so on. The Wanzai case in this research, especially shows the diverse distinctions that can occur in a micro-local context (see Chapter 6 of this thesis).

As Australian and Chinese social work practitioners make efforts to change diverse power relations between different agents in the field to transform unequal structures, they must also build an understanding of the distinctions between agents holding different positions and capitals in the field and note how distinct discourses result in barriers of mutual understanding and collaboration between different agents. A critical perspective should be adopted to question whether these distinctions are based on the ideology of market competition or whether agents can collaboratively pursue social justice, social equality and human rights.

Care and control

Modern state governments, whether in China or Australia, all contain the contradictory aspects of care and control. As evidenced in the research data, Australian and Chinese governments exert some control over how social workers may empower people. Powerful governments regulate social work practice according to their preferred ideology and focus. Most often, governments pay lip service to the provision of services and support (Zhu & Chen, 2013; Chenoweth et al., 2005). As governments manipulate the welfare provision system, they fund or give grants to conforming organizations and social workers working within them (Tang, 2010a; 2010b; Zhang et al., 2013; Zhu & Chen, 2013; Chenoweth et al., 2005; McDonald & Chenoweth, 2007; Alston et al., 2018). Governments may offer what they think the community and the organization need, rather than work with communities and organizations to define and realize their needs (Tang, 2010a; 2010b; Zhang et al., 2013; Zhu & Chen,

2013; Chenoweth et al., 2005; McDonald & Chenoweth, 2007; Alston et al., 2018). Social workers must conform to the discourse endorsed by governments to deliver services. As well, social workers often struggle with the discord between different levels of government or different political parties (Zhu & Chen, 2013; Chenoweth et al., 2005). If national governments do not have the policies and funds to better support welfare provision, local governments, especially those based in rural areas, do not have the resources or the motivation to deliver more services (Ife, 1997, Shi, 2011).

Nevertheless, research findings present that both Australian and Chinese governments promote welfare systems to provide necessities and care to disadvantaged groups in society. Both interviewed Australian and Chinese social work practitioners noted that when governments played the role of coordinator, supporter, and supervisor in welfare provision, organizations and social workers were enabled to empower vulnerable groups. In this modern world, governments have the responsibility to effect and protect social equality and justice from a holistic perspective. As evidenced in research findings in Chapter 5 and 6, when legislation and policies are based on the values of social justice, equality, and human rights, people, especially the disadvantaged, gain empowerment. According to research interviews and findings illustrated in Chapter 5 and 6, the policies specifically targeting women's welfare and the legislation protecting women's rights can empower women and challenge patriarchal culture.

However, in response to globally intense economic competition, governments in both nations have adopted a neoliberal ideology and have squeezed funding for welfare provision. Further, governments are to a large extent at the mercy of the globalized market economy system. The paradox of care and control within the modernization system is evident in the relationship between governments and social workers and between social workers and service users, and in the ideological conflicts that the market economy causes in relation to liberation or exploitation. The concepts of care and control are clearly presented in every parts of this thesis, including literature reviews, theoretical discussions and research interview, this tension plays out in social work practice in both countries.

Globalised market economy system

China and Australia are embedded in the globalised market economy. In terms of literature reviews in Chapter 1 and 2, as part of the global economic market, Chinese and Australian governments make efforts to maintain their global economic status to ensure welfare provision and solve social problems. Showed from literature reviews in Chapter 1 and 2, the rapid global economic competition results in social issues being dealt with under the premise of economic development, rather than from a sustainable social and natural development perspective. The contradictory nature of care and control

within modernization also causes governments to adjust welfare provision in terms of economic outcomes.

The market mainly values economic rationality and rarely pays attention to humanistic efforts embedded in actions. As governments believe in the market's omnipotent power, Australian social workers undertake big data analysis and utilize cost-benefit analysis to persuade governments to offer support. The market's pursuit of economic rationality is also present in the case of the Qinghong practitioners' hand-made crafts being priced according to the material costs rather than the significant human input. When governments believe in market rules and pursue economic rationality, a tangible quantitative standard is used to evaluate the efficiency of welfare deliveries, and means testing is adopted to assess the eligibility of welfare recipients (Chenoweth et al., 2005; McDonald & Chenoweth, 2007; Alston et al., 2018). If the organization and service user have greater access to capital through their ability to earn or their social position, then they have a greater chance to survive in the competitive market environment

Rural disadvantage, losing connection with nature

According to the interviews and the literature review, the disadvantaged situation of 'rural' during the process of industrialization and urbanization in both Australia and China is a significant barrier for social workers in their attention to the empowerment of rural people. In the context of competitive and intense globalization, and rapid industrialization and urbanization, most rural communities have experienced economic decline. People are isolated in rural communities and suffer from a lack of adequate public and private services. In particular, rural women bear the stresses of dealing with the (often inadequate) finances of the family and caring for family and community members (Alston, 1995, p. 86-96; Alston, 1998; Zheng & Wang, 2000; Xiao & Yang, 2005; Shortfall, 2006a; Zhou, 2013; Warner-Smith et al., 2014).

In particular, the unique dual rural–urban citizenship system in China creates vulnerable social groups such as rural migrant labourers and left-behind rural groups. The hierarchical nature of welfare provision in China especially damages rural people's rights and ability to gain equal welfare benefits with urban citizens.

Through literature reviewed regarding rural structuring and restructuring during China and Australia's pursuit of modernization and economic growth in Chapter 2, it can be seen that rural people who depend on family farms for survival, are affected by the modern industrial and market discourse around producing food. Climate change is considered by Australian governments as a 'normal risk' needed to be managed by farmers (Alston, 2005b; Tonts, 2005; Howard, 2016, pp.91-102). Both Australian and Chinese rural people over-exploit lands for farming and grazing. They use chemical

fertilizers and pesticides to increase production, which significantly causes pollution of soil and water. This model of 'rural restructuring' in conjunction with market competition, is challenged by social workers adopting a sustainable ecological view (Besthorn, 2004; 2012; Boetto, 2017; Betto & McKinnon, 2018)

Theoretical tools applied to findings

Habitus

Habitus is the relationship between agency and structure

Social workers construct empowerment practices under different contexts in Australia and China. Social workers differ according to their background, life experience (including gender experience), and interpretation of empowerment. Social workers' position and disposition in empowering disadvantaged people are influenced by their social work education and accreditation, the organization and community they work with, the welfare system and its discourse and the political culture of Australia and China. Simply speaking, as agents of practice, social workers develop their habitus through interacting with the environment in which they work and live.

According to Bourdieu, structural inequalities such as hegemonic masculinity, authoritarianism of governments and economic rationalism of the market can be normalized through individuals' habitus (Webb et al., 2002, p. 37). If social workers and service users cannot thoroughly reflect on their habitus and make changes, they reproduce structural inequalities. For example, most Australian social work interviewees mentioned that some social workers simply accept neo-liberal ideology and view the powerless groups as problematic individuals and operate as agents of the state exerting control. Chinese social work practitioners attempt to gain the professional power of social work through developing case interventions and evaluation skills. Nevertheless, they lack a comprehensive understanding that the scientific professional discourse of social work is another way of endorsing power inequalities with powerless groups.

In addition, people's habitus shows in the way they take the culture of systems for granted. Chinese governments manipulated the entire system of welfare provision in the planned-economy period and they are still the main body delivering welfare services today. Thus, most Chinese people have become accustomed to the administrative welfare provision model and consider government workers as social workers. This research indicates that the public in China treat social workers with some suspicion because rarely does anybody other than government agents have the legitimacy to engage in welfare provision.

Habitus is significantly influenced by micro contexts

Research data demonstrates that people' habitus is significantly influenced by micro contexts such as organizations and communities. In China, social work practitioners are more likely to act in accordance with organizations' leadership, aim, values, type and mission, and in Australia, social workers conduct practices in line with organizations' aims, types, leadership and values. Nevertheless, by contrast with Chinese social work practitioners who have various educational backgrounds, Australian social workers are more likely to apply empowerment practice through challenging unequal structures.

Empowerment largely relies on individuals being willing to take action to make changes internally and externally. Both Australian and Chinese social workers are engaged in influencing different agents and transforming power relations in micro contexts such as organizations and communities. They aim to change the habitus of individuals to enable them to critically reflect on the ways structural inequalities influence them and to endeavour to take actions against structural oppression. Australian and Chinese social work practitioners negotiate with different stakeholders by acknowledging the field those stakeholders act in and use the language with which they are familiar. Changing the culture in micro contexts can further lead to the addressing of macro structural inequalities.

Field and doxa

Acting in fields, understanding doxa, constructing practices to change power relations

Australian and Chinese social workers act in different fields such as organizations, the welfare provision system, communities, social work education, the developing profession of social work and political agendas. Research findings suggest that their main empowerment strategy is to influence different agents within different fields. Different agents live and work in diverse fields. Social workers must understand the doxa that is the specific logic or rules and unquestioned belief of a field (Deer, 2008a).

According to the research data, when Australian social workers attempt to negotiate with governments, they use the language of cost-benefit, data analysis and economic efficiency. This is in response to the neoliberal welfare provision discourse in Australia. When Chinese social work practitioners attempt to negotiate with governments, they use the language of building a harmonious society, improving the governing ability of government and helping government to deliver welfare services. This is embedded in the Chinese government's promotion of social work to pursue the improvement of social management and social services during the process of modernization.

Furthermore, social workers in China and Australia reported that they understand the doxa of rural communities in which they work and this facilitates interventions to empower local people. For instance, in Australia, social workers can run rural collectives based on shared interests such as

occupation, social status, economy and art, and expand those rural collectives as larger movements among many communities. According to the Chinese social work practitioners, however, a community project is mainly based in a certain physical community. Kinship is the determining factor in the majority of Chinese rural communities. Thus, the pursuit of interests mainly happens within the physical rural communities to which people belong.

Acknowledging similarities and distinctions between fields

In China and Australia, organizations are embedded in different welfare provision fields such as government organizations, religious organizations, well-structured non-profit organizations, for-profit organizations and community groups. The research data suggests that in both Australia and China, similar types of organizations share similar ideologies, dispositions and positions. For example, government institutions tend to govern social groups and address social issues. Civil organizations are more flexible and able to deliver welfare services in more creative ways. The power distinction between fields determines how societal structures function. Thus, interactions and distinctions between fields are determined by societal structures and, in turn, reproduce those societal structures.

Capital

Organizational distinctions

Because of the different political and sociocultural structures in Australia and China, what is considered as 'capital' is not the same in organizations in Australia and China. For example, in China, the leadership of an organization largely determines how the organization's practitioners implement practices. The organization's relationship with government is of great importance for its survival and development in China. It is imperative for organizaions to build cooperation with governments, especially when they attempt to implement practices in rural communities. By comparison, in Australia, the aim and personnel structure of an organization determines what kinds of resources it can obtain and what kinds of practices it conducts. Unlike Chinese organizations, Australian organizations attempt to maintain and strengthen advocacy for policy change. By comparison with China, Australia has a relatively flexible political structure and social and political advocacies have occurred across its history.

In terms of literature reviews in Chapter 1, Australian civil society also has a long history of participating in welfare provision. Many organizations in Australia have built sustainable cooperative relationships with governments. In China however, civil society has only been able to participate in welfare provision since 2006 when the Chinese government began promoting the social work profession.

Evidenced in research findings in Chapter 5 and 6, in both Australia and China, a well-structured organization with outstanding leadership and clear aims, which values creativity, flexibility, and foresight, is beneficial to social workers in the construction of empowerment practices. When an organization's aim accords with government directions, the organization gains more support and resources. From research interviews, when an organization's practitioners feel valued by governments, they have more motivation to empower disadvantaged people. As showed in research findings in Chapter 5 and 6, if an organization specializes in a certain area such as domestic violence, the organization builds capital and gains more support and resources from governments and society.

In both Australia and China, if the organization focuses on women's services, its practitioners have stronger gender awareness and sensitivity in practice. If the organization is well structured, creative and flexible, its practitioners are more likely to remain in the organization and build a strong knowledge base about their communities and groups. During this process, these practitioners are more likely to build tangible trust with service users, foster firm beliefs in the values of social equality and justice, and grasp the skills of acting on these values. Also, an organization's relationship with government is a very significant form of capital, facilitating the gaining resources to empower service users. If the organization builds long-term cooperation with governments and foundations, it has more chance to secure continual funding. Presented from research findings in Chapter 5 and 6, organizations are more powerful if they integrate research and practice, develop long-term strategies, implement practice at different levels, and adopt clear financial management.

As reported by Australian and Chinese social workers, if organizations are not located in local areas, they are not able to accurately grasp the needs of local people and their communities. Organizations with few resources usually struggle with satisfying the various needs of service users. Some Chinese organizations particularly reported that it is difficult for them to find capable local practitioners to engage in community work in rural areas.

Whether in Australia or China, cooperation with universities and the media is a very important form of capital of organizations. Universities send students to help organizations engage in projects and provide research analysis and evaluation for organizations to improve methods of practice. Organizations offer education and field placement supervision for university students. In addition, organizations utilize the authority of universities and the media to engage in public education, build their reputation, and expand their services.

According to research findings illustrated in Chapter 5 and 6, organizations and social workers are powerless to help poor individuals earn more income. It is the responsibility of governments to provide a basic living guarantee for the poor, the aged, the disabled, the sick and people who have experienced

natural disasters. These vulnerable people, and the social workers trying to help them, do not have the required economic capital to gain benefits from the market. Especially in China, it is very difficult to help poor rural residents and rural migrants working in cities to improve their living status. Australian social workers and Chinese social work practitioners implement their practice in local communities. Based on research interviews, if the community has strong cohesion and creativity this helps social workers to empower people.

Universal welfare system and civil societies participating in welfare provision

Australia is a developed Western country with advanced economic development, a relatively universal welfare system, abundant lands and resources and a population of only around 25 million. All of these are beneficial social conditions in which welfare practitioners can work to empower vulnerable groups. The universal Medicare system in Australia is especially highly praised by the social work practitioners interviewed. In contrast with Australia, China has a huge population of more than 1.3 billion people and is a developing country with a residual and hierarchical welfare system. Compared to disadvantaged groups in Australia, a huge number of Chinese people live in poverty and many rural people living in poverty, cannot meet their survival needs. In addition, Australia has a more vigorous civil society participating in welfare delivery than China. This is because welfare development in Australia was historically based on the engagement of civil society. Moreover, Australia does not have a rural–urban dual citizenship system. Rural residents in Australia share the same welfare rights, such as the basic pension as urban residents. Furthermore, Australia has a relatively flexible political structure compared to China. Non-profit organizations in Australia do not need to find a specific government institution to be their direct supervisor and it is easier for them to register as organizations than non-profit entities in China.

Australian social workers clearly mentioned the empowering effect local universities have on local community members, local social workers and organizations. La Trobe University has campuses in Bendigo, Albury-Wodonga, and Shepparton, which benefits local social workers and provides them with continual social work training. Based on the description of Australian rural policies in Chapter 2 and the introduction to Albury-Wodonga region in Chapter 5, Australia's regionalization policies may play a supportive role for universities to set up campuses in regional cities. Chinese practitioners, however, did not mention in interviews that there were universities in rural areas to support their practices. During China's pursuit of modernization, most economic, educational, medical and welfare resources are centralized in urban areas. Rural areas are very disadvantaged compared to cities.

The social movements such as labour movements and feminist movements that thrived in the late twentieth century are empowering for both welfare practitioners and vulnerable groups in society. These movements began in groups and communities and then influenced the government to make

reforms and issue policies targeting human rights, social equality and social justice. These social movements significantly inspired the public and impacted social work education. When the achievements of these social movements are endorsed by governments through legislation and policies, social workers have stronger voices in transforming social inequalities. However, in the late twentieth century, governments overthrew polices that ensured the achievements of social movements.

Efficient government in implementing policy

By comparison with Australian governments, Chinese governments are very powerful and efficient in promoting and implementing policy. For example, if Chinese governments decide to alleviate poverty in rural communities, they can very easily centralise all the human and financial resources necessary to achieve poverty alleviation. Another example is the rapid development of the social work profession following its promotion by the Chinese government. The case of Wanzai clearly shows how the government embeds social work into every part of its administrative structure. It is very helpful for social workers intervening in local rural communities if local governments largely support their work.

Conclusions of this research

Empowerment is a cultural reproduction process from micro- to macro-levels

In this research, rural women's empowerment is taken as a symbolic field. Because China and Australia share the commonalities of industrialization, market economy, urbanization,and a patriarchal culture, rural women in China and Australia face similar difficulties: rural communities with weak economies, geographic isolation, loose social connections and patriarchal oppression. Social work practitioners are regarded as agents in this research, participating in providing services for rural women in China and Australia. The practice of social workers in empowering women is associated with the kinds of feminist ideologies they adhere to and how strong their gender awareness is.

In terms of Bourdieu's theory of structural constructivism, and according to the analysis detailed above, social work's intervention in rural women's empowerment in Australia and China is a process of cultural reproduction. During this cultural reproduction process, social workers are restricted by social structures but also actively construct rural women's empowerment in China and Australia.

From the research analysis, three main cultural structures can be concluded to be barriers for social workers in empowering women: the underlying philosophy adopted by governments to control individuals and the society, economic rationalism in pursuit of maximum economic benefit, and patriarchal culture. Empowerment is a core value of the social work profession. Interrelated with the values of human rights, social equality and social justice, empowerment is a cause pursued by the

social work profession. When social workers work to empower women, whether in China or Australia, they interact with and resist those three main cultural barriers.

As social work is recognized as a profession, it is embedded in the scientization culture of modernization. It has the aim of improving the wellbeing of human beings along with achieving an equal and just society. Thus, in this thesis, I attempt to define two cultures as the ultimate aims of the social work profession.

Humanization: According to this cultural definition, individuals achieve maximum freedom in society. They have the maximum right to pursue freedom, equality, justice and democracy. This pursuit is based on the human need for love and connection and is a conscious process to minimize the desire to control, manipulate and cause harm to others.

Socialization: Human beings construct the history and reality of society. They pursue humanization to further reflect whether their constructed social structures benefit them in the pursuit of humanization, that is, whether human beings in society are encouraged and supported to pursue a more free, equal, just and democratic society. This type of society can only be maintained by building a harmonious relationship with the natural world because human beings depend on the bequests from natural resources to survive.

Therefore, social workers' empowerment practices show the interactions between scientization, humanization, socialization, government control, economic rationalism and patriarchal culture. The complicated interaction between these factors demonstrates a cultural reproduction process. These cultures are inherently abstract however and contain dualistic natures in the modernization system. The cultural reproduction process is embodied in patterns of distinction between multilevel fields in practice.

From a macro perspective, under the framework of globalization, there are distinctions between Western and Eastern countries, developed and developing countries, collectivism and individualism, universal welfare systems and residual welfare systems, professionalization and indigenization, democratic politics and authoritarian politics, men and women and so on. From a micro perspective, there are distinctions between different organizations, welfare practitioners, vulnerable groups, practitioners, service users and so forth. General standards are adopted to make these distinctions. Nevertheless, unless being considered from a holistic perspective, continual distinctions reproduce current structures rather than reform current structures.

If the social work profession aims to achieve humanization and socialization, it must build continual understanding of these distinctions and their contradictory nature and note that each nation has a

different position and disposition in the globalization system. Thus, different nations develop relatively different ideological discourses for welfare provision, which lead to different development contexts for the social work profession. For example, the social work profession in China is required by Chinese governments to pursue modern social management and welfare provision by learning from Western developed nations. The social work profession in Australia is required by governments to improve the economic efficiency of addressing problems of vulnerable groups. The capitalist economic system is the basis of the contemporary (modernization) social system. Overall, the welfare provision of a nation relies on its economic development. Thus, the social work profession in different nations needs to comply with their government's economic development discourses.

The cultural reproduction process is also the interaction between human beings and social structures. This interaction represents the habitus explained by Bourdieu. Habitus is remembered by bodies and reinforced by emotions, beliefs and consciousness. Social work is a profession that works to assist human beings to improve their welfare. It is an endless process for social workers to understand human beings in structures. During this process, social workers build dialogue with themselves between body, emotion and mind, and they reflect on the contextual response of body, emotion and mind to societal structures. This is the building of the living philosophy or logic of love through which social workers better understand empowerment of themselves and others. It is more complex than holding compassion and sympathy and simply understanding 'scientific' service methods.

The modern welfare provision system puts social workers in a good position to systematically learn knowledge and theory about the societal structures of economy, politics, welfare, culture and about the psychology of human beings, and to examine this knowledge and these theories in practice. If social workers can use this position to uncover the contradictory nature of modernization and inform others about the societal cultural reproduction process, they are reproducing the culture of liberation.

An ideal empowerment model

Organizations are taken as substantive fields studied in this research. Social workers are recognized as agents who actively construct empowerment practices for disadvantaged people. As mentioned above, social workers' construction of empowerment is a cultural reproduction process. In order to make this cultural reproduction process reform current structures for the further liberation of human beings, rather than strengthening current structures, I propose an ideal empowerment model based on the research findings about organizations and social workers (noted in Chapter 5 and 6).

Organizations

According to this research analysis, the cultural capital of organizations mostly determines how social workers engage in the cultural reproduction process of empowerment. Organizations utilize, expand

and create cultural capital in the culture reproduction process of empowering people. In terms of research analysis, if organizations integrate the following factors, they have more capital to reform structures and empower disadvantaged people:

- strong leadership and clear aims in challenging structural inequalities;
- strong support for social movements in communities;
- capacity to undertake diverse collective activities (educational, recreational and mutual help);
- capacity to engage at multiple levels including individual, group, community and politics; and
- open cooperation with diverse institutions and groups at community, national and international levels.

An ideal empowerment model for women can be built when these factors target gender inequalities within the patriarchal culture.

Professionalism of social workers

Being a professional social worker entails an endless process of understanding and learning. It involves:

- understanding relevant theories;
- being knowledgeable about the histories and current macro social structures of countries, and about the complex power relationships in the local communities they are engaged in (from my research, the cultural sensitivity of social workers lies at this point);
- insisting on challenging structural inequalities or oppression;
- breaking down overall strategies into applicable approaches in practical fields;
- critically reflecting on complex power relationships in practices and their constructions in these complex power networks;
- holding a holistic view to pursue equality, justice, human rights and empowerment;
- mastering the techniques of language to serve service users and negotiate with different stakeholders to better empower service users; and
- reflecting on their own habitus under current structures and building integration between body, emotion and consciousness.

Suggestions for further research

Habitus and the practice of empowerment, social justice and social equality

Australian social workers and Chinese social work practitioners engage in work with or without social work titles. In both China and Australia, those who truly believe in and try to apply social work values of equality and justice will integrate these values into every part of their life and work. This is not only about how they grasp social work theories and use learned social work skills or professional

techniques. In fact, this is bound up with their accumulated understanding and experience of working with human beings in the current modern system.

The basis of Australian and Chinese social workers engagement in empowerment practices is that they believe in helping others and in pursuing a more humane and equal society. Their habitus, including personality, background, life experience, educational background, values, disposition and position in their organization, influences how they practice.

Nevertheless, in terms of this research data, regardless of social work education or practice, there is limited in-depth exploration of the relationship between body, emotion and consciousness, and people's relationship with themselves and the natural world. This is not about the professionalism of dealing with psychological problems; this refers to how social workers understand the internal spiritual world and how the outside world such as society and the natural world impact on a person's body and spiritual world. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, many Australian social workers are already applying an ecological lens to address the contradictory modernization system and to pursue a just, equal and sustainable world. Given empowerment is a cultural production and reproduction process, it is of great significance for further research to explore how social workers build their habitus to reproduce cultures of social equality, justice, human rights and sustainable development in this paradoxical modernity system.

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List of acronyms

AASW *Australian Association of Social Workers*

ABS *Australian Bureau of Statistics*

ACWF *All-China Women's Federation*

AIHW *Australian Institute of Health and Welfare*

ARIA *Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia*

ASGC *Australian Standard Geographic Classification*

CCCP *The Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party*

CCW *Chunyan Craft Workshop*

CFPA *China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation*

CNV *Centre for Non-Violence*

COS *Charity Organization Society*

CPG *The Central People's Government of the of the People's Republic of China*

ACWF *All-China Women's Federation*

CYC *China Youth Committee*

DET *Department of Education and Training*

DH *Department of Health*

DHSH *Department of Human Services and Health*

DPC *Disabled People Committee*

DPIE *Department of Primary Industries and Energy*

DSH *Department of Human Service*

DSS *Department of Social Service*

DWA *Domestic Workers' Association*

DAWR *Department of Agriculture and Water Resources*

FEM *Folk Education Movement*

HIV *Human Immunodeficiency Virus*

LGBT *Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender*

LSW *Lily Social Work Agency*

MARA *Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of the People's Republic of China*

MCA *Ministry of Civil Affairs of the People's Republic of China*

MF *Ministry of Finance of the People's Republic of China*

MHS *Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security of the People's Republic of China*

MHUR *Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development of the People's Republic of China*

MHWC *Ministry of Health, Department of Women and Children's Health of the People's Republic of China*

MNR *Ministry of Natural Resources of the People's Republic of China*

MLSS *Ministry of Labour and Social Security of the People's Republic of China*

MSH *Migrant Sister's Home*

MWPC *Maple Women's Psychological Counselling Centre*

NBS *National Bureau of Statistics*

NDIS *National Disability Insurance Scheme*

NPC *National People's Congress*

NRCM *New Rural Cooperative Medical Insurance*

NRCP *New Rural Cooperative Pension Insurance*

PARC *Primary Agricultural Producer's Cooperative*

PRC *People's Republic of China*

PUMCH *Peking Union Medical College Hospital*

Qinghong *Qinghong Social Work Agency*

RC *Republic of China*

RIRDC *Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation*

RRMA *Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Areas*

RW *Rural Women*

RWGPS *Rural Women's GP Services*

RWM *Rural Women Magazine*

SARS *Severe Acute Respiratory Syndromes*

V4I *Voice 4 Indi*

Wanzai SW *Social Work Leading Team in Waizai Prefecture Government*

WCA *Wanzai Civil Affairs Bureau*

XLCS *Xiangshan Loving Comprehensive School*

YMCA *Young Men's Christian Association*

YUPS *China Youth University for Political Sciences*