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The Politics of Indigenization: A Case Study of Development of Social Work in China

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Internationalization and indigenization are dialectical processes of knowledge transfer. However, social work literature has paid scant attention to the process of indigenization, which can best be understood as one of recontextualization. This paper introduces Basil Bernstein's theory, which contends that recontextualization is a political process, as an analytical tool for us to understand the politics of indigenization. To demonstrate the usefulness of this tool, this paper analyzes how, in China, the Ministry of Civil Affairs and social work academics interactively compete for this control.

Keywords: *Indigenization, recontextualization, China, social work development, Basil Bernstein*

Internationalisation and indigenization are two dialectically interacting processes of knowledge transferring mostly from developed to developing areas (M. C. Yan, 2005). Compared to internationalisation, however, indigenization

has received scant attention in Western social work literature. A quick keyword search of articles listed in the Social Work Abstract from 1978 to February 2005, for instance, revealed only eight records containing the word "indigenization". Discussing social work, Walton and Abo El Nasr (1988) suggest that indigenization means a modification of non-native social work discourse, by making it relevant to the importing country's values, needs and problems. They contend that indigenization is a transition from an importing stage to one of authentication, by which a domestic discourse of social work is built "in light of the social, cultural, political and economic characteristics of a particular country" (Walton & Abo El Nasr, 1988, p.136). However, the actual process of indigenization, the means by which an imported discourse is filtered, tested, grounded and reproduced and what social forces may affect this process, has not been satisfactorily explained.

Drawing from the experience of social work development in China, and employing a sociological theory proposed by the late British sociologist Basil Bernstein, this paper discusses and demonstrates how various social forces influence the social work indigenisation discourses in China. In this paper, discourse refers to two closely related meanings. First, a discourse is a social configuration which embodies not only thought, but also meanings and actions. In other words, it is not what is being said but the "true" meaning of "preempted through the social and institutional positions held by those who use them" (Ball, 1990:2). Thus, different institutions generate their own discourse of actions and meanings. In this connection, social work discourse refers to a mode of social configuration with a specific set of values and practices as claimed by its proponents through institutional process.

Second, according to Bernstein (2004), as a process, a discourse also denotes "the social base of the pedagogic [or social] relation, its various contingent realizations, the agencies and agents of its enactment". (p.364, Bracketed is the authors' own interpretation) For Bernstein, recontextualization is a dynamic process in which different discourses "are appropriated and brought into a special relationship with each other, for the purpose of their selective transmission and acquisition" (Bernstein, 2000, pp.46-47). Thus, this selection process

is always political, and involves power relations between different social forces, with each of them trying to control the production and reproduction of the dominant social configuration of the discourse which is to be recontextualized into the local context.

The purposes of this paper are twofold. The first is to provide readers involved in transferring social work knowledge to developing countries with an analytical tool – Bernstein's theory – that may help them to understand the politics of indigenization in the local arena. The second is, by examining recent developments in social work in China, to demonstrate the usefulness of this tool for readers who concern the issue of indigenization of social work in other countries. We will first briefly describe the current development of social work education in China. Bernstein's recontextualization theory will then be introduced, and used to examine how the imported discourse of social work is recontextualized in China. We shall demonstrate how the recontextualization theory permits us to locate the nature of conflicts, dilemmas and contradictions created as a result of different field agencies competing to define and limit the process of recontextualizing social work into the Chinese context. Implications for international social work practice will be examined.

Social Work Development in China

After 1949, a vast welfare and relief services delivery system was established in China, under the auspices of the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MoCA). Since then, the MoCA has grown into a large bureaucracy, supported by a huge group of non-professionally trained staff with little formal training in social work. The mandates of the MoCA are manifold ranging from registering associations, naming streets, operating funeral service, taking care of veterans, coordinating relief work, and operating welfare facilities. Many of these are urban administrative works. By the year 2000, the MoCA employed 1,658,359 people in thousands of welfare units (Department of Finance and Administration Ministry of Civil Affairs of China, 2001). Nonetheless, as Liu (2003b) observes, because the MoCA is responsible for all marginalized groups and relief work, social welfare has gradually become one of its main focus. According

to a study in Chongqing, the quality of services delivered by these units has been of major concern to the MoCA and, in the early 1980s, the Ministry undertook a national policy of modernization, designed to upgrade these services to more professional levels (Nie & et al, 2004). Seeking to learn from international experience, The MoCA turned to its counterparts in the Western world and soon discovered the profession of social work. To professionalize its own services, the MoCA decided to import elements of Western social work and integrate them into its existing practices.

The MoCA also turned to domestic institutions of higher education for intellectual support by re-establishing social work education programs that had briefly existed in some universities prior to 1949. In 1989, the first of these programs was re-inaugurated in Peking University with the support of the MoCA. Since then, formal social work training has rapidly been expanded, and to date, the China Association of Social Work Education has 160 member institutions (CASWE, April 2005). The development of social work education in China has been speedy, but not smooth, and two different discourses of social work in China have emerged (Ge, 2000; S.B. Wang & Xu, 2003). The first one is a discourse mainly dominated by social work scholars in universities and colleges, which argues that social work in China, must include professional elements (including formal training, the use of scientific knowledge, and the development of scientific skills, humanistic values and professional ethics) used throughout the developed world (S.B. Wang & Xu, 2003). The other one is dominated by the MoCA, which accepts the need for scientific and professional social work, but emphasizes respect for local tradition and practice within its own system.

A Process of Recontextualization: Brief Overview of Bernstein's Theory

In this paper, indigenization is understood as a process of recontextualization. As a sociologist of education, Bernstein argues that recontextualization is concerned with the construction of a pedagogical discourse that "is a principle for appropriating other discourses and bringing them into a special

relation with each other for the purpose of their selective transmission and acquisition" (Bernstein, 1996:47). It is, in essence, a principle for appropriating knowledge from various other discourses to form a unique discourse for cultural reproduction. In its original development, recontextualization often refers to the process of translating social forces into pedagogical processes in a classroom and school context (Neves & Morais, 2001; Singh, 2002; Solomon & Tsatsaroni, 2001).

Furthermore, the recontextualization process necessitates legitimizing change. According to Bernstein, this is regulated by distributive rules that "mark and distribute who may transmit what to whom and under what conditions, and ... attempt to set the outer limit of legitimate discourse" (Bernstein, 1996:46). This, however, should not be taken to mean that there is only one mode of interpretation permitted by the legitimizing ideology. According to Bernstein, the recontextualizing principle creates its fields using different agents of recontextualizing functions (Bernstein, 1996:47). Bernstein identifies two important recontextualization fields – the official recontextualization field (ORF) and pedagogic recontextualization field (PRF). The former refers to various state agencies and ministries, and the latter refers to various academic and research institutions. Bernstein also suggests that "which discourse is appropriated depends ... upon the dominant ideology in the official recontextualizing field and upon the relative autonomy of the pedagogic recontextualizing field" (Bernstein, 1996: 67). Thus the relationship between these two fields defines which discourses are to be recontextualized and how they are to be recontextualized.

As we will demonstrate in this paper, there is keen competition between these two fields to define the appropriate meaning of modern professional social work in today's China, in which social work and social work education are in their infancy stage. As a result, there is space for different social forces with different ideology and vested interest to manoeuvre (Han, 1996; Tsang & Yan, 2001; S. B. Wang, 1998). At the system level, we shall argue that recontextualization of social work in China enables different social forces to appropriate discursive resources from the international arena to further its own domestic agenda. Power and control are therefore the key

dimensions in understanding the recontextualization process; as Bernstein argues, power constructs relationships *between*, and control relationships *within* given forms of interaction (Singh, 2002). The major power struggle manifested in the interaction is the control of framing, which "is about *who* controls *what*" (Bernstein, 1996, p.5, italics in original). Indigenization can be understood as a framing process in which the Western social work discourse, which is portrayed as one monolithic entity, is selectively and discursively appropriated by various parties in the local context; however, this appropriation is regulated by the rules of social order, i.e., the regulative discourse which defines the hierarchical relationships of these competing parties and their expected conduct, character and manner (Bernstein, 1996).

The Regulative Discourse Governing Recontextualization

In China, the socialist market economy is the regulative discourse that regulates all aspects of the framing process. For instance, senior government officials have stated repeatedly that social work is intended to serve the process of economic reform, as a means of ensuring "ending *fanyou*" (stability and prosperity) (Li, 1992; M. F. Yan, 1996). One element of economic reform is China's open door policy, which signals China's intention of becoming part of the global community. To be part of the modern global community, China believes that *jiegui*, or the process of becoming connected to the track of the Western world, is necessary. Since the re-instatement of social work education program in the early 1980s, social work educators and officials from the MoCA alike have been actively engaging with social work educators from the developed world, through whom they intend to import "modern" knowledge and "scientific" skills and social work methods from "Western" countries. In accordance with *jiegui*, professionalism and scientific methodology have become the ultimate goals for both MoCA officials and social work academics.

Indigenization is an issue that has troubled Chinese society for more than a century. Beginning in the late Qing Dynasty (late 1800's), under pressure from Western imperial

powers to make political and cultural concessions, intellectuals in China started a debate on how to modernize China. To Socialist China, however, *jiegui* does not imply the loss of its sovereignty. Hence, the baseline of *jiegui* is not about total Westernization, but rather about how Western knowledge and technology and Chinese culture can compliment each other to further China's modernisation. The late Qing notion of *Zhongti Xiyong* (Chinese corpus, Western application) has been reiterated as one possible model (Han, 1996; Huang, 1996; S. B. Wang, 1998). According to this notion, Western social work is perceived as a monolithic, modern and scientific entity that can be transformed within an indigenous Chinese conceptual framework (Tsang & Yan, 2001), and Western knowledge is something that can be applied to serve a social agenda within the Chinese political and cultural context (e.g., Lu, 1984). Translated into the jargon of Socialist China, indigenization can be understood as "*Socialism with Chinese characteristics*". In other words, to make Western knowledge useful to China, it needs to be filtered, tested, grounded or even reproduced based on local cultural, political and social experience and conceptualization. The ideas of *jiegui* and Chinese characteristics set the backdrop for the competition between the MoCA and social work academics to recontextualize social work in China.

Two Competing Recontextualizing Fields in China

The importation of Western social work practice has sparked heated debate about the indigenization of social work in China. Despite the fact that the first formal social work training program was initiated in 1984 by the MoCA, tensions between the emerging professional social work education system and the well-established non-professional MoCA system were observed as early as the late 1980s (Chau & Liu, 2001). According to some leading social work scholars in China, indigenous social work practices in China, based as they are on imported Western knowledge, will only gain social acceptance if they reflect the *professionalism* (i.e., nature of professionalism) found in the international social work arena (Yuen-Tsang & Wang, 2002), which is deeply rooted in Western culture (Hugman, 1996; J. Midgley, 1981). MoCA theorists, one

the other hand, while also seeking Western input, insists on a more broadly defined *professionalism* of China social work, which they contend must be grounded in local practice within the historical and current context of China (e.g., Lu, 1984; Q. S. Wang, 2004). As a result, two parallel and conflicting recontextualizing fields, led by the MoCA (the ORF) and by social work scholars (the PRF) respectively, have emerged in China.

As Yuen-Tsang and Wang (2002) observe, the debate over how widely or narrowly social work professionalism should be defined creates noticeable tension in China. The underlying cause of this tension may largely be a result of MoCA practice. As Zhu (2004) summarizes, social work scholars in academic institutes and policy makers and theorists within the MoCA debate whether civil affairs constitute professional social work service, and whether social work, as a form of Western social helping institution, has ever existed in China after 1949 (Lu, 1984; Q. S. Wang, 2004; S. B. Wang, 1999; M. F. Yan, 1996). These debates implicitly question the legitimacy of the MoCA as a modern form of social helping institution. Responding to these challenges, theorists and officials from MoCA system insist that civil affairs are a form of non-professional and administrative-oriented social work practice (e.g., Q. S. Wang, 2004).

Meanwhile, most social work academics in China are ambivalent about regarding the welfare and relief work conducted by the civil affairs system as professional social work in a Western sense. To distinguish the social work discourse that they represent and teach from traditional civil affairs, social work scholars in China, strategically and sometimes uncritically, define social work as a helping activity that is guided by altruism, based on scientific knowledge, and employing scientific methods (M. C. Yan & Tsang, 2005). This definition not only distinguishes what they are advocating from the work of civil affairs cadres, but also portrays the latter as atheoretical, non-professional and politically motivated. However, both sides understand that to legitimize their positions, they must adhere to the dominant political ideology, i.e., the regulative discourse – *Chinese socialist characteristics*. Thus, these two competing agencies, located in two different recontextualization fields, the MoCA are in constant conflict with the social work

academics over how to define the “*professionalism*” of social work – in various dimensions including scientific vs. heuristic, altruistic vs. administrative, helping vs. managing, humanistic vs. ideological – in terms of Chinese socialist characteristics. To further understand the social work recontextualization process in China, it is important to note the structural relationship that exists between the official recontextualizing field and the pedagogic recontextualizing field in social work in China.

ORF: Dilemma and Control of MoCA

Controlling the definition of *professionalism* is of primary importance to the MoCA, a vast bureaucracy with a huge low-skilled labour force, and which is already faced with the growing challenge of emerging social problems caused by economic reforms. Meanwhile, these same economic reforms have forced the Chinese government to adjust its social programs, and major social reforms designed to reduce the state’s expenditure on welfare have already taken place (Croll, 1999; Wong, 1995). Budgetary limitations have meant that rapidly expanding community services have had to hire hundred of thousands of unemployed or laid-off residents to provide services in communities at low wages. Hiring these people helps to stabilize society by minimizing social unrest due to high levels of unemployment, but leaves the MoCA with a massive low- and un-skilled workforce, forcing it to walk a very thin line between maintaining its own internal stability on the one hand, and upgrading the quality of its service to the larger community on the other.

The MoCA attempts to legitimise its social functions by controlling the discursive space surrounding social work development, and stressing the resemblance between the nature of its social service functions and those of newly imported professional social work model. To that end, the MoCA established in 1991, when the discussion of social work development was still in an early stage, the China Association of Social Workers, with the majority of its members coming from the civil affairs system. The name of this association may indicate MoCA’s intention to blur the boundary between civil affairs and social work. The MoCA also tried to develop a discursive alliance with social work academics by creating and control-

ling a social work journal – China Social Work, an official discursive space through which different partners could be involved in the process of recontextualizing social work. This journal was published under the leadership of the MoCA, but was supported and edited by social work educators. However, for some reason this was a short-lived journal that lasted only several years. Since its discontinuation, MoCA's departmental journals have become some of the very few arenas for the discussion of social work and social welfare in China.

By controlling the welfare units in the field, the MoCA limits not only the discursive space of the PRF, but also its influence in direct practice, the final pedagogic site for social work academics to test their indigenised knowledge. As seemingly the sole employer, the MoCA controls the employment situation of social work graduates. Despite the rapid increase in the number of social work programs in China in recent decades, the Chinese government did not officially proposed to accept social work as an occupation until July 2004. Lacking an employable occupation, there is no social niche through which scholars engaged in formal social work education programs (PRF) can indigenise their knowledge through research, practice and student internship. By controlling the job market and fields of practice, the MoCA limits the discursive space of social work academics to classrooms, conferences and writings, which are restricted channels confined within the academic arena. As a result, the pedagogical recontextualizing field becomes merely armchair discussion.

PRF: Dilemma and Resistance of Social Work Academics

The MoCA (ORF) has control over the actual operation and delivery of social welfare services, and direct control of welfare units and its massive personnel. However, it has no jurisdiction over social work education programs, which are the province of the Ministry of Education (MoE) at both the central and local levels. As a result, although the MoCA reintroduced social work education programs to the higher education system, it has only limited control over the content and method of social work education programs. In other words, the pedagogic recontextualizing field extant in the higher education system is influenced by two official recontextualizing

fields instead of one, although it is more likely to be regulated by the administrative, financial and discursive rules laid down by the MoE rather than those of the MoCA. This, in accordance with Bernstein's theory, has given social work scholars a degree of relative autonomy to define the pedagogic recontextualizing field of social work. However, this does not mean that social work education program can just produce its own group of social workers, because the social workers they train need to work under the remit imposed by the MoCA.

Yet, nowhere in the literature or official document can we find that MoE and MoCA are in direct competition. Instead, MoE's role in the debates over social work's *professionalism* is relatively indirect, for MoE has no direct interest in how social work is practised in the field. Its main concern is to ensure that its jurisdiction is not trespassed by other government departments, namely MoCA in this case, and the rules of the regulative discourse are embraced within the curriculum design. However, two decisions made by MoE have greatly empowered the PRF in the recontextualization process. First, as it has tight control over the use and publication textbooks, the MoE can ensure that any new pedagogical knowledge transmitted in the social work program will not violate China's state policies or, more important, its socialist ideology. To standardize social work education as expected by the MoE, the China Association of Social Work Education (CASWE), which was set up in 1994 to coordinate and facilitate the development of social work education in China (Yuen-Tsang & Wang, 2002), recently published a new set of textbooks. These books are based on a core social work curriculum recommended by the CASWE but endorsed and published by the Higher Education Department of the MoE. In the standard, it is clearly spelled out that social work in China is understood (at least by MoE in agreement with the CASWE) to be a profession that is guided by altruism, embraced by a set of values based on scientific knowledge, and employing professional skills to help people to help themselves (Department of Higher Education Ministry of Education, 2004). Consequently, MoE reinforces the social work academics while running against MoCA's authority in defining social work in China.

Second, in the early 2000s, the MoE conducted a reform

of higher education that included the approval of more than 125 new social work education programs. A critical mass of social work scholars has more or less been formed. At the same time, however, the higher education reforms further weaken MoCA's domination of the recontextualization and sets back its influence in the recontextualization process by disabling MoCA's training arms. As part of the higher education reform, the China College of Civil Affairs was downgraded back to cadre training institute status, as were many other training institutes operated by various ministries. By restructuring higher education in China, the MoE indirectly empowers the PRF.

Meanwhile, the PRF also has inherent problems that hamper its control of the recontextualizing process. The majority of social work scholars in China were trained in various social science disciplines such as sociology and anthropology; only a handful of social work scholars have formal education in social work, mainly from Hong Kong. While this diverse educational background means these scholars have broad-ranging knowledge and insights from various disciplines that may facilitate the indigenization process, their lack of formal social work training and practice experience weakens the scholars' credibility and that of the agencies in the PRF in general. As a result, social work academics have turned to their counterpart outside China for support, and since 1986, frequent and active exchanges between social work educational institutes in China and foreign social work schools have taken place (Garber, 1997). Particularly important to this exchange are social work institutions in Hong Kong, due to its unique status of having strong cultural links to both China and the West and its geographical proximity (Chau & Liu, 2001; Ngai, 1996). Frequent academic exchanges, like conference and seminars, have been organized, and social work education institutes in Hong Kong have actively recruited social work educators from China into their graduate programs. Currently, Hong Kong higher education institutes are offering at least two Master of Social Work programs to other Chinese scholars. As Yan (2005) observes, the efforts of Hong Kong social work education institutes to assist their counterparts in China to develop social work education is a part of their own survival strategy following Hong Kong's return to China. By instilling a Western model of pro-

fessional social work and strengthening their counterparts in Mainland China, the social work profession in Hong Kong may be able to shape the future of China's national policy vis-à-vis the welfare system. As such, the outside-mainland-China influence they exert further complicates the competition of the two recontextualizing fields.

Competing and Collaborating: Dilemma of the Two Fields

The competition between the ORF (MoCA) and the PRF (social work academics) is not absolute, and the boundary between the two fields is sometimes inter-penetrable. For instance, social work scholars have repeatedly raised concerns about job opportunities for their graduates (e.g., Chau & Liu, 2001; Liu, 2003a; S. B. Wang, 2000). While social work has, since 2004, been a recognized occupation in China, most social work graduates have not been able to find work in their field. Many of them end up working in the private sector in jobs that are irrelevant to social work. This creates pressure for social work education institutions to work closely with the MoCA, which dominates social service provision and leads the planning of social policies and services in China (Yuen-Tsang & Wang, 2002). Also, in order for their students to gain practical experience, social work education institutions must rely on local MoCA units and cadres to provide practicum opportunities.

Although the MoCA controls the employment opportunity, it cannot ignore the social work academics. After all, to conform to the dominant discourse of modernization, MoCA needs to rely on the academics which are relatively in a better position intellectually and politically to connect with the international arena, i.e., *jiegui*. For its part, the MoCA also understands that if it is to upgrade its services, it needs to build an alliance with emerging social work scholars, who can provide it with the theoretical and technical support needed and in-service training to its massive untrained workforce. By becoming involved with MoCA's in-service training, social work educators may be able to export their concept of what constitutes professional social work to MoCA's staff. On the other hand, they may also legitimise MoCA's claim that civil affairs con-

stitute social work, and upgrading MoCA cadres may further delay the need for the MoCA to hire professionally trained social work graduates.

The MoCA also functions as part of the PRF through its local training arms. In 2004, about seven members of the CASWE were training arms of the MoCA, although most of them were at the provincial or municipal community college level. As Yan and Tsang (2005) have found, social work programs in China tend to include some unique elements from their sponsoring institutions, and MoCA's participation in PRF discursive activities such as conferences and publications allow it to influence the PRF by advocating its own ideas in the pedagogic recontextualizing field.

Recently, the growth of the PRF, particularly with support from the MoE and other external agencies, has led the MoCA to soften its stand. Recently, Ministry officials and policy analysts have recognized that, if it is to become a modern helping institution, it must reconcile the differences between traditional civil affairs and the newly emerging discourse of social work imported from the developed world. Some individuals promote the idea of separating MoCA's dual mandates – social welfare services and urban administration – and re-aligning its organizational structure (S. B. Wang, 1999; Zhu, 2004). Another move that could blur the boundary between the ORF and PRF is Shanghai's recent establishment of a social worker registration system. Based on academic qualification, the registration system identifies two levels of occupational status: social worker and social work assistant, with each category having its own qualifying examination. Intriguingly, both levels require a certain number years of relevant social work experience, which is still largely monopolised by the civil affairs system. The Shanghai system, on the one hand, officially recognizes social work as an occupation within the government system and provides a mechanism for the MoCA to transform and increase the "*professionality*" of its own workforce by hiring trained social work students; on the other hand, however, its establishment may benefit the existing service providers (i.e., civil service cadres), by allowing them to achieve professional status through examination rather than formal training.

In brief, in China, both the MoCA and social work ac-

ademics agree that Western social work must be filtered and reframed within China's politico-cultural context. However, beneath the surface of this agreement lies a competition to define *professionalism* in social work within the context of *Socialism with Chinese characteristics*. This competition is not only about two rival or competing forces. Located in different social positions, agencies in the two recontextualization fields may intersect with other social forces that indirectly complicate the process. For instance, the MoE and social work academics from outside China have empowered social work academics, even though their very existence was initiated by and requires the support from the MoCA. The interaction between the ORF and PRF, as demonstrated in the case of China, is always political.

Conclusion: Implications to International Social Work

This paper has examined the politics of indigenization of social work in China by using Bernstein's recontextualization theory. We argue that indigenization is a political process, in which competing social forces try to dominate the recontextualization of an imported discourse, and that it is necessary to understand how these forces interact. Bernstein's theory, by identifying how agencies of two competing fields (i.e., the official recontextualization field and the pedagogic recontextualization field) interact, provides a useful theoretical framework for understanding the development of social work not only in China but also in other countries in at least twofold. First, we contend that this theory is important to the emerging concern of international social work among the social work profession in North America (Healy, 2001; Hokenstad & Midgley, 1997; Midgley, 1992). Among the many forms of international social work is the one that involves international exchange among social work scholars. However, so far, the exchange has been criticized as a one-way process in which colleagues in the developed countries are invited to and take initiative to introduce what they know and what they practice in their own country to their counterparts in the developing world. To avoid professional imperialism (Midgley, 1981), the principle of interdependence has been promoted.

Nonetheless, Yan (2005) contends that inter-dependence must be established upon a mature indigenization of social work practice in the developing country. So far, the understanding of indigenization has not been fully explored in the international social work literature. As demonstrated in the case of China, indigenization is a political process. Bernstein's recontextualization theory provides social work practitioners, who involve in the social work development in the developing country, not only a theoretical framework to understand how indigenization may work among indigenous actors but also to sensitize their reflexivity as outsiders of an internal political process. To prevent professional imperialism may also imply that we should be cautious not to intrude into the recontextualization process. After all, if social work is a social construction, then it may need to be contextualized within the cultural-socio-political context in which it is practiced (Payne, 1997).

Second, this paper employs Bernstein's recontextualization theory to analyze the indigenization process in a case country. While this theory is originally developed to account for the social basis of the ways in which social meaning is selected, interpreted and transformed into pedagogic meaning, which is commonly called school knowledge, it is also useful for social work educators to understand how the social work curriculum is being constructed in our society. Like the profession itself, social work education has been in constant revision to reflect the social demands, such as "shifting of government ideology" (Poppo, 1995; Reisch, 1998; Wenocur & Reisch, 1989) "therapeutic culturalism" (Epstein, 1994, 1999; Specht & Courtney, 1994), "globalization" (Ife, 2000), just to name a few. However, resistance to change has also sparked constant debate within the profession in terms of its own missions and identity (e.g., Gibelman, 1999; Gibelman, 2000; O'Neill, 1999; Specht & Courtney, 1994).

More or less, the social work curriculum is the result of social chemistry between social work educators and external forces. Bernstein's recontextualization theory offers us a tool to understand how this process shapes what we teach in the schools of social work in our own society. More importantly, Bernstein's theory of recontextualization helps us to locate the parameter of autonomy within the institutional and discursive

constraints marked and shaped by political and social forces. Such understanding will be critical to the profession, members of which have been seeking to confirm its own identity since its very early day. If indigenization is about recontextualization of knowledge, then it is not something only for the exotic societies in the developing world but also a local phenomenon that most people in the developed world may have overlooked.

In summary, in order to understand indigenization as a political process of recontextualization, it is important to know not only *what* discourse is being imported, but also *how* the importing discourse is to be contextualized (Bernstein, 1996). However, recontextualization is not something unique to the socialist China, but also a local phenomenon in any form of society. As a case study, the development of China social work education is used to demonstrate how Bernstein's theory can be used to understand the competition of different actors and forces in determining the pedagogical construction within a particular socio-political context. More important, we also contend that the same theoretical framework is useful for our own self-analysis.

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