

Christian Aspalter (ed.) (2014), *Social Work in East Asia*. Surrey: Ashgate (Routledge). £95.50, hbk.
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In Asia social work has become a major means of delivering social services as well as relieving and preventing social problems at an individual, family, and community level. With the rise of social work the number of activities undertaken by social welfare NGOs and the government has increased throughout East Asia, resulting in a greater demand for professional social workers.

Social Work in East Asia, provided the diversity of contexts as well as the history and development of social policies, social services and the social work profession in the various countries. Eight of the ten chapters in the book were devoted to case studies of Japan, Mongolia, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines. The discussion focused on the development of social welfare, the trend and the future of social work of each of the selected countries. In the introductory, as with the concluding chapter, Aspalter provided the framework and cross-national meta-analysis which added good value for the integration of the book as a whole.

International social work, on the global stage, is changing and the rapidly developing Asia, as a phenomenon, is worthy of in-depth critical examination. The trend in Asia, as with the rest of the world, is toward greater civil participation through non-government organizations. Social workers should increasingly harness volunteers and community resources to augment professional helping (Tan, 2006; 2014). Prevention and developmental strategies must be systematically incorporated in social-work intervention, especially in rural contexts. Pragmatic approaches involving community self-help, mediation of conflicts using indigenous leaders, and mutual aid associations appears to be more appropriate in the Asian context (Tan, 2006; 2014).

As to how social work in East Asia will develop into the future, it depends greatly on the societal culture and social political contexts. In Chapter Seven Aspalter, writing with Zulkarmain Hata and Zarina Saad, asserts that, in Malaysia, social workers have a poor professional image due to a lack of professional training and meagre wages. In several countries, such as Japan, Thailand and Malaysia, difficulties in recruiting social work students have been experienced, while, on the other hand, there are social work graduates that are employed in non-social work-related jobs.

The professional recognition is a matter of timeliness rather than due to the poor image of social work. It is a social development process moving towards the greater appreciation of the vital role that social workers play in any society. Thailand, for instance, is a unique mix of the ideology of nationalism and the king's support for welfare as opposed to the demands of a strong market economy. According to Kitipat Nontapattamadul in Chapter Six, the role of social work in Thailand has gradually shifted from a residual to a more universal model of service provision rooted in the cultural background of charity in preference to the provision of social welfare for nation building.

To Aspalter (Chapter One) the social political contexts determines the development of social work in the various countries. Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam are leaning towards socialism while Mongolia is a former socialist country now transformed as a nation with multiparty democratic election. Single-party dominance in Singapore and Malaysia as well as Japan, until recently, have their advantages in planning their approach towards both economic and social development. Taiwan, Thailand, and the Philippines, like Mongolia, have multi-party competitive democracy with free elections and these have implications for progressive social work and social development.

In socialist and communist countries the governments' attitudes towards social work have been guarded as they previously did 'not need social work because everything was taken care of by the party' (p. 2) and the state. China has, in the last 15 years, reversed its stand on social work, now fully supporting it as needed especially with the fast ageing society and with the emergence of new social problems due to migration and one-child policy. Social work in Japan did not see steady development until recently 'due to heightened electoral competition' (p. 3), and was prompted to enhance the welfare provisions so as to extend the political party's political advantage.

In Japan, social workers tended to be activists of left-wing political parties, and when the Democratic Party grew strong social work likewise gained prominence. According to Hubert Liu (Chapter Two), a great deal of the support for social work legislation, social work licensing and social work employment was provided by the government which resulted in social work and social work education programmes being introduced. Strong support for the left-wing parties came from the social work community as was witnessed in Taiwan and South Korea. With the development of welfare legislation, the author Liu pointed out that in Japan there is a gap between the government and private sectors and that there was little mobility beyond the sector boundaries. Since 1987, with the certification of social workers, the profile of social workers was significantly enhanced.

For Hong Kong, Ernest Chui (Chapter Five) views social work as participating in social control, and on the other hand the conservative government is generally cautious of social workers and their "subversive" activities. Social workers, as community leaders and organizers, often encounter conflict with the authorities when challenging the status quo. Conservative governments in East Asia often see social work as providing a safety net and helping to resolve social concerns but are unwilling to wield power and key positions in society to social workers.

For better control by the states, both the policy as well as the planning of welfare programmes are viewed as the government's prerogative, and not that of the social movement or grassroots leaders' role. In Taiwan, on the contrary, social work development was primarily determined by both the government and the social workers themselves. Whereas, in Thailand, the government appears to be more of a driving force behind social work development than the social work professionals themselves.

In Mongolia, as observed by Oyut-Erdene Namdaldagva in Chapter Three, the relationship between the government and the social work sector may be deemed as being more 'symbiotic'. There are many social problems such as child labour, homeless children, child prostitution and unemployment, which need to be dealt with and social work could be called on to deal with many of these issues (Aspalter, 2014).

As pointed out by Rosaleen Ow in Chapter Eight, in Singapore the government works hand in hand with social workers over prevention of social problems so as to achieve and maintain 'social harmony'. Legislative and policy support for social work by the government were easily obtained in some countries like Mongolia, but harder to get in others such as Taiwan and Japan.

In Thailand, the terms 'social work' and 'social assistance' are both utilised which is a cause for confusion to the public. Social work is also often lumped together with volunteer services, philanthropy and charity work, at times blurring the professional boundaries. However, in countries like Philippines, Japan, Mongolia, Malaysia and Hong Kong, social work seems to be more clearly defined as Aspalter finds in Chapter One.

Another major factor is the educational background of social workers. In Malaysia and Thailand, as with other parts of the world, there is the problem of non-trained social workers or non-social work majors joining social work or even teaching core social work courses. Some of these have received in-house training or continual education. This inadequacy, however, will still have an impact on the development of professional social work.

In Chapter Nine, the development of social work in Philippines is seen by Jem Price within a wider international context. Religious teachings have influenced social politics in many Catholic countries. However, as early as 1947, it was primarily the American-trained social workers that set up the first schools of social work and constituted the Philippine social workers association. In 1965, the first law was passed to regulate social work, and this also regulated the operation of social work service centres. Overall, the colonial and American political influence, as well as the contributions of the United Nations and international welfare NGOs, made significant impact on the social work situation in the Philippines.

Singapore's social work development, as narrated by Rosaleen Ow in Chapter Eight, also puts forward the key idea that the type of social welfare policies and programmes will determine the political will and actual room for the development of professional social work services. Singapore, with the many helping hands approach, has developed a welfare state in a class of its own being influenced by British social workers during the colonial days. Social work was first introduced in 1952. Two professional associations emerged, the almoners and the professional social workers; their amalgamation, in 1971, formed the current Singapore Association of social workers. Singapore's social policy reflects the incremental welfare ideology with the government consciously choosing not to go the welfare state route.

Singapore has recently launched The National Social Work Competency Framework to provide a 'clear articulation of social work roles across the profession with the corresponding knowledge and skills required' for effective delivery of interventions, so as to be 'future-ready, social workers', who are grounded in core competencies (NSWCF, 2015:1). This may be a trend, in the years to come, for the East Asian countries, as social work continues to quest for professional upgrading.

This book promises to keep up with the trends, providing an understanding into the rapid development and the efficacy of social work in this region. As with most edited books, however, the chapters vary in the consistency and depth of analysis. Despite the fact that two of the chapters, Japan and Philippines, were written by non-local social workers, in the book overall, the chapters expound social work development with current insights, making this book a useful document to scholars of comparative social welfare policy and social work.

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TAN NGOH TIONG
SIM University
tannt@unisim.edu.sg

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The book sets itself an ambitious task in attempting to respond to its key questions, namely: 'what is social work for' and 'who is social work for'? It approaches answering these questions