JOURNEY TO INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL WORK: A PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL REFLECTION

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The author has been a traveler traversing not only the geographic and cultural but also professional social work boundaries of Hong Kong, London, Toronto, San Francisco, Beijing, and now Vancouver. The stories that unfold in this article are closely knitted with the notion of "international" in contemporary social work. As a former colonial elite, an immigrant, a minority, and a privileged social worker and scholar, he experienced "international" in social work as a continued struggle against imperialism in both the local and global levels. To conclude his narrative, the author highlights some issues which may be worthy of contemplation if the social work profession really wants to have a fair exchange among social work communities from the developed and developing worlds.

"The image of traveler depends not on power, but on motion, on a willingness to go into different worlds, use different idioms, and understand a variety of disguises, masks, and rhetoric. Travelers must suspend the claim of customary routine in order to live in new rhythms and rituals. Most of all, and most unlike the potentate who must guard only one place and defend its frontier, the traveler *crosses over*, traverses territory, and abandons fixed positions all the time."

(Said, 1994, p.17, italics in the original)

I am a traveler. The stories that I will relate in this paper are not only about an immigrant's sojourn experience; they are also stories of the professional growth of a social worker who *crosses over* boundaries of international social work territories. As long as I am a traveler, my experience is in constant change. According to Said (1994), travelers "belong to more than one world" (p.11). All travelers are thus "international."[1] The internationality embedded in my own journey may offer some interesting dimensions to the current discussion of international social work. Reflecting on my personal and professional journeys between the developed[2] and developing[3] worlds, I argue that we must critically reflect on the imperial/colonial relations hidden in the current discussion of *international* social work. The stories

recounted in this paper will be used to examine concepts and principles—including *interdependence, reciprocity, cultural competence*, and *the exportation model*—proposed by major international social work scholars. Implications on the theory and practice of international social work will be discussed.

Embarking on the Social Work Journey

In October of 1981, I embarked on my professional journey as a student of a two-year diploma program in social work. Social work, both as a discipline and a profession, was not only western but also modern—an enlightened progression toward which Hong Kong was striving. Said (1994) observed that in a colony "it was assumed native elites would be taught the rudiments of intellectual culture in idioms and methods designed in effect to keep those native elites subservient to colonial rule, the superiority of European learning and so forth" (p. 6). This was an accurate description of Hong Kong – a British Colony. Perhaps social work was one of many examples of 'the superiority of European learning' through which I, like many other people of my age in Hong Kong, was kept subservient.

My first exposure to the rudiments of modern social work was through the texts that were chosen for us. The first English social

work textbook that I had ever had was a U.S.-Canada collaboration—the earliest version of *Social Work Process* written by Compton and Galaway (1979). Except for a very few Hong Kong-based materials, the majority of the textbooks and references we used were from the West. Chinese materials were largely from Taiwan and were either translated from or based on Western (mainly British and American) materials. These Western materials indoctrinated us with a set of social work values, knowledge, and skills that were mainly developed in two major Anglophonic countries, Britain (U.K) and the United States of America (U.S.).

In the 1980s, a postsecondary education in Hong Kong was indispensable for members of the lower class who aspired to join the ranks of the colonial elite. The prospect of upward mobility was so appealing that we young people from the lower class seldom questioned our desire to be part of the colonial elite. This desire, however, did hamper us from questioning what we were learning. We tended to perceive the knowledge and values of this Western learning—for instance, those underpinning social work—as noble, progressive, and even emancipatory, despite the vivid conflicts we encountered between what we were learning in school and what we were actually experiencing in the field. For instance, my classmates and I found it challenging to uphold the principle of confidentiality with our clients who, like us, lived with six to eight people in a physical space of 100-200 square feet. Likewise, we were uncertain about how to apply the principle of self-determination to our clients, who, also like us, were socialized in a culture in which making major personal decisions without consulting or seeking permission from family and/or elders was widely perceived as disrespectful.

The traditional Chinese culture in which many of us – and our clients – were socialized, tends to be structured around relations of

authority. As I have discussed elsewhere, Chinese who identify with the traditional hierarchical culture may tend to incorporate or interpret authority relations into other systems. As an educated professional, I was often seen as an authority by my clients, who expected that I, as someone with a higher status, would provide them with answers. Hoping to learn how to deal with cultural expectations that did not fit well with my professional role, I brought these dilemmas to the supervisory meetings. However, these difficulties were very often understood as nothing more than issues of professional amateurism and thus were framed simply as areas in which I needed to improve. The inconsistencies between the Western theories that we learned and the actualities of the local cultural context therefore eluded critical examination, as their cultural relevance was displaced by a standard discourse of job performance.

In October of 1985, after two years in the field, I decided to return to school to pursue a baccalaureate degree in social work (BSW). This two-year program was full of fascinating theories and concepts, such as Titmuss' grand ideas of a welfare state. Western success in the social engineering approach ignited the fire of our progressive minds with respect to social remedies that were needed at that time in Hong Kong society, which had a prosperous economy and numerous social problems. We were also introduced to the Western philosophy of social welfare, such as John Rawls' distributive justice. Just as with the diploma course, almost all my teachers had been educated in the West. International materials, mainly from the U.K. and the U.S., dominated our reading lists. Local materials were again rare.

Likewise, the relevance of Chinese culture was seldom a part of what we learned and was, instead, positioned as somehow savage. I still have a recollection of a particular lecture in which a guest speaker from our Philosophy

in Social Welfare course showed us a book written by a Taiwanese social work scholar who had tried to re-interpret (or deconstruct) the ten famous Chinese legends of filial piety from a western child abuse perspective. These traditional stories, treasured by many generations of Chinese, were turned into vivid examples of child abuse. For instance, there was a boy called Huang Xiang who would warm his parents' bed with his body in the winter and cool his parents' bed by fanning in the summer. The book interpreted this story as a child abuse case. The filial piety of Huang became a forced labor by his abusive parents. We were completely stunned by the author's "new" Western interpretation and became skeptical as to whether Chinese culture could ever accommodate the rudimentary principles of modern social work.

A Journey to the Imperial Capital

In the 1980s, many young social workers in Hong Kong went abroad to pursue their graduate studies, partly because of the lack of graduate programs in Hong Kong and partly because we wanted to acquire firsthand knowledge of the West. As Hong Kong was a British colony, it was not surprising that many of us chose to study in England. In 1989, with enough savings, I gave up my job as the manager of a children-and-youth community center in Hong Kong and went to London to pursue my Master of Science in Social Policy and Planning at an internationally renowned university.

As an international student, I crossed over not only the geographic but also the cultural boundary to the imperial capital, London. Traditionally, about sixty percent of the students of this renowned university are foreign students[4]. Many are from developing countries, particularly the existing and former British colonies. With its pioneer role in contemporary welfare state development and its imperialist history, Britain has been a center of welfare state study. For many of us,

studying in Britain was more or less a "secular pilgrimage" (Janin, 2002), a journey in which people travel to the *holy land* "to pursue their own academic, literary, historical, scientific, political, military, artistic or other interests" (p. 3). We sought not only to experience but also to learn from the wisdom of the imperial center.

However, such knowledge did not come without its share of disillusionment. The year that I was in England was also the year of major social discontentment over Prime Minister Thatcher's poll tax, a measure seen as further reduction of government welfare responsibilities[5]. The crisis of the British welfare system was especially disturbing to those young intellectuals from the developing world, including myself, who admired so much of Beveridge's legacy of the modern welfare state. Living in the imperial capital—the birthplace of the modern welfare state—I realized that the West, or at least Britain—the imperial master—was not as successful or as effectual as portrayed in our textbooks.

This prestigious educational institute of the imperial capital provided me an international scope, particularly through its diverse student body. However, in my recollection, localism, rather than internationalism, was perhaps a truer reflection of the interests of this imperial academy. For instance, I still remember my first book-searching experience in its library. Coming from a polytechnic in Hong Kong, I was quite used to a library full of international literature. It surprised me that materials at the library from foreign countries, particularly developing countries, were relatively inadequate, at least in those sections related to social policy and social work studies.

Nor did classroom discussion reflect the internationality of the diverse student body. Most classroom discussions were largely about domestic issues. International examples were occasionally brought up by foreign students who knew so little about the British systems that we needed to use examples from

our home countries to demonstrate our understanding of the theories that were taught. Although such input was appreciated as exotic, it was never at the center of discussion and learning. After all, it was the British examples that we needed to know for our examination papers.

The university has always had two Master of Science in Social Policy and Planning programs: one for developing countries and the other one unspecified. When I applied for admission, I was perplexed by the title of these two programs because I was unsure how to position Hong Kong. Was it a developed or developing city? The very existence of two different programs may indicate that they were tailored to suit the needs of the two different social and economic contexts. However, to uphold the dichotomy between developed and developing countries may also indicate a logic of imperial "otherness" (Said, 1979) embedded in the program design.

After all, like many colonial elites from the developing world, I had paid a secular pilgrimage to the imperial capital. Such a pilgrimage may, in hindsight, reflect an imbalance in knowledge generation and transmission between the developed and developing worlds, an imbalance rooted in the historical imperial-colonial relations. We elites from the colony were there to learn. Our experiences and stories were of little use to the imperial center. However, the knowledge and, perhaps more importantly, the degree that we gained from there were viewed as powerful in our homeland.
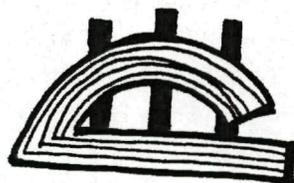
Returning to Hong Kong

I returned to Hong Kong in 1990. The master's degree from a prestigious British university brought me both professional and social advantages. Not only was I promoted to a midlevel management position in the agency where I used to work, I also attained a part-time teaching position at a college. Unlike that of my predecessors, my teaching was situated in the social context of the early 1990s, an unsettled period for Hong Kong. One of the major social debates of that time was centered on Hong Kong's social security system. Recently returned from our studies in England and North America, colonial elites such as myself formed various policy groups, eager to apply our learning to ameliorate the social conditions of Hong Kong.

Since it had been agreed that Hong Kong would maintain its status quo for fifty years after 1957, time was running short for those who wanted to change the colonial minimalist welfare system before 1997. These groups were actively critiquing not only the colonial government's policies but also the Chinese and British governments' future plans for Hong Kong, in hopes that a more comprehensive social safety net could be installed. Our goal was not to challenge the appropriateness of Western social security systems but rather to optimize their value in Hong Kong within a short time. Western concepts, theories, and methods were still the tools that we used to analyze and tackle local problems, and Western standards were still the yardsticks we used to measure local conditions.

Meanwhile, the brutal suppression of the student movement in Tiananmen Square, coupled with the impending return of Hong Kong to China, fueled social concerns that, come 1997, the people of Hong Kong would lose many of the freedoms they had enjoyed under the British imperial regime. One proposal to defend against this fate was to further internationalize Hong Kong, justifying Hong Kong's claim to a unique socio-political

status by appealing to its internationality. The rationale was that Hong Kong was vital and irreplaceable as an international hub. The social work profession of Hong Kong thus took a proactive approach not only to maintain its international scope but also to try to broker a greater linkage between the social service professions of China and the international community. To broker such a connection, we needed to know what China needed. Therefore, the exchange became two way. For instance, my colleagues and I organized a tour of 200 seniors to visit the social services of a city in southern China. In the meantime, social work schools in Hong Kong also started offering courses on social policy in China. I was one of the instructors who taught such a course in an undergraduate program.

It is now widely recognized that the Hong Kong social work profession has had a major impact on China's social work education development (Garber, 1997; Liu, 2003). With China's reintroduction of social work education in 1984, scholarly exchanges between Hong Kong and Mainland China became even more frequent. Social work scholars and practitioners from Hong Kong enthusiastically engaged in different levels of exchange with social service colleagues—mainly communist cadres and social work scholars—in China who showed a great eagerness to learn from us about how to *modernize* and *professionalize* their social services.

In order to survive, the social work profession prioritized internationalization. The colonial baggage of the Hong Kong social work profession was turned into a valuable asset that not only helped defend its future but also established its role as a broker in bridging China's social work profession with the rest of the world. Internationality became a means of continued viability. Consequently, the cause of indigenization within the Hong

Kong social work profession received relatively scant attention (Chu, 1999).

Becoming Canadian

In 1993, like tens of thousands of people from Hong Kong, I migrated to the great multicultural metropolis of Toronto. Moving to Toronto was another form of internationalization for me. This time, the internationalization did not embed in a locality, for instance Hong Kong, but in my body. All travelers with more than one cultural experience are international by nature (Brah, 1996). However, this international dimension is confined by a local context in which the travelers are positioned as minorities needing to adapt to the host culture.

Three months after settling in Toronto, I was fortunate to secure a position as a coordinator of a youth employment program in a mainstream agency. The daily commute was like a transformational tunnel through which I temporarily dropped my Chinese language, culture, and beliefs and assumed my professional persona. As an immigrant and a social worker, I crossed back and forth between my Chinese life world and my English work world. Like all immigrants, I had to be culturally competent in and adaptive of different cultural environments. The need for such adaptation leads me to wonder what it means to be culturally competent, a major requirement of international social work. As many international social work scholars contend, with an increasing number of immigrants in our caseloads, social work in a multicultural society is inevitably international (e.g., Healy, 2002; Midgley, 1990).

Very often, cultural competence discussion implicitly assumes a bicultural process in which the Caucasian social worker crosses the cultural boundary into that of his/her minority clients (Lam & Yan, 2000). Yet, for a social worker who is an immigrant and a minority, cultural competence may not be merely a bicultural issue. I routinely worked

within a web of culturally diverse constituencies. For instance, when a Caucasian employment counselor referred a Somali refugee youth to me, and I, a Chinese social worker, decided to place this youth with a South Asian training employer, the notion of cultural competence became complex and intriguing. In which culture(s) should I be competent? How can I be competent in all these cultures?

Each immigrant is a linchpin linking at least two countries; immigrants are always transnational (Brah, 1996). In this sense, social work, a local helping activity, can be affected by international dynamics. I remember that there was always some uneasiness between my Eritrean colleague and his Ethiopian clients due to the colonial history and long-time conflicts between these two countries. Their encounters were transnational and closely linked to the conflicts between the two countries. This transnational linkage was juxtaposed with and complicated by the power difference embedded in the helping relationship between my colleague – the helper – and his clients – the helpees.

Through unequal racial dynamics, the internationality embedded in a local setting of a Western country is inescapably connected with its imperial history. In my doctoral dissertation study (Yan, 2002), I found that many visible minority social workers reported having had the experience of being rejected by their Caucasian clients. More interestingly, some of them even experienced being rejected by clients coming from their own ethno-racial community. According to their accounts, they were told by clients that compared with their Caucasian counterparts, they as minorities were not competent or powerful enough to help them or advocate for them. The experiences of these workers may signify a racist reality that many visible minority immigrants experience.

To ground international social work in a local context, perhaps we should start from the issue of racism rather than cultural competence. Racism is not only a local problem. It is also rooted in the history of imperialism – a hidden dimension of internationality. After all, as argued by many authors (e.g., Anthias, Yuval-Davis, & Cain, 1992; Omi & Winant, 1994), the whole idea of racial difference was the result of the colonial/imperial hegemony. Many immigrants come from the developing countries, a large number of which are either current or former colonies of the West. Their status in the developed host countries is often understood as inferior.

As a social worker helping many immigrant youth attain employment, I found that very often such racist attitudes were disguised by the hegemonic premium put on the so-called "local experience." For instance, employers, sometimes even minorities and immigrants themselves, frequently used the excuse of "a lack of Canadian experience" to deprive thousands of qualified immigrants of jobs and promotion opportunities. The local accreditation bodies of various professions have similarly turned away thousands of immigrants who were trained in the universities of their home countries, even though the instructional models and curricula of those universities were largely based on Western models introduced in and/or imposed during the colonial period.

In brief, the *internationality* of social work practice in multicultural societies of the West may need to be understood within the context of imperial/colonial history and white supremacy, both of which internationally infuse and regulate the everyday life of not only people of the developing countries but also tens of thousands of immigrants from developing countries who now reside in the developed world.

Journey of International Exchange

In 1998, I returned to school full time in order to pursue my doctoral degree in social

work. As a Chinese doctoral student who could speak the Chinese language, I was involved in an international collaboration between my school—a Canadian university—and a college in China. This proved to be a valuable experience for me in terms of understanding the meaning of international social work. International social work is important because we live in an interdependent world (Healy, 2002; Hokenstad & Midgley, 1997a), and it has been suggested that reciprocity should be the principle of an equality-based international collaboration (Healy, 2002; Hokenstad & Midgley, 1997b; Midgley, 1990). According to Miriam-Webster's Online Dictionary[6], reciprocity is defined as "mutual dependence, action, or influence." In other words, mutuality in exchange must be based on the dependence of both sides. In real life, however, this mutuality is not yet realized since the interdependent world is a global world dominated by the West. In the global era, military imperialism is transformed into economic, political, and cultural domination. The reciprocity that these scholars urge cannot be disentangled from the brutal reality of economic globalization.

In the very beginning of the project, we were very aware of the need to follow the reciprocity principle. The idea of reciprocity is, however, not an easily achievable goal. First, social work is largely a Western construct. As in the case of Hong Kong, it was introduced to many developing countries during the colonial era by the imperial regimes as a superior form of knowledge or a paternalistic social mechanism to resolve indigenous social problems. Second, over the years, the West has established a paradigm of modern social work that is supported by myriad literature written and accumulated by its scholars and disseminated through its powerful and aggressive publication industry. (I will come back to this point later.) Third, many developing countries, including China,

do not have sufficient resources to develop their social work programs. They rely on substantial support from the developed countries.

Scholars from the West, who, deliberately or unconsciously, position themselves as experts, are reminded not to export knowledge to the developing countries. In employing their Western lens to see the primitive condition of social work services in the developing world, colleagues from the West are, genuinely but sometimes uncritically, eager to share (or teach) their knowledge. Though the reciprocity injunction may sound right in principle, it is not easily put into practice. Any reciprocal exchange involves at least two agents. The dynamics between them are not unilateral, nor are they exclusively regulated from either side.

When I visited China in 1999, my colleagues expressed a strong desire to obtain access to Western (particularly U.S.) literature. Along the lines of the early phase of social work development in Hong Kong, my colleagues in China viewed Western knowledge as a means of modernization—a national policy since the 1970s—which has mandated the social work profession itself in China (Yan, 1992). To be modernized is understood as *jiegui* ("connecting the rail track") with the international community. My colleagues in China equate modernization and *jiegui* with learning, following, and adapting to their counterparts in the West. To "import" social work knowledge from the West becomes the foremost goal of international collaboration. We scholars from the West are always uncritically positioned as experts, and colleagues in the developing world are always eager to learn due to their lack of access to information about and experience of the Western world. Refusing to share our social work knowledge with them may be seen as arrogant and unfriendly.

As a result, the reciprocity of international exchange is hampered by the unequal dynamic

of importation and exportation of western knowledge between colleagues from the two different worlds. This dynamic is, however, the result of the history of imperialism, through which the West is positioned as an internationally accepted standard of modernization and advancement. All developing countries must aspire to this standard or, as my colleagues in China say, to *jiegui*. Yet, the standard of the *gui* (the track) with which to connect is always Western.

Teaching in the United States of America

Having finished my doctoral study, I started a new journey by accepting a teaching position at a university in the United States. The fact that I need a visa to work in this country signifies that crossing the Canadian-U.S. border is an international act. As a traveler crossing the border, my identity shifted from Canadian citizen to U.S. foreign worker. This crossing was more than a change of legal status. Said (1994) claimed that "travelers must suspend the claim of customary routine in order to live in new rhythms and rituals." Crossing, therefore, is also cultural. Culturally, I must adapt to the new host. Despite many similarities, Canada and the U.S. are culturally different in many aspects. Perhaps Michael Moore's film *Bowling for Columbine* is a good, albeit simplistic illustration of some of these cultural differences. Meanwhile, the socio-politico-cultural milieu in which social work is practiced in these two countries is also different. After all, Canada and the U.S. have two different welfare systems.

Intriguingly, the international aspect of crossing the Canada-U.S. border is not perceived by many international social work scholars. For them, international is confined to the exchange between developed and developing worlds. For instance, Caragata & Sanchez (2002) note that North American schools of social work have actively participated in international collaboration. However, in their articles, Canada and the U.S. are lumped into one socio-political entity: North America. Collaboration and exchange between these two countries are not defined as international. Meanwhile, Mexico, a member of the North American Free Trade Agreement, is positioned differently. Collaboration between Canada and Mexico, and between the U.S. and Mexico, is classified as international. By classifying their international partners according to the developed/developing paradigm, many Western social work scholars reinforce the imperialist notion of "Otherness," in that the developed is understood as the helping subject, and the developing is understood as the object to be helped.

The exchange between the developed and developing worlds is not reciprocal. Now situated at the center of the global economy, I grasp a sense of the power of the capitalist market economy in creating and maintaining an unequal knowledge base between the developed and developing worlds. This unequal base makes reciprocity and mutuality of international exchange hard to attain. As noted by Wachholz and Mullaly (2000), the textbook (including journal publications) industry of this country is so powerful that it not only impacts on one's teaching at the local level but also dominates the international generation and dissemination of social work knowledge through its profit-driven control of the global market.

Despite the ethnocentric nature of U.S. textbooks and journals, they are perceived by many social work scholars from developing countries, particularly those who have been educated in the Anglophonic Western

countries, as state-of-the-art knowledge. To compete with their local and international counterparts, higher education institutions in the developing world tend to assess their faculty's productivity according to their number of publications in U.S. journals. Sustained by this push-and-pull force, social work knowledge from the developed countries is elevated to a superior position. In brief, under the existing global order, international exchange constitutes a new form of imperialism, and is always unequal. Despite forceful advocacy for reciprocity from many social work scholars, cultural imperialism in international social work is part of the untamable global economic domination of the West, which may be beyond what socially conscious international social work scholars can control.

Observations and Implications

To summarize my personal and professional journeys, I state a few observations and implications. First, the word "international" is never neutral. It is rooted in the imperial-colonial history of the human race during the last four centuries. Owing to its origin in and transmission through imperial regimes, social work in the developing world has, by default, already been internationalized. My professional journeys in Hong Kong and to China indicate that social work in developing countries has always been "international," or, more specifically, "imperial." Through various channels, including textual materials, secular pilgrimages, and appointments of expatriate scholars from the West, social workers in the developing world are trained with values, knowledge, and skills from the West, particularly Britain and the U.S. To borrow Du Bois's concept, social work students and practitioners in the developing countries, through exposure to Western materials and local actualities, have developed a "double consciousness," an intimate knowledge of the two worlds, which allows them to practice the Western-constructed social work in a local context.

Second, scholars in the developing world have recently given much attention on how to indigenize social work inherited from a colonial history (Hammoud, 1988; Walton & Nasr, 1988; Wang, 1998). Indigenization and internationalization are not antithetical but rather dialectical to each other. According to the imperialist understanding of social work, the "local" culture and actualities of the developing world are always subjugated as primitive, underdeveloped, and ignorable. A true mutuality in international exchange may need to be built on an equal sharing of knowledge, which requires our colleagues from developing countries to generate their own indigenous understanding of social work, a form of privileged localized knowledge that they can share with their colleagues in the West. Currently, I am co-editing a Chinese book on community work for readers in China. To ensure a genuine exchange with indigenous scholars, a dialogical approach is employed to organize the book. Each chapter has two parts – an introduction and a commentary – written by a pair of scholars, one from inside and one from outside China. The international (outside) and local (inside) perspectives are mutually appreciated, challenged, and validated. After all, *internationalization* of social work inevitably interfaces with indigenization, which is seldom addressed in international social work literature.

Third, though colleagues in the West may consciously try to avoid any form of cultural imperialism (Midgley, 1981) in which Western social work values, knowledge, and skills are positioned as elite, superior, and hegemonic, a strict refutation of the exportation model may nonetheless ignore the fact that the social work profession in the developing world is deeply entrenched in both the goal of connecting with their counterparts of the developed world and the hegemonic global standard defined by the

West. We need to recognize that as long as the desire for importation among colleagues from the developing world is intense, it may take a long time to achieve an equal base between the developed and developing countries in international exchange and collaboration. To resolve this difficulty, a constant negotiation of the exchange agenda may be critical (Tsang, Yan, & Shera, 2000). As in the above-mentioned Canada-China collaborative project, despite all the logical problems (details see Tsang, Yan & Shera, 2000), almost all major decisions were made bilaterally between the two sides through regular long distance phone calls of the two co-chairs.

Fourth, in terms of social work knowledge generation, we need to empower colleagues from the developing world and de-center the leading role of the developed world. We need to let the voices, ideas, experience, and theoretical conceptualizations of our colleagues from the developing world be heard, not only in their own countries as indigenous knowledge, but also in the Western world as an alternative perspective. To do this, we must create more platforms for this kind of equal exchange, for example, by comprising international journals of editorial boards and reviewers from both developed and developing countries. To enable more colleagues from the developing world to share their local knowledge with colleagues from the West, domestic journals in the West should recruit more international peer reviewers who have knowledge of the two worlds. Domestic national conferences should proactively invite participants from the developing world. For instance, the Annual Program Meeting of the Council of Social Work Education could extend its invitation to colleagues all over the world. Special panels could be organized to encourage foreign presentations. Fee waivers for social work scholars from developing countries might permit them to attend conferences whose fees are prohibitive.

Fifth, language is a critical issue in allowing the voices of colleagues from developing countries to be heard. English, as the dominant language in the international social work exchange, inhibits many non-English-speaking colleagues from the developing world from participating on an equal footing. Recently, the Canada-China project has published the first book on China's social work development in an English edition (Tsang, Yan & Shera, 2004). It took three years' time and involved the work of more than five translators and two professional English editors to translate more than twenty-five articles written by colleagues from China. Despite the fact that bridging the language barrier is a demanding process in terms of resources and time, this proves to be an important task for international social work. In the traditional practice, colleagues from the West have relied on an anthropological approach—"going native," observing, and writing about the "other" or the voices of social work scholars from the developing world either are unheard or are represented by scholars from the West. Now, stories of the development of social work in China can be told directly by the indigenous scholars.

Sixth, if we are to understand global interdependence, we cannot ignore its imperial/colonial history and relations. It has been argued that globalization is not a process driven by equal participation among countries of the developed and the developing worlds (e.g., Ife, 2000; Kellner, 2002; Steger, 2003). Fanon (1967) has suggested that "the gravest mistake would be to believe in ... automatic interdependence" without taking historical context into consideration (p.13). Therefore, in order to translate the ideal of interdependence into a social work curriculum in the West—at least in North America—we must not lose sight of the imperial history embedded in and the neocolonial dimension imprinted in notions of "international," particularly in view of the recent trends in

economic and cultural globalization. Perhaps the first aim of an international social work curriculum should be to equip students to reflexively understand the ideal of interdependence in international social work, vis-à-vis the imperialist history of social work development in the developing world, the local oppressive conditions faced by transnational minorities, and the brutal realities of globalization imposed on the developing world.

Conclusion

Upon finishing this manuscript, I accepted an offer from a Canadian University. This time I will be moving back to my second home. However, as a Canadian social work scholar who has taught in the U.S., returning to Canada will be another international experience. My traveling story has not finished but turned a page. Traversing the boundaries of the social work communities of the developed and developing worlds in the last two decades reminds me of the complexities abounding in the discussion of international social work. We live in a global world. The meaning of "international" within the current global order is inherited from the imperialist era, which has not totally vanished from the human experience. This imperialist history has located social work communities of the developed and developing worlds in unequal power positions, particularly in terms of knowledge generation and transmission. While we promote an interdependent world, we should not lose sight of this unequal imperial dimension that is hidden both in the local social work practices of multicultural societies in the developed world and in the international exchange with social work colleagues from the developing world.

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Footnotes

[1] Healy (2001) defines *international* as "between or among two or more nations, of or pertaining to two or more nations of their citizens, pertaining to the relations between nations, having members or activities in several nations, or transcending national boundaries or view points" (p.5). She also recognizes that the word *international* is used interchangeably with *cross-national* and *global*. In this paper, *international* also includes a transnational dimension.

[2] The term *developed countries* refers to countries with advance industrial development , for instance, the G7. However, very often in social work literature, *developed countries* is used interchangeably with *the West or Western countries or the North*. Very often these terms are loosely defined. Since it is not the intention of this paper to define these terms, I will use them interchangeably to signify a group of Anglophonic industrial countries.
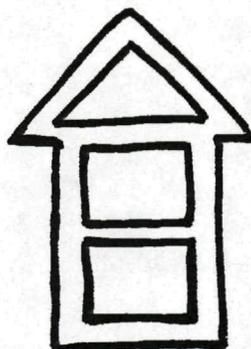
[3] Some people use *third world* or *the South* to describe countries that are economically underdeveloped. In this paper, for consistency, *developing* is used to signify the process of development.

[4] Please refer to http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/pressAndInformationOffice/aboutLSE/information.htm

[5] Please refer to http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/timelines/england/pwar_poll_tax.shtml for further information on the poll tax.

[6] See http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary?book=Dictionary&va=reciprocity.

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