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Gendered Social Work?

**A Research on Male Social Workers in Shenzhen Special
Economic Zone**

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Abstract

This paper is an empirical study on social work in China from the gender perspective. In this paper, I will analyze how social work in China, as a relatively new career, is being interpreted and constructed under Chinese modern gender norms; at the same time, how male social workers experience work and personal life in the context of feminized social work.

There is an interesting phenomenon that many male social workers consider their job as a short-term practice rather than a long-term career. They keep considering choosing other jobs when working as social workers, and furthermore, they would rather quit even after a few years' working when confronted with marriage. I carried out my qualitative research by interviewing eight male social workers in Shenzhen Special Economic Zone to perceive their understanding and feeling of the career and found out that low wages was the key factor, which cannot fulfill social expectations on men and leads to low self-realization. As a result, the phenomenon reflects an inappropriate policy that needs adjustment during the process of social work professionalization.

Key words: China, marriage value, gender norm, social work professionalization

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Chapter 1 Introduction

I have always been concerned about social work development in China as both a student with a social work background and a social worker with a half a year frontline practice. From being a student myself, majoring in social work, I found that there were many more girls than boys studying in this discipline. I presumed that this could be due to the requirement of the traits of patience and empathy, which can relate more to the nature of females, generally speaking. However, when I became a social worker, I gained a different understanding that social work also requires logic and rationality which men seem to relate more to the nature of males, if referring to gender stereotype. Until I studied gender at Lund University, where I learned that gender is a concept constructed by the society, and therefore, those entire characteristics, including patience or logic, are also social constructed and in fact that there is no taken-for-granted quality that men or women should have or be inclined to have. This refreshed my thinking that social work is a no-gender preference career. The reason why female social workers are the overwhelming majority as compared to male social workers, would be the gender norm shaping human behavior and career choice, perhaps not only in China but also worldwide. For my interest, I would like to analyze how social work in China is regarded as a female career by the public and how this impacts male social workers.

There has been plenty of research studying labor segregation in relation to gender inequality, whereas relatively less empirical studies on men's participation in 'female' occupations. At the same time, there has not been sufficient research done on social work in China so far, and even less study on social workers in China from the micro level. Therefore I believe my research will contribute to this gap in the knowledge of this field.

According to my research question-**“how social work in China is regarded as a female career by the public and how this impacts male social workers”**-I will start by western research that how social work is regarded as a female

occupation, identify social work in mainland China that whether it is the same as western social work, and analyze its impact on male social workers. I consider the aim of this research to help people understand how social work in China is developing as a new career at the current stage, and how traditional values regarding gender norms is influencing people on career choices, although gender relations have been through a big transition in recent years. At the same time, I will describe the impact on male social workers from their own perspective, which directly reveals the voice from inside. Furthermore, I would like to re-label social work with non-gender preference and aim for it to be helpful to policy makers accelerating social work development from the gender perspective, since the Chinese government has launched a lot of policies in order to encourage social work development and its professionalization.

In this paper, I will elaborate my ideas through six chapters. Excluding the introduction, this paper consists of five chapters. Chapter 2 gives background information regarding both gender norms and social work in China, Chapter 3 is a literature and theory review, which looks back on relevant research and helps formulate my research hypothesis. Chapter 4 explains the reason why I chose the interview method and how I conducted interviews. In Chapter 5, I elaborate my research results based on theory and method. In the end, Chapter 6 concludes the paper and points out my expectation for future research. In addition, I attached the interview guide and relevant information to the appendix.

Chapter 2 Background Information

Generally speaking, social work is a feminized profession worldwide, similar to kindergarten teachers, nurses, secretaries, etc., which indicates most of social workers are female and most people would have a taken-for-granted idea that it is a female occupation and that it is more suitable for women as compared with men. As an exotic concept from western countries, social work in China only started developing in recent years. Given cultural differences, I assume the Chinese case has its own specialties. In its localization and professionalization procedure, I would like to focus on social work in Shenzhen Special Economic Zone to research how social work in mainland China is regarded as a female career by the public and how this impacts male social workers. I will start by introducing background information regarding Chinese gender norms including traditional gender relations, modern gender relations in urban areas and existing paradox in marriage.

2.1 Gender Norm

Nowadays, gender is a term that is widely acknowledged as socially constructed in the social science context. Meanwhile, the norm is a “may or may not be explicit” (Butler 2004: 41) term that functions in social practice. “A norm is not the same as a rule, and it is not the same as a law” (Ibid). It is “acted out in social practice and reidealized and reinstated in and through the daily social rituals of bodily life” (Ibid: 48). Moreover, the gender norm is a “form of social power that produces the intelligible field of subjects, and an apparatus by which the gender binary is instituted” (Ibid). Based on biological difference in sex, the characters and behaviors of males and females were polarized and defined by the form of social power. And therefore, the patriarchal society is produced and women are recognized as the second sex in most countries worldwide. The historical formation of the gender norm gave reasonable explanation to human

behavior at that time as the gender norm shifts dimension from time to time “to the extent that gender norms are reproduced, they are invoked and cited by bodily practices that also have the capacity to alter norms in the course of their citation” (Ibid: 52). The patriarchal system has somehow changed to a new system with more gender egalitarianism in some countries to different extents. In order to feature male social workers in Shenzhen, I need to embed them into the Chinese gender norm.

2.2 Traditional Gender Relations

As a country having the longest history of any civilization, China has been a patriarchal society for most of this time (Sun 2009: 287). Deeply influenced by Confucianism, females were restricted within the family if we take a look at ancient dynasties. Their duty was to assist their husband and take care of the children and all the other housework. The epitome of Confucianism’s definition of an ideal woman could be “virtuous wife and good mother” (*xian qi liang mu*) (Ibid: 290). Female roles were strongly constructed as attachment in the context of family rather than conscious human beings (Yi 2006: 44). Since they were bound within the family, they do not have any access to the society “outside” of the family. Meanwhile, males were advocated to concentrate on careers and the public sphere, and be away from any housework. They were regarded as superior than females. The traditional labor division was *nan geng nv zhi*, which means “men farm and women weave,” or *nan zhu wai, nv zhu nei*, which loosely means “men are career oriented and women family oriented” (Sun 2009: 290). As a result, it has been a clearly defined and preserved dualistic society for a long time.

The ethical codes shaped traditional female values, and also, the social values. The typical rule, for instance, is “the three obediences and four virtues.” The three obediences means a woman should obey her father before marriage, obey her husband when married, and obey her sons in widowhood. “Three obediences” closely ties one woman’s life to the other person, indubitably to a man, to force them to be dependent on men and give up self-conscious (Yi 2006: 44). The four virtues indicate morality, proper speech, modest manner, and diligent work. These

four virtues provide strict rules and paradigms for women's behavior (Ibid). If they do not obey these obediences and virtues, they will be tagged as "bad woman" so that all the people will shun them. Since Confucianism was the ideological root of social structural principles, ethical precepts, and behavioral norms (Sun 2009: 290), the patriarchal order attached female's role to the important males around her, such as her father, her husband and her son, which reinforced the female's subordinate position and at the same time emphasized the male's dominant position.

The other dominant moral standard is "ignorance is a woman's virtue." It tells women not to study, which is the symbol of patriarchy, to be afraid of women gaining enough knowledge to realize the inequality between men and women so that they opposed patriarchy (Yi 2006: 46). They were supposed to stay at home, taking care of all the housework, and it was not necessary to have much social knowledge. Thus, women are encouraged not to read, not to have their own opinion, not to be smart etc., but to obey their husband and be the subordinate. Relatively, men are encouraged to be knowledgeable, talented and socialized.

The division of men as breadwinners and women as housewives defines female's role "within" family; "family" is the whole and only world for females, unpaid housework became the female career for their whole lives. However, males have other social discipline to follow when it comes to the public sphere, but within the family, they are at an absolute dominant position. I do not think the superior position of men within the family prevents them from having troubles. Relatively, if women would be criticized on unsatisfying housework, men would also have pressure from a discontented career or social network. Just like an old Chinese saying, "men are afraid of taking a wrong profession; women are afraid of marrying a wrong husband" further suggests that women's happiness seems to be realized only through family life. Or, put it in a more serious light, a woman's happiness depends on her husband's success as a substitute for her own self-actualization (Sun 2009: 291). Consequently, men have to take up the heavy burden that being successful is not only for self-actualization, but also for family happy life once they get married. The profession a man takes is the most important thing which determines his class, salary, and social status. The more a

woman relies on her husband, the more a man is confronted with the anxiety of having a good job and becoming successful, in which case, career success is the only approach where his responsibility to his wife and family can be completed.

2.3 Modern Gender Relations in Urban Areas

The Chinese society has been experiencing great change since the People's Republic of China was built up in 1949, especially during last 33 years after launching economic reform and opening-up in 1978. As I mentioned, gender norms vary in terms of social practice, when it comes to gender equality in China, or more specifically in urban areas, it has achieved great success during the past sixty years. Since Marxist theories became the dominant ideology used to support gender equality in China, the communist party advocated the liberation of women and encouraged them to challenge the traditions, and thus women became more active in politics and economic production (Ibid: 288) as well as education opportunities. Here, I would like to elaborate on the huge social transition in China from three aspects.

Economically, the market economy took the place of the former completely planned economic system. Generally speaking, the macroeconomic environment is equal to everyone because the market is open to everyone, which makes it possible for women to participate in the labor market to complete self-fulfillment. At the same time, women have more flexibility to take advantage of their time by choosing to work as part-time or full-time. In order to live a better life, more and more women are willing to get out of unpaid housework and instead be a second-earner for the family. Men also would like to encourage their wives to work as long as they can handle the housework and career at the same time. However, the society does not place great expectations on their work, at least in comparison to men, because men are still supposed to be the first and main earners supporting the family. When comparing career and family to a woman, the latter is always considered to be more important.

At the political level, from the feminist perspective, the economic system shapes the gender relations, social services, and women's relationship with the

welfare state (Daly & Rake 2003). The Chinese welfare system is a combination of means-tested benefits and institutional benefits. The government mainly provides basic living expenses for those who are living under the average standard, and meanwhile, other benefits are bound to institutions, such as companies and non-governmental organizations, which mean citizens gain benefits by access to a job in certain kinds of institutions so that they are encouraged to work. The government creates a working-friendly environment for citizens, although gender inequality does exist to some extent, on the whole, everyone has access to the labor market and is encouraged to create value for both the country and themselves. As Daly and Rake claimed, “part of what it means to be a citizen is defined in terms of rights of access to social services and public resources” (Daly & Rake 2003: 17). In other words, citizenship is partly based on the right of having access to the public sphere. Anyway, women gain chances to get more participation in the public sphere, thus they behave more as citizens and gain more rights. The status of gender equality has improved.

From the cultural aspect, individualism plays an important role during the transition. But referring to individualism, I need to mention late modernity first. As Harris wrote, “Late modernity is defined by complex, global capitalist economies and a shift from state support and welfare to the private provision of services” (Harris 2004: 3). With globalization, the world becomes more homogeneous to some extent. Different countries communicate more at different levels, share more things in common and are influenced by each other. “A rise in individualism and a decline in traditional gender status constraints are important aspects of social change at the turn of the twenty-first century” (Irwin 1999: 31). Individualism is more accepted and consumed as part of the modern norm; even though China has been a country of collectivism for a long time.

In general, Chinese society has been and still is in the process of transition. As mainly analyzed here, influenced by neo-liberalism, feminism, and individualism, the traditional image of women has gradually shifted to a new picture. They are treated as individuals who are willing and have their own ability to have access to education and a career, seizing the opportunity to participate in the public sphere and make use of rights as citizens, be responsible for personal life trajectory and

deal with success and failure, which has totally subverted the image of passive, obedient, restricted-within-family subordinate.

2.4 Argument and Marriage in Paradox

With women coming into the public sphere, gender equality became the dominant ideology in contemporary China, if we regard it from a macro perspective. However, it has been argued that the patriarchal concept of the ideal Chinese woman has varied at different times and in different regions of the country (Weeks 1989) which makes sense since China is such a big country with multicultural interactions among 56 ethnicities and a dual structure of urban and rural areas. What I will focus on is the general situation in urban areas.

In the globalization era, the meaning of marriage and family varies from before. As Giddens stated, “the traditional family was above all an economic unit” (Giddens 2002: 54). Marriage has the function of an economic coalition and traditional marriage had more of an emphasis on the function. But nowadays marriage has turned to a new picture that two persons come together in the name of love. Theoretically speaking, women in urban china own the right to pursue an ideal marriage with the one she loves. However, in fact, marriage involves much more than only love. There is a prevailing value that a marriage is a coalition of two families, which refers to the old saying “*men dang hu dui*” which means “people from the households with the same social status are expected to marry each other.” This reveals the traditional philosophy that people born and raised from similar background would be easier to match with each other, further, family background is also taken into consideration when choosing spouses in terms of economic status, political status, and educational level.

There is another popular theory concerning marriage as well. If we divide men and women into four levels: A, B, C and D. It is said the perfect match will be A man with B woman, B man with C woman and C man with D woman, left with A woman and D man with difficulty in finding spouse for the reason that it is widely believed that a man should be better than his wife (even if only slightly) in every way, including education, status, and even intelligence (Weeks 1989: 509).

Here is a current popular saying on Chinese university campuses, “finding a rich husband is better than finding a good job” which reveals that although female college students in urban china have achieved academic success, when ready to pursue a career they are still confronted with the traditional expectations toward women’s value and positions (Sun 2009: 291). Meanwhile, it transfers the pressure to men that being rich and successful at a career is the guarantee for good marriage, otherwise, who wants to marry a D guy?

Chapter 3 Literature Review

3.1 Men and Social Work

Social work is naturally categorized as suitable for women worldwide. With men coming into this field, the controversy would occur around masculinity and femininity, deriving from gender norms. “Essentialist notions of women being natural carers tend to raise questions about men’s presence in a ‘caring profession’ such as social work” (Christie 2001: 29). However, is social work indeed a caring profession? Let us have a look at the definition of social work. “Social work may be defined as an art, a science, a profession that helps people solve personal, group (especially family), and community problems and attain satisfying personal, group, and community relationships through social work practice” (Farley, Smith & Boyle 2009: 7) . Social work aims at solving problems through professional procedure. On one hand, it solves personal problems such as emotional problems, and on the other hand, it develops relationships among individuals. It is a professional procedure linking theory with practice. It can be understood as an art because social workers need to follow basic principles such as confidentiality, but there are no strict rules and each case can be solved in various ways. “Certainly the main focus of the social worker is on helping people improve their social functioning, their ability to interact and relate to others. On the other hand, there are many in the related helping professions who also assist with interactional problems” (Ibid: 7). Social work is not only about empowering individuals and improving personal abilities, but also about working on the issues that occur through interaction. Solving problems is not the only goal, but the approach to enhance social functioning. Its aim is not merely emphasis on the problem, but to find out what kind of ability the client lacks and thus try to develop his/her abilities.

Social work requires professional skills and values. “Social work is an art; it requires great skills to understand people and to help them to help themselves. It

is a beginning science because of its problem-solving method and its attempt to be objective in ascertaining facts and in developing principles and operational concepts. It is a profession because it encompasses the attributes of a profession” (Ibid: 7). To understand people requires listening and responding as well as analyzing deep meaning beneath language, which involves knowledge of psychology and practical interviewing skills; to help them to help themselves is a procedure that empowers people and improves personal abilities so that they will eventually help themselves. As a result, it is a comprehensive practice that is about much more than just caring.

Vivienne argued that “social work is an activity which is largely hidden from public view” for the reason that it “remains a service focused on disadvantaged and marginalized individuals and groups”, and the service “often takes place in service users’ homes and in offices where it is not usually observed anyone else”, as well as its “code of confidentiality makes it difficult for social workers to promote or defend their practice” (Cree 2003:1-2). The clients that social workers provide services to are usually not the mainstream; therefore this special minority group does not draw the attention of the majority. In addition, workplaces and work codes are obstacles making people hardly have access to recognize what social work is, except the service users, and maintains the bias that it is a caring profession that is suitable for women.

The social construction of a job in terms of gender not only influences decision making but also self-actualization achieved from the job. “The ‘best’ job is, of course, evaluated according to subjective and intersubjective criteria. Gender may be highly significant here for the values behind the criteria...one could also add that ‘best opportunities’ for many also is a matter of consideration in relation to personal life and family. An individual viewing him-or herself as primarily a parent or a spouse will perceive the labor market differently from someone viewing work and career as more important” (Alvesson & Billing 2009:80). The best job is a result after comparison, which takes into consideration objective conditions and subjective feelings. If a job is widely agreed as a good job but cannot satisfy the individual, then it is not the best job, at least not the best for him/her. Whereas if a job is an interesting job for the individual but not

regarded as good from the society, in that case he/ she probably encounters pressure for choosing the job. In addition, the role theory works here too. If a man views himself as a husband and a future father, he probably considers responsibility for the family the most and hopes to gain a reasonable salary, from which he is able to fulfill his breadwinner role and uphold masculinity.

When men work in women's occupations, there is special pressure on them in terms of gender issues. For instance, "they are supposed to have technical competence and physical strength and expected to masculinized their job, if they do not they are faced with disbelief and non-acceptance" (Ibid: 88). Due to the biological difference, men are regarded as with more physical strength so that more physical work is naturally left to men and meanwhile, they are also expected to provide technical support, such as IT support. If not, their masculinity will be doubted. Hence, gender is always an active element operating in work.

There are many debates in western countries about men social workers. "It is sometimes assumed that men, because of their gender, have unique qualities that can benefit the users of social work services...as making up for 'absent' fathers (Ruxton, 1992; 1993), as working more effectively than women with 'unruly' boys (Jensen, 1995), as providing a 'gender balance' within teams (Ruxton, 1993; Jensen, 1995; Christie, 1998c) and as improving the working conditions of women (Jensen, 1995)" (Christie 2001: 29). From this perspective, male social workers are regarded as having advantages during work, especially for some service users. Meanwhile, however, we can also summarize benefits from women social workers, such as more empathy towards female clients, or better at building relationships with shy girls. In fact, from my point of view, these benefits are more dependent on individuals and create a balance of different advantages between genders, rather than specifically gender benefits.

Relatively, research on Chinese male social workers is a young field. As I have introduced in Chapter 2, except for in big cities, there are seldom social work job opportunities afforded in mainland China, and even in those big cities where social workers are providing services, still, it is at the starting level to the point that little research has been done on social workers in China, not to mention the small group of male social workers available to research. Therefore, I encountered

difficulties in searching literature on this topic, but at the same time, I consider it an opportunity to contribute to this area.

3.2 Social Work Education and Social Work Career

To study male social workers, I need to refer to those who choose to study the social work discipline as a professional activity. Vivienne has claimed that men study social work due to their expectation for a future career. “Men coming into social work education do so in the knowledge that their promotion prospects are higher than those of women and that their career paths as a result may be quite different” (Cree 2001:152). Men are inclined to realize that they would rather do management work with big possibility rather than stay for long at the frontline of social work. Thus, their choice of social work is only part of a long-term career plan, starting from the education. Additionally, there are other elements influencing their decision. “Investigations of men in non-traditional settings (men who are nurses, teachers and house-husbands) suggest that there may be a connection between men’s willingness to take on caring responsibilities and their own experiences of being nurtured by their parents” (Ibid). Personal experience is always a big factor influencing education and job decisions; therefore, in this case, decisions are more dependent on each individual and hard to generalize. At least, however, we can conclude that the decisions are made initially, whether the expectation on management work or the influence of previous experience, social work education is an original choice and a social work career is the correspondent outcome.

There are concerns about gender differences in decision making. Vivienne did interviews on reasons why students chose to become social workers and found out “Men and women were equally likely to stress childhood relationships, careers and/ or personal satisfaction as motivating factors for choosing social work as a career. But just as importantly, women students were much more likely to have had previous experience in being primary careers themselves (caring for children or older relatives) than men students” (Cree 2001: 154). I consider this as referring to the gender norm again, that women are naturally inclined to take more

caring work than men and therefore have more of a chance to gain experience in taking care of people, from which they may have different career satisfaction in doing social work as compared with male students.

Cases are different in western countries as compared to China. There has not been much research on Chinese social work education yet. This may relate to the relatively delayed development of social work education in mainland China. “Chinese social work education revived in the 1980s when four universities were initially approved by the Ministry of Education to establish the baccalaureate programs...and the number of schools offering such programs has increased from 20 in 1994 to 200 in 2006 (China Association for Social Work Education, 2007)” (Xiong & Wang 2007: 561). Social work education has only developed for around 30 years since the revival in 1980s. The rapid growth in the last 15 years brings out opportunities as well as challenges. So far the research has been focused on macro level discussing professionalization and indigenization, but few study paid attention to micro level exploring why men students choose social work and how they view social work.

3.3 Social Work in China

For further analysis on Chinese male social workers, I would like to give a general introduction of social work in China as well as social work in Shenzhen Special Economic Zone.

- Social Work Education

Different from western countries, where social work originated from charity activities, which have a profound history and have been developing through centuries, social work in China started very late but experienced a very rapid expansion in recent years. Chinese social work education revived in the 1980s when only four universities were authorized for “social work and management” baccalaureate programs (Pearson & Phillips, 1994; Ngai, 1996). However, currently, a drastic expansion of social work education programs have increased from 20 in 1994 to 200 in 2006 (China Association for Social Work Education,

2007) which is now the second largest number of schools offering social work training at the university level after USA (Xiong & Wang 2007: 561). It is said that the “Spring of Social Work” has come according to the Sixth Plenary Meeting of the 16th Central Committee of the China Communist Party, where an important document was published focusing on building a socialist harmonious society, of which one central task in the future is developing a powerful group of social work professionals (Central Committee of China Communist Party, 2006) (Ibid).

Fundamental features were summarized as follows during 1980s and 1990s. First, professional training was inadequate among Chinese social work educators as well as the transferring of social work educators such as social science or the humanities. Second, lack of systematic or standardized social work curriculum was the case for most universities or colleges. Third, there is difficulty in gaining appropriate textbooks and reference material. Fourth, field placement resources were insufficient. Eventually, there existed an obvious gap between theory and practice (Ibid: 564). Nowadays the situation has changed significantly, for instance, I did not encounter textbook problems when I started studying social work in 2004, however, I consider some problems still in the process of being resolving since it takes a long time to improve the quality of education. Take social work educators for example, qualified educators are still facing limited resources as compared to the great expansion of programs.

- Shenzhen Model

Shenzhen is a Special Economic Zone located along the southern Chinese border with Hong Kong. Due to the economic liberalization, Shenzhen became the first and even one of the most successful Special Economic Zones, with special economic policies and flexible governmental measures given by the government of the People’s Republic of China. It currently also holds sub-provincial administrative status, with powers slightly less than a province. All this allows Shenzhen to utilize special policies doing business and promote social welfare that does not exist in the rest of mainland China. What is more, due to the geographical advantage next to Hong Kong, Social work in Shenzhen shares big benefits from Hong Kong social work experience via

purchasing cross-border supervision, which invites Hong Kong professional and experienced social workers to come to Shenzhen to conduct supervision for social workers in Shenzhen.

Social work in Shenzhen started with the policy paper ‘opinions concerning the establishment of social work manpower teams and the promotion of social work development’, abbreviated as ‘1+7’ paper because it had one main document and seven appendices issued in September 2007 by the Shenzhen municipal government. Besides, social work service agencies have established since 2007 and have now registered 43 agencies providing social work services. “In daily operation, it is a tripartite model composed of social work organizations (commonly known as the employer organization, *pinren danwei*), the social service units (also known as the user organizations, *yongren danwei*) and the supervision organizations (*dudao jigou*), which are the Hong Kong NGOs...while the Shenzhen Civil Affairs Bureau forms the role of funder and coordinator.” (Hung, Ng & Fung 2010: 368).

The Shenzhen model of social work is unique in China. Comparing it with that of other cities, such as Guangzhou and Beijing, some commentators have described the Shenzhen model as a ‘forceful and determined one’ (Shen, 2008; Yuen et al., 2009). It demonstrates the creativity and initiative of municipal government and Shenzhen Civil Affairs Bureau officials in molding the integration of social work into the existing social and political structure, mass organizations (such as All-China Women’s Federation and China Disabled Persons’ Federation) and social service institutions. As social work is new to the nation, any structural changes require creating new social work posts and designing an employment and management structure. It is a challenge for the Shenzhen municipal government to be the architect of social work in a context in which social work has not been understood – or even recognized – by the public; it is even more challenging when government officials at different levels and in various bureau and organizations do not possess even a basic understanding of it (Hung, Ng & Fung 2010: 367).

Social workers confront huge challenge due to the fact that almost everything is brand new. “Being new to the social work field, working in a new system and

being young and fresh (not to mention that a great majority are from other parts of China), social workers who took up the jobs in Shenzhen were motivated by the challenge to be pioneers in the development of social work in China” (Ibid: 370). Their enthusiasm encounters the barriers that are lack of support from both their employers and user organizations, and the poor understanding of social work leaders and staff of the social service units; as a result, they had “high expectations of their supervisors from Hong Kong in six areas: emotional support, practical guidance, education in social work knowledge, skills and values, performing as a role model, and communicating and negotiating with concerned organizations for resources and support” (Ibid:371).

The exploring the process of social work development in Shenzhen in terms of confronting challenges is as follows (Liu 2010: 5~6) :

- *Low degree of social cognition*

The two main misunderstandings is regarding social workers as volunteers, and regarding all staff working in the social service field as social workers. It leads to inappropriate treatment of social workers by considering them as regular staff rather than professional service providers

- *Inadequate cooperation from social service units*

Staffs from social service units (user organizations, yongren danwei) are not able to cooperate well with social workers due to a low or wrong understanding of social work.

- *Lagging of social worker team construction*

Most social workers are fresh graduates with limited practical experience and immature skills, but social service units, social work agencies and Hong Kong supervisors all have different difficulties in management. For instance, social workers need to have flexible working time and place according to different clients which may conflict with regular management from social service units.

- *Immature of social work agencies*

Many agencies cannot provide professional program operation and conduct social workers training for their improvement, the quality of their service needs to be promoted.

As discussed above, it is suggested that Shenzhen social workers are indeed pioneers in the development of social work in China. They confront opportunities and challenges at the same time. They cannot be sure of a future career though theoretically there is a career path. Still, nobody has completely practiced it yet. Meanwhile, they encounter bigger challenges from the society, for instance, they cannot gain a good reputation from social work as compared with mature professions such as lawyers and doctors, because the public has a limited understanding of social work. There are a lot of uncertainties being a social worker; however, what is special for male social workers is that they are under higher expectations than females according to traditional gender norms which still exist nowadays. In addition, once they confront marriage, the pressure rapidly increases as the uncertainties seem unfavorable for marriage.

Chapter 4 Theory Framework

4.1 Masculinity

A collection of movements aimed at defining equal rights and opportunities for women is regarded as feminism. Through three waves of feminism, starting from the late nineteenth century, women's rights were gradually established and defended equally with men to some extent which is in line with modernization and democratization. And feminist theory is the theoretical discourse of feminism aiming to understand and analyze the nature of gender inequality from a critical perspective.

Thus, the patriarchal world has experienced a great revolution since feminist theory began to get acknowledged by more and more people and therefore gender equality has significantly improved. Traditional expectations of women within the private sphere was accordingly transferred to both the public and private spheres, meanwhile, expectations on men within the private sphere became greater than before such as the argument concerning absent fathers and the father's role within family. However, the expectation of men to be the breadwinner is by no means weakened. "In general, the role of breadwinner is considered a male prerogative, so even when a woman's wage is brought into the home, the male wage is privileged" (Brittan 1989: 114). As a result, the requirements of males became multiple and enhanced.

Although the privileged status of men as breadwinner has now weakened somewhat, men are still on the way to pursue a certain kind of power, or in other words, men still enjoy a certain kind of power because of traditional culture, just in a different way—perhaps not as obvious as the previous dominant position in both the public and private sphere. Since men's behavior depends upon the existing social relations of gender, therefore, to achieve those requirements, one must fulfill the expectation of masculinity. In this case, masculinity is a form of

power driving men's behavior. Thus, I will start analyzing with further discussion on masculinity.

● General definition

Masculinity is a vague concept that differs from time to time. It is “not a coherent object about which a generalizing science can be produced” (Connell 2005: 67). But it is widely agreed that the concept is inherently relational that it only exists when contrasted with “femininity” (Ibid: 68). If there is no definition of femininity, there will not be a corresponding construction of masculinity, as these two are often contrary.

Connell proposed four strategies to define masculinity:

“*Essentialist* definitions usually pick a feature that defines the core of the masculine, and hang an account of men's lives on that” (Ibid). Scholars have proposed the essence in variety, for instance, activity, risk-taking, responsibility, aggression, etc. The problem here is that people would define the core from different perspectives, and no one would agree on a certain one. Furthermore, the essence changes according to society transformation. Traditionally, the masculinity ideal is *wen-wu*, which literally means literary-martial and it “encompasses the dichotomy between cultural and martial accomplishments, mental and physical attainments, and so on” (Louie 2003:4), while the modern understanding of masculinity in China is more focused on men's career. Other qualities are also required, such as responsibility and ambition... but they are subordinate in comparison to career. However, different cores in various cultures and time periods consist of masculinity with comprehensive meaning that gives us a broader picture to identify with masculinity and gender norms.

“*Positivist* social science, whose ethos emphasizes finding the facts, yields a simple definition of masculinity: what men actually are” (Connell 2005: 69). The positivist definition was often utilized in psychology and ethnography, the former scales in masculinity/femininity and the later describes the pattern of men's lives in certain cultures. However, description cannot be neutral as it derives from a certain standpoint based on gender assumptions. There are no facts “out there” as natural science since gender is a socially constructed term. Besides, by sorting

into the categories ‘men’ and ‘women’, it is “unavoidably a process of social attribution using common-sense typologies of gender” (Ibid). The pre-assumption of gender is like a colored lens that affects the procedure of finding out what men actually are. Furthermore, the focus on some actions or attitudes titled as ‘masculinity,’ regardless who displays them, will refer to contradictions within personality. It would be inappropriate to generalize those behaviors.

Normative defines masculinity as “what men ought to be” (Ibid: 70). The definition itself is quite illustrative of gender norms that often can be found in media studies. But who defines the norm and how the norm formulates is deceiving, for instance, the old Chinese saying “men are afraid of taking a wrong profession” implies men ought to work in a right profession, however, what is supposed to be the right or wrong profession for diverse individuals? There must be a certain type of profession that is highly acknowledged by the public, for example, doctor or lawyer. However, is other profession correspondingly a wrong one? Hence, some norms can be hardly met by anyone or even “gives no grip on masculinity at the level of personality” (Ibid).

Semiotic approaches define “masculinity through a system of symbolic difference in which masculine and feminine places are contrasted. Masculinity is, in effect, defined as not- femininity” (Ibid). In this definition, masculinity stands on the opposite side of femininity and there is no overlap or articulation in between. Masculinity is understood in a system of gender relations as a process of practice. For example, the subordinate status of women suggests the dominant status of men, the subordinate character of women implies men’s power in different spheres; thus, gender relations offer explanations of masculinity.

I would rather understand the concept as an ideology that “not created by any one person or by any single group... a series of beliefs that a group of people buy into and that influences how they go about their lives” (Reeser 2010: 20). Masculinity is not defined by someone but as part of the culture under social construction with diverse and multiple background. It constitutes the gender norm and in return affects men’s beliefs about what they ought to do as well as how they ought to act. It is an invisible power driving men’s behavior and meanwhile,

something men would like to pursue and achieve as an approach of self-actualization.

● **A Role perspective**

From a role perspective, masculinity is a kind of performance. “Role theory draws attention to the fact that most people, for most of the time, behave in ways which are socially prescribed (Hargreaves 1986). People are by no means free agents, going about their business or doing their own thing. Instead, role theorists claim, they are more like actors on a stage, playing out pre-scripted parts. To be a man, they suggest, is to play a certain role. Masculinity represents just a set of lines and stage direction which males have to learn to perform” (Edley & Wetherell 1996:100). The process of socialization is a process of a person understanding what the appropriate behavior is in different contexts. To follow the social rules, everyone has to realize their roles of different circumstances and behave as the role requires. For a man, he has different roles, such as a husband, a breadwinner, an employee, a son, a father etc., of which he needs to behave as. It is expected and the expectation is socially prescribed. His appropriate performance is not only as a human being but also as a performance of masculinity.

“Brannon (1976) saw the male role as consisting of four basic clusters:

- ‘no sissy stuff’- the avoidance of all feminine behaviors and traits
- ‘the big wheel’- the acquisition of success, status, and breadwinning competence
- ‘the sturdy oak’- strength, confidence and independence
- ‘give ’em hell’- aggression, violence and daring (see also Fsteau 1974; Pleck and Thompson 1987)”(Ibid: 101)

Brannon defined masculinity as a combination of the four strategies analyzed above. Social learning theorists, such as Walter Mischel and Albert Bandura, also argued that sex-typed behavior is learnt and reinforced during the process of socialization. Usually, “the male sex role appears to be the dominant role” (Ibid). Males share the power to be the privileged breadwinner. This idea of ‘the big wheel’ character is emphasized in many cultures, as the status of a man within family or in the society is closely related to his breadwinning competence and

acquisition of success. The other characteristics such as independence and aggression can be understood as an extension of “the big wheel”.

● A cultural perspective

The culture perspective is similar to the role perspective in some ways. “Since the 1960s, cultural theorists have understood culture as the whole way of life of a society or community. It represents a kind of framework, passed down from generation to generation, through which ordinary people conduct and make sense of their everyday lives. From a cultural perspective, therefore, every culture in the world must contain its own specific set of ideas or themes which relate to men and masculinity...these ‘cults’ of masculinity can be seen as providing members of a cultural community with a shared understanding of what it means to be a man: what one looks like, how one should behave and so forth” (Ibid: 105). From cultural perspective, masculinity is understood as culturally taken for granted that it is inherited from older generations and should be passed down to younger generations, and that people of the cultural community are being educated and also educating others by following the ideology, which means the different voice will encounter big pressure from the mainstream. Take Confucianism for example, the ethical codes and virtues have functioning for thousands of years and males are expected to be career-oriented and own the power within the family, thus even if Chinese society has experienced enormous transformation, the cultural roots are not completely eliminated, but still somehow existed in gender norms.

Men’s dominant position determines that they own the power to define meaning. What it means to be men/women and what kind of job is a men’s/women’s job. “Men have dominated many of the key institutions which help to produce and recycle meaning (namely, the church, schools and, more recently, the media), it is usually their ‘version’ of the world” (Ibid: 108). They are the rule-makers as well as the judges. However, patriarchal relationships are not easy to be reversed because it is accepted and presumed as natural. “Patriarchy, like any culture, does not declare its own partiality...it represents itself as the way of seeing the world; as entirely natural, normal and straightforward” (Ibid). This is how culture can be passed down from generation to generation and masculinity is educated and reinforced through action. “Men are simultaneously the producers

and the products of culture; the masters and the slaves of ideology” (Ibid: 109). Consequently, to some extent, it is not obvious for men to realize their hegemony status, while women are in a better position to perceive the gender norm and men’s power.

4.2 Segregation of Work

There seems to exist a universal phenomenon that certain types of work are connected with a certain gender. “The labor market in most (Western) countries is often characterized as being segregated, horizontally and vertically. There are few sectors and jobs areas where there is an equal distribution of the two sexes (normally defined as the minority group being at least 40 per cent) and it is common that men occupy around 90 per cent of the positions at the top (however the top is defined)” (Alvesson & Billing 2009: 49). The segregation of work into female and male work reflects the gender norm of the society, what kind of work is suitable for men and what kind is suitable for women is according to what meaning the job contains, as constructed by the society, and the fact that the top positions are occupied by men reveals men’s power in public sphere. “The present gender division is historically rooted in cultural systems of meanings and ideas about what is feminine/ masculine (female/ male) and then considered suitable and appropriate work for women and men” (Ibid). Referring to the role theory, one role of a married man is to be the breadwinner of the family, according to most cultures, thus he is expected to do a real men’s job and earn enough money in order to support the family. This is supposed to be the right way to fulfill his masculinity and perform well in the breadwinner role.

According to semiotic definition, masculine and feminine are constructed as “oppositional, dichotomous and hierarchical where the masculine is (usually) privileged. Hence, the division of labor into ‘female’ and ‘male’ work areas is considered to be a key element in the subordination of women in work and society. Women are more likely to work in the less secure, more precarious forms of employment, which are also characterized by lower earnings and fewer opportunities for training and promotion, compared with men (Giddens, 1989;

Fine, 1992; Roos and Gatta, 1999) ” (Ibid). Although the women’s role is not restricted within family only, their subordinate status does not change much. When they come into the public sphere, they are not in a completely free position to do whatever they want either, since the jobs were segregated and tagged as female/male work and men’s privileged status has formulated, thus they have in fact limited opportunities and are under lower expectations. As a result, women are more likely to work in the area with less security and lower wages. In turn, with more and more women working in that area, those jobs are without a doubt labeled as female jobs. Therefore, it is a vicious circle of labor and work.

Novarra (1980) has described women’s work as six tasks,

“Which predate the money economy and which are necessary for the human race to survive and life to be tolerable, and these functions are still today women’s main work areas. These are: to bear children; to feed them and other members of the family; to clothe people; to care for the small, the sick, the elderly and the disabled; to be responsible for the bringing-up of children; and to take care of the home (including making products of use value for the home). Men have shared, in varying degrees, the tasks, which are needed to sustain and continue the human race, such as farming, but our image of men’s work is neither historically nor today drawn from the six tasks, Novarra argues”(Ibid: 50) .

From the above quote we can see the segregation of work corresponds with the dichotomy construction of masculinity and femininity. Among the six main tasks, “care for the small, the sick, the elderly and the disabled” is therefore easily referred to social work as it matches the public impression of social work. In fact, social work is “an art, a science, a profession that helps people solve personal, group (especially family), and community problems and attain satisfying personal, group, and community relationship through social work practice” (Farley, Smith & Boyle 2009: 7). It is indeed that the disadvantaged groups such as the small, the sick, the elderly, and the disabled may confront more difficulties in daily life no matter physically or mentally and those require more care and help, which constitutes an important area of social work service. The caring character is demonstrated as a crucial character when conducting social work, as a result, in

some ways, the 'caring' character makes social work a feminized profession (Christie 2001: 2).

4.3 Re-label Social Work

I consider the reason why less male social workers than female social workers exist in China originated with fewer male social work students than female students. Just like the worldwide phenomenon, there are fewer male students studying social science than female students. Besides, the public prejudice about social work, regarding it as a mainly caring occupation rather than a profession, discourages male students' from joining in. By and large, the prejudice causes and maintains the gender imbalance of social workers. "Within certain areas there were even taboos against the other sex doing the work. Men risked ridicule from women as well as other men, if they did women's work (Shorter, 1975). Besides, prestige was connected to the work men did, and men lost status and power if they did women's jobs" (Alvesson and Billing 2009: 50). The segregation of work makes a job no longer simply a job but representation of a series of things, such as, social and economic status, power and prestige, as well as femininity and masculinity. No matter men doing women's work or women doing men's work, in both cases they will encounter different pressure. Since social work is feminized, men joining mean they need courage to confront debate.

Here it is important to recall the labeling theory, which originated in sociology and criminology. "The labeling perspective rejects any assumption that a clear consensus exists as to what constitutes a norm violation-or for that matter, what constitutes a norm-within a complex and highly heterogeneous society" (Rist 2007: 72). The gender norm is also a type of norm that has been invoked in all aspects of society. For the labor market, it labels the job based on assumptions that a society defines men and women as they are supposed to be or ought to be. The feminized label of social work indicates its connection with femininity, which represents less power and prestige with lower income in career. Obviously, in general, it would not be the best choice for men with gender concerns. "If a label is applied to the individual, it is posited that this in fact causes the individual to

become that which he is labeled as being” (Ibid: 77). The label of a job affects the individuals who do the job. Working in a female-labeled occupation, men are more inclined to doubt their self-identity and have concerns about masculinity fulfillment, where the gender norm brings pressure through the label.

However, since the label is socially created, it will change according to social context changes. “A re-labeling of a job takes some time; it is not done in a matter of days. As a result of the industrial revolution (and mechanization) in Britain, men eventually took over former female specialties like baking, brewing and spinning (Bradley, 1993). The introduction of a new technique might also work the other way round, eventually redefining a man’s job as a ‘typical’ woman’s job. This clearly shows that the gender division of labor has little to do with biology but is historically constructed on the basis of historically changeable interests and assumptions” (Ibid: 52). The social construction of a job can be reversed in response to social change; new technology may bring new ideology, but it takes a long period of time. Consequently, the possibility of change demonstrates that there is a chance to construct new ideology from the critical perspective.

As an import from western countries, social work in mainland China is currently still at the beginning stage. On one hand, it may have inherited the entire image of social work in western countries, including the female label; however, on the other hand, during its indigenization process in mainland China, it probably changes in some ways in order to better serve the Chinese context. In this way, the beginning stage means that a stable system has not been established yet, in which circumstances there exists good opportunities to establish a brand new label on social work. From my point of view, social work is not a female-suitable profession but has no gender preference. One of my purposes of doing this research is to re-labeling social work by presenting it from social workers’ perspective and clarifying public prejudice. First, we will find out whether social work in mainland China has been feminized or not and if so, we could review the short history of formulation procedure and perhaps consider the possibilities of re-labeling. The meaning of re-labeling is to help the public gain a better understanding of social work, balance social worker teams without gender

preference, avoid troubles brought on by gender issues that happened in western countries and accelerate its professionalization in China.

Chapter 5 Methodology

5.1 Why Interview?

Since social work is a feminized occupation in western countries, and has been developed in Shenzhen for no more than four years, my intention is to explore whether and how social work in China is feminized and how male social workers as a small and special group respond to the discourse, I am researching an interpretation from an individual perspective in the context of the Chinese gender norm. I need to obtain information from male social workers' expressions and therefore I choose interview as the method of research. "The qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples' experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations" (Kvale 1996: 1). The interview will reveal thoughts from male social workers' perspective through their expressions on how they view social work, how they think of their lives as well as expectations for the future, from which we will have a better understanding of the career, and more importantly, male social workers' opinions will disclose their particular situation when doing a female job.

Contrary to quantitative research, interview has its limitations in two senses. Here, "first, there are few standard rules or common methodological conventions in qualitative research communities; and second, hardly any general texts have existed in which questions of method...were discussed" (Ibid: 13). Different from designing questionnaires, interviews have no such step-by-step rules to follow as the interview is an interaction between people and the common principles are quite general. As a result, the researcher needs to explore through literature to find his/her way to conduct the interview according to the research purpose. In addition, the interview research method lacks standardized procedures, which requires the interviewer to have strong skills that are "knowledgeable about the interview topic and to be familiar with the methodological options available, as

well as having a grasp of the conceptual issues of producing knowledge through conversation” (Ibid: 13). Without sufficient knowledge on the interview topic, the interaction will likely be unproductive and therefore the knowledge produced will be fruitless.

However, the interview is still a good method to gain information through conversation as “narratives and conversations are today regarded as essential for obtaining knowledge of the social world, including scientific knowledge” (Ibid: 8). From the interaction between interviewer and interviewee, a lot of information is shared and knowledge is produced. Meanwhile, the conversation has “a structure and a purpose. It goes beyond the spontaneous exchange of views as in everyday conversation, and becomes a careful questioning and listening approach with the purpose of obtaining thoroughly tested knowledge” (Ibid: 6). The structure and purpose is designed by the researcher, based on aiming the conversation to concentrate on a certain topic that will lead to an in-depth discussion on a certain question. But this does not mean the interviewees lose their own initiative, they are “the subjects not only answer questions prepared by an expert, but themselves formulate in a dialogue their own conceptions of their lived world. The sensitivity of the interview and its closeness to the subjects’ lived world can lead to knowledge that can be used to enhance the human condition” (Ibid: 11). In short, a good interview is a benign interaction between interviewer and interviewee which creates a win-win situation.

5.2 Ethical Issues

The method of interview inevitably involves ethical issues because “an interview inquiry is a moral enterprise: the personal interaction in the interview affects the interviewee, and the knowledge produced by the interview affects our understanding of the human situation” (Kvale 1996: 109). Ethical issues do not belong to a specific stage of interview but throughout the entire research process, starting from formulation of the purpose of an investigation to the final outcome and report. It is important to take ethical issues into consideration from the very beginning and keep them in mind throughout the process.

Steinar proposed three ethical guidelines as *informed consent*, *confidentiality* and *consequences* (Ibid: 112-117). According to these guidelines, I started each interview by briefly introducing my research purpose and my personal background as well as a general introduction of the interview content. After that, I assure them that the data from the interviewees would remain private and not be reported. Furthermore, I also considered the consequences for the interviewees and I am aware that there will be no harm to them. On the contrary, it turned out that they felt happy being interviewed and they also showed a friendly willingness and looked forward to reading my thesis as they thought it was significant to understand social work from social workers' perspective and they were able to contribute useful information as a male social worker.

5.3 The Role of Researcher

Steinar proposed two metaphors of the research interviewer's role as a *miner* or as a *traveler* (Kvale 1996: 3-5). In the *miner* case, the interviewer is a miner who seeks for underground valuable metal, uncovers the subjects' conscious experiences and purifies the facts as well as meanings by transcribing from oral to the written mode. The alternative *traveler* metaphor regards the interviewer as a traveler on a journey that enters into conversations with the people he/she encounters and may also ask questions with a certain aim deliberately. Afterwards, the original stories are interpreted from the *traveler's* perspective. Further, the *traveler* may change through a process of reflection according to what he/she has experienced from the journey that leads to new ways of self-understanding and may also bring change to interviewees via their own story-telling and self-reflection during conversations (Ibid: 3-5).

I consider my role as a combination of the two. I have been working as a frontline social worker for half a year in 2008 when social work was at the very beginning stages in Shenzhen Economic Special Zone, which gave me sufficient pre-knowledge of the group of social workers so that I could aim to reveal their true meaning beneath the conversation as a *miner*. At the same time, I am also a traveler asking questions "that lead the subjects to tell their own stories of their

lived world (Ibid: 4)” and then interpreting the responses from my own perspective. The conversation is on one hand between a researcher and a subject, on the other hand between a female researcher and a male social worker. I cannot avoid the limitation of studying and interpreting male social workers from the female’s perspective, but meanwhile, our interaction was an opportunity for their own self-reflection and perhaps brought about new self-understanding. To conclude, I am a *miner* as a social worker and a *traveler* as female researcher.

However, my female researcher’s role perhaps has impacted interviewees from two aspects. On one hand, I brought my female assumptions into leading the interviews, for instance, I assumed everyone should have career ambitiousness as believing Chinese gender norm defining males are career oriented. On the other hand, my interviewees may choose to satisfy the assumption by emphasis on their responsibility for future family in order to demonstrate their masculinity, verbally at least. In this case, some may have exaggerated pressure from low paid work and I consider it adds up to the limitation of my interviews.

5.4 Interview Guide

I chose to conduct *semistructured* interviews and prepared an interview guide before meeting my interviewees. “For the semistructured type of interview...the guide will contain an outline of topics to be covered, with suggested questions” (Kvale 1996: 129). Among my interview questions, some of them seem to not directly relate to the research question, but I consider these questions important to help encourage the interviewees to describe and give me updated information on social work development in Shenzhen since I have been away from frontline social work for two and half years and I cannot assume my former data was still valid.

I divided my interviews into four main parts to gain information. Part 1 aims at finding out the relationship of personal experience and the decision of choosing to be a social worker. Part 2 tries to obtain knowledge on their working experience as male social workers. Part 3 collects information about their attitude towards social work in China and personal career plan. And finally, part 4

searches for their personal thoughts on how to develop social work in mainland China. (Please refer to Appendix 1) Of course other questions were asked during the conversation according to different cases, Appendix 1 is the guide for leading the interview.

5.5 Interviewees

I interviewed ten people in total in January 2011; nine of them are frontline male social workers and one female social worker working as the dean of service department in a social work service agency. The purpose of interviewing a female social worker was to obtain information from a different perspective in terms of gender and occupation which may be inspiring. Among the male social workers, my first interviewee is working in Dongguan City where social work was started in 2009 and its development is copying Shenzhen model. The first interview was a pilot interview and after that I revised my interview guide to its current version. The other eight male social workers are from the same social work service agency where I had worked before, one of whom is my previous colleague so that my interview with him was focused on background information such as policy change rather than his personal feelings. As a result, the other seven male social workers were my formal interviewees.

Four interviews were conducted in subjects' offices, two in restaurants and one in a café. Each interview lasted for 40 minutes to one hour. I assumed the office would be the best place as it was private space and would not be disturbed by others, but afterwards I realized the restaurant and café also have advantages because the conversation was more relaxed and the interviewees easily talked more and gave more information that I could go deeper analyzing beneath the language. I felt that they were quite frank with me because of my previous work experience and regarded me as "one of them", so the trust between interviewer and interviewees was built up easily.

My interviewees are from the same social work service agency where I worked before, but they provide service in various areas. The longest working experience is three years, almost as long as the period of Shenzhen social work

development and the shortest is around nine month. Let me introduce their personal information one by one. **A** graduated in 2008 and had been working since then. He provided service for disabled people. He had a girlfriend and planned to marry her when I interviewed him. Now he has left the agency and gotten married. **B** graduated in 2009 and started working in August 2009, his office is set in a community and he provides service for family members of revolutionary martyrs within the community, he is single. **C** graduated in 2009 and joined the agency since November of 2009, he is a social worker for elder people within the community and he just got married around one month ago. **D** has worked for three years for disabled people and has been promoted as supervisor assistant since January 2010, but most of his working content is still frontline, except for a little more administrative work added. He is in a relationship. **E** tried to take the examination for master studies after graduation in 2008 but failed, so he came to the agency and worked for disabled people for two and half years and he currently has a girlfriend who is a master student of social work. **F** also tried the master examination for social work but failed, so has started working in a rehabilitation center since April 2010, he was single. **G** is the most special interviewee. He started working since 2008 and quit after two years. Afterwards he worked as an insurance seller and cosmetic seller and eventually came back to social work in December 2010; he currently works for people and families with low-income. He had a girlfriend when I interviewed him and they are married now.

5.6 Textual Analysis

After transcribing the interviews into transcripts, I will mainly use textual analysis conducting my analysis as a text can be treated as whenever we produce an interpretation of something's meaning (Mckee 2003: 4). It is a sense-making practice and I choose the post-structuralist approach by believing that all cultures do indeed make sense of the world differently and it is impossible to say that one is right and the others are wrong (Ibid: 9). Based on western social work theories and literature, the Chinese case has its own specialty. I will reveal my findings

and compare it with western situation in order to better understand social work in different cultural context from the gender perspective.

According to my interview guideline, the interviewees respond in terms of self-understanding of social work, self-actualization from social work and career plans. I interpret every one of them as both a social worker and a female researcher, which means we share the same Chinese cultural background but I understand them from a female perspective. I will interpret them individually to understand how they make sense of social work and masculinity by taking into account of their personal background, meanwhile, I will also summarize the findings to see if they share anything in common and the common point may be representative for male social workers in mainland China.

Chapter 6 Analysis

6.1 A Coincidence: Involve in Social Work Education

Unlike western male social workers who come into social work education due to their expectation of a future career that leads to management work (Cree 2001: 152), most Chinese social work students do not understand social work at all before entering into college. They did not initially choose the discipline by themselves, but passively adjusted. As everyone should take the College Entrance Examination and apply for several universities and majors, according to the score, if one is not qualified for the first choice, he or she will be passively arranged to the discipline that requires a lower score. As compared to popular majors such as Economic and IT, or traditional majors such as history and law, social work is such a young and unfamiliar discipline in China that few students would apply to it as the first choice. And therefore, low competition brings low score entrance, the students who finally “choose” to study social work are not really “choosing” but passively adjusted.

Generally speaking, the entire society has a low degree of recognition of social work so that few people would regard it as a good choice for four years college studying. Just as D stated, “I had no idea, only knew it belongs to art, and I was adjusted, and so were most of my classmates.” His situation is representative for most of my interviewees and most of the people that I knew who study social work. He started college in 2004, the same as I did and at that time, and the career of social work was seldom heard of.

Some may have limited knowledge about social work according to personal experience, for instance, by reading relevant material. B described as “My first choice was to study psychology, by a curious coincidence, I knew sociology through reading, and I did not know social work at that time, but basically

believed these disciplines are related.” He only had a very vague idea that social work is a discipline that belongs to art. Social work was not extremely strange or unheard for him, the way he understood social work was based on his knowledge of sociology by considering that they are related.

There was only one interviewee that mentioned he knew about social work before studying it, which is because of his living experience. C expressed, “It was not my first choice, but I knew a little about social work at that time. Because I was born and raised in Shenzhen, and we watched Hong Kong TV shows, so I just heard of it a little bit.” Hong Kong TV shows tell stories about Hong Kong people’s daily lives which probably involve social workers and from which C gained his primary exposure to social work. However, I consider the Hong Kong TV show as the reason given that it has been popular in mainland China for a long time. The deeper reason underneath is Shenzhen Economic Special Zone has been deeply influenced by Hong Kong culture as they are geographically neighbors and constant trading brings cultural exchange and similarity. As compared to inland cities, Shenzhen has no doubt benefited from the convenience and possibility to consume Hong Kong culture.

In total, with no or little knowledge of social work, mainland Chinese social work students’ coming into this field can be concluded as coincidence, which in most circumstance is not chosen by initiation but passively adjusted. It is due to low social recognition of social work, very limited social work occupations, as well as the late introduction of social work education in mainland China. Their choice has no association with a future career.

6.2 Become a Social Worker-Reasons in Variety

Viviene has stated the explanation for becoming a social worker is not single in the UK and there are a number of persistent themes that contributors draw on to explain the choice of social worker as a career, including:

- Childhood and family background
- Experiences of education and work

- The influence of significant individuals
- The perceived value base of social work
- The urge to ‘do something’, to make a contribution to society (Cree 2003: 155).

Childhood and family background has influence on decision making in two ways, on one hand, a happy and secure living environment guides a need to make society a fairer place for those less privileged than themselves, on the other hand, experiencing disadvantage and injustice may leads to a deep-seated desire to challenge injustice and change society (Ibid: 156). However, my interviews referred very little to this aspect. I consider their recognition of social work as mainly built up through education; it is different from the UK case where the decision of becoming a social worker can develop from childhood. They did not talk about living background not because it is not important, but because social work is too young in mainland China to be visible since their childhood.

Experiences of education and work did play an important role that my interviewees mentioned. It is pointed out that undergraduate university studies are crucial for bringing them into social work (Ibid). It works the same in some cases, for instance, D said: “I like it when studying; the teachers taught about values and social problems, I think social work is quite necessary. And it is fun to treat helping people as a job.” He accepted social work through college education and its necessity of becoming a career. He was worried about the possibility of being a social worker due to the fact that the career opportunities are very limited. He searched the internet to confirm social work not just a major in university but also as a practical job conducted in specific cities and according to which, he formulated a personal plan to become a social worker. On the other hand, employment experiences are also critical in the development of an understanding of social work as a career (Ibid). To some extent, it can even make up for unsuccessful education. B’s experience is a case in point. He explained: “Actually I didn’t think it would have a future when I was in college, I can’t identify it, either. The teachers didn’t fully understand it, many of them were transferred from the sociology department, they just teach, and we even learned a lot of social investigation methods that belong to sociology. Until 2008, the seventh semester, I got a chance to be a volunteer in Sichuan, I took an internship there for one

month during summer holidays, from then on, I started to have feelings about social work. I experienced a lot of things that touched me, and I realized social work is really good and necessary. “The opportunity of being a volunteer in Sichuan referred to the “5.12” earthquake that happened in Sichuan province which was a big disaster for all Chinese. B was first gaining little from his education and he pointed out a common problem that social work colleagues were transferred from other disciplines (Tong 2007: 645). In the first few years of social work education, he was taught sociology rather than social work. Fortunately, he developed his own recognition of social work through the volunteer experience and chose to be a social worker initiatively after identifying with social work’s values.

Significant others can be hugely important in influencing the decision of becoming a social worker (Cree 2003: 156). The pilot interviewee mentioned his professor in college but the other social workers did not talk much about this.

Some may give a negative reason, for example that they became social workers because they did not want to become lawyers, teachers or civil servants. However, Vivienne interpreted this response as a positive choice, by considering their unwillingness of choosing another job as due to identifying with the **value base of social work** (Ibid: 157). I had an interviewee give the negative reason but I did not interpret it as Vivienne did. C stated: “there is nothing else I can do, I really accept social work. Even if I take the civil service examination, it is restricted. Actually it is better to be a civil servant...but it is also good to be a social work to have the mental comfort.” C respects the profession of social work and enjoys the self-satisfaction it brings. But obviously, he thought a civil servant as a better choice. He talked in the later conversation that he had taken the civil service examination a few times but failed and he had been working on it, and therefore to be a social worker was not his first choice and he did not have a further career plan in social work because he did not want to stay long.

The last explanation Vivienne found was that people felt they had to take action in order to **bring change** to individuals and society rather than only show sympathy (Ibid). This explanation requires strong initiative which I did not encounter during my interviews.

However, Chinese social workers provided more explanations except above reasons:

- Practical character of social work
- No special reason

Social work is a practical discipline; some think it can be put into practice immediately after graduation. For instance, E said: “Sociology studies on the theory, you need to further study as a postgraduate or a PhD. Social work is micro and more concrete. At the beginning, I thought the payment was all right, and I came here with hope.” He highlighted the practical character of social work by comparing it to sociology, because one is able to become a social worker immediately after graduation. Sociology, however, has no corresponding occupation. He seemed to have made a rational decision with consideration of payment. But in later conversations he started to complain about the salary and showed disappointment.

The other two interviewees stated making the decision without much consideration, of course their attitude towards social work is positive, and however, they came to the area with neither ambition nor a clear expectation. They just followed a natural route, studied social work and became a social worker. Since their social work education was probably coincidence, if the education experience was not inspiring and they did not transfer to or minor in any other subject, social worker seemed to be a natural choice even without initiative.

All in all, different reasons were explained for becoming social workers. “These reasons are not separate from one another; they do not exist as ‘either-or’. Instead, they are likely to be ‘both-and’ (Derrida 1978)” (Ibid). Social work education is not the determinant factor influencing male social work students from becoming social workers. In fact, their responses reflect the flaws of social work education in China at the current stage--not professional enough as some of the teachers are not professionals. In addition, Vivienne carried out a study in 1994 and found out that “some students saw social work in career terms only, as a reasonably well-paid job, with good career prospects” (Ibid: 158). It is not suitable

for Chinese students, nobody mentioned a career prospect and this indicated the career itself as not being adequately developed as it has not formulated a clear path that students could see themselves connected to from what they had learnt and what they were going to do. Furthermore, Vivienne also pointed out that “career choices and career paths in social work are still significantly affected by issues which are rooted in gendered assumptions and gendered practices (Cree 1996)...men know they are, to a degree, going ‘against the grain’...and both women and men believed that men’s career prospects would be better than those of women once they were qualified” (Ibid: 159). However, the gender segregation of social work in mainland China has not been clearly formulated yet as it has not been long enough for the society to understand and recognize social work. In this case, male social workers have no obvious reasons for their career choices and no clear expectation for career path.

6.3 Gender Segregation of Social Work

Will gender issues bring many differences in conducting social work? The answer cannot be simplified as yes or no. No matter male social workers or female social workers, there are advantages and disadvantages during work according to different circumstances. When my interviewees talked about their work experience, each case was specific.

- Inconvenience

A works in the Federation of Disabled. He talked about the experience of working with people suffering from mental disorders, “sometimes meeting the mental patient, they take off their clothes and are naked, it’s a little inconvenient but it’s all right.” It was an embarrassing moment when a male social worker had to provide service for a naked female mental patient; however, it is assumed that a female social worker may encounter the same embarrassment at work. Thus, the inconvenience is occurred by particular circumstance that cannot be generalized as gender disadvantage in this career.

- Convenience

B works in the community. He described a referral client who made much progress with him due to gender advantages. “If the client is divorced; he would have difficulties talking with women social workers, but much easier to male social workers. As last time a 40-year-old client had a very happy conversation with me. He was a client referral from my colleague, a female social worker, she had slow progress with him, but after my intervention, things got better.” Clients who encountered emotional problems would have troubles communicating with heterosexuals but easier to homosexuals; in this case, taking gender factor into consideration would be helpful to the practice.

- Physical strength or gender trap?

Men are regarded as having more physical strength, which is part of masculinity, and thus some physical work is naturally left to men. F works in a rehabilitation center where most of the staff is female. He said his colleagues were very happy when he joined in the center as they said “finally someone can help us to move stuff!” The physical strength is considered as a resource and advantage and more importantly as masculinity, which for F himself, may turn out to be a limitation brought on by gender. If everyone supposes he is the one dealing with all the physical work, being a man becomes a burden to him. Consequently, he will no doubt take all the physical work in order to fulfill his masculinity.

- Playmate and security

G works in a civil affairs bureau, and specializes in providing service for residents with minimum living standards and sometimes helps with community activities. “Young children prefer male social workers, especially 11~12 teenager boys, they like male social workers spending time with them, they think girls are not interesting, men are more stimulating...for the security, men are better, for example, I often have to visit my clients at night, so men are better...” The interaction with teenage boys he performed was similar to “making up for absent fathers” as Ruxton (Christie 2001: 29) proposed. And the security issue is still referring to the physical strength of masculinity.

The cases I presented above are personal experience that cannot be generalized. As male social workers, they encountered both convenience and

inconvenience according to various circumstances; they experienced benefits and burdens as men working in a female-dominated occupation. In the following section, I will discuss some interesting opinions regarding the gender issue in social work.

- More suitable for women?

Some expressed their attitude that social work is more suitable for women by pointing out that femininity matches the requirement of social workers. B said: “sometimes I feel girls are more suitable, because they are more careful and compassionate.” There were also other interviewees that mentioned compassion as an advantage conducting social work, especially when building relationship with clients. However, as I have analyzed in Chapter 3.1, social work is a professional procedure that requires professional skills and values, carefulness and compassion in some cases may help, but believing social work is more suitable for women by attributing it to personal character is an example of the gender norm, which believes femininity stands opposite to masculinity.

Some argued the reason as the fact that low payment cannot fulfill masculinity and the breadwinner role. C stated: “girls are more suitable as compared to guys for two reasons, one is the salary, and one is compassion. It’s a realistic world, men have to undertake more. To be a social worker can’t necessarily feed the family. If being a social worker can help one afford a house and car, then it’s all right.” He took girls’ compassion for granted just as B did and explained nothing about this, meanwhile, he pointed out that the low salary could not fulfill the social expectations for men’s role as breadwinners, but girls did not need to worry about this. He viewed himself as a husband rather than an individual, perhaps because he was in a steady relationship and planned to get married. From the cultural perspective, “every culture in the world must contain its own specific set of ideas or themes which relate to men and masculinity...these ‘cults’ of masculinity can be seen as providing members of a cultural community with a shared understanding of what it means to be a man:...how one should behave and so forth” (Edley & Wetherell 1996: 105-106). It is assumed that men should take the responsibility to support the family while women are not as required to contribute financially. E held the similar opinion as C by saying “no big

difference between men and women, speaking of the job itself. But for men, the pressure is much bigger; because men should undertake more family responsibilities.” Breadwinner and financial responsibility for the family is highlighted for masculinity in Chinese culture, therefore male social workers are under pressure affected by the gender norm.

Some expressed the reason by contrasting femininity and masculinity. F said: “it depends on an individual’s character. The society would think girls are supposed to be patient and take care of others, but men should have big goals and a high salary, and stand out. In this case, it’s more suitable for girls.....they are more tolerant with girls, they have lower expectations.” He tried to describe it in an objective way, which reflected he had an obvious polarized understanding of the Chinese gender norm. However, gradually, he seemed to accept the social construction and followed it by believing girls had advantages at work. Referring to the semiotic approach definition which defined masculinity as not-femininity, he followed the logic of social work as requiring patience and caring, which is the opposite of big goals and high salaries, and then social work is feminized.

To explain the reason why social work is more suitable for women, male social workers emphasized the compassion of females, which is similar to the western understanding that a “caring” character leads to feminized social work. The difference is, low salary is the other crucial element accelerating gender segregation of social work. When compared with women, Chinese men are under more pressure to earn money, which is not only a social expectation but also their own understanding of masculinity.

- More suitable for men?

There is only one social worker that believed men are more suitable by referring to management work. G said: “For the career, men can do better. Men are having more leadership skills, and can search and integrate resources with strong power. Another example, for the bidding and projects, men can do better. For the administration work of social work, women can do it.” He associated masculinity with the abilities of leadership and management, and we can see that he has potential expectations for doing management work and he is aware of the

career path, which is different from the other interviewees. He also talked about women's competence for administration work. What he said reflects the segregation of work, the typical thoughts that administration is feminized and management is masculinized.

- No gender preference?

Most interviewees held the opinion that there is no gender preference for social work. A said: "It's suitable for humans, not only for women. It's incomplete to say women are just sensitive...doing social work highlights an interest in values, to think helping people is meaningful, not always carefulness and skills. It is not about how excellent the social worker is, but about whether he can show an interest in developing values..." He emphasized social work's value a lot, trying to weaken gender difference and skills at work but to highlight personal beliefs in doing the job well. D also stated that "the clients would think girls are more careful, but guys are more responsible. But for me, it's not particularly suitable for girls or guys." From the insider's perspective, gender plays a double role in social work, acting as both a strength and weakness due to different circumstances; however, there is no reason to generalize it as feminized or masculinized.

To sum up, when speaking about the attitude on whether social work is more suitable for women, male social workers separated it into two different parts. For the career itself, most of them do not think it has any gender preference, as it is a career that has comprehensive requirements. However, taking into consideration the social gender norm, it is more suitable for women. Low payment, less pressure, and more leisure time are connected to women, which reflect low social expectations. On the other hand, breadwinner, ambition and responsibility are supposed to be men's tasks. It is quite different from western countries; social work is labeled as a female job due to its caring character. However, low payment, less pressure and more leisure are the key elements constructing feminized social work in China. From the insider's perspective, the segregation of social work is not obvious, but it is in the process of formulating because of low wages.

6.4 Self-actualization and Masculinity

Self-actualization could be a neutral term estimated by several indices such as payment, social status, etc., meanwhile, it could also be a vague concept that is determined by personal feelings, such as satisfaction and happiness gained from work. Of course these two aspects are related in some way, for instance, high salary affords the possibility of abundant material goods which may bring the feeling of satisfaction. However, this is not an absolute or determined by each other. I prefer to regard self-actualization as a term reflecting personal feelings, and this is the reason why I interviewed them on their thoughts about whether social work can bring self-actualization or not.

Some choose to be social workers because of their willingness to help people. In this case, they value ‘help’ much more than other aspects and they achieve self-actualization mostly through the help they are able to provide, rather than salary or social status. I consider it provides alternative understanding of masculinity which pursues individualized goals instead of the mainstreaming perception. Persistency and strong commitment to a profession, along with the ambition of being pioneers rather than salary oriented job hunting is their own innovative approach to practice masculinity.

More often, however, I find they tended to interpret self-actualization from two aspects: one from the social work career itself, and one from the feedback from work. For the career, A described social work as “a quite tame job, salary is neither high nor low.” D thought his personal value is not realized through work because “so far I just see more clients changed, it is not as good as what I imaged in college, and what you do is different from what you learn, I am placed between the agency and the government.” F said “the career is able to realize self-value, but the work itself is not professional enough, I feel I did very little.” In the process of social work professionalization in China, social workers are assigned not only case work, group work, or community work, but also work from different bureaus, such as technical support work and administration work. The additional work took much time and energy from social workers, which is the reason why

they do not think it is professional enough and it gradually decreased their passion for social work.

For the feedback, it usually involves social recognition and social reputation, but the key focus is on salary. A described it as “my friends think I am very exalted, but you know, the society values money...three or five years later, my friends may all have houses and cars, but I will have nothing.” Houses and cars are not only the material foundation for a good life, but also the symbol of success and masculinity. The gender norm requires men to be the breadwinner who earns enough money and provides a substantial life, and that substance includes a house and car, at least in modern China. C explained in a more detailed way, “If the salary is 6000 per month, I would like to do it all my life. I am a realistic person, you know, working in Shenzhen, you need car and house, but the current salary cannot achieve it at all. ” They regard money, a car, and a house as a good actualization of male role playing, otherwise, masculinity is not performed well enough.

The inadequate professionalization of social work negatively influenced male social workers to achieve self-actualization through the career. Furthermore, the low payment is the key issue that brings difficulty in the breadwinner role; masculinity cannot be performed via low salary. As a result, generally speaking, considering the nature of the work and salary, self-realization is hard to achieve in the current situation.

6.5 Leave for a Masculinized Job

The low self-actualization I analyzed above is directly related to male social workers' leaving or their potential to leave. Lyons et al. (1995) has studied stress and violence as well as staff wastage and found that “stress and violence contribute not only to people's decision to leave social work, but also to their decision to change jobs within social work” (Cree 2003:166). It seems related that people leave social work due to stress to a large extent, but the stress discussed here is quite different. Unlike the former study that stress came from violent

incidents at work, Chinese male social workers are not suffering stress from work but from the gender norm of the society.

Some have no future plan after leaving social work. A had sent in his resignation when I did the interview. He expressed, “I actually planned to leave at the end of 2010. I don’t know what to do in the future, maybe 1,000 or 2,000 per month, everything is possible, but I am thinking, if I don’t leave, isn’t it a bigger waste?” He chose to quit in spite of having not found a better job. Leaving requires courage; he was not satisfied with the present situation and took the initiative to change his life. I consider initiative and courage as both constitutions of masculinity.

Some aim to become civil servants. C said, “My parents are both civil servants, so they wish me to be a civil servant too. Social work is just a transition, you should consider further. My girl friend thinks it’s all right if I can be a probationary supervisor, otherwise, I should leave to get better job with better payment.” Civil servant is the most preferred job my interviewees mentioned after leaving social work. Working in the government represents power, higher social status, and better wages, which mean more success as compared with social work.

Some had a clear career plan such as F planned to apply for doing a master program in Hong Kong so that he could become a teacher or work in an NGO such as conducting programs, or even set up his own agency. G hoped social work would develop nationwide; in that case he would begin an undertaking, for example, going back to his hometown to set up his own social work agency. We can see that F and G have higher career aspirations rather than frontline social workers.

To conclude, the leaving reasons are varied, such as A even not having a backup plan. However, what is similar is that they pursue better jobs that are more appropriate for men, with more power, higher social recognition, and higher social status, from which they would realize masculinity. What I am worried about, is their leaving will reinforce the feminized impression of social work, since the gender unbalance would become more serious, leading to a vicious circle.

Meanwhile, the knowledge from experienced social workers cannot be passed down to fresh social workers, which to some extent is a kind of resource waste.

6.6 The Key Issue: Low Salary

Most of my interviewees have complained about the low salary of social work that highly effects their fulfilling the breadwinner role. I will explain the standard of social worker's salaries and compare it to the living expenses in Shenzhen.

According to "1+7" paper, social workers are divided into different levels, and the salary corresponds to the different levels. Here is the salary standard announced in 2007. (Please refer to Appendix 2) My interviewees are all undergraduates and have gained the certification of assistant social worker, and thus they are at the eleventh level with salary, around 3,720 RMB per month. Since the salary varies a little from different social work agencies, I will refer to their concrete income later. The salary constitutes all the income, there are no other benefits attached.

According to Mercer's 2009 survey of living costs, Shenzhen is 42nd on the list of most expensive cities in the world. The survey covers 214 cities across five continents and measures the comparative cost of over 200 items in each location, including housing, transport, food, clothing, household goods and entertainment. There is also a list on daily items. (Please refer to Appendix 3)

Referring to my previous living experience in Shenzhen, the living expense listed above is credible. Thus, we can see that my interviewees' salary can only cover their own expenses; there is not much left each month. If they are married, the salary cannot even afford accommodation for two which means their spouse has to work to be the second-breadwinner of the family so that life will not be too difficult. Furthermore, since rent takes a big amount of the entire income; they probably have little savings for purchasing a house and car.

We can also find the salary difference among different levels is not big; however, promotion is neither easy nor fast. According to "1+7" paper, in

principle, a 10th level assistant social worker or above is able to get promoted after being employed for no less than three years at each level. Assistant level and shi-level are able to be promoted after no less than two years employment. If the probation period has completed, graduates can be directly employed as eleventh assistant social workers after obtaining professional qualifications; postgraduates can be directly employed as ninth social workers with social work qualification; PhD graduates can be directly employed as eighth social workers with social work qualifications. In short, a graduate with an assistant social work qualification will start as an 11th assistant social worker and work hard for two years to be promoted to the 10th level, and afterwards each promotion takes no less than three years. Suppose someone works as a social worker for long enough; it will take him or her no less than 11 years from the 11th level assistant social worker to reach the 7th level intermediate social worker with a salary increase of only 1,510 RMB per month, how patient and how money ignorant is he/ she supposed to be?

From the role perspective of masculinity, with eleven years proceeding, a man is probably growing into an individual with comprehensive roles, such as a husband and a father, his responsibility and social expectation become multiple, not only living on his own, but also supporting his family and supporting his children. Additionally, pressure may also come from a girlfriend or spouse. Imagine a girl expecting to marry a guy better than herself, how determined is she supposed to be by understanding her spouse's limited promotion, especially financially? Following this logic, it is easy to understand their expectations for a reasonable salary and anxiety for the future so that leaving social work becomes one of the options.

6.7 Unattractive Career Path

The professional levels listed above are from the official document, however, referring to the interviews I have conducted; the policies were not implemented well or strictly followed. On the contrary, there is another career path developing

in practice. I cannot find supported official document for it thus far, but according to my interviewees, it is in fact being utilized more than the professional levels.

The promotion follows the route of *frontline social worker—supervisor assistant—probationary supervisor/junior supervisor*. A social work graduate with more than a half year frontline working experience is able to apply for the supervisor assistant position. In principle, every six social workers elect one supervisor assistant; every four supervisor assistants elect one probationary supervisor. And if the probationary supervisor works for a certain amount of time and passes the test held by Shenzhen Social Worker Association, he/she will become a junior supervisor. The salary is adjusted according to the promotion, for instance, speaking of the agency I interviewed, the frontline social worker earns 3,650 RMB per month, the supervisor assistant earns 4,350 RMB per month with a 700 RMB increase, probationary supervisor earns 5,150 RMB per month with a 1,500 RMB increase, and the junior supervisor earns 5,500 RMB per month. As compared with the professional levels mentioned before, the salary rises faster.

However, interestingly, my interviewees are not satisfied with this career path. Everyone has complained about their probationary supervisor for not being professional enough to be the supervisor. Just as G said: “as before, Hong Kong supervisors provided emotional support, but now... (Sigh)...I am really sick of that: neither ability nor professional skill is better than you, but they are in charge of you. Actually it’s the qualifications that haven’t been controlled well; the local supervisors are not qualified.” This is due to the supervision model that has changed since 2009 that some positions are not able to be supervised by Hong Kong experienced supervisors, and instead, local supervisors conduct supervision of them.

Since 2007, the cross-border supervision from Hong Kong NGOs benefited social work in mainland China a lot. Although cross-border supervision had some limitations, such as Hong Kong supervisors’ lack of knowledge about the local social and political systems (Hung, Ng & Fung 2010:372), their professional supervision has encouraged mainland social workers and accelerated their progress. Start in 2009, Hong Kong supervisors gradually left supervision of most positions, and instead, local supervisors were elected and started to supervise

frontline social workers. Usually, local supervisors have only one or two more years working experience than frontline social workers, in this case, as compared with Hong Kong experienced supervisors; the quality of professional supervision has decreased rapidly.

Someone is even against the career path by choosing not to follow it. B said: “I don’t want to be an assistant; I would rather to stay in the frontline. I can accumulate experience in the frontline and I can do more with the experience and recourses...I think the career development is not to be the assistant, if I am able to be given more recourses, it’s affirmation too.” I consider local supervisors’ unprofessional supervision as not helpful in most situations, which bring trouble rather than support and negatively affect the recognition of career path from frontline social workers. As a result, the current career path is not inspiring enough. Relatively, even there is a career path; most of my interviewees did not refer to it when talking about their career plans. For those who would like to stay in social work, they prefer talking about management; those who are planning to leave, and thus the path obviously means nothing.

In fact, according to the interview with the female social worker who is the dean of service department in the social work service agency, there are some social service units (*yongren danwei*) prefer male social workers in recruitment. The reasons refer to the position requirements in terms of physical work, IT skills and security of working in the night as well as in favor of gender balance within working team. Furthermore, social work organizations are also concerning about the same issue. A serious gender imbalance of social workers may leads to troubles; take the agency I interviewed for example, there were seven female social workers taking maternal leave at the same time slot which brought inconvenience to both social service units and social work organizations. Consequently, she admitted male social workers enjoyed the priority of recruitment with equivalent capacities, and so did the promotion of future positions. It seems a direct way achieving gender balance but in reality is producing gender inequality in social work career.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

Rooted in Confucianism, China has been a patriarchal society for thousands of years. Like many other countries worldwide, the gender relations define men as breadwinners and women as housewives. Although the communist party built up the People's Republic of China and gender equality has achieved great success, when it comes to marriage, traditional gender norms are still influencing people. Women prefer to marry someone better than themselves which brings pressure on men to pursue career success. The social work career is a young profession in mainland China with low social recognition. Male social workers encounter struggles and difficulties in self-actualization. As a social work pilot city, Shenzhen Economic Special Zone is developing social work at a decent scale. I conducted my interviews there to obtain information on my research question: how social work in mainland China is feminized and how it impacts male social workers. I interviewed eight male social workers from a social work service agency where I worked before and found out that low wages were the key issue that negatively affected them from realizing masculinity and therefore most of them have been considering leaving.

I supposed the segregation of social work as a feminized profession in China was similar to western countries, as Chinese social work was learned from western experience. However, the Shenzhen case illustrated this differently. First, social work in mainland China has not been clearly labeled as female work for the reason that it is such a young profession with low social recognition. The public has limited knowledge of social work, thus it takes time to publicize it first and then it shall be gendered. Second, from the male social workers' perspective, most of them do not agree that social work is more suitable for women, when speaking of the profession itself. They considered it as having no gender preference and realized gender brought advantages and disadvantages to social work at the same time. Third, social work in mainland China is in the process of feminizing, the key factor for which is low wages. Male social workers cannot see a bright future in

this profession with low wages and an incomplete career path, thus they are considering leaving, especially for those who are planning to get married, because they view themselves as a husband and need to support the family. Masculinity cannot be realized via low wages. In addition, the fewer males participate in social work, the more likely that people will label it as a feminized occupation, which is a vicious circle.

With limited time and budget, I conducted eight interviews and my interviewees are from the same social work service agency. I hope in the future, other researchers will be able to interview more people with various backgrounds. Furthermore, there are more and more cities developing social work nowadays in mainland China, thus it will be very interesting to do research in other cities, maybe social workers there have better treatment and the research results will be different. Last but not the least, social work in China is in the process of professionalization, which confronts both opportunities and challenges. We should seize the opportunity to re-label social work as a no gender profession in order to avoid problems brought on by the gender segregation of work. Not only to improve salary standards in order to be a magnet for more pioneers, but also to establish a more reasonable and attractive career path for each social worker. I hope this paper will contribute to better policies for accelerating social work development, from which more social workers will join in this field with passion and interest but not gender concern, regarding it as a long-term career rather than a short-term job, actualizing themselves during work, and passing down their accumulated experience to freshmen in order to create a reinforcing circle for the social work career path.

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Appendix 1 Interview Guide

Part 1

- Personal information (When did you graduate? When did you start working as a social worker? What kind of social work do you do?)
- Do you understand what social work is when you chose to study in college?
- Why did you choose to be a social worker? How do you feel about self-actualization during work?
- Do your family, relatives and friends know what social work is? How do they think of you being a social worker? How do you feel about their opinions? Feel pressured?
- How do you feel about the overall social work experience?

Part 2

- Do you have a work partner? How many male social workers in your team?
- Do you agree that social work is a career more suitable for female? Is male not suitable for it?
- What do you think if there are more male social workers?
- Have you ever felt self-sacrificed since you chose to be a social worker?
- How do you feel about self-actualization by working as a social worker?
- Do you have any experience that positively or negatively affect your work just because of your gender?
- How do you think about your career development? Will you choose other career in the future?

Part 3

- Comparing to other career, what do you think of the specialty of social work?
- What do you think is the biggest problem regarding the career itself in China?
- Do you think social work has a bright future in China? Do you clearly know the future of yourself in this career?

Part 4

- Suppose you are the spokesman for social workers, what do you want to tell most?
- Suppose you are at a position that can make big decisions, what do you want to change most?

Appendix 2 Shenzhen Social Workers Payroll in 2007

Professional job titles		Average salary (yuan/month)
Intermediate	7 th level social worker	5230
	8 th level social worker	4930
	9 th level social worker	4510
Assistant	10 th level assistant social worker	3960
	11 th level assistant social worker	3720
Shi-level	Shi-social worker	3330
Probationary period	College graduates	3190
	Undergraduates	3660
	Dual-degree, graduates (without degree)	3890
	Master	4320
	PhD	4920

The above salary includes the expense of social insurance and personal income tax, and according to actual situation, the specific remuneration packages can float up and down by 10%.

Appendix 3 Cost of living in Shenzhen

Food/Drink	Price (Yuan)
milk, small paper cup	2.90
white bun supermarket	1.8
half sliced bread	5
apples (per kg)	7
water (1.5 liter)	2.5
lettuce (0.5 kg)	1
rice (0.5 kg)	2
pork (0.5 kg)	12
spareribs (0.5 kg)	18
bag of nuts	5-20
Daily usage	
big bottle soap	20-30
t-shirt, men	20-50
shirt, men	40-200
Restaurant	
dinner, 2 person	30-120
lunch, 2 person	25-50
Chinese fast-food order (incl. delivery)	10-20
Some dishes	
fish	20-100
vegetable	10-30
meat	20-50

rice/bowl 1-2

Living/work

rent house, 50m2 2.000Y/month * **see note below**

rent house, 100+m2, good location 8.000Y/month

buy house (normally 70-150m2) 7-25K RMB/m2

utility (electricity, water, management) 200/month

internet 2MB ADSL 1440Y/year

native English teacher, fulltime 10.000+Y/month * **see note below**

taxi 5 km (start 12.5) 20

bus/subway 2-5/trip

(http://www.startinchina.com/shenzhen/life/cost_of_living_in_shenzhen.html)