

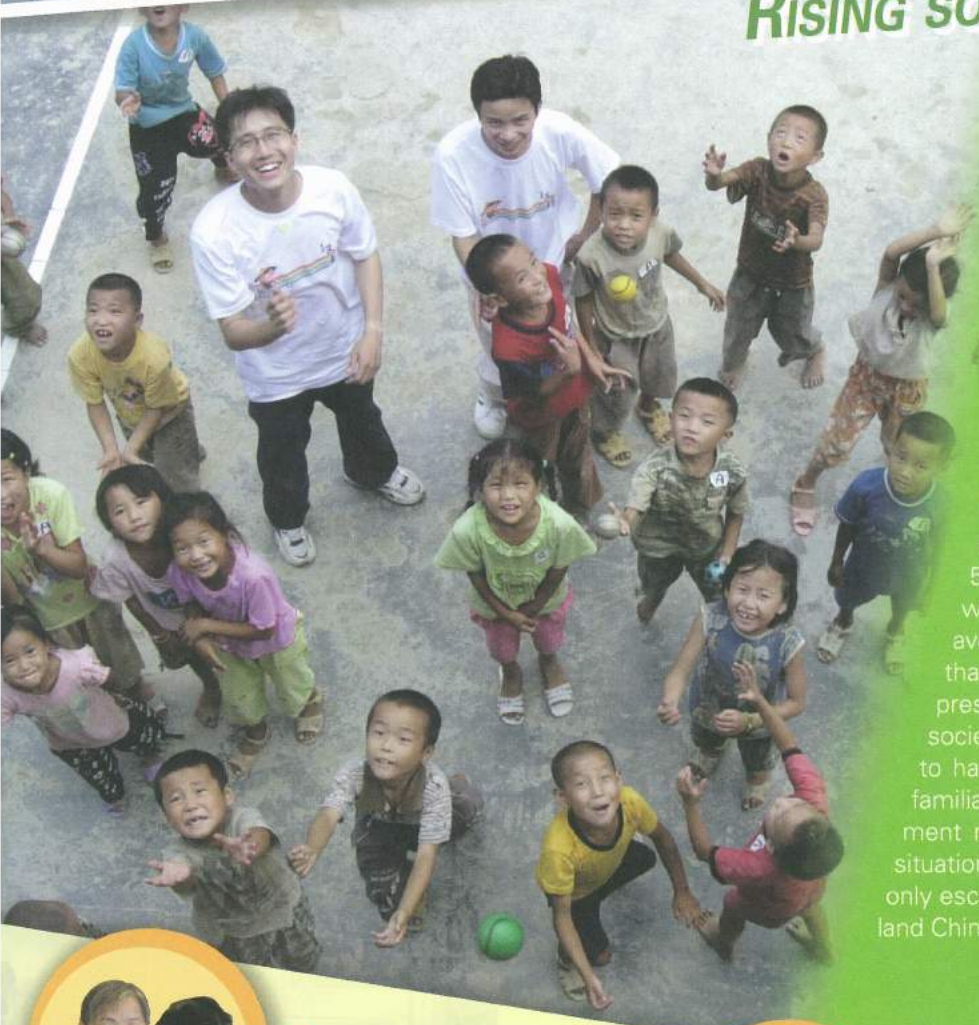


Department of Applied Social Studies Serves the Society

RISING SOCIAL DEMAND IN CHINA

It is globally recognized that mainland China has undergone rapid economic development and drastic social change in recent decades. As Ye Xinhua, the Deputy Director of the Shanghai Civil Affairs Administration, has commented: "When a society continues to experience fast economic development, social problems such as unemployment, the ageing of citizens and rising levels of crime . . . become a major concern." In fact, economic development not only brings complex social issues, but also psychological burdens. A recent global survey conducted by the International Research Institutes (IriS) found that as many as 59% of Chinese people suffer from a severe work-life imbalance. This is 10% higher than the average of 24 other countries. In addition, more than 35% of Chinese people suffer from family pressure. The country's one-child policy, its ageing society, and the high value placed on family seems to have put the Chinese under a heavy burden of familial duties. At the same time, economic development requires them to work long hours. In such a situation, the demand for formal psychological care can only escalate. How is the social service sector in mainland China currently coping with such demand?

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CAN WE GET OLD BUT REMAIN BRIGHT? PAGE 3



IS SMALL CLASS TEACHING A BLESSING FOR HONG KONG EDUCATION? PAGE 6

Boosting Social Work Education and Practice in China

(from the cover page)

Professor Alex Kwan, Head of the Applied Social Studies Department at CityU, believes that a more qualified crop of social workers with proper professional skills is urgently needed to maintain the well-being of China's people and society. "Psychological counseling and advice from social workers are critical to an inner release that can help people to avoid further social problems," Professor Kwan said. Both the academic community and the government in China recognize the role that social workers can play in such areas as schools, hospitals, rehabilitation centers, prisons, and government-run care facilities and even in rural development and military and industrial settings.² "This creates impressive prospects for professional social workers in China," Professor Kwan noted. "A social work board has been established in Beijing, which implies that the government has addressed the importance of social work and moved forward toward its professional development and education."

Department Highlights

SS and the Correctional Services Department host forum on rehabilitation services

More than 100 scholars, NGO representatives and members of the Government's Correctional Services Department (CSD) recently took part in an NGO forum on the rehabilitation services that are co-organized by SS and the CSD. The aim of the forum, which took place in September 2007, was to look at the way in which the concept of social capital helps rehabilitants gain acceptance by society with respect to social networking, the level of societal care and trust, and the participation of social groups.

SS Professor Lo Tit-wing emphasized that the concept of social capital could be applied to the latest rehabilitation projects conducted by the CDS, noting that the enhancement of social capital could help reduce societal conflict and gain support for rehabilitants, which is crucial to the success of rehabilitation programs in Hong Kong.

CityU Acting President Professor Richard Ho Yan-ki expressed his appreciation for the practical value of the forum. He pointed out that enhanced social capital could contribute to social stability and that the forum itself was a demonstration of the concept in practice, as it encouraged the participation of all members of society. He further stressed that applied research is one of CityU's key strengths through which it is dedicated to improving society.

Mr. Yau Chi-chiu, Assistant Commissioner (Rehabilitation) of the CDS, thanked the participating NGOs for their support for both the department and rehabilitants. In future, he said, the CDS would like to work more closely with CityU and the NGOs to improve rehabilitation services in Hong Kong and build a more harmonious and stable society.





Nurturing the profession

To provide professional services for a variety of people in need, it is critical that social service providers are equipped with proper knowledge and skills. Social work education in China has developed dramatically in the past two decades. In 1988, Beijing University launched the mainland's first social work program. Today, about 200 universities and colleges have social work departments or programs with nearly 10,000 graduates every year.

However, social work on the mainland is still immature in terms of both education and practice. "At present, the shortage of experienced social work educators is the main problem," Professor Kwan commented. Due to the short history of China's social work profession, most of the educators in the field have limited experience with front-line work. "When students encounter problems or confusion during work placements, they find it difficult to get advice from their teachers," one mainland social work educator conceded. "This can be frustrating, but it really takes time to integrate theory and practice."³

Formal education on the mainland is also not practical enough. It does not prepare students to act and to apply what they have learned flexibly according to the circumstance. A French social worker in China explained: "Many Chinese colleagues are energetic and fond of the work, but they are very inexperienced. They have learned something from school, but when they face problems, sometimes they just don't know how to deal with them."⁴ Even though many social work practitioners are caring and compassionate, they often lack a comprehensive understanding of what they do, which leads to inefficiency, frustration, and disappointment for service users.

There is also a need to improve in-service social work training. Many existing social services on the mainland are conducted by government



Prof. Alex Kwan

officials who are not very well trained. In addition, some practitioners, regardless of their educational background, are granted the title of social worker after passing a set of examinations. This means that they need not have had any social work training. "With improved in-service training and examinations, current staff can be better equipped with social work methodology and values, thus enhancing their capacity, while new social work graduates can inject new blood into the profession," one social work educator said.⁵

To turn social work into a profession, quality social work education and training are essential. Social work practitioners need to be equipped with critical thinking skills and analytical abilities to handle and apply their knowledge effectively in a variety of circumstances. Recognizing such needs, Professor Kwan flew to Chengdu to deliver a lecture on practical skills to 100 social workers in early November 2007. He said he hopes that social work educators in Hong Kong will help to strengthen the social work profession on the mainland, noting that the Department of Applied Social Studies at CityU is ready to do so.

Reported by Yanki Yan

¹ Reported in the Shanghai Star, 01-13-2005

² Reported in China Development Brief, 12-12-2006

³ Chen Tao, Dean of the Department of Social Work and Administration at the China Youth University for Political Sciences. Reported in China Development Brief, 12-12-2006

⁴ Patricia Crouan, from Beijing Huiling, an NGO serving mentally handicapped people. Reported in China Development Brief, 12-12-2006

⁵ Chen Tao, reported in China Development Brief, 12-12-2006

Growing Old, Growing Brighter



Lee and Yau want to make good use of their time and so are active members of several social service centers. In the past few years, they have spent much of their leisure time performing volunteer work and joining such classes as Tai Chi, lawn-bowling, Cantonese opera, social dancing and fan dancing, none of which they had a chance to enjoy when they were young.

Old age can mean the start of a new level of self-development

The two have not only found that their bodies are stronger than ever, but also that their self-confidence and communication skills have improved greatly. Lee was recently the champion in a lawn-bowling competition. "I was very happy," she said. "I never in my life thought I could win a competition." Lee and Yau have also both been invited to serve as marshals for several activities. "I was very shy in the past," Yau recalled. With the support of social workers, they are now rather skillful speakers. "Bit by bit, I have gained courage," Yau said. "I can sometimes even joke with the audience."

Having devoted themselves to volunteer work, Lee and Yau realize how important it is to cherish life and show concern for others. They frequently visit hostels for the elderly and teach the residents how to dance and sing Cantonese opera. "It's my pleasure to give them happiness," Yau explained, "but as I see fewer and fewer familiar faces there, I appreciate how precious life is. We should live our life to the fullest." Death does not scare her, she said, but makes her value life.

In addition to their volunteer work, they also contribute to the community by promoting an atmosphere of mutual help among their neighbors. "I was once the beneficiary of another's help, and so I know what it is to feel helpless," Lee said. "I therefore sometimes make healthy soup for my neighbors, especially when they are sick."

Many people think that growing old means the body deteriorates and the mind slows down and that the elderly can only be taken care of rather than maintain self-sufficiency and even grow and develop.

The stories of Lee and Yau, who are now nearly 70, demonstrate that this is not the case. For them, old age has meant the start of a new level of self-development. "Retirement has actually been a turning point and given us the chance to enjoy life," they explain. "We now have more time to learn new things, meet new people, and have a look around the community. It's like going to university."

When they were young, they spent almost all of their time working and sleeping. "To earn a living, I worked two jobs a day. I had no time and no extra money to play with," Yau said. "Life was so tense and structured, but we now realize that life can actually be relaxing and joyful," Lee continued, a smile unfolding on her face.



It seems a given that the physical health of the elderly would deteriorate with time. Yet, although this commonly happens, it is not the rule. The physical health and strength of older people can not only be maintained, but also built up. Last year, Lee was injured by a falling shelf in a shopping mall and was unable to walk for a period of time. Her health deteriorated rapidly. "It nearly broke my heart," she said. "Then I told myself, 'never give up!' A lot of things are still waiting for me to do. I must get well." Such optimism and willpower, and regular exercise and physiotherapy, brought her back to health within three months. Even her doctor was surprised at her quick recovery. Yau maintains her health by eating a healthy diet. "I want to live longer," she emphasized. "I want to keep the energy to explore new things."

"I told myself, never give up! I want to keep the energy to explore new things."

Lee and Yau are excellent examples of positive ageing, which does not merely refer to a lack of problems or deterioration; it means continuing to grow and experience satisfaction with life during old age. Lee and Yau have not stopped developing because they are old. Rather, by playing active roles in the community, they have developed their potential and live their lives to the fullest. Old age can be as bright a period as any other in life.

*Reported by Yanki Yan
Photos by Cheng Kai Leung*



Positive Approaches to Ageing Well

Enjoy life	This can be a time to explore and develop potential. Make merry while you can.
Cherish life	Cultivate a sense of worthiness by contributing to the community and being concerned for others.
Be optimistic	Become more open-minded and flexible. Never give up.
Be active	Take the initiative to make friends and strengthen your social support network.
Adopt a positive lifestyle	Build up healthy habits, such as exercising and eating healthily, to maintain energy.



Self-Financing Programs

One of the strengths of SS is its provision of high-quality teaching and training. In addition to its full-time programs, the SS department also offers a number of part-time, self-financing programs aimed at working students. This year, there are six self-financing programs on offer, as follows.

Program	Application Deadline
BA (Hons) Social Work with Minor in Counselling	February 29, 2008
PGD in Psychology	
MSocSc in Social Work	
MSocSc in Counselling	
MSocSc in Psychology of Education	
MSocSc in Applied Sociology	May 31, 2008

(For more information, please visit <http://ssweb.cityu.edu.hk/apss/index.aspx?cid=23>)

These programs attract hundreds of students every year. The following comments from current students and graduates provide a good picture of how valuable they are.

- "The BASWMC is a meaningful and useful program. The courses enhance my critical thinking abilities and practical competence to allow me to be a reflective social worker." (Becky Ng, BA (Hons) Social Work with Minor in Counselling)
- "I originally chose CityU because the campus is easily accessible. However, I soon realized how lucky I am to study here. The course subject matter is not easily explained, and yet the lecturers manage to create an enjoyable and interesting atmosphere. When you glimpse your classmates in the lecture theaters, you can see how much they enjoy the lectures. I have no regrets about signing up for this program." (Teresa Chan, PGDP in Psychology)
- "I have learned a great deal about the latest studies in the caring professions. Also, the critical thinking skills and open-mindedness of the lecturers and students has really impressed me. I am very proud and grateful to be part of a circle that continues to grow in strength." (Lau Wing Seung, Master of Social Sciences in Social Work)
- "Without any prior academic or working background in sociology or social work, it was really a challenge for me to pursue studies in Counselling, especially at the Master degree level. I would like to thank all of the SS teachers. It was their staunch teaching attitudes and constant support that



motivated us. I am proud to be a graduate of SS." (Abby Lam, MSocSc in Counselling)

- "As a supply teacher for international schools in Hong Kong, I often meet children with learning difficulties and behavioral issues. The MSocSc in Psychology of Education program has empowered me to help these children in overcoming their difficulties and maximizing their potential. As the world is getting more complicated, I cannot help but think that I could never have become a good teacher without having undergone this training." (Jackie Newman, MSocSc in Psychology of Education)



- "In addition to gaining knowledge of human interactions, this program has also equipped me with social research skills that I can apply in a variety of situations." (Dominic Wong, MSocSc in Applied Sociology)

To provide more information on these part-time, self-financing programs, a Graduate Studies Information Day will be held on Saturday, January 12, 2008 from 1:00 pm to 6:30 pm in the Purple Zone, 4/F, Academic Building, CityU of Hong Kong.

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