

## EDITORIAL

### **Social policy and social work in the aging context of China**

In the past five years, both social work and social policy in China have undergone tremendous changes. And this year is the beginning of 12th Five-Year Plan, which is regarded as a watershed of national development strategy moving toward a more balanced and integrative approach for promoting economic and social development.

In order to generate new knowledge and deepen further discussions on the theme of social work and social policy in China, we, on behalf of the editorial staff of the *China Journal of Social Work*, have produced this special issue. To prepare this issue, we did not do it in a usual way by determining a specific topic or theme. Rather, we broadened the scope of subjects to provide more choices for contributors who are willing to write about what interests them the most and contribute the knowledge that they are most familiar with. The contents of this special issue reflect what we, as the guest editors, hoped to achieve. For us at least, the interesting but unexpected occurrence is a commonality among the majority of the articles, in which social work and social policy related to the elderly are the focal point.

Of course, it is a timely issue when the Chinese government recently publicized new findings on demographic changes from its 6th Population Census conducted in 2010, showing that population aging is challenging traditional family care and straining its immature social security system. According to the State Statistic Bureau, population growth in China declined to an average growth rate of 0.57% during 2001–2010, although the total number of its population is still large at 1.34 billion. Meanwhile, the growth of the aged population has outpaced average population in this country in recent years and this trend will continue in the foreseeable future. The proportion of those aged over 65 now is 8.87% and the increase of elderly people becomes greater with a decrease in the child population aged 0–14 at 6.29% compared to the 5th Census in 2000 (China Statistic Bureau 2011). Although it is still too early to accurately predict the consequences of such a demographic change in China in the future, we as social scientists can make a wide but intelligent guess on the impact of rapid aging on care services for the elderly and the pension scheme designed to meet the needs of retired people. For the social work profession, demographic change and especially aging in China will inform its social service system and social policy making to cope with a series of daunting challenge in the next decade and beyond.

In this volume, we invite Chinese scholars to talk and write about social work and social policy in China in the context of aging and social transition. The topics of the articles vary from institutional care for the elderly, pension reform policy and its impact on pensioners, death and suicidal ideation among nursing home residents to the effects of social environment on health and disaster prevention education curriculum. The contributors in this volume include not only experienced and senior scholars in the field, but also the young and ambitious rising stars. They provide their knowledge, understandings, insights and critical points from a broad lens of demography, psychology, education and social policy.

We begin this special issue with an interview conducted by Gary Sigley with Professor Yongxiang Xu regarding social work and social policy in contemporary China. In this interview, Yongxiang Xu shares his insights on the development of social work as a profession in China in general and recent progress of social work services and social policy in Shanghai in particular. According to Xu, social work's emergence as a profession in China can be interpreted as a complex interaction between social work educators, government, community development and international exchange of professional practice in the process of economic reform and social transformation. And more importantly, social policy in recent years has been escalated to the top of the agenda of the country's development strategy. Sigley's interview with Yongxiang Yu can be used as a forward to help readers understand the dynamic changes of social work and social policy in China.

The next three articles focus on social work practice and social policy related to the elderly in China. Yun Zhou and Xiao Wang describe variations of Chinese pensioners' demographic characteristics and their relationship with the pension system from a quantitative approach and call for more attention and policy concern on the insecure economic situation of the vulnerable elderly. Shengming Yan and Songguo Yi discuss a sobering but eye-catching issue in China, death and suicidal ideation among institutionalized elderly. Based on survey data in urban China, Yan and Yi disclose that culture is a significant factor to impact on elderly people in nursing homes to express their feelings and behave in relation to mental health. Their study indicates that depressive symptoms and life satisfaction of elderly nursing home residents are associated with death and suicidal ideation, i.e. those who have depressive symptoms and lower satisfaction are more likely to report death and suicidal ideation. Therefore, this information is quite important both for care providers and policymakers to develop preventive services to counter suicide in homes. Hua Ding uses a mixed research method to examine service quality of the society-run homes for the aged in Beijing and identify different dimensions and domains of service quality. According to her research findings, the service quality in the society-run homes for the elderly in the context of marketisation is unsatisfactory and more effective regulation and quality control are needed to improve the situation.

The next two articles in this volume focus on the effects of social environment on health and project collaboration in the field of disaster prevention education in China. Yawen Li discusses the effects of social environment on health from a life-ecological perspective and relates this study to the core subject of social inequality in recent debates of social research in China. Li suggests that it is important to explore the aspects of social environment in relation to health in this transitional country that implies further efforts on quality health services and sound policy reform of health care. Xuewei Zhang, Yunong Huang and Mingli Li mainly describe the project collaborations between Aide et Action and other non-governmental organizations, governmental agencies, schools, local communities and volunteers. They tactfully analyze the key factors influencing the collaboration process and outcomes and also emphasize the significance of collaboration itself in implementing the project.

The social work profession in China is developing in the context of both expected challenges and unanticipated changes, which makes the subject easily debatable and controversial. Meanwhile, the process of social policy making and implementation has been embedded in the country's economic development strategies and political orientations in a new era. With the progress of the market economy and rapid change in the social fabric of China, social work professionals, educators and policymakers are confronted by a series of challenging but frequently ignored emerging questions: what is the core of social work competence? How can social work practice be strengthened

by policy advocacy in the context of rapid aging and social transition? How can we improve our practice to help people in need and facilitate our social policy making? We think there are many ways of knowing and surely different channels of searching for potential answers.

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**Reference**

China Statistical Bureau, 2011. China will reaches to zero population growth around 2032. *Xin Jing Bao*, 29 April, p. 1.