

Indigenization and authentication of epistemology in China's social work: Moving beyond Confucianism, Taoism, and Chinese Buddhism

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Abstract

How China's social work can establish its own epistemology has remained largely unexplored. This article focuses on Confucianism, Taoism, and Chinese Buddhism to start this epistemological exploration, as they represent Chinese culture and can provide valuable epistemological elements for China's social work. Moving beyond epistemological elements from these philosophies, how social workers in China can further develop social work research and practice based on the unique Chinese context is also discussed, specifically through the processes of indigenization and authentication of epistemology in China's social work. Limitations and future research directions are also presented to guide future discussion.

Keywords

Authentication, Chinese culture, epistemology, indigenization, philosophy, social work

Introduction

The social work discipline originates in the West, has developed based on Western values, and thus reflects Western epistemologies (Tsui and Yan, 2010). As a value-laden concept, epistemology derives from the macro cultural context that includes worldviews and values, and affects our understanding of how knowledge should be produced, perceived, and verified (Wolfer and Hodge, 2007). Epistemology shapes the social work discipline, and profoundly affects how social workers analyze and adopt different knowledge to solve social problems in their social contexts (Kirk and Reid, 2002). For instance, how mental health social workers can construct and utilize knowledge of mental health services, rather than simply adopt knowledge from other health professions (Gould, 2006); how social workers can improve their practice through the evaluation and integration of different professional knowledge (e.g. theoretical, personal, empirical) in different contexts (Hudson, 1997); how social workers can apply dialectics into their practice and critically evaluate

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practice knowledge based on its contradictions and interconnectedness (Tsang, 2000). Moreover, non-Western researchers gradually realized that the epistemological discussion in social work should also be contextualized, as this Western discipline cannot sufficiently represent their culture (Ragab, 2016). Similarly, social work in China also relies much on Western knowledge frameworks (Tsang and Yan, 2001). A social work discipline that reflects Chinese values and epistemology is needed to better solve social problems in China. However, the epistemological discussion of China's social work might be diverse, due to China's multicultural and multiethnic context (S Lee et al., 2018). This article only focuses on Han Chinese, the majority ethnic group in China, and aims to explore the epistemology of China's social work through three major philosophies (Confucianism, Taoism, Chinese Buddhism) that significantly influence Han Chinese culture (National Geographic, 2019). Specifically, this article aims to (1) briefly introduce the development of social work in China and accentuate the necessity of exploring the epistemology of China's social work; (2) reflect on epistemological elements from Confucianism, Taoism, and Chinese Buddhism, and connect them to China's social work; and (3) move beyond these epistemological elements through the discussion of indigenization and authentization of epistemology in China's social work. Overall, rather than only focus on epistemological positions of traditional Chinese philosophical systems, our main purpose is to highlight the culture-specific views and methods regarding production, articulation, and mobilization of social work knowledge. This introduction of social work as a system of knowledge and skills to China has led to a complex and dynamic process of learning, assimilation, adaptation, and Indigenous knowledge production (Yan and Tsang, 2008).

The development of social work in China

The development of China's social work is embodied in Chinese history. When China lost the first opium war to the United Kingdom in 1842, the weak Qing dynasty gradually faced threats of being conquered by Western colonialism and imperialism (e.g. ceded territories to the United Kingdom; Wahed, 2016). Even though this feudal dynasty was overthrown by revolutionists and the Republic of China was established in 1912 (Schoppa, 2017), the nation was still overshadowed by Western colonialism (Yuen-Tsang and Wang, 2008). Advanced Western sciences and technologies were regarded as elixirs for China to catch up and revive again (Chen, 2014). The social work discipline was then introduced to China in the 1920s by Western missionaries, and social work programs were established gradually (Tsang and Yan, 2001). However, the development of this discipline was sluggish (Bai, 2014), due to unstable political situations (e.g. continuous wars among warlords, the Japanese invasion, the civil war between the Communist Party and Kuomintang) in China (Zarrow, 2006). When the People's Republic of China (PRC) was established in 1949, class struggles were still the priority and capitalist elements were determined to be eradicated in Chinese society (P Huang, 1995). Therefore, the social work discipline was abolished due to its Western background (Yip, 2007). In 1978, given the low productivity of the collective and planned economy, China implemented economic reforms and opened to the world (Zhou and Xiao, 2018). The rapid economic development caused an enormous social transition and many social problems thus emerged (e.g. soaring unemployment due to the end of the planned economy and many state-owned enterprises; Hutchings and Taylor, 2007). Under this circumstance, social work was reimported into China in the 1980s and assisted by scholars from Hong Kong to help the government tackle social problems (Yan and Tsang, 2005; Yuen-Tsang and Wang, 2008). However, epistemological doubts about this Western discipline were not exposed at that time. First, it was the advanced methodological and instrumental aspects of this Western discipline that were emphasized by Chinese scholars, and fundamental epistemological issues were overlooked due to the infancy of

China's social work (Tsang and Yan, 2001). Second, this discipline was managed by the government and only existed in major cities without being generalized nationwide (Yan and Tsang, 2005). It was primarily adopted to help the government intervene in macro social problems (e.g. poverty), yet micro practice with individuals was not prioritized (Yuen-Tsang and Wang, 2002). Third, as Marxism–Leninism was still the dominant ideology, materialistic epistemology emerging from the reform was still nascent and did not generate significant influences on social work (Tsang and Yan, 2001; Yip, 2007).

As China continues developing, China's social problems have become more complicated and subtle. For example, left-behind children in rural areas are faced with psychological challenges as their parents separate from them and migrate to rich urban areas for more job opportunities (Song et al., 2018). Therefore, a knowledge framework that reflects Chinese epistemology is needed to better understand and analyze these social problems emerging from China's social transitions. However, the epistemology of China's social work has remained largely unexplored in the literature. Under this circumstance, we thus focused on three major ancient philosophies, Confucianism, Taoism, and Chinese Buddhism, to start this epistemological exploration. They were chosen not only because they represent the origin and development of Chinese civilization, but also because they are the pillar of Chinese people's faith system and profoundly influence Chinese society (Chun, 2012). This discussion paves the way for other epistemological explorations and can boost the development of China's social work. The following sections present these philosophies and further discuss their potential epistemological influences on China's social work.

Confucianism

Confucianism is based on the thoughts and discourses of Confucius who was born in 551 BC and of his supporters (Kimba and Carew, 1990). It emphasizes harmonious social relationships and the integration of individuals into these social relationships, which can further establish and maintain a stable social order (D Ho, 1995). Specifically, moral discourse such as The Five Constants (i.e. benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, trustworthiness; Li, 2009; F Wang, 2004) is used by Confucianism to achieve this goal. This moral discussion provides ethical guidelines for Chinese people, further becomes the prerequisite for the harmonious social order, as individuals are indispensable parts of social relations, and their behaviors also affect these relations (Yu, 2005). Mou Zousan, the late contemporary Neo-Confucian, further suggested that the moral discourse in Confucianism accentuates the role of the subject in social relations, and further explains the ultimate question of being, a moral metaphysics perspective that guides individuals' life and China's social structure (Mou, 2015). His emphasis on analyzing Confucianism as a whole throughout its development shows integrative and consistent stances to better understand epistemological influences of Confucianism (Mou, 2015). Based on the above analyses, classical Confucian epistemologies were based on a structurally ordered holistic worldview and deeply rooted in axiological premises. Knowledge of what is real is intimately tied to the ontological nature of things. The primary methods include introspection and intuitive perception of reality (Rošker, 2021b). Confucian scholars tend to limit themselves to what is observable in the natural as well as the social and moral order, but will not speculate on what is unobservable like the afterlife and the spiritual order (Confucius, 1999). Knowledge gained through sensory perception or observation can then be elevated to a higher order of knowing, which is closer to the Western ideas of wisdom and insight, through reflection and forward thinking (Mi, 2017). Furthermore, knowledge is often expected to serve pragmatic social and moral functions (Rošker, 2021b), and learning is a highly valued pathway to knowledge and wisdom (Mi, 2017). The emphasis on ongoing learning, ultimately acquiring knowledge with a moral purpose (public good) can therefore be seen as a culturally facilitated position among Chinese social workers.

Even though Confucianism experienced both suppression and revitalization in Chinese history, it still profoundly influences Chinese people's worldviews and values (Li, 2009), and can thus become an important epistemological component in China's social work. Particularly, as Confucianism elucidates how Chinese society operates based on social relations, and how individuals should follow those ethical guidelines and locate themselves in Chinese society to have harmonious social relations (Al-Daraweesh and Snauwaert, 2013), a relation-oriented and contextual epistemological stance thus emerges to guide China's social work; social work should be embedded in the collective Chinese society, analyze individuals and their social relations, and further consider the interplay between various social relations and individuals' behaviors, a viewpoint that guides social workers to reflect on social problems in a holistic and comprehensive manner (Liu, 2017). Virtues promoted by Confucianism provide social workers with effective tools to understand and evaluate individuals' behaviors in Chinese society (Yu, 2005), and problems may emerge when individuals cannot fulfill these virtues and when these perceived inadequacies disrupt social relations (Sigurðsson, 2010), a viewpoint that guides social workers to connect the moral subject with social relations (Mou, 2015) and reflect on social problems in a human-centered manner (Liu, 2017). In other words, these understandings help social workers analyze how problems on both the micro individual level and the macro social contextual level possibly happen in China (Sigurðsson, 2010) from comprehensive, dynamic, and iterative perspectives. Rooted in Confucianism, these abovementioned epistemological stances can guide social workers to contemplate social work research and practice based on the characteristics of Chinese society, and further design social work resources that specifically target the Chinese context.

Taoism

Taoism, or Daoism, originated in the Warring States Period that started from 403 BC (Oldstone-Moore, 2003). Through yin-yang theory, Taoism suggests that there are no static and perpetual relations existing among things, and all relations consist of contradictory components but can achieve temporary balances (Chun, 2012; Fang, 2014). Taoism also holds that individuals need to know their inner self first by integrating different senses they have before truly knowing the outside world (Shien, 1953; J Wang and Stringer, 2000). However, individuals from different backgrounds may perceive things differently, and they need to think from different perspectives to better get to know the truth (Shien, 1953). Taoism also emphasizes integration and proposes that only by putting yourself into nature and becoming one with nature can individuals have a chance to achieve ultimate philosophical Tao (J Wang and Stringer, 2000). The Taoist epistemological position is characterized by its explicit contingent stance, asserting that the constant truth (Tao) can never be fully comprehended and articulated (Wu et al., 1961). Knowledge is always contingent upon references and frames. Any idea, like goodness or any measure of size or time, only makes sense when it is considered vis-à-vis something else. In this sense, it can be understood as compatible with a constructivist position (Hua et al., 1999). This epistemological orientation affords flexible interpretations of Taoist concepts, and Chinese social workers have found it easy to apply them to direct practice (e.g. Chan et al., 2014). Guided by Taoism, an integrated epistemology can help social workers understand and balance contradictory components (e.g. different social relations) in society to understand social problems, put forward solutions, and boost social development, a dialectics process that requires social workers to handle interconnectedness and contradiction dynamically in practice (Tsang, 2000). As for individuals' intervention, this philosophy enlightens social workers to think from clients' perspectives, and help clients know more about themselves by analyzing their needs, capacities, characteristics, and circumstances to better locate clients' problems

(Tsang, 2013). Moreover, social workers should integrate clients in the surrounding environment and further ascertain how individual problems are caused between them and their surroundings (P Leung et al., 2009). Particularly, a fusion of perspectives between social workers and clients can strengthen the hermeneutic understanding of clients' situations, as it breaks problematic positivist knowledge frameworks that overlook the value relativism in human interactions and emphasizes social workers' positive value involvement in client intervention (Y Ho and Yuen, 2010). Based on the abovementioned discussion, Taoism provides relation-oriented, integrative, and human-centered epistemological perspectives to understand social problems in China, which can further become important epistemological roots in China's social work.

Chinese Buddhism

Buddhism was estimated to be brought to China from India during the Eastern Han Dynasty (from 25 AD to 220 AD; Ling, 2004). It has developed into different schools in China (D Ho, 1995), but only common precepts are discussed here. In Buddhism, karma theory is an important component. Karma derives from human consciousness, is expressed through actions and words, and further generates effects on the larger context (Xia, 2011). All relations in the universe rely on and interconnect through karma, a perspective that helps us infer how the consequences result from the causality among different things (Xia, 2011). Buddhism also holds a view that only consciousness remains eternal and only constant reflection can help individuals get to know the true reality (Chapple, 2017). Individuals who convert to Buddhism also need to constantly help ordinary people to build up their karma for the afterlife (Chapple, 2017; Thomas and Kumari, 2010), a process that further shows the causality between individuals' behaviors, their destiny, and social relations (Xia, 2011). In fact, Buddhist epistemology is massive and tied to various intellectual traditions in India (Arnold, 2005). After reaching China, it flourished and subsequently became a shaping force in Confucian theory development (Wen, 2011). Given the purpose and scope of this article, as well as our above analyses of Buddhist precepts, we can only select two key means of knowledge (pramāṇa) that are commonly found among most Buddhist epistemologies: perception and inference (Rošker, 2021a). For our purpose here, perception includes observation and sensory processing of phenomena consisting of particular objects; and inference is a more cognitive process that allows us to come to recognize more general objects of knowledge, such as categories, concepts, and ideas (Stoltz, 2009). Chan (Zen), a prominent school of Chinese Buddhism, proposed an approach more in line with traditional Chinese philosophical sensibility, probably with Taoist overtones. For instance, its last patriarch Hui Neng (638–713 CE) explored the idea of spiritual inquiry without the use of words, which resonated with the Taoist claim that 'the word that can be spoken is not the constant word' (Wu et al., 1961: 1). The intuitive grasp of spiritual essence often privileged in Chan Buddhist narratives can be seen as a sample of inferential knowing as characterized by Stoltz (2009). These epistemological thoughts can guide China's social work. Explicitly, a reflexive and meditative perspective, informed by karma, can be used to infer how social issues are generated based on social workers' perceptions of complicated and unstable interrelations, and further help them put forward intervention based on constant reflection (K Lee et al., 2017a). For instance, individuals' mental health problems may result from interrelated social and individual factors, and social workers need to delve into and reflect on these relations to reveal the karma of clients' life events, a process that further facilitates social work intervention (K Lee et al., 2017a, 2017b). A human-centered perspective is also needed for social workers to genuinely understand individuals' experiences, interact with, and help them. This perspective is in line with the expectation for Buddhism believers to help ordinary people (Thomas and Kumari, 2010).

Building upon abovementioned analyses, how social workers in China can move beyond these three traditional systems needs to be discussed, namely through the processes of indigenization and authentication.

The process of indigenization

Indigenization in the field of social work can be understood as a process of developing countries importing advanced social work knowledge from Western countries and modifying it based on their contexts (Law and Lee, 2016; Yan, 2013). Nevertheless, the indigenization of epistemology in social work has not been intensively discussed. In China, this discussion has reflected the debate between Western and Chinese values because epistemology is an illustration of cultures and values (Getty, 2010). Therefore, how to balance the relation between Western paradigms and the Chinese cultural context has become a difficult question (Tsang and Yan, 2001).

One viewpoint is that since social work is a Western discipline and still new in China, all Western social work knowledge including its epistemology should be imported (Tsang and Yan, 2001); this is consistent with the first stage of indigenization put forward by Nimmagadda and Balgopal (2000) that Western social work knowledge is the best. However, Tsang and Yan (2001) further suggested that this blind belief and obsession with Western paradigms have not considered complicated situations in China as well as the diversities in Western social work knowledge.

Yan (2013) mentioned that as a value-laden field, imported Western social work may contradict the Chinese cultural context. The awareness of local culture and context shows the second stage of indigenization (Nimmagadda and Balgopal, 2000). Yan and Cheng (2009) explored the compatibilities between Western social work and the Chinese cultural context and found some distinctive differences. First, Western values emphasize individuality and self-care (Heller and Brooke-Rose, 1986). However, Chinese values accentuate self-repression and individuals' demands are weakened to consider more collective benefit (Chiu and Kosinski, 1995). This difference is illustrated in traditional Chinese philosophies such as Confucianism (e.g. being altruistic due to social relations and social order; F Wang, 2004), Taoism (e.g. integrate yourself into nature and become one with nature, form harmonious relations with others; J Wang and Stringer, 2000), and Buddhism (e.g. helping others get salvation through self-mortification; Thomas and Kumari, 2010). The second difference is that Chinese culture emphasizes self-reliance and hard work (Yan et al., 2009; F Wang, 2004). When individuals encounter difficulties, they normally choose to solve these difficulties by themselves rather than seeking help from others such as social workers (Yan et al., 2009). These characteristics show that China's social work needs to be human-centered, reach out to people who need social work services, and better help them with Chinese epistemology, especially in the current context where Chinese individuals' well-being in the collectivistic society has become the major political agenda of the government (T Leung and Tam, 2015). The third one is that conducting social work research and practice needs flexibility and autonomy, whereas in China, social work relies much on and is heavily managed by the government (Tsang et al., 2008), which limits its flexibility to some extent.

Despite the differences, this Western discipline also shares similarities with Chinese culture. One example is humanism (Yan and Cheng, 2009; Yip, 2007), which is not only mentioned by ancient philosophies (e.g. Confucianism; Kimba and Carew, 1990; Li, 2009), but also promoted by the current government (i.e. collective humanism) to improve individuals' well-being within family, community, and society (T Leung et al., 2012; T Leung and Tam, 2015). Western social work also emphasizes similar values (Gamble, 2012). This similarity shows that this Western discipline can be integrated into the Chinese context and match the government's political and economic agendas (e.g. harmonious society) to facilitate China's social development (Yan and Tsang, 2005; Yan, 2013; Yan and Cheng, 2009; Yan and Tsui, 2007). Identifying these differences and similarities coincides

with the third and fourth stages of indigenization where social work knowledge and practice are constructed and revised through the influences of local knowledge and culture (Nimmagadda and Balgopal, 2000). A strategy recommended by Chinese social work leaders is *zhongti xiyong*, or Chinese corpus, Western application (Yan and Cheung, 2006; Yan and Tsang, 2005). They believe that it is possible to stick to the body (corpus) of traditional Chinese culture and existing social arrangement, and selectively assimilate professional social work knowledge and practice from the West (X Huang, 1996). A critique of this approach has been offered (Tsang and Yan, 2001) and an alternate strategy for building Indigenous social work knowledge and practice has been discussed (Yan and Tsang, 2008). This situation is further consistent with what Nimmagadda and Balgopal (2000) suggested, that reflexivity is also needed during these stages to constantly reflect and improve the indigenized model.

However, problems of indigenization are gradually exposed; for example, indigenized models from Western countries are not fundamentally congruent with developing countries' cultural contexts, because they are from foreign countries and developing countries only revise these models based on their needs (Ragab, 2016). Social work researchers and practitioners thus wonder how social work can better develop in their own culture.

The possibility of authentization

Following the path of indigenization, the concept of authentization was put forward (Walton and Abo El Nasr, 1988). It is a process whereby social work should be developed based on developing countries' own cultures and values (Ng and Sim, 2006). Social work researchers are encouraged to create their own social work knowledge other than relying on Western theories and values because they are more familiar with their own cultural and social contexts (Walton and Abo El Nasr, 1988).

Ragab (2016) proposes specific steps for developing countries to authentize their own social work model. The first step is reconceptualizing social work based on values rooted in local culture and history. The second step is to ascertain developing countries' political, economic, and social situations in order to have more contextual information. The third step is to systemically and deeply study local social problems to find how local social, economic, and political systems cause these problems. The fourth step is to find the most appropriate Indigenous practice generated in local contexts, which can substitute practice imported from the West; additionally, practice and knowledge generated from the fourth step need to be integrated into local historical, cultural, and social contexts, and compatible values and knowledge from other cultures can also be adapted to the local model. The steps above form the foundation of the authentized model, but constant evaluation and tests are also needed to improve it.

As these three ancient philosophies are still influential in Chinese society, they are thus important components in the process of authentization. Specifically, since the economic reform in the 1980s, these philosophies have been promoted by the government to cultivate Chinese ethos and build national identity, in order to balance the rapid Westernization (Kang, 2012; Li, 2009; Meissner, 2006). These philosophies have also been integrated into the contemporary socialism (e.g. the harmonious society) to promote civic education and maintain social stability, which further complements the dominant Marxism ideology (Li, 2009; Meissner, 2006). Guided by Ragab (2016), the first step traces epistemological roots in Chinese culture to reconstruct social work in the Chinese context. The second step examines the contemporary Chinese context to see the capabilities between the epistemology founded in the first step and the context. Specifically, this discipline should be rooted in social relations that constitute Chinese society, further analyze these social relations and individuals in these relations through reflexive, integrated, and human-centered perspectives. It is anticipated that social problems can be traced and identified based on these contextual analyses in China. For instance, filial piety (e.g. taking care of parents when they get old) is a Confucian value

and still influences Chinese people, but has been challenged by the modern senior care system (Feng et al., 2012). How Chinese people perceive the senior care system and how policies regarding this system should be designed can only be accurately understood through the Chinese epistemology embedded in Chinese history, values, and society. Findings from these social problems in the Chinese context will further add new elements to the epistemology and will constantly improve the authorized model (Figure 1). This model is also dynamic, as it aims to constantly discover epistemological elements in traditional philosophies and enrich the epistemological content of China's social work. Social workers also play flexible roles in identifying and evaluating different epistemology, and further adopting the optimum one to avoid potential epistemological conflicts in their research and practice, a process that accentuates their critical reflection on different social issues, contexts, knowledge, and self-regulation (Bogo, 2018).

However, this authorized process also has drawbacks. First, more detailed instructions in each step are needed to guide the authorization process of China's epistemology. For instance, how epistemology found in traditional philosophies should be applied to the contemporary context needs constant examination and reflection. Second, whether the Western origins of social work can be eliminated and what role Western knowledge plays in the process of authorization are still unclear. Third, even though the authorization process emphasizes cultural uniqueness, independence, and diversity, it is still unclear how this process can reconcile with the Western standard that is recognized internationally.

Discussion

This article analyzed Confucianism, Taoism, and Chinese Buddhism, and showed how the epistemological roots from these three philosophies can be further embedded in China's social work through the processes of indigenization and authorization. However, it is also noted that besides these three traditional philosophies, there are many other philosophies (e.g. Legalism) in Chinese culture. Even though they are not as profound as the three major philosophies, these philosophical thoughts may still provide a valuable basis for the epistemology in China's social work. Hence, future discussion may also need to explore how these philosophies can contribute to the epistemology of China's social work.

This article only focused on ancient philosophies in Chinese culture. However, contemporary ideologies and thoughts from each administration of the Chinese government may also have significant influences on the epistemology of China's social work. For example, the *Scientific Development Perspective* from the Hu Jintao administration emphasized *harmonious society* and *person-centeredness* (T Leung and Tam, 2015; Yuen-Tsang and Wang, 2008), two concepts that closely relate to the social work discipline and can be further analyzed to trace the epistemological roots of China's social work in this contemporary era. As China's political and economic systems are still in transition (Yuen-Tsang and Wang, 2008), how to continue reforms and what new ideologies will be put forward may significantly impact social development and have potential influences on the epistemology of China's social work. Hence, there is a need to continuously follow and examine these contemporary ideologies to capture their influences on China's social work. Furthermore, there is also a need to integrate traditional Chinese philosophies and contemporary ideologies, in order to have a connected epistemological discussion that can better guide the development of China's social work.

As mentioned at the beginning, this article only discussed the epistemology of China's social work from the perspective of Han Chinese. Therefore, future studies need to explore the epistemology of China's social work from the perspectives of other ethnic minorities. This direction cannot only enrich the epistemological discussion in China's social work but also provide theoretical foundations to solve social problems related to ethnic minorities. Even within the Han Chinese population, in other Chinese regions (e.g. Hong Kong), there may be some different epistemological

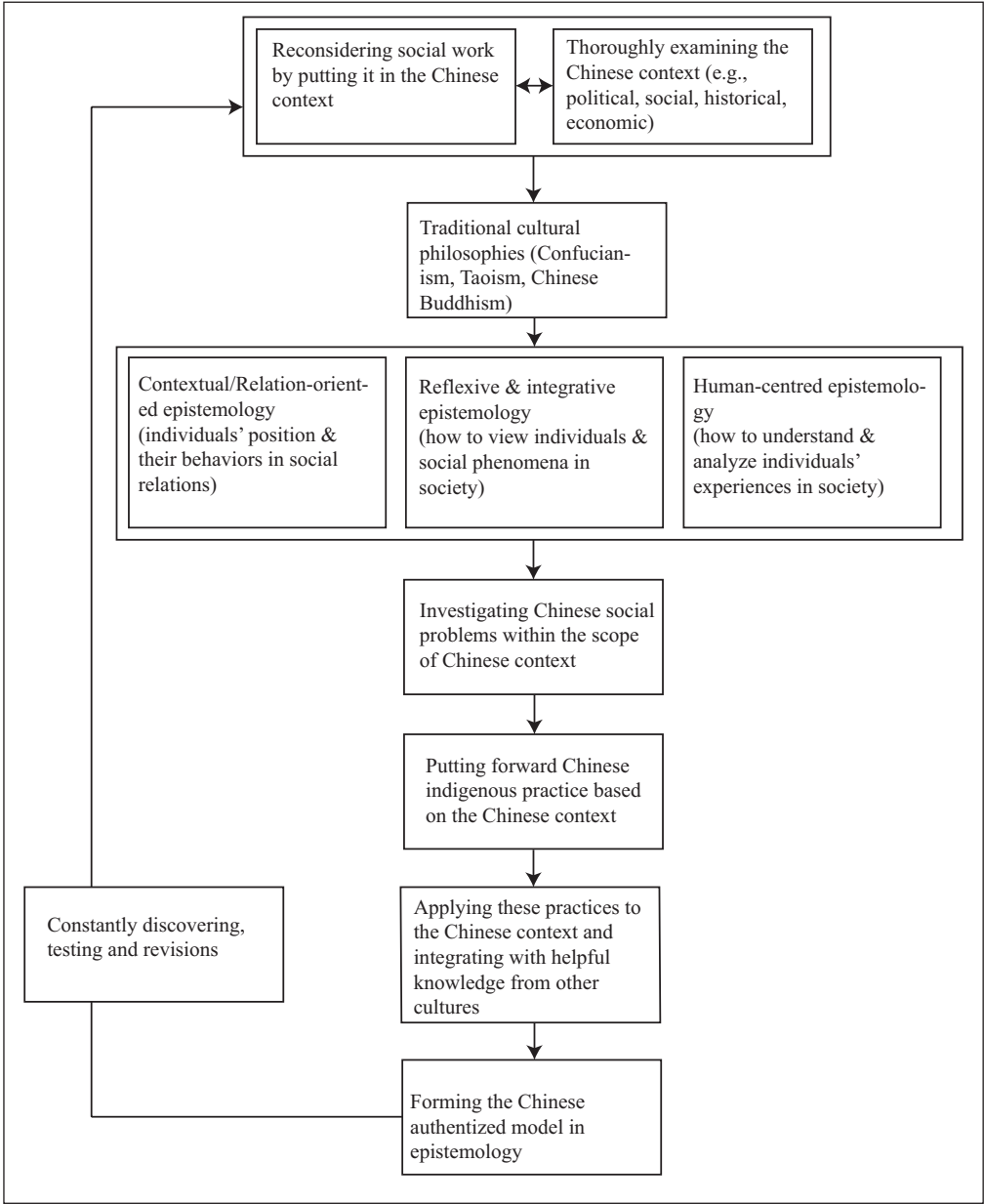


Figure 1. The authentication of social work epistemology in China.

discussions compared to those in mainland China, which may guide their social work research and practice differently (Law and Lee, 2016). Therefore, how unique contexts in different Chinese regions influence the epistemology of social work should also be explored to further enrich this discussion and better serve different Chinese populations.

Moreover, this article only provided a general review of the three major philosophies and the processes of indigenization and authentication. As these three philosophies may contain other subtle philosophical ideas related to the epistemology of China's social work, thorough examinations

of each philosophy are necessary. Building upon these examinations, the processes of indigenization and authentization also need to be constantly discussed so as to boost the development of the social work discipline in China.

Conclusion

Parallel with the rise of China in terms of its economy and global clout, there is a strong trend of increasing investment into research and development (e.g. China was the second largest investor in 2018 at US\$554.3 billion; Congressional Research Service, 2020). As expected, Chinese social work scholars and researchers have also become increasingly active in knowledge production and mobilization. A casual review of their work reveals a wide range of theoretical commitment, epistemological position assumed, and methodology employed. Whereas the use of traditional and culture-specific epistemology and knowledge production practice can often be found (e.g. Chan et al., 2014; P Leung et al., 2009), there is likely a complex set of dynamic interaction between them and Western theories and methodologies. Further systematic research is needed to elucidate the processes, and the findings could enrich our understanding of how Chinese social workers join the global community of scholars and researchers in shaping the future of social work knowledge and practice.

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