

What Is International Social Work?
Its contribution to social work in a global society.

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There are two purposes to this presentation: First, to clarify the meaning of international social work, and secondly, to inquire into its contribution to social work itself, particularly under the present trend of globalization.

The Meaning of International Social Work

1. Following are not necessarily international social work: 1) practice or research on or in other countries, 2) joint work with practitioners or professors of other countries, 3) international comparative research and analysis, 4) assistance to the 2/3 World and research on South-North relations, 5) cross cultural social work, 6) devotion to international social work organizations, and 7) Participation in an international conference. Of course, the internationalization of social work is not identical with international social work.
2. I define international social work as follows: International social work is social work which deals with problems caused between nations or across national boundaries or efforts beyond national boundaries to solve those problems. International social work thinks of and acts for the well-being of all people on this earth, or 6.5 billion people in some 200 countries and districts. International social work does not attach any special meaning or importance in value to any specific country or people.
3. International social work is irreconcilable with egocentrism, ethnocentrism, and xenophobia, and unable to do without "compound eyes" or eyes from the outside. It is always necessary to carry around two blank world maps in one's pocket, one with national boundaries and the other without national boundaries. The former is the map of nation states or of nations, and the latter is the map of "one world" or "earthpeople".
4. International social work is not the social work of the second map. We are between the two. We have to, however, envisage what the world in the second map looks like. Searching from among existing scholarly concepts, "cosmopolitanism" and "world citizens" would be appropriate terms to describe it. They may (or may not) be the ultimate goals of international social work. But their meaning is different today from the original. "Cosmopolitanism" does not deny the existence of nation states to insist on the multi-culturism and the acceptance of "the other" (l'autre), and "world citizens" does not postulate the

existence of a state or a government. Both still are long term goals.

5. Having a historical perspective is necessary. The definition of international social work itself has developed. In early days, "international" in the term international social work was an adjective or a modifier to "social work" while in later days, the two parts were combined into an inseparable concept of "international social work." I describe the historical development of the international social work definition in a "Three Phase Theory" by ways of breaking through national boundaries—social work: (1) on immigration and wars and international social work conferences, (2) with joint work and in cooperation with other countries, and (3) across national boundaries.

The Contribution of ISW to Social Work in a Global Society

6. What is the contribution of this international social work to social work in a global society? Our concern here is not how (international) social work could and should effectively intervene, ameliorate, and solve social problems and life difficulties caused in the global society, to promote or to prevent the forces of globalization, but how international social work would and could advance social work itself, the main entity, in globalization.
7. International social work connotes criticism of existing social work. First, your social work interest, understanding, and even definition, are certainly bound by realities, needs and histories about you. International social work lets you know that there is always someone who sees the very same thing from the other side. Being "right" and "wrong" are reversible. Social work would develop as far as it reaches national boundaries, or by country. There is nothing wrong with it, but now globalization doesn't allow it to stop there.
8. Secondly, your framework of social work may only think of yourself. A (true) social policy would not consider how it could influence people in other countries. A law to promote the well-being or human rights of people in country A may destroy the well-being or human rights of people in country B. Welfare states may be an enemy for international social work while they often have been regarded as a goal to achieve in many countries. As R. Pinker says, welfare states, or a form of nation states, are containers and also walls of welfare. All benefits, services, and rights are denied to people one centimeter outside the national boundaries. Or the concept of welfare states must be redrawn.
9. Thirdly, your social work may unconsciously not see national boundaries. International social work intentionally doesn't, either. The acquisition of the view not to see national boundaries gives an opportunity to see matters by

other indices such as class, gender, race/ethnicity/tribe, and religion from the very beginning. Totally different pictures may appear in front of you.

10. Fourthly, international social work would clarify the position of social work in this stream of globalization, in today's society and in a historical context, to determine the direction that social work should take for the immediate future. "Globalization means the process... for the value and system of the central country to diffuse into other areas through choice and coercion," and "the value and system" including not only economic ones but also noneconomic ones such as "human rights, democracy, the electoral system, civil society, and the minority policy." Social work itself is one of the latter and in the midst of globalization. 0000
11. "The central country" is the United States of America. American social work goes all over the world to become the world social work, a globally common standard. Only social work could not go against the stream of globalization. A symbolic example is the three basic documents, which were developed recently by IASSW and IFSW jointly: The International Definition of Social Work, Ethics in Social Work: Statement of Principles, and Global Standards for the Education and Training of the Social Work Profession.
12. Let's take up the international definition for discussion. Its content—the framework and constituting concepts—is very identical to one that the United States social work has developed with great efforts. It takes for granted that social work is a profession, places people against environments, and names human rights and social justice as fundamental principles. Postulated behind words is the supremacy of individuals, the development of people's full potential, democracy, the modern civil society, and maybe Christianity—the typical Western modern philosophy.
13. Even before globalization, social work had been essentially unipolar. It was born in Europe (the first stage) and later matured in the United States (the second stage). There have been no alternative models so far. It is not a matter of being good or bad. The only plausible approach would be (1) to "accept [today's model] as it is...., and (2) to enrich [it] with realities and experiences [and concepts and perceptions] in some 200 countries and areas. Just an example—how about replacing social justice and human rights with the concept of "kyosei" (symbiosis, conviviality or living-together)? Not dissemination but absorption....Social work will hopefully mature into a third stage.

International social work imposes a question, "Is the present field of social work all right?" Much of what has accumulated till today in practice and theory may have to be reconsidered.