Social Work Organizations’ Role in the Social Capital Building in China: A Case Study Among Rural Migrant Workers in Xiamen

Shanshan Hong1• Rosila Bee Mohd Hussain1• Danny Tze Ken Wong2

Accepted: 22 January 2021 © The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2021

Abstract
Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are considered important actors in promoting social capital, social welfare, and social work organizations (SWOs) and are fast-developing in China. This research adopted a case study to look into SWOs’ (Social Work Organization’s) capacity to build social capital among rural migrant workers (RMWs) in Xiamen, China. It is found that SWOs’ capacity in linking social capital is still weak. Their capability in social networking and trust and norms building is over-shaped by the environmental factors. SWOs’ role in building social capital in China is social construction production. SWOs should reexamine their social development roles but not to be co-opted into the authoritative control system and play a major factor in social capital establishment standing for clients’ authentic development. It is suggested that SWOs should focus more on linking social capital (both structural and cognitive social capital) between vulnerable groups and other organizations, especially government departments and policymakers, and apply social capital into social work theory development with its context in China.

Keywords Social work organization · Social capital · Rural migrant worker · China · Bonding · Bridging · Linking

Introduction
The revival of China’s social work profession was part of a political agenda, seen as a new governing strategy (the soft approach) (Leung et al., 2012). Along with professional development, social work organizations (SWOs) are considered a core force among social organizations supported by society and government, serving a more and more essential role in solving social problems and enhancing social harmony in China (Ma, 2012). SWOs are social organizations providing social work services or practices such as education, training, and evaluation, functioning as collaborative governance, professional service provision, and harmony building in China (Tan & Cao, 2013).

The rapid development of SWOs in China is attributed to three factors: the increasing demands for social service, the fast promotion of social work professionalization in universities, and the strong support from the government (Xu & Peng, 2015). It is presented that the development of SWOs has a strong relationship with the upsurge of “purchase of service contracting” (zhengfu goumai fuwu) impelled by government, social work is functioning as a replacement in filling the gap of social welfare area where government fails to cover, and as a social welfare provider it can also ensure the social stability (Zhu & Chen, 2014).

Along with SWOs’ expansion, Chinese scholars have arisen attention on this topic. Currently, three subjects are majorly studied: focusing on the development of organizations, especially discussing how to get over the difficulties such as deficiency of resources; proposing possible ways to realize the professionalization of social work with SWOs’ efforts; and concentrating on the governance of SWOs. However, these researches seldom view SWOs as positive social organizations, which have participated actively in social management and social administration, contributing to enhancing social capital and civil society formation.

Social capital has been applied in NGOs’ intervention to promote social welfare on researches in other countries. It is meaningful to examine SWOs’ role in building social capital, which plays a significant part in social service provision and social welfare promotion in China. What is more, as