



CHECK IT OUT! APASWE

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From Vietnam

Buddhism Approach to Social Work in Vietnam

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Hoi LOAN, NGUYEN,

BSW. Thu TRANG, NGUYEN,

University of Social Sciences and Humanities, VNU, Vietnam

Prologue

In most developed countries, Social Work rooted from charity activities with religious orientation. Social Work in USA started from the end of the 19th century from Catholicism charity activities. In Asia countries, religious associations with their doctrines, especially Buddhism has implemented charity activities in various aspects of social life.

In Vietnam history, Vietnamese people are affected by Buddhism; in some ages, Buddhism used to become the national religion. In many centuries ago, when social welfare system did not exist in this country, the pagodas, temples played a role as a system of social services for people, in order to solve physical and spiritual difficulties.

32/2010/QD-TTg

According to decision number 32/2010/QD-TTg of Government Minister issued on March, 25th, 2010 on agreement on Social Work profession development in the period of 2010 – 2020, there is a article of establishing centers for Social Work to providing professional Social Work services to individuals, groups, families and communities who have problems. This kind of center will be organized at level of district, commune, precinct, city, schools. Particularly, these centers have functions as following:

-Coordinating services through information collection, assessment and service reference for clients.

-Providing direct services through intake procedure, adoption, counseling for clients.

-Training-Education-Communication through skills training for social workers, clients, communities.

-Supporting-Developing communities through organizing community activities, connecting with human resource in community.

-Consulting policy for the government.

Practically, Vietnamese people have not had a habit of either using social services or requiring social workers for supports for the following reasons:

-Clients are afraid of affecting their honor, prestige if anyone knows their problems, their stories. Vietnamese people think that save face is the most important rule to live in a community with the full respect from others.

-Clients do not understand the nature, causes, consequences and the resolutions to the problems they are facing in a critical manner.

-Clients have not understood, had enough information and trusted in Social Work professionals.

-Clients have still believed in their own capacity of solving problems by themselves instead of asking the help from others that based on their cultural and religious belief.

Nowadays, in Vietnam, there are about 3 million children with disabilities, just only 1.3% of them accesses educational services since their afraid of stigma; most of people infected by HIV/AIDS do not use care and support services for their scare of being

detected by community; just only 58% of women in the 25% of the poorest people uses maternity services; 30% of Vietnamese population need at least a kind of mental health services but they are limited in this country (MOLISA, 2011).

Buddhism and Social Work

Limited to access officially social services, Vietnamese often seek the spiritual, affection, counseling support from monks, Buddhist temples or pagodas... to solve their problems. They believe that their misfortunes are their destiny, they hence find the way to solve them by their spiritual activities and charity works...



Image 1

Buddhist followers in HoeNhai pagoda (Hanoi, Vietnam) are cooking for poor patients having blood cancers (held every Sunday)

Buddhism however is not the national religion in Vietnam, as the report of Vietnam Association of Buddhism (2008), 80% of Vietnamese

people have at least one basic belief of Buddhism, such as the belief on Nirvana, the hell, cause-effect rule, reborn, fate, predestinated relationships, karma, charity and the power of mercy and alms,... These beliefs affect people's moral and awareness, making a spiritual power to overcome the substance temptation, life obstacles to lead to a better life with altruism, inclined to the good, anti cruel, modest, and philanthropy. They are the motivation of creating the volunteer, freedom of moral behaviors, helping people reduce their selfish, greed – the root of bad habits, conflicts, violence in our society. All of them are the base of social capital to improve the feasibility and effectiveness of Social Work activities in Vietnam.

Currently, there are more than 10 thousand pagodas, over 30 Buddhism schools at many levels,... In the past thousand years, these Buddhism agencies have taken part in many community and social works such as adopting and fostering orphans, homeless elderly, abandoned people as a hospital, a shelter, a school and a temporary reside for people in the war, calamities or special situations; a trusted address for rescuing families in crisis and positively taking part in solving social problems in the country.



Image 2

Voluntary doctor is checking for a poor elderly in Linh Son pagoda where provide health care service for poor people every Sunday with volunteers from various hospitals (Hanoi, Vietnam)



Image 3

Orphan children are raised in Bo De pagoda with nearly 200 other homeless children and elderly,... (Hanoi, Vietnam)

As a matter of fact, in Vietnam, it seems that Buddhist temples undertake all 5 functions as a potential Social Work service centre in Vietnam (service coordination and providing, training – education – communication, community support and development, policy

consulting and mobilization). Because of many similarities and the strong bond between Buddhism and Social Work, clients who are also the Buddhist followers will feel more familiar with Social Work service centers when seeking for support in resolving their problems.

Social Work is a humane and international field, but to ensure its effectiveness, each country need to create its own pathway (ethnicity). Building a unique way of each community, country in Social Work firstly is based on the specifically existed culture. Furthermore, the effectiveness of Social Work activities not only depends on social worker but also on the clients. The foundation of Social Work is the compassion of each person, and Social Work depends on social values, ethics, lifestyle, and psychological characteristics of each community rooted from its own culture.

Buddhist in Vietnam

Buddhists in Vietnam have concentrated on resolving social problems such as homelessness, poverty, hunger, natural disasters, illnesses, war, dioxin, HIV/AIDS... With its doctrines and social behaviors, Buddhism in Vietnam intends to join social associations to resolve social problems in Vietnam. There is a great similarity in Buddhist doctrines with the Social Work objectives, allowing a new approach to be built: Buddhism approach to Social Work in Vietnam

with its ethnicity to enhance the effectiveness and adaption to Vietnamese culture.

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