

Day 1

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ARIISW

SESSION on

Buddhist Social

Work



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**Decolonization,  
Indigenization,  
Spirituality,  
and Buddhist Social Work**  
**Social Work Academics  
Resisting the Globalization of  
Western-rooted Social Work**



**Introduction of Buddhist Social Work**

**(abstract)**

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For the past several years, a group of university professors, monks and NGO leaders have been continuing to explore Buddhist social work. A presentation will be given of a short history from its birth to the present time. A great deal of international research and meetings (forums, workshops, and expert meetings, etc.) were carried out, their reports, papers and books published, ideas exchanged and opinions sent by email. Some of the things we achieved during this process are (1) showing the first shoots from the seeds that were sown, (2) showing us first-hand, pictures of the present situation in of Buddhist “social work” in all 12 Buddhist majority countries in Asia as a result of the publishing of a series of reports country by country, (3) forming the Asian Buddhist Social Work Research Network among colleagues in those countries, (4) constructing the ABC Model, (5) formulating a working definition of “Buddhist Social Work”, and (6) pointing out the next steps to be taken after the definition for the future development of Buddhist social work.

The ABC Model pertains to the meaning or the definition of the term of “Buddhist Social Work”. The term has had three different forms of usage: in Model A, Buddhist social work means Western-rooted professional social work simply performed by Buddhists. In Model B Buddhist social work is Western-rooted professional social work modified and indigenized with Buddhist elements

(values, knowledges and skills) thrown in. In Model C, Buddhist social work is different. It is “intrinsic” or “indigenous” Buddhist social work. It does not begin with Western-rooted professional social work as a foundation, but begins with Buddhism itself.

Several points are featured in the working definition. For example, Buddhist social work (a) ultimately aims at the wellbeing of all sentient beings, (b) pays attention to the inner aspect of beings, (c) does not accept Western individualism and the self-actualization needs theory as it stands, (d) puts care and compassion, loving kindness and mutual help, and interdependency and self-reliance, and the building and bonding of human relations, as fundamental principles, and finally, (e) lays Buddhist views, philosophies, and teachings as its foundation.

After the formulation of a working definition, Buddhist social work is now moving forward into three directions: (1) the testing or refining of the working definition and basic understanding of Buddhist social work from the standpoint of Buddhist theories and teachings, empirical research, historical review, and practice; (2) to contextualize it in each country or society for curriculum design, education, policy making, programs and practice; and (3) the hope that each country and society will be able to go forward on its own journey of exploration of Buddhist social work.

Even so, it may would take hundreds of years for Buddhist social work to grow from the tiny seed to a large, mature tree.

### *The Contribution to the Development of Social Work itself*

There is an appendix to this Buddhist social work study. It is the contribution to the development of social work as a whole, which had its roots in Europe, matured in North America and is now entering a third stage in which it becomes global. The establishment of Buddhist social work outside Western-rooted professional social work means the rejection of the “Social Work = Western-rooted professional social work” equation. A worldwide Social Work can never be achieved by the dissemination and promulgation or the globalization of Western-rooted professional social work alone, and not by indigenization, either. It can only could be achieved only by the understanding of the “indigenous” social works in all parts of the world and the embracement of them into a concept of social work. The discussion on Models B and C as well as on Buddhist social work as a whole would make a contribution to the development of social work as a whole