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Towards A Culturally Sensitive Model of Social Work Supervision in Hong Kong

by

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A Thesis Submitted in Conformity with the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of Toronto

Faculty of Social Work

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the format, purpose, relationship, authority, and ideal of social work supervision in the cultural context of Hong Kong. Grounded theory approach was used to explore the experiences and views of supervisors and supervisees from seven focus groups and forty in-depth interviews to modify a model derived from North American literature into a culturally sensitive model within the context of Hong Kong.

The format of supervision in Hong Kong is relatively loose. Written agendas and supervisory contracts are seldom used. Both supervisors and supervisees view successful client outcomes as the highest priority, but supervisors view supervision as a rational and systematic tool for safeguarding the standard and quality of service, while supervisees hope that supervision will provide emotional support and foster teamwork.

The supervisory relationship is both personal and professional. Tension is lessened by the traditional Chinese cultural values of reciprocity: qing, yuan, and face. The use of supervisory authority reflects the political strategy of the British-Hong Kong
government--"consensus by consultation and consent"--which was used to reduce conflict and gain acceptance.

The ideal supervision is scheduled in advance and regularly conducted in a comfortable and pleasant physical environment. The supervisor's advice and instructions would be clear, concrete, specific, and workable, in which supervisory relationship would resemble student fieldwork supervision. For supervisors, supervisory practice is ideal when staff members are self-disciplined and self-motivated; then the use of administrative authority can be reduced to a minimum.

It is worthwhile for researchers to conduct studies in specific societies, especially the multi-ethnic societies such as Canada and the United States. Developing models of social work supervision in different cultures will contribute to theory building; research on cross-cultural supervision will refine existing supervisory practices; and studies of the supervisory dyad will benefit the supervisory practice at the micro-practice level. Outcome research on cross-cultural practice may also be used to evaluate the effectiveness of various supervisory practices.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

This study will explore the format, purpose, relationship, authority, and context of social work supervision in Hong Kong from the perspectives of both the supervisor and the supervisee, in order to generate a culturally sensitive model of social work supervision grounded in the data collected from social work practitioners. Social work has been practised in Hong Kong for five decades (Hong Kong Council of Social Service, 1998; Hong Kong Social Workers Association, 1996). In the last fifty years, most social work supervisors received their professional training either from schools of social work in the United Kingdom, United States, Canada, and Australia or from social work training institutions in Hong Kong, which combine aspects of North American and British models of social work education (Ng, 1996). Social workers in Hong Kong, therefore, mainly practise Western social work supervision in the cultural context of Hong Kong. This causes difficulties in supervisory practice. For example, in the graduate course on social work supervision in Hong Kong that I taught, some of the mature students who are, themselves, social work supervisors claim that they encounter many difficulties working with their Chinese supervisees. The supervisors reported that they were often criticized by their staff members for being “task-oriented,” “impersonal,” or for adopting “laissez-faire” attitudes.
Unfortunately, there is a scarcity of research literature that focuses on the practice of social work supervision in a specific cultural setting (Tsui, 1996), and updated empirical information about supervision for social workers in Hong Kong is also lacking (Tsui, 1997b). Only one journal article (Ko, 1987) and several MA theses (Fu, 1999; Ho, 1993; Lam, 1997; Lau, 1982; Leung, 1997; Tam, 1998; Yuen, 1989) dealing with the subject could be found after a comprehensive literature search (Tsui, 1996, 1997b), and all of them are descriptive studies of supervision in specific human service settings.

Supervision has achieved a unique and important position in social work practice (Kadushin, 1992a). It is recognized as a major factor in determining the quality of service to clients and the level of professional development and job satisfaction among social workers (Harkness, 1995; Harkness & Hensley, 1991; Harkness & Poertner, 1989; Kadushin, 1992a; Tsui, 1998). However, after more than 120 years of development (Tsui, 1996, 1997a), the academic debates regarding social work supervision still focus on basic supervisory issues, such as the compatibility of administrative and educational functions (Erera & Lazar, 1994a; Harkness & Poertner, 1989; Kadushin, 1992a; Payne, 1994; Shulman, 1993) or the relative merits of interminable lifelong supervision and autonomous practice (Epstein, 1973; Rock, 1990; Veeder, 1990). Obviously, there is still a long way to go in order to develop the theory building necessary in the field of social work supervision.
1.2 Models of Supervision

Before attempting to create a model of social work supervision, we should examine the existing theories. Five types of supervisory models can be identified in the social work literature (Tsui, 1996). The first type views supervision as a form of social work practice and emphasizes the supervisor's use of social work skills in supervision (Brashears, 1995). The second set of models are the structural-functional models that focus on the goals, structure, and functions of supervision. Gitterman's integrative model (1972), Munson's model of authority (1976, 1979a, 1979b, 1981, 1993), and Granvold's supervision by objectives (1978) belong in this category. The third type of models are those based on the various formats of supervision in human service organizations that reflect different levels of professional autonomy. There are the traditional casework model which is widely used in human service organizations (Kadushin, 1974, 1992a, 1992b, 1992c; Ko, 1987), the group supervision model (Getzel, Goldberg, & Salmon, 1971; Kaplan, 1991; Kaslow, 1972; Shulman, 1993), the peer supervision model (Skidmore, 1995), the team service delivery model (Payne & Scott, 1982), the "tandem" supervision approach (Watson, 1973), and the autonomous practice model (Barretta-Herman, 1993; Epstein, 1973; Rock, 1990; Veeder, 1990; Watson, 1973), the last representing the highest level of professional autonomy. The fourth category, the interactional process models, focus on the interaction between supervisor and supervisee (Latting, 1986). Supervision here is viewed as a process composed of different stages of professional development so that there are clear guidelines for the progress of both the supervisor and the supervisee (Gitterman, 1972; Gitterman & Miller, 1977; Hart, 1982; Worthington, 1984). Finally,
feminists have criticized the traditional supervision model and provided an alternative partnership model, which emphasizes the sharing of power and an equal collegial relationship in supervisory practice (Chernesky, 1986; Hipp & Munson, 1995).

Common to all these models is the view that the human service organization is the major context for social work supervision. The purpose of supervision is to enhance rational problem-solving with educational and emotional support (Kadushin, 1992a), and the supervisory relationship is considered a professional working relationship. In addition, the roles and expectations of the supervisor and the supervisee are usually stated in a written supervisory contract (Brown & Bourne, 1996; Fox, 1983; Osborn & Davis, 1996). However, this is a limited conceptual picture of social work supervision in North America. In fact, the organizational context may be only one of the factors influencing the supervisory relationship because the supervision also occurs in a larger context--societal culture--which most North American supervision models neglect (Tsui, 1996). This neglect is surprising since the context in North America is surely multi-ethnic and multicultural (Kim, 1995; Lee, 1996; Peterson, 1991; Tsang & George, 1998).

Traditionally, social work supervision has been recognized as a practice embedded in an organizational setting (Austin, 1981; Holloway & Brager, 1989; Kadushin, 1992a; Miller, 1987; Munson, 1993). This narrow conceptualization encourages scholars to focus their studies on the supervisor-supervisee relationship in a human service organization (Erera & Lazar, 1994a, 1994b; Kadushin, 1992b, 1992c; Munson, 1981). Hence, many of the investigations undertaken in the past five decades focused on factors such as the use of authority, the supervisory contract, supervisory
roles and styles, and supervisory functions and tasks, which are all features of the supervisor-supervisee relationship within an organizational context (Tsui, 1996). This view, however, is valid only when one perceives supervision as a process involving two parties—the supervisor and the supervisee—who are both employees of a human service organization.

When, however, we view the supervisor and the supervisee as members of a specific society in which culture has a significant influence on behaviour, we perceive that supervision is a multi-faceted interactional process and that we may need to explore the cultural context that affects all its aspects. A human service organization is a part of society, supported by the resources and sanctions of society, and affected by the immediate environment through laws, public policy, funding regulations, as well as the moral, relational, and religious values of the society. The tremendous influence of cultural context on the supervisory process cannot be neglected.

The process of supervision is far more complex than its portrayal in the existing North American social work literature. While supervision obviously involves the supervisor and the supervisee, the client is central to the whole process, which occurs within an organizational context. This context sets the parameters of the process: which clients will be seen, what goals are to be achieved, and how these goals are to be realized. Social workers' interventions for effective client outcomes and their supervision occur in both an organizational context and the cultural context of the society.
1.3 Culture

Culture is the broadest ethnographic concept, in the sense that it has many definitions. The classic materialist interpretation of culture focuses on behaviour (Harris, 1968). "Behaviour" refers to the sum of a social group's observable patterns of behaviour, customs, and ways of life. The most popular ideational definition of culture is the cognitive definition, according to which culture comprises the ideas, beliefs, and knowledge that characterize a particular group of people, but is not itself behaviour (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952). As this study aims to explore the impact of culture on both the behaviour and thinking of the supervisor and the supervisee in the supervisory process, culture is perceived as both a product of social action and a process that guides the future action of the people within the group (Fetterman, 1998). It includes both behavioural inclinations and cognitive tendencies, which means that culture can reflect the character of members of a specific group both explicitly and implicitly.

Culture provides a set of guidelines and standards for the members of a social group to use to view the world, to behave, to evaluate the behaviour of others of the same group, and to relate to people from different cultural groups (Goodenough, 1961, 1996). The impact of culture can be found in social institutions such as art, law, and morality. Culture is clustered around the value and belief system of society. In this sense, values are the link between culture and behaviour. Culture affects human action through values that orient people's behaviour towards the specific ends preferred by a particular cultural group. Hence, culture can be viewed as systems of shared ideas,
concepts, rules, and meanings that exist and are expressed in human life (Keesing, 1981). It functions as a variety of codes that help construct meanings of reality, experience, and behaviours. Once established, culture has an organic life of its own. Each cultural system possesses its own technological, sociological, and ideological components. These produce the unique entity, identifiable to both insiders and outsiders, that distinguishes one culture from another. It also provides the basis for identification and a sense of belonging for its members.

Distinct cultural traits can be identified in Chinese societies (Bond, 1986, 1991, 1996; Chan, 1994; Chan & Tam, 1997; The Chinese Culture Connection, 1987; Fei, 1948; Hsu, 1953; Hwang, 1988; King, 1997; King & Bond, 1985; Li & Yang, 1973; Woo, 1995; Yang, 1987, 1988, 1990, 1994). These traits may have a significant impact on all aspects of social work supervision, including the format of supervision, the purpose of supervision, the supervisory relationship, and the use of supervisory authority. For example, it has been suggested that the supervisory relationship in Chinese culture is different from its counterpart in North America in many respects (Bond, 1986, 1991, 1996; The Chinese Cultural Connection, 1987). The relationship exhibits several traits of Chinese culture. These cultural traits involve the notion of "reciprocity" in two-way interpersonal communications and relationships of a specific society (Hwang, 1987; Yang, 1992). There is give-and-take, as well as exchange of ideas, resources, and concern. For example, qing is an intensive lifelong primary relationship (Hwang, 1988; King, 1990a, 1993, 1994; Ng, 1975; Yang, 1992). En and pao involve the exchange of concern, information, resources, and services. En is to give and pao is to return in the future (Qiao, 1990; Wen, 1990; Yang, 1987). Yuan is a predetermined primary relationship in life (Lee, 1982; Yang, 1990). Face refers to the status of a
person in a social network (Chan, 1990; Chu, 1990; Hu, 1944; Hwang, 1988, 1990; King, 1990b; Wu, 1990; Yang, 1987), The Chinese emphasis on reciprocity differs from the North American view of the supervisory relationship which emphasizes professional boundaries. All these differences may explain the fact that Chinese supervisees in Hong Kong view their supervisors, who were trained according to North American and British educational programs in social work, as being rather impersonal.

The North American and Chinese concepts of authority also differ. It has been suggested that the Hong Kong government is characterized by the process of achieving consensus by consultation and consent (Davis, 1977, Endacott, 1964; King, 1975; Miners, 1997), while traditional Chinese culture emphasizes seniority, obedience and benevolence (Fei, 1948; Leung & Nann, 1995; Wu, 1986; Zhong, 1989). In North America, the emphasis is on democratic participatory management, demonstration of professional competence, and the use of a supervisory contract between the supervisor and the supervisee (Fox, 1983; Kadushin, 1974, 1992b; Kaiser, 1997; Munson, 1993; Shulman, 1993). In other words, in Hong Kong, the supervisory relationship emphasizes stability and harmony, rather than the North American goals of change and participation. These differences will be explored in this study.

A search of the empirical research on social work supervision produced in the last five decades (from 1950 to 2000) located only 34 empirical research articles. No research studies could be found in the existing Western literature on the influence of culture on supervisory practice. This gap in research studies, both in North America and Hong Kong, is a cause for concern for
Researchers and practitioners in the field, because it leads to the assumption that knowledge about supervision from one culture can be generalized and applied to other cultures. Using models of supervision developed in North America in another cultural context may be invalid. For the clients, supervision affects the quality of the direct services to the client and the job satisfaction of social workers (Harkness, 1989; 1995; Harkness & Hensley, 1991; Kadushin, 1992a). Social workers in human service organizations, as members of a specific society within a cultural context, practise social work supervision using inappropriate models that are incompatible with the cultural context and, as a result, are harmful to clients, frontline social workers, and supervisors themselves.

1.4 The Social Work Profession in Hong Kong

Hong Kong was originally a small fishing village. The Chinese tradition was the dominant culture. At that time, welfare was confined to the charity offered by the kinship network. In 1842, Hong Kong became a British colony as a result of the Opium War (Sin, 1997; Wang, 1997). British rule, combined with Chinese customs, influenced Hong Kong society (Lau, 2000; Miners, 1997). During this period, Western missionaries became important providers of social welfare services (Sin, 1997). In 1949, when the communists took over mainland China, capital and skilled labour migrated to Hong Kong, which became the centre for industrialization (Yiu, 1997). Various social problems arose during the industrialization process, and the Hong Kong government and non-government organizations that practised professional social work were forced to assume responsibility for serving the community (Sin, 1997). The social welfare service began its
professional social work practice in the voluntary sector in the late 1940s (Hong Kong Council of Social Service, 1998; Hong Kong Social Workers Association, 1996; Social Welfare Department, Hong Kong Government, 1998). The training of social workers became an important task. Hong Kong underwent a developmental process similar to that of the United States. In Hong Kong, social work practitioners tended to follow the paths of their counterparts in North America and Britain in the development of social work training programs and social welfare service programs. For example, the University of Hong Kong adopted the British system, while the Chinese University of Hong Kong adopted the North American system (Ng, 1996). The Western style of social work education, represented mainly by the British and North American systems, dominates the field of social work education. Based on the British system of civil service, occupational ranking and networks were developed. The classification and recruitment of these networks are based on training and qualifications the graduates of BSW programs become officers, while diploma graduates can only be assistants.

1.5 Research Focus and Methodology

The purpose of this study is to take the first step in assessing the influence of culture on the social work supervisory process. It aims to generate a culturally sensitive model of social work supervision within the cultural context of Hong Kong. The research will add to the general body of professional knowledge about social work supervision; it will provide a preliminary description of the distinct features of social work supervision in Hong Kong, and it may also help to improve the
quality of services to clients, not only in Hong Kong but also in other Chinese societies and in multi-ethnic societies in North America.

The grounded theory approach, one of the five traditions of qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1994, 1998), will be used to explore the meaning of the supervisory experience for supervisors and supervisees in the cultural context of Hong Kong. This approach uses constant comparison to construct a culturally sensitive model of social work supervision from the data generated in Hong Kong. The overall strategy is to develop an initial model from North American social work literature and to modify it according to the views of those engaged in social work supervision in Hong Kong.

1.6 Organization of the Dissertation

There are seven chapters in this research report. Chapter One highlights the objectives, rationale, and background of the study. Chapter Two is a comprehensive review of the existing literature on the historical development, theories, and models, as well as empirical research, of supervision in social work. A comprehensive model of social work supervision is constructed in Chapter Three to serve as a guiding theoretical framework. Chapter Four defines the research questions and describes the research approach and design. Chapter Five contains the findings of the study, while Chapter Six presents a discussion of the model of social work supervision grounded in the cultural context of Hong Kong. Chapter Seven presents a summary of
the grounded model of social work supervision and its implications for research and practice. The report will conclude with reflections on the practice of social work supervision in North America and Hong Kong.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will explore the nature of social work supervision in the existing literature from three perspectives. First, there will be a historical review of the development of social work supervision. Second, theories and models of social work supervision will be examined. Finally, I will conduct a comprehensive literature review of the empirical research on social work supervision carried out in the last five decades. After a review of the Western literature, an initial model of social work supervision will be formulated as a basis for grounded theory research on social work supervision in the cultural context of Hong Kong in the next chapter.

2.2 The Roots of Social Work Supervision: A Historical Review

Although a review of the historical development of social work supervision is an effective way to explore its nature, scant scholarly attention has been paid to the historical development of social work supervision (Rabinowitz, 1987), and little effort has been made to search through the history of social work practice to discover when and how supervision arose. Only by tracing the roots of social work supervision can we understand its philosophy, identify its important features, clarify its functions, and explain its functions in organizational and cultural contexts. As the history of social work is lengthy (beginning in 1878), for the purposes of this review, the historical development has been divided into five stages, each with its own dominant theme, in
order to provide a clear outline of the history of social work supervision.

2.2.1 Stage 1: Administrative Roots of Social Work Supervision (1878 - 1910)

In North America, the roots of social work supervision can be found in the Charity Organization Societies (COS) movement, which began in 1878 in Buffalo. Today, social work supervision has three widely recognised major functions: administrative, educational, and supportive (Austin, 1957; Erera & Lazar, 1994a; Kadushin, 1976, 1985, 1992a; Munson, 1979d, 1993; Payne, 1994; Poertner & Rapp, 1983; Shulman, 1993, 1995); however, there has been considerable debate as to which function was dominant during the early COS years. Some scholars suggest that supervision in social work was established to fulfill an educational function (Encyclopaedia of Social Work, 1965; Kadushin, 1976, 1985, 1992a), while others argue that social work supervision began as a form of administrative accountability (Austin 1957; Kutzik, 1977; Waldfogel, 1983).

Those who believe education was the first function argue that educational supervision in the early COS years must have been necessary since most of the agency visitors were untrained (Kadushin, 1992a). However, Kutzik (1977) points out that, although untrained, the volunteer visitors came from the upper classes of society. In fact, they were board members of the agency, and they would not have been supervised by paid agents drawn from the middle and working classes who served as clerks or case assistants. As Kutzik (1977) observes, consultation rather than supervision was the rule among the COS settlement staff. The egalitarian nature of COS movement made it difficult to establish the hierarchical relationship of administrative supervision. Hence, it can be concluded that there was an absence of supervision in the early
COS years (Kutzik, 1977). At the turn of the twentieth century, visitors began to be recruited from the middle and working classes. Some positions became paid jobs. Supervision then became a way for the top management of human service agencies to ensure administrative accountability. Given the historical context, it is likely that supervision was, at its inception, administrative rather than educational or supportive.

Although the administrative function probably emerged first, educational and emotional support soon followed during the early years of the twentieth century. As some visitors did not know how to offer help to the needy, there was a high turnover of volunteers. Training and job orientation were carried out by the experienced and permanent agency staff (Kadushin, 1981; 1992a); however, their primary duties were still administrative, such as providing leadership and assigning work to the volunteers. At the same time, the supervisors gave emotional support to those visitors who felt frustrated in their work with clients; this is the earliest evidence of supportive supervision in the history of social work. Nevertheless, the dominant mode of supervision in the early years of social work was administrative.

2.2.2 Stage 2: A Changing Context of Supervisory Training and the Emergence of a Literature Base (1911-1945)

In 1898, a six-week summer training program was offered to 27 students by the New York Charity Organization Society. This was the first formal social work education program. After several summer training programs, the New York School of Philanthropy was established in 1904; it offered a one-year program with student fieldwork instruction. It evolved into the first school of social work, which is now Columbia University School of Social Work.
In 1911, the first course in fieldwork supervision was offered under the auspices of the Charity Organization Department of the Russell Sage Foundation, headed by Mary Richmond (Kadushin, 1976, 1985, 1992a). In the 1920s, as the training of social workers shifted from the agency to the university, fieldwork supervision became an educational process that imparted the required values, professional knowledge, and practice skills for social workers. Students learned social work practice from individual supervision sessions in their fieldwork placements (Munson, 1993). This format was derived from the tutorial system used in British universities such as Cambridge University. As a result of these educational roots, tutorials and individual conferences were adopted as the usual format for supervising social workers in human service agencies. According to Munson (1993), the form and structure of social work supervision have remained constant from the nineteenth century to the present, but its content has evolved and shifted over the years. Social work supervision reflects the values of our society and the strategies of professional practice. It is natural that social work supervisors practise what they learn in university and then adopt the role of the tutor when they become supervisors. Thus the individual conference has become the dominant format for social work supervision. Student supervision has influenced the format and content of staff supervision in the social work field, although the processes are different in terms of focus, structure, and purpose.

Prior to 1920, the social work literature provided no reference materials on social work supervision (Kadushin, 1992a). However, when fieldwork supervision became an integral part of social work education, it was no longer enough to simply teach "how"; a practice teacher had
to be able to show the students "why." Student supervision is a mechanism for social work students to learn-by-doing. An experienced social worker oversees the work of the student. Student supervision was seen as the key part of the learning process. Staff supervision and student supervision took separate paths, since the function of field instruction is primarily educational: it bridges the gap between the education provided by schools of social work and the reality encountered in service agencies (Bogo, 1993; Bogo & Vayda, 1998; Rogers, 1996a, 1996b; Vayda & Bogo, 1991).

Teaching, therefore, needed some theoretical underpinnings. In 1936, Virginia Robinson published *Supervision in Social Case Work*, the first book on social work supervision, which defined supervision as "an educational process" (Robinson, 1936). Following this trend, there were 35 articles on supervision for caseworkers published between 1920 and 1945 in *Family* (it was renamed *Social Casework* and is today *Families in Society*). During this period, the professional development of social workers became the dominant purpose of social work supervision (Burns, 1958; Harkness & Poertner, 1989). For a long period of time, student supervision and staff supervision were considered similar. It was not until the 1980s that scholars and researchers began to recognize the conceptual, methodological, and practical differences between staff supervision and student supervision. Scholars (Bogo & Vayda, 1998; Kadushin, 1981, 1992a) conceptualized the differences in terms of purpose and mission, activities, time perspective, primary focus, rewarded behaviours, approach, and methods of governance.
2.2.3 Stage 3: The Impact of Practice Theory and Methods (1930s - 1950s)

During the 1920s and 1930s, innovation in social work was not limited to the field of education. There were major changes in social work practice that had a profound impact on social work supervision. In the 1920s, psychoanalytic theory emerged as an influential theory in the helping professions (Munson, 1993). During the 1930s, there was an integration of psychoanalysis and social work. Social workers borrowed selectively (and were especially drawn the concept of the unconscious) to better understand the motivation, thoughts, feelings, and behaviours of both the social worker and the client. Social workers began to understand that self-awareness and understanding of their own personal attitudes and feelings are very important to professional practice. In this period, due to the pervasive influence of psychoanalytic theory, the supervisory process was basically considered a therapeutic process by social work supervisors (Rabinowitz, 1987). Influenced by the psychoanalytic concepts of the unconscious, transference, and counter-transference, social workers became aware that the workers’ feelings, thoughts, and behaviours with clients were influenced by issues beyond in the workers’ conscious awareness. In order to provide good service, the social worker recognized the need to become “self-aware.” The process of gaining self-awareness occurred during individual sessions of analysis or therapy involving the supervisor and the supervisee. These sessions shed light on the personal and affective perspectives of supervision.

Until the 1950s, the social casework method had a great impact on the format and structure of social work supervision (Austin, 1952; Munson, 1993; Towle, 1954). Some aspects of this method are still in force, such as the dyadic relationship between the supervisor and the
supervisee and the confidentiality of the content of the supervisory session. Some supervisors even extend the concept of the "worker-client" supervisory model to include a "parallel process," in which the supervisor helps the supervisee who then uses the same skills in helping clients. This particular approach, although still in use, is rejected by many social workers who consider the "casework the caseworker" approach a violation of the privacy of the supervisees (Kadushin, 1992a, 1992b; Ko, 1987; Munson, 1993).

2.2.4 Stage 4: Interminable Supervision versus Autonomous Practice (1956 - 1970s)

As we have seen, in the early years of social work practice, supervision was a means of monitoring the work of volunteers. At a later stage, formal social work training programs that included fieldwork supervision as part of the learning process were set up in the universities. After the integration of psychoanalytic treatment theories and methods into social work practice, supervision became a therapeutic process. By the 1950s, the therapeutic emphasis had waned and supervision came to be regarded as a stage in professional development of social workers (Rabinowitz, 1987). The psychodynamic influence remained in the supervisory process, but social work supervision became a lifelong process in the supervisee's career.

In the 1940s and 1950s, questions arose about both the value of and the need for continuing social work supervision for professionally trained social workers (Austin, 1942; Bacock, 1953; Schour, 1953). With the creation of the National Association of Social Workers in the United States in 1956, social work took a significant step towards mature professionalization; however, the strong desire to achieve professional status soon led to a debate regarding independence. As independent practice and continual learning were regarded
as two hallmarks of well-developed professions (Waldfogel, 1983), some social workers perceived extended supervision as an insult to their professional status (Munson, 1993) and began to search for alternatives. There was a movement away from "interminable" supervision towards autonomous practice, achieved after a number of years of professional practice (Austin, 1957; Munson, 1993).

2.2.5 Stage 5: A Return to the Administrative Function in the Age of Accountability (1980s - present)

In the current of managerialism since the 1980s, human service organizations have faced escalating demands from the government and the community to ensure that funding is spent in a "value-for-money" and "cost-effective" manner. Resources and funding became dependent on the effectiveness and efficiency of the delivery of service. The quality of service is defined not only by the professional practitioners but also by funders and service consumers. Supervisors of human service organizations and the profession as a whole, began, once again, to emphasize their administrative function in order to promote effective and efficient service to clients.

This shift of focus is reflected by the changing definitions of social work supervision in five recent editions of the Encyclopaedia of Social Work. In 1965, social work supervision was still defined as an educational process (Encyclopaedia of Social Work, 1965); however, in the following three editions, the definitions were administratively oriented (Encyclopaedia of Social Work, 1971, 1977, 1987). For example, the 1987 edition states that "the new emphases on the managerial functions of supervision reflects that an organic integration of the
administrative and educational foci of supervision is crucial to enhancing the quality and productivity of human service organizations.” In the current edition, Shulman (1995) tries to combine the administrative and the educational functions. He observes, “this emphasis on the educational aspect of supervision has over the years been combined with a second emphasis on administration that includes efforts to control and coordinate social workers to get the job done” (Shulman, 1995, p. 2373). In the field of social work, the differentiation of supervision according to service settings has become apparent. For example, medical social workers adopt a task-oriented approach to consultations with their supervisor due to the time-limited nature of their cases. The residential service and child welfare agencies focus on monitoring the performance of the frontline staff as is required by law. This indicates that the nature of supervision is affected by the changing context of the society.

2.2.6 Summary of the Historical Development of Social Work Supervision

In summary, social work supervision began as an administrative practice in the early Charity Organizations Society years. At the beginning of the twentieth century, universities set up training programs, and gradually a body of knowledge and a theoretical framework for social work supervision emerged. Unsurprisingly, supervision became an educational process. At the same time, the impact of psychoanalysis and its treatment methods led to the casework-oriented format and structure of supervision. When social work evolved into a profession, support grew for independent autonomous practice among social workers. However, in the age of accountability of the last two decades, supervision became administratively oriented again, in order to ensure quality of service to clients and resource acquisition for human service
The development of social work supervision can be perceived as the result of the influence of external funders and professionalization forces within the profession over the last 120 years. Funding is influenced by many factors including the socio-political state of society and the ideology of welfare. These forces determine the level of resources for human service organizations and mould the administrative nature of social work supervision. The internal forces within the social work profession represent the social workers' pursuit of respect and recognition for their professional status. This includes the establishment of professional training institutes and professional associations, the use of scientific knowledge in their practice, and the formulation of a code of ethics as a self-monitoring mechanism. At present, there is concern over the growth of private practice and developments in licensing legislation. The effects of these trends on the future of social work supervision remains to be seen (Munson, 1993).

In fact, the development of social work supervision outlined above can be taken as a historio-cultural process. It reflects the culture of the social work profession and the larger society. This is very pertinent to this study: the building of a culturally sensitive model of social work supervision should take into account not only the ethno-cultural context but also the historio-cultural context.

After reviewing the historical development of social work supervision in the North America, we will examine the situation in Hong Kong. Although the history of social work supervision in Hong Kong has not been documented in any existing literature (Tsui, 1996), the
development of social work practice in Hong Kong probably followed the pattern found in North America, although this theory requires empirical verification. It is clear, however, that voluntary social welfare organizations in Hong Kong went through a developmental process similar to that of their counterparts in the United States. Many social work supervisors received their professional training in Canada, the United States, Britain, or local schools of social work that adopted North American or British models of social work education (Hong Kong Council of Social Service, 1998; Hong Kong Social Workers Association, 1996; Ng, 1996). The North American model emphasizes methodological training and competence in practice, while the British model focuses on critical thinking and ideological debate. However, few social work supervisors received training in social work supervision. Most practice what they learned from fieldwork supervision and their practice experiences as supervisees. This may be the reason that the one-to-one tutorial approach, the self-awareness of the social worker, and administrative accountability became the major features of social work supervision in Hong Kong (Ko, 1987).

2.3 A Comprehensive Review of Models of Social Work Supervision

As mentioned before, social work supervision is almost as old as social work practice itself. Although its format and focus have varied over the years, supervision has assumed and maintained a unique and important position in the social work field (Waldfogel, 1983). Social work supervision has been identified as one of the most significant factors in determining the job satisfaction levels of frontline social workers. It has also been cited a crucial determinant of service quality (Harkness, 1995; Harkness & Hensley, 1991; Harkness & Poertner, 1989; Kadushin, 1992a; Munson, 1993; Shulman, 1993).
Some scholars have observed that there are numerous competing models of supervision in the helping professions (Kaslow et al., 1979; Latting, 1986; Lowy, 1983; White & Russell, 1995), and Rich (1993) even describes the field as a "supervisory jungle." Despite the multitude of models, there is no empirically grounded theory of social work supervision available to the social work profession (Kadushin, 1992a; Middleman & Rhodes, 1985; Munson, 1993; Tsui, 1997b; White & Russell, 1995).

Many scholars have borrowed theories from other social sciences to describe, explain, and predict the behaviour of the supervisor and the supervisee in the supervisory process (Kadushin, 1992a; Munson, 1993; Shulman, 1993). From the late 1800s to the 1950s, the major trend was to borrow theories from psychology, mainly from Freudian psychology (Bernard & Goodyear, 1992; Munson, 1981). Since the 1950s, scholars have also turned to the works of sociologists to provide a conceptual background. For example, Kadushin (1968) adopted the interactional framework of Goffman. Munson (1976, 1979a, 1979b, 1979e) conceptualized supervision according to Merton's role set and interaction theory. In its practice, social work supervision also borrowed from other helping professions such as medicine, nursing, and education.

Rich (1993) reviewed all existing models of supervision and constructed an integrated model that encompasses all the perspectives and components of supervision. Holloway (1995) constructed a "systems approach to supervision" (SAS) model for supervision that emphasizes the interrelationship between the various subsystems of clinical supervision. McKitrick and Garrison (1992) suggest an outline for theory building in supervision that facilitates the process of constructing a practice model of supervision. The model provides a detailed inventory of
action guidelines for clarifying the philosophy, context, approach, process, supervisor-supervisee relationship, and outcome of supervision. Although these models are derived from the practice of clinical supervision, they provide a useful reference point for formulating the conditions and components of a model of social work supervision. In this section, the models of social work supervision will be reviewed. Particular attention will be given to supervision for social workers; clinical supervision in psychotherapy will be treated only indirectly, since it focuses on the skills of therapy.

A model is a simplified picture that serves to explain, and to act as an aid to understanding reality (Dechert, 1965; Galt & Smith, 1976). Sergiovanni (1983) suggests that model building should be concerned with the ideal, the context, the components, and the action guidelines for supervisors. Models add clarity to the supervisory process and are useful to its application. Since models are specific and flexible, they are also easily modified and tested (Bernard & Goodyear, 1992). In supervisory practice, models can serve as a common language between the supervisor and the supervisee. It is possible to learn how to supervise through imitation or by a "trial and error" approach. However, without a model, the supervisor may not conceptualize and understand the process of supervision in a holistic manner.

In social work and family therapy fields, there are various interpretations of the term "model of supervision." I have identified eleven models of supervision under five categories. Although some of them come from family therapy counselling, have incorporated them into the following table (Table 1) because social work practice has been deeply influenced by family therapy.

25
Table 1: Models of Supervision

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Model</th>
<th>Sources</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A. Practice Theory as Model</strong></td>
<td>(Bernard &amp; Goodyear, 1992; Liddle &amp; Saba, 1983; Olsen &amp; Stern, 1990; Russell, Crimmings, &amp; Lent, 1984; Storm &amp; Heath, 1985)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>B. Structural-Functional Models</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Integrative Model</td>
<td>(Gitterman, 1972; Lowy, 1983)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisory Function Model</td>
<td>(Erera &amp; Lazar, 1994a; Kadushin, 1992a)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>C. Agency Models</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casework Model</td>
<td>(Kadushin, 1974, 1992a, 1992b; Ko, 1987)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Supervision Model</td>
<td>(Kadushin, 1992a; Sales &amp; Navarre, 1970; Watson, 1973)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Supervision Model</td>
<td>(Watson, 1973)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Service Delivery Model</td>
<td>(Kadushin, 1992a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>D. Interactional Process Models</strong></td>
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<td><strong>E. Feminist Partnership Model</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>(Chernesky, 1986; Hipp &amp; Munson, 1995)</td>
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</table>
2.3.1 Practice Theory as a Supervision Model

Scholars who have noted that clinical supervisors adopt therapy theories as models of supervision have cited various reasons for this development (Liddle & Saba, 1983; Olsen & Stern, 1990; Storm & Heath, 1985). First, there is the dearth of formal supervision theory; second, theories on therapy are relatively well-developed; third, therapy has been clearly described in existing literature; fourth, therapy theories offer guidance on skills; fifth, the use of therapy as a model of supervision allows us to build on what we already know; and sixth, the formats of therapy and supervision are similar. For example, solution-focused therapy provides a structured format and clearly scheduled stages for helping the client.

The parallel linkage between therapy and supervision is called "isomorphism," which occurs when two complex structures are mapped onto each other. For each part of one structure, there is a corresponding counterpart in the other (Bernard & Goodyear, 1992). There are, however, some drawbacks to an isomorphic relationship between therapy and supervision (Russell, Crimmings, & Lent, 1984). First of all, it inhibits the development of a formal theory specific to supervision. Second, it hinders attempts to view supervision in an integrative manner. Third, therapy theorists often fail to operationalize their hypotheses and constructs for verification and testing. Finally, the dependence on therapy theories, to some extent, suggests that the profession has not reached a mature stage: one of the indicators for measuring the maturity of practice of supervision is the emergence of models that are independent of therapy (Bernard & Goodyear, 1992).
2.3.2 Structural-Functional Models

The structural-functional models of social work supervision focus on the objectives, functions, and structure of supervision. Three models can be identified: the supervisory function model, the integrative model, and the model of authority.

a. Supervisory Function Models

This model emphasizes the administrative, educational, and supportive functions of supervision (Erera & Lazar, 1994a; Kadushin, 1992a). Each supervisory function has its own set of problems and goals. The priorities of administrative supervision are to adhere to the agency policies and procedures and to implement them effectively. Educational supervision addresses the staff's level of professional knowledge and skills and aims to improve their competence in professional practice. In the area of supportive supervision, the supportive-expressive function is fulfilled by taking care of workload, stress, and morale, in order to improve the job satisfaction and motivation of the social workers (Kadushin, 1992a; Shulman, 1993, 1995).

b. Integrative Model

Gitterman (1972) suggests three social work supervision models: an organization-oriented model, a worker-centred model, and an integrative model. The organization-oriented model focuses on the client outcome, while the worker-centred model emphasizes job satisfaction and
professional development of frontline staff. Gitterman (1972) prefers the integrative model, which is a combination of the other two models, since it is more comprehensive. He maintains that the integrative model is rich enough to illustrate the dynamic perspective of the organic link between the supervisor and the supervisee, yet remains simple to use. It covers “knowing,” “feeling,” and “doing.” Both the supervisor and the supervisee have functions to perform and roles to play.

Lowy (1983) also formulated three kinds of models. The work-oriented model ensures that the practitioner’s work is carried out in accordance with the demands of the organization according to professional values. The theory- and method-oriented model emphasizes schools of thought and methods. The learning model focuses on the educational aspects of supervision. None of these models exist in a pure form, but they are useful in conceptualizing supervision in social work. As Lowy (1983) points out, a move toward theory building in social work supervision is necessary in order to generate significant discussion about issues affecting supervision and its impact on social work theory and practice. Now we face the challenge; it is the time for us to seize the opportunity.

c. Models of Authority

Munson (1976, 1979a, 1979b, 1981, 1993) deals primarily with the use of authority in social work supervision. As authority is built into the supervisory relationship, the supervisor should use it to meet the needs of the supervisees. Munson developed two models to represent the ways that authority is used: the sanction model represents the authority inherent in the
administrative position based on agency sanction, and the competence model is based on professional authority derived from the supervisor's knowledge and skills (Munson, 1981). Munson (1979b, 1981) conducted a study of 65 pairs of supervisors and supervisees. Significant variations in level of interaction, supervision and job satisfaction, and sense of accomplishment were found according to the source of the supervisor's authority. When Munson (1981) compared these variables, he found that the competence model is more effective in creating a high level of interaction, supervision satisfaction, sense of accomplishment, and job satisfaction. From the research findings, the competence model of authority was recognized as more effective in enhancing supervisor-supervisee interaction and job satisfaction.

2.3.3 Agency Models

In human service organizations, supervision models often reflect the level of control exercised by the agency in supervision (Kadushin, 1992a; Skidmore, 1995; Watson, 1973). At one extreme, there is the casework model in which there is a high level of administrative accountability. At the other extreme is the autonomous practice model in which there is high level of professional autonomy (Epstein, 1973; Rock, 1990; Veeder, 1990). In between, there are the group supervision model (Getzel, Goldberg, & Salmon, 1971; Kaplan, 1991; Kaslow, 1972; Shulman, 1993), the peer supervision model (Skidmore, 1995), and the team service delivery model (Payne & Scott, 1982).

a. The Casework Model

The "theories" of social work supervision have been greatly influenced by the theories of
social work practice, especially social casework practice (Kadushin, 1992a). This may account for the fact that the format of supervision looks like casework intervention. The casework model consists of a supervisor and a supervisee in a one-to-one relationship; the role of the supervisor encompasses the administrative, educational, and supportive functions. This is the most widely used model of supervision both in North America and in Hong Kong, especially for inexperienced workers (Kadushin, 1974, 1992b; Ko, 1987), because social work supervisors tend to practise the one-to-one tutorial method they learned from their fieldwork supervisors in schools of social work, or they revert to the methods that they used as frontline social workers.

b. The Group Supervision Model

Next to the casework model, the group supervision model is the most popular model of supervision in social work (Kadushin, 1992b; Ko, 1987). It is often used as a supplement to, rather than a substitute for, individual supervision (Kadushin, 1992a). In a session of group supervision, the supervisor functions as a group leader, encouraging staff members to share their difficulties and their insights. As this model focuses on the common needs of the staff members, the workers in the group cannot be too diverse in terms of their levels of training or experience (Watson, 1973). Within the group, the balance of power between the leader and the members is more even than in other models. The members are exposed to a wide variety of learning experiences in a comfortable environment, and emotional support is provided by the group. Of course, group supervision is sometimes ineffective in handling specific individual needs or problems and it can lead to peer competition among members. Thus the success of the group supervision model depends on the skills of the supervisor and the motivation of staff members.
Group supervision is more economical in terms of the time spent. In addition, the staff feel that they have greater freedom to communicate their dissatisfaction to the supervisor in group supervision sessions (Kadushin, 1992a).

c. Peer Supervision Models

In peer supervision, there is no designated supervisor and all staff participate equally (Watson, 1973). Staff members take responsibility for their own work. There are no regular individual conferences between the supervisor and the supervisee; instead, there are regular case conferences of all staff and collegial consultation is common. Peer supervision can make the staff more sensitive to the needs and difficulties of others by creating an atmosphere of mutual help and sharing; however, it may not be a good choice if the staff is inexperienced: the supervisor and the supervisee would not have adequate knowledge and experience for effective and meaningful sharing.

One model of supervision that evolved from the peer group model is the tandem model (Watson, 1973). When there are two frontline social workers who would like to consult each other apart from the peer group, they form a "tandem." Both are experienced practitioners, and neither is designated as the supervisor. As a tandem, they meet occasionally and informally to discuss their assignments and working experiences. Tandem members arrange to go on vacation at different times so that they can cover each other's work, thereby exposing themselves to learning opportunities. However, tandem members are not accountable for each other's job performance. Their main objective is to share professional knowledge and skills.
d. The Team Service Delivery Model

In the team delivery model, the supervisor plays the role of team leader. There are no regular supervision sessions. The team focuses on the work itself and contributes to the decision-making process, although the team leader has the final say. The responsibility for work assignment, performance monitoring, and professional development belongs to the team (Kadushin, 1992a).

e. Autonomous Practice

A movement in favour of more professional autonomy for social workers has coincided with the maturation of social work as a profession. It is one of the natural steps of the developmental process, like the creation of professional training institutes, the formulation of professional code of ethics, and the establishment of professional associations. Its advocates argue that, for experienced and professionally trained practitioners, there is no need to provide supervision (Epstein, 1973; Kutzik, 1977; Veeder, 1990). The amount of time that constitutes "experience" ranges from two to six years (Kadushin, 1992a; Veeder, 1990; Wax, 1979). Epstein (1973) argues that autonomous practice is possible in the social work field. Its two preconditions are the decentralization of bureaucratic authority and the abandonment of the obligatory teaching process as a means of controlling professional behaviour. These developments would, in turn, make social work practice more flexible, although administrators would still systematically monitor and appraise the staff.
A national survey conducted by Kadushin (1974) in the United States showed that social workers accept the administrative functions of their supervisors, but that experienced workers complain about educational supervision if it is provided by inexperienced supervisors. Mandell (1973) found that prolonged individual supervision for social workers might stifle creativity and innovation. In autonomous practice, staff members are not assigned supervisors. The staff are "self-directed" (Rock, 1990) and responsible for their own professional practice. In addition, they have to take the initiative to enhance their own professional development. It is suggested that trained workers should be allowed to assume responsibility for their work and professional development after a number of years of supervised practice. In fact, this kind of autonomy has long been found in private practice.

Barretta-Herman (1993) proposed a model of supervision for licensed social work practitioners. According to this model, a licensed practitioner is assumed to be well-trained and experienced. Thus, the primary responsibility for continual professional development and accountability rests with the practitioner while the supervisor plays the role of facilitator. Group supervision is adopted as the major mode of supervision. The supervisor is no longer "super" in knowledge and skills. Supervisors assume the role of experts to help supervisees reflect on their practice. The supervisory relationship is interactive, interdependent, and more evenly balanced. As Veeder (1990) points out, however, this method blunts the self-accountability of the truly autonomous professional.

As proposed by Watson (1973) in his article "Differential Supervision," the goal of supervision is to provide better service to the clients by helping social workers become more
competent in their jobs. A variety of supervisory models should be provided as options to meet the needs of staff members.

2.3.4 Interactional Process Models

These process models focus on the interaction between the supervisor and the supervisee in the supervisory process. For example, Latting (1986) proposes an adaptive supervision model that uses four interactional patterns between the supervisor and the supervisee. According to this model, instrumental behaviour denotes the administrative and educational functions, while expressive behaviour refers to the supportive function. Supervisors can take a proactive or a reflective approach to their expressive behaviour. If supervisors take proactive attitudes, they encourage, or collaborate with, the supervisee. On the other hand, supervisors may take a reflective approach where they entrust or instruct the supervisee.

There are two types of interactional process models. The first arises when developmental models of supervision focus on the stages of development in the supervisory process by which supervisees acquire skills for their professional practice (Hart, 1982; Stoltenberg, 1981; Worthington, 1984). The second type is the growth-oriented model of supervision that is supervisee-oriented. It focuses on the enhancement of the supervisees' understanding of their personal self and professional self. The supervisor shifts the emphasis from service delivery to the development of the self, which is the requisite for a professional helping relationship. The growth-oriented model ensures that frontline staff express their feelings, have personal insights, and develop their personalities (Gitterman, 1972).
2.3.5 The Feminist Partnership Model

As in other areas of social work practice, feminism has had a significant impact on social work supervision. Some feminists are critical of the traditional social work supervision model and see interminable supervision, administrative control, and the power hierarchy of the supervisor-supervisee relationship as manifestations of a patriarchal model of power.

Some writers (Chernesky, 1986; Hipp & Munson, 1995) propose an alternative feminist partnership model that assumes the social worker can be self-directing, self-disciplined, and self-regulating. The relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee would be reconstructed as a sharing relationship between equal partners. The hierarchy of power would be reconceptualized as affiliation. Direct supervision as a performance-monitoring mechanism would be replaced by indirect mechanisms such as group norms and peer approval. The advocates of the feminist partnership model claim that it is more compatible with the values and goals of the social work profession than the traditional authority model.

A review of the eleven existing models of social work supervision reveals that only the feminist partnership model addresses the impact of the greater environment. Most of them focus on professional autonomy, supervisory functions, the supervisory relationship, supervisory authority, and the format of supervision. Since social workers are also members of a socio-cultural system, the values, beliefs, and norms of their society have considerable influence on their behaviour. The above-mentioned models neglect the importance of the cultural influence.
In addition, the models do not build on each other. Each scholar describes a certain aspect of social work supervision, but none addresses the larger picture of cultural environment. Hence, it is very important to examine supervision in the cultural context.

2.4 Empirical Research on Social Work Supervision

After the review of the historical development and the models of social work supervision, an overview of the empirical research literature on supervision for social workers published over the last fifty years will be provided. It will explore the state of the art of the research on social work supervision.

As noted earlier, supervision has come to occupy a unique and important position in social work practice. It is recognized as the primary factor in determining the quality of service to clients and the level of professional development and job satisfaction of social workers (Harkness, 1995; Harkness & Hensley, 1991; Harkness & Poertner, 1989; Kadushin, 1992a). However, there is a dearth of empirical research literature on the actual practice of supervision (Harkness & Poertner, 1989; Loganbill, Hardy, & Delworth, 1982; Erera & Lazar, 1994a). Unlike student supervision, where the types and extent of fieldwork supervision can be readily examined for research purposes, staff supervision in social work—which is embedded in an organizational context—cannot be so easily investigated. Due to the hierarchical power relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee and to the confidential nature of the process, it is an extremely delicate and difficult task to elicit information about the supervisory performance of the supervisor and the job performance of the supervisee within an agency.
setting. These difficulties may account for the fact that there is less research on staff supervision than on student supervision in the field of social work.

2.4.1 Criteria for Selecting Empirical Research Literature

a. Selection Criteria

All the empirical research literature published between 1950 and 2000 on staff supervision of social workers was reviewed for this study. Altogether, 34 journal articles and book chapters were identified. Five criteria were used to identify the relevant literature. First, selection was limited to literature published in refereed journals or books. Second, the literature was confined to that published between 1950 and 2000. No database or backdated issues of professional journals in social work could be found before 1950. Third, the focus of the research had to be related to supervision for social workers in human service organizations. Fourth, only empirical studies that collected first-hand information were included. Theoretical discussions on supervision would not be considered. Fifth, in cases where authors published similar results and discussions from a single research project in various academic journals, only the most influential and significantly cited article was selected for review.

b. Selection Procedures

As a result of the above-mentioned selection criteria, the research came from three major
sources (for the full list of research literature, refer to Appendix I). First, all the entries under the key word “supervision” from electronic databases, such as Social Work Abstracts, PsyLit, and Sociology were scanned. Second, all the articles published in the major journal on supervision, The Clinical Supervisor, (founded in 1983) were scanned. Finally, the bibliographies of the updated versions of the two most popular and comprehensive texts on supervision, Kadushin's (1992a) Supervision in Social Work (third edition) and Munson's (1993) Clinical Social Work Supervision (second edition), were scanned.

2.4.2 Researchers

In the 1970s, Kadushin (1974) conducted a large-scale national survey on social work supervision in the United States. The random sample was comprised of 750 supervisors and 750 supervisees. This was the first attempt to provide a picture of social work supervision in the United States at that time. Munson (1976) published his doctoral dissertation on the uses of structural, authority, and teaching models in social work supervision. His empirical study involved 65 dyads of social work supervisors and supervisees. The results were published several times (Munson, 1976, 1979a, 1979b, 1981). After this period, research on social work supervision began to be published with increasing frequency.

Shulman (1981) conducted a wide-ranging survey of the context and the skills of social work supervision. It remains the most comprehensive survey undertaken in Canada. Following the path of Kadushin (1974, 1992b, 1992c), Munson (1976, 1979a, 1979b, 1981), and Shulman (1981, 1993), a number of younger scholars conducted significant research studies on a variety
of supervisory issues in the 1980s and 1990s (e.g., Eviskovits et al., 1985; Erera & Lazar, 1993, 1994a, 1994b; Harkness, 1995, 1997; Harkness & Hensley, 1991; Harkness & Poertner, 1989; Poertner & Rapp, 1983; York & Denton, 1990; York & Hastings, 1985). Some of these studies borrowed from the frameworks established by Kadushin, Munson, and Shulman. For example, Erera and Lazar (1994b) operationalized Kadushin’s model of supervision to create the Supervisory Functions Inventory and validated the model’s utility as a measurement tool of the supervisory role. Eviskovits and colleagues (1985) adopted Munson’s instrument for measuring the worker’s evaluation of supervision in their study of supervision and work context. Harkness (1995, 1997) tested Shulman's interactional social work theory by examining the association between skills, relationships, and outcomes in supervised social work practice.

2.4.3 Research Focus

The 34 research studies in the last fifty years can be divided, according to their focus of research, into three categories: basic descriptive studies, studies on supervisory issues, and studies on client outcomes.

a. Basic Descriptive Studies

The pioneer of empirical research on social work supervision was the Western New York Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). They conducted the earliest empirical study in 1958. Self-administered questionnaires were sent to all members (N = 229) of the Western New York Chapter. One hundred members returned completed questionnaires.
The respondents generally felt satisfied with their supervision. However, they believed that there was a need to change supervision gradually in order to meet the needs of the individual staff. No respondent objected to supervisory authority or rejected the administrative functions of the supervisor; however, supervisees found that the educational and supportive functions of supervision were the most useful.

Many of the 34 studies are introductory descriptive studies that explore the state of the art of supervisory practice in a specific place at a specific time. For example, in 1973 and in 1989, Kadushin (1974, 1992b, 1992c) conducted large-scale national surveys with random sampling on social work supervision in the United States. As well as analyzing basic descriptive data, Kadushin presents the strengths and shortcomings of social work supervision identified by supervisors and supervisees (Kadushin, 1992c). He drew a large random sample of 750 supervisors and 750 supervisees from the membership of the NASW of the United States. These two important sample surveys provided a representative picture of the state of the art of social work supervision in the United States. In the 1989 survey, Kadushin found that the dominant structure of supervision remained the individual session. Both supervisors and supervisees preferred the educational function of supervision, followed by the supportive function. Evaluation of staff performance was perceived as a difficult task for both the supervisor and the supervisee. Regrettably, Kadushin (1992b) did not take the opportunity to do in-depth analysis, for example, to use inferential statistics, for the purpose of theory building. He provided basic descriptive statistics to show current supervisory practice but did not inform supervisory practice in the future.
Shulman (1981) conducted a comprehensive survey of all the supervisors in child welfare, residential, medical, and school settings in British Columbia and Ottawa. One hundred and twenty supervisors returned their questionnaires. In 1991, Shulman replicated the study as a subdesign of a larger survey on social work practice (Shulman, 1991); 93 social work administrators and 222 frontline staff were studied. Both studies (Shulman, 1981; 1991) found strong correlations between the use of supervisory skills, the supervisory relationship, and the supervisory outcome. Shulman (1991), in his replicated study, used causal path analysis to assess the direct and indirect causal contributions of one variable or set of variables. The data analysis indicates that effective use of supervisory skills may enhance the supervisory relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee, and eventually improve the supervisory outcome in terms of staff satisfaction and morale.

Melichercik (1984) conducted the most in-depth study of supervisors. He used the diary method for data collection. A non-random sample of 85 social work supervisors was selected from 12 social welfare agencies in Ontario. They were sent self-administered day logs for recording the daily activities of one week. Melichercik (1984) was able to provide a clear picture of the practice of social work supervision in Ontario. The social work supervisors spent the largest portion of their time on administrative functions, that is, in program management. The second most time-consuming function was educational; this function could be divided into two groups of activities. The first consisted of teaching ways to deal with procedures, policies, guidelines and standards, and the second focused on staff development and the enhancement of skill competence (Melichercik, 1984). While an important study, the report provides a picture of, but not a practice guide for, supervision.
Outside North America, Pilcher (1984) undertook a well-designed descriptive study of the state of the art of social work supervision in Victoria, Australia. Also in Australia, Scott and Farrow (1993) conducted a study that evaluated supervisory practices according to the professional standards set by the Australian Association of Social Workers. In Hong Kong, Ko (1987) conducted the only empirical study on supervision for social workers using a survey methodology. Questionnaires were sent to all supervisors and supervisees of seven voluntary family service agencies in Hong Kong. Sixteen supervisors (out of 18) and 100 supervisees (out of 116) returned their questionnaires. Ko found that the dominant formats of supervision in voluntary family service agencies were individual sessions and case conferences, supplemented by occasional group supervision sessions. The less experienced workers preferred individual sessions, but the more experienced workers did not exhibit the same preference. Three informal elements—experience in supervision by the supervisor, worker-centredness, and supervisor-worker relationships—had a significant influence on the supervisory functions (Ko, 1987). On the one hand, this reveals that the dynamics of the supervisory process have a significant impact on supervisory functions. On the other hand, this implies that formal elements, such as the supervisor’s qualifications, do not have any significant effect on supervisory functions. Ko’s (1987) findings indicate the importance of the supportive-expressive nature of social work supervision.

Poertner and Rapp (1983) used “task analysis” to construct a description of social work supervisors’ daily activities. A task analysis of a large child welfare agency was conducted using a systematic approach. All social work supervisors (N=120) in Illinois, one-third of
supervisees (N=227), and 22 fieldwork supervisors were invited to rank the importance of a preliminary list of tasks. The study indicated that, according to the population studied, the dominant function of supervision is the administrative function, including worker control, caseload management, and organizational maintenance. Greenspan and her colleagues (1991) conducted a survey of 198 supervisees. All were experienced social workers drawn by random sampling. It was found that a significant amount of supervision is provided. Experienced practitioners continue to want clinical supervision, but many feel that social work supervision lacks consistent expertise. Greenspan and her colleagues (1991) maintain that advanced supervision should be included as a specialization within social work practice.

In both the West and in the East, social work scholars have tried to provide a clear picture of the state of the art of social work supervision during the last five decades. However, none built a successful theory or conceptual framework. Kadushin (1992b, 1992c) in the United States, Shulman (1981) in Canada, Pilcher (1984) in Australia, and Ko (1987) in Hong Kong could only provide descriptive pictures of the current state of supervisory practice.

b. Studies on Supervisory Issues

In the studies on supervisory issues, eight issues emerge as significant concern to researchers: supervisory functions; supervisory context; structure and authority; supervisory relationship; supervisory style and skills; job satisfaction; training for supervisors; and gender issues. In the following section, there will be a review of these studies.
(i) Supervisory Functions

In an empirical study, Erera and Lazar (1994a) targeted a research population comprising nearly all social work supervisors in Israel, which included team leaders (N=99), service-oriented supervisors (N=23), and treatment-oriented supervisors (N=111). A role conflict and ambiguity questionnaire was administered. The study indicated that team leaders experienced more role conflict and role ambiguity than treatment-oriented supervisors, because team leaders perform multiple administrative duties and supervisory roles at the same time. Based on these findings, Erera and Lazar (1994a) examined the compatibility of the administrative and educational functions in supervision and suggested that the two should be separated. In addition, Erera and Lazar (1994b) constructed a measurement tool to operationalize Kadushin's model of supervisory functions; the resulting Supervisory Functions Inventory (SFI) was validated using the same sample as the previous study (Erera & Lazar, 1994a). Factor analysis generated seven factors corresponding to the three supervisory functions. The factors of the administrative function are policy, planning, and budgeting; quality control; and contacts with community services. Another three factors were associated with the educational function: professional skills and techniques; professional boundaries; and knowledge and information. Finally, support for frontline social workers was considered the seventh factor. A further univariate analysis of variance revealed that the administrative function, and not the educational or supportive function, was responsible for the differentiation among social work supervisors in various service settings (Erera & Lazar, 1994b).
(ii) Supervisory Context

Eisikovits and his colleagues (1985) studied 63 frontline social workers in public social service agencies in Northern Israel. Two sets of measurement were used: one to assess the work and treatment environment, and the other to evaluate the quality of professional supervision. It was found that supervisory variables (for example, the professional development of workers and the administrative skills of supervisors) were positively correlated with work environment variables (for example, task orientation, independence, and involvement) and with treatment environment variables (for example, autonomy, spontaneity, and clarity of rules). Based on these findings, Eisikovits and his colleagues (1985) suggested creating a work context for effective service delivery and integrating the growth, administrative, control, and expectation aspects of supervision in agency policy and training programs for supervisors.

Scott (1965) studied all social workers in a public social work agency in a small American city. Ninety caseworkers returned self-administered questionnaires and eleven supervisors were interviewed. It was found that the social workers generally accepted the supervision system in their organization, though professionally oriented staff were more critical of the system than those nonprofessionally oriented. At the same time, the staff supervised by professionally oriented supervisors were less critical of the supervision system than were the staff under the supervision of less professionally oriented supervisors (Scott, 1965). This suggests that the professional frontline staff have higher expectations for supervision, and that professional supervisors provide supervision leading to a higher level of staff satisfaction.
(iii) Structure and Authority

In a well-designed study, Munson (1981) selected 65 pairs of supervisors and supervisees randomly from social welfare agencies in three American states. A self-administered questionnaire was mailed to supervisors. The data on supervisees were collected through administering an interview schedule. Munson (1981) found that there was a significant relationship between the use of authority and levels of interaction, supervision satisfaction, and job satisfaction: job satisfaction and supervision satisfaction were found to be higher in the "competency model" (the authority of the supervisor comes from knowledge and practice skills) than in the "sanction model" (the authority of the supervisor is inherent in the position, based on agency sanction). However, no differences in job satisfaction and supervision satisfaction were found among three structural models of supervision: the traditional casework model, the group work model, and the independent practice model.

(iv) Supervisory Relationship

The supervisor's role in providing support to frontline staff is very important. Himle, Jayaratne, and Thyness (1989) conducted a sample survey of 800 social workers randomly drawn from a population of 2,664 social workers in Norway. Four aspects of the supervisory relationship were studied (psychological strains, job satisfaction and turnover, work stress, and social support) as well as four kinds of social support (emotional, appraisal, informational, and instrumental). The survey indicated that instrumental support for completing tasks and informational support provided by the supervisor may reduce psychological stress and, in turn,
relieve the burnout and job dissatisfaction of frontline social workers. Himle, Jayaratne, and Thyness (1989) suggest that both appraisal support and emotional support are ineffective in buffering work stress, because appraisal support is mainly given for improvements in job performance and emotional support is sometimes not accepted by frontline workers as it requires too much personal disclosure. The researchers conclude that human service organizations should train supervisors to give informational and instrumental support, which enhances supervisees’ skill competence, especially that of new and inexperienced staff.

(v) Supervisory Styles and Skills

Russell, Lankford, and Grinnell (1983) used the managerial grid to analyse supervisory leadership in a large human service organization where, surprisingly, their results indicated that a high number of supervisors adopted a “1.1” supervisory style; that is to say, their primary concern was not for people or production. Russell and her colleagues (1983) tried to operationalize the supervisory style, using the New Managerial Grid as an instrument, in a sample survey of 44 supervisors and 510 supervisees in Texas. The Management Evaluation Scale for social workers (Russell, Lankford, & Grinnell, 1981) was used to measure the supervisees’ attitudes towards their supervisors. The scale measures were communication, unit management, program management, regional management, management by objectives, personnel policies, and personnel evaluation. The results indicated that the attitudes of supervisees towards their supervisors are not dependent on supervisory styles.

Granvold (1977) studied the supervisory leadership of 108 social work supervisors
randomly drawn from a region of the Texas Department of Public Welfare. He divided the sample into three groups according to their service areas: financial services, social services, and support services. The study indicated that, although social service supervisors had the highest educational level and the largest number of masters degrees of the three groups, the three groups possess similar supervisory styles (Granvold, 1977). This suggests that education does not have a significant impact on supervisory style. Formal professional training is the least important factor in preparing supervisors for their job responsibilities. From the same group of supervisors, Granvold (1978) found that there is a positive relationship between consideration (the extent to which a supervisor is likely to feel mutual trust, respect, and warmth in the supervisory relationship) and supervisory procedures supporting worker autonomy, responsibility, self-initiative, participation in agency operations, and independent decision-making. He also found a positive relationship between organizational structure and supervisory procedures including the use of regular, formal conferences, written communication with supervisees, reviews of agency effectiveness through follow-up records, and implementation of time studies. These findings suggest that social work supervisors are not effective in both organizational objectives and worker objectives, although they direct more attention to latter (Granvold, 1978).

Dendinger and Kohn (1989) revised the Supervisory Skills Inventory (SSI) that was originally developed for assessing the generic skills of the supervisors in business and industry. The SSI was administered to 50 social work supervisors and 238 supervisees. This validated instrument consisted of 12 domains: setting goals, planning and organizing, directing and delegating, solving problems, enforcing work rules, relating to and supporting staff, maintaining
equipment, building teams, assuring safety, evaluating performance, training and coaching, and handling stress. The SSI generates evaluations of effectiveness, interest in improvement, handling negative feedback, relating to others, and commitment to the organization. The SSI was validated for assessing the strengths and identifying the areas for improvement for social work supervisors.

Regarding administrative leadership, York and Hastings (1985) studied the total staff of three county social service departments in North Carolina (N=172). They found that the effectiveness of supportive supervision did not increase according to the level of the worker's maturity. York and Denton (1990) surveyed 93 social workers in an American state by mailed questionnaires. Respondents were asked to rate the overall performance of their supervisors and to describe the extent to which these supervisors exhibited twenty leadership qualities. It indicated that the key predictor of the performance of social workers is the communication skills of the supervisor.

(vi) Job Satisfaction

Newsome and Pillari (1991) gave self-administered questionnaires to 121 randomly selected social workers in a department of human resources in a medium-sized city in the southeastern United States. Their survey revealed a positive correlation between job satisfaction and the overall quality of the supervisory relationship. This suggests a good supervisory relationship enhances the job satisfaction of supervisees. In addition, Rauktis and Koeske (1994) surveyed 232 supervisees, chosen by random sampling, from the Southwest Division
membership list of the National Association of Social Workers. They found that supportive supervision appears to have a direct and positive association with job satisfaction. The findings of these two studies strongly support the need for providing supportive supervision in order to increase staff morale and job satisfaction.

(vii) Training for Supervisors

Vinokur-Kaplan (1987) surveyed 310 child welfare supervisors and 966 child welfare workers selected randomly from a nationwide group of 605 supervisors and 2,299 child welfare workers in the United States. It was found that, although in-service training for supervisors is always recommended, such training is often not received. Era and Lazar (1993) surveyed a non-random sample of 99 team leaders and 111 clinical supervisors about the training needs of social work supervisors in various organizational settings in Israel. Their findings indicate that supervisors coming from treatment-oriented agencies and service-oriented agencies shared common training needs. In addition, Gray (1990) surveyed 104 supervisees drawn by random sampling. The study reveals that the status of licensure has an important influence on the structure of supervision. Licensed social workers in private practice receive frequent and lengthy supervision sessions. This suggests that the historical feature of supervision—accountability—is re-emphasized in licensed practice.

(viii) Gender Issues

Munson (1979c) surveyed 65 pairs of supervisors and supervisees by cluster sampling
from three states in the eastern United States. He found that female supervisors are quite competent regardless of the gender of the supervisees and that there are no relationship problems between female supervisors and their male supervisees. In fact, when supervisees were asked to rate their supervisors, female supervisors received significantly higher scores than males on many variables, including nondirectiveness, helpfulness, evaluation of performance, ability to set priorities, role-orientation, clinical competence, contribution to the improvement of workers' effectiveness, friendliness, ability to expressing appreciation, and tendency to engage in informal interaction (Munson, 1979c). In addition, females were more relationship-oriented and intuitive than their male counterparts, although it would be hasty to assume that men, therefore, take the task-oriented approach that is often ascribed to them. In fact, the results of Munson's survey indicate that there is no difference between male and female supervisors on variables associated with the administrative aspects of supervision.

Although the empirical research studies undertaken on supervisory issues contributed to the improvement of micro-skills of supervisory practices in the social work field, the discussions of the results, in most of the studies, were not conducive to theory building. The narrow conceptualization of social work supervision makes the integration of theory and practice in social work supervision fragmentary. It also limits the horizon and scope of a holistic theoretical model that would explain the experiences of the parties involved in the supervisory process. To understand the influence of specific cultural context on the practice of social work supervision, including the format, objectives, supervisory relationship, use of authority, and the ideal of supervision, has become an important research agenda for the social work profession.
c. Studies on Client Outcomes

Harkness and Hensley (1991) conducted an experiment with a supervisor, four social workers, and 161 clients to support their contention that research on supervision should be focused on client outcomes. The experiment assessed the influence of helping skills and relationships, in both supervision and practice, on client outcomes. A social work supervisor gave two male and two female workers supervision for 16 weeks. In the first eight weeks, mixed-focused supervision was used, which emphasizes administration, training, and clinical consultation. In the last eight weeks, client-focused supervision, which emphasizes staff intervention and client outcomes, was provided. When these two types of supervision were compared on the basis of their effects on client satisfaction and generalized contentment, the results indicated that client-focused supervision is significantly more effective than mixed-focused supervision in achieving client’s satisfaction with goal attainment, with worker’s help, and the worker-client partnership. In another study, Harkness (1995) replicated his study, using four social workers from community health centres (two males and two females) and 161 clients as subjects. The study, an examination of the impact of skills and the supervisory relationship on supervised practice, was a test of Shulman’s (1993) interactional helping theory. The predicted associations among the skills, relationships, and outcomes of practice were examined by calculating six correlation coefficients between client ratings of the worker-client relationship, worker helpfulness, goal attainment, and generalized contentment. Four of the correlations were significant. The study indicated that supervisory skills and the supervisory relationship had a significant effect on client outcomes.
2.4.4 Critique of Existing Research Literature on Social Work Supervision

The following is a critical review of the research methodology used in the empirical studies outlined above, which addresses characteristics such as the presence of theory, sampling, research design, data collection, and data analysis.

Nearly half of the studies (16 out of 34) tried to involve both the supervisor and the supervisee (for example, Kadushin, 1974, 1992b, 1992c; Harkness, 1997; Ko, 1987; Munson, 1979a, 1979b; Shulman, 1981). Eight studies focused on the supervisor (for example, Erera & Lazar, 1993, 1994a, 1994b; Granvold, 1977, 1978), and nine, on the supervisee (for example, Gray, 1990; Greenspan et al., 1991; Pilcher, 1984; Rauktis & Koeske, 1994). There was, however, scant research based on pairing the supervisor and the supervisee as a dyad, thus enabling the researcher to look at the interactive dynamics of the supervisory relationship. This kind of research design is difficult to achieve since there is a power differential between the supervisor and the supervisee and it is extremely difficult to find research subjects willing to participate in the study. As mentioned before, only Munson (1981) tried to pair the supervisor and supervisee in his study. Harkness and Hensley (1991) conducted the only study dealing with client outcomes, the ultimate goal of supervisory practice, and found that there was a pattern of association among skills, relationships, and outcomes. In addition, Harkness (1995) designed an experiment that showed that mixed focused supervision produces better outcomes in client satisfaction and generalized contentment.
More than half of the studies (19 out of 34) used random sampling methods including cluster sampling, systematic sampling, or surveying the whole population. Among the 34 studies reviewed, only five using non-random sampling, while another seven administered questionnaires to all subjects. However, the response rates of the some large-scale studies were not satisfactory. As Rubin and Babbie (1997) note, a 70% response is required if one wants to generalize the findings. However, few research studies in social work supervision can achieve this response rate.

Many of the studies reviewed were exploratory. Often, they did not have a clearly stated hypothesis. A generalized conceptual definition of supervision was frequently used, making the construct of “supervision” too vague to operationalize and to test precisely. This omission affects the construct validity of the research design.

Most of the studies were one-shot, cross-sectional surveys. Some of them were conducted on a large scale (for example, Himile, Jayaratne, & Thyness, 1989; Kadushin, 1974, 1992b, 1992c; Shulman, 1981; Vinokur-Kaplan, 1987). There were only a few in-depth studies for example; Melichercik (1984) used self-administered diaries to collect information about the daily activities of supervisors over the period of one week. Harkness and colleagues (1991, 1995) used an experiment with a variety of foci to examine the impact of supervision. Dendinger and Kohn (1989) reassessed a small proportion of the samples of their study after six months in order to validate the Supervisory Skills Inventory (SSI).

There is a lack of longitudinal studies, particularly panel studies, that observe samples at
different points in time. Quantitative methods were often adopted for analyzing the data, but in-depth qualitative research methods were seldom used. The lack of comprehensive and all-round research on social work supervision reflects the fact that empirical research on social work supervision is still in its early developmental stage. Researchers still tend to focus their main efforts on providing an overview of supervisory issues in practice, rather than carrying out in-depth investigations aimed at theory construction or model development. There is a strong need for researchers to conduct qualitative studies, which explore the functioning of social work supervision in various cultural contexts in order to build theoretical models of social work supervision. For this reason, I adopted a qualitative research approach in order to build a culturally sensitive model of social work supervision in Hong Kong.

2.4.5. Relevance to Theory Building

The above issues concerning research design reflect the difficulties of conducting research on social work supervision. The majority of the studies have problems with internal, external, and construct validity. The studies seldom focus on client outcomes, and only one study treats the supervisor and the supervisee as a dyad. Although a number of researchers have conducted studies on supervision during the last five decades, there has been a lack of programmatic investigation of supervision, particularly in the area of theory building. For example, none of the studies discuss the impact of specific cultural contexts on social work supervision, although cultural traits may be a very important factor affecting the supervisory relationship. The review of empirical research shows that there is a strong need for researchers to conduct qualitative research to collect in-depth information about supervision in specific cultural contexts.
2.5 Summary

This chapter provides a full picture of social work supervision from three perspectives: a historical review, a theoretical review, and an empirical research literature review. A review of the historical development of social work supervision in the United States over the last 120 years reveals that the development of social work supervision was very much influenced by external societal forces (for example, demands from funding sources) and internal forces (for example, the process of professionalization). Eleven existing models of social work were reviewed, but none consider the influences of the external environment, especially the cultural context. It was surprising to note that only 34 empirical research studies were published in the last five decades. Moreover, there is considerable room for improvement in the sampling, research design, and data analysis of these studies. None of the empirical studies aims to build a model of social work supervision. Obviously, there is a long way to go in the area of theory building in social work. The use of a qualitative research methodology to explore in-depth information on the way supervision functions within a specific cultural context will be necessary to the development of theory of social work supervision. In response to this need, this study adopts a grounded theory approach to explore the practice of social work supervision in the cultural context of Hong Kong.
CHAPTER THREE:
A COMPREHENSIVE MODEL OF SOCIAL WORK
SUPERVISION WITHIN THE CULTURAL CONTEXT

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the philosophy, principles, and cultural context of social work supervision in North America will be explored. A preliminary comprehensive model of social work supervision will be generated from the existing literature on social work supervision published in the North America in order to guide the research study.

3.2 Philosophy and Principles

A model is an abstract of reality (Dechert, 1965; Galt & Smith, 1976). In professional practice, models of practice are constructed on the basis of assumptions and principles that reflect the underlying philosophy of the practice itself. A model of social work supervision is no exception: its philosophical base is the ideals and beliefs of social work supervisors. A close examination of the theoretical and empirical bases of supervision reveals seven basic principles that govern model building in social work supervision in North America. These principles are as follows:
Supervision is an interpersonal transaction between two or more persons. The premise of supervision is that the experienced and competent supervisor helps the supervisee and ensures the quality of service to clients (Kadushin, 1992a; Kaiser, 1997).

The work of the supervisee must be related to the agency objectives through the supervisor (Harkness & Poertner, 1989; Kadushin, 1992a; Poertner & Rapp, 1983; Shulman, 1995; Skidmore, 1995).

In this interpersonal transaction, there is a use of authority (administrative function), an exchange of information and ideas (professional/educational function), and an expression of emotion (supportive function) (Erera & Lazar, 1994a; Munson, 1976, 1979a, 1979b, 1981, 1983, 1993).

As part of the indirect practice of social work, supervision reflects the professional values of social work (Kadushin, 1992a; Munson, 1993; Shulman, 1993; Tsui, 1997a).

The supervisor monitors job performance, teaches professional values, knowledge, and skills, and provides emotional support to the supervisee (Erera & Lazar, 1994a; Kadushin, 1992a; Tsui, 1998).

In order to reflect both the short- and long-term objectives of supervision, the criteria for evaluating supervisory effectiveness include staff satisfaction with supervision, job accomplishment, and client outcomes (Kadushin, 1992a; Harkness, 1995; Harkness & Hensley, 1991).

From a holistic point of view, supervision involves four parties: the agency, the supervisor, the supervisee, and the client (Tsui, 1996).

Based on these principles, I have designed the model shown in Figure 1.
Figure 1: A Proposed Model of Social Work Supervision
Developed from Western Literature
3.3 The Supervisory Relationship

As indicated in Figure 1, while the supervisory relationship is the core of social work supervision (Fox, 1983, 1989), it has been long defined in a narrow way, that is, as a supervisor-supervisee relationship with no attention to context. This oversimplified view severely limits the scope of meaningful discussion and analysis of the topic. The view fails, for example, to offer any explanation of the fact that the root of social work supervision is administrative supervision, and it neglects the ultimate and most important objective of social work practice—quality of service to clients. This limited vision of the supervisory relationship has also led researchers to focus exclusively on debates related to the dynamics between the supervisor and the supervisee, such as supervisory functions and professional autonomy. In order to discuss social work supervision in a holistic manner, we have to reconceptualize the supervisory relationship as a multi-faceted relationship among the agency, the supervisor, the supervisee, and the client, within a cultural context (refer to Figure 2).
Figure 2: A Comprehensive Model of Social Work Supervision
3.4 The Agency, the Supervisor, the Supervisee, and the Client

The process of social work supervision in an agency is affected by its organizational goals, organizational structure, policy and procedures, service setting, and organizational climate. All are related to the culture of the task environment of the organization (Kast & Rosenzweig, 1985). As far as the agency is concerned, supervision is a tool for achieving organizational objectives that uses organizational policy and procedures in a specific service setting and within an organizational structure which exists, within the bounds of a specific organizational climate. The supervisor, as a "middle person," has to be a mediator and a liaison between the agency and the supervisee. On the one hand, supervisors are administrators and, as such, members of the agency's management; on the other hand, they rank as the highest frontline staff. Supervisors have to use their own supervisory styles and skills in order to play the various roles required to fulfill their responsibilities. They have to follow agency policy and procedures, and interpret them to supervisees. During this process, supervisors have to make policy and procedures specific, concrete, and workable. Supervisees as professional frontline practitioners have their own training background, working experience, training needs, and level of competence. All these culturally related variables will affect the format and frequency of their supervision. Finally, clients have their own problems. The way in which clients perceive their problems is very much influenced by their culture (Chau, 1995; Lee, 1996) and also affects their means of seeking help and using the resources provided by the social workers. Naturally, the outcomes of the social work intervention are closely associated with the culturally embedded worker-client relationship.
3.4.1 The Agency and the Supervisor

In the relationship between the agency and the supervisor, agency policy governs the behaviour of supervisors. Although there may be no specific and concrete working guidelines, the supervisor serves as a "middle person" in the organization and is a channel between the agency and the supervisee. By means of the monitoring role of the supervisor in the supervisory process, the supervisee’s practice is made to conform to agency goals. At the same time, the supervisee obtains direction from the supervisor. Thus, the administrative accountability between the supervisee and the agency is established indirectly through supervision.

3.4.2 The Supervisory Process: Interaction between the Supervisor and the Supervisee

As noted, research on supervision has traditionally focused only on the supervisory process. The core of this process is the supervisory relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee. This relationship consists of three major components: the supervisory contract, the choice of an appropriate format for supervision, and a development process that consists of several stages. Within the supervisory contract, goals, expectations, and tasks are set. By establishing an agreed-upon contract, both the supervisor and the supervisee come to understand both their rights and responsibilities, and, in addition, they determine the schedule and skills required. A supervisory contract can serve as a plan, an agreement, and as a standard for
evaluation. The format of supervision is chosen according to the level of professional autonomy allowed by the agency, the supervisory styles and skills of the supervisor, and the needs and level of experience of the supervisee. Once again, most of these factors are influenced by culture. At various stages in the supervisory process, there are indicators that measure the progress of both the supervisory relationship and the supervisee's advancement. These indicators give both the supervisor and the supervisee a clear step-by-step action guideline to improve job performance (Tsui, 1998).

From another point of view, the supervisor-supervisee relationship may be perceived as a process consisting of a variety of administrative, professional, and psychological components. Within each component, a number of supervisory tasks have to be fulfilled by the supervisor, who must assume a variety of supervisory roles. This interactional process is characterized by use of authority, exchange of information, and expressions of emotion. These three kinds of interpersonal transactions, in fact, represent the three major supervisory functions—the administrative, educational, and supportive functions—which, of course, overlap with each other.

3.4.3 The Supervisee and the Client

Between the supervisee and the client there is a worker-client relationship that is mainly a professional helping relationship. It is governed by a professional code of ethics and by agency policy. In this worker-client relationship, the supervisees use the knowledge they have acquired
from their social work training program and the advice given by their supervisors to work with clients to achieve the intervention objectives. Possible client outcomes can be a change in relationships, an enhancement of awareness, or a behavioural change. Effective client outcomes are, of course, the ultimate objective of social work supervision (Harkness & Poertner, 1989; Harkness, 1995). In other words, supervision eventually works for the clients, and not only for the workers (Kaduhsin, 1992a).

3.4.4 The Client and the Agency

The relationship between client and agency can be viewed as a relationship between service consumer and a service provider. In the social work field, most service consumers do not have to pay the cost of the service received. The client is not a direct service consumer because the consumer who receives the service and the funder who pays for it are two separate entities. As long as the government or a donor pays the bill for human services, there will not be direct administrative accountability from the agency to the client in a real sense. However, as service consumers, clients can empower themselves to give feedback to the funder, and thus indirectly bring pressure to change the agency.

3.5 Implications for Social Work Supervision

Seeing the supervisory relationship as a fourfold process helps to explain the behaviour of the parties in that process in a more precise way. In the supervisory process, supervisees have to be accountable to the client, but not directly. They are only accountable to the client through
the supervisor and the agency. Hence, as long as the social worker is not employed directly by the client, some sort of supervision will probably be necessary. This analysis also reveals why supervision in private practice has different features. Because the client pays the bill for service, a direct service provider-customer accountability from the worker to the client is established. The need for indirect accountability through supervision is, therefore, reduced.

The model of social work supervision proposed here provides a holistic view of the context of social work supervision (see Figure 2). Culture, not the organization, is recognized as the major context. In addition, the components of social work supervision are reconceptualized within a wider perspective. In this model, the effectiveness of supervision depends on several factors: the relationships among the individual parties (the agency, the supervisor, the supervisee, and the client); the contract, format, and development stages of the supervisory process; the balance among the various supervisory functions; and the relationships among the features of supervision and the culture of the external environment.

This new model of social work supervision shows that past research studies on supervision confined themselves to a restrictive perspective: a supervisory process in which the supervisor-supervisee relationship is the core. Confining attention to the supervisory process has shortened our vision and limited our discussion to narrowly focused issues, for example, compatibility among various supervisory functions and the issue of professional autonomy. This focus does not contribute significantly to theory building in social work supervision, nor does it provide philosophical insight or practical action guidelines for researchers and practitioners.
It is time for us to turn our efforts and attention to the construction of a more comprehensive model of social work supervision based on data from different cultural contexts. The model proposed in this study is intended to encourage the creation of a grounded theory of social work supervision.

3.6 Culture as the Context for Supervision

Traditionally, social work supervision has been recognized as an indirect social work practice embedded in an organizational setting (Austin, 1981; Holloway & Brager, 1989; Miller, 1987; Munson, 1993). For this reason, the organization has been taken as the context for supervisory practice and researchers have focused their studies on the supervisor-supervisee relationship within human service organizations. Hence, past investigations have focused on factors related to the supervisor-supervisee relationship within an organizational context, for example, the use of supervisory authority, the supervisory contract, supervisory roles and styles, and supervisory functions and tasks.

The above view, however, is valid only when one perceives supervision as a process taking place between two parties—the supervisor and the supervisee—both of whom are employees of a human service organization. However, when one considers supervision as an interactional process involving four parties—the agency, the supervisor, the supervisee, and the client—the agency becomes an integral part of the supervision process (Holloway & Brager, 1989). The agency itself is no longer the context for social work supervision. Obviously, if we
perceive supervision as a multi-faceted interactional process that involves the agency as one of the participating parties, we need to identify the factors that affect all four participating parties. A wider perspective is needed for explaining the dynamics of these four parties, a perspective that includes the environment of the organization.

As an enabling social work process, social work supervision involves considerable interaction and exchange among the agency, the supervisor, the supervisee, and the client, and each of these parties have objectives that are embedded in a specific cultural context. Within this four-party relationship, frontline social workers report the progress of their professional intervention to their supervisors. Supervisors report the key information about the service delivery to the top management of the agency. The agency has to be accountable and responsive to the needs of the clients in order to receive the support of the community. Culture deeply influences the problems of clients and the solutions to these problems, the intervention approach of the supervisee, the roles and styles of the supervisors, and the organizational goals and processes of the agency.

Unfortunately, “culture” is very difficult to define; it is very abstract and has different meanings for different people in different contexts (Berry & Laponce, 1994; Ingold, 1994). Culture is a shared system of concepts or mental representations, established by convention and reproduced by transmission. Anthropologists in the past have adapted their notions of culture to suit the dominant concerns of the day, and they will continue to do so. Therefore, debates on the correct meaning of culture are always inconclusive (Ingold, 1994). We have to understand that unless we identify culture as a set of specific traits, it is very difficult to have meaningful
The term "culture" was first used by Tylor (1871) to refer to a complex whole that includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, customs, and other capabilities and habits acquired by a member of society. A comprehensive survey by Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) identified over two hundred formal definitions. They divided these definitions into six groups: descriptive (listing features); historical (emphasizing heritage and descent); normative (emphasizing shared rules); psychological (emphasizing the processes of adaptation and learning); structural (emphasizing organization and pattern); and genetic (emphasizing the origin or genesis of culture). No single definition has gained general acceptance (Berry & Laponce, 1994; Goodenough, 1996).

Other scholars have attempted to define "culture" using a fourfold typology (Ingold, 1994; Jenks, 1993). First, culture is a general state of mind; it refers to an aspiration towards individual human achievement or emancipation. This reflects a highly individualist philosophical commitment to particularity, difference, and perfection. Second, culture is an embodied collective category. It refers to the state of intellectual and/or moral development in society. Culture, in this aspect, is the same as civilization. Third, culture is a descriptive and concrete category. It can be conceptualized as the collective body of arts and intellectual work of a society. This is one of the ways "culture" is used in everyday language. Fourth, culture is a social category—the whole way of life of a people. This is the pluralist and potentially democratic sense of culture often used in sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies (Jenks, 1993).
Geertz (1973) defined culture as an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols. LeVine (1984) defined culture as "a shared organisation of ideas that includes the intellectual, moral, and aesthetic standards prevalent in a community and the meanings of communicative actions. But formal definitions do little to clarify the nature of culture; clarification is only possible through ethnography" (LeVine, 1984, p. 67).

Instead of defining culture itself, D'Andrade (1984) provides three major views about the nature of culture. One is the notion of culture as knowledge, as the accumulation of information. According to this view, culture can and does accumulate and does not need to be shared if the distribution of knowledge is such that the proper "linking understandings" are maintained. The second view is that culture consists of "conceptual structures" that create the central reality of a people, so that they "inhabit the world they imagine" (Geertz, 1983). According to this view, culture is not just shared, it is intersubjectively shared, so that everyone assumes that others see the same things they see. In this view, culture does not accumulate any more than the grammar of a language accumulates, and the total size of a culture, in terms of its body of information, is relatively small. The entire system appears to be tightly interrelated, but not necessarily without contradictions. The third view of the nature of culture mediates between the "culture as knowledge" and the "culture as constructed reality" positions. It views culture and society as something made up of institutions such as the family, the market, the farm, the church, the village, and so on (D'Andrade, 1984).

Culture is difficult to define, but easy to distinguish and identity. It is the way of life and
the way of viewing the world of a specific social group. Distinct cultural traits can be identified. Within the context of supervision, culture affects all four parties involved in the supervisory relationship. Social work supervision is a part of a complex theoretical and professional value system and service network situated inside a particular culture. Therefore, it can only be understood as part of the cultural context of the participants. The objectives and policies of an agency, for example, are shaped by the culture of its top management, the culture of its funding sources, the culture of the community, and the culture of the profession. Supervisory roles, styles, and skills are all very much influenced by the culture of individual supervisors. Similarly, the supervisees' working experience, training needs, and emotional needs are all influenced by their culture. Finally, culture determines how clients interpret their problems and how they get help to solve them (Chau, 1995; Lee, 1996; Peterson, 1991; Tsang and George, 1998). Thus, all four parties are embedded in culture as the major context for supervision. The emphasis on reciprocity and the family network in Chinese culture, for example, may have an explicit and implicit impact on the behaviour of the supervisee, the supervisee, the agency, and the client.

However, the notion of culture as a major context for supervision has not received as much attention as it deserves; in fact, it has largely been neglected by both researchers and supervisors, as mentioned in Chapter Two. Little empirical research has been done in this area (Harkness & Poertner, 1989; Tsui, 1997b). Although the question of how to practice supervision in a specific culture or in a multicultural setting is an important topic for research and practice, none of the published empirical literature in the last five decades has touched on this area though there is a fast-growing literature on cross-cultural social work practice in North
3.7 Summary

The aim of this chapter was to construct a more comprehensive model of social work supervision than that normally found in the current literature. In the new model, both the supervisory relationship and the supervisory process were reconceptualized in a holistic manner. This reconceptualization will provide a wider perspective for research and theory building in the future. It is this model that will provide the guiding framework for the study. The influence of culture as the major context was emphasized. Although culture is a social construct that is very difficult to define, cultural traits are relatively easy to identify and distinguish. The next step for theory building in social work supervision will be the task of generating a culturally sensitive model of social work supervision grounded in the data collected from a specific cultural context.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research question, the research approach, and the design of the study. The research question is stated in Section One. In Section Two, the design and methods of data collection are described and explained. The management and analysis of data is reported in Section Three. This section also describes the measures taken to ensure the trustworthiness and safeguard the ethics of the study. In Section Four, the limitations of the study are discussed. Section Five is a summary of the chapter.

4.1 Research Question

This study explores social work supervision in Hong Kong, in order to generate a model of social work supervision within this specific cultural context. This endeavour will help us to understand the impact of the cultural context on the supervisory process as well as the format and the structure of supervision itself.

The study will explore the following three questions, in order to develop a model of social
work supervision in the cultural context of Hong Kong.

a. What are the distinct features of the format of supervision, the purpose of supervision, the nature of the supervisory relationship, and the use of authority in the supervisory process in social work supervision in Hong Kong?

b. How does cultural context influence the supervisory practice of social workers in Hong Kong?

c. What is the ideal supervisory practice according to social workers in Hong Kong?

4.2 Research Design and Methods of Data Collection

The research was designed to have three stages. Stage one consisted of six focus group sessions, three with supervisors and three with supervisees. At stage two, forty in-depth interviews were conducted, twenty with supervisors and twenty with supervisees. The third stage of research consisted of a focus group session with six local experts on social work supervision.

Research on organizations is always politically sensitive as it is influenced by the power and interests of the members of the organization. In Hong Kong, this influence is strengthened by Chinese cultural traits that emphasize face (Chan, 1990; Chu, 1990; Hwang, 1990; King, 1990b; Wen, 1990; Yang, 1987), which represents the status of specific individuals in a social network. As a result, any study of supervision for social workers needs to be conducted in a very careful and sensitive way. The supervisory process involves two completely different but equally intense
relationships. The first is a hierarchical formal relationship between superior and subordinate, and the second is the horizontal informal relationship between partners on a job. Both are very close relationships, but the distribution of power is so unequal that it is difficult to interview the supervisor and the supervisee as a dyad. An in-depth study of social work supervision in Hong Kong must take this into consideration.

This is a qualitative study of social work supervision in Hong Kong. A grounded theory approach was used to further develop the model of social work supervision proposed in Chapter Three. In the research process, focus group interviews were used to generate ideas for formulating an interview guide for in-depth interviews with supervisors and supervisees respectively. Aided by twenty years of practice experience in the social work field in Hong Kong, I conducted in-depth interviews to explore the format of supervision, the purpose of supervision, the supervisory relationship, and the use of supervisory authority. After the in-depth interviews, another focus group interview was conducted with local experts in social work supervision, including agency directors and social work scholars, to see if their views suggested an adjustment of the model of social work supervision that emerged from the analysis of the data from the in-depth interviews.

I chose a qualitative research method because this study is related to culture and the qualitative method is best-suited to the research questions. This conclusion was reached after reviewing the existing literature on the history of social work supervision, the theoretical models of social work supervision, and empirical research on social work supervision presented in Chapter
Two. I found no studies on the effect of culture on supervision. Hence, a qualitative study on social work supervision in the cultural context of Hong Kong is a significant step towards theory building.

As a means of providing a preliminary picture of how Chinese culture influences the supervisory practices in Hong Kong, qualitative research enabled me to have face-to-face contact with informants who are participants in the practice and who can describe their own motives. These in-depth interviews provided an understanding of the special and particular language of the practice of social work supervision within a specific cultural context. As Spradley (1980) observes, culture can and should only be explored through the words and actions of members of the specific social group. I examined what people do (in this study, the behaviour of supervisors and supervisees), what they say (the views and wishes of supervisors and supervisees), the tension between what they really do (supervisory relationship and use of supervisory authority) and what they ought to do (purposes of supervision), and what they make and use (format of supervision). Later, I used these data to modify the comprehensive model of social work supervision arising from Western literature so that it is applicable in a Chinese society.

A grounded theory approach is one of the traditions of qualitative research. It is a general methodology for developing theory by thinking about and conceptualizing data collected systematically (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). It was developed by two sociologists, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in 1967 (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The methods and procedures were elaborated upon in subsequent works (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin,
1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In contrast to the proponents of the traditional deductive approach to theory building, ground theorists hold that theories should be "grounded" in data from the field, especially in the actions, interactions, and social processes of members of a social group (Creswell, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The essence of the grounded theory approach, then, is its emphasis on theory development.

A grounded theory approach has two important theoretical functions. One is to generate a new theory, and the other is to modify an existing theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In this study, the latter function was adopted. As mentioned at the end of Chapter Two, there has been little research effort geared towards theory building that is grounded in data collected from the social work field and viewed as part of a specific cultural context. A grounded theory study is an appropriate approach for exploring social work supervision in Hong Kong. Since in this study, the model of social work supervision that was developed from the Western literature, the model will be modified after collecting data from the social work field in Hong Kong.

In this grounded theory study, I examined how supervisors and supervisees act and react in supervision. To achieve this, I developed and interrelated categories of information collected mainly from in-depth interviews, and then created a visual model of social work supervision in the cultural context of Hong Kong. Based on the grounded theory approach, I used systematic procedures to analyze and develop the theory. The procedures included open coding, axial coding, selective coding, and a conditional matrix. The themes represented the relationship among various
categories related to supervisory practice within a visual model. In a grounded theory study, the researcher emphasizes rigour and scientific credibility, in order to generate a theory that provides an abstract analytical schema (in this study, the model of social work supervision) of a phenomenon (in this study, the process of social work supervision) that relates to a particular situation (in this study, the cultural context of Hong Kong).

4.2.1 Sampling

Following the typical procedures of a grounded theory study, I began by selecting a homogeneous sample of individuals to study. The sample included informants with similar identities in similar situations. In this study, the homogeneous sample was supervisors and supervisees in social work in Hong Kong. I invited some of my friends in social work to be informants, and they, in turn, suggested names of supervisors and supervisees who were willing to be informants. As the data collection proceeded and the categories emerged, I turned to a more heterogeneous sample to see under what conditions the categories hold true. In this study, I selected social work supervisors and supervisees with different grades, various lengths of working experience, and different service settings to be informants.

Again, following the procedure of grounded theory studies, I conducted twenty interviews with supervisors and twenty interviews with supervisees. The strategy for selecting the informants is usually theoretical sampling, which uses theoretical purpose and proven theoretical relevance as sampling selection criteria. This means that certain concepts are deemed significant because they are repeatedly present or notably absent, or because they earn the status of categories. A category
represents a unit of information composed of events, happenings, instances, or alternative pattern that become repetitive and are thematically saturated (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The goal is to maximize the categories and diversities until no additional data are found to develop the properties of the category. The number of interviews and visits conducted therefore depended on whether the theory was elaborated in all of its complexity. The researcher uses a constant comparative method to compare the information gathered from the field and the emerging categories (Creswell, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Theoretical sampling is cumulative because concepts and their relationships accumulate through the interplay between data collection and analysis. In the process, sampling increases the depth of focus. In the initial sampling, I chose open sampling and generated as many categories as possible. In the process of axial coding, relational and variational sampling was adopted to maximize differences at the dimensional level in the data. This was done systematically and purposefully: I moved from one situation to another, gathering data on theoretically relevant categories. I chose informants and service settings that maximize opportunities to collect data regarding variations among the dimensions of categories and to find out what happens during changes. In the process of selective coding, discriminate sampling was adopted. It allowed me to ask questions relating to the categories and then analyze the data again. This process enabled me to collect the evidence to support or refute the questions, thereby verifying the data. Consistency, variation, process, and flexibility are all important components of theoretical sampling. Finally, I compared the literature review to the data gathered, to see the differences.
The general rule in a grounded theory study is to sample until saturation of each category is reached (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). There are three indications of theoretical saturation: first, no new or relevant data seems to emerge; second, category development is dense as paradigm elements are taken along with variation and process; and third, the relationships between categories are well-established and validated.

In Hong Kong, social workers are divided into various grades based on their professional qualifications and experience. Most frontline social workers are social work assistants (SWAs) who are sub-degree holders and assistant social work officers (ASWOs) who are BSW graduates or above. Supervisors in charge of children and youth service and in community development teams are assistant social work officers. The supervisors in clinical service settings such as family service centres are social work officers (SWOs) who have had at least five years’, post-BSW experience. Using theoretical sampling, supervisors have been included if they fit the criteria for supervising frontline staff who have been trained in social work. For supervisees, candidates must be full-time paid staff, trained in social work, who hold a social work position and are supervised by a senior social worker.

Social work supervisors with the grades of social work officers and assistant social work officers were invited to participate in three focus group sessions for supervisors. If they accepted the invitation, they were assigned to the three focus group sessions according to their availability.
There were also three focus group sessions for supervisees. Social workers with the grades of assistant social work officers and social work assistants were invited to participate. In the focus group sessions for supervisors, both social work officers and assistant social work officers were mixed. In the focus group sessions for supervisees, there were six social work assistants in session one and two, and five assistant social work officers in session three. There were eight informants in session one, six informants in session two, and another six in session three. Twenty social work supervisors and twenty social work supervisees were invited to participate in the in-depth interviews. They were not dyads since it is a sensitive matter to interview both the supervisor and the supervisee (Munson, 1981). For the focus group session with local experts on social work supervision, six agency directors and social work scholars knowledgeable in supervision were invited to contribute their views on the supervisory practice in Hong Kong, in order to modify the visual model of social work supervision generated from in-depth interviews.

4.2.2 Data Collection

The process of data collection was divided into three stages: stage one involved focus groups with supervisors and supervisees; stage two, in-depth interviews with supervisors and supervisees; and stage three, a focus group interview with local experts in social work supervision.
Stage One: Focus Groups with Supervisors and Supervisees

Focus groups were used to explore the distinctive cultural dimensions of supervisory practice in Hong Kong. The focus group provides a good forum for both supervisors and supervisees to express their views and ideas about supervision in a free and comfortable environment. The information collected was used to develop a guide for conducting in-depth interviews with social work supervisors and supervisees. Focus groups were held to verify the preliminary selection of research questions for the study. As noted, there were three focus group sessions for supervisors and three sessions for supervisees. Their purpose was to obtain direction and feedback from supervisors and supervisees on the important aspects of the purpose of supervision, the supervisory relationship, and the supervisory process in Hong Kong. In each group session, there were five to ten participants. A highly experienced social work supervisor and I moderated all the focus group sessions.

The purpose of the study and the rights of the participants were clearly explained to the participants, and each participant signed a consent form. Before the discussion, dinner or refreshments were served. There was an informal chat as a warm-up for participants. After the group session, a small souvenir (for example, a diary) was given to each participant. I invited two experts in supervision to join us. One was an expert in clinical supervision and the other was a fieldwork director of a local school of social work. Each had eighteen years of experience in supervisory practice. All sessions of the focus groups were audiotaped and transcribed for analysis.
according to procedures developed by scholars on focus group method (Berwald & Bellerose, 1990; Morgan, 1997; Morgan, 1993; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). The feedback from the focus group sessions was analyzed using focus group analysis techniques (for example, code mapping transcripts, overall grid formation, and inter-group comparisons) (Knodel, 1993).

Stage Two: In-depth Interviews with Supervisors and Supervisees

In-depth interviews were face-to-face encounters between the researcher and the informant for the purpose of understanding the informants’ perspectives on their lives, experiences, or situations, as expressed in their words (Kvale, 1996). The length of this stage of the research was eighteen months. I used these interviews to explore an in-depth view of supervisory practice in Hong Kong. They also revealed the motives of the informants. During the in-depth interviews, I spent most of the time in conversation with the informant. The focus of our discussion was the experience of the supervisory process in Hong Kong. In this forum, an insider’s definition and perception of the social reality of the supervisory process was studied using the language of social workers in Hong Kong.

After analyzing the discussion during the focus group sessions, an interview guide for in-depth interviews was developed according to the research questions and the answers provided by the participants of focus groups. Key components, including the format and purpose of supervision,
the supervisory relationship, supervisory authority, and ideal supervision were identified. Probes for further information were also developed. After constructing the interview guide, one supervisor and one supervisee were interviewed. The two pilot interviews were audiotaped and transcribed in Chinese. After analysis, two interview guides (one for supervisors and another for supervisees) were finalized and used as guides for discussions between the researcher and informants in the in-depth interviews.

All the interviews were arranged in advance. All the social work supervisors and supervisees in Hong Kong were potential informants for this study. The informants were identified according to their service settings, grades, years of experience, and gender, in order to maximize the categories of informants. Interviews were conducted in places and at times convenient to the informants. The interviews were conducted in Cantonese but included some English terms. This mixed language is unique to social workers and other professionals trained in Hong Kong, since they learned the theory of social work in English but practise it in Cantonese. A brief description of the objectives of the study and an assurance of the confidentiality of the data were given to the informants. The informants were required to sign a consent letter to ensure that they understood their rights before participating in the interviews. The names of the informants and their organizations are not recorded on the audio tapes. This released most of the tension of the informants, especially the supervisees. The interviews lasted from an hour to one-and-a-half hours. Usually, supervisors had longer interviews than supervisees. Most supervisors preferred to be interviewed in their offices because they are accustomed to having a private room for confidential conversations. The
supervisees preferred to come to my office on campus in the town centre as most of them do not have their own offices.

The interviews were semi-structured. The interview guide was used as a basis for discussion and also as an outline for coding the data for analysis. This helped me to focus on the predetermined topics while remaining informal in the conversation and free to probe unanticipated areas. The informants were also encouraged to introduce any topics that they considered relevant to the research area. As noted, the content of the interviews was audiotaped for transcription and analysis in order to develop a model of social work supervision in the cultural context of Hong Kong.

Stage Three: Focus Group with Local Experts in Social Work Supervision

After I conducted the six focus group sessions and in-depth interviews with the supervisors and supervisees, I organized a focus group session with six agency directors and social work scholars with advanced knowledge and extensive experience in social work supervision. Their views were used to refine the model of social work supervision that I constructed on the basis of the review of North American literature. The group session was also audio-taped for transcription and analysis.
4.3 Data Management and Analysis

4.3.1 Data Analysis

After listening to the audio tapes of the in-depth interviews, I transcribed them into Chinese and translated them into English. The conversation concerning the theory building of social work supervision was transcribed. Reflective and marginal remarks were added. While collecting data, I began the analysis. This is a “zigzag” process (Creswell, 1998): I went to the field to interview the informants, returned to analyze the data, went again to gather information again, then returned to analyze further, and so on. Memos were attached to significant themes, and data were coded into patterns.

Four methods of data analysis were adopted: open coding, axial coding, selective coding, and a conditional matrix (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In open coding, I examined the transcripts and field notes in my journal in order to develop initial categories of information about the phenomenon. Using the constant comparative approach, I attempted to “saturate” the categories. To do so, I continued looking for representative examples of the category until the new information obtained provide no further insight. Within each category, I found several properties, or subcategories, and looked for data to dimensionalize the category, or show its extreme possibilities on a continuum. Finally, this process reduced the database to a small set of themes that characterize the supervisory process under study.
Axial coding involves assembling the data in new ways in order to interconnect the categories. Using a coding paradigm or logic paradigm, I tried to identify a central phenomenon (i.e., a central category about the phenomenon that explores causal conditions that influence the phenomenon), specifies strategies (i.e., the actions or interactions that result from the central phenomenon), the cultural context and the interviewing conditions (i.e., the narrow and broad conditions that influence the strategies), and the consequences for this phenomenon. I also created a coding paradigm that enabled the visualization of the wide range of conditions and consequences related to the central phenomenon in this study—the supervisory process. This paradigm is a theoretical model that visually portrays the interrelationship of the axial coding categories of information.

Selective coding involves writing a story that integrates the categories in the axial coding model. In this phase, conditional propositions (or hypotheses) are typically presented. I identified the core category and tried to relate it to other categories systematically. This means that I had to validate the relationship between the core category and other categories in order to enrich, refine, and develop these categories.

The conditional matrix refers to the final stage wherein the researcher may develop and visually portray a discursive set of theoretical propositions that elucidates the social, historical, and economic conditions influencing the central phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The final
embedded structure is the "integrative diagram," in which I presented the actual theory in the form of a visual model. This represents the culminating visual model of the study.

On the basis of the data analysis process and my experience of supervisory practice in Hong Kong, I then developed a substantive level theory. The end product of the study is a visual supervisory model with specific components: a central phenomenon, causal conditions, strategies, conditions and context, and consequences. All of these are prescribed categories of information in the theory. The theory is subjected to further empirical testing with the introduction of the variables or categories derived from field-based data, although the study may end before further testing because the generation of a theory is a legitimate outcome.

In this study, I described and compared the cases and explored the meaning of the interviews. Those data with potential importance for analysis were fully transcribed and translated into English in order to illustrate the themes and patterns identified from the study. During the process of the in-depth interviews, I jotted down field notes in a journal. These enabled me to reflect on the data and pursue a better in-depth understanding of supervisory practice in Hong Kong.

4.3.2 Efforts to Ensure Trustworthiness

Qualitative research emphasizes the credibility and dependability of the findings (Lincoln &
Guba, 1985). The strength of qualitative research lies in its narrative power, which enables an understanding of the undocumented processes that may not be revealed without close contact and detailed knowledge of the people in context. Although there is no way to achieve absolute trustworthiness in a qualitative study, I have taken several measures to ensure the trustworthiness of the study, as listed below.

a. Triangulation

Using this method, I went to several types of sources that could provide insights about the same events or relationships. The aim of this procedure of qualitative inquiry is to examine a single social phenomenon from more than one vantage point. This may involve the use of multiple researchers, multiple information sources, or multiple methods, in order to enhance the inter-subjectivity of the study. I collected information about supervisory practice in Hong Kong from multiple sources: the supervisors, the supervisees, and the local experts. Two local researchers were invited to be peer researchers who would help conduct the focus group sessions and conduct peer debriefing. Multiple methods were also used in this study: a literature review, focus groups sessions, and in-depth interviews.

b. Peer Debriefing

Peer debriefing is a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner similar to
an analytic session for the purpose of exploring aspects of an inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer’s mind (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, two PhD candidates from other universities served as peer examiners. One was an expert with eighteen years of practice experience in clinical supervision, and the other, a student fieldwork director with eighteen years of experience in student fieldwork supervision. Through this process, I discussed the rationale, research design, data collection procedures, and data analysis methods of the study with the two peer examiners. In addition, I invited four informants to spot check the transcription, in order to ensure the credibility of the study.

c. Members’ Checking

Two supervisors and two supervisees were randomly selected to countercheck the accuracy of the transcriptions of their own in-depth interviews. This measure aims to enhance the reliability of the interpretation of the informants’ contributions. In addition, the English version of the transcript was checked by my academic peers to ensure an accurate translation of the Chinese transcript. Parts of transcript were selected for translation from English back into Chinese to ensure the accuracy of translation.

d. Literature Review

After developing the theory or model, I used the literature of social work supervision
published in North America for “supplemental validation.” In addition, references to Chinese culture were used for checking the credibility of the findings related to the cultural influence. I referred to the literature in order to validate the accuracy of the findings and to investigate any discrepancies between the findings and the published literature. Theoretical literature and empirical research literature on social work supervision published in the last five decades were reviewed and compared with the findings of the study.

4.3.3. Ethical Considerations

I clearly briefed each informant about his or her right to refuse to join the study or to withdraw from the study. Consent forms were signed by the informants. The method of interview safeguarded the confidentiality and the right of withdrawal of the informants. Informants could refrain from answering any questions that they felt were sensitive. In the interviewing process, they could also skip any questions or terminate the interview. Informants were reassured that their supervisors or supervisees would not be interviewed in the same study.

4.4 Limitations of the Study

As supervision involves a power relationship between a supervisor and a supervisee in a formal organization, it is a very sensitive topic to study. In Hong Kong, this sensitivity may be increased because the Chinese culture, which emphasizes face, does not encourage supervisors or supervisees to discuss any negative aspects of supervision that involve both parties. In addition, the
top management of some of human service organizations may not allow the staff to participate in in-depth interviews conducted by an external researcher on supervision, because such interviews are perceived as violations of the privacy of internal agency matters. Finally, the impact of managerialism and changes to the granting system, which introduced a demand for a high level of job performance with reduced resources, also threaten frontline social workers in Hong Kong. Fortunately, only two of the supervisees who were invited to participate refused the invitation due to personal reasons.

4.5 Summary

This study examined the state of the practice of social work supervision in Hong Kong and explored the influence of Chinese culture on supervisory practice. A qualitative research method was adopted within the grounded theory tradition. Theoretical sampling was used to invite supervisors, supervisees, and local experts to participate in the study. At the first stage, three focus groups for supervisors and three for supervisees were conducted to collect their views on social work supervision in Hong Kong. At the second stage, twenty supervisors and twenty supervisees were chosen by theoretical sampling and were interviewed in depth. At the third stage, after analyzing the data, local experts on supervision were invited to participate in a focus group session to give their views on the interpretation of the results. Open coding, axial coding, selective coding, and a conditional matrix were used to analyze the data with a constant comparative approach.
Limitations of the study was discussed. Triangulation, peer debriefing, members’ checking, and a literature review were used to safeguard the trustworthiness of the study. Chapter Five, presents the findings which will generate a supervisory model that is applicable to the cultural context of Hong Kong.
CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS

5.1 Background Information on Informants

This chapter presents the findings from the focus group interviews and in-depth interviews with supervisors and supervisees in Hong Kong. Six focus group interviews were conducted: three for supervisors and three for supervisees. For individual interviews, a total of forty informants were interviewed: twenty supervisors and twenty supervisees. To ensure confidentiality, the names used in this chapter are not the informants’ real names. For supervisors, surnames were used, and for supervisees, first names were used. This mode of address reflects the traditional office practice in human service organizations in Hong Kong. For information about individual informants, please refer to the Appendix III.

Twenty social work supervisors were selected from eleven service settings. Ten were male, and ten, female. The service settings included school social work, integrated service teams for youth, outreach services for youth, children and youth centres, elderly services, rehabilitation, residential services, substance abuse counselling, family service centres, employee assistance programs, and services for new immigrants. The informants’ work
experience ranged from four years to twenty years. Eight were Social Work Officers (SWOs) (service supervisors with at least five years of post-BSW working experience); another eleven were Assistant Social Work Officers (ASWOs) (unit supervisors with BSW degrees). Only one was a Senior Social Work Officer (SSWO) (a senior service supervisor with at least eight years of post-BSW working experience).

Of the twenty supervisees interviewed, five informants were male and fifteen were female. Five were Assistant Social Work Officers, and another thirteen, Social Work Assistants (SWAs) (social workers with two years of full-time or four years of part-time sub-degree training at Diploma level). There were also two Senior Social Work Assistants (Social Work Diploma holders with at least five years of SWA experience). They came from ten service settings, including an integrated service team for youth, outreach social work for youth, children and youth centres, school social work, family service, rehabilitation, residential service, medical social work, hotline service, and community development. Their working experience ranged from one to twenty years. Most had four to six years of experience in the social work field.

5.2 Format and Structure of Supervision

5.2.1 Format of Supervision Sessions

The focus group sessions and in-depth interviews confirmed that the format of social
work supervision was mainly the one-to-one session. The format of these sessions is usually an individual tutorial. The supervisor and the supervisee discuss issues with a focus, such as a case review. However, the discussion might touch upon agency policy, since the goal of the supervisor and the supervisee is to handle the case in the best way within existing agency policy, regardless of the size of the organization. Group sessions such as case conferences, team meetings, sharing meetings, and development groups for professional social work staff are used as supplementary means of supervision. In both large and small organizations, the supervisor might not feel comfortable talking about personal feelings in a group session. In the individual sessions, supervisors feel it is much easier to talk about their own feelings and personal matters.

*Kenneth, a youth worker with four years' experience in a children and youth centre, said, "In the group sessions with many staff, my supervisor seldom talks about his feelings. In individual sessions, the supervisor talks about his feelings. I also talk about my family and personal feelings. I don't expect him to respond, but I hope he can listen and can understand my situation and difficulties."*

Some supervisors use individual sessions and group sessions in rotation. A supervisor also separates junior staff and experienced staff since their needs and concerns are different. For urgent matters (for example, cases in crisis, program plans for meeting deadlines, or personal matters), supervisees always approach their supervisors immediately. In fact, this kind of ad hoc face-to-face contact between supervisor and supervisee, though it is not a
formal supervision session, serves as an essential form of communication to resolve immediate difficulties. Through informal chats, each learns about the other's daily life and work. It is assumed that the supervisor and the supervisee keep the content of their discussion in the individual sessions confidential. However, the fact is that some supervisees discuss with colleagues how their supervisors talked to them in their individual sessions.

Billy, a very young frontline social worker in an outreach team for youth, told me, "In fact, colleagues will share the content of the discussion in the individual supervision session with others. If the supervisor is not consistent, everyone will know."

Except in cases where it is stipulated by agency policy, supervision sessions are not regular and scheduled in advance, as one might expect. Supervisors report that, in some service units, formal supervision sessions are only scheduled for conducting staff appraisal exercises. That means there are no real ongoing supervision sessions. Almost all supervisors interviewed claimed that the information from supervision sessions would be used as one of the sources for staff appraisal. In some human service organizations, then, supervision sessions are also performance appraisal sessions.

Nancy, a caseworker in a government-run family service centre, described the format of her supervision session: "There are two kinds of supervision sessions. The first one is the performance appraisal session, which is conducted every six months. The other kind involves cases that are brought up by the supervisee in consultations with the supervisor about methods and skills for handling cases."

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The format and frequency of social work supervision are influenced by agency policy, the nature of service setting, the nature of the tasks, the experience of the supervisees, and the attitude of the staff. For example, in residential settings, the staff have to be on shift duty, so it is difficult to bring everyone together for a group supervision session. Still, the unit needs to hold staff meetings to discuss issues that affect everyone in the residential unit. Every staff member must attend a group supervision session one afternoon a week.

Miss Ching, who is in charge of a children and youth centre, explained to me, "There are different foci for different staff according to their seniority, personality, and gender. For junior staff, supervision is orientation. For well-experienced staff, supervision is training and career development. For staff with strong personalities, a non-directive method will be adopted. As a woman, it is easier to talk with another woman; for example, it is easy to have physical contact. As a Chinese woman to supervise a male subordinate is difficult. The male supervisee feels it is difficult to agree with what a female supervisor says. The older staff also query how a supervisor conducts the supervision session. Dealing with this situation, I would ask my supervisor for help."

In most human service organizations, while there is no written supervisory contract, there is a verbal agreement between the supervisor and the supervisee on the format and structure of supervision sessions, which is established at the beginning of their supervisory relationship. Both the supervisor and the supervisee may express their expectations of supervision. However, they seldom evaluate or change the format of the supervision session once they have started the supervisory process.
Mrs. Lok, a highly experienced service supervisor in school social work, said, "There was only a verbal agreement between the supervisee and me when we started our supervision, but we follow the proposed format and seldom make changes."

5.2.2 Content of Supervision Sessions

Regarding the content of supervision sessions, there are two kinds of subject matter. The first is the discussion of the program plan, work plan, or report on work progress. The supervisee starts the session with a verbal report and then asks the advice of the supervisor. In most situations, the supervisor has the final say on the resulting plan of action. This shows the way in which the supervision session acts as a mechanism for establishing the accountability of service quality. The supervisor plays the role of gatekeeper in the process, ensuring that the service outcome is up to the standards expected by the organization and the community. The other frequently discussed subject in supervision sessions is clinical micro skills. This kind of discussion is always based on specific cases. Some supervisors prefer to focus on the direction and principles of the intervention instead of going into the details of every case.

Mr. Wong, a highly experienced supervisor of a counselling centre, explained, "I think the most important aspects of supervision are the ethics and principles in handling cases, not the micro skills."
However, for cases in crisis, supervisors will give specific and concrete instructions and require the supervisee to follow them step by step. In this situation, the supervisee always consults the supervisor. A supervisee would also approach a supervisor about relationships with other colleagues. From the supervisees' perspective, "to be human" means "to be personal". If supervisors are not prepared to talk about personal matters and show concern for their supervisees, they will be perceived as inhuman.

For example, Cindy, a medical social worker in a large public hospital, said, "What I consult my supervisor about is all related to agency policy. For matters related to my clients, I only seek advice when there is trouble. When we can also talk about our feelings, the supervision is much better."

Lily, a youth worker with six years' experience in children and youth services, expressed her feelings about supervision: "Usually we have time to talk about our feelings. Every time, I really feel that I am talking with a friend... However, I also remind myself to be rational. She is my boss; I would be reserved about some things, for example, when my views on programs do not match with hers."

Of course, there are other subjects discussed in supervision sessions. Whenever there is an additional workload, the supervisor will approach the supervisees to canvas their views. In addition, methods of establishing relationships with clients and their significant others (for example, parents and teachers) are discussed in supervision sessions. Some supervisors focus on the needs of the staff at crucial stages of professional development.
Mrs. Lok, an experienced school social work supervisor, said, "For new staff, the most important thing is to calm them down. I try not to handle administrative matters in supervision sessions. I help them to handle relationships with teachers and the dynamics in school. After that, I ask the staff to draft a service plan. As a supervisor, my duty is to help the staff recognize their strengths and weaknesses, position themselves in a team, and survive and function in a service agency. Emotional support is very important to both new and old staff."

Many supervisees talk to their supervisors about their problems working with peers. However, they seldom talk about personal matters, even when they consider their supervisor a good friend. They tend to separate official matters from personal ones and handle these different matters in different places and at different times.

Since 1995, the social welfare sector in Hong Kong has been experiencing granting reviews and rapid changes. The Social Welfare Department of the Hong Kong government introduced a new subvention system composed of three components. The first is a set of service quality standards consisting of four principles, 19 standards, and 79 criteria to assess the service effectiveness, managerial efficiency, and public accountability of non-government organizations receiving government grants. The second is a set of funding service agreements which monitors the quantity and quality of service delivery in specific service settings. The third is a service performance assessment system, which includes self review and review by the Social Welfare Department. Non-government organizations are
negotiating with the Social Welfare Department to adopt a lump sum grant approach, which would give them more autonomy in spending their limited funding. However, there is no guarantee that staff salaries and resource provisions will be comparable to those offered by the government. The Social Welfare Department also contracts out some of welfare services.

This drastic reconstruction of the relationship between the funding source and social welfare organizations will make the service funding and accountability in the welfare sector in Hong Kong more like the American model. It will also make social work supervision even more administratively oriented. Obviously, accountability and progress of work will be the sole concerns of the supervisor, which will change the task environment of social workers and create new tensions between the supervisor and the supervisee.

Mr. Wong, a supervisor in a counselling center, observed, "The recent subvention review did not affect our service objectives; however, it really affected staff communication. The demand from the agency seems unlimited. Services that have been performed well have to be kept up to standard. At the same time, there is demand for more innovative services. The staff are afraid of these demands. I understand the concern of both parties—the agency and the staff. If there were not so many administrative demands, I could encourage the staff to be more creative. I could take proper care of the cases. However, it is difficult to handle administrative matters at the same time. I don't think it is okay to separate administrative supervision from professional supervision. It doesn't work. These two things cannot be cut by a knife."

Mr. Chow, a young supervisor of an outreach service for youth, said, "There is an
impact (of the subvention review). We have to submit figures, and we lack the time to discuss the direction of our service. Fortunately, the situation in our outreach service for youth is relatively better as there are fewer norms and more autonomy."

5.2.3 Time and Place of Supervision Sessions

Although many supervisees hope to schedule regular supervision sessions in order to receive better preparation, many service units only have supervision sessions on an ad hoc basis, initiated by the supervisor or the supervisee. The heavy workload (including meetings and paperwork) makes it very difficult for the supervisor or the supervisee to have regularly scheduled sessions. The supervisor relies on the supervisee to take the initiative in scheduling and preparing supervision sessions.

Mr. So, a supervisor in the rehabilitation field, commented, "The ideal is for the staff to take initiative. Otherwise supervision itself will become a formality."

Supervision sessions are usually rather short. The average is one-and-a-half hours and the lengths range from half an hour to three hours. The physical setting of the supervision sessions affects the feelings of the supervisee. Most sessions are held in the supervisor’s office. Of course, supervisors take this for granted; they feel quite comfortable with the arrangement as they feel secure in their own offices.
Miss Ching, who is in charge of a children and youth centre, said, “We have a supervision room. When we enter the room, I have the feeling to be a supervisor. The feeling is so strong that my awareness of being a supervisor is higher.”

Mr. Choy, a senior supervisor of a resident rehabilitation unit, described his feelings: “When we have a supervision session in my office, I am the boss. Whenever we are in the group room, we become more equal.”

Only a few supervisors use places other than their office for supervision sessions. This arrangement may reflect the organizational culture of the agency. Of course, the limited office space in Hong Kong has to be taken into consideration. In many service units, there is no other room available.

Mr. Chow, a supervisor of outreach teams for the youth, suggested that supervisors and supervisees “go out for supervision session in a casual place. It is because our Director also did so.”

Kevin, a youth worker, observed, “Most of the time, we choose places outside our offices for supervision sessions. It may be a restaurant, a garden, or a university campus. The feeling is relaxed. There are no disturbances, no documents, and no need to remember the work. It is easier to concentrate.”

Supervisors and supervisees seldom prepare a written agenda for the supervision session; however, most jot down notes as their records. For some supervisors, this is a requirement of their agencies, since agencies use the information for staff appraisals. For
others, it is just a convenient practice. The notes remind the supervisor what has to be done in the near future. Most supervisors let their supervisees read their records. Some agencies even require the supervisor and the supervisee to sign a record of the supervision session. The supervisees are very sensitive to their supervisors' remarks.

_For example, a frontline social worker shared her experience in a focus group session: "My supervisor said, if you do not work hard today, you will have to work hard to find a job tomorrow. It makes us scared."_

### 5.3 The Purposes of Supervision

For both supervisors and supervisees, the quality of services to clients is the purpose of supervision in their service units. Supervisees are very aware of their accountability to their supervisors. They easily accept the supervisory function of monitoring the progress of their work. Supervision is a mechanism that makes frontline social workers accountable to senior management and to clients, through their supervisors. Of course, supervision also aims to enhance the communication between the supervisor and the supervisee through the individual supervision sessions. In group supervision sessions, communication and consensus among the members of the work team can also be established. However, the supervisor has to play the role of the group leader with effective strategies and skills, and members have to be ready to share their feelings.
For most supervisors, the primary purpose of supervision is to ensure the quality of service by providing advice on service direction and by ensuring that the tasks are well performed. The performance takes into account not only the end product but also the process itself, which can be monitored by reading case recordings and program progress reports. This monitoring mechanism aims to fulfill the administrative demands of the agency and the funding source. If there are problems in the service operations, the supervisor has to work with the supervisees to improve the service.

Mr. Choy, an experienced supervisor of a residential rehabilitation unit, said, “The supervisor has a leading role in keeping the service going. When you find something wrong or when the staff have difficulties in operations, you have to talk to them. It is important to understand the views of the staff through supervision. Is it workable? How? Is there anyone willing to do it?”

Mr. Wong, who is in charge of a counselling centre, expressed his view: “The major aim of supervision is to make sure that the staff match the objective of the centre, including planning and skills.”

In a sense, then, supervision is a mechanism to ensure the output of service and quality assurance. The supervisor has to help the staff to understand the public demand for accountability, especially to service users. In order to improve service, practical working skills are taught by the supervisor. Supervision also serves functions that are not purely administrative. As a supervisor said, “a supervisor is a supporter, a counsellor, and an
educator." We shall discuss other functions in the rest of this chapter.

A second function of supervision is to encourage staff development and to help individual staff have specific areas of expertise. Supervision provides orientation to new workers on strategies and skills to deal with clients, especially involuntary clients. It was found that the developmental stage of the supervisee influences the format, structure, and purpose of supervision. More autonomy of practice will be given to those social workers who have more practice experience. Supervisors treat supervision as a mechanism for developing the staff, but many supervisees use supervision as an opportunity to seek the supervisor's advice concerning their interventions. If the matter relates only to procedures, the supervisee will consult peers. If it relates to decisions, the supervisee will consult a peer first, and then consult the supervisor.

This is the educational function of social work supervision that is mentioned by many scholars (e.g., Kadushin, 1992a). A supervisor of a new service told me that, as the service is so new, the supervision provides a kind of orientation to help the staff grasp its nature. The supervisor also uses the supervision sessions to identify the training needs of the staff and discuss clinical skills in handling cases.

Mr. Choy elaborated on the educational function of supervision: "In terms of development of the staff, I also have the role of a teacher. I make use of the supervision session to teach the staff how to do this."
A supervisor shared his views with other supervisors in a focus group: "The purpose of supervision is to strengthen the space and autonomy (of the staff), stimulate the staff, and enhance their development."

Third, supervision provides a place and a time to show support to the supervisees. It allows supervisors to show their appreciation. This supportive function is the third function of social work supervision recognized by Kadushin (1992a). A supervisor further noted that support can be emotional, as well as practical.

A supervisor presented the needs of her supervisees: "The staff tells me how they do the job. In fact, they are not asking what they should do; they just need my recognition."

Mr. Choy discussed his supportive role in supervision: "Sometimes (in addition to being a supervisor) I would also be a counsellor. The staff is so new. The helping process is unstructured. When I am available, I talk with them about life. For example, when they quarrel with their spouse, I also share with them how I cope with it... Official matters must be handled. However, if personal matters cannot be settled, official matters will be in trouble. If the supervisee is willing to talk to me and trusts me, with my background as a counsellor, I will try to help him or her; however, it is not in the capacity of a superior and a subordinate. After that, their job performance will be better. Formal and informal matters cannot be totally separated. But for some kinds of personal matters they have to handle it themselves; I won't intervene. In terms of official matters, I am the supervisor, but in terms of personal matters, I am a friend."
Fourth, supervision is a tool that allows the supervisor to build up the work team and enhance communication and cooperation among the staff. This includes the communication between the supervisor and the supervisee, as well as that among members of the work team. This can eliminate misunderstanding; in addition, the supervisor may help the supervisee to concentrate on frontline services.

*A supervisor commented on the functions of supervision in focus group discussion:* 
"I am deeply influenced by the existing functions of supervision. Administrative, educational, and supportive functions were internalized. I think there is also a fourth function, that is communication. I can make use of the opportunity to talk to the staff."

*A superintendent of an elderly service unit said,* "I let them know what I hope they will do. In addition, they have to let me know what they are doing."

For supervisees, the primary purpose of supervision is also related to the accomplishment of work. It includes the quality of service output, the process of work, job accountability, and feedback to improve the outcome of intervention.

*A frontline worker shared her views about the objective of supervision in the focus group discussion:* "The purpose of supervision is job accountability... it is task-oriented."

*May, a school social worker with four years' experience, said,* "The purpose of supervision is number one. It is to make us accountable and monitor our job
performanee. Second, it is to give advice, and, third, to evaluate our performance.”

Kenneth, a youth worker in a children and youth centre, tried to quantify the functions of supervision: “90% is related to the task, including its progress, effectiveness, and outcome. The other 10% is related to personnel matters, including my personal feeling and my relationship with my colleagues.”

The supervisees agree with the supervisors that the second purpose of supervision is to learn how to do the job.

Lily, a youth worker in a children and youth centre, maintained that the goals of supervision are, “To provide guidance for service delivery, to provide professional advice for staff.”

Sally, a frontline worker in an integrated service team for the youth, said, “The supervisor will give you professional advice. It makes you do a better job.”

Nancy, a caseworker in a government-run family service centre, observed that the supervision process allows the supervisor, to get to know the work of the staff, including the situation of case management and the difficulties encountered and try to help... to understand the career plan of the staff and the readiness to move to other units.”

Third, supervisees, like supervisors, recognize that supervision serves as a mechanism for the supervisor to provide emotional support.
May, a school social worker, commented that an important aspect of her supervisor's responsibilities is "to provide emotional support to the supervisees, to face the frustration...to understand my feelings about work. He also lets me know his feelings."

Lily, a youth worker, continued, "Another function is to relieve work pressure, to revitalize the staff, to understand the staff's feelings, and to clarify the direction."

Supervisees agree with supervisors that social work supervision is also used for establishing consensus and communication among members of the work team. This can help to eliminate conflicts among staff.

Charles, an experienced community worker, observed that one of the functions of supervisors is "to achieve the consensus among staff in handling tasks and operations of the service unit, and to enhance team building through sharing."

Karen, a social work assistant in a rehabilitation unit of a large non-government organization, said, "supervision helped to eliminate staff conflict. Everyone agrees on something and writes it down. This is a compromise process. The documents will be the evidence behind the consensus."
5.4 The Supervisory Relationship

Since there are many supervisees, with a wide range of qualifications, experiences, duties as well different genders, under the supervision of a single supervisor, it is rather difficult for the supervisor to define the supervisory relationship. For supervisors, it is a relationship between the supervisor and a group of staff. In fact, it consists of a variety of supervisor-supervisee relationships. However, for supervisees, it is a very important interpersonal relationship between two individuals who are differently placed in terms of power, salary, qualifications, and experience.

_A frontline worker shared her experience of working with supervisors in a focus group session: “The supervisee’s experience comes from the totality of many supervisors, including present and former. The supervisor’s view is formulated by the totality of his/her supervisees as a collective.”_

Most supervisees described the relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee as a “superior and subordinate” relationship. This construction was also familiar to supervisors. However, many supervisees said that their supervisors are their friends. All of them, though, at the same time, emphasized that their supervisors are not close friends. Supervisees saw themselves as assistants to their supervisors in the working process. Supervisors used different metaphors to describe their role, such as a film director leading a team of actors with distinct personalities, a leader of a basketball team who has strategies for
team building, a steersman of a dragon boat who has to provide the right direction, and an emperor who has many followers to protect him. Obviously, the vertical hierarchy between the supervisor and the supervisee in the organizational context creates a horizontal personal distance between the supervisor and the supervisee.

Mr. Choy, the supervisor of a residential rehabilitation unit, talked about how he handled the personal matters of his staff: "I never take the initiative to talk with the staff about their personal matters, even when I have seen something. I do not say anything, unless they take the initiative to talk to me."

Cindy, a medical social worker, said, "It is purely the relationship between a superior and a subordinate. It is formal interaction. There is a distance between him and me. I won't tell him anything personal."

Mrs. Lok, a school social work supervisor, said, "The staff respected me a lot in the process of supervision, because I am their supervisor. Even beyond supervision sessions, there is still the hierarchy. They respect my seniority and experience."

Katherine, a youth worker in a children and youth centre, told me about her supervisor: "My boss and I are like the leader and the follower in the Communist Party. Whenever he talks, I have to agree."

A supervisor told other participants in a focus group, "The top management delegates tasks and assigns staff to me. I just pay attention to completing the task. I forget they are human beings. However, the staff expect to be human beings from the very beginning. Once they are off duty, they have to take care of children and invest in the stock market. I have to remind myself that I have to be people-oriented. But it is
very difficult. When I try to be people-oriented, the achievement of agency objectives is slower.

Some supervisors and supervisees used the familial relationship to describe their supervisory relationship. Supervisees may view their supervisors as senior family members, for example, a parent or an elder brother or sister.

A supervisor talked about her staff in focus group discussion: “I am both the father and the mother. When I am a traditional father, I go out to seek resources and let them have autonomy. However, when there is conflict, I have to play the role of the mother to mediate. I also have to help them to cope with their daily difficulties.”

Another supervisor in the same focus group responded, “I look like an elder sister; I am one of their peers. However, I have greater responsibility. I take care of them, and they show their concern for me.”

A third supervisor in the same group said, “I have two kinds of roles: when I handle personnel matters and organizational culture, we are like father and son; when I handle tasks, our relationship will shift to that of the official and the citizen.”

Many supervisees described their supervisors as “both teacher and friend.” Other supervisees described their supervisors as members of their extended family.

Nancy, a caseworker, said, “The supervisory relationship is between the teacher and the student. She is willing to share her working experience and knowledge with you,
to help you adjust to the working environment, and to pick up your work. The working atmosphere is family-like. After office hours, we go to have a meal together. Many colleagues in this centre have been “brought up” by the supervisor. This is why we are a little bit afraid of her.”

Billy, a worker in an outreach team for youth, said, “Our team is like a family. The supervisor is like my mom. But it is not exactly the same. She knows I live alone. She always reminds me to have good sleep and a meal. However, when we work together, it is like a superior and a subordinate.”

Kenneth, a youth worker in a children and youth centre of a large non-government organization, said, “The supervisor and I are friends of different ages. It seems like brothers. In terms of job duties, he has to make decisions. But if there is something to be discussed, there is space for me.”

May commented on the relationship with her supervisor: “In the first year, our relationship was like teacher and student. Afterwards, we had more opportunities to talk with each other, and our relationship became a friendship. The life experience of the supervisor has great influence on the supervisory relationship. For example, my supervisor said that when her children grow up, she may spend more time on work. When the supervisor expresses her feeling, the relationship becomes more personal and affective.”

Some supervisors and supervisees present the supervisory relationship as one between equals. They view each other as teammates, colleagues, and partners. This kind of relationship enhances communication and sharing of experience.
Mr. Hui, a team leader of an outreach team for the youth, said, "It is like a game of puzzles. Everyone is responsible for a part. The supervisor fills up the holes."

Of course, there are also mixed feelings and various patterns of relationship. In reality, a supervisor supervises many supervisees and thus develops different types of relationships with different staff. A supervisor also establishes different levels of relationship with the same supervisee at different stages in the working process. In addition, the nature of the tasks and the environment affects the pattern of relationships. When supervisors and supervisees are working to achieve goals, the relationship tends to be more formal. When they have informal chats or meet at a gathering, the relationship will relax and seem like one between friends or peers.

Mr. Choy said, "It is not clear. Some of my supervisees are friends. Some are my students, since I taught them. For others, it is straightforward superior-subordinate relationship. They ask for advice. I give instructions, they implement."

Mr. Hui continued to share his views on supervisory relationship: "I feel that supervisees are friends, but my status is higher, since the relationship is basically a working relationship. They won't play with you. They seek your advice and respect your views."

Sally, a social worker in an integrated service team for youth, said, "The supervisory relationship is a mixed relationship. Sometimes, we are like the boss and the assistant. Sometimes, we are like brother and sister. I have a good relationship with my supervisor, but we are not really friends; it tends to be superior and subordinate."
In the working process, the supervisor views me as the assistant. When we have informal chats and touch on our unhappy feelings, we are like brother and sister. The relationship is 60% superior and subordinate, 30% boss and assistant, and 10% brother and sister."

Mr. So, a supervisor in the rehabilitation field, said, "One of my supervisees is my colleague in another organization. We work together like friends. Another new and junior staff member, on the basis of her fieldwork supervision experience, requests me to provide supervision and teach her. It is like teacher and student. She is also accountable to me."

In the focus group discussion, a supervisor said, "I think I can be more natural, more genuine, and try to be myself. It is very difficult to keep the balance— to be friendly and to be authoritative at the same time and to get things done. It is very demanding."

When we talked about the relationship elements specific to Chinese culture, it was found that some of the informants believe in qing between the supervisor and the supervisee. Qing refers to a primary and intense relationship between two parties in daily life. It is a personal, informal relationship, in which there is an exchange of information, concern, regards, and the resources for a close relationship.

Although supervisees hope that their supervisors have some qing that is, a long-lasting primary relationship, they still think that, as employees, they should follow the policy and regulations of the agency. Some supervisees complained that, although some supervisors talked a great deal about qing, in action, they usually behaved very officially and formally.
This reflects the point of view expressed by supervisors. Supervisors think that qing should not be abused by letting supervisees violate agency policy and procedures; if so, it would be unfair to colleagues and clients. Supervisors maintain that in the early stages of supervision, they may have a formal relationship with their supervisees, but they are ready to develop an informal relationship in the course of time. Supervisors emphasize that supervisees are not volunteers but employees of the agency. They are making full use of the public money to serve clients, and this is why the supervisor has to make the supervisee accountable and productive. Obviously, both the supervisor and the supervisee would like to build a close relationship, but their starting points are different. The supervisor envisages a formal relationship on a rational basis, while the supervisee expects an informal relationship on an emotional basis. The supervisor views the supervisor-supervisee relationship as a kind of professional relationship between an administrator and a group of staff.

As a result, supervisors take many factors into consideration when they handle the supervisory relationship. However, for the supervisee, the supervisor-supervisee relationship is a personal relationship because it is conducted on a one-to-one basis.

Mr. Wong, who is in charge of a counselling centre, told me, “Qing is something that makes me hesitate to punish someone who makes me angry.... I think there is qing. It may be because we are social workers and Chinese—sometimes, we feel hesitant to make hard decisions. However, it does not affect the implementation of agency policy. But I would spend more time trying to understand them than being the bad guy to be attacked by them.”
Miss Siu, who is in charge of a children and youth centre, said, "Supervision has qing, but when there is too much, you cannot implement the agency policy and regulations. Without qing, you cannot motivate the staff to work. Balance is important, but difficult to achieve... qing sometimes makes good supervision impossible. However, in the long run, it will be no good to supervisees, as there will be no professional development. But qing can provide space for the staff to take a breath."

Kenneth, a youth worker, said, "I think there is qing. I will do what I promise my supervisor. He does the same. I don't want to owe qing to others. It looks like there is something not yet finished. It is hanging in the air. I would like to handle it."

Another youth worker, Lily, said, "When we have qing, we become frank, express our own frustration, and a close relationship can be established. I would understand her situation. She has taken a position and become very bitter. Then friendship is built. I always remind myself that I cannot violate the rule owing to qing as she is ultimately the boss."

Kenneth's comment provides an exact description of the pao in the Chinese culture. Yang (1987), in his famous book, Pao, pao, pao, illustrated the reciprocity between the people who take care of others and the people who are the objects of their care. Pao represents the close and mutual relationship between two individuals in which the senior protects, and takes care of, the junior. In return, the junior respects, and works hard for, the senior.
Some supervisees believe that there is yuan, a predetermined relationship in life. It is arranged by the God in advance. Human beings can do nothing to alter it. First, they think it is yuan that they met each other in life. In this sense, yuan can be good or bad. Second, they may find that they have similar views on handling their job and find it easy to communicate. Some supervisees reported that the supervisor-supervisee relationship developed gradually during the supervisory process. At the beginning, they only discussed official matters. After a period of cooperation, the supervisor would exchange ideas and views with the supervisee. The gender of the supervisor and the supervisee strongly affects the supervisory relationship. However, the personality, life experience, style, and skills of the supervisor also influence it. For example, supervisees find that supervisors with a humanistic outlook, rich life experiences, a relationship-oriented style, and competent skills are easier to get along with. In a nutshell, supervisees appreciate supervisors who show their concern for example, by visiting a supervisee who is sick in hospital.

Mr. Hui, an experienced team leader of an outreach team for the youth, said, “I believe there is yuan. Definitely there is such a thing. In Hong Kong, there are several thousand social workers. By yuan, we work together. I work with so many colleagues, I don’t expect that I can get along with all of them. I hope I can get along with some of them and develop a social relationship. It is not only technical support at work, but emotional support.”

Miss Siu, who is in charge of a children and youth centre, said, “Some colleagues get along better. They find it easier to understand what you say. I can say that this is yuan.”
Miss Yin, the superintendent of an elderly service unit, said, "I feel that there is yuan. For example, when I met my supervisor, we talked with each other very well."

Sally, a social work assistant in an integrated team for youth, said, "I believe in yuan. It refers to compatibility in terms of values, mentality, and personality."

Carrie, an experienced caseworker in a government-run family service centre, said, "To work with every supervisor is a kind of yuan, but it may not be good. In my organization, the staff all change over several years. When there is a new emperor, the servants will also change."

The physical setting and time perspective also affect the nature of the interaction between supervisor and supervisee. In supervision sessions, supervisees tend to talk about official matters and share concerns related to peer relationships and emotions affecting the job. However, after office hours, it seems much easier for both the supervisor and the supervisee to share aspects of their private life and personal experiences. Although listening is a basic interpersonal skill that every social worker should know well, some supervisors cannot master it. Supervisees commented that many supervisors just tell them what to do and how to do it without listening to them in order to understand their difficulties and expectations.

Almost all supervisees said that they would not openly disagree with their supervisors in front of others in order to preserve their supervisors' "face". They said they would do so
whether or not they liked their supervisor and whether or not there was a third party present. They would do so for anyone, since it is a way of respecting others. In fact, supervisees are willing to be followers, since they need a mentor to provide guidance. However, the direction has to be clear and the advice has to be specific and concrete.

A supervisee shared her approach to coping with top management: “The top management has policy; the frontline workers have strategies to deal with it.”

Katherine, a youth worker, said, “I would give face to my boss. When there is something that he cannot answer, I do not ask again.”

Mr. Wong, who is in charge of a counselling centre, said, “My supervisees certainly give me face. In front of others or one to one, they preserve my face. When we are alone, they are also respectful to me. I don’t protect my staff, but when they commit mistakes, I look into it. I bear my part of the responsibility. Sometimes, I forgive my staff.”

A superintendent of a children and youth centre, said, “The staff gives face to their supervisor as part of our organizational culture. The experienced staff give you even more face. They never argue with you... I feel I have En on them. Sometimes, they are inadequate at work. I help them, but I never think about what they have to do in return.”

Mr. Choy, a supervisor of a rehabilitation centre, said, “I don’t think I have to act as an authority figure. I only act as a model, that is enough. There is En, but I would give them flexibility, for example, flexibility in the working schedule. I
would hire a temporary worker to release staff to take no pay leave."

*Lily, a frontline worker in a children and youth centre, said, “I would give face to my supervisor. Ultimately, she is my boss. She is the centre-in-charge, and if she persists, I would give way to her.”*

*Sally, a social work assistant in an integrated service team for youth, said, “My supervisor wants to establish his image as an authority figure. You do the job, and he claims the credit.”*

The supervisory relationship is complex and dynamic. Supervisors find it easier to get along with a staff whom they have chosen. It was found that the supervisor and the supervisee feel that they can work with each other more easily if they are close in age and occupational rank. This is because when supervisors select staff, they choose people with personalities and values compatible with their own. Reciprocally, the staff identify with a supervisor who has appointed them. Life experience is important: it can enhance the supervisor's understanding and empathy for the personal situations of the staff. Without this experience, the supervisor has to be more creative, in order to have the ability to understand and predict the difficulties encountered by the supervisees. Work experience also helps: supervisees respect practical frontline experience in direct service. This experience also facilitates mutual understanding and sense of common purpose.

There are two difficult aspects of the supervisory relationship. First, the expectations
of the supervisor and the supervisee are rather different. The supervisor adopts a rational attitude in dealing with supervisees, but supervisees need emotional support at work and personal concern. Another difficulty arises from the coexistence of personal and formal relationships between the supervisor and the supervisee. Supervisors feel that supervision creates pressure and tension. They have their own ways of relieving these pressures. None of the supervisors mentioned that they were influenced by their former supervisors, although their student fieldwork supervisors influenced their current supervisory practices. Still, both the supervisor and the supervisee think that the control of the nature of supervisory relationship is mainly in the hands of the supervisors.

A supervisor (an Assistant Social Work Officer) told the focus group, “If I had choice, I would choose to be a supervisor when I am older. It is better to be mature when one is a supervisor. Pretending to accept your staff and accepting your staff are really two different things. For example, my supervisee has a newborn baby and is frequently late. Conceptually, I understand; however, this kind of understanding and patience is not as good as having real life experience.”

A supervisor of a children and youth service commented in a focus group session: “I found that nine out of ten staff expect the supervisor to have personal concern for them. They really mind if you do not provide emotional support. It is very significant. I feel that supervisees need the care of the supervisor. If you only focus your attention on service delivery, they would feel that you don’t have qing and you are very cold... They want you to think of them, not just put them in your heart or treat them to tea. You have to click on something so they feel there is a personal touch.”
In the focus group session, a supervisor of a counselling centre said, "I had a good friend. She was my supervisee. When she quit the job, she told me that she was no longer my friend. This hurt me very much. It made me never work with friends in the same service unit."

Mr. Choy, the supervisor of a residential rehabilitation unit, said, "My leadership plays an important role. If I adopt the straightforward attitude of a boss in a boss-subordinate relationship, the staff will treat me as their boss. If you keep yourself open, staff will take you as their friend, a teacher, or a senior member of their family."

As for supervisees, they are influenced by their past experiences of being supervised by their former supervisors. For supervisees, there are six characteristics of the supervisor that affect the supervisory relationship: life experience, working experience, professional qualifications, personality, working process, and gender. Supervisees respect supervisors who have richer life experience, longer working experience, and higher professional qualifications than themselves. If the personalities of the supervisor and the supervisee match, the communication and relationship will be better. Listening is a very important element in determining the quality of the supervisory relationship. In the working process, if the supervisor is ready to listen to the supervisee's views and to recognize the supervisee's efforts, the relationship will be better. Finally, male supervisees prefer a male supervisor, while female supervisors prefer female supervisees. It seems that there is a great deal of pressure on female social workers to become supervisors. Supervisees understand a great deal about their supervisors' pressure. Of course, all six elements are influenced by the cultural context of Hong Kong. For example, experience and professional qualifications are highly respected in Hong Kong.
A caseworker in a family service centre commented in the focus group for supervisees, “I understand why my boss shouts at me. It is because she faces great pressure, really great pressure... Sometimes, she becomes crazy, I understand why. She shouts at me; maybe she was shouted at by others. I understand her and have empathy for her.”

Carrie, an experienced caseworker, said, “I didn’t even express all my views; she (the supervisor) told me what to do. If the situation is like this, there is no need to have supervision. It is not supervision. It is instruction... The age of the supervisor really matters. Having a humane supervisor is important to the staff. For example, my former supervisor would send me regards when I submitted an application form for sick leave.”

5.5. Supervisory Authority

The focus group interviews and in-depth interviews reflect the fact that the supervisor has dominant power in decision-making in the supervisory process. When the supervisor and the supervisee differ, the supervisee always follows the supervisor’s instruction. Only a few supervisees would choose to talk with their peers and then convey their views to the supervisor. Almost all supervisors interviewed tend to adopt a “consensus” approach to the use of their supervisory authority. They have a baseline plan in their mind and then consult the staff. In the process, supervisors let the supervisees
discuss the issue but supervisors also express their own views implicitly. If the staff agree, then a decision is made collectively. If not, supervisors try to absorb the opinions of the supervisees, revise their own hidden agenda, and then sell the revised plan again. In most cases, the staff do not argue with the supervisor, since they are accustomed to give face to their superior. In this way, the supervisor passively acquires the consent of the staff. After the consultation process, the supervisor can grasp the views of the staff, this legitimizes the plan and also provides essential information. Of course, there are different structures and processes of using administrative authority in different organizations. In general, large human service organizations tend to have well-structured hierarchies and procedures. However, there is a common practice in large and small organizations: supervisors use consultation and co-optation to manipulate the decision-making process.

When supervisors use the "consensus" approach, they divide issues into two categories according to their nature. When the issues are related to agency policy or administration, the supervisor makes the decision in a straightforward way. For matters related to professional practice or service delivery, the supervisor encourages staff discussion. For service delivery, if the timing is tight (for example, in urgent cases) the supervisor makes the decision and gives specific step-by-step instructions. For other services, the supervisor allows the staff to discuss the matter among themselves. In the end, the supervisor gives clear instructions and makes sure the staff follow them. However, some supervisees consult their supervisors because they want to hold their
supervisors responsible for decisions. When supervisors give vague advice or tell supervisees to do it in their own way, supervisees feel anxious about the results.

A supervisor told the focus group, "There are red, yellow, and green lights. First, on those matters with a red light, there is no room for discussion. I make the decision, for example, annual leave or working hours. Second, on matters with a green light, the staff members make the decision, I just care about the output. On matters with a yellow light, we may discuss, for example, the direction of our service unit, the program objectives for next year, or the nature of new services.

Mr. Chui, who is in charge of a children and youth centre, said, "For some matters, I make the decision. For other matters, we make the decision together. I hope that we have 'consensus.' However, the staff members expect me to make the decision. After I make the decision, they are unhappy. Supervisory authority is only an abstract power; whenever you use it, you really possess it."

A supervisor told other members in a focus group, "For those matters that are not urgent or are without great implications and high risk, I handle them carefully and discuss with colleagues in the working process."

A team leader of an integrated service team for the youth, Mr. Au, said, "After I sell my ideas, if the staff do not buy them and the matter is not serious, I pass the decision on to the staff. For service delivery, I give staff a free hand. For administration, they have to follow; there are no other alternatives."

Miss Dong, the supervisor of an employee assistance program, said, "Usually I consult them, though I already have had a plan. But I certainly keep it secret. The
staff do not insist on their views. If my views are totally different from their views, I tell them my ideas. To a certain extent, I would like to influence them."

Mr. Wong, who is in charge of a counselling centre, said, "If the staff have confidence and trust in my experience and integrity, the effect of supervision will be better."

From the supervisees' perspective, the supervisor adopts the "consensus" approach to make decisions. From the supervisors' perspective, the use of administrative power for making decision is only a last resort, since it discourages staff morale. However, some staff think "consensus" is only a political gesture on the part of the supervisor, so the supervisees do not speak candidly in the consultation process. Supervisees tend to give way to their supervisors most of the time. This, of course, maintains the harmony within the service unit; however, it reduces the staff participation and sense of belonging.

May, a school social worker, said, "If I thought the supervisor's ideas were not good, I would tell him. If he thought my comments were reasonable, he would accept them. If he does not accept them, I agree with him but do it in another way. Sometimes, he knows. He asks why. Sometimes I explain and sometimes I cover it."

Kevin, a social worker in the outreach team for the youth, said, "My supervisor always uses lobbying. She discusses matters with us privately. The decisions are made in the working group. I feel that the supervisor spends a lot of time on this kind of decision-making process. It is very difficult."
Cindy, a medical social worker, said, “Usually, the supervisor makes the decision. He chooses the best alternative in his mind, except when the matter is in the process of implementation. Then, if we have different views, we discuss them. There would be some modification. But usually the supervisor’s view dominates.”

Matthew, a social work assistant in a government-run residential unit, said, “When it is related to agency policy, the approach must be top down. When it is related to the clients, we (supervisees) have more autonomy.”

5.6 Ideal Supervision

Many supervisees, especially young ones, hope that when they are staff social workers they will receive social work supervision in the same format, structure, and manner as the student fieldwork supervision that they received during their years of social work training. Supervisees hope that the supervision sessions will be regular and that dates and times for supervision sessions will be fixed in advance, so that both the supervisor and the supervisee can prepare for them. They believe that the sessions should be held at least once a month, and their length should be at least one hour. The content of supervision sessions should be comprehensive, and cover policy, practice, and skills. Most of the time in supervision sessions should be spent discussing work, and part of it should be focused on sharing ideas and feelings. The requirements for jobs should be described and explained in concrete terms. Supervisees do not mind high standards and strict requirements, but they need clear direction and specific action-oriented guidelines. If they achieve their goals, they expect their
supervisors' appreciation and recognition. When they make mistakes, they welcome their supervisors' view on what has gone wrong, if it is expressed in a friendly manner. However, supervisors tend to give very conservative advice. Usually the advice is very vague and not action-oriented. Supervisors learn supervisory practice from their supervisors and follow the same pattern. The quality of social work supervision directly and significantly affects the quality of direct service to clients, staff morale of the frontline social workers, and even the commitment of staff social workers.

Mr. Wong, who is in charge of a counselling centre, said, "Use personal experience, since the nurturing side of supervision is very important. Rich experience, readiness to consolidate experience, and actions are very important to supervision."

Katherine, a youth worker, said, "My supervisor is a member of the team. He has a baseline plan in his mind. In the discussion, he doesn't tell us his plan. When we vote, he tells us. But he makes us feel that he is only one of the members to vote, and not the chairman."

Matthew, a frontline worker in a boys' home, said, "If our views are different from the supervisor's, we discuss them with him as a group. However, most of the time, there is no follow-up."

Supervisors hope that supervision can be individualized and tailor-made for supervisees. There should be no use of administrative authority. The highest level of supervision is to have nothing to supervise (following the Taoist belief in the value of
nothingness in the traditional Chinese culture). Good supervision should enhance the professional growth of the staff by identifying their strengths and weaknesses, and should provide resources and opportunities for them to improve, in order to achieve service accountability. This approach would benefit the supervisor, the supervisee, and the clients. Good supervision should also lead to the establishment of a trusting relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee. A consensus approach should be adopted for decision-making. Staff participation should be encouraged, and there should be support, encouragement, and personal concern for the supervisee. The experience should be pleasant and happy. Eventually, the staff’s sense of belonging to the agency will increase. There should be regular sessions arranged with an advance schedule. Both the supervisor and the supervisee should be well-prepared for the supervision sessions. The supervisor should be a role model for the supervisees, and locations other than the supervisor’s office should sometimes be used for supervision sessions.

In the focus group session, a supervisor in an outreach service for youth said, “I hope I can serve as a role model. I believe in model teaching. As a supervisor, I have to do a good job myself. In the past, I would come late, but now, as a supervisor, I am never late. I have to be stricter on myself. For the staff, model teaching is not to instruct, but to let them see what you do, then they would automatically do a better job. As a supervisor, I have to be careful in what I say; staff may be hurt. Being frank may make them maladjusted. Good supervision has to take care of both the tasks and the people. I am concerned for people, as job satisfaction is very important for the life of the staff. When the task is done, the staff are very happy. Then we can share the joyfulness.”
Mr. Yue, a superintendent of a boys' home, said, "In good supervision, we can have chats. But there is a direction. It is intended to improve service. There is a visible horizon and mutual trust... Sincerity is very important, to make the staff feel that you are working for clients, not for accountability to top management. Don't let the staff feel that you are challenging them."

Mr. Choy, a supervisor in rehabilitation service, said, "Good supervision means that when there is something wrong, I will know quickly. Staff are willing to tell me what is wrong. They are ready to follow my advice and instructions. They know what they are going to do, and everyone knows their positions and roles. They also know the channels to express their views. The whole team can operate well. This is the most effective supervision."

A school social work supervisor said, "I also take care of the personal side, the whole person for example, family matters. If supervisees raise personal issues, I talk to them. If I feel that they are disturbed very much, I advise them to contact a counsellor. But I talk to them about personal issues affecting job performance."

A supervisor told the focus group session, "There are the four "F"s-- principles that are very important to supervisors. They are firm, fair, flexible, and friendly."

For supervisees, the ideal supervision is focused on the affective side. This is because the supervisor-supervisee relationship is a one-to-one relationship for supervisees. It is a personal relationship. They hope that supervision will be a natural and comfortable sharing process in which there is two-way communication in the discussion, along with flexibility
and recognition. The supervisor should be human, fair, and understanding. Ideal supervision should also serve as an opportunity for reflection. The supervisor should enable the supervisee to become a competent professional practitioner. The advice given by the supervisor should be specific, clear, and concrete, and the supervisor should provide insights with “super-vision.”

Lily, a youth worker, said, “First, there are clear instructions. Second, (a supervisor should) reflect what I am doing, identify my strengths and weaknesses, and give me advice for improvement. Third, (a supervisor should) provide concrete support (for example, for staff development). Fourth, (a supervisor should) provide a free atmosphere. Anything can be discussed without any reservation.”

Sally, a social work assistant in an integrated service team for youth, said, “Good supervision should be like student fieldwork supervision. We have lots of discussions about service delivery. I feel that we should talk more about our feelings. Social work is human work, and the emotions of the social worker affect how they treat clients.”

Charles, a community worker, said, “The supervisor has to understand me and have empathy for me. There should be a win-win situation. I can get the supervisor’s understanding and support, and recognition for my effort and motivation. The supervisor should motivate me, widen my perspective, let me try, and even let me be wrong.”

Nancy, a caseworker in a government family service centre, said, “Effective supervision is optimal. Don’t do too much. We don’t need too many meetings. There
is no need to see me every day. Be systematic and efficient. The supervisor gives me feedback and works with me to search for answers on issues. Even if he doesn't know the answer, I think he is a good supervisor. If there is something unfair, he has to fight for us. Finally, a supportive attitude is the most important thing."

5.7 Summary

This chapter provides an in-depth profile of social work supervision in Hong Kong, based on the data collected from the six focus groups, forty in-depth interviews, and a focus group with local experts. It deals with the format of supervision, the purposes of supervision, the supervisory relationship, the use of supervisory authority, and the ideal form of supervision. In Hong Kong, the structure of social work supervision is characterized by its loose format, evident in the infrequency of sessions and the lack of a written supervisory contract. Supervisors and supervisees agree about the four major purposes of social work supervision: service quality, professional development, emotional support, and teamwork. Usually, supervisors emphasize the rational elements of supervision, while supervisees focus on the affective ones. The supervisory relationship is both personal and professional. In addition, attitudes towards interpersonal relationships in Chinese culture, especially the concepts of qing, yuan, and face, have a significant impact on the behaviour of both the supervisor and the supervisee. These cultural traits also contribute to the unique features of the supervisory relationship in Hong Kong. Supervisory authority resembles the prevailing political strategy of the British Hong Kong government: "consensus by consultation and
consent." The ideal of supervision tends to be less administrative and more personalized, learning-oriented, highly specific, and emotionally supportive than the existing practice.

The study demonstrates that the cultural context has influenced supervisory practice. In Chapter Six, a model of social work supervision in Hong Kong will be formulated. Common themes will be identified so that supervision in Hong Kong can be compared to its counterpart in North America.
CHAPTER SIX: A MODEL OF SOCIAL WORK SUPERVISION IN HONG KONG

6.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the three research questions outlined in Chapter Four in light of the findings presented in Chapter Five. Comparisons are made to the social work supervision literature reviewed in Chapter Two to highlight the distinct features of social work supervision in Hong Kong and to better understand what social workers in Hong Kong consider to be the ideal approach to supervision. To recapitulate, the three research questions are as follows:

a. What are the distinct features of social work supervision in Hong Kong in terms of the format of supervision, the purpose of supervision, the nature of the supervisory relationship, and the use of authority in the supervisory process?

b. How does cultural context influence the supervisory practice of social workers in Hong Kong?

c. What is the ideal supervisory practice according to social workers in Hong Kong?

Based on the findings of the study presented in Chapter Five, I modified the model of social work supervision according to the situation in Hong Kong, in order to formulate a culturally sensitive model of social work supervision in Hong Kong. I discovered that the new model differs from the model derived from the North America literature with
respect to format, purpose, relationship, and use of authority. This chapter explores the influence of culture on the practice of social work supervision in Hong Kong. The model of social work supervision presented in Chapter Three was revised to reflect the experience of social workers in Hong Kong and is presented in Figure 3.

As Figure 3 illustrates, the revisions take into account the significant influences of culture on the four parties involving in the supervisory process (that is, supervisee, supervisor, agency, and client). The attitude of the supervisor is rational and professional. The attitude of supervisee, in contrast, is more personal. In supervisory practice, both the supervisor and the supervisee highly respect experience, including supervisory experience, practice experience, and life experience. However, the supervisor tends to be more future-oriented, while the supervisee is often past- and present-oriented. The format of supervision is characterized by verbal agreement and infrequent supervision sessions. Supervision fulfills four purposes: administrative, educational, supportive, and communicative. In the supervisory relationship, three kinds of relationships--familial, collegial, and hierarchical--coexist. Figure 3 also illustrates that the supervisory relationship in Hong Kong is both personal and professional. The values of reciprocity that characterize Chinese interpersonal relationships--qing, yuan, and face--release the tensions and help to maintain a harmonious supervisor-supervisee relationship, despite physical, organizational, and psychological distances. The use of supervisory authority is influenced by the political culture in Hong Kong. Supervisors adopt the political strategy used by the British-Hong Kong government--"consensus by consultation and consent."

The details of these revisions will be discussed in the sections following Figure 3.
Figure 3: A Culturally Sensitive Model of Social Work Supervision in Hong Kong
6.2 The Distinct Features of Social Work Supervision in Hong Kong

Based on the data collected from the focus groups and in-depth interviews, I further developed the initial model of social work supervision proposed in Chapter Three. The modifications to the model are only a starting point for an exploration of this complicated topic. As the time and resources for the study were limited, some issues were not addressed, such as the relationship between the client and the agency, and the link between supervision and the effects of an intervention.

6.2.1 The Format of Supervision

Although many social work supervisors in Hong Kong have the title “service supervisor,” they do not have any training in social work supervision. Their supervision is based on imitating the behaviour of their superiors and following organizational policy. The format of social work supervision in Hong Kong is less organized than its North American counterpart. This characteristic is reflected in two differences. First, the supervision sessions are not as frequent as those in North America. Second, the supervisory process begins with a verbal agreement; no supervisory contracts are used.

The typical format of a supervision session in Hong Kong is similar to that in North America: individual sessions supplemented by group supervision (Kadushin, 1974; 1992b; Ko, 1987). The duration of supervision sessions is also similar since the data shows that they are between one and two hours in length (Kadushin, 1992b); however,
supervision sessions in Hong Kong occur once a month, or sometimes as infrequently as twice a year. This finding is consistent with Ko's discovery (1987) in her survey of family service centres in Hong Kong where 53 percent of respondents attended individual supervision sessions once every three to four weeks, and 32 percent had supervision sessions two to four times a week. She found, however, that 14 percent of the respondents had not attended an individual supervision session in the month preceding the survey. Overall, then, supervision sessions are significantly less frequent than sessions in North America. As Kadushin (1992b) found in his survey, supervision sessions in North America are scheduled on an average of once a week, which suggests that supervision sessions in Hong Kong may not be adequate to fulfill both monitoring and educational functions.

In North America, supervisory contracts aim to establish an explicit and direct statement of the purposes, functions, and format of supervisory practice. In Hong Kong, verbal supervisory contracts are implicit and indirect statements, which help both parties establish a certain degree of consensus in order to minimize conflict in the future.

The need to establish a clear, goal-oriented contract between the supervisor and the supervisee is emphasized throughout the North American literature on supervision (Fox, 1983; Kaiser, 1997; Munson, 1993). As Kaiser (1997) explains, a supervisory contract achieves a mutual understanding, obtains cooperation to work on the client’s problem, and determines mutual expectations for criteria for evaluation in order to establish shared meanings between the supervisor and the supervisee. Fox (1983) emphasizes that the
supervisory contract may also protect the independence of the supervisee in an unequal power relationship by clarifying disagreements between the supervisor and the supervisee. Both Fox (1983) and Kaiser (1997) provide clear frameworks and guidelines for developing a supervisory contract. The outline of a proper supervisory contract should include information about the structure, process, standards, confidentiality, priorities, and feedback system of supervision.

In North America, as well as establishing a general supervisory contract, some supervisors use a specific “sessional contract” (Shulman, 1993), which delineates the tasks to be completed in a particular supervision session. Although these contracts are rarely put into writing, many supervisors and supervisees make explicit agreements about the structure of the supervision (Munson, 1993). In the supervisory contract, the frequency, length, and time of sessions, as well as the learning method are clearly stated (Kaiser, 1997). Granvold (1978) found that the supervisory relationship in North America includes regular, formal conferences, written communication with supervisees, reviews of agency effectiveness through follow-up records, and implementation of time studies. Of course, these measures may be used by supervisors as institutional means to control the staff; however, as the job duties and practice approach are well defined by the organizations, the supervisor may not interfere with the direct practice of the frontline social workers. Such interference would make the supervisory process and supervisory relationship less personal.
In contrast, according to the data in this study, the supervisor and the supervisee in Hong Kong seldom use written or explicit supervisory contracts; there is only a verbal agreement at the beginning of the supervisory process. In fact, Chinese social workers try to avoid using the term "contract" as the word has legal implications. In Chinese culture, legal solutions for conflicts are discouraged; conflicts are resolved by means of traditional authority and reconciliation. The use of a formal contract implies that there is lack of mutual trust (Ko & Ng, 1993). The verbal agreement usually covers the format, frequency, and nature of the discussions for the entire course of the supervision sessions. The verbal agreement seldom touches on the criteria for evaluating staff performance, and it does not touch on preparations for the supervision sessions since no agenda for the supervision session is provided. However, many supervisors take written notes for their records, which will become one of the major sources of information for evaluating staff performance. The whole arrangement allows supervisors to have the freedom to make decisions according to their personal preferences.

6.2.2 The Purpose of Supervision

Based on the findings in Chapter Five, I found that supervisors and supervisees were in agreement regarding the purpose of social work supervision. The data indicated that the primary goal of supervision is to ensure that the quantity and quality of service leads to a successful client outcome as a result of the social work intervention. As well, supervision is seen to enhance staff development. It helps to equip the supervisee with the professional knowledge and skills necessary to do the job effectively. As the data
indicated, supervision provides a time and place for the supervisor to show appreciation and give emotional support to the supervisee. Finally, supervision is a mechanism to communicate, coordinate, and cooperate with one another as a team.

In North America, Poertner and Rapp (1983) conducted a task analysis and found that both supervisors and supervisees maintained that the administrative function was the major function of social work supervision. The administrative function was seen as the most important task by 63 percent of the respondents in the study. The educational and supportive tasks were noted by only 20 percent of the respondents in Poertner and Rapp's Study (1993). However, when supervisors were asked about the primary objective for supervision, they responded that it is to ensure effective and efficient service for clients. In contrast, supervisees consider their professional development the first priority (Kadushin, 1974, 1992b). This discrepancy is not reflected in the research conducted in Hong Kong. A distinct feature of supervision in Hong Kong is that both the supervisor and the supervisee consider emotional support and teamwork important aspects of supervision. According to the findings in Chapter Five, the content of discussion in supervision sessions sometimes relates to personal matters, therefore crossing the North American boundaries reported in the professional literature. In addition, the consensus between the supervisor and the supervisees, and the cooperation among team members are achieved by supervision, making the situation somewhat different from that in North America. In North America, it is the responsibility of both the supervisor and the supervisee to maintain professional boundaries in staff supervision and in student supervision (Bogo & Vadya, 1998).
In summary, the perception of the purposes of social work supervision in Hong Kong is characterized by three distinct features. First, there is consensus between the supervisor and the supervisee about the purpose of supervision. This is not surprising: Chinese culture emphasizes harmony and compromise, which is achieved by the use of authority. Social groups function smoothly when there is an authoritarian interaction pattern between superior and subordinate (Bond & Hwang, 1986; Fei, 1948; Ko & Ng, 1993). Second, discussion of personal matters occupies a significant portion of supervision sessions. This is consistent with the traditional Chinese view that a superior must show both authority and benevolence to a junior because an effective leader has to make clear decisions and take care of subordinates (Bond, 1996; Bond & Hwang, 1986; Leung & Nann, 1995; Wu, 1986; Zhong, 1989). Third, supervision is used to achieve not only individual goals but also collective ones such as team building. This reveals the tendency of Chinese people to place the collective interest before individual interests. Individual achievement is assessed and recognized in terms of its contribution to the collectivity. A member's excellent performance is viewed as his or her contribution to the group (Fei, 1948; Hui & Tan, 1996: King, 1990a, 1990b, 1994).

6.2.3 The Nature of Supervisory Relationship

The supervisory relationship in Hong Kong is a combination of three kinds of interpersonal relationships. The first is the hierarchical relationship between a superior
and a subordinate found in a formal organization in which the organizational goals are the governing factors. In this formal relationship, rational authority is the dominant force for determining the behaviour of both the supervisor and the supervisee. The second is the collegial relationship between an experienced senior professional consultant and a professional practitioner in direct service. In this collegial relationship, the professional culture of social work provides the dominant norms for the behaviour of the supervisor and the supervisee, and the professional network becomes the domain for the interactions between the supervisor and the supervisee. Also, it is the collegial relationship exists among officers who share similar norms and have similar job prospects. The third is the familial relationship, which reflects a psychological transference arising from the interpersonal interaction between the supervisor and the supervisee. The supervisor and the supervisee sometimes perceive each other as members of the same extended family. In this context, the traditional values of Chinese reciprocity will be the guiding principle. Reciprocity entails a two-way interaction involving a dynamic exchange of ideas, resources, and concern (Hwang, 1987; Yang, 1992). In summary, the experience of individual social workers in the supervisory process is a dynamic mixture of organizational context, professional culture, and Chinese values.

The above discussion reveals the most distinctive feature of the supervisory relationship in Hong Kong, which is its dual perspective. The supervisory relationship is both personal and professional at the same time. In Hong Kong, supervision is an interpersonal process that reflects cultural norms and context. This is manifested by the familial transference reported by social workers, especially the supervisees. They view
their supervisor as a member of their family (for example, mother, uncle, brothers, or sisters). This supports the well-established finding that the family is the fundamental unit of Chinese society, permeating most sociopolitical activities (Bond, 1996; Chan, Ho & Tam, 1997; Kim, 1995; Wong, 1975; Wu & Tseng, 1985). A number of scholars stress the significance of personal relationships for Chinese people. Yang (1992) divides Chinese relationships into three categories: family members, insiders (relatives, friends, neighbours, classmates, and colleagues), and strangers. As Hwang (1988) found in his study, Chinese people deal with each category in a distinct way. They use expressive ties which emphasize the needs of the individual, when they deal with people they consider to be family members. With strangers, Chinese people have instrumental ties; equity acts as a guiding principle. With insiders, they have mixed ties in which equality is the norm. In mixed ties, qing and face greatly influence the behaviour of the parties involved. Between the two parties, there is an balancing of qing. In Chinese culture, both parties are expected to keep the balance even. Otherwise, one will become inferior to the other.

In the North American literature, a close personal relationship is perceived as an interaction between equals; it is “an intimate interaction through a process of increasingly personal disclosure” (Altman & Taylor, 1973). In the literature on supervisory relationships, the professional perspective receives virtually all the attention while the personal relationship is seldom mentioned (Kadushin, 1992b; Munson, 1993; Shulman, 1993). The informal relationships mentioned in the literature are usually those with peers and friends (Kaiser, 1997). North American supervisees seldom view the supervisor as a
senior member of their family. The two perspectives (personal and professional) are clearly distinguished, not mixed.

The coexistence of formal and informal interpersonal elements that exists in the supervisory relationship in Hong Kong may create a certain degree of tension. First, it is very difficult to have these two very different kinds of relationships with the same person at the same time. Of course, the degree of difficulty depends on the life experience, mutual understanding, and interpersonal skills of the supervisor and the supervisee. Second, it may lead to role confusion. A supervisor may have to fulfill two conflicting roles (for example, a lenient mother and a demanding supervisor) at the same time. The dynamic interplay between the hierarchical, collegial, and familial elements makes the development of the supervisory relationship a very subtle, delicate, complicated, and complex phenomenon. Crossing personal and professional boundaries puts supervisors in a difficult position. They have learned from the North American literature that the personal boundary should be clearly separated from the professional boundary. However, their supervisees expect the harmonious combination of both aspects. This may explain the fact that supervisors in Hong Kong feel that it is very difficult to be a good supervisor. In the eyes of supervisees, the supervisors are “foreign” and “strange” to them. They feel that the supervisors are not adequately understanding and concerned.

Of course, they are not alone in this perception. In Israel, where the cultural context is quite different from that of North America, Erera and Lazar (1994a) studied a population comprised mainly of social work supervisors. The respondents included team
leaders (N=99), service-oriented supervisors (N=23), and treatment-oriented supervisors (N=111). A questionnaire addressing role conflicts and ambiguities was administered. It showed that team leaders experienced more role conflict and role ambiguity than treatment-oriented supervisors, because team leaders performed administrative supervision and educational supervision at the same time. Era and Lazar (1994a) examined the compatibility of the administrative and educational functions of supervision, and suggested that the two should be separated. Unfortunately, they did not grasp this research opportunity to investigate the impact of the cultural context on supervisory practice in Israel.

The societal culture of Hong Kong is a meeting point of the East and the West. The economy of Hong Kong has been, in turn, agricultural, industrial, and post-industrial (Sin, 1997; Wang, 1997). After an open economic policy was adopted by the Chinese government in 1978 (Fairbank, 1992; Yiu, 1997), Hong Kong began to develop a post-industrial economy; the service industry became the dominant sector (Luk, 1995; Wong, 1994). Notwithstanding this development, the Chinese concept of reciprocity of interpersonal relationships still has a significant influence on the beliefs and behaviour of members of Hong Kong society (Bond, 1996; The Chinese Culture Connection, 1987; Goodwin & Tang, 1996).

As members of Hong Kong society, the supervisor and the supervisee are not exempt from cultural influences. According to the data collected from interviews and focus groups, qing, yuan, and face all have a significant influence on the supervisory relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee. With regard to qing (that is, a
long-lasting, close primary relationship), the data indicated that there was a gap between the supervisee's demand and the supervisor's response. Some supervisees think that they have yuan (that is, a predetermined relationship in life) with their supervisors, but others do not. Most supervisees think that they "give big face" (that is, show great respect) to their supervisors, especially in front of others.

In Hong Kong, qing, yuan, and face help to release the tension and improve the relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee. Previous research on Chinese relationships is supported by the findings of this study: qing, a long-lasting, close primary relationship, which is characterized by a genuine exchange of ideas, resources, and concern, can release the tension between the supervisor and the supervisee in the formal dimension of the relationship (Hwang, 1988; King, 1990a; 1994; Ng, 1975; Yang, 1992).

Qing can also facilitate the continuity of a harmonious interpersonal relationship, even between people of different ranks. In Hong Kong, the British system of ranking has a deep-rooted influence. There are two substantive ranks in the social work profession: officer grade and assistant grade. The officer grade is granted to social workers with Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) qualifications who are initially recruited as assistant social work officers. After a number of years of service, they may be promoted to the position of chief social work officer. Assistant grade is granted to social workers with sub-degrees in social work. Their highest promotion is to the position of chief social work assistant.
Social workers cannot be promoted from assistant rank to officer rank unless they receive BSW training. Gradually, the officers and the assistants develop separate career networks, which affect training opportunities, interests, and prospects. This difference further consolidates the hierarchical power structure.

When used properly, qing can be very effective in diluting the tension arising from the hierarchical relationship in human service organizations. Qing can enhance mutual aid even when the parties are not members of the same family. Qing is also a basis for the social exchange between the supervisor and the supervisee. There is an expectation that the relationship will be of a give and take nature (King, 1990a, 1990b, 1994). Whenever this expectation is established, both parties will be more patient; they do not have to demand the other party's payment right away, and, as a result, both parties can sustain a harmonious relationship. However, qing can also be abused by the supervisor if it is used as a subtle form of control over the personal life of the supervisee. For example, qing can be used to probe the private life of the supervisee. It can also be used inappropriately to motivate and control the staff. For example, the supervisor may use qing to make unreasonable requests that go beyond official duties, such as asking a supervisee to perform the supervisor's own personal tasks.

Yuan facilitates the supervisory relationship in two ways. Some social workers believe that their supervisory relationship is predetermined by God; they accept their difference in status as natural (Lee, 1982; Yang, 1990). For supervisors and supervisees on good terms yuan, may become a strong basis for the consolidation and further
development of their relationship. This is because both parties believe that their good relationship is predetermined by God. In fact, as many respondents reported, yuan itself may arise from their perception of a compatibility of personalities, interests, and working styles. In some cases, supervisors have the opportunity to choose their staff in selection interviews. The selection process involves choosing those who have yuan and bypassing those who do not. Thus, yuan is not really determined by God, but by the people involved in the supervisory process.

Finally, face is an effective way to reduce supervisor-supervisee conflict and to preserve the norms in the existing power structure. Face represents the status of a person in a social network (Chan, 1990; Chu, 1990; Hwang, 1990; King, 1990b; Wen, 1990; Yang, 1987). As Fairbank (1962) suggests, face demands appropriate social behaviour and recognition from others. “Loss of face” is the inability to follow the social norms, which leads to devaluation in the social network. Thus, face is one of the components integral to the reciprocity the relationship: whenever someone gives you face, he or she expects you to give face in return.

This communication (or compromise), if used in properly, can reduce interpersonal conflict to a minimum (Ko & Ng, 1993). This was confirmed by a cross-cultural comparative study conducted by the Chinese Culture Connection (1987). In the study, employees in Hong Kong were ranked highest among 22 countries and regions (including Taiwan and Japan) in terms of Confucian work ethics. This means that Hong Kong
workers were characterized by their ordered relationship, thrift, persistence, sense of shame, reciprocity, personal steadiness, protection of face, and respect for tradition.

All the supervisees interviewed reported that they had to give face to their supervisors in all circumstances, private and public. This reflects the dual nature of the supervisory relationship—personal and professional. In the supervisory context in Hong Kong, the supervisor is a senior, in both a personal and professional sense. Of course, supervisees hope that their supervisors will take care of them and, thus, give face in return.

The custom of giving face to others is also common in other cultures (Goffman, 1972). "Face-work" is a social ritual in American and British societies. It involves establishing a self-image that helps one avoid embarrassment and the aversion of others (Goffman, 1956, 1972). However, the concept of face in Chinese culture has more dimensions than its counterpart in North American societies. As Hu (1944) points out, there are two basic categories of face in Chinese culture: lian and mianzi. Lian can be preserved by faithful compliance with rituals and social norms. It represents the confidence of a society in the integrity of an individual's moral character. The loss of lian makes it impossible for a person to function properly in his or her social network. In contrast, mianzi refers to the aspect of face that is emphasized in North America: a reputation achieved through efforts. Hu (1944) also notes that the North American concept of "face" corresponds to the Chinese mianzi but entirely lacks the connotations of lian. In addition, the sensitivity of Chinese people to face is stronger than that of other
ethnic groups (King, 1990a, 1990b, 1994). The loss of *face* is something very serious to Chinese people. In short, the dual perspective (personal and professional) and the value of reciprocity in relationship (*qing, yuan, and face*) are the two distinctive and crucial features of the supervisory relationship in Hong Kong.

In North American literature, the supervisory relationship is perceived as the major context for social work supervision. This relationship has three components: power and authority, shared meaning, and trust (Kaiser, 1997). Power and authority (two different factors as will be discussed below) are the most important elements in the supervisory relationship. The power differential arises from the fact that the supervisee is accountable to the supervisor. In this respect, the power relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee is the same in North America and in Hong Kong.

Shared meaning refers to the mutual understanding and agreement between the supervisor and the supervisee. The use of a supervisory contract is a way to verbalize and visualize the agreement. The contract may protect the supervisee in the unequal supervisory relationship (Levy, 1973). For example, supervisees may have the autonomy to choose an intervention approach in their direct practice that is clearly stated in the supervisory contract. Trust refers to respect and safety (Kaiser, 1997). Respect safeguards the esteem of the supervisees; they feel more important and dignified when they are respected as professional practitioners. Safety protects professional autonomy; if the supervisees feel secure, they will have strong motivation to put their new ideas into practice. Esteem and autonomy are important elements in the supervisory relationship.
because they are related to the job motivation and satisfaction of supervisees (Kadushin, 1992a; Munson, 1993; Shulman, 1993).

In North America, "reciprocity" refers to a fair and genuine caring relationship characterized by mutual give and take, where both parties are at the same hierarchical level, such as the relationship between spouses, siblings, or friends (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1984; Noddings, 1984). The exchange component of reciprocal relationships in North America tends to be relatively short-term and symmetrical (Yum, 1988). However, reciprocity becomes more complicated in an unequal relationship, such as the supervisory relationship (Kaiser, 1997; Munson, 1993). In Hong Kong, the supervisor and the supervisee handle reciprocity easily because, in their cultural context, the tension created by the coexistence of a personal and professional relationship is mitigated by qing, yuan, and face. Qing increases their level of mutual tolerance. Yuan enhances their mutual acceptance. Face maintains the mutual respect. All help to resolve the problems arising from crossing personal and professional boundaries.

6.2.4 The Use of Supervisory Authority

Power and authority are important components of the supervisory relationship (Kaiser, 1997). Power is the ability to control others, while authority is the right to do so (Kadushin, 1992a). A distinctive feature of the use of supervisory authority in Hong Kong is the process of "consensus by consultation and consent." This was the most significant political strategy used by the British-Hong Kong government before the China
government took over Hong Kong in 1997. In the last four decades, this topic has been studied by numerous political researchers (Davis, 1977; Endacott, 1964; King, 1975; Lau, 1990; Lau & Kuan, 1988; Miners, 1998; Scott, 1989). The British-Hong Kong government realized that it did not have the mandate of the people because of the lack of a democratic direct election system. Thus, administrative structures at various levels (e.g., executive council, legislative council, urban council, advisory policy committees, and district offices) were set up to co-opt the indigenous political elite into the decision-making process and to gauge public opinion for policy formulation and implementation (King, 1975; Miners, 1998; Shera & Page, 1995). The government officials also lobbied the most powerful social groups in order to identify disparities between the people’s views and government policy. Finally, the government announced a consensus and introduced a publicly accepted policy, although the acceptance was only a passive one. Any objection to the government policy was thus reduced to an acceptable level. King (1975) describes this process of consultation and co-optation, aimed at achieving consensus and consent, as the “administrative absorption of politics,” and Endacott (1964) maintains that the Hong Kong government was a “government by discussion” (p. 229).

Of course, the success of this political strategy was based on three conditions. First, the British government had a great deal of experience in using this strategy; it had done so in other British colonies (Lau, 1990; Miners, 1998). This is why Britain was able to handle the diversity of political approaches in Hong Kong with ease. Second, in the three decades before 1997, the economy of Hong Kong was much better than that of
neighboring regions (especially Mainland China), and the people were reluctant to abandon the status quo (Lau, 1990; Miners, 1998). The most important condition may have been the third: the "consensus by consultation and consent" strategy, supplemented by the co-optation of elite, was compatible with Chinese culture, which emphasizes mutual respect and compromise. As Lau and Kuan (1988) found in their study of the political values of the people in Hong Kong, the majority (74.8%) agreed that the government should treat the people like a father treats his children. Bond (1996) also found that Chinese societies are characterized by hierarchy and discipline. The studies conducted by Wu (1986) and Zhong (1989) show that Chinese employees expect their leaders to be considerate and benevolent. They tend to equate authoritative supervision with a parental role. Gabrenya and Hwang (1996) suggest that harmony within a hierarchy is a characteristic of social behaviour in Chinese societies. The Chinese tend to be very sensitive to their hierarchical position in social structures and will behave in ways designed to display, enhance, and protect both the image and the reality of their position.

Ting-Toomey (1988) proposed that the Chinese are concerned about face and thus develop a social, rather than a task perspective, in order to avoid conflict.

In supervisory practice, consensus by consultation and consent maintains the harmony between the supervisor and the supervisee in the power hierarchy. Supervisors in Hong Kong adopt this approach selectively, according to the situation. Regarding administrative matters related to external accountability or organizational policy, there is no room for discussion; supervisors give instructions for the staff to follow. Consensus by consultation and consent is only used for matters related to professional practice or
service delivery, such as setting program objectives or choosing a counselling approach. In fact, the consultation process, itself, is a means for both the supervisor and the supervisee to make each other accountable. It is an extension of the reciprocity of the relationship. For the supervisor, the consultation process is a means to reinforce the legitimacy of decisions. After undergoing the consultation process and establishing consensus, staff members find it difficult to say no. For supervisees, consultation is a way for them to pass the responsibility of decision-making to the supervisor. The supervisor will be accountable for the consequences of the decision. As both the supervisor and the supervisee benefit from the consultation process, it is widely used. However, there are two costly drawbacks attached to this consensus approach. First, the professional autonomy of frontline social workers in Hong Kong is not protected by institutional systems for example, the supervisory contract but depends on the supervisor who in turn is influenced by a specific organizational context. Second, this political strategy may reduce the level of staff participation and their sense of belonging (Shera & Page, 1995) since they do not feel that they are the owners of the organization.

In North America, Munson (1979a, 1979b, 1981) undertook the most significant study on the use of supervisory authority. He found that there was a clear relationship between the use of supervisory authority and levels of interaction, supervision satisfaction, and job satisfaction. Job satisfaction and supervision satisfaction were found to be higher in cases where the supervision followed the competency model (the authority of the supervisor comes from knowledge and practice skills) than when it followed the sanction model (the authority of the supervisor is inherent in the position based on agency
sanction). In the competence model, the supervisor has to demonstrate competence in order to establish professional authority in front of the staff and receive their recognition and acceptance.

Both Munson (1981, 1993) and Kaiser (1997) recognize the importance of the use of authority in the supervisory relationship and emphasize the significance of the power difference between the supervisor and the supervisee. The means of handling the power difference is a delicate issue. At one extreme, if the power difference is too great, the staff will not be motivated to try their best. At the other extreme, the power difference may be too small to allow for adequate monitoring of staff performance. Unlike supervisors in Hong Kong, where the cultural context emphasizes the acceptance of hierarchy and the pursuit of harmony, supervisors in North America have to build up their authority by demonstrating their skill competence in order to establish their expert power (Kadushin, 1992a). In addition, supervisors have to be skilful in setting the limits in the relationship and in developing a shared meanings with supervisees, so that supervisees will view the supervisor as their role model (Kaiser, 1997) and referent power can be established (Kadushin, 1992a). As Kaiser (1997) summarizes, a key factor underlying the dynamics of the use of supervisory authority is attitudes towards authority. Culture is one of the significant variables contributing to the development of these attitudes.
6.3 The Influence of Culture on Social Work Supervision in Hong Kong

When I examined the ways in which the cultural context in Hong Kong influences the behaviour of the supervisor and the supervisee in the supervisory process, a number of cultural issues emerged that have significant implications for the practice of social work supervision. The issues could be divided into four main themes: the supervisors' and supervisees' perspectives on time; the various dimensions of space, which include not only physical space but also organizational and psychological distances; the value orientation of the supervisor and the supervisee; and the differing attitudes of the supervisor and supervisee.

Time perspective refers to the flow of time and related events from the past to the present and on to the future. The concept of space refers to the relevant physical, organizational, and psychosocial spaces and distances between the supervisor and the supervisee. Value orientation refers to the beliefs and norms of the supervisor and the supervisee. Finally, attitude refers to how the supervisor and the supervisee perceive their roles and how they deal with each other. In the following sections, the distinctive features of these cultural influences will be identified and the implications for practice explored.

6.3.1 Time Perspective

Time perspective refers to time management, time orientation, and stages of development. The following discussion will focus on the time management of
supervision sessions, time orientation of the supervisors and the supervisees, as well as the stages of development of the supervisory process, the supervisor, and the supervisee in Hong Kong.

The irregular schedule of supervision sessions and infrequent contacts between the supervisor and the supervisee in Hong Kong are particularly striking by North American standards. The loose structure arises from the perception of supervision as an informal mechanism for discussion, rather than a professional mechanism for monitoring service quality and enhancing professional development. The agreement between the supervisor and the supervisee is consensual instead of contractual. No formal supervisory contract is used, nor is there an agenda for formal and professional discussion. The lack of a clearly defined structure reflects the interplay of personal and professional interactions between the supervisor and the supervisee, which can be directly attributed to the cultural context. As a result of this approach to time management, supervision sessions in Hong Kong may be too infrequent to fulfill the functions of monitoring service outcomes and enhancing the professional development of social workers. Supervisors find that they cannot depend on supervision sessions to monitor this progress of service programs. They tend to use informal contacts with staff to monitor this progress. Frontline staff think that there is lack of professional development opportunities in supervision sessions. Supervision sessions are too administratively oriented in their eyes.

More importantly, supervisors and supervisees in Hong Kong have different time orientations. Supervisors emphasize functions related to the future, such as ensuring the
quality of service in order to safeguard future funding or educating staff members for future professional growth and development. Supervisees, on the other hand, are more concerned about emotional support provided here and now. They also want to resolve the staff conflicts and establish staff consensus and communication. Supervisors are more future-oriented than their supervisees as a result. Here again, we see the personal/professional nature of the supervisory relationship in Hong Kong; in this case, supervisors are relatively professionally oriented to future concerns while supervisees are more personally oriented and are anchored in the here and now.

I also found that the use of supervisory authority and the expectations brought to the supervisory relationship are greatly influenced by the past experiences of the supervisor and supervisee. In this respect, the time orientations of the supervisor and the supervisee are quite similar. Both are oriented to the past. Supervisees’ past experiences include fieldwork in student placements and their later employment, and these experiences have a great deal of impact on their attitudes and behaviour toward their supervisors. For the most part, supervisees hope that their supervisors will provide intensive professional supervision that is similar in format, structure, and style to their student fieldwork supervision. However, supervisors may not want to do so for two reasons. First, there are so many administrative duties to handle that they cannot devote themselves to this time-consuming task. Second, they lack expertise in direct practice, which is necessary to provide specific action guidelines to supervisees.
The conception of supervisory authority is also greatly influenced by the experience of the supervisor and the supervisee. There are three types of experiences: supervisory experience, practice experience, and life experience. In Hong Kong, experience and seniority are highly respected. Experience is perceived as an asset. The more supervisory experience supervisors acquire, the stronger their supervisory authority. This is called “status in the field.” It is highly respected by supervisors and supervisees. More practice experience gives supervisors more confidence in the supervisory process, especially when they provide specific advice to their supervisees related to direct practice. Finally, life experiences, such as marriage, parenting, sickness, and separation, are viewed as increasing their understanding of their staff members as human beings and strengthen the staff’s acceptance of their supervisors as seniors.

For supervisees, the experience of fieldwork supervision during their training affects their expectations of their supervisors. They hope that the staff supervisor will play the teacher’s role. The practice experience of supervisees also affects their expectations of their supervisors. More life experience strengthen supervisees’ confidence and makes them more reluctant to follow the instructions and advice of their supervisors. Once again, the personal and professional perspectives are reflected in the handling of past experience. This supports the findings of Ko’s survey that, in Hong Kong, less experienced workers preferred to see their supervisors individually, while more experienced workers had less preference for individual sessions (Ko, 1987).
Kluckhon and Strodbeck (1961) emphasize that Chinese people have a strong past-time orientation and that they respect tradition and follow established rituals. This was supported by a sample survey of 577 respondents in Hong Kong (Chan, Ho & Tam, 1997) and was evident in my study. Although Hong Kong social workers have undergone the process of modernization and industrialization, they are still highly past-oriented since tradition and experience are highly regarded.

From a time perspective, the process of supervision in social work in Hong Kong can be divided into stages—each with a different emphasis—which makes it easier for supervisors to focus their efforts on improving professional competence, enhancing staff morale, or providing emotional support to their supervisees. For example, at the beginning of the supervisory process, the focus of supervision is mainly on orientation, job induction, and fine tuning in the newly established supervisory relationship. At this stage, supervision sessions are held more frequently than at other stages.

In Hong Kong, supervisors undergo several stages of development. As novice supervisors, they have to accomplish the transition from direct practitioner to supervisor. At this stage, the supervisor has to adjust to a new role set. When supervisors take up managerial duties, they become human service managers. When supervisors adjust to managerial work and achieve a balance between managerial work and professional work, they become mature supervisors. When, finally, supervisors are free to devote their attention to the personal needs and emotions of the supervisees, they become mentors.
As a frontline social worker, the supervisee also has various stages of development. At the first stage, as a new worker, the supervisee undergoes orientation and job induction. The supervisee experiences a great deal of anxiety while establishing work patterns and mastering the basic level of required skills. At this stage, the supervisor offers emotional support to the supervisee and provides the necessary information for day-to-day service. After completing the orientation and job induction stage, the supervisee becomes an autonomous social worker. This second stage marks the transition from dependence to independence. At the third stage, the supervisee becomes a member of the service team. This reflects the transition from independence to interdependence. At the fourth stage, the supervisee, with the supervisor's help, develops an area of specialization. Through the course of professional development, job satisfaction and staff morale are enhanced. At the final stage, the supervisor has to prepare the supervisee for future development. The supervisor considers not only professional and managerial factors but also the personal aspirations of the supervisee. If the supervisor and the supervisee have a mutual understanding of their own developmental stages and the developmental stage of the supervisory process, their relationship will be more likely to progress smoothly.

The developmental stages of the supervisor, the supervisee, and the supervisory process affect the format and structure of supervision, the purposes of supervision, the supervisory relationship, and the use of supervisory authority. The combination of the stages of the three parties (the supervisor, the supervisee, and the supervisory process) make the interaction of the supervisory practice very dynamic and complex. In Hong Kong, supervisors feel more comfortable when working with supervisees with less, but
similar, working experience. Understanding each other's background (the nature of their experience and their attitude toward their experience) and time orientation (past-, present-, or future-oriented) increases the efficacy of supervision.

In North America, only a few empirical studies on the stages of social work supervision, or the developmental stages of the supervisor, the supervisee, and the supervision have been described. The existing literature on stages of development is primarily derived from psychotherapy supervision (Alonso, 1983; Hart, 1982; Hess, 1986, 1987; Stoltenberg, 1981; Stoltenberg & Delworth, 1987; Worthington, 1984). In a survey of 500 social workers, Greenspan and her colleagues (1991) found that experienced practitioners continue to want supervision but often feel that social work supervision lacks consistent expertise. In Israel, Lazar and Erera (1996) conducted a study of social work supervision with novice and experienced social workers. They found that supervisors made consistent distinctions between novice and experienced social workers. Supervision for novice social workers focused on administrative matters, inspection and control, client issues, inter-organizational communication, and job-related tensions. Shulman (1993) suggests some guidelines for new supervisors and new social workers to handle their anxiety regarding their new relationship and the adjustment to the new job and role set.

According to my data, time management, time orientation, and stages of development have significant influence on the format, purposes, relationship, and use of authority in supervision in the cultural context. The major implication for practice is that
it is necessary for both the supervisor and the supervisee to make full use of supervision sessions, and understand each other's background, time orientation, and stage of development, in order to achieve an effective supervisory process.

6.3.2 Space Concept

Culture cannot be separated from context since one of the functions of culture is to provide a highly selective screen between the human being and the outside world (Hall, 1976). This screening function provides a structure for perceiving the world and protects the nervous system from "information overload" by programming the memory of the system so that less information is required to activate the system. The perception of the physical world, including space and distance, is very much influenced by culture (Hall, 1990). For human beings, there are acceptable levels of comfortable distance between different kinds of people, for example, intimate partners, insiders, and strangers. In different cultures, these acceptable levels vary (Hall, 1990).

Space has three dimensions: physical, organizational, and psychosocial. Regarding the physical dimension, the physical setting of the supervision session has a significant impact on the atmosphere of the discussion. An official setting will heighten both the supervisor's and the supervisee's awareness of the differences between them in the power hierarchy of the organization. Thus, a formal venue for supervision will make the supervision session seem more like an administrative meeting. This may encourage the supervisor to demand job accountability and to review progress of work, but it may
discourage the expression of personal feelings and suppress concerns for each other as peers and friends. In contrast, the use of an informal setting for supervision sessions may enhance the ability to share feelings and exchange ideas; however, it may not be appropriate for providing progress reports and giving instructions. When the supervision session is held in the supervisor's office, supervisees are reminded that they are subordinates. In general, supervisors are much less aware of the impact of the physical arrangements; they feel very natural conducting supervision sessions within their own physical boundaries. In fact, the restricted physical space in social service units in Hong Kong limits the choice of venue. In these circumstances, the choice may not reflect the orientation of the supervisor or the supervisee, but the limitations of the agency. In addition, the physical space within the office of the supervisor is much less than that of their counterparts in the North America. The supervisor and the supervisee have to work together in close physical proximity. This may further reduce the privacy and autonomy of frontline social workers.

Regarding organizational space, both the supervisor and the supervisee feel that they are constrained by the internal restrictions imposed by agency policies and procedures, and by the external demands of the funding sources. Under these circumstances, the organizational space that is, the discretionary power of the supervisor and professional autonomy of the supervisee is smaller than before. In North America, these constraints have been present for many years. However, for social workers in Hong Kong, there has been a drastic change since the introduction of a new funding system for agencies in 2000. As the demands of external funding sources may be urgent, strict, and
impersonal, there is no room for supervisors, as middle management, to use the "consensus by consultation and consent" strategy. Frontline social workers were accustomed to the stable and harmonious working environment of the old funding system and the "personal and professional" supervisory relationship. It has been difficult for them to adjust to the rapidly changing and impersonal demands of their supervisors. Thus, their feelings about the constraints on their autonomy are much stronger than those of their counterparts in North America because of the cultural differences in terms of supervisory authority and supervisory relationship.

Between the supervisor and the supervisee, the usual decision-making mode is the "consensus" approach, a political process of consultation and consent in the workplace. This follows the well-documented "govern by consultation and consent" approach. After supervisors mentally establish their own plan of action, they discuss issues with their staff who have a hidden agenda of their own. During the discussion (or consultation) process, the supervisor learns more about the staff's ideas, views, feelings, and difficulties regarding the issue. If there is a consensus, the collective decision is easily reached. If the view is divided between supervisors and the supervisees, supervisors will implicitly communicate their views to the staff. Supervisees seldom disagree with their supervisors in front of others. As a result, the consensus is achieved by the silence of the staff, which is an acknowledgement of the constraints placed on them by the supervisor. First-line supervisors are both "managerial" and "marginal." They are the most senior frontline workers but the most junior administrators. Hence, supervisors feel that they are caught
between the demands of top management and those of the frontline staff, and that they have little space and autonomy in their supervisory practice.

As in North America, the goals of social work supervision are greatly influenced by the demands of the task environment (including the demands of funding sources, organizational policy and regulations, and professional accountability). In Hong Kong, the major funding source for social welfare organizations is the Social Welfare Department of the Hong Kong government. The introduction of a new granting system has imposed constraints on the activities of subsidized non-government organizations. The top management, including the board and the executive, sets stricter organizational policies and regulations in order to ensure the quantity and quality of service. The Social Workers Registration Board also exercises control over the behaviour of social workers in their professional practice.

These demands limit the autonomy of social workers, both supervisors and supervisees. These changes are recent and reflect the current organizational culture and professional culture of Hong Kong. Now, the situation in Hong Kong is similar to that in North America; as Kaiser (1997) observes, social work supervision takes place within the larger context of both the organization and outside forces, such as funding sources and licensing bodies. However, the resistance and sense of restriction are stronger for social workers in Hong Kong than they are for their counterparts in North America. First, these changes are a new development in Hong Kong, while they have a long history in North America. Second, frontline social workers in Hong Kong, as indicated by the data from
the in-depth interviews, are accustomed to a consultation process and harmonious working environment so it is relatively difficult for them to adjust to the change. Third, the past-time orientation encourages frontline social workers miss the “good old days”; and, therefore, makes it difficult to accept the new demands.

Psychosocial space refers to the personal distance between the supervisor and the supervisee. Supervisors and the supervisees develop various kinds of personal relationships, such as friendships or family-type relationships; however, both parties never forget the power difference between them. Almost all view the official relationship as the dominant relationship. Influenced by the North American literature, supervisors clearly distinguish official matters from personal matters. Only those personal matters affecting job performance are discussed in supervision sessions; other personal matters are discussed after office hours or in informal chats. Supervisors adopt a personal role when discussing such matters.

The informants maintained that the life experience, work experience, gender, and personality of the supervisor and of the supervisee are elements that greatly influences the supervisory relationship. Life experiences and work experiences are assets for supervisors, but supervisors find those frontline workers with complex lives and working experiences more difficult to supervise due to the respect given to seniority in Chinese culture.
Gender is also a complicated issue (Chan & Leung, 1999). Among the supervisees interviewed, male supervisees unconditionally preferred male supervisors; they felt uneasy when supervised by females. Female supervisors preferred female supervisees to male supervisees. In Hong Kong, female supervisors, in contrast to male supervisors, need to demonstrate their competence if they wish to receive promotion and, as a result, female supervisors are more demanding than their male counterparts. With regard to personalities, the more similarities between supervisors and supervisees the better, which is why supervisors find that the staff that they have recruited are easier to supervise.

6.3.3 Value Orientation

Values are the norms and beliefs that guide the supervisor and the supervisee, and that reflected in the purposes and functions of social work supervision. The behaviour of the supervisor and the supervisee is affected by the values of the funding sources, the agency policy and regulations, the organizational culture, and the societal culture. To satisfy the requirements of funding sources, external demands on the service agency must be met; otherwise, funding will be cut in the near future. In Hong Kong, funding sources now focus on cost-effectiveness, financial accountability, and value-for-money. This demand has encouraged top management of human service organizations to develop a new set of values, which are reflected in agency policy and regulations. Supervisors are the gatekeepers in frontline service settings; they ensure social workers abide by agency policy and follow the regulations.
Organizational culture refers to the social environment and working atmosphere of an organization. It is the totality of the norms, symbols, systems, and behaviour of the staff members over time. It varies according to the objectives, size, complexity, and products of the organization. The characteristics of organizational culture are developed through interaction among staff members over a long period of time. Informants observed that organizational culture has a great impact on the supervisory relationship and the use of supervisory authority. This is because supervisors learn from their superiors, and the frontline staff internalize the customs of the agency from more experienced colleagues. In fact, each member of the staff, whether a supervisor or a supervisee, undergoes a process of informal socialization.

In terms of societal culture, although supervisors and supervisees belong to different ranks and social circles, both groups are deeply influenced by the cultural context. For example, the reciprocity of interpersonal relationships in Chinese culture has a significant influence on the beliefs and behaviour of supervisors and supervisees in Hong Kong. Qing, yuan, and face greatly affect the supervisory relationship. Reciprocity releases tension and sustains the supervisor-supervisee relationship in a harmonious manner at the personal level. The use of supervisory authority has been significantly influenced by the political culture of Hong Kong society. Consensus is achieved by consultation, co-optation, and consent, which ensures the legitimacy, stability, harmony, and continuity of the power structure. This culturally compatible political strategy used by supervisors reinforces the status quo of the professional relationship and enables the supervisor to get things done by means of the frontline staff.
6.3.4 Attitudes

Attitudes refer to the way in which the supervisor and the supervisee perceive their roles and deal with each other. The findings revealed that the differences in terms of position and power between the supervisor and the supervisee are recognized by the supervisors and accepted by the supervisees. For supervisors, the supervisory process is rational and systematic: supervision is a professional practice. From the supervisor's perspective, the supervisor-supervisee relationship is a one-to-many relationship. The supervisor deals with a group of staff; a supervisee is only "one of the colleagues who needs my monitoring and guidance." The supervisor is very careful to be a competent and fair supervisor. From the perspective of the supervisee who is also a frontline social worker, however, the supervisor-supervisee relationship is a one-to-one relationship, similar to other personal relationships. "The supervisor" is the only person who can determine their job prospects and their well-being on the job. The supervisory process is not only professional but also personal. This great discrepancy between the supervisor's and the supervisee's attitudes towards their roles between the supervisor and the supervisee can be the cause of many conflicts, misunderstandings, and disappointments. It also accounts for their different foci: the supervisor focuses on "what the staff should be," while supervisees are concerned about "what the staff are." If supervisors listened with more patience and focused on the emotional needs of supervisees rather than the accomplishments of tasks, the story of supervision in Hong Kong might be different.
The above-mentioned discrepancy in attitudes is reflected in the emphases placed on different supervisory functions. Supervisors and supervisees agree that there are four major functions of supervision—administrative, educational, supportive, and communicative—but supervisors, with few exceptions, pay more attention to the administrative and educational functions. Exceptional supervisors pay a great deal of attention to the needs of their supervisees and assess their situations in relation to their developmental stage. Supervisees need professional guidance alongside emotional support. Most of them understand the constraints of their supervisors and accept the supervisors’ administrative authority very well.

Obviously, there are great differences between the supervisor and the supervisee in terms of self-image, status, and roles. In the cultural context of Hong Kong, supervisors are highly conscious of their image as well as their duties, while supervisees only perceive themselves as members of the staff. Both parties recognize the power difference. However, supervisees are conscious of their inferiority in the power structure even though they accept the reality. This may explain the fact that peer relationships are not fostered in the supervisory context in Hong Kong. In terms of role playing, supervisors have a strong motivation to be the leader and this role is more acceptable to their supervisees than it is to supervisess in North America. Although there is tension between the supervisor and the supervisee, the conflict can be reduced to a minimum. This is because the supervisor takes the role of a leader, while supervisees accept their position as followers. This compatibility ensures stability and minimizes the conflicts.
6.4 The Ideal of Social Work Supervision as Formulated by Supervisors and Supervisees in Hong Kong

In general, supervisees in Hong Kong, especially young social workers, prefer supervision that aims to improve their professional development. They hope that supervision for frontline social workers will be similar to their student fieldwork supervision in their school years. In terms of the format and structure of the supervision session, supervisees indicated that there should be clear direction and specific action-oriented guidelines for intervention. Supervisees greatly appreciate feedback from their supervisors.

The supervisors who were interviewed usually want to dispense with administrative supervision. They maintained that the ideal use of supervisory authority is to have nothing to supervise. This is in keeping with the Taoist value of nothingness in the traditional Chinese culture. The Chinese have three schools of thought regarding management. The most idealistic is the Taoist belief that staff members can function well without any supervision. In fact, this represents the ideal state—a shared mission and a team of self-motivated staff members. The second school follows the Confucian philosophy of management, which emphasizes mutual respect and adhere to social norms (Ko & Ng, 1993). The staff members contribute their efforts and, in turn, they receive esteem, respect, and satisfaction. The most pragmatic school reflects the Legalist philosophy, which emphasizes the establishment of a fair policy, a clear reward and
punishment system, and specific regulations for staff members. As Shing (1988) points out, there are six important characteristics of Chinese management: totality, reciprocity, harmony, unity, pragmatism, and clarity. The ideal of supervision formulated by social workers in Hong Kong is consistent with the various philosophies of Chinese management. For both supervisors and supervisees, the lowest level is the Legalist school, which emphasizes rules and regulations. The next level is Confucian school, which emphasizes trust and mutual respect. The highest level is the Taoist school, which emphasizes self-motivation and autonomy of frontline workers.

In North America, the literature seldom addresses the concept of ideal supervision, but there is empirical research on the strengths of supervisors. As a survey conducted by Kadushin (1992c) indicates, the supervisors should have social work expertise, and be ready and able to share, teach, and communicate their knowledge and skills to the supervisees. Second, the supervisor should have the qualities that encourage learning: empathy, respect, and support-relationship skills. Third, the supervisor should possess personal characteristics including courage and caring. Supervisees valued the following qualities in supervision: first, ability, empathy, and concern; second, expertise, knowledge, skills, and practice experience; and third, the ability to listen.

For both the supervisor and the supervisee in Hong Kong, the ultimate criterion of ideal supervision is the effective outcome of intervention for the client. This is consistent with Kadushin’s (1992a) comment, “Supervision is for clients.” Studies conducted by Harkness and his colleagues (Harkness, 1995, 1997; Harkness & Hensley, 1991) reached
the same conclusion. Ideal supervision possesses certain characteristics. First of all, with regard to the format and structure, supervision sessions should be regular, planned in advance, and conducted in a comfortable and pleasant physical environment. Second, advice and instructions given by the supervisor should be clear, concrete, specific, and workable. Third, supervisors must be capable of understanding and responding to the difficulties that supervisees encounter in practice. Finally, supervisors should demonstrate their competence in direct social work practice for the benefit of their supervisees. These characteristics were also identified in the two large-scale surveys conducted by Kadushin (1974, 1992b) in the United States. It seems that there are similarities and differences between the ideals of social work supervision envisaged by social workers in North America and in Hong Kong. These findings will have many implications for theory building and education in the social work field.

In order for social workers in Hong Kong to approximate their vision of ideal supervision, it is important to make better use of their time and to engage in planning. Supervisees need a regular schedule for supervision sessions, planning for the sessions, frequent contacts, and follow-up from the supervisor; this involves a comprehensive schedule. Supervision should aim to solve present problems and encourage future professional development. Obviously, many of these characteristics in practice resemble student fieldwork supervision.

In Hong Kong, the supervisees’ experience of fieldwork supervision during their school years affects their expectations of their supervisors. As suggested by Bogo and
Vayda (1989, 1998), the process of student fieldwork supervision can be conceptualized as an Integration of Theory and Practice (ITP), a loop that begins with the retrieval of experience for reflection, and then links retrieved data with cognitive associations for professional response. Retrieval necessitates the recall of information, while reflection starts with personal associations engendered by life experiences, and the student’s feelings and assumptions regarding the retrieved data. Linkage is an analytical process whereby both the student and the fieldwork supervisor select concepts and frameworks to explain and interpret the situation. Professional response is the selection of a plan that will inform the practice the next time the student confronts this specific situation. The ITP loop provides a structure for the integration of cognitive and affective processes. Hence, student fieldwork supervision focuses on professional development and personal growth, which may help to explain the fact that the supervisees in this study preferred the model used in their student field supervision.

In Hong Kong, Choy and his colleagues (1998) conducted a survey of students’ perceptions of the roles and tasks of field instructors. They found that the two most significant roles performed by field instructors are enabler and educator. These findings are compatible with empirical knowledge developed in North America, however, there are two differences. First, social work students in Hong Kong are mainly supervised by faculty-based field instructors, while their counterparts in North America are more likely to be supervised by agency-based field instructors. Second, social work students in Hong Kong tend to be more dependent on their field instructors than their counterparts in North America (Choy et al., 1998).
In the North American literature, students became the focus of investigation in the last decade. Scholars focused their attention on the student/field instructor relationships (e.g., Bogo, 1993; Bogo & Vayda, 1998; Fortune et al., 1985; Fortune & Abramson, 1993) and emphasized the importance of fieldwork instructors’ training (e.g., Rogers, 1996a, 1996b, 1996c; Rogers & McDonald, 1992, 1995). On the other side of the world, researchers in Israel conducted studies on the student-field instructor relationship and supervisor’s styles and behaviour from students’ views (Lazar & Eisikovits, 1997; Lazar & Mosek, 1993).

Compared to student fieldwork supervision, the supervision for staff social workers seems to have lagged behind in terms of theory, practice, research, and training. Social work supervisors, in North America, Hong Kong, and other parts of the world, need to reflect on their experience in student fieldwork supervision and rethink their approaches to supervision of staff social workers.

6.5 Summary

This chapter addresses the three research questions posed regarding the distinct features, the cultural influences, and the ideal of supervision in Hong Kong. I compared the data collected in Hong Kong with the literature on supervision in North America. Social work supervision has four aspects: format, purpose, relationship, and use of authority. The format of supervision in Hong Kong is characterized by its loose structure;
it relies on a verbal agreement and supervision sessions are infrequent. Regarding the purposes and functions of supervision, the supervisor and the supervisee have the same professional goals. Supervision sessions are also used to address personal matters and encourage team building. The most distinctive feature of the supervisory relationship in Hong Kong is its dual perspective: it is both personal and professional. The tension of the supervisor-supervisee relationship is mitigated by Chinese cultural values that stress reciprocity: qing, yuan, and face. As a result, the relationship can be maintained without friction. Supervisory authority reflects the political strategy of the British-Hong Kong government before 1997. Through consultation and co-optation, with the passive consent of supervisees, a consensus is achieved without much conflict. From the characteristics of supervision in Hong Kong, it is obvious that societal culture has a significant influence on the supervisory relationship and that political culture has determined the form of supervisory authority.

Four themes influence the four aspects of social work supervision. These themes are time perspective, the concept of space, value orientation, and attitudes. A past-time orientation encourages social workers in Hong Kong to respect experience, both personal and professional. This includes supervisory experience, practice experience, and life experience. To a certain extent, the behaviour of the supervisor and the supervisee is determined by their background and experiences. The space allowed to both supervisors and supervisees has been greatly affected by the demands of funding sources and agencies. As a result, the discretion of the supervisor and the autonomy of the supervisee have decreased. However, since Chinese social workers in Hong Kong tend to respect
hierarchy and treasure harmony, their relationships are maintained by reciprocity and consensus. Finally, there is difference between the attitudes of a supervisor and that of a supervisee; while the supervisor's attitude tends to be professional, the supervisee's is more personal. The ideal of supervision for supervisees is to have specific, clear, supportive supervision that is oriented towards their professional development and which is similar to their student fieldwork supervision. The supervisor appreciates a self-motivated and self-disciplined staff because administrative supervision can be reduced to a minimum.

There are both similarities and differences between the forms of social work supervision in North America and those in Hong Kong. Clearly, the context of Hong Kong, especially the cultural context, has a strong influence on the practice of supervision and the behaviour of supervisors and supervisees. The preceding exploration of the contextual influence on supervision in Hong Kong contributes to the process of theory building; the nature of supervision is re-examined and clarified. In Chapter Seven, the implications of this study for practice, teaching, and research will be discussed. The discussion will be useful not only to supervisors and supervisees in Hong Kong but also to their counterparts in North America.
CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

7.1 Rationale and Focus of Research

This study examines the format, purpose, relationship, use of authority, and ideal of social work supervision in the cultural context of Hong Kong. A grounded theory approach was used to explore the experiences and views of supervisors and supervisees, based on data collected in six focus group sessions (three with supervisors and three with supervisees), forty in-depth interviews (twenty with supervisors and twenty with supervisees), and a focus group session with local experts in social work supervision. Based on these findings, I modified the model of social work supervision generated from the research literature on social work supervision in North America in an attempt to generate a culturally sensitive model of social work within the cultural context of Hong Kong.

In the development of the social work profession, supervision has a unique and important position. It is recognized as one of the major determinants of the quality of service to clients, the level of professional development of social workers, and the level of job satisfaction of social workers (Kadushin, 1992a; Munson, 1993; Shulman, 1993). However, a review of the historical accounts of the development of social work supervision in the twentieth century and the empirical literature on social work supervision in the last five decades reveals that academic debates on social work supervision still focus on basic supervisory issues, such as the compatibility of administrative functions and educational functions (Erera & Lazar, 1994a; Harkness & Poertner, 1989; Kadushin, 1992a; Payne,
1994; Shulman, 1993) and the respective merits of lifelong supervision and autonomous practice (Epstein, 1973; Rock, 1990; Veeder, 1990). Most research studies are quantitative investigations of the current state of social work supervision in specific service settings and locations in North America and other countries. Many studies neglect the influence of the cultural context on supervisory practice even though they conduct research in other countries (e.g., Erera & Lazar, 1994a).

A comprehensive literature review identified eleven models of supervision; however, most of these models limited the forum of supervisory practice to its organizational context and paid little attention to the effects of different cultures on supervisory practice. It seemed that a qualitative study of social work supervision in a specific cultural context would help to fill this research gap. As an experienced social work supervisor and teacher in Hong Kong, I conducted the study, guided by the following three research questions:

a. What are the distinct features of social work supervision in Hong Kong in terms of the format of supervision, the purpose of supervision, the nature of the supervisory relationship, and the use of authority in the supervisory process?

b. How does cultural context influence the supervisory practice of social workers in Hong Kong?

c. What is the ideal supervisory practice according to social workers in Hong Kong?

7.2 Summary of Findings and Analysis

Regarding the first research question, I found that the format of social work supervision in Hong Kong is relatively loose when compared to its counterpart in North
America. Written agendas and supervisory contracts are seldom used, though both supervisors and supervisees take notes for further use. The frequency of supervision is not adequate for proper monitoring of job performance or the development of the professional competence of the supervisee. Supervisors and supervisees use informal encounters for monitoring work progress and external training programs for staff development.

Both supervisors and supervisees view the client's rights and benefits as the highest priority of supervision; however, they have different views on the ways to achieve satisfactory client outcomes. Supervisors view supervision as a rational and systematic tool for safeguarding the standard and quality of service by monitoring the job performance of staff members. They believe that this mechanism will ensure that the client will receive the best service. On the other hand, supervisees hope that supervision will provide emotional support and foster teamwork; such supportive supervision would enhance their service output and the client would benefit.

The supervisory relationship of social workers in Hong Kong is very distinctive. It is characterized by a dual perspective—personal and professional. In Hong Kong, the supervisor is a “senior,” in both a personal and a professional sense. The tension arising from the dynamics of these two different types of relationships is lessened by the traditional Chinese cultural values of reciprocity: qing, yuan, and face. These values ensure that the unequal power structure of the supervisory relationship can be maintained in a harmonious, stable, and sustainable manner.
The use of supervisory authority reflects the political strategy of the British-Hong Kong government: "consensus by consultation and consent" has been adopted by supervisors to take into account the divergent views of supervisees, to reduce conflict to a minimum, and to come up with an acceptable decision. These characteristics of the supervisory relationship and supervisory authority in Hong Kong reveal that the cultural context, including traditional Chinese culture and British-Hong Kong political culture, has a great impact on the behaviour of the supervisor and the supervisee, and thus on supervisory practice.

Regarding the second research question, it was found that the cultural context of Hong Kong has a significant influence on the practice of social work supervision. The cultural influence can be considered according to four main factors: time perspective, the concept of space, values orientations, and attitudes. In terms of the time perspective, Chinese culture has a high regard for tradition and experience; as a result, supervisory experience, practice experience, and life experience are assets for both the supervisor and the supervisee. These experiences affect their "status in the field" and are the foundation of their authority. In addition, the developmental stages of the supervisor, the supervisee, and the supervision process, as well as the availability of resources in the future, influence the behaviour of the supervisor and the supervisee. Supervisors tend to be more future-oriented, while supervisees are more present-oriented. In the most literal sense, the physical setting of supervision is limited by the lack of office space in Hong Kong. A more theoretical concept of space, in terms of organizational distance, is evident in the
effects of the internal restrictions imposed by the agency and the external demands from the funding sources. The professional autonomy of frontline social workers and the discretion of supervisors are both reduced by organizational constraints. There is also a psychosocial distance, which is illustrated by the gap between the officer rank and the assistant rank in the networks of social workers in Hong Kong. With regard to value orientations, both the organizational culture and the societal culture greatly influence supervisory practice. The supervisor's relationship with the supervisee has three aspects: hierarchical, collegial, and familial. The supervisory relationship is both personal and professional. The reciprocity of interpersonal relationships in Chinese culture--illustrated by the concepts of qing, yuan, and face--help to preserve the power hierarchy of the supervisory relationship. Finally, the supervisor and the supervisee have very different views of their professional roles. The supervisor perceives the supervisory relationship is a "one to many" professional relationship, which explains the supervisor's tendency to be rational, impersonal, and goal-oriented. However, the supervisee perceives it as "one-to-one" relationship, which is similar to other personal relationships that are more intimate and supportive.

With regard to the third research question, I found that the ideal supervision situation is one that is scheduled regularly, planned in advance, and conducted in a comfortable and pleasant physical environment. The supervisor's advice and instructions should be clear, concrete, specific, and workable. The supervisor should listen to what supervisees say and try to understand their difficulties. Finally, supervisors are expected to demonstrate their skill and competence by solving problems in a direct professional
manner. In fact, the ideal practice from the perspective of supervisees resembles student fieldwork supervision. As far as supervisors are concerned, supervisory practice is ideal when staff members are self-disciplined and self-motivated; then the use of administrative authority can be reduced to a minimum.

Based on the findings and analysis, the initial model of social work supervision was revised to reflect the above-mentioned changes. The foundations of the model rest on research in the North American literature on social work supervision and on the first-hand information collected from supervisors and supervisees in social work in Hong Kong. It is a more culturally sensitive model, which reflects the influence of Chinese culture and the British system of government and its inherent ranking structure.

7.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings and analysis of the study, the implications for supervisory practice and research were identified and are outlined in the following sections. Although the study was conducted in Hong Kong, some of the recommendations may be applied to supervisory practice in North America where supervision is often a cross-cultural practice between members from different ethnic groups.

7.3.1 Implications for Supervisory Practice

The study revealed that supervision in social work is not only a professional practice but also a personal practice embedded in cultural and organizational contexts.
The form of supervisory practice in Hong Kong is a combination of, and compromise between, the North American concept of supervision and the British system of government within the Chinese cultural context. That these contradictory components coexist without conflicts is astonishing. It suggests that social workers do not pursue ideas in a linear manner; they tend to be intuitive, relying on unconscious processes (Schon, 1987). In their daily practice, social workers go through the loop of retrieval of information, reflection, and professional response again and again (Bogo & Vadya, 1998). In this loop, social workers handle the competing values at different layers of thought. Hence, these values are not necessarily in conflict with each other. The situation seems to resemble a clever child handling conflicting demands from parents, teachers, and peers.

Hence, both the format and physical setting of supervision sessions should reflect not only the goals of supervision but also the culture of the society and the organization. An incompatibility between the format and goals will affect the effectiveness of supervisory practice which, is not only the case in Hong Kong; but it is also true in North America.

As the study indicates, life experience, practice experience, and supervisory experience are very important determinants of the behaviour of both the supervisor and the supervisee. Top management should endeavour to match supervisors and supervisees with complementary backgrounds and experiences. A satisfactory match of supervisor and supervisee based on values, background, personalities, and gender is highly
recommended. Of course, this may be difficult to achieve as there are many constraints on the arrangement of personnel. Still, an understanding of each other’s backgrounds, including professional qualifications, work experience, and supervisory experience, will enhance communication between the supervisor and the supervisee and encourage a harmonious working relationship. Building mutual understanding and formulating contracts are important issues that should be addressed by the supervisor and the supervisee. A clear, mutually agreed-upon contract, whether verbal or written, would help the supervisor and the supervisee to clarify their respective expectations. It would eliminate unnecessary conflicts and, to a certain extent, protect the autonomy of the supervisee in direct practice. For the supervisor, the support of the frontline staff and the sanction of top management are equally important. Without this support, supervisors become “sandwiched,” between the two levels of the hierarchy facing demands from both the top and the bottom, and feeling isolated.

For both the supervisor and the supervisee, the source of emotional support should come not only from each other in the vertical power hierarchy but also from colleagues and clients. Peer support can be encouraged by informal sharing sessions among supervisors of the same grade and among the supervisees. There should also be opportunities for recognition of the contribution of frontline social workers by clients.

The findings in this study reveal that supervisors and supervisees have a common mission: to provide quality service to clients in order to solve their problems. However, both parties must use this common base to create a shared vision. Without the shared
vision, meaningful supervision cannot be achieved. The study revealed that, in fact, supervisors and supervisees use different words and live in different social worlds, even though they work closely in the same organizational context. In order to realize fully supervision’s capacity to develop the skills of social workers and thus improve the quality of service, the supervisor and the supervisee must understand each other’s thoughts and feelings. This study is a starting point for the process to achieve this end.

In fact, social workers in Hong Kong are at a crossroad. In the last five decades, almost all social workers in Hong Kong have worked for the government or in government-subsidized human service organizations. They have little sense of an individual professional identity due to the absence of a professional registration system and the scarcity of private practice. They view themselves as employees of specific human service organization, instead of individual members of the social work profession. The establishment of professional self-image is still in its early stages that may explain the fact that social workers in Hong Kong tend to rely on their employers to provide support, both educational and emotional, to enhance their own professional growth.

If frontline social workers want to enjoy professional autonomy, they have to pursue their own professional development in a self-directed manner. Like other professionals (e.g., medical doctors, lawyers, and engineers), social workers must recognize the fact that they have to pay for the benefits of professional development. In this regard, professional associations and peer networking will play critical roles.
Without resolving the issue of positioning professional identity, the supervisor and supervisee will continue to be dissatisfied with each other, because, in fact, they both want contradictory things. Supervisors want supervisees to show professional competence, but they continue to treat them as employees. Supervisees demand professional autonomy, but are only willing to make the effort of an employee. These discrepancies inevitably create tension and conflict between the supervisor and the supervisee as each feels disappointed in the other.

Supervisees in the study expressed the desire that supervision for staff social workers should resemble student fieldwork supervision. We should not treat this desire as a sign of regression in the face of difficulties in the supervisory process. In fact, student fieldwork supervision is superior to staff supervision in many ways. There are many areas in which staff supervisors can learn from the student fieldwork supervisors, including the preparation for supervision sessions, teaching and learning strategies, assessment of training needs, supportive attitudes, and the establishment of learning contract. Obviously, student fieldwork supervision is more specific, systematic, and well planned than staff supervision. More importantly, students in fieldwork supervision are encouraged to put their ideas into practice and tell the supervisor their problems. The sense of security established during fieldwork ensures students will not be embarrassed in the process of pursuing professional development.

Of course, we should not ignore the basic differences between these two kinds of supervision in social work, especially in terms of purpose and power structure. In the case
of supervision for staff social workers, the supervisees are paid staff who have the obligation to get the job done effectively and efficiently. The supervisor is in a higher position in the hierarchy and must monitor their job performance in order to ensure that the quality of service can meet the expectations of clients, funding sources, and human service organizations (Kadushin, 1992a, Munson, 1993). In the eyes of the top management of human service organizations, professional growth and emotional support are just byproducts of the supervisory process. However, in the case of student supervision, students pay a tuition fee to the university in order to receive learning opportunities. The "supervisor-supervisee" relationship is, in fact, a teacher-student relationship. This is why student fieldwork supervision is always accessible, warm, and supportive (Bogo & Vayda, 1998; Kadushin, 1981, 1992a). Students are expected to make mistakes and receive suggestions for improvement. These discrepancies may account for the fact that student supervision can be idealistic but supervision for staff social workers is always realistic.

7.3.2 Implications for Further Research

Research on social work supervision is very difficult to conduct since it involves many sensitive issues relating to the power hierarchy and to the personal relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee. In addition, a study that considers both the supervisor and the supervisee requires a great deal of research. Research on supervision is administratively complicated and emotionally complex. Thus, it is no surprise that only few empirical research studies have been undertaken in the last five decades.
Since supervision is a culturally specific and contextually embedded practice, it is worthwhile for researchers to conduct research studies in specific societies, especially multi-ethnic societies such as Canada and the United States. To create models of social work supervision for different cultures will contribute to theory building. A comparison of supervision models from different cultural contexts will improve the supervisory practice in multi-ethnic societies where it is very common for supervisors and supervisees to belong to different ethnic groups. Research on cross-cultural supervision will refine the existing supervisory practice and facilitate the supervisory process. I believe this effort will help both supervisors and supervisees understand their supervisory practice and improve their delivery of direct service; eventually the clients will benefit.

If the consent of the supervisor, the supervisee and the organization is forthcoming, a study of the supervisory dyad would be an extremely interesting and useful source of information on supervisory practice at the micro-practice level. Both the supervisor and the supervisee would receive useful feedback, but of course, the power disparity will remain a problem if the three parties are unable to adopt a very open attitude.

More than ten years ago, Harkness and Poertner (1989) reviewed the state of research on social work supervision in North America. They proposed that existing social work supervision should be reconceptualized; the new model would include multiple operational definitions of social work supervision that reflect various strategies in supervisory practice. This study is an attempt to define social work supervision practice
in the cultural context of Hong Kong. It is a qualitative study and should be succeeded by quantitative investigations of the current state of social work supervision (for example, a large-scale sample survey or a longitudinal day log study) in order to construct a representative profile of the current state of social work supervision in Hong Kong. It would be helpful if scholars in North America were to conduct similar qualitative research in order to determine the influence of cultural context on the practice of social work supervision. The contrast created by context would certainly refine our understanding of social work supervision in different cultural contexts. An understanding of the similarities and differences will clarify the nature of social work supervision and help determine its future.

The ultimate objective of social work supervision is to improve service quality. Research on social work supervision should explore the link between supervisory practice and client outcomes in various service settings (Harkess & Poertner, 1989, Harkness & Hensley, 1991; Harkness, 1995, 1997) and, of course, in various cultural contexts. Outcome research on cross-cultural practice (Tsang & George, 1998) may also be applied to evaluate the effectiveness of various supervisory practices and to identify effective supervisory strategies. The assessment of outcome effectiveness must address issues of definition and measurement, in addition to the match of the supervisor and the supervisee dyad, the data should be collected from multiple sources, including supervisor’s reports, supervisee’s reports, and objective measures.
Finally, it is significant that many frontline social workers are impressed by the fieldwork supervision they received at school. Research on student fieldwork supervision is superior to studies of staff supervision in terms of scope and methodologies. It is necessary for us to conduct studies on the feasibility of adopting aspects of the format, strategies, and skills of fieldwork supervision when supervising staff social workers.

7.4 From the Nature of Supervision to the Future of Supervision: A Personal and Philosophical Reflection on the Research Journey

This study involved tracing the roots of supervisory practice, examining supervisory theories, reviewing existing empirical research studies, and exploring the specific features of social work supervision in a specific cultural context. All these efforts contributed to an understanding of the nature of social work supervision. The research was illuminating in other respects as well. The study encouraged supervisors and supervisees to express their ideas and ideals, as well as their difficulties and dreams. All this valuable first-hand information provided me with an in-depth understanding of social work supervision in Hong Kong. The experience of conducting this study revealed that, although the functions of social work supervision are influenced by the contexts of supervisory practice, the future of social work supervision can be jointly shaped by the supervisor and the supervisee.

If we were asked to identify the most unique element of the social work profession, the practice of supervision would be a likely choice. Social work supervision is one of the
major mechanisms of monitoring the quality of service outcome and a tool for the development of the professional social workers. Of course, this culturally sensitive model of social work supervision does not bring the effort of theory building to an end; it is a starting point for a new journey on the part of researchers, educators, and practitioners.

Research is, by nature, a lonely process of pursuing knowledge. The long journey of this study has made me more empathetic to the supervisor—"a marginal person" mediating between the top management and the frontline staff. There are demands and deadlines to meet, but there are few opportunities to share the difficulties and frustration. Thus, peer support is very important to both supervisors and researchers. On the research journey, I was lucky to have peers who were interested in my study and appreciated my efforts.

It is difficult for me to bracket my two roles—as an experienced supervisor and as a teacher of a course on supervision—in the research process. The distance between "self" and "supervision" has led to much soul-searching. The change of identity from "I am a supervisor" to "I am the teacher of supervisors" and then to "I am a researcher specializing in supervision" has been difficult to negotiate alone. This journey involves the interaction and struggle among the personal self, the professional self, and the academic self. In this qualitative study, I discovered that I had used my "self" to explore supervisory practice. I often reminded myself that I had to put my professional self aside and try to be more academic. However, without professional experience, I would not have been able to interpret the rich information collected in interviews in a meaningful
manner. When I reviewed the data about traditional Chinese values, my personal self reminded me that I am also a Chinese and that I share these beliefs.

In the research process, I also discovered that the philosophy of qualitative research is very complementary to Chinese culture. In traditional Chinese culture, the "individual" is placed in the environment of an uncertain nature. The "individual" is a part of it. Everything is "becoming," not "being." In qualitative study, inquiry is an ongoing process in which the researcher is also a participant. In this study, as a researcher, I felt that I was also embedded in the cultural context. There was also the reciprocity of Chinese interpersonal relationships, including qing, yuan, and face, in my encounters with the informants.

The necessity of describing Chinese culture in order to prepare the literature review and write the study report made me aware of the degree to which I belong to the Chinese ethnic group. However, at the same time, I became aware of the diversity of various Chinese cultures. One's location--in Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, or North America--differentiates one's behaviour. Also, Chinese culture varies over time: contemporary Chinese societies are dramatically different from those in ancient times.

Supervision makes social work practice not only effective and efficient but also unique and humane. Therefore, it is important for us to revisit the nature and essence of social work before we embark on supervisory practice. When we practise supervision, we have to be both culturally sensitive and contextually specific. We have to remember that
we, too, are social workers. As supervisors, we have to see supervisees not only as staff members but as human beings with motives and dignity. Supervision is not merely a mechanism for ensuring service accountability; it is also an opportunity to pursue personal and professional growth. During this long journey of exploration, I reconfirmed my belief that to be natural and human is the ultimate and universal principle for supervisory practice and social work intervention.
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Appendix II: Consent Form

**Title of Research Project:**

"Towards A Culturally Sensitive Model of Social Work Supervision in Hong Kong"

Investigator: *TSUI, Ming-sum*

I acknowledge that the research procedures have been explained to me clearly and any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I have been informed of the alternatives to participation of the study. I also understand the benefits of joining the research study. The possible risk and discomforts have been explained to me. I know that I may ask now, or in the future, any questions about the study or the research procedures. I have been assured that records relating to me will be kept confidential and that no information will be released or printed that would disclose our personal identity without my permission. I have agreed to have the interview audio tape-recorded but if I wish to speak off-the-record at any time during the interview.

I understand that my participation in this study is completely voluntary and that my decision to participate or not, will not influence any services that we may receive. I further understand that I am free to withdraw our participation from the study at any time.

I hereby consent to participate.

Name:

Signature:

The person who may be contacted about the research is:

Mr. TSUI, Ming-sum
Office tel.: (852)-2766-5739

Date:
Appendix III: Information about Informants

Supervisees:

1. **Yvonne**: A school social worker (ASWO) with four years of experience

2. **Kevin**: An outreach youth worker (SWA) with six and a half years of experience

3. **Nancy**: A caseworker (ASWO) with four years of experience in a government family service center

4. **Katherine**: A youth worker (SWA) with one year experience in a children and youth center

5. **May**: A school social worker (ASWO) with four years of experience

6. **Charles**: A community worker (SWA) with five and a half years of experience

7. **Karen**: A social worker (SWA) with seven and a half years of experience in a rehabilitation service unit

8. **Kenneth**: A youth worker (SWA) with four years of experience in a children and youth centre

9. **Sophia**: A social worker (SWA) with six years of experience in a government counseling centre

10. **Linda**: A social worker (SWA) with two years of experience in a children and youth centre

11. **Sally**: A social worker (SWA) with two years of experience in an integrated service team for the youth

12. **Billy**: An outreach youth worker (SWA) with two years of experience

13. **Winnie**: A case worker (SWA) with one and a half years of experience in a government family service centre

14. **Carrie**: A caseworker (SSWA) with twenty years of experience in a government family service centre

15. **Matthew**: A social worker (SWA) with five and a half years of experience in a government residential institution for boys with behavioral problems
16. **Cindy**: A medical social worker (ASWO) with two years of experience in a public hospital

17. **Lily**: A youth worker (ASWO) with six years of experience in a children and youth centre

18. **Olive**: A youth worker (SWA) of a children and youth center with two and a half years of experience.

19. **Mimi**: A community development worker (SWA) in a neighborhood community development project with ten years of experience

20. **Timothy**: A medical social worker (ASWO) in a public hospital with twenty years of experience

**Supervisors:**

1. **Mrs. Lam**: A service supervisor (SWO) with eighteen years of experience of a family service centre

2. **Mr. Au**: A team leader (SWO) of integrated service team for the youth with twelve years of experience

3. **Mr. Hui**: A team leader of an outreaching team for the youth with eight years of experience

4. **Mr. So**: A service supervisor in community rehabilitation unit (SSWO) with sixteen years of experience

5. **Miss Yin**: A superintendent of an elderly home (ASWO) with six and a half years of experience

6. **Mrs. Lok**: A school social work supervisor (SWO) with twenty years of experience

7. **Mrs. Cheng**: A school social work supervisor (SWO) with ten years of experience

8. **Mrs. Chui**: A center-in-charge of a children and youth centre (ASWO) with twelve years of experience

9. **Miss Dong**: A service manager of an employee assistance program (SWO) with sixteen years of experience
10. Mr. Choy: A service supervisor of a residential rehabilitation unit (SWO) with thirteen years of experience of a mid-size non-government organization

11. Miss Ching: A center-in-charge of a children and youth centre (ASWO) with four years of experience

12. Mr. Yue: A superintendent of a residential unit (ASWO) with sixteen years of experience

13. Mr. Chow: A service supervisor of outreach service for the youth with ten years of experience

14. Miss Siu: A center-in-charge of a children and youth centre with five years of experience

15. Mr. Wong: A center-in-charge of a counseling centre with twenty-one years of experience

16. Mr. Leung: A center-in-charge of a children and youth centre (ASWO) with six years of experience

17. Miss Lai: A center-in-charge of a rehabilitation centre (ASWO) with five years of experience

18. Miss Ling: A service supervisor in rehabilitation field (SWO) with thirteen years of experience.

19. Miss Tsui: A service supervisor in service for new immigrants (ASWO) with ten years of experience

20. Mr. Tung: An superintendent of an elderly hostel with twelve years of experience.
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
FACULTY OF SOCIAL WORK
THESIS RESEARCH FOR PHD IN SOCIAL WORK

"Towards A Culturally Sensitive Model of Social Work Supervision in Hong Kong"

by Ming-sum TSUI

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET (for Supervisors)

1. Name of Participant:

2. Sex:

3. Education:

4. Your Own Position/Grade:

5. No. of Supervisees:

6. The Position of Your Supervisees:

7. Your Training in Social Work Supervision:

8. Your Experience in Social Work Field:

9. Nature of Service Setting:

10. Status of Organization:

11. Size of Organization:

12. Length of Period of Supervising the Current Group of Supervisees?


__ Year(s) and __ Month(s)
INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SUPERVISORS

1. Format and Structure of Supervision

a. What is the format of supervision?
   (Is it individual session or group supervision? Or both?)
   Or some other formats?)

b. Is there a written contract to specify the objectives, expectations, responsibilities and formats of supervision?
   (If no, why not?)

c. Is there verbal agreement about supervision?

d. What is the major content of discussion in the supervision session with your supervisee(s)?

e. How frequent is the supervision session?
   (Is it regular? Is it enough or not? Who initiates the supervision session?)

f. How long is each supervision session?

g. Where is the supervision session held?
   (Interviewing room? Your office? or your supervisee’s office? How do you feel about it?)

h. Is there any written agenda?
   (Who sets the agenda?)

i. Is there a written record of the content of the discussion?
   (If no, why? If yes, what is the content?)

2. In your own opinion, what are the major purposes of supervision in your own service unit?
   (Probes: What are the meanings and functions of supervision in your own view? If you could change it, what should be the supervision for?)

3. How do you describe the supervisory relationship between you and your supervisee(s)?
(Probes: Just like friends (or enemies)? brother and sister? teacher and student? boss and subordinate? uncle and nephew? or father and son? Could you please describe your own experience? What are the factors affecting the supervisory relationship?)

4. How supervisory authority is used in your service unit?

(Probes: How the decision is made in the supervisory process? Who makes the decision? If there is different view, whose view prevails? Would there be discussion between you and the supervisee(s)? How the discussion is going? In what manner? What is the nature of the communication? Is it equal? or just one way? How do you feel about it?)

5. How do you describe "good supervision" for social workers?

(Probes: What makes you feel that the supervision is good or not? What happens in the supervisory process? How good supervision influences direct social work practice and job satisfaction of social workers?)

6. If you could, which part of supervision you would change?
PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET (for Supervisees)

1. Name of Participant:

2. Sex:

3. Education:

4. Your Own Position/Grade:

5. The Position of Your Supervisor:

6. Gender of Your Supervisor:

7. Your Experience in Social Work Field:

8. Nature of Service Setting:

9. Status of Organization:

10. Size of Organization:

11. Length of Period Being Supervised by the Current Supervisor?

   ____ Year(s) and ____ Month(s)
INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SUPERVISEES

1. Format and Structure of Supervision

a. What is the format of supervision?
   (Is it individual session or group supervision? Or both?)
   Or some other formats?)

b. Is there a written contract to specify the objectives, expectations, responsibilities and formats of supervision?
   (If no, why not?)

c. Is there verbal agreement about supervision?

d. What is the major content of discussion in the supervision session with your supervisor?

e. How frequent is the supervision session?
   (Is it regular? Is it enough or not? Who initiates the supervision session?)

f. How long is each supervision session?

g. Where is the supervision session held?
   (Interviewing room? Your supervisor's office? Or your office? How do you feel about it?)

h. Is there any written agenda?
   (Who sets the agenda?)

i. Is there a written record of the content of the discussion?
   (If no, why? If yes, what is the content?)

j. How would you describe your supervisor?
2. In your own opinion, what are the major purposes of supervision in your own service unit?

(Probes: What are the meanings and functions of supervision in your own view? If you could change it, what should be the supervision for?)

3. How do you describe the supervisory relationship between your supervisor and you?

(Probes: Just like friends (or enemies)? brother and sister? teacher and student? boss and subordinate? uncle and nephew? or father and son? Could you please describe your own experience? What are the factors affecting the supervisory relationship?)

4. How supervisory authority is used in your service unit?

(Probes: How the decision is made in the supervisory process? Who makes the decision? If there is different view, whose view prevails? Would there be discussion between you and the supervisee(s)? How the discussion is going? In what manner? What is the nature of the communication? Is it equal? or just one way? How do you feel about it?)

5. How do you describe "good supervision" for social workers?

(Probes: What makes you feel that the supervision is good or not? What happens in the supervisory process? How good supervision influences direct social work practice and job satisfaction of social workers?)

6. If you could, which part of supervision you would change?