INTRODUCTION

From the establishment of the Communist China, the limited professional social work services and social work education came to a total halt since the Cultural Revolution (1960s). Before the Open Door Policy in the 1980s, social work education was restricted to cadres training institutions for the Communist Youth League, Women’s Federation, Labour Union, and Civil Affairs workers. This chapter describes how social work education in China evolved through several important historical periods since the early 1900s from a purely Western Christian-based social work education (before 1949) to an ideologically driven human service cadre training (before Open Door Policy) and then towards aligning more with professional social work education internationally (Gao & Yan, 2014; Li, Han, & Huang, 2013; Wang & Tsang, 2016; Xiong & Wang, 2007).

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Driven by high pressure of social problems arising from the rapid economic growth and urbanisation, the development of professional social work education in China in the past two decades was rapid. By the end of 2018, there were more than 348 undergraduate and 150 diploma social work programmes, and 147 Master of Social Work (MSW) programmes, as well as 17 PhD programmes graduating over 40,000 social work graduates each year. The China Association for Social Work Education (CASWE) has a current membership of over 380 institutions. The total social service workforce has reached 1.24 million. Since the establishment of public professional social work examination system, 439,266 had passed the examination and registered as social workers and senior social workers in China (China Philanthropy News, March 22, 2019). Concomitantly, this thriving social work workforce has been employed in a variety of emerging social welfare services, requiring social work professional input. Although there are issues on the lack of standardisation of curriculum design and fieldwork practice, ill-equipped social work teachers, and the weak career prospects for social work graduates, the development of professional social work education has been phenomenal. Being the second largest economy with the largest population in the world, there is ample room for the further growth and improvement of the quality of professional social work services and social work education in China.

This chapter will review the historical development of social work education during three period of time in China, 1910–1978, 1979–2005, and 2006–date. These landmark periods were closely linked to the sociopolitical context of China in the last century. The situation of Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan will not be included as the development of social work education was not affected by the political scene in mainland China. Standard and level of professionalisation in these three places were much higher. Professors from these Chinese communities were an important driving force after the Open Door Policy in fostering re-connection of the social service sector with professional social work organisations internationally.

TRUNCATED EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION (1910–1978)

Social work was non-existent in traditional China, Ching Dynasty, until the establishment of the Republic of China in 1910. Social work education was introduced into China by a group of American Missionary teachers through the sociology programme of St. John’s University, Shanghai in 1908. Headed by an American missionary Daniel Kulp, the social work programme was established in the sociology department of the Shanghai Wujiang University in 1914, together with the establishment of a university-based community service centre. The Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) (established in China in 1895), under its secretary, John Burgees set up a social service organisation (the Social Progress Club) for students in Beijing 1912.
Together with other missionary teachers from Princeton University, they later set up the sociology department at Peking University in 1922. Financed by the Rockefeller Foundation, a religious and social service department was established in the Xiehe Hospital, Beijing in 1918. The Department of Sociology of Peking University with a social work programme set up was renamed as Department of Sociology and Social Services in 1925. Xiehe Hospital offered fieldwork placements for social work students from Peking University. By the 1930s, there were 12 missionary-related universities in China offering social work education within the departments of sociology. These programmes were initially taught by missionaries from America, and later by local social work teachers educated in America (Gao & Yan, 2014; Leung & Nann, 1995). Professor Jieqiong Lei, widely known as the “mother of social work education in China”, graduated from America and returned to China to help promoting social work services in the 1930s. The first independent department of social work (Department of Social Welfare) was established in Nanjing Jinling University in 1948.

As illustrated above, major features of the early stage of social work education were: subordinating under sociology (social work programmes were offered within the sociology departments), missionary-led (early programmes were set up and taught by American missionaries), limited in scale (there were only 12 universities with social work programmes in 1930), modelled after the West (American-based curriculum with social casework as the major social work method taught), with limited government recognition and support (there were basically no social work jobs available in the society at that time). The primary purpose of social work education was to provide trained workforce supporting university-based social service projects initiated by Christian missionaries from the West (Wang & Tsang, 2016).

After the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, Western-oriented social work practice under the previous capitalistic regime was regarded as an “iron fist behind a velvet glove” that oppressed the working-class people. Labelled as “bourgeois or pseudo-science”, social work together with other social science disciplines, such as psychology and sociology were abolished in university education in 1953. Only Marxist economics were taught to university students as a required subject in political education for all.

At the same time, missionaries had to leave and most social welfare organisations were either closed down or taken over by the PRC government. Under the “iron-rice bowl” system of the centrally planned economy, work units were responsible for the provision of social, cultural, and educational services, including social welfare services ranging from child care to family support services. As life expectancy was short, there was little need for services for the elderly. New groups of government-employed and administration-oriented non-professional “social workers” were established. They were cadres in trade unions, women’s federations, communist youth leagues and the neighbourhoods who employed administrative procedures
and ideological education to resolve social contradictions/conflicts and personal problems. To resolve family and individual issues, people involved had to undergo people’s mediation in which the “client” would face public and open criticisms, and directive instructions to learn from the role models of being a good citizen under the socialist system of New China. Administrative procedures would discipline (job demotion, salary deduction, and transfer to unfavourable positions) or reward (job promotion, selection as learning model, and housing or welfare benefits) the client to induce “desirable” individual behavioral and ideological “changes” (Leung & Lam, 2000).

The American National Association of Social Workers made its first visit to China in 1977. According to its report, China was apparently seen as an utopia without Western types of social problems, such as poverty, juvenile delinquencies, abandon babies, mental illnesses, obesity, unwed marriages, and family breakdown. On the surface, there was no need of “professional social workers” (Chauncey & Sally, 1979). For three decades, the term “social work” was recognised as a type of non-paid volunteering work. Professional social work and social work education were absent from China’s social welfare and educational system.

**Reinstating Social Welfare and Social Work Education (1979–2005)**

In adopting the Open Door Policy (1978) and market-oriented economic reform in the 1980s, the traditional welfare protection offered by the collectives, notably work units in the cities and communes in the rural areas, was eroding rapidly. Under a more pluralistic economy, people’s livelihood became less secure due to rising unemployment, inadequate labour market protection, and income instability (Chan & Chow, 1992). Pension support and healthcare protection had become either inaccessible or less reliable. Even worse, the traditional family support had been broken down rapidly due to higher population mobility, increased family breakdown and divorces, draconian family planning policy and ageing population. Unprecedented social issues emerge. They include income inequalities, urban poverty, family violence, care of the elderly and the disabled persons, drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, abandoned babies, homeless vagabonds, left-behind children, and frail older persons in villages due to migration of young people to cities for jobs (Leung & Xu, 2015, Chapters 2 and 3).

Facing rapid escalating of social demands and the need for effective social control, the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MoCA) was then established in 1978 to take charge of formulating social policy for the welfare of the deprived and under-privileged populations. At the same time, sociology was restated in universities in 1979. Prominent sociology scholars, such as Professor Xiaotong Fei and Professor Jieqiong Lei, advocated for the establishment of social work education programmes. In the first textbook on sociology published in 1984
by Professor Fei, there was a chapter on “applied sociology”, referring to social work as a professional discipline under sociology.

The Ministry of Civil Affairs (MoCA) was aware of the need to have better trained and equipped cadres to cope with the profound social challenges. It established the national Cadre Training College in 1983. Study tours were organised, especially to Hong Kong to learn about the design and operation of social welfare services outside China. After a national conference in 1987 on the need of social work education, the MoCA supported the setting of social work programmes in four universities in 1988. In the same year, the Asia–Pacific Association for Social Work Education (APASWE) collaborated with Peking University organised an international conference on social work education in Beijing. Participants were mainly professors from the four universities, cadres training colleges of Women’s Federation, Communist Youth League, Labour Union, and others from sociology departments of various universities with interests in developing social work education. That conference was portrayed as an icebreaking contact for Chinese social work educators with their Western counterparts.

In 1986 to 1989, the University of Hong Kong (HKU) collaborated with Sun Yat-sen University to launch the first social work programme after 1949 in Guangzhou. Courses were taught by social work teachers from HKU. Meanwhile, HKU MSW students were arranged to have fieldwork placements, supervised by HKU supervisors at work units, such as the street offices and cadre colleges in Guangzhou. The evaluation report on the Project observed that sociology students and government cadres were suspicious of China’s need of Western-based social work found in capitalistic societies. Yet they were fascinated by the variety of “soft” skills of social work in relating with people. They included skills in interviewing, counselling, running small groups and simulation games, as well as organising social activities. However, as the local teachers were not professional social workers, there were no practicum requirements in the programme. As there were no social work jobs, few of the students seemed interested in pursuing a social work career. Many of the graduates of Sun Yat-sen University took up civil service jobs that had a brighter and clearer career path. Without fieldwork placements, students treated social work teaching as an academic discipline rather than professional education (Leung, Nann, & He, 1990).

Following the beginning of the negotiation on the future of Hong Kong between China and the UK in the mid-1980s, Guangzhou, a major city close to Hong Kong, had shown more interests in learning more about social work operated welfare service model. Neighbourhood-based welfare services for children, the disabled, and the older people began to emerge particularly in those relatively wealthy communities, and some of the traditional NGOs, such as the YMCA and Young Women’s Christian Association, under the sponsorship of the Communist Party, were re-invigorated to provide social services (Chan, 1993). In learning from Hong Kong, the MoCA promoted
community services and implemented “welfare lotteries” to generate funds for social services in 1986. The general public could buy the lottery tickets and the winners would receive cash payments. After paying the prizes, the remaining sum would be allocated for funding social welfare and natural disaster relief projects. In 2017, welfare lotteries raised a total of 63 billion yuan (around US$9M) (MoCA, 2018).

Under the leadership of the MoCA, with support from social workers and social work teachers within and outside China, the China Association of Social Workers (CASW) was established in 1991. The CASW joined as a country member of the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) in 1992. With the support from the Ministry of Education, the professional organisation coordinating social work education institutions in the development of social work education, the China Association of Social Work Education (CASWE) was formed in the following year (1995) and participated as a member of the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW). Funded by the Keswick Foundation, Hong Kong, CASWE was responsible for organising pilot social service networks to serve as practice base for students, social work conferences, overseas study tours, textbook publications, and training workshop for teachers.

Despite increased international contacts and support, initial responses in setting up new social work education programmes remained cautious. By 1997, there were only about 21 social work undergraduate programmes established, with about 1000 graduates a year. To tackle unemployment issues of high-school graduates, the government started policy to rapidly expand higher education and enrolment in 1999. Social work was re-classified as a “non-controlled development” subject, local governments and universities had the discretion to set up occupation-oriented programmes. Social work programmes soared immediately from only 36 in 2001, 90 in 2002, 172 in 2003, and further to 211 in 2007, producing over 10,000 graduates each year. The phenomenal growth of social work education programmes was not a response to the employment demands from the social welfare sector. Until then, there were still no formal social work positions for the employment of social work graduates. In fact, the government, specifically the MoCA, was still cautious about promoting social work as a profession. The situation was described as an “education-led” social work development. Most social work graduates, particularly those from prestigious universities, could not enter into employment as professional social workers. In other words, social work education was evolved independently by detaching itself from the social welfare field (Leung, 2013).

In general, the design of the social work curriculum was modelled after the Hong Kong or the international framework, including basic courses on social work practice, fieldwork placements, social policy, human behaviour and social environment, research and management. Despite the high growth in number, programme quality remained poor. Hindering factors included the
lack of social work teachers with practice experiences and formal social work education; inadequate standardisation of curriculum (lacking accreditation mechanism); insufficient locally produced textbooks and teaching material, as well as qualified fieldwork supervisors and practice settings (Leung, 2007, 2013; Wang & Tsang, 2016). More importantly, the government had no formal social work positions, and the development of NGOs was very limited. The lack of career prospects had greatly discouraged high-school students from choosing social work programmes and entering social work jobs after graduation.

There were criticisms that the social work curriculum was directly and implanted into the Chinese society without going through the process “indigenization”. Professor Shi, the former secretary of CASWE, was critical of the situation. He concisely pointed out that China’s social work education development was “born late but grew fast; led by educational institutions; insufficient quality teachers; and conveniently swallowed the whole curriculum package without adequate digestion” (Shi, 2004, p. 31). The whole social work education was growing too fast. Yet it lacked the capacity and environment to build up a competent educational system supporting the development of the social welfare services and social work profession. Described as “Great Leap Introduction” of social work values and knowledge of social work from Hong Kong and the West, the former President of the CASWE, Professor Si Bin Wang showed concern over the lack of quality of social work education (Wang, 2012). Prominent Chinese social work educators, such as S. B. Wang, B. N. Shi, R. X. Xu, and Y. G. Xiong, have queried that social work education in China has been adopting international standards without going through a systematical process of indigenisation (Leung, 2007, 2013).

As most social work teachers in universities had backgrounds of sociology, political science or philosophy without any professional social work education, the need of improving the quality of social work teachers became paramount. In the beginning of the 1990s, a number of university teachers of social work programmes were sent to Hong Kong, mostly University of Hong Kong and Chinese University of Hong Kong, for their Doctoral or Master research degrees. The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, in collaboration with Peking University, set up the Master of Arts programme in social work (later retitled as MSW), produced more than 230 graduates since 2000. The University of Hong Kong, in collaborating with Fudan University, introduced two master programmes in social work and social service management in Shanghai 2001. Six teachers of Fudan University took the MSW programme and became the programme with the largest number of professionally trained social work institution in China during that time. This was the first social work programme operated by an outside Mainland China institution registered under the Ministry of Education. In short, Hong Kong played a key role in facilitating and empowering the early stage of social work education in Mainland China.
In 2001, social work was formally recognised as an “occupation” by the Ministry of Labour (2001). In 2003, MoCA encouraged local governments to set up pilot projects and employ social workers. In 1995, Shanghai Pudong district government contracted Shanghai YMCA to manage a community service centre. In 2003, the first independent welfare non-government organisation (NGO) in China was set up in Shanghai. Both of them employed social work graduates and received professional consultation and supervision from NGOs in Hong Kong. Shanghai, as a pioneer in the development of social work practice, set up an examination-based system for the accreditation of social workers in 2003. Three semi-governmental NGOs were set up, employing over 1300 social workers in 2006. Through government purchase of services, these social work-based “correctional services” for young people (drug users, discharged prisoners, juvenile delinquents) were formally introduced into Shanghai (Leung, 2013). Despite calling those social work jobs, the persons hired were not necessarily professionally trained. Many of the social work professors took on a CEO or Chairperson of newly established NGOs to establish new services and evaluate programme effectiveness. Social work teachers also took on as leaders in the NGOs, conduct research, and provide services to the population.

During this period of time, professional social work was only beginning to be recognised academically as a sub-discipline of sociology and occupationally under the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MoCA). Besides acting as a training base for social work teachers from China, Hong Kong performed the bridging role connecting China to the international social work community. More importantly, a group of Hong Kong scholars specialised on research studies on China’s social welfare and social work practice has emerged (Chan, 1993; Chan & Chow, 1992; Chow and Xu, 2001; Leung, 1994; Leung & Nann, 1995). Emerging international publications on social issues, social policy, and social work facilitated more international interests on and collaboration with China.

**SOCIAL GOVERNANCE REFORMS AND PHENOMENAL GROWTH IN SOCIAL WORK SERVICES, WORKFORCE AND SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION (2006–2018)**

After a decade of phenomenal growth in social work education and limited development in the development of social work jobs, the year 2006 was a turning point. In that year, the Communist Party of China (CPC) Congress pledged to build up a harmonious society and there was a need to construct a large social work workforce. In the same year, the government published the occupational standards and methods for qualifying examinations for social workers. According to the *2012 Code of Social Work Practice* published by MoCA, social work was recognised as an occupation to implement social policy of the government and the CPC, mitigate social tension, resolve social
problems, maintain social stability, promote social justice, and construct harmonious society (MoCA, 2012). More importantly, social work seems to promise the CPC the “soft power” to resolve social contradictions, ideological conflict, and maintain social stability after the rapid economic reform, with reduction of the life-time employment (breaking of iron-rice-bowl) and associated employment security due to the large-scale privatisation of state enterprises.

Being officially recognised as an important agent in the building of social cohesion and harmony, number of universities in China offering social work programmes rapidly expand. The number of institutions offering BSW and MSW programme increased rapidly from 227 in 2008 to 348 in 2018. More social work programme teachers were professionally qualified from overseas or locally. Fieldwork experiences were required as standards of practice in professional programmes, although the quality of the fieldwork supervision varied across institutions. Local professional organisations are being established in the areas of medical social work, palliative care social work, community social work, industrial social work, clinical social work, and family social work were being established. In order to regulate professional standards, all social workers, trained or non-trained, would take a national public examination to get themselves registered.

There are two levels of expectation in the public examination for registered social workers: assistant social worker level and social worker level. Assistant social workers are required to sit examination on basic social work “integrated abilities” and practice. Social workers are required to be examined on senior levels of the above together with social work legislation and policy. In the first national qualifying examination in 2008, 24,840 (18% of the 137,800 total number who took the examination) were qualified as registered social workers. With the government recognising the need for good quality social service due to rapid ageing of the population and growing income disparities, the Framework on National Medium-and Long-Term Talent Development Plan (2010–2020) issued by the CPC and government ministries included social work as one of the six key workforce to be promoted in the year 2010. It also put forward the goal of having 1.5 million social workers by the year 2015 and three million social workers by the year 2020. Again, the Opinions on Strengthening the Construction of Social Work Professional (2011) and the Medium- and Long-Term Plan for the Construction of Social Work Professional Talents (2011–2020) (2012) put forward specific requirements for the education, training, assessment, and employment of social workers. The targets were revised to having 0.5 million social workers by the year 2015 and 1.45 million by the year 2020. Table 5.1 provides the figures on the phenomenal growth of social workers and social work programmes from 2006 to 2018.

This is the stage of formal recognition of social work into the social infrastructure of society. The development of social work services has been acknowledged and promoted under the auspicious of the CPC and facilitated
Table 5.1 Development of social workers personnel, professional educational programs and schools in China (2008–2018)

|                                      | 2008   | 2010   | 2012   | 2014   | 2015   | 2016   | 2017   | 2018   |
|--------------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Participants in social worker exams  | 137,800| 69,000 | 126,866| 207,694| 276,500| 299,300| 331,800| 424,500|
| Social work workforce                | –      | 0.2M   | 0.3M   | 0.4M   | 0.5M   | 0.76M  | 1.02M  | 1.24M  |
| Registered social workers            | –      | 45,000 | 72,086 | 113,907| 184,865| 200,000| 312,089| 439,000|
| Social work organizations            | –      | 500    | 1247   | 3521   | 4686   | 6600   | 7511   | –      |
| Social work educational institutions  | 227    | 261    | 292    | 313    | 324    | 338    | 339    | 348    |
| MSW programmes                       | –      | 58     | 61     | 104    | 104    | 105    | 105    | 147    |
| No. of SW graduates                  | 10,000 | –      | 20,000 | 30,000 | 30,000 | 30,000 | 30,000 | 40,000 |
| Investment (billion RMB)             | –      | 0.7    | 1.25   | 2.22   | 2.67   | 4.268  | 5.11   | –      |

Sources CASW (2009, 2010, 2013) and MoCA (various years)
by the MoCA through two major channels. First, local governments were encouraged to develop social work jobs. Second, regulations on social governance reforms included facilitating the formation and registration of social service and welfare organisations, notably social work organisations. The government deploy public funds to purchase social services from social work organisations to strengthen and standardise social service provision in the community. To strengthen the social infrastructure, a series of programmes and policies were established. Regulations and guidelines published to promote social work practice include: social work ethics (2013), social work leadership (2015), children work guidelines (2014), elderly work (2015, 2016), development of social work positions (2016), and community work guidelines (2017), social casework and group work practice guidelines (2018), and standards for senior social workers (2018). The role of social work practice in specific fields includes remote marginal regions (2012), volunteering (2013), rehabilitation in natural disasters (2013), enterprises (2013), youth work (2014), correction services (2013), drug abuse (2014), social assistance (2014, 2017), mental health (2015, 2017), domestic violence (2015), and protection of left-behind children (2015). The strategy for effective social work intervention to tackle various social needs and problems in society was being clearly articulated and turned into policy standards.

According to the China Social Work Development Report 2011–2012 edited by the China Social Work Research Center (CSWRC) of the MoCA, there are 11 recognised fields of social work practice (CSWRC, 2013). They are social assistance, post-natural disaster rehabilitation, work with the disabled persons, women, older persons, young people, medical social work, rural social work, correctional services, union social work, and drug abuse services. The 2008 Wenchuan earthquake has prominently publicised the contribution of social work in post-natural disaster rehabilitation. Nationally, community-based campaigns on linking up social organisations, social workers, and volunteers are thriving. Coastal provinces with ample resources have been more vigorous in promoting non-governmental social work organisations, developing a variety of community-based welfare services, encouraging innovations, implementing government purchase of services, and promoting social work jobs and careers (Leung & Xu, 2015, Chapter 7; CSWRC, 2013).

In the Greater Bay Area with major cities like Shenzhen, Dongguan, and Guangzhou, social service organisations employed experienced professional social work supervisors from Hong Kong to help them in developing a robust system of social welfare services (Law & Liu, 2018; Mo & Tsui, 2016, 2018; QCSWS, 2018). Urban management with private housing estates and owners’ involvement also enhance quest for more market-oriented community service provisions. Private housing estates hired social workers and professionals in running club facilities to cater for needs of retired persons and families with young children (Xu & Hou, 2015; Xu & Xu, 2016). Based
on standardisation of government purchase of services, more social work organisations emerged employing a large number of social workers. Now Guangdong tops the country in terms of the number of social workers and non-governmental social work organisations, as well as the amount of funds allocated by the local governments for the purchase of welfare services for their citizens (Gong, Jiang, & Leung, 2019; Law, 2019; Lei & Chan, 2018). In essence, more specialised social work services have been emerging particularly in coastal cities, demanding better-equipped social workers, and more specialised social work educational programmes.

Government purchase of service is regarded as a “double-edged sword”. It has provided the necessary funding support to develop much needed welfare services and a greater role of non-governmental organisations in social welfare, leading to further social governance reforms. However, if the contribution of professional social work cannot be demonstrated and government funding support may facilitate corruption and collusion in the service delivery process, then, credibility of the government in social work can be eroded (Wang, 2018a). With limited fund-raising and revenue generation capacity, social work organisations are largely dependent on government funding for the delivery of social welfare services. By becoming the “servant” of the government and struggling to obtain funds through competitive bidding, they have limited ability for service innovation and respond to newly emerging needs, not to mention advocacy (Gong et al., 2019; Xiong & Wang, 2007).

Relationship of social workers with the government can be described as “embeddedness” in which social workers are grafted into the existing government-dominated social and governance system (Wang, 2011; Wang & Tsang, 2016). Social workers have to be dependent on government patronage, trust, and funding. Under the government administrative leadership and funding control, professional discretion is severely threatened (Wang, 2011). In practice, social work projects, particularly those based in the community, have to be supervised and monitored by local government officials. Community centres in some cities, such as Shenzhen, have been renamed as “Community Centers of the Party”. A key requirement for social work organisations bidding for family services centres in Guangzhou is that the organisation has to set up a CCP party branch, i.e. the need to have party member social workers in charge. In a nutshell, social work currently is functioned as an integral part of the government and the Communist Party system. The issue of how to effectively collaborate with the Party becomes a key challenge for the further development of the social work profession (Wang, 2018b). As more political cadres are becoming social workers through qualifying examinations and more professionally trained social workers have to take up political duties of maintaining social stability, the dividing line between professional intervention and political education is becoming increasingly blurred.
FUTURE CHALLENGES (2019 AND BEYOND)

There is profound and remarkable development of social work professionalisation and social work education in the past decade. The growth of social work workforce, social work teachers, social welfare services, and social work programmes has been impressive and unprecedented; and yet they are not without challenges (Liu, Lam, & Yan, 2012). Instead of relying on textbooks and material imported from Hong Kong and Taiwan, as well as translated materials from the West, local teachers have contributed to building new knowledge, produced impressive locally relevant textbooks, published their research in newly established local social work journals, and oftentimes in international journals as well. Indisputably, more and more social work teachers are better equipped with formal social work education received in China, Hong Kong and overseas. China has become an active player in the international social work community, including the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and International Association of School of Social Work (IASSW). Engagement includes the sponsoring and participation in international and regional conferences, making overseas study trips, sabbatical arrangements, and collaborative agreements in research and student/staff exchange.

The example of the Five-year China Collaborative (2012–2017) by American Council on Social Work Education, International Social Work Education, the International Association of Schools of Social Work, with consultation from the China Association of Social Work Education guided and monitored the development of seven regional partnerships between social work programmes in China and the United States, is a good illustration of the vibrant development of international collaboration. Established programmes in top universities in the United States, such as New York University and University of Southern California, are establishing their respective programme in China, online and off-line. Universities in China are resourced to hire international scholars as permanent and/or visiting faculty. Start-up grants and large funding for social science impact studies are easily available as a result of rising expectations of the middle class and growing affluence of the society. The future development of social work education in China is going to be interesting, fluid, and dynamic. However, there are challenges confronting the development of social work education in China.

1. **Enhancing the academic status of social work education:** Currently, many social work programmes are still subordinated under the departments of sociology. Social work needs to be recognised as an independent academic and professional discipline with its own department or school. Academic status of social work can only be enhanced through active research and publications, admission of quality students, and improvement of employment prospects of social work graduates. Social work teachers now are often distracted by their active involvement in establishing and operating social work organisations, delivering government
financed welfare projects and working on large research grants on social problems. Although these projects can provide teachers with direct service experiences and offer social work students with better fieldwork opportunities, the incentives of receiving remunerations can divert teachers’ motivations and efforts to improve teaching and research output. The termination of two BSW programmes in prestigious universities in Guangzhou in 2017 was a clear indication that the university administration was not satisfied with the academic performance of social work teachers as well as with the employment prospects of the social work graduates.

2. **Moving towards accreditation of social work programmes**: Currently, the establishment and monitoring of a social work programme are regulated and monitored only by the Ministry of Education, university administration, and facilitated by CASWE. There are still programmes with no professionally qualified social work teachers, and fieldwork placements requirements and supervision are not standardised. Following international good practice and to ensure quality professional education, there should be an independent professional mechanism, with explicit criteria established to accredit social work programmes.

3. **Improving employment prospects and career for social workers**: Based on a public examination system to qualify social workers, the value of social work education would be in doubt. It is estimated that the majority of the social work workforce, including those registered social workers, are not necessarily having formal social work education. A more differentiated job classification system should be formulated to provide favourable employment and career prospects for social workers with formal social work training. The current MSW programmes enrol students with both social work and non-social work undergraduate degrees. There should be clear distinctions between the MSW and BSW programmes in curriculum design and preferably in employment prospects. Different programme concentrations and advanced practice programmes can be provided to provide the required and specialised expertise in the field.

4. **Promoting international collaborations**: To widen exposures of social work teachers, more teachers can seek their attachments overseas, Hong Kong and Taiwan. These opportunities to travel overseas might be affected by the Sino-US tension started in 2019. Getting an international visiting scholar visa to the United States may be more difficult. Overseas fieldwork placements possibilities for students and especially for master and doctoral students should be explored in order to broaden perspective of locally trained social workers. There is new funding from the government for universities to hire renowned overseas social work scholars and experienced social work practitioners to share their experiences and good practice. However, the relevance of the research and practice of visitors who are willing to visit China may need a process of integration
into the Chinese context. In fact, more fee-charging courses on practice skills taught by overseas experienced social workers can be found in China now. International travel and international exchange will have to be rebuilt under the new normal post-covid-19 pandemic as well.

Finally, social work education has been caught in a vicious circle. Poorly developed social work jobs with low pay and limited job promotion prospects cannot attract highly motivated and quality students to enrol in social work programmes and enter social work jobs. Dropout rate in the social welfare field has been high. Oftentimes, receiving social work education from loosely structured social work curriculum and fieldwork arrangements taught by professionally incompetent teachers with limited direct social work practice experiences, social work graduates are ill-equipped for social welfare jobs. Evidence-based programme evaluation is rare. Without the evidence to demonstrate the value of social work, employers would find it difficult to raise salary and improve working conditions for social workers. Unless there is a breakthrough in this vicious circle, the maturity of social work profession and social work education may take a long and winding road.

**Note**

1. Examples of these Regulations are: *Circular on Promoting the Development of Non-governmental Social Work Organizations (MoCA, 2009); Opinion Concerning Strengthening and Innovating Social Management (CPC, 2011); Guiding Opinion Concerning Government Purchase of Social Work Services (MoCA, 2012); Guiding Opinion Concerning the Purchase of Services from the Society (State Council, 2013); Options on Reform and Transfer of Functions of the Organization of the State Council (State Council, 2013); Guiding Opinion on Government Purchase of Services from the Social Sector (State Council, 2013); Opinion on Speeding Up the Promotion of Community Social Work Services (MoCA, 2014); Opinion on Further Promoting the Development of Non-governmental Social Work Organizations (MoCA, 2014); Management Methods for Foreign NGO (State Council, 2017); Opinion Concerning the Strengthening and Perfecting Urban and Rural Community Governance (CPC, 2017); Opinion of the MoCA on Further Strengthening and Improving the Management of Social Service Organization (MoCA, 2018); Opinion on Reforming the Management System for Orderly and Healthy Development of Social Organizations (State Council and CPC, 2018); and Circular on Innovating Social Innovation and Services (MoCA, 2018).*

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