From 2010 to 2020, more than one million individuals have received social work training in China (Niu & Östbø Haugen, 2019), while, by the end of 2018, 1.2 million professional social workers were employed (Ministry of Civil Affairs, 2019). Nowhere in the world has such a rapid expansion of social work education occurred previously. This expansion has helped to create a rapidly emerging field of practice. Compared to other countries in which the professionalisation of social work was driven, initially, by the expansion of the different forms of practice, which then led to the creation and expansion of social work education, the professionalisation process in China occurred in a different sequence. First, the construction of an academic discipline, second the expansion of social work education, then the shaping of practice.

The development of social work in China may be characterised as ‘late start and rapid development’, which has provided an advantage to ‘learn the experience and lessons from other countries and regions in that course, so as to avoid detours and make fewer mistakes’ (Yan, 2019, p. 418). However, copying Western experience and, perhaps, most frequently U.S. experience, has not been without difficulty. Recently, there has been evidence of a groundswell of opinion calling for the need to develop an indigenous, localised social work in China (Yan & Tsang, 2008).

This combination of rapid development and imported Western approaches to social work has led to significant criticism about the appropriateness of different models of supervision that have been used in Chinese social work. There have been claims that the supervisory relationship in China differs from that found in Western countries, both on account of the different historical trajectory of Chinese and Western societies as well as the differing cultural contexts. In a study conducted in Shanghai of the supervisor–supervisee relationship, An and Szto (2019) identified key micro-level factors for an indigenous Chinese model of supervision. The findings from this study demonstrated that supervisory relationships are important to develop a supervisee’s professional identity through identification and confirmation of professional values, development of social work knowledge, and understanding the ethical basis for social work practice. In many cases, An and Szto found that the experience of delivering professional social work was limited in
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A major area for development in China is social work field education, in particular: supervision capacity in agencies, practitioner skills in field education, and systems and structures for cooperation between social work practice agencies and universities. A consequence of the rapid expansion of social work has been a lack of experienced social work practitioners with the skills and knowledge to undertake high quality supervision of students. Field education is a central element of social work education and, according to Holden et al. (2011), education is the signature pedagogy of social work and the key component that plays a significant part shaping a student’s professional identity. The strong sense of professional identity is a core component that supports good practice, and its presence or absence may influence the turnover rate. In a Chinese study, one of the authors demonstrated that both a weak sense of professional identity and poor job satisfaction had a direct negative effect on social worker intentions to leave their post (Jiang et al., 2019).

There has been a long history of collaboration between Chinese and European university departments of social work. This chapter builds on the experiences from one such collaborative joint project entitled, ‘Building Bridges between Europe and China to Strengthen the Social Work Profession’ (BUIBRI), which focused on the development of fieldwork education in China. The intention that underpins this project is twofold: to develop fieldwork education in China and all participating countries through the construction of a programme to enhance fieldwork education by educating some 600 agency supervisors.

The aim of this chapter is to describe and analyse the aims, methods, and processes within the BUIBRI project, which has a central focus on developing fieldwork education. Through investigation of these processes, the chapter reviews the challenges that have arisen in a cross-cultural collaboration to develop best practice in field education by treating the project as a case study. The chapter has been organised as follows. After a brief introduction, subsequent sections provide: an overview of social work and social work education in China; a discussion of key issues that confront the development of agency-based supervision and field education in China; details about the partners, aims, and objectives of the BUIBRI project; how the training programme was developed; how this programme was realised in three regions in China; what was learned from both research using the construct of ‘self-efficacy’ among the supervisors and also from the evaluation of the programme; how transnational knowledge sharing is possible; and what we have learnt from the various challenges and successes.

The State of the Art of Social Work and Social Work Education in China

During the 1920s, several social work courses were started at a small number of universities in China. However, the real development of a social work discipline in China began in the 1980s. The development trajectory escalated following the sixth Plenary Session of the sixteenth Central Committee Meeting of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in 2006, at which an important regulation to build a large social work workforce was proposed. In subsequent years, as an element of national strategy and institutional infrastructure construction, the social work profession was developed rapidly with the assistance of ‘top-down’ government initiatives. Social work education in China has undergone a remarkable expansion over the past two decades. In 2000, there were only 28 universities with undergraduate social work programmes, graduating approximately 1,000 students per year. By 2010 there were undergraduate social work programmes at 258 universities with about 10,000 graduates in 2010. A Master of Social Work...
(MSW) was introduced at 33 universities in 2010; by 2012, a master’s programme could be found at 60 universities with an annual intake of 2,000 post-graduate students (Liu, 2012, pp. 156, 172, 195). By 2019, a total of 430 universities and colleges provided diploma or undergraduate social work programmes, while the number of universities providing MSW social work programmes had reached 150 (Ministry of Civil Affairs, 2019).

Over the past 30 years, the development of social work in China has taken its own unique path, which has three core components.

**Government-led social work:** during the early period of social work development in China, the government issued a series of documents and policies which strongly influenced the emergent forms, structures, and practices of social work. As a consequence, increasingly, social work has become a pragmatic tool of social management and has developed a social structure approach that is ‘embedded’ in the current administrative system and is, thereby, constrained by the government administration and is reliant on government administrative system and resources. Consequently, the professional independence of social work is, to a significant extent, circumscribed.

**Education first:** social work education delivered through universities has played an important role in the development of social work in China. A large number of university teachers have become professors in social work education, either by transfer from other disciplines (notably: sociology, psychology, and philosophy) or through further training in social work. In addition, many new colleges and universities that provide social work programmes have sprung up.

**Clinical orientation:** social work has been characteristically clinical in orientation. The dependence on the governmental sector for resources has further intensified the clinical nature of the social work professional mission and forms of social governance. In order to be recognised and supported by the government, the discipline of social work will need to expand its sphere of competence within the existing professional ecosystem – deepening the government’s recognition of the discipline’s professionalism and ability to provide irreplaceable and necessary clinical services. Clinical approaches and skills have been given prominence in the development of the idea of the ‘social work professional’, while the development of macro skills and the structural mission of the discipline have been downplayed.

**Supervision in Field Practice Education in China**

In compliance with the predominant international structure of social work education, field practice has become an integrated component in both undergraduate and MSW social work curricula in China. For example, the National MSW Education Committee (2012) requires that ‘social work field practice’, supervised by an agency-supervisor, should comprise one-sixth of all the learning credits in an MSW programme. Meanwhile, the minimum number of required hours of field practice for MSW students, for those with a social work education background and those without, were set as 600 and 800 hours, respectively. There are good reasons to believe that field education has become a central element of undergraduate programmes. For example, in a 2016 survey of final-year students across all universities and colleges in Guangdong Province, one of the authors found that all of the sample \( n = 575 \) had experienced social work field practice as an integral part of their study (Lei, 2020).

The arrangements for provision of supervisors in field practice varies across Chinese universities. There are three ways for students to be supervised during field practice by supervisors who are: members of the academic staff that provides the programme; employed as members of staff...
by the social work agency that provides the field practice; and dual supervisors who hold positions at both the university and the agency. The three Chinese partners in the BUIBRI project, Fudan, Nanjing Normal, and Sun Yat-sen University, all rely on dual supervisors for student placements. However, using supervisors employed by social work agencies may be the preferred approach. For example, in Guangdong Province, a recent study has shown that 52.9% of students were provided with an agency supervisor while 15.8% and 14.4% of students were supervised by university supervisors and dual supervisors, respectively (Lei, 2020).

Although the importance of field practice is well recognised in Chinese social work education, recent studies have identified some significant obstacles that impede effective delivery of field practice for students. In particular, the lack of a quality placement causes a number of concerns (Wu et al., 2016). First, contradictory to the field practice requirements, it is still possible for some students to go into the field without supervision. Some 16.3% of students in the survey by Wu did not have any supervisor during their placement. Second, there is a lack of qualified supervisors, both from universities and agencies. In these cases, students received unplanned, ad hoc supervision (Chen et al., 2018). These tended to be disorganised sessions because of the lack of preparation and often led to a poorer learning experience than those provided by qualified supervisors. According to a survey of 15 MSW programmes in China by Liu et al. (2013), three of the top four most significant challenges identified with respect to field education were: ‘lack of well-trained supervisors’, ‘lack of qualified social work supervisors in the agency’, and ‘lack of motivation for faculty to supervise students’ (Liu et al., 2013, p. 190). Third, the quality of supervision has become a pressing concern, which impacts significantly upon students’ enthusiasm and performance during the placement. The quality of supervision has significant implications for students’ development of professional identity (Cai et al., 2018). In the UK, field supervisors are required to be registered qualified social workers, have a minimum of 2 years of practice experience, and have a practice education qualification before they take full responsibility of teaching, supervising, and assessing students (British Association of Social Work, 2019). In China, field supervisors are not required to undertake any training before they undertake the practice education role, and some supervisors may not even have social work qualifications (Liu et al., 2013). The importance of the quality of supervision for the development of students’ competencies through their engagement in field practice was demonstrated by a 2018 comprehensive survey of students (n = 848) drawn from almost all Chinese MSW programmes (Wang et al., 2018). Similarly, a qualitative study of MSW students at a Shanghai university revealed that most students, during field practice, had performed very passively by only accomplishing tasks to the minimum level of competence because they did not receive timely and sufficient supervision (Cai et al., 2018).

The BUIBRI project

The main goal of the BUIBRI project was to address the need to develop quality in the social work field education system in China. Many scholars have described challenges to organising and implementing field education in China at the policy, university, and organisation levels (Cai, Bo, & Hsiao, 2018; Chen, Wub, & Peng, 2018; Li, Han, & Huang, 2012; Ting & Zhang, 2012). Quality field education, especially the availability of qualified faculty and field supervisors and adequate field agencies for placement, has been identified as a crucial factor for social work students to develop professional identity and demonstrate the ability to integrate theories and research knowledge into practice (Liu, Sun, & Anderson, 2013; Ting & Zhang, 2012). Within this context, the BUIBRI project was planned to overcome these challenges by building systemic linkages between practice, research, and education. The BUIBRI project aimed at
building a relevant relationship between social work education and working life by enhancing university-agency cooperation to provide support for students' practical placements.

The specific objectives of the BUIBRI project were as follows:

1) to develop the skills of social work teachers in field education;
2) to develop resources for social work learning and teaching;
3) to promote the recognition of social work as an academic discipline;
4) to develop social work as a research-oriented professional system based on academic education in cooperation with academics and stakeholders.

These objectives were achieved by developing teaching and study materials and constructing and delivering training programmes to a) a group of 30 trainers that consisted of faculty and agency supervisors who then developed further and delivered the training to b) 600 agency supervisors who then provided placements to c) 600 students in three locations in China: Shanghai, Nanjing, and Guangzhou. In addition, the project produced two handbooks in Chinese that contained guidance about principles and methods of field studies in social work education.

The BUIBRI project, as a collaborative initiative between European and Chinese institutions, operated by exchanging best practices in the field of social work education. The three involved Chinese universities were Fudan University, Sun Yat-sen University, and Nanjing Normal University. From Europe, three universities participated: University of Eastern Finland in Finland, University of Hertfordshire in the UK, and University of Gothenburg in Sweden. Associated partners of the BUIBRI project were the China Social Work Academy and the China Association for Social Work Education. BUIBRI project partner universities had a long-term prior collaboration with Chinese academic institutes and scholars in the field of social work through academic exchange programmes, jointly written scientific articles, and various research and educational projects. The main motivation for these Sino-European collaborative initiatives was an interest in European social work traditions by Chinese colleagues who were relatively unfamiliar with European approaches, as the initial reference point for the development of social work in China was often US experience (Li et al., 2012, p. 643). The endeavours and experience gained through years of Sino-European collaboration were brought together in BUIBRI to introduce elements of European social work into Chinese social work systematically. Although European social work is not a homogenous entity (Frost, 2008; Lorenz, 2008), it can be characterised as aspiring to develop social work as an integrated part of a statutory system of social welfare that protects people's social rights. The underlying assumption behind the BUIBRI project was that achievements of European social work, represented in this case by British, Finnish, and Swedish experience, could be creatively discussed, transformed, and used to assist in the construction of the field education system in China in a way that would address the needs of Chinese society through its cultural and political contexts. The approach adopted by the project was to investigate best practices by country and based upon the insights found to develop and implement training materials and programmes for the Chinese context.

Substantive Discussion

Training the Trainers (Developing the Training)

The development and delivery of cross-national social work education programmes are implicitly paradoxical by nature. Embedded within the idea of a cross-national social work education programme is the assumption of a universal social work rather than a context-specific
indigenous social work which has been derived from local social, political, and economic conditions (for discussion of these issues see Gray, 2005). Yet, such cross-national social work education programmes are often purposed to contribute to the development of an indigenised social work practice. The processes of planning, delivery, and review in the BUIBR1 project contained the paradoxical nature of the cross-national educational programme through collaborative dialogue across all four nations involved in the programme.

Planning the Programme

There were three major challenges in planning the programme: conceptual clarity and consistency; complexity of devising a programme that would teach skills needed to supervise students during a placement whilst simultaneously developing participants’ ability to teach those skills to others; and negotiating the content of the programme across a multinational team with different approaches to and understandings about pedagogy, social work, and higher education.

The aims of the programme were stated in the form of learning outcomes, in line with recent pedagogical approaches (Biggs, & Tang 2011):

1. be able to actively reflect on the nature and form of practice education in the context of BUIBR1 project;
2. understand the nature of learning and be able to develop and enable learning in practice;
3. understand and be able to manage the process of practice learning;
4. demonstrate the ability to facilitate learning and use effective teaching skills;
5. understand the principles of assessing students’ competence and be able to apply these in practice learning;
6. be able to reflect on personal professional development.

Delivering the Programme

The initial element of the programme was delivered over three consecutive days in Nanjing for 30 participants, later called trainers, from three cities in China: Guangzhou, Nanjing, and Shanghai. Several follow-up days were held for the participants, some with an international team and some with Chinese members only. The content of the programme was organised around six themes:

- What Makes Good Practice Learning?
- Structuring the Student’s Learning
- Theories of Learning
- Enabling Student Learning
- Assessing Students
- Continuous Professional Development for Supervisors

Most sessions were presented jointly by a Chinese and European project team member, symbolising the cross-national collaboration and a visible response to the programme paradox. English and Putonghua (often known as Mandarin Chinese) were the languages used. Although many, but by no means all, of the Chinese participants had a good understanding of English, sequential translation was necessary. As the context demanded, sometimes this was word-for-word, and sometimes it was a summary. As is always the case, learning through translation slowed the pace of the sessions. There were several occasions in which European members of the team
Höjer et al. used terminology that confused meaning. A notable example was the terms ‘evidence-based’, ‘research-informed’, ‘research-led’, ‘research-based’ social work. How many practitioners or academics whose first language was English would, with confidence, able to split these conceptual hairs? Compliance with the terms in the bilingual glossary was central to promoting understanding in both the teaching materials and during learning events.

During the delivery of the programme, a number of devices were purposively employed to reduce the impact of communication challenges and to promote learning in a second language. These approaches were designed to limit the amount of spoken English and increase the amount of time that participants spent working in a Chinese linguistic climate. Decks of slides that were either in Chinese or Chinese and English for each presentation that were prepared prior to the delivery session, and printed copies of the slides were available to participants. Small group discussions and exercises were held in Chinese; frequently, a Chinese member of the team facilitated the feedback with European members of the team, receiving summaries in translation, thus, reducing time taken for translation. A handbook was provided for the whole of the programme, which was available in two versions – one English and one Chinese (this handbook was modified according to the comments of participants about its usefulness; several iterations were produced). When presentations were made in English, presenters made efforts to simplify their use of language, speaking precisely with clear diction. Aside from these language issues, one-third of the participants spoke Cantonese as their first Chinese language, and these participants had varying levels of competence in Putonghua.

Throughout the delivery of the programme, both the Chinese and the European tutors were alert to the emotional experience of the participants. First, in that they were expected to both learn new skills and then teach those skills to others. At times, this expectation raised anxieties, not unreasonably for participants. Second, as pedagogical traditions are influenced by geography and discipline, the pedagogical approach taken would have, for many of the participants been a novel experience. The majority of the participants had been educated in a didactic tradition with a strong emphasis on listening to the teacher. While this approach formed a part of the programme, a number of sessions used an active and participatory approach to learning to encourage the participants to develop their approach to teaching as preparation for when they would be teaching other potential agency supervisors.

Educating the Supervisors (Training Programme in Action)

After the training for the 30 trainers in September 2018, ten trainers each returned to Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Nanjing to proceed with the subsequent phase of the BUIBRI project in which they would educate agency supervisors from each region. An education programme for 100 supervisors per year (600 in total over the duration of the project) was planned for delivery at each location (Guangzhou, Nanjing, and Shanghai), with one round in 2019 and the second round in 2020. Here, we present experiences from the first round of the programmes for 300 supervisors that were delivered in 2019. These training programmes were led by the trainers who had participated on the training for trainers programmes. Each project team organised the training in their own region accordingly. During the planning of these programmes, two participants from each university were present, as well as the trainers themselves to develop training jointly for use on these training programmes for supervisors.

At all locations, the education programmes for supervisors comprised an initial three-day residential workshop during which a very similar training programme was followed to that of the trainers’, with follow-up days at various intervals. These programmes were structured using the six themes previously mentioned, and a new handbook was generated with its links to videos,
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PowerPoint presentations, and exercises – all used as the training tools during the programmes. The focus of this training was on the development of skills for supervisors. Training materials were modified and developed to suit the regional context, and different forms of programme delivery emerged.

The Shanghai team commenced recruitment for the training in the spring of 2019 through the Shanghai Association of Social Work, the organisation in charge of social work registration in Shanghai. More than 200 applications were received; places on the programme were allocated to the first 100 candidates to apply who met the selection criteria, which addressed the need for diversity of practice focus among the social work profession and the applicants prior experience of supervision. The teaching team held several sessions to prepare training materials that were suitably adapted to the Shanghai context. For the delivery of the programmes, the 100 successful applicants were organised in to five groups of 20 according to geographical location. Each of these groups was led by two trainers who had participated previously in the training for trainers programme; each group was led by a different pair of trainers.

The arrangements in Nanjing were very similar to those in Shanghai. The Nanjing team recruited 100 candidates through major social work organisations based in Nanjing. The ten trainers prepared regionalised teaching material through a series of meetings prior to organising the training for all of 100 selected candidates.

In order to enhance the impact of the BUIBRI project, the Sun Yat-sen University team at Guangzhou decided to extend the partnership to include all of Guangdong Province. Their development strategy can be summarised as follows. First, the Sun Yat-sen University team invited six other universities and colleges to participate in the project. Three of these universities and colleges were located in less well developed parts of Guangdong Province (eastern, western and northern), both economically and in respect of social work provision. Students from these universities and colleges had been looking forward to finding a social work placement in the Pearl River Delta, the region with the strongest economic and social work development in Guangdong Province. Second, the Sun Yat-sen University team persuaded 13 social work agencies from the Pearl River Delta to provide positions for social work interns. Third, the ten trainers who had participated in the training for trainers programmes had all been selected from amongst the applicants from these universities, colleges, and social work agencies. Based on the training materials developed by the BUIBRI project, they delivered two rounds of training for 200 agency supervisors selected from the 13 social work organisations. Fourth, members of the Sun Yat-sen University team acted as facilitators and assisted the six universities and colleges to negotiate with the 13 social work agencies to secure placements for their students. Lastly, in order to fully mobilise the resources of 200 trained supervisors, all the social work agency partners agreed to assign these supervisors to students from other higher education institutions, even if they did not come from among the project partner universities in Guangdong.

In all three locations, the education programme was not only directed toward supervisors involved at the three participating universities, but it was also made available to supervisors at other universities in their region. From the beginning of the project, it was evident that the development of social work education would diverge and vary between the three locations. The contexts in each location were distinct, for example, the development of supervision for social work students was grounded in a longer and more established tradition in Shanghai and Guangzhou than in Nanjing. There were also localised differences in provision between Shanghai and Guangzhou. In order to build in a level of localisation specific to each region in the project, guidelines, organisational structures, pedagogic approaches, and examples used in learning were modified and adapted to ensure a good fit to the local context to create the best education possible for the local situation.
What was Learned and Impact of Programme

During the evolution of the teaching programmes, the content was discussed with the participants to understand which parts they found easiest to grasp and which they found to be the most useful for them in their future role as supervisors. After training, the participants from both Shanghai and Nanjing acknowledged the value of teaching methods, teaching approach, and course design and gave positive overall comments about the training programme. Some participants were very enthusiastic about novel ideas such as the sections about peer counselling or Gibbs Cycle of Reflection (Gibbs, 1988). Many participants expressed the view that they would like further training of a similar style. A very positive outcome was the development of a peer support group amongst the trainers; this is evidence of their commitment to the values and pedagogic principles embedded in both the training programmes and the BUIBRI project.

A variety of approaches have been used to measure the impact the programme for supervisors, which have included: participant satisfaction surveys during the programme using a three-data-point evaluation (prior to, immediately post, and several months after the delivery of the programme once the participants had supervised a student on placement) that was theoretically grounded in changes in self-efficacy (Holden et al., 2002); and a qualitative evaluation designed to triangulate different perspectives following the participants’ application of the programme principles in their own teaching (this applies both training of trainers and educating the supervisors).

Participant Satisfaction Surveys

In Guangzhou, agency supervisors completed a short survey designed to ascertain their views about the quality of supervisor training. The participating agency supervisors were generally satisfied with ‘training content’ and ‘training methods’. Five indicators with the top ratings were: ‘to lecture clearly’ (97.03%), ‘supervision of practice learning’ (96.04%), ‘contents of good practice learning’ (95.05%), ‘guidance on the process of practice learning’ (95.05%), and ‘training materials’ (93.07%). However, it must be noted that five indicators received the lowest ratings below 90%, including ‘research-based practice’ (66.34%), ‘length of training’ (83.17%), ‘practice of critical reflection’ (85.15%), ‘to learn relevant theories’ (87.13), and ‘plan of teaching’ (88.12%). There is clearly more to do to meet the training needs of agency supervisors.

Longitudinal Evaluation Using Self-efficacy

The investigation of ‘self-efficacy’, originally derived from Bandura’s (1997) work, was used to measure changes in self-perception of individual ability to perform a given role – as social work trainer or educator – and to explore the ‘fit’ of this research approach in a Chinese cultural context. More than 300 participants in the BUIBRI programme have been surveyed to ascertain their views about their self-efficacy to perform certain tasks. During the first round of training, all 300 participants completed the questionnaire before (T1) and after their training (T2). These 300 supervisors would then train 300 students in 3 months using the same teaching materials that were used for their training. After completing the teaching task, they would be evaluated again by the same questionnaire (T3). Initial findings suggest that, as hypothesised, older more experienced supervisors had higher self-efficacy scores than younger and less experienced supervisors. There were also differences between the three locations. Supervisors from Guangzhou, with a longer tradition of having agency supervision and some supervision training, had higher scores before the training programme. Interestingly most of these differences disappeared after the training (T2). Everyone achieved higher scores, and, following the training, the
differences between sites were not large enough to be statistically significant. A more detailed analysis also comparing supervisors with different backgrounds (gender, age, with and without a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) etc.) is under way, but preliminary results point at good results for most groups. Overall, it appears that the training program has had a positive impact on self-efficacy for most participants and decreased the differences between different locations and in respect to background.

Qualitative Evaluation

We conducted three focus groups with the supervisors, one at each site, to evaluate the impact of the training programme on their experience of practice education. Six supervisors from each site attended these focus group interviews. Supervisors expressed the view that they found it difficult to absorb all of the training materials presented over a 3-day period and that it was challenging to apply what they learnt in the reality of day-to-day practice. However, most shared the view that the training had provided them with a more structural and systematic approach to support students. Supervisors remarked that the training instilled a significant shift in their work with students; they recognised that it is of fundamental importance to consider the students’ perspective in their practice learning journey. They realised the importance of getting to know students as individuals, identifying their learning needs, and exploring their interests at the outset. Training about supervision helped them to appreciate that supervision not only serves an administrative function but also an emotional and educational function to support students’ learning. Additionally, it was very clear that supervisors found Gibbs’ Cycle of Reflection, which was introduced in the training, a useful tool (Gibbs, 1988). They commented that not only could they use the model to help students to reflect on their practice but also as an aid to reflect on their own practice as supervisors. Different templates used for induction, supervision, and assessment were introduced in the training. Most supervisors found that these templates provided useful insights about how to structure and plan induction, supervision, and assessment. However, they all found it difficult to implement these templates in their entirety because of the time needed to complete the paperwork and the need to develop an indigenous version.

In other ways, this project has generated additional positive outcomes. In all participating universities, conferences about social work and supervision in social work education have been held. From various locations, there are reports about results from the programme. For instance, the strategy employed by the Sun Yat-sen University to widen the project partnership within the Guangdong Province has generated positive outcomes. By February 2020, there were a total of 137 students who had finished their placements within the framework of the BUIBRI project. Seventeen of them had signed a long-term contract to work in the social work agencies in which they finished their placements. Moreover, the BUIBRI project has enjoyed good publicity, in part, because the Sun Yat-sen University held five more launching ceremonies about the project and its programmes for supervisors in Maoming, Meizhou, Zhuhai, and Shenzhen other than just in Guangzhou. Similar results can be reported from the other locations.

Discussion

The BUIBRI project has facilitated not only new knowledge and skills in social work but also new thinking about social work education in China. First, the project has introduced new perspectives, for example, about recent Nordic and other European social work developments and educational philosophy into the Chinese social work education community, which, to date, has been extensively influenced by American social work ideas, concepts, and structures.
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Nordic social work educational frameworks place more significance on the social structures that underpin personal problems and difficulties than Chinese frameworks have to date, which have been more focused on clinical social work variants. Consequently, in addition to recognising the importance of clinical practice, Nordic approaches have promoted and emphasised the importance of improving systems and the establishment of social mechanisms to empower individuals. These approaches are grounded in a desire to provide a better environment that enables the individual to grow and develop. These philosophical ideas have begun to contribute to the development of social work education in China, through initiatives such as the BUIBRI project.

Second, the BUIBRI project has provided an opportunity for a dialogue between Chinese and European countries conducted through the conduit of social work. This dialogue has provided an opportunity for the academic and practice fields of Chinese social work to summarise and jointly collate the unique characteristics of the developing Chinese approach to social work and then juxtapose these ideas and concepts with those in use by European partners. From this creative engagement, both parties have been able learn from each other.

Third, China’s social work practice has been developed subsequent to the emergence of an academic discipline of social work, which is an ‘education first’ pattern. Whilst this style of development has many advantages in China, it has become apparent that both a significant proportion of social work academics and the teaching materials used, for example textbooks, have not been responsive to emergent trends in social work practice. Some inherent deficiencies appear to be present from the beginnings of the social work education in the 1980s, which has become increasingly unable to respond to the needs of practice development. The implementation of the BUIBRI project has enabled a group of educators and practitioners to improve their professional knowledge and abilities. These trained educators and practitioners will sow seeds on the fertile land of Chinese social work that, hopefully, will flourish, influence, educate, and help more practitioners, supervisors, students, educators, and the people who use social work services.

**Conclusion**

The evidence has suggested, for a long time, that functional interaction between social work education and the practice field is a critical factor to promote the use of a research-based approach in practice (e.g., Orme & Powell, 2007; Piippo et al., 2013; Steens et al., 2018). This may concern social work education and practice in different societal contexts. The BUIBRI project has demonstrated that success in transnational knowledge sharing is associated with efforts to develop social work as a recognised academic discipline and a domain of research-informed professional expertise. In spite of the considerable influence of nation-specific characteristics about the policies and practices of social work, academisation is a common element of the striving to develop social work as a professional system which combines research, education, and practice (Dellgran & Höjer 2016). Perhaps the most important lesson to be derived from the BUIBRI project is that this common element provides a sensible platform for beneficial knowledge sharing between Chinese and European universities to enable fruitful mutual learning. The project created a basis for future collaboration in the field of social work education focused particularly on linking academic qualifications to professional accreditation in China.

**Notes**

1 In this chapter, when we talk about social work agencies, we mean both governmental and non-governmental organisers of social work interventions.
2 Guangdong is a province in south-eastern China, covering 179,800 square km with a population of approximately 106 million
3 The written version (simplified Chinese) of Cantonese and Putonghua are the same, but the spoken versions of these dialects of the Chinese language are significantly different.

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