

# The Origin and Development of Anti-Drug Social Work in Chinese Mainland

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**Abstract:** Anti-drug social work is a critical component of anti-drug initiatives and plays a crucial role in addressing drug-related issues within society. As a relatively new field within social work, it incorporates specialized theories and professional methodologies to tackle drug-related problems. Anti-drug social work is also an interdisciplinary field that aims to integrate various perspectives and approaches towards addressing drug-related concerns. Its development is driven by the need for innovative social work practices, the advancement of anti-drug efforts, and the enhancement of social governance in relation to drug-related issues. However, the progress of anti-drug social work is hindered by various challenges, which require the implementation of innovative strategies. Therefore, it is essential to understand the origins and evolution of anti-drug social work, learn from past experiences, and identify current obstacles in order to promote its sustainable development in the future.

**Keywords:** Social Work; Anti-Drug Social Work; Origin and Development

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## 1. Introduction

Anti-drug social work is an emerging discipline that integrates distinctive theories and professional approaches in order to confront drug-related problems. It assumes a crucial role within the broader arena of social work by amalgamating anti-drug initiatives into societal structures. Professionals within this domain possess specialized knowledge and adhere rigorously to ethical principles in their practice. They effectively harness anti-drug expertise and deploy social work methodologies to render targeted interventions, such as drug rehabilitation, bolstering, educational initiatives, and overall management. Employing multifaceted strategies encompassing ideological education, legal advocacy, behavioral treatment, psychological counseling, and support programs, anti-drug social work endeavors to facilitate individuals in their journey towards overcoming drug addiction and successfully reintegrating into society, encompassing both psychological and physiological aspects.

## 2. Materials and Methods

This study focuses on the Origin and development of anti-drug social work in Chinese mainland area. Through finishing various period Chinese mainland region on anti-drug social work records and referencing the relevant scholars' discussion in anti-drug social work, we describe the path and pattern of anti-drug social work in different social stages, discuss the specific characteristics

and summarize the regular pattern of it. At last, we discuss the future development direction of anti-drug social work in Chinese mainland area.

### **3. Results**

#### **3.1. Demand and Orientation: The Origin of Anti-drug Social Work in Chinese Mainland**

The anti-drug social work in China was initiated by the requirements for the modernization of the governance system and governance capacity of China, outlined in the Decision on Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening Reform passed at the Third Plenary Session of the Eighteenth Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. Promoting the modernization of the national governance system and governance capacity is of significance to the prosperity and development of the Party and the country, the long-term stability of the nation, and the well-being of the people (Xi, 2020). The development of anti-drug social work in China is driven by the needs of social work development, the advancement of anti-drug efforts, and the requirements of anti-drug social governance.

##### 3.1.1 Demand for the development of social work

###### *3.1.1.1 Fulfilling the professional mandate to address societal issues*

At its core, social work is a humanitarian endeavor (Li, 2009). It involves the application of specialized knowledge, skills, and methodologies to aid marginalized groups facing adversity. By integrating existing social resources, uncovering latent potentials, and bolstering social functionality, social work endeavors to prevent and resolve a myriad of social issues stemming from various causes. Drug addicts, for instance, would cause a host of societal challenges, including issues pertaining to the physical and mental well-being of these addicts, disruptions in their families, and engagement in criminal behavior. The development of anti-drug social work thus entails delivering specialized services aimed at facilitating the social rehabilitation of drug addicts, addressing their physiological, psychological, and social needs, mitigating and resolving the multifaceted social issues arising from drug-related problems, and fostering societal harmony and progress. The involvement of social work in anti-drug initiatives, aimed at preventing and remedying the social consequences of substance abuse, inherently aligns with the fundamental objectives and functions of social work.

###### *3.1.1.2 Imperatives for the development trajectory of professionalized anti-drug social work*

As social challenges continue to evolve, the scope of social work expands as a vital approach to addressing and alleviating these challenges (Wang, 2014). In anti-drug endeavors, the escalating complexity of drug-related issues has prompted recognition from both the Party and government regarding the pivotal role of social work. In November 2011, a joint effort from the Organization Department of the Central Committee, Ministry of Civil Affairs, and 18 other departments yielded a definitive delineation of "social work professionals" in the Opinions on Strengthening the Development of Professional Teams for Social Work, specifically acknowledging content related to "anti-drug and drug rehabilitation". This delineation underscores the significance of anti-drug work and drug rehabilitation as key domains for the distribution of social work professionals in

China. Moreover, the plenary meeting of China National Narcotics Control Committee in 2016 emphasized the importance of community-based drug rehabilitation in anti-drug efforts, emphasizing the urgent need for the expansion of anti-drug social organizations and teams (Mo, 2011). At a broader level, these signals clearly indicate the dawn of new opportunities for professional development within the realm of social work. Hence, anti-drug social work is also an indispensable imperative for the continued advancement of professionalized social work.

### 3.1.2 Demand for the development of anti-drug work

#### *3.1.2.1 The Grim Situation of Drug Abuse*

In 1979, Yongde County's Minglang Township in Yunnan Province uncovered the first transnational drug-trafficking case since the founding of the People's Republic of China. This event marked a significant departure from the notion of a "drug-free country" (Zhang & Ni, 2022). The influx of foreign drugs has continued to rise alongside the expansion of China's open regions. Despite implementing various measures to curb the drug supply, such as "first-line defense, second-line investigation, third-line interception" and "prohibition of cultivation, production, trafficking, and use", the drug situation in China remains severe. International drug control theories posit that reducing demand is the fundamental solution to addressing drug issues. In anti-drug efforts, preventing drug use among the general population, particularly students and youth, is paramount. Anti-drug social work employs educational campaigns to deter new drug users, assists individuals and families who have been harmed by drug use, and reduces drug demand, and harm of drugs, thereby alleviating the dire drug situation.

#### *3.1.2.2 Flexible strategies in anti-drug work*

Anti-drug social work emerged as a development strategy in the 21st century, with its roots tracing back to the late 1990s in China. Professional anti-drug social work applies the principles of love, respect, and assistance to drug control. It provides drug users with care, drug rehabilitation assistance, employment guidance, legal consultation services, and behavioral supervision, aiming to restore and improve their social functioning and promote social fairness and justice (Mo, 2020). "The softest thing in the world can penetrate and overcomes the hardest" (Laozi, 1972). Solving the drug problem is extremely challenging, and flexible approaches of social work serve as a "soft" solution to the "hardness" of drug addiction. With love at its core, social work embodies flexible strategies in anti-drug efforts, providing indispensable support to the cause.

### 3.1.3 Demand for anti-drug social governance

#### *3.1.3.1 Essential social participation in drug control*

General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized: "We must adopt a highly responsible attitude towards the country, the nation, the people, and history, adhere to the strict drug control policy, help people win the battle against drugs, and improve the drug control system." (Xi, 2020). Drugs, as a global public hazard, pose an extremely complex social problem that threatens national political security, cultural prosperity, economic development, and social progress. Faced with such complexity, neither the government, the market, nor society alone can solve the drug problem

unilaterally. It requires the participation of diverse entities, especially the intervention of social work. In the realm of drug control, social work acts as a bridge between government departments, social organizations, communities, and drug addicts, facilitating coordination among various participants and making drug control more effective. In this aspect of drug control, social work, as an emerging force, plays a significant role in the participation process.

### *3.1.3.2 Implementing the path of socialist drug control with Chinese characteristics*

In the face of the severe domestic and international drug situation, the intricate drug problem compels us to explore sustainable governance approaches from the perspective of social governance. As drug problem governance is an integral part of China's social governance, anti-drug efforts must follow the path of socialist drug control with Chinese characteristics. Socialist social governance with Chinese characteristics requires the creation of a governance pattern of "joint efforts, co-governance, and shared benefits" based on the value orientation and standpoint of "putting the people first". Social work's participation in anti-drug social governance consistently adheres to altruism as a guiding value, centers on serving the target population, provides individualized, humane, and concrete services, promotes social fairness and justice, and embodies the value orientation of socialist social governance with Chinese characteristics of "putting the people first". Therefore, it can be said that anti-drug social work is the main path to socialist drug control with Chinese characteristics.

## **3.2. Enlightenment and Development: The Evolution of Anti-Drug Social Work in Chinese Mainland**

The evolution of anti-drug social work in Chinese Mainland can be divided into three stages.

### 3.2.1 Enlightenment stage

Most scholars in this field believe that the initial stage of anti-drug social work in China can be traced back to the late Qing Dynasty and the Republican era. In the first year of the Guangxu Emperor's reign (1875), grassroots anti-drug activities took place. During the 1920s and 1930s, anti-drug groups played a role in anti-drug movements.

#### *3.2.1.1 Anti-Drug Movements Led by County Sages*

Representative figures include Guo Songtao, Yan Fu, and other learned individuals. Guo Songtao was deeply inspired by the West, especially Britain, and proposed the method of guiding the people. He first educated local gentry and then dispatched them to persuade and guide the people through words and actions, aiming to lead the people to abstain from drugs. Yan Fu proposed the establishment of opium-smoking cessation societies. By publishing poems and texts on quitting smoking in major newspapers and periodicals, people were made aware of and understood the dangers of opium, advocating for everyone to stay away from opium and prevent falling into the abyss of drugs.

#### *3.2.1.2 Anti-drug movements promoted by Western missionaries*

Many experts and scholars in the academic community believe that early anti-drug social work might also include some anti-drug activities carried out by Western missionaries in China. According to relevant literature, some Western missionaries in China, during earlier periods, played a role in advocating for the importance of drug control and the dangers of opium. Western missionaries in China exerted considerable influence and significance in advancing anti-drug principles and urging individuals to refrain from substance abuse.

### *3.2.1.3 Establishment of anti-drug social organizations*

The milestone in the development of anti-drug social organizations was the establishment of the China National anti-drug Association in 1910. In 1918, the Anti-Opium Society was established in Beijing, later renamed the International Opium Commission. Subsequently, anti-drug associations were established throughout the country, playing a role in promoting grassroots anti-drug propaganda and smoking cessation efforts.

### 3.2.2 Preliminary establishment stage

The nascent phase of China's anti-drug social work can be traced back to the period when the Communist Party led efforts in revolutionary bases and during the formative years of the People's Republic of China (Zhang & Yan, 2022).

#### *3.2.2.1 CPC-led Revolutionary Base Period*

During this period, the Communist Party of China initiated anti-drug measures, actively advertised anti-drug policies, and mobilized groups to participate in anti-drug campaigns. Some scholars suggest that these early participants in anti-drug advocacy constituted the pioneering voluntary anti-drug social workers.

#### *3.2.2.2 Early Years of the People's Republic of China*

In February 1950, the Central People's Government issued the Prohibition Order on Opium, initiating a nationwide mass movement against drug abuse, effectively eradicating illegal drug use and laying the foundation for a "drug-free nation". This movement extensively leveraged the power of grassroots organizations, social groups, and the general populace.

### 3.2.3 Professional Development Stage

The professional evolution of anti-drug social work can be divided into three phases.

#### *3.2.3.1 Initial phase of professionalization in anti-drug social work (1990s to the end of 20th century)*

Most domestic scholars concur that the inception of professional anti-drug social work in China can be traced back to the collaboration between the Daytop International and Yunnan Province. Daytop stands for "Drug Abuse Yield to Our Persuasion". Daytop is an US organization originated

from the therapeutic community (TC model) of the 1950s and 1960s, pioneered by American psychologist David Deitch, et al. It utilizes principles and methods from psychology, behaviorism, and sociology to establish a unique community culture. It advocates responsible care and love, embraces the potential for personal transformation, promotes honesty, trust, and responsibility, and encourages mutual assistance and growth by hand-holding. In 1991, a landmark agreement was signed between the Ministry of Health of China and Daytop International to establish a drug rehabilitation center in Kunming. (Zhang, 2016). The establishment of China's first rehabilitation center, operating on a collective treatment model, occurred in 1998. By 2001, Daytop had become a practical base for the Department of Social Work at Yunnan University and subsequently for the Department of Sociology at Yunnan Normal University. Although the term "anti-drug social work" had not been formally coined during this period, social work had already significantly been incorporated into China's anti-drug framework.

### *3.2.3.2 Comprehensive expansion phase of anti-drug social work (end of 20th century to 2008)*

As the complexities of combating drug abuse continued to mount, there was a notable surge in the advancement of anti-drug social work initiatives. In 2003, Shanghai emerged as a pioneer in innovating the approach to drug prohibition by integrating social work principles and methodologies. The establishment of the Council of Shanghai Ziqiang Social Services, the first professional anti-drug social work organization in the Chinese mainland, marked a significant milestone in the nationwide expansion of anti-drug social work. Following 2005, the formation of organizations like Guangdong United and Datong Social Work in Guangdong marked the spread of anti-drug social work from Shanghai to encompass the entire nation. During this period, various regions actively experimented with effective drug rehabilitation models through pilot programs and other practical initiatives.

### *3.2.3.3 Phase of professional advancement in anti-drug social work (2008 to present)*

Firstly, the intervention of social work in anti-drug efforts was legitimized in this period. The 2008 Anti-Drug Law explicitly stated the engagement of social work in community-based drug rehabilitation, marking the formal legitimization of intervention of social work in anti-drug efforts. Secondly, notable policy support was given for anti-drug social work. The 6th Plenary Session of the 16th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China first mentioned the need to construct a competent team of social workers. In 2011, the Central Organization Department and 18 other departments jointly issued the Opinions on Strengthening the Construction of Professional Talent Teams in Social Work. In 2015, the Office of China National Narcotics Control Commission issued the National Plan for Community Drug Rehabilitation Work (2016-2020). At the 2016 Plenary Session of the China National Narcotics Control Committee, a proposal was made to vigorously develop anti-drug social organizations and teams. In 2017, the Office of China National Narcotics Control Commission and 12 other departments issued the Opinions on Strengthening the Construction of Anti-Drug Social Worker Teams. Thirdly, there was a significant expansion in the academic offerings related to social work, particularly in the field of anti-drug social work, with several universities introducing specialized programs and courses. In 1980, Peking University took the lead nationally by establishing an undergraduate program in social work and management. Following this milestone, it introduced a master's program in 1982, a doctoral program in 1985, and established a post-doctoral mobile station in 1986. Throughout this period, the university has

been actively exploring localized approaches to teaching social work, conducting practical research, nurturing talent, and advancing scientific research. In 2019, Yunnan Normal University initiated the enrollment of its inaugural cohort for a master's program in anti-drug social work. Additionally, universities such as East China University of Science and Technology were among the first to offer doctoral education in sociology, with a specific focus on anti-drug social work. These policy and legislative measures not only facilitated the institutionalization and standardization of anti-drug social work but also contributed to the cultivation of a robust cadre of professionals in the field.

### **3.3. Pattern and Structure: Current Statue of Anti-Drug Social Work in Chinese Mainland**

#### **3.3.1 Development models of anti-drug social work**

Presently, across China, efforts are underway to explore and establish various development models for anti-drug social work. These models, synthesized from research on anti-drug social work, can be primarily classified as follows: the community-based comprehensive development model, the family-based social work and drug rehabilitation service model, the peer education model, and the bio-psycho-social model.

##### *3.3.1.1 The Community-Based Comprehensive Development Model.*

Embracing the ethos of "government-led initiative, autonomous operation of associations, and active participation from all stakeholders", this model integrates insights from comprehensive governance practices in the political and legal domain and contemporary social concepts like social support networks (Wang, 2007).

For instance, the "Zhongzhi Community" in Shanghai exemplifies the distinctive features of the model. Given the demand of government for specialized services, it provides a range of services including community-based drug rehabilitation, behavioral correction, psychological counseling, employment guidance, and welfare support for drug abusers in the Pudong New Area. By leveraging methods such as social support networks and community care, it facilitates the integration of community resources to aid drug addicts in overcoming addiction and restoring individual functionality.

The hallmark of this model lies in its departure from the traditional government-centric approach to drug rehabilitation. Instead, it establishes a collaborative drug rehabilitation model led by the government, with community organizations, social workers, and other stakeholders playing pivotal roles. Through the procurement of services from professional social work institutions, the government encourages community volunteer organizations and other societal forces to actively engage in anti-drug and drug rehabilitation endeavors.

##### *3.3.1.2 Family-Based Drug Rehabilitation Service Model*

The family-based social work and drug rehabilitation service model is dedicated to drug addicts and their families. By intervening in the lives of drug addicts' families and providing a gamut of specialized services, social workers aim to assist drug addicts in psychological and physical drug

rehabilitation. For example, in communities like Yuexiu District, Guangzhou City, Guangdong Province, drug rehabilitation services have adopted names such as "Happy Home" or "Sunshine Home," underscoring the pivotal role of families in these initiatives. These services prioritize family support as a linchpin for catalyzing change among service recipients. Through initiatives such as counseling to address negative family dynamics, resource linkage for underprivileged families, and the establishment of communication platforms for family members, these services empower families to become steadfast allies in aiding drug addicts through their journey to recovery. The understanding and support provided by family members play a crucial role in facilitating drug rehabilitation.

The distinctive characteristic of this model lies in its utilization of family support to achieve its objectives. Typically, family support for drug addicts encompasses instrumental support, emotional support, and informational support. By emphasizing the role of social workers as mediators, this model seeks to bridge communication and foster interaction between drug addicts and their family members, thereby facilitating the achievement of its objectives.

#### *3.3.1.3 Peer Education Model*

Peer education refers to a method where individuals with similar ages, backgrounds, experiences, socioeconomic status, and the same gender, who share a common language, come together to share information, ideas, or behavioral skills to evoke a sense of resonance among peers and achieve educational goals (Zhu, 2005).

A typical example is the peer education service in Shanghai, especially the one-year "Rebirth" peer education counseling project in 2011. This project trained 50 peers, including 10 peer counselors, leveraging their positive influence within their peer groups. Ultimately, through help from peers, the project led 387 drug abusers to undergo drug rehabilitation (Zhang & Yan, 2022). With the expansion of peer education groups and the establishment of peer education workshops, this model's effectiveness has gained recognition in society. Many scholars and experts believe that peer education can be an important approach to community-based drug rehabilitation, which can be promoted nationwide.

This model stands out for its reliance on individuals who have overcome drug addiction and are now actively involved in anti-drug advocacy. With the guidance of trained and evaluated peer counselors who have shared experiences and attitudes and employ similar methods of resisting drugs, this approach aids those with similar backgrounds in quitting drugs, reintegrating into society, and ultimately eradicating societal discrimination and bias against those rehabilitated.

#### *3.3.1.4 Restrictive-Community-Based Rehabilitation Model*

The restrictive-community-based rehabilitation model is designed for drug addicts who are homeless, destitute, and unemployed. It involves the government or society funding the construction of community rehabilitation facilities, providing accommodation, employment, rehabilitation services, and support for reintegration into society. The most famous example is the Yulu Community model in Kaiyuan, Yunnan Province. Yulu Community was established in the context of accelerating the establishment of drug rehabilitation centers nationwide in 2006, under



the deployment of China National Narcotics Control Commission and the Ministry of Public Security. It actively explores a new model of drug rehabilitation that integrates physiological detoxification, psychological rehabilitation, and social reintegration. Yulu Community operates under the principle that its residents are the community's stewards, fostering a unique community structure that is characterized by closeness, intimacy, and adaptability across various facets including living conditions, employment prospects, social dynamics, interpersonal connections, and community organization. Under the traditional drug rehabilitation model, drug addicts face issues such as family breakdown, economic bankruptcy, family rejection, societal discrimination, and employment difficulties upon release. The restrictive-community-based rehabilitation model effectively addresses these problems, providing drug addicts with a bridge for reintegration into society, promoting both physical and psychological rehabilitation, enhancing employment skills, helping them disengage from their previous associations with drug users, reducing the rate of relapse after drug rehabilitation, and consolidating their drug rehabilitation.

#### *3.3.1.5 Bio-Psycho-Social Model*

Bio-psycho-social model is a new medical model established after the 1970s. This medical model offers a holistic understanding of human health and illness based on biological, psychological, and social perspectives. It not only underscores the biological aspect of human but also recognizes the greater significance of the social dimension. The bio-psycho-social model, supplanting the conventional biomedical approach, signifies progress not only in medical technology but also in medical ethics, cultivating a deeper reverence for human dignity. The United Nations' Comprehensive Multidisciplinary Outline of Future Activities in Drug Abuse Control, released in 1997, identifies drug addiction as a chronic, relapsing condition. Consequently, addressing drug addiction requires a comprehensive approach drawing from disciplines such as medicine, psychology, sociology, and others. This model finds wide application in drug rehabilitation efforts. The bio-psycho-social model involves social workers intervening at three levels—biological, psychological, and social—in drug addicts' lives. Through physiological detoxification, psychological therapy, and the reconstruction of their social support systems, this model aids drug addicts in overcoming physical dependence, psychological cravings, and social behaviors associated with drug use, thereby fundamentally supporting their recovery from addiction.

This model entails drug addicts undergoing physiological detoxification either through mandatory isolation in drug rehabilitation centers or voluntary or compulsory detoxification in the community. Subsequently, psychological detoxification therapy is conducted. Compared to physiological detoxification, psychological detoxification is a longer process, requiring social workers to provide prolonged psychological correction, correct their misconceptions, reshape the meaning and value of life, and establish a positive and optimistic worldview. Meanwhile, another key aspect of social work lies in rebuilding social support networks for drug addicts, transforming their original social relationships, and facilitating their reintegration into society.

#### *3.3.2.1 Development of Anti-Drug Social Work Institutions*

Benefiting from robust policy backing, the advancement of anti-drug social work in China has surged forward swiftly, with a promising trajectory in institution building. As of 2016, there were

over 700 anti-drug social organizations established nationwide, employing around 29,000 anti-drug social workers. By the end of 2022, the number of anti-drug social workers (specialized) nationwide had reached nearly 100,000. Developed regions such as Shanghai, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Guangdong have nurtured and propelled a batch of anti-drug social service institutions with certain scale and social influence, such as "Ziqiang Social Services", "Zhongzhi Center", and "United Center", through government procurement projects. However, due to the relatively late start of social work in China, anti-drug social work, as an emerging field of social work, is still in its infancy stage domestically, and there are still many problems in the construction of anti-drug social work institutions, mainly in terms of their limited number and small scale. Presently, beyond the well-established anti-drug social work institutions in coastal developed regions like Guangdong and Shanghai, other major cities such as Chongqing, Chengdu, and Kunming are still in the process of expanding both the quantity and magnitude of their social work institutions. Particularly, in these cities there is a shortage of institutions specializing in anti-drug social work. In light of the nationwide demand for the socialization of anti-drug efforts, the existing quantity and scope of social work institutions fall significantly short of meeting the necessary standards.

### *3.3.2.2 Development of Anti-Drug Social Work Force*

The severe situation of anti-drug work urgently requires a large number of anti-drug social workers, and it also poses new professional requirements on these teams. In December 2015, the China National Narcotics Control Commission, along with 11 other departments, collectively released the National Plan for Community-based Drug Rehabilitation (2016-2020), introducing the "8-31" Project aimed at community-based drug rehabilitation. The plan explicitly emphasized the necessity to "establish social work force", setting a target for anti-drug social workers to constitute over 30% of the full-time personnel engaged in community drug rehabilitation by the conclusion of 2019 (Zhang & Mo, 2020). In January 2017, the China National Narcotics Control Commission and other 12 departments jointly issued the Opinions on Strengthening the Development of Anti-Drug Social Workforce, which specified the responsibilities, training, and service rules for anti-drug social workers. In 2018, the Office of the Yunnan Provincial Narcotics Control Commission and the Department of Civil Affairs of Yunnan Province jointly approved the establishment of the first domestic training base for anti-drug social workers at Yunnan Normal University. Subsequently, many training bases were established across the country, greatly promoting the development of anti-drug social work teams in China.

Presently, China's anti-drug social work teams face challenges in training professionally certified talents. Higher education institutions serve as primary sources of intellectual and talent support for anti-drug social work. Currently, there are 82 vocational colleges offering associate degree programs in social work, 333 colleges and universities offering bachelor's programs, and 183 offering master's programs in social work. Additionally, 22 colleges have established independent doctoral programs in social work and social policy, comprising 5 doctoral programs in social work and 17 doctoral programs for research in social work. Annually, these colleges train nearly 40,000 social work graduates, serving as a vital talent pool for China's social work sector. As of September 2022, 929,000 individuals nationwide have obtained professional qualification certificates for social work, including 724,000 assistant social workers, 205,000 social workers, and approximately 400 senior social workers, forming a hierarchical talent structure (Yan, 2022).

Despite the continuous expansion of China's social work talent pool, there remains a substantial shortage of talent, particularly in the field of anti-drug social work.

### 3.3.3 The Social Development Level Of Anti-Drug Social Work

In China, anti-drug social work is still in its infancy despite entering a stage of professional development, as evidenced by the following:

#### *3.3.3.1 Inadequate Top-Level Design*

Top-level design is an institutional guarantee for anti-drug social work. Over the past decade, numerous regulations and measures regarding anti-drug social work have been issued by both central and local authorities. However, many of these measures have yet to be implemented. The biggest issue is that these policies only permit social work to legally enter the anti-drug field, failing to include forward-looking planning for the future development of anti-drug social work and institutional documents to enhance the basic guarantees for anti-drug social workers. For example, regulatory systems for aspects such as occupational entry, training, promotion, compensation, professional development, and welfare urgently need improvement.

#### *3.3.3.2 Limited Social Awareness*

Anti-drug social work, as a specialized branch within the broader field of social work (Wang, 2017), has garnered less attention compared to traditional areas such as elderly, women, and children and youth. Consequently, public awareness of this discipline remains limited. During the implementation of anti-drug social work initiatives, it has become evident that many individuals perceive anti-drug social workers solely as community workers or law enforcement officers, lacking understanding of their roles, responsibilities, and manner of working. It's not unusual to encounter instances where there is resistance and reluctance to accept the efforts of anti-drug social workers. Furthermore, some government officials exhibit incomplete comprehension of this field, with certain departments still regarding drug control as the exclusive domain of law enforcement agencies. This focus on law enforcement measures neglects the societal development dimension of anti-drug initiatives and diminishes the acknowledgment and backing for the emerging anti-drug social work.

#### *3.3.3.3 Urgent Need for Professional Improvement*

The call for professionalization in anti-drug social work encompasses both the institutional framework and the expertise of practitioners. Institutional professionalization involves the establishment of dedicated anti-drug social work organizations, exemplified by entities like the Council of Shanghai Ziqiang Social Services and the Council of Suzhou Ziqiang Social Services. These specialized institutions are not comprehensive organizations that cover all aspects of social work because anti-drug social work significantly differs from traditional social work in terms of ideology, content, target population, scope, focus, requirements, and the willingness and needs of service recipients. Professionalization of anti-drug social workers entails specialized training, education, and practical experience in areas such as professional learning, work, methodologies,

and capabilities to enhance the level of professional service, rather than some volunteer jobs that anyone can do.

#### **4. Discussion**

What should we do with the anti-drug social work in Chinese mainland?

##### **4.1 Continuous Improvement of the Anti-Drug Social Work System**

Social work, with its values and methodological skills, provides unparalleled professional advantages and characteristics when intervening in anti-drug efforts. In recent years, the effectiveness of social work in the field of drug control has become increasingly prominent, and the continuous improvement of the anti-drug social work system is an inevitable trend.

###### *4.1.1 A drive by the endogenous growth of the anti-drug social work system*

Over the past decade, central and local government departments have strengthened efforts in the top-level design of anti-drug social work, vigorously promoting its development and continuously promoting the endogenous growth of the anti-drug social work system. The endogenous growth of the anti-drug social work system, whether at the macro level concerning legal regulations and policies safeguarding anti-drug social work, or at the micro level concerning the education, management, and incentive mechanisms for anti-drug social workers, have played a significant promoting role.

###### *4.1.2 External drive by the localization of the value system of anti-drug social work*

Social work was introduced to China from the West and has since been shaped by China's unique political structure, social institutions, and historical heritage, resulting in disparities or even clashes with Western models of social work. This contrast is particularly prominent in anti-drug social work, where China's perspectives and values regarding narcotics diverge significantly from those of Western nations. For instance, the legalization of recreational use of marijuana in countries like Canada, Uruguay, and Thailand has seriously challenged the global drug control framework and underlying cultural ideologies. Values have consistently underpinned the evolution of anti-drug social work in China. We must approach control measures scientifically, acknowledge their efficacy in curbing drug addiction, and prioritize professional services to address related issues. The guiding principle for steering anti-drug social work in China is to balance control measures with service provision. Consequently, the future trajectory of anti-drug social work in China will necessitate the advocacy of a value system that aligns with China's unique circumstances, reasoning, and legal framework, with an emphasis on "dedication, professionalism, inclusiveness, and compliance", tailored to meet the nation's specific needs.

###### *4.1.3 A drive by the needs for innovative development of the practical system of anti-drug social work*

For China, the intervention of social work in anti-drug efforts can be considered a new systemic attempt. Compared to other fields of social work, anti-drug social work, especially in the field of

drug rehabilitation, faces more complex and diverse issues with service recipients. For example, as service recipients may have caused harm to society, they may face rejection and marginalization from the public. Alternatively, the service recipients themselves may not actively accept social workers' services and may even avoid them because they perceive anti-drug social workers as government agents sent to supervise and discipline them. This means that anti-drug social work will face many challenges, and the existing models of social work may not be suitable for addressing these issues. It requires adjusting strategies, concepts, and practical models according to the actual situation to promote innovative development in the practical system of anti-drug social work, providing service recipients with multi-level, comprehensive, and more professional services.

#### 4.2 Continuous development of institutions for anti-drug social work

##### *4.2.1 To increase in the number of professional institutions for anti-drug social work*

Engaging social work institutions in anti-drug efforts can allow them to release their proactivity and innovative capacity. This approach can generate novel methodologies for supporting, rehabilitating, and reintegrating drug users into society, thereby bolstering the resilience and confidence of individuals struggling with drug addiction. Therefore, it is crucial to strengthen the nationwide presence of anti-drug social work institutions, improve their professional standards and service capabilities, and promote broader societal recognition of anti-drug social workers and institutions to advance the development of these organizations.

##### *4.2.2 To create the standardization of institutions for anti-drug social work*

Institutional support is necessary for both the internal functioning and external operations of social work institutions. Facilitating the standardization of anti-drug social work institutions necessitates enhancing and refining systems for managing archives, implementing performance evaluation mechanisms, assessing service effectiveness, and supervising and inspecting fund allocations. This ensures that anti-drug social work institutions can operate internally in an orderly manner, achieve standardized and efficient development, and effectively support the socialization of anti-drug efforts.

##### *4.2.3 To improve the professionalization of institutions for anti-drug social work*

The improvement of the professional level of anti-drug social work institutions is closely related to their specialization and professionalization. Currently, plenty of anti-drug social work are undertaken by institutions that originally served traditional social work, with a relatively low level of specialization. There is a lack of specialized institutions dedicated to anti-drug social work. In the future, it is necessary to establish more specialized institutions in this field to expand the coverage of professionalization.

#### 4.3 Continuous Enhancement of the Quality of Anti-Drug Social Work Personnel

##### *4.3.1 Further improvement of the training system for anti-drug social work*

Higher education institutions, educational bases, and research institutes are the primary sources of professional talents for anti-drug social work, providing intellectual support and human resources for anti-drug efforts. Therefore, in order to improve the quality of anti-drug social work personnel, it is necessary for universities, educational bases, and research institutes to elevate the expertise of instructors and mentors, refine the curriculum for training on anti-drug social work, overhaul inadequate curriculum structures, systematically allocate time to theoretical and practical courses in anti-drug social work, bolster the proficiency of both students and practicing social workers, institute regular training programs, foster knowledge enrichment initiatives, and cultivate a talent development model tailored to China's specific requirements. These measures will further refine and enhance the talent cultivation system for anti-drug social work in China.

#### *4.3.2 Continuous expansion of the anti-drug social work personnel*

The continuous expansion and development of the talent team for anti-drug social work in China cannot be achieved without a complete set of policies and institutional designs. Therefore, it is essential to formulate policies for developing the talent team of anti-drug social workers, improve their salaries, social status, and promotion prospects, strengthen the occupational security of anti-drug social work personnel, and increase investment in the field. It is also necessary to enhance publicity efforts, improve public recognition of anti-drug social workers, open up employment pathways for professional graduates in anti-drug social work, and enhance the professional honor, happiness, and sense of accomplishment of anti-drug social workers. This will help retain professional talents in anti-drug social work at a high level and promote the growth of the talent team of anti-drug social workers.

#### *4.3.3 Continuous enhancement of the quality of anti-drug social force*

Currently, both the quantity and quality of the existing anti-drug social work teams are far from satisfactory. It is imperative to enhance the quality of anti-drug social workers and promote the development of anti-drug social work teams. To improve the quality of anti-drug social workers and professional service levels in this field, it is imperative to establish standards for entry, on-the-job training, professional development, continuing education, supervision services, and performance assessment, ensuring the professional development of anti-drug social work institutions. Among these measures, it is particularly crucial to establish and implement professional standards and career planning for institutional staff.

#### *4.3.4 Continuous improvement of anti-drug social governance*

Since the 18th National Congress, the Communist Party of China and the country have continuously emphasized the modernization of the national governance system and capacity. Social work plays a crucial role in the social governance of drug-related issues, and enhancing the capabilities of anti-drug social work institutions and social workers is a sustainable path toward improving drug-related social governance.

#### *4.3.5 Enhancement of service capabilities of anti-drug social workers*

In the process of drug control, it is necessary to take forceful measures to crack down on drug production and trafficking while also utilizing the flexibility and professional functioning of social work to guide citizens to consciously stay away from illegal drug use. This involves truly implementing the concept of "people-oriented" and using professional knowledge and skills to help service recipients resist unhealthy habits and behaviors, thereby reducing the risk of drug abuse. This places higher demands on the service capabilities of anti-drug social workers. Anti-drug social workers need to extensively study law, sociology, anthropology, education, psychology, social work, and other professional methods and techniques, summarize their experience from anti-drug practices, and continuously improve their own capabilities in social governance (Mo, 2021).

#### *4.3.6 Improvement of quality of anti-drug social work institutions*

The introduction of professional social work institutions into drug control is a major drive for the long-term implementation and effectiveness of anti-drug social governance. Continuous promotion of anti-drug social governance helps these institutions grow, testing their governance capabilities in practice and promoting the improvement of governance levels through interaction.

## **5. Conclusion**

Social work is an integral part of social development. As Chinese-style modernization progresses, the emergence of anti-drug social work represents a targeted response to the diverse needs of society. Anti-drug social work is an important component of drug control efforts and also a significant field of social work. Currently, anti-drug social work remains in its infancy, with both theoretical frameworks and practical applications still in early stages of development. Hence, it is imperative to enhance the anti-drug social work system, foster the growth of related institutions, bolster the competence of anti-drug social work teams, and elevate the standards of social governance in this domain. These efforts are essential for steadfastly progressing along the path to anti-drug social governance with Chinese characteristics.

### **Patent:**

No patent was involved.

### **Authors' Contribution:**

Use this section to provide a statement on the work that each of the enlisted authors has contributed to this manuscript. Author's contribution can be listed using the provided responsibilities below, through putting authors' name after each role.

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*Visualization:* Guanyao, Mo.

\*All authors have read and agree to the final version of the manuscript that will be published. Authorship should be limited to those who have contributed substantially to the work of this manuscript.

### **Funding:**

This research received no external funding.

### **Data Availability and Release Statement:**

The details of this research can be found in the books: Guanyao. Mo (2011). *Anti-drug Social Work*. Beijing: People's Public Security University of China Press. & Mo (2020). *Practical Guide to Anti-drug Social Work*. Beijing: China Social Sciences Press.

### **Acknowledgements:**

We are particularly grateful to the *Asian Association for Substance Abuse Research* as a platform for academic discussion, while Dr. Spencer De Li gave a lot of useful suggestions for this study. We would like to express special thanks to AASAR and Dr. Spencer De Li.

### **Conflicts of Interest:**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.



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