


# Conscience and Convenience: How Social Workers Pursue Rehabilitation in Chinese Community Corrections

Jize Jiang  and Xuan Chen

*The establishment of community corrections in China marks a restructuring of the Chinese penal field and a possibly differentiated arrangement of penal power. Social forces and community actors are now enabled and encouraged to participate in penal affairs and to share devolutionary penal power with the authoritarian state. Yet little research attention has been allotted to examine how these burgeoning social organizations, professional service providers, and community actors manage their participation in rehabilitative work and negotiate their rehabilitative aspirations with state ideologies and policy mandates as they work within Chinese community corrections (CCC). Drawing on observational data and in-depth interviews with social workers within CCC, we show the ways in which social workers actively create strategies to pursue their professional values of service and implement rehabilitative ideals and caring ethos while, at the same time, minimizing the risk of challenging state authority and jeopardizing penal policy priorities. Three devised approaches are presented, and their implications are discussed.*

## INTRODUCTION

Since its inception by penal reformists at the end of the nineteenth century as a utilitarian approach for alleviating prison overcrowding, community-based corrections (or penalties) have been tied intimately to the rehabilitation ideal and to a reintegrative vision for normalizing and correcting offenders' behaviors (Garland 1985; Simon 1993). Given the rise of the punitive turn in criminal justice since the late 1970s in Western democracies, the rehabilitative ethos in the sphere of community corrections has been subject to change because of the ongoing transition to late modernity in many societies (Allen 1978; Garland 2001).

Yet debates have reemerged regarding the form, status, and nature of rehabilitation-related practices in the contemporary penal system (Petersilia 2003; Miller 2014). Some argue that the escalating punitiveness, especially the dramatic growth of prison populations, has signified the apparent recession, decline, or even reverse

---

Jize Jiang Assistant Professor, School of Law, Tongji University, Shanghai, China. [jiangize1989@gmail.com](mailto:jiangize1989@gmail.com)

Xuan Chen (corresponding author) Lecturer, Department of Social Work, Zhejiang Sci-Tech University, Hangzhou, China. [chenxuan@zstu.edu.cn](mailto:chenxuan@zstu.edu.cn)

The authors would like to thank N. A. Weihe, Yi Han, and the four anonymous reviewers for their invaluable comments and suggestions, and we are also grateful to the social workers, justice officials, and community actors for their agreement to share their participating experience with us over the research project. This work was generously supported by a grant from the Research Program of Zhejiang Soft Science (Grant no. 2021C35033).

of penal welfarism established in the postwar period (Lynch 2000; Wacquant 2009). Challenging this dystopian analysis, other researchers have asserted that rehabilitative processes have not become extinct or been supplanted by punitive measures but, rather, have perhaps become more interactive or been assembled with other ongoing logics of penal governance such as risk management and restorative justice (see, for example, Cheliotis 2006; Goddard 2012; Hannah-Moffat and Maurutto 2012; Werth 2013; Maglione 2021). Regardless of these disparate analyses, this stream of scholarship has suggested that rehabilitation in community corrections is not a given but, rather, a contestable element in both penal policies and correctional practices (Miller 2014; Schoenfeld 2014). It has further highlighted a flourishing accomplishment of the rehabilitation ideal, which is particularly contingent on the social, political, and ideological contexts of the penal system through which welfare aspirations are pursued, practiced, and performed in the penal system (Donohue and Moore 2009; Bailey 2019).

This study extends comparative studies of punishment by showing how implementing rehabilitative programs and social service delivery have become a contested and compromising process for professional groups in the recently formulated field of Chinese community corrections (CCC) (Robinson and McNeill 2016). The development of CCC was motivated principally by therapeutic and preventative goals, and its implementational processes rest mainly on the state's collaborative partnerships with local community actors (including professional groups) to create a new round of interactions with the state and offenders (Quirouette 2018). Nonetheless, within China's authoritarian context, the power structure between the state and professional groups in CCC is notable in that the state has superior and ultimate power to determine the development and direction of the penal field (Jiang and Liu 2022).<sup>1</sup> To accomplish the legally required rehabilitation objective within such an authoritarian context, professional service providers and community actors must abide by the state's rules and align their practices with the state's expectations and requirements (Halushka 2017).

More specifically, we document and analyze how social workers, a vital professional group charged with furnishing rehabilitative services within CCC, make sense of their work objectives and practical experiences in the day-to-day operations of offender assistance and education. Analytically, we conceptualize CCC as a newly emerging penal field in which a multitude of social actors, using diverse discursive resources and hybrid logics, accumulate influence and power to gain prominence and maintain their legitimate status (DeMichele 2014). In this penal site infused with struggles and compromises, various actors and groups mobilize their available capital and deploy workable strategies to compete against one another, thereby affecting the ongoing process and future trajectory of CCC's reconfiguration, which are also shaped by external forces and the habits of the participating actors (Page 2012).

In doing so, our study moves beyond the presumption that professional groups enlisted by CCC lack agency and merely act on behalf of the state's legal ideologies

---

1. The Chinese community corrections' (CCC) institutionalization and operation represents a shift in Chinese crime control from the state's punitive and tough-on-crime model to a lenient community-governance paradigm. As such, this new paradigm emphasizes the service delivery function of penal institutions and entails that local agencies make decisions independent of the state (see Hughes 2007). This requirement may cause friction with the Chinese authoritarian regime where the state enjoys the unchallenged, superseding, and encompassing power over public affairs.

in an authoritarian polity (Cheliotis 2006). Despite the authoritarian context in which the state often directs and stewards CCC practices, professional social workers are actively involved in devising strategies and developing tactics to implement therapeutic and welfare missions as part of their professional duties.<sup>2</sup> In attempts to reconcile the ideals of rehabilitation and reintegration with political and institutional mandates, professionals reshape the contours, nature, and meaning of CCC in practice. Our analysis thus provides a more nuanced understanding of CCC in action, focused on power dynamics, than previous studies that have generally centered on the broad characterization of this penal institution or on the risk-control logics of Chinese penal and social governance (see C. Li 2015; Yuan 2019).

In what follows, we start with a critical overview of CCC's development and operation, including the role of social workers as a professional group in the field as well as a note on the theoretical framework adopted for the present study. Following a description of the research methodology, we examine the interview data with the social workers, looking at their interactive experiences with offender treatment and rehabilitative services delivery in light of the risks and challenges that they face during the process and, within these problematics, the creative strategies that they utilize to actively pursue and practice their professional objectives while deferring to the authoritarian state's directives and ideological imperatives. We conclude by discussing theoretical and policy implications for improving the effectiveness of social workers in providing rehabilitative services within the CCC field.

## BACKGROUND

### CCC's Formation and Operation in a Modernizing Society

In the traditional era of China's planned economy, the government was in a position of social dominance and exercised hegemonic, comprehensive control over society. The adoption of a market-based economy in the late 1970s brought about a profound shift in the Chinese state-society relationship. Since then, Chinese civil society has gained increasing power in social governance as the state elites continued to devolve governance power to the local communities. In the Chinese penal realm, local community organizations and actors were also mobilized to implement criminal penalties in the community setting and engage in offender supervision and management when offenders were released from prisons (Trevakes 2010). Indeed, as explicitly stipulated in the law governing community corrections promulgated in 2019, contemporary CCC represents a systemic reform embodying the governance ideology to empower, and alliance with, civil society.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, CCC has now evolved to a complex (socio-)legal institution that integrates the penological core of enforcing criminal sanctions and the welfare

---

2. We are also inspired and informed by Lynette Chua's (2012) study on how Singapore's gay activists have engaged in "pragmatic resistance" and deployed "strategic adaptation" during their identity politics in authoritarian states.

3. Law of Community Corrections of People's Republic of China, enacted 2019, entry into force 2020.

dimension of providing correctional education and rehabilitative support to offenders (Dan 2008).

Despite its recent development into a formal legal institution, CCC can be traced back to the earlier *Bangjiao* system (a social control system of neighborhood-based supervision and assistance), a semiformal system of control with a long history of being utilized to supervise and rectify criminal offenders (Jiang 2013). In 2019, after years of experimental practice across the country, CCC was finally extended to all thirty-one provinces by specialized legislation. This institutionalization was driven by a perceived penal crisis that concerned the growing fiscal burden on prison administration (see also S. Li 2014). Deploying CCC to alleviate prison overcrowding was considered by Chinese policy makers to be a cost-effective solution to the pressing problems in penal governance without undermining public safety in the community (Wu 2004). Further, CCC's formal emergence has been construed as a result of China's wider ideological shifts in crime control from penal severity and incapacitation toward penal proportionality and moderation (E. Li 2015b). Contemporary CCC can be applied to implement four types of sanctions: public surveillance, probation, parole, and temporary execution of a sentence outside a confinement facility.

Two features stand out that distinguish contemporary CCC (crystalized by the law) from its previous versions. First, CCC's rise, and expansion, has transcended the traditional form of penal governance that was a state-dominated sphere. With the enactment of a specialist law administering community-based sentences and corrections in 2019, CCC has now become a socio-legal field with extensive collaborative partnerships in which community actors and organizations are actively empowered, and even prioritized, to participate. CCC has inherited the tradition of a "total-society strategy" in crime control (Jiang 2013). That is, community corrections systems work as a congregational hub for various social forces<sup>4</sup> and community organizations, including local justice agencies, governmental bureaucracies (that is, the Department of Civil Affairs), the Women's Federation, volunteers and social workers, China's Communist Youth League, and even business organizations. Despite prevalent social participation in CCC, the local justice office still maintains the lead in directing and managing the implementational process in local communities. Meanwhile, a "total-person control approach" is also practiced in order to fulfill the goal of community corrections, through which an offender's values, ideas, and behaviors are under the control of correctional agencies (Jiang et al. 2015).

Second, a series of legislation and policies associated with the CCC establish and emphasize the professionalism in implementing community corrections. They encourage local justice bureaucracies to recruit or enlist professional groups to participate, whereby those professionals can employ their expertise and provide specialized services to facilitate the process of developing rehabilitation programs for offenders (Wu 2008). Their professional skills and clinical judgments are crucial to their successful operation,

---

4. As an official term in the CCC law, "social forces (*Shehui lilian*)" refer to the set of groups, professionals, actors, and resources that emerge and grow from the civil sphere and contribute to social development in China. They include charity associations, non-governmental organizations, and non-profit organizations, foundations, voluntary organizations, and other non-official social services groups. They are usually located in the community for more convenient interactions with community residents and work to help solve their problems.

given that they are able to diagnose and treat the underlying personal and social causes of, and thus presumably prevent, offenders' criminal behaviors.

### Social Workers' Multifold Roles in CCC

The recent developments in CCC have seen both a greater emphasis on the rehabilitative ideal in Chinese official penal discourse and a greater strength of professional participation in promoting the rehabilitative process. Conceived as the main force of professional service provision, social workers in China have gained elevated status in CCC and been actively engaged in community correctional work. In the contemporary Chinese correctional system, community-based organizations, including correctional volunteers and social service workers, play a major role in interacting with offenders during penal implementation in the community. While the participation of professional groups (including justice-involved social workers) has been formally prescribed in law, their roles are ambiguous (see also Lynch 1998). Indeed, their presence and operations are often precarious and highly dependent on official authorization and governmental funding capacity. Meanwhile, they are sometimes recruited as part of a correctional bureaucrats' workgroup, and, at other times, they establish independent, contractual relationships with the local governments, which purchase their professional services for implementing community corrections.

Research has identified and outlined three key roles that social workers have practically assumed within contemporary CCC (C. Li 2015). First, scholars have found that social workers serve principally as professional service providers or a type of helping professional (Xiong 2019). Informed by a multidisciplinary approach to community corrections stipulated in the specialist law, CCC's rehabilitative services need to be provided by those who understand and seek to address the underlying causes of criminal behavior, such as unemployment, discrimination, mental illness, substance use, poverty, and broken families. Well trained and with substantial treatment experience, social workers often possess the appropriate knowledge of offending behaviors and are equipped to cure or reduce offenders' criminogenic risks.<sup>5</sup> They craft individualized rehabilitation programs and offer consultative advice for offenders on how best to avoid recidivism and reintegrate into the community. By working to facilitate offenders' participation in treatment programs, counselors deploy their professional expertise and skills to provide customized services to offenders during community supervision. In this way, they usually identify their role as service delivery and caregivers in CCC through their professional service provision. In China, professional corrections social workers focus on behavioral change and offenders' "healing," which is intended to transform offenders into productive citizens (Xiong 2019).

Second, studies have shown that professionals in CCC work to supervise and manage offenders for improving community safety and maintaining social and political stability (E. Li 2017). Research suggests that this role may be derived from the legacy of

---

5. In China, these risks are largely sociological factors leading to offenders' criminality, mainly including family care, economic and material support, treatments of mental illnesses and substance abuse, psychotherapy, education and job-seeking services, and assistance in marriage formation (see also Hannah-Moffat 2004).

deploying and recruiting law enforcement officials as correctional practitioners in previous CCC practices (E. Li 2017). “Law and order” have become the dominant working ideology among correctional agencies, and punitive control has become their quotidian working practice. Intensive supervision to ensure offenders’ compliance with supervisory rules is their priority in daily performance, and “zero reoffending” is the implementational goal that social workers strive to achieve (Xiong and Rong 2012). Additionally, social workers have sometimes assumed the role of legal educators who work on popularizing legal rules and teaching offenders’ accountability to help them develop legal knowledge and become law-abiding residents (Jiang and Liu 2022).

Finally, aligned with the notion of “managerial justice,” they work as nodal actors to coordinate and connect with justice officials and correctional administrators, offenders, and other community actors to facilitate the efficient completion of correctional programs in the community (C. Li 2012). In some cases, they prepare reports on offenders’ risks and needs that help legal personnel acquire knowledge about the offenders and make informed decisions in the sentencing phase. The efficiency value and risk control—swift case disposition with minimal resource input and the goal of reducing recidivism and maximizing community safety—are the crucial concerns for correctional social workers given that their performance evaluation is usually based on the number of cases resolved.

Past research has examined the multifold roles that social workers play within CCC as well as the obstacles that they have encountered in practicing rehabilitative work and meeting formal missions in the law (Jiang et al. 2014; E. Li 2021). In addition, abundant studies have also probed struggling processes and the resulting strategies that correctional social workers have devised to respond to a variety of social, economic, and political challenges arising from a transition to late modern societies, such as fiscal austerity and welfare retrenchment; the prevailing mindset of “new penology” or the ascending risk paradigm of justice in correctional systems; the boundary blurring of care and control and bureaucratic mandates and organizational imperatives (Kemshall 2010; Gray 2013; Halushka 2017; Tomczak 2017). We contend that these studies have been conducted within societies that have developed relatively mature penal-welfare frameworks and that are operating established rehabilitative apparatuses. However, from a comparative historical perspective, China is experiencing a transition to a modern society with its penal-welfare apparatus in the making and an embryonic rehabilitative institution in its penal system (E. Li 2021). The professional level of social workers, the range of criminological or other scientific knowledges deployed to correct offenders’ behaviors, and the extent of the individualization of intervention programs, have been incipient and rudimentary (Jiang and Liu 2022).

As such, there has been little research on how social workers reconcile these various (and sometimes competing) roles in a newly emergent CCC or on how they negotiate with state power in the Chinese authoritarian context. Despite the superseding power structure between professional groups and the state in the contemporary CCC field, social service professionals still enjoy a certain amount of discretion in deploying their agentic actions and mobilizing their expertise to achieve rehabilitative goals (Cheliotis 2006). Drawing on interview and observational data, we study the everyday politics and practices associated with the rehabilitation work that social workers experience within the CCC field. Our analytical focus is on how these professionals navigate



through, and negotiate with, the powerful influence of the state and the traditional institutional logics in the community-based correctional process.

## RESEARCH SETTING AND METHOD

The present study was conducted in a large Chinese city that has been a nation-wide pioneer in practicing correctional services in the community and that has now developed a relatively mature and institutionalized field of community corrections. Well-trained social workers were recruited by the local government to provide rehabilitative services to offenders under community punishment. Social workers within this city, and those involved in CCC, are usually dispatched into neighborhoods for a period of time and are therefore able to develop steady relationships with local community residents as well as to acquire sufficient information on neighborhood resources and challenges for delivering their services and handling their cases. Some of them work mostly in the community setting and have a counseling office in the local justice building so that they have a separate space for interacting frequently with offenders and performing their programs. Other social workers may work at justice agency offices with correctional administrators. These professionals might have fewer meetings with offenders, and, thus, their work routines are focused on case management and report writing. Their clients include a range of probationers, parolees, delinquents, and those under local diversion programs.

The data are primarily from in-depth interviews with professional social workers in community corrections as well as allied justice personnel ( $N = 42$ ), all of whom have at least two years of work experience in probation or parole. We gained access to these interviewees through the networks of one of the authors in the study who is a licensed social worker committed to offender rehabilitation within community corrections. We drew on these personal connections to ultimately recruit forty-two people to participate in our study. Our sample is composed of thirty-six social workers and six correctional officials, of which thirty-three were female and nine were male. These social workers span a total of five different community organizations and three justice personnel bureaus across three districts at the city.

The interviews were conducted individually ( $n = 20$ ) or within groups of two or three interviewees based on participant convenience, and most of them took place at workplaces or offices where our interviewees work. They lasted from two to four hours. Interviews were semi-structured, consisting of open-ended questions about how social workers make sense of their work objectives and professional duties as well as how they interact with state actors and perceive the state's influence during their daily practices of carrying out rehabilitation programs. The social workers were instructed to tell the story of their personal experiences with the correctional officials, which often entailed a narrative of contestation, compromise, and frustration. Additionally, the participants were asked to discuss ways in which to improve the quality and effectiveness of community corrections services from their professional viewpoints. Following the principles of grounded theory (Charmaz 2006), interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed in order to extract theoretical concepts and recurrent themes. In analyzing our data and summarizing key themes, we focused on the thoughts and actions of our interviewees

and on their formative processes and contexts. When encountering some confusing notions or controversial issues, we called some of our interviewees back and asked them for clarity and confirmation. Ultimately, our findings were structured into two sections, with the first section comprising the challenges faced by the participating social workers and the second explaining how they strategically adapt to the authoritarian CCC field.

## FINDINGS

This section first shows that social workers' engagement, which was implemented by CCC, has both structurally and discursively challenged the authoritarian state's ingrained role in the Chinese penal field and its social governance. As a social participatory force, which differs from the traditional model of correctional administration, social workers' involvement may generate problematics and become fraught with risks or frictions with the authoritarian state. Those challenges could also be interpreted as impediments to the Chinese realization of penal welfarism within CCC. We then demonstrate that, to accomplish their rehabilitative ideal and professional objectives in CCC, social workers must undergo strategic adaptation to an authoritarian context in which their interests may conflict with the state's ideologies and institutional priorities. Overall, the social workers' strategic experiences represent a social process through which this developing professional group is guided by conscience, but it only works when it is convenient within this so-called "progressive" penal institution (Rothman 1980).

### Risks and Challenges Facing CCC Social Workers

The emergent institution of CCC opened up space for professional groups to participate in penal affairs, and, in the beginning, the social workers expressed excitement about their entry into this new field. They were longing for their engagement in corrections and interactions with offenders because they finally had an opportunity to apply their knowledge in real-world settings and achieve community well-being through their genuine care and professional passion. Opening the gate for social workers to CCC has affirmed their professional identity<sup>6</sup> and enhanced their sense of value (Interviewee 202011; Interviewee 202102). Yet, as they spent more time working and practicing, social workers began to realize the risks, challenges, and problems related to their involvement in CCC. The engagement-induced risks inevitably arose due to the entrenched authoritarian political culture and the administrative traditions that the state always uses to control civil affairs and community members. As the social workers noted, the challenges and disadvantages associated with their participation in CCC

---

6. Our interviews reveal the diversity of the meaning of social workers' professional identity in CCC. Some consider themselves as a helping professional who provides care and service to offenders, while others may have broader understandings of their role as an important agent for social change in the modernizing China. Those that hold the view of social change explicitly conveyed their comprehension of offending behaviors as social structural problems including poverty and socioeconomic inequalities. For the current crisis of identity that social workers are experiencing in other societies, see Powell 2001.



were sometimes explicitly experienced in their routine work activities and, at other times, were discerned and grasped after their long-time work in the field.

### *Enduring Hierarchy*

Many of the social workers highlighted the structural problems and the imbalance of power and resources between the state and social organizations in CCC. They further noted how heavily dependent social work organizations were on resources from the state's justice agencies. This excessive dependence may subject social work organizations to the state's will and authority and thus undercut their autonomy and development. In CCC, justice authorities wield tremendous power to guide and assess the annual performance of social work organizations, and sometimes their regulatory rules and service requirements differ significantly from social workers' professional ethics and values (Interviewee 202105). During the rehabilitative practices of the social workers, justice administrators frequently appear to extend their powerful reach, directly interfering in their performance. The social workers reported that, even their proposed programs, which had been shown to be effective, might be denigrated by the justice authorities as ineffective interventions or unqualified to be applied (Interviewee 202109; Interviewee 202103). In our study, the CCC social workers often lamented the lack of trust exhibited by correctional officials regarding their competence. Their involvement was sometimes framed as an "intrusion" to the officially prescribed terrain (Interviewee 202107). As one experienced social worker explained, "both parties [we professionals and correctional administrators] do not cultivate and maintain mutually trusted and supportive relationships over the course of achieving claimed objectives in the law. Our participation may become problematic in their [correctional administrators'] eyes, but we think it is our duty to assist offenders and we believe we can" (Interviewee 2021010).

These structural challenges give rise to, and are also reinforced by, the extraordinarily limited discretionary power that social workers can exercise during their rehabilitative programs. The social workers complained about the narrow space whereby they can hardly freely "display their full talent and potential" given the correctional officials' restrictive oversight and their predominant role in authorizing rehabilitative programs (Interviewee 2021011). In addition, their structural disadvantages within CCC are exacerbated by bureaucratic constraints<sup>7</sup> that are familiar to correctional officials but seem bizarre to service professionals. Social workers, as newcomers in CCC, found their participation was challenging and bewildering. One social worker conveyed that, on the first day in CCC, she was overwhelmed by the administrative intricacies and government officials' indifference (Interviewee 202101). Similarly, others also felt intimidated by the complex official regulations and governmental mandates that perceptibly

---

7. The bureaucratic constraints mainly involve a variety of formal requirements by justice authorities for social workers in CCC that have little to do with the substance of their rehabilitative work, such as a display of their work's being aligned with the leaders' thoughts and the Communist Party-state's ideologies, an onerous procedure of paper work and filling forms, and a receipt of administrators' approval before proceeding to the next step of rehabilitation. These requirements occupy much of social workers' time in doing rehabilitative work.

interfered (and even conflicted) with their professional treatments. To work in the field correctly and without conflict, they must spend time understanding the administrative rules and adjusting themselves to the bureaucratic processes that they did not expect to encounter and experience.

### *Incongruous Orientations and Ambiguous Status*

Social workers' involvement in CCC engenders collusion between established penal officials and emergent welfare/service practitioners, given that these two groups hold disparate visions, goals, and values toward implementing community correctional programs. Notably, a lack of common understanding of professionalism and the expert's role in rehabilitation work apparently lingers between the state and social workers. Social workers in CCC have shared that community corrections, as an outgrowth of social governance's modernization, represent an emergent form of national "penal welfare" to offenders (Garland 1985). The social workers interviewed underscored the progressive values of their participation in CCC. They expounded that, for themselves, the profession of social work is essentially guided by altruism and the application of scientific approaches to promote the restoration of normal life for offenders, the reintegration of offenders into the community, and the provision of other assistive services (Interviewee 202121; Interviewee 202118). As one senior social worker vigorously stressed, demonstrating the professionalism of their work for offenders:

We (social workers in CCC) have a quite different point of start from justice professionals when dealing with offenders in the community. We do not think offenders are innately bad or evil, and there must be some underlying reasons that they become "criminal" and we need to address them. When we work with offenders, we do some diagnosis first and listen to their inner voices, developing a clear sense of why and how they commit crimes, and then we formulate our rehabilitative programs based on our knowledge about this offender. I developed a lot of therapeutic programs for drug offenders, delinquents and substance abusers through my expertise in dancing and yoga. We also deliver individualized services to them by connecting a web of social, justice, and medical organizations and gleaning those resources. We do not hope they think they are "criminals" and internalize that identity in the community, but an acceptable member of the community. Our interventions always send a message of hope and transformative potential, and let them know we are helping and encouraging, not controlling and oppressing, them. (Interviewee 202121)

They further noted that their professional values include respect, acceptance, self-determination, individualization, and confidentiality for the offenders. In this way, their practices should aim to "normalize" those individuals who were considered pathological using innovative, professional skills (Interviewee 202016). They further highlighted that the core working philosophy underlying social workers' correctional practices is to place offenders on the normal track of community life and prompt reintegration. To that end, they have cultivated a firm belief in working to assist offenders in restoring

their normal social ties, repairing and rebuilding broken social bonds attendant to their offending, and providing rehabilitative support. Yet justice authorities may still retain “cognitive inertia”<sup>8</sup> regarding community corrections as a form of sentence implementation in community settings, thus requiring offenders to comply with the principles of “abiding by supervisory rules, completing thought reform, and starting with a clean slate” (Interviewee 202103). In their eyes, following the tradition of law enforcement and the value of security and stability, “professionalism” seems to entail close monitoring, restrictive control, and zero reoffending.

Those conceptual and discursive disagreements constrain social workers in ways that often result in social workers compromising their professional aspirations and expertise in the face of official authority. Several social workers in our study expressed concerns about truly realizing the rehabilitative goal of their community corrections services. When asked to work with offenders in CCC, those values and ideals were reduced and diluted in the face of justice authorities’ requirement of professionalism: “professional *supervision* rather than professional *corrections*” (Interviewee 202106). In practice, they were frequently deployed to act as the authoritative body of community corrections, substituting judicial officials to implement the sentence and enforce the law or practicing the prescribed duty of offender supervision and management. They felt that this type of work obviously represented the coercive force and authoritativeness of criminal sanctions, and their operation essentially leads to the treatment of offenders as convicts in need of control and repression rather than as citizens who require productive socialization and rehabilitation. Several social workers expressed their dissenting opinions about the supervisory task that was sometimes assigned by justice officials:

We were not trained by how to effectively supervise offenders in the community and stop them from doing bad things. We understand the supervisory component in the process of community corrections, but we should not stand in that position. It is at least NOT our main job. (Interviewee 202122)

I feel my job of corrections as a very soft and humane approach to offender management, not just using a watching eye on those offenders. My professional training teaches me about being friendly and kind to offenders so that they could not become resistant against our management tactics. The supervision work justice authorities assigned to us is quite impersonal and maybe counterproductive to crime prevention in the community. (Interviewee 202115)

We see our clients [offenders] as transformative subjects, and we seek to change their behaviors and attitudes by our various designed programs. We care about how much they could make with our efforts. (Interviewee 202120)

---

8. This phrase refers to justice officials’ entrenched ways of thinking about and defining the ideal and function of community-based corrections that may become outdated or stagnated compared with contemporary roles of CCC.

Generally, these social workers have found their perceived role of providing rehabilitation services and promoting offenders' well-being minimized in favor of sentence implementation and offender supervision. Their position in the CCC field has been gradually marginalized and is in constant struggle with the weighty influence of state actors in the authoritarian Chinese context (Jiang and Liu 2022). One manager of a social worker organization noted this subjugation of correctional organizations by the government:

I see that most correctional social work organizations are actually founded, managed, and operated by government agencies. That is the case of formally delegating certain government functions to our organizations in our name. This seems by nature another way to circulate the power among government agencies. It looks like we, as new actors, become "involved" in the field, but we merely aid government agencies in completing their mandated work. (Interviewee 202103)

Several social workers further explained that conflicts and controversies surrounding the status of social workers in community corrections have been rooted in earlier institutional arrangements of community corrections systems in China, a model that failed to incorporate the idea of "socialization of criminal sanctions" into community corrections practices. Social work-based measures were subsequently adopted and gradually introduced into the current criminal justice system. In the eyes of correctional administrators, social work-related practices in the penal system are construed as a relatively mild or "lenient" substitute that is useful in overcoming pitfalls in traditional community sanctions (Interviewee 202014). Without proper space for rehabilitation in CCC's ideational foundation, the "welfare provision"<sup>9</sup> function of CCC may be minimized and even eroded by the state's interference and the policy priority of community orderliness and stability (Interviewee 202102). In effect, this penal, not rehabilitative, function of CCC has been frequently endorsed and stressed by contemporary correctional administrations. One official in a municipal bureau of community corrections described:

It is indeed difficult for our correctional officers to embrace the social work's ideology regarding corrections, such as helping those offenders without any criticism, unconditional forgiving of their past mistakes, always showing respect, unreserved support, and providing counseling services. After all, we think offenders we supervise are criminal convicts. As such, how can unconditional acceptance and care be offered to those convicted offenders? (Interviewee 202109)

---

9. While this concept of the "welfare function" of modern community-based corrections was noted by interviewees in our study, it has been deftly theorized in David Garland's (1985) historical accounts of the development of a penal-welfare complex in Britain. The emergence of rehabilitative interventions on offenders in the community can be conceptualized as a form of "penal strategy in a welfare state" (231). CCC serves as a sort of welfare function because its interventions aim to meet offenders' needs based on their individualized circumstances and emphasize normalization as an approach to dealing with offenders in the community.

Considering the structural disadvantage and the discursive friction with governmental correctional officials, the social workers noted that they are generally mired in an ambiguous position within the CCC field. As a result, they frequently wrestle with officials' incapacitation and deterrent orientations to offender management. To make themselves more visible, social workers seek to represent the uniqueness of their ways of thinking about, and dealing with, offenders, which they consider beneficial to the offenders and essential to the CCC's welfare goal. Our interviewees mentioned that they seize every opportunity to "reshape" the correctional administrators' knowledge of criminal behavior (or the Chinese "official criminology") (Garland 1996) and seek to drive discursive changes in contemporary CCC. However, when assigned to deliver rehabilitative services in the field, along with a more entrenched culture of security and stability, the participants often expressed feeling disregarded, frustrated, and alienated (Interviewee 202107; Interviewee 202108).

### *Financial Precariousness*

Another challenge faced by social workers in CCC emerges from unstable sources of funding for rehabilitative services, which results in precarious job security as social workers in CCC. In China, the government's fiscal funding to purchase social workers' services is not completely incorporated into, and less instituted within, the government's public fiscal system.<sup>10</sup> This singular source of funding paves the way for the instability of social worker' programs, severely constraining the sustainable involvement of social organizations in CCC, which was stressed by one social worker: "When there is ample funding, more services will be purchased; if there is limited funding, limited services will be purchased; if there is no funding, no services will be purchased; therefore, only when the leaders of justice agencies believe that it is important, then purchases will happen" (Interviewee 202109). The deficit and insecure governmental funding for social workers' rehabilitation programs may jeopardize social workers' long-term employment and lead to constant attrition in social workers within CCC. As mentioned, given the lack of consensus on professionalism, when social workers insist on exercising their own professional agency, and are yet unable to fulfill the official interests, their service contract with the government might be terminated for the upcoming year.

In practice, justice agencies are inclined to purchase correctional services from social work organizations that are willing to represent and follow the authority's interests. This fact possibly generates risk for some social work organizations. To sustain their own business operations, social workers may need to tentatively abandon professional values, and the philosophies of social work, to accommodate authorities' requirements and justice officials' needs (Interviewee 201910; Interviewee 202013; Interviewee 202021). Accordingly, CCC, in the long run, has witnessed the frequent resignation of experienced social workers who feel disappointed with their profession and who

---

10. The specialist law of CCC enacted in 2020 explicitly stipulates that the local government should apportion its fiscal resources on CCC's implementation, staffing, and service procurement. Despite this law, social workers in our sample suggested that this has yet to be carried out in practice and entails more detailed executive rules to be made.

consider working elsewhere when community correction services are lacking consistency and continuity (Ma and Mao 2013). Therefore, the instability and precarity of social workers in CCC may considerably impair the quality of their services and chip away at the success of the programs.

### **Strategies to Pursue Rehabilitation in an Authoritarian State**

Despite the necessary ties with the state for correctional social workers in CCC, it does not mean a true collaboration model has been established for social work groups and correctional authorities. Skepticism continues concerning the proper role, capacity, and effectiveness of social workers in CCC. Meanwhile, tensions have arisen whenever the legally mandated involvement of social workers in the pursuit of rehabilitation ideals rival the established penal traditions and values that underscore order maintenance and disorder minimization.

As such, social workers, who are deployed to practice rehabilitation services in CCC, are placed in the difficult position of striving to assist offenders and alter offenders' behavior in a way that is least detrimental to offenders and community members and most compatible with institutional, governmental, and professional needs. They are simultaneously directed at managing and treating offenders in a way that maximizes their rehabilitative success and aligning themselves with the Chinese penal system's goals and priorities. Three distinct, but closely related, strategies for social workers to pursue their professionally driven rehabilitation ideals emerge in our interviews with them. The next sections describe these strategies and considers their role in balancing the competing demands associated with simultaneously attending to social workers' professional aspirations and the goals of the penal system.

#### ***Seeking Common Ground while Reserving Differences for Conflict Aversion***

Social workers in CCC understand the imposing authority of the state actors in the Chinese penal system. Direct resistance against the state's penal power, or refusal to follow officials' orders, seems impossible and dangerous. For optimal performance of their duties, they must carefully learn how to cooperate with correctional administrators and penal officials by identifying the commonalities and differences in their professional contributions and state priorities. Discovering the space where they can work together with state actors can make their participation and input legitimate and valuable; however, in the face of occasional conflicting goals and interests, correctional social workers, with limited agency, choose to be less submissive to state actors and strive to preserve the crucial dimensions of social work as a helping profession while also doing correctional work. Regardless of which direction they take, social workers in CCC make efforts to avoid trouble with the state authorities.

When faced with the social governance model in China, social workers must present themselves as a necessary fit with the state's governing priorities and policy goals—the socialist ideology of “for the people, by the people, and with the people.” Social workers must demonstrate that their participation in, and pursuit of, the rehabilitation

ideal is “for the people” (Interviewee 202105). To gain the state’s acceptance, they must advocate for the idea that the social work value of “people have potential” aligns with the penal welfare concept of “people’s behaviors can be altered” in a modern penal system (Duan and Li 2014). Moreover, this ideology embraced by social workers coincides with the state’s contemporary commitment to constructing a socialist system of community corrections by building partnerships with local community organizations and actors, thus creating opportunities for incorporating and promoting professional services of correctional social workers. Social workers are viewed as constituents of “the people” with whom the state aims to work, according to the socialist ideology.

With the specialist CCC law’s passage, the participation of social workers in CCC is increasingly considered “necessary” by correctional administrators, given that they feel like they are in “the same boat” (Interviewee 202102). Social workers are increasingly welcomed by state officials, given that their involvement and input embody the state’s socialist ideology. Social workers’ rehabilitative services are interpreted by the state actors as “good for the people” because they are intended to “make up” for the lack of caring and treatment practices in traditional community sentences (Interviewee 202101). To make CCC’s ideological function more salient and effective, state officials have developed high expectations for the role of correctional social workers in providing humanitarian, individualized treatment and educational support. For them, the rehabilitative services that social workers perform represent the socialist state’s contemporary pressing concern about social harmony and its capacity to govern society; thus, state actors pay close attention to capabilities of social workers to perform their rehabilitative services, including “the professional relationship to be built with offenders, creation of correctional profiles, reoffending risk assessment, individual correctional plans, correctional intervention of high-risk individuals, and visualization of intervention effectiveness” (Interviewee 202011).

In addition to the ideological commonalities that social workers attempt to establish with the socialist state, they note that their professional character and practices as social welfare providers have to be allied with, and, thus, are highly dependent on, the state’s ways of understanding and utilizing social work services to implement community corrections. For example, when they fail to demonstrate the professional advantages<sup>11</sup> requested by the state authorities in a timely way, or they are unable to present their own professional correctional program design to correctional officials, they are subordinated to work objectives set up by the state actors, including tracking and monitoring offenders, case management, and providing legal education. In these cases, as the social workers described, they feel a need to switch roles to then work effectively as “surrogate law enforcers” (Interviewee 202015). In our interviews, the social workers reported that, nowadays, they proactively take the responsibility of monitoring the locations of the mobile phones carried by offenders twenty-four hours a day; to administer offenders’

---

11. The range of social workers’ professional advantages is understood by justice authorities to complement their traditional justice activities and to strengthen their capacity to govern crime in contemporary Chinese society. It includes diagnosing, assessing, and treating criminal and juvenile offenders; developing and implementing social service programs; providing consultation, education, or training to criminal justice systems; and having scientific knowledge about crime causation and employing that knowledge to assist policy makers and officials in formulating possible solutions to crime and other social problems.



admission into community corrections (as well as their release), and to manage their daily reporting activities and instruct offenders about CCC's principles and rules.

To preserve and protect the aspirations of the rehabilitation ideal, social workers learn to combine those imposed administrative priorities with their rehabilitative endeavors in ways that minimize the occurrence of opposition and confrontation. This innovative strategy to merge two goals is metaphorically described by social workers in CCC as a mechanism of "watching with love and care" (Interviewee 202118; Interviewee 202007; Interviewee 202014). As such, social workers seem to put offenders "on a leash" and warn them not to go outside the community boundary in order to prevent their escape, to avoid losing control over them, and to minimize the risk and harm that offenders may pose to the community.

Out of their professional ethics and goals, social workers also take as many opportunities as possible to help offenders as well as to show care and concern about offenders' success in the reentry process. As several social workers note, they have to "stick in a pin wherever there's room" (Interviewee 202111; Interviewee 202119). In other words, these additional measures and rehabilitative programs should not be ostensibly or overtly practiced; otherwise, state actors may possibly conclude that these implementations "squeeze" or disproportionately take too much time away from completing the correctional agencies' supervisory mission and administrative work (Interviewee 202106). For example, in the process of organizing offenders to participate in daily community services, social workers have them wear vests with volunteer logos rather than those assigned by the government with the quintessential character of "corrections" (Interviewee 202106). In most circumstances, social workers seek to find resources and create opportunities to help offenders perform community service together with other volunteers in other non-criminal social work groups. From the perspective of the social workers, this is a better way of ameliorating offenders' sense of inferiority arising from the "criminal" label, and it is also easier to help offenders gain acceptance and trust from the community residents (Interviewee 202018; Interviewee 202019; Interviewee 202107).

### *Catering to the Higher Correctional Authority for Asserting Shared Interests*

Most social workers consider service procurement contracts with the government as valuable opportunities to apply their professional expertise and fulfill their rehabilitation ideals. Establishing their contract with the correctional agency is not only a chance to perform professionally but also provides a promising outlet for securing funding and client resources from the government. Yet CCC social workers find that these contractual relationships are largely precarious and fluid because this sector of public service is in the hands, and under the control, of state actors. To stand out among all the potential competitors in the bid for the CCC service contract, our interviewees emphasized that they put forth more effort than the contract requires. Once they get a chance to be involved, social workers must come up with ideas for maintaining contractual relationships with the correctional authorities.

Social workers in CCC recognize that signing continuing service contracts with state actors is a complex bureaucratic process. Over various phases, consistently

satisfying state interests and ideologies is crucial for enabling social workers to begin, and to continue, their programs in CCC. As the social workers noted, gaining acceptance, and getting credit, from state authorities can pave the way for entering the CCC field. This entrance usually begins from a particular exploratory service program under the stewardship of state authorities. If this exploration is successful and affirmed by the higher authority, it will be treated as a pilot program deemed worthy of promotion. Many of the social workers stressed that only when the service purchaser reaps “hard” benefits from their services (in terms of CCC’s development and implementation) will state actors be willing to sustain this co-option and allow for their continual engagement. Correctional social work organizations can merely enter the gate to provide services for the upcoming year with no long-term guarantees for continued service.

To maintain a rapport with correctional authorities, social workers must explicitly demonstrate the common interests that they share with higher correctional decision makers who wield the power to allow their admission and continuation in CCC. The common interests center on program success and cost-effective services in CCC (Interviewee 202017; Interviewee 202108). Before continuing in their service contracts for subsequent years, social workers must demonstrate to correctional authorities their potential to successfully perform the care and rehabilitation of offenders. Program and service effectiveness is pivotal for both correctional authorities and social workers in forming a mutually beneficial alliance. One social worker commented about the significance of emphasizing and realizing common interests with the correctional authority:

When the program works effectively, and correctional officials see the effect, I know they are pleased and excited. They like it, which means we [CCC social workers] would have the chance to continue our service and work together here. Only we could meet their interests and management goals, they might think we are valuable and would be happy to have us in the field. (Interviewee 202121)

Additionally, for social workers, maintaining close ties with correctional authorities is about more than just the shared interest of offering successful services. More importantly, social workers need to expand the zone of common interests, contributing beyond the scope of the contract whenever possible. Our interviewees discussed that “do-more” thinking is built on the extra capabilities of social workers as well as on the progressive, open-minded, organizational culture of correctional agencies (Interviewee 202011; Interviewee 202019; Interviewee 202103). As professional social workers, they are trained to work not only beyond the domain of community corrections and criminal offenders (or clients in conflict with the law) but also within other contexts or groups such as health-care institutions, families, or youth. For instance, one director of a social work organization in CCC shared her story of efforts to expand common interests with the state actors:

As residents reduce their outdoor activities due to the COVID-19 pandemic, while Internet frauds occur more frequently, our team develops a therapeutic social work team against internet crimes and financial crimes. Moreover, during our intervention we find that emotional anxiety and depression are very

common, and they usually result from the unemployment of male offenders and family conflicts of female offenders. We then arrange gender-sensitive and individualized therapeutic programs for them. We emphasize integration and support components of our services. But actually, at the beginning, as the contract requests, we only conduct group counseling activities based on needs of the criminal offenders. We did not expect that the widespread positive feedbacks from our clients [offenders in CCC] attracted considerable media attention. That was soon also specially reported and praised by the Ministry of Justice. Thus, our one-year service contract turned into a three-year contract. Honestly, our organization is only responsible for community interventions in problem adults, and now the higher correctional authority entrusts the whole work of community corrections (including intervention services for juveniles) to us. Correctional officials also encouraged and emboldened us to explore more in CCC. We are excited about this trust, and we think it results from our willingness to think more, contribute more, and do more. The state will be very happy with it. (Interviewee 202120)

This excerpt illustrates how the successful completion of service contracts may only delimit a small number of common interests for social workers to “dance and perform” on a narrow stage (Interviewee 202120). If they want to draw the constant attention from higher correctional authorities, whereby they can sustain their service contracts with state actors, they may consider innovations that address the broader needs and issues of penal governance that the state may face in addition to possible solutions. Perhaps more importantly, they need to put those ideas into practice and let the authorities know that they are working “for” them.

### *Advertising to Accumulate Popular Attention and Credit from the State*

Because the reoffending rate during CCC is the key performance indicator when evaluated by Chinese correctional authorities, frontline justice actors have expressed serious concern over the control of potential reoffenders during their community corrections (Xiong 2019). However, it usually takes more than a single year to realize positive effects from the correctional programs designed by social workers. Over the programming process, social workers craft their service programs based on offenders' individualized needs and “broker” community resources to assist offenders (Quirouette 2018). Therefore, in completing their rehabilitative duties, social workers often encounter tensions between the officially requested program efficiency and their care about service quality as well as the attendant time pressures.

Before waiting for the ultimate outcomes and demonstrable success of their services to emerge, social workers usually project themselves as “reliable social entrepreneurs” that warrant investment and support (Interviewee 202001; Interviewee 202125). To accumulate sufficient credit from the government and acceptance from society, several social workers reported their efforts to engage in research and noted striving to produce evidence-based proposals for correctional officials. Working like social scientists, they often collected and analyzed data by conducting experiment-based “pre-test and post-test interventions” so as to find out the best programs with

convincing evidence to effectively alter and correct offenders' cognition and behaviors (Interviewee 202017). After reaching conclusions through their research and testing, social workers began advertising their correctional programs and rehabilitative services to expand the scope of their audience. To do so, as our interviewees explained, they regularly resorted to media for reporting and disseminating the efficacy of their programs, highlighted their professional approach to rehabilitative services and their qualifications and state-approved licenses, participated in academic conferences with presentations and publishing journal articles, and directly worked in the community to carry on programs that they had demonstrated to be useful. In this context, directors of social work organizations in CCC may seem like "retailers" who have to learn and master efficient "marketing" strategies to publicize their "products and services" (that is, psychotherapy or drug treatment programs) and thus augment their reputation (Interviewee 202012). Above all, they do such things in order to amass community members' trust and public acceptance.

Through tireless dedication to advertising correctional programs among the public, social workers in CCC hope to accrue adequate credit from administrators of criminal justice. For them, the government's trust of their services is critically important for continuing their contract(s) with the justice agencies. The government's acceptability helps social workers increase opportunities for their expertise beyond the CCC agencies, including criminal courts, prosecutors, prisons, juvenile reformatories, and addiction treatment centers (Interviewee 202101).

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

China's efforts to modernize social governance over the last decade have prompted the CCC's institutionalization, a progression that represents an important penal development within an authoritarian welfare state in the making (Garland 1985; Jiang and Liu 2022). This change also marks a restructuring of the Chinese penal field, wherein social forces and community actors are enabled and encouraged to participate in penal affairs, and offers the opportunity to share devolutionary penal power with the authoritarian state. While a burgeoning scholarship has discussed the evolution, character, and pitfalls of this emergent penal institution (Jiang et al. 2014; E. Li 2015a), fewer researchers have examined how these flourishing social organizations, service professionals, and community actors embrace and represent the force of penal welfare, while pursuing rehabilitative ideals as they work in CCC (Garland 1985). To broaden this literature, we have explored social workers' agency during their community corrections work within the Chinese authoritarian polity. This research has revealed the negotiation practices of this emergent professional group, which participates in community corrections processes in order to deliver rehabilitative services, as well as their interactive experiences with both offenders and justice personnel.

Our analyses of social workers' daily activities and experiences in CCC field suggests that social workers' engagement in rehabilitative practices is a dynamic process of interactions between the authoritarian state and subjective/agentive innovations. These interactive experiences of social workers incrementally help them cultivate more realistic understandings of their role in CCC and aid in developing a relationship that we

term “pragmatic rapport” with justice authorities. This “pragmatic rapport” is crucial for social workers to survive in the authoritarian field of CCC because this relationship helps social workers access state-owned resources and gain the state’s endorsement. Social workers strive to expand their terrain of social services in the CCC field but constantly feel frustrated in the face of superseding state authority. However, this frustration does not completely intimidate social workers from pursuing their rehabilitative ideals and aspirations of providing social services to clients. Rather, they devise various strategies to rehabilitate offenders, which are compatible with state and institutional priorities, while maintaining their “autonomous” status and professional ideals in the field with minimal confrontations with the state.

Often “walking on the ice,” Chinese correctional social workers have developed strategies such as seeking common ground while respecting differences, catering to the superior authority of service purchasers, and advertising to accumulate popular acceptance and credit from the state (Barry 2021). For social workers within CCC, these approaches collectively function to maintain professionalism, practice professional values, and promote the well-being of offenders. Indeed, some of the identified strategies demonstrate promising compatibility between the state’s demands and social workers’ interests. For example, on the one hand, social workers’ efforts to disseminate their research findings and promote evidence-based rehabilitation programs improves their reliability in the eyes of the government and the public and, on the other hand, demonstrates an important form of mobilizing social resources and deploying scientific knowledge to both solve social problems and construct a harmonious socialist society.

Nonetheless, the adaptive strategies that social workers deploy are not always effective in overcoming friction with the authoritarian state and often result in a more submissive, and even passive, position in CCC for social workers given the risks of challenging state authority, institutional interests, and policy priorities. Limitations associated with the funding and administration of rehabilitative programs further impede social workers’ potential to achieve penal welfare objectives when the authoritarian state wields predominant discursive power and holds considerable practical resources. Further research might explore how social workers in CCC, with extraordinarily limited resources and onerously plagued by state authority, defend their conscience, resist with their wits and courage the state’s interferences in pursuit of a rehabilitative ethos, and “survive the cracks” to ensure that offenders are fairly and respectfully treated in the community.

This study is aligned with past work on the struggling trajectory, or the surviving fate, of the rehabilitation ideal of punishment in late modern societies. It highlights the politics of penal logics and practical ideologies among the various actors and groups that shape penal development and the nature of the penal system (Lynch 1998; McNeill et al. 2009; Goodman, Page, and Phelps 2017; Goddard and Myers 2018). The current analysis, however, extends this vein of research by examining adaptive actions of social workers, an emergent professional group, which is assigned to perform rehabilitative work in an authoritarian CCC. In so doing, we offer innovative insights into how rehabilitation unfolds within a peculiar penal site where the power structure between the state and the civil sphere is fundamentally disparate from that in Western democracies where most studies have been conducted. We contend that, whatever strivings social workers make to implement rehabilitation for their professional aspirations, they

are always, and cannot escape being turned into, part of the state discourses and contributions (see also Jiang and Liu 2022). In this way, social workers, in their pursuit of the rehabilitative ideal, may suffer from becoming instruments of the state, or rendered accomplices of the state, to govern populations in the community beneath a veil of penal professionalism and civil engagement.

Our findings speak to the importance of moving beyond legal enactment to facilitate the realization of the penal welfare ethos in a modernizing Chinese society. A piece of specialist legislation on CCC alone is unable to address the multifold challenges and predicaments rooted in Chinese social realities and political structures. Meanwhile, merely allowing social workers to participate in community-based correctional programs, without affording them adequate resources and an autonomous space for exercising discretion and applying professional expertise, can lead to social workers' disenchantment with rehabilitation ideals in CCC. To ameliorate this situation, CCC social workers might be both empowered in the discursive dimension and equipped with adequate funding and stable resources for their work. The evaluation of their rehabilitative performance should not be reduced to several quantitative (and often decontextualized) indicators such as the reoffending rate or the rate of case clearance. Instead, it should be based essentially on offenders' individualized needs, their structural predicaments, and their well-being in the community.

This study presents a starting point for examining how civil forces and community organizations interact with state actors in the Chinese penal field since the authoritarian state has recently begun to underscore the importance of social forces in state development and invigorate social groups, service professionals, and community organizations to participate in public (penal) affairs. The transformative dynamics and restructuring process is uneasy in such an authoritarian context, and struggles and compromises between the state and society will still exist against this background, thus rendering the future fate of rehabilitative programs, and the social workers' role in achieving the ideal, continually uncertain and contestable. Future studies would benefit from a larger and more diverse sample, in addition to comparative analyses across Chinese jurisdictions, to deepen our understanding of how social organizations and professional groups pursue and practice rehabilitation ideals in CCC. This is particularly contributive to the study of punishment and society by extending the ambit to include a typical authoritarian state against the backdrop of China's changing state-society relationship and its rapid transition to a modern society.

## REFERENCES

- Allen, Francis A. 1978. "The Decline of the Rehabilitative Ideal in American Criminal Justice." *Cleveland State Law Review* 27: 147–56.
- Bailey, Victor. 2019. *The Rise and Fall of the Rehabilitative Ideal, 1895–1970*. London: Routledge.
- Barry, Monica. 2021. "'Walking on Ice': The Future of Parole in a Risk-obsessed Society." *Theoretical Criminology* 25, no. 2: 325–42.
- Charmaz, Kathy. 2006. *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis*. New York: Sage Publications.
- Cheliotis, Leonidas. 2006. "How Iron Is the Iron Cage of New Penology? The Role of Human Agency in the Implementation of Criminal Justice Policy." *Punishment & Society* 8, no. 3: 313–40.



- Chua, Lynette. 2012. "Pragmatic Resistance, Law and Social Movements in Authoritarian States: The Case of Gay Collective Action in Singapore." *Law & Society Review* 46, no. 4: 713–48.
- Dan, Moli. 2008. "Rethinking and Reconstructing the Concept of Community Corrections in China." *Wuhan University of Technology Xue Bao (Social Science Section)* 21, no. 1: 57–64 (in Chinese).
- DeMichele, Matthew. 2014. "Studying the Community Corrections Field: Applying Neo-Institutional Theories to a Hidden Element of Mass Social Control." *Theoretical Criminology* 18, no. 4: 546–64.
- Donohue, Erin, and Dawn Moore. 2009. "When Is an Offender Not an Offender? Power, the Client and Shifting Penal Subjectivities." *Punishment & Society* 11, no. 3: 319–36.
- Duan, Xuefen, and Dan Li. 2014. "How Social Workers Intervene in Community Corrections: An Empirical Analysis from Tianjin City, China." *Social Construction* 2: 54–60 (in Chinese).
- Garland, David. 1985. *Punishment and Welfare: A History of Penal Strategies*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate.
- . 1996. "The Limits of the Sovereign State: Strategies of Crime Control in Contemporary Society." *British Journal of Criminology* 36, no. 4: 445–71.
- . 2001. *The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gray, Patricia. 2013. "Assemblages of Penal Governance, Social Justice and Youth Justice Partnerships." *Theoretical Criminology* 17, no. 4: 517–34.
- Goddard, Tim. 2012. "Post-welfarist Risk Managers? Risk, Crime Prevention and the Responsibilization of Community-Based Organizations." *Theoretical Criminology* 16, no. 3: 347–63.
- Goddard, Tim, and Randy Myers. 2018. *Youth, Community and the Struggle for Social Justice*. London: Routledge.
- Goodman, Philip, Joshua Page, and Michelle Phelps. 2017. *Breaking the Pendulum: The Long Struggle over Criminal Justice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Halushka, John. 2017. "Managing Rehabilitation: Negotiating Performance Accountability at the Frontlines of Reentry Service Provision." *Punishment & Society* 19, no. 4: 482–502.
- Hannah-Moffat, Kelly, and Paula Maurutto. 2012. "Shifting and Targeted Forms of Penal Governance: Bail, Punishment and Specialized Courts." *Theoretical Criminology* 16, no. 2: 201–19.
- Hannah-Moffat, Kelly. 2004. "Criminogenic Need and the Transformative Risk Subject: Hybridizations of Risk/Need In Penalty." *Punishment & Society* 7, no. 1: 29–51.
- Hughes, Gordon. 2007. *The Politics of Crime and Community*. New York: Palgrave-Macmillan.
- Jiang, Jize, and Jingwei Liu. 2022. "Penal Welfare or Penal Sovereignty? A Political Sociology of Recent Formalization of Chinese Community Corrections." *Punishment & Society* 24, no. 4: 501–28.
- Jiang, Shanhe. 2013. "Social and Crime Control with Chinese Characteristics." In *The Routledge Handbook of Chinese Criminology*, edited by L. Cao, Y. Sun, and B. Heberton, 27–37. New York: Routledge.
- Jiang, Shanhe, Deping Xiang, Qi Chen, Chengxiang Huang, Shengyong Yang, and Dawei Zhang. 2014. "Community Corrections in China: Development and Challenges." *Prison Journal* 94, no. 1: 75–96.
- Jiang, Shanhe, Dawei Zhang, Jin Xiong, Deping Xiang, Richard Greenleaf, Jie Liu, and Na Xu. 2015. "Semiformal Crime Control and Semiformal Organizations in China: An Empirical Demonstration from Chinese Community Corrections." *Asian Journal of Criminology* 10, no. 4: 287–302.
- Kemshall, Hazel. 2010. "Risk Rationalities in Contemporary Social Work Policy and Practice." *British Journal Social Work* 40, no. 4: 1247–62.
- Li, Chuan. 2012. "From Specific Deterrence to Risk Management: The Theoretical Shift in Community Corrections in China and Its Future Approach." *Legal Sciences (Journal of Northwestern University of Political Science and Law)* 3: 186–94 (in Chinese).
- . 2015. "Rehabilitation, Correction and Selective Control: The Three Functions of Chinese Community Corrections and Their Implications." *Chinese Legal Studies* 5: 158–76 (in Chinese).



- Li, Enshen. 2015a. "Towards the Lenient Justice? A Rise of 'Harmonious' Penalty in Contemporary China." *Asian Journal of Criminology* 10, no. 4: 307–23.
- . 2015b. "China's Community Corrections: An Actuarial Model of Punishment." *Crime, Law and Social Change* 64, no. 1: 1–22.
- . 2017. "The Rhetoric and Practice of Community Corrections in China." *Asian Journal of Criminology* 12, no. 2: 143–62.
- . 2021. "Unravelling the Mystery of Parole in China." *British Journal of Criminology* 62, no. 4: 896–913.
- Li, Spencer D. 2014. "Toward a Cost-Effective Correctional System: New Developments In Community-Based Corrections in China." *Victims & Offenders* 9, no. 1: 120–25.
- Lynch, Mona. 1998. "Waste Managers? The New Penology, Crime Fighting, and Parole Agent Identity." *Law & Society Review* 32, no. 4: 839–70.
- . 2000. "Rehabilitation as Rhetoric: The Ideal of Reformation in Contemporary Parole Discourse and Practices." *Punishment & Society* 2, no. 1: 40–65.
- Ma, Liangcan, and Zeyue Mao. 2013. "In between the Government and Society: Shenzhen Model of 'Government Purchase of Social Work Services' and Its Enlightenment." *Social Welfare* 3: 45–49 (in Chinese).
- Maglione, Giuseppe. 2021. "Restorative Justice, Crime Victims and Penal Welfarism: Mapping and Contextualizing Restorative Justice Policy in Scotland." *Social & Legal Studies* 30, no. 5: 745–67.
- McNeill, Fergus, Nicola Burns, Simon Halliday, Neil Hutton, and Cyrus Tata. 2009. "Risk, Responsibility and Reconfiguration: Penal Adaptation and Misadaptation." *Punishment & Society* 11, no. 4: 419–42.
- Miller, Reuben J. 2014. "Devolving the Carceral State: Race, Prisoner Reentry, and the Micro-Politics of Urban Poverty Management." *Punishment & Society* 16, no. 3: 305–35.
- Page, Joshua. 2012. "Punishment and the Penal Field." *The SAGE Handbook of Punishment and Society*, edited by J. Simon and R. Sparks, 152–66. London: Sage Publications.
- Petersilia, Joan. 2003. *When Prisoners Come Home: Parole and Prisoner Reentry*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Powell, Fred. 2001. *The Politics of Social Work*. London: Sage Publications.
- Quirouette, Marianne. 2018. "Community Practitioners in Criminal Courts: Risk Logics and Multiply-Disadvantaged Individuals." *Theoretical Criminology* 22, no. 4: 582–602.
- Robinson, Gwen, and Fergus McNeill. 2016. *Community Punishment: European Perspectives*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Rothman, David. 1980. *Conscience and Convenience: The Asylum and Its Alternatives in Progressive America*. New York: Routledge.
- Schoenfeld, Heather. 2014. "The Delayed Emergence of Penal Modernism in Florida." *Punishment & Society* 16, no. 3: 258–84.
- Simon, Jonathan. 1993. *Poor Discipline: Parole and the Social Control of the Underclass, 1890–1990*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Tomczak, Philippa. 2017. "The Voluntary Sector and the Mandatory Statutory Supervision Requirement: Expanding the Carceral Net." *British Journal of Criminology* 55, no. 1: 152–71.
- Trevakes, Susan. 2010. *Policing Serious Crime in China: From "Strike Hard" to "Kill Fewer."* London: Routledge.
- Wacquant, Loic. 2009. *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Governance of Social Insecurity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Werth, Robert. 2013. "The Construction and Stewardship of Responsible Yet Precarious Subjects: Punitive Ideology, Rehabilitation, and 'Tough Love' among Parole Personnel." *Punishment & Society* 15, no. 3: 219–46.
- Wu, Zongxian. 2004. "On Some Reflective Issues of Community Corrections." *Chinese Justice* 7: 60–64 (in Chinese).
- . 2008. "Several Theoretical Issues on Social Forces and Community Corrections in China." *The Law Review* 3: 133–39 (in Chinese).

- Xiong, Guibin. 2019. "The Comprehensive Management Model: The Dilemmas of Chinese Community Corrections' 'Supervision-Rehabilitation' Goals and Their Solutions." *Chinese Social Work Studies* 17: 140–63 (in Chinese).
- Xiong, Guibin, and Rong Rong. 2012. *New Development of "Beijing Model" of Community Correction: From the Perspective of Sunshine Halfway Home in Chaoyang District*. Beijing: China Social Publishing (in Chinese).
- Yuan, Xiaoyu. 2019. "Risk, Risk Assessment, and Community Corrections in China." *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 63, no. 14: 2466–82.