

Three Models of Community Corrections in China

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Abstract: *This paper explores the development of community corrections in China, focusing on the role of social work within different models of practice. Despite ongoing debates over the punitive versus welfare nature of community corrections, the paper highlights the shift towards a welfare-oriented approach. It identifies three main models of community corrections in China—Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou—each incorporating social work to varying degrees. The findings suggest that social work is increasingly recognized as a crucial component in promoting rehabilitation and reintegration within the community corrections system.*

Keywords: Community Corrections, Welfare Nature, Three Models.

1. Introduction

On December 28, 2019, the Law of the People's Republic of China on Community Corrections was adopted at the 15th meeting of the Standing Committee of the 13th National People's Congress. The meeting formally decided to implement this law starting July 1, 2020. This law provides detailed regulations on community corrections and the implementation process. Several laws also explicitly mention the role and functions of social forces and social work in community corrections work. This is an affirmation of both at the legal level.

Specifically, Article 13 of the Community Corrections Law provides that the state encourages and supports the participation of enterprises, institutions, social organizations, volunteers, and other social forces in community correction work the law. Article 11 refers more specifically to social work: community correction agencies organize social workers with legal, educational, psychological, social work, and other professional knowledge or practical experience to conduct community correction-related work according to their needs. Regarding education and support, the law stipulates that community correction institutions can purchase community correction social work services or other social services through public merit to provide the necessary support for community correction subjects in education, psychological counseling, vocational skills training, and improvement of social relationships. These legal articles enable social forces and social work to be affirmed regarding community correction work subjects and contents. The adoption of the Community Correction Law has comprehensively opened a new situation of community correction work and provided a legal basis for the positioning, participation forms, and service contents of social work participation in community correction (Qi, 2020).

2. Controversy Over the Nature of Community Corrections

China officially defined community corrections. China's Supreme People's Court, Supreme People's Procuratorate, Ministry of Public Security, and Ministry of Justice promulgated the Notice on the Launch of Pilot Community Correction Work and Opinions on the Trial Implementation of

Community Correction Work Nationwide in 2003 and 2009, respectively. Both regulations elaborate on the concept of community correction, "Community correction is a non-custodial sentence enforcement method, which refers to the non-custodial sentence enforcement activity of placing criminals who meet the legal conditions in the community and having special state organs, with the assistance of relevant social groups, civil organizations and social volunteers, correct their criminal psychology and behavioral vices and promote their smooth return to society within the period determined by the judgment, ruling or decision."

However, there is still a controversy about whether the fundamental nature of community corrections is punitive or welfare in Chinese academia. Some scholars believe that the real nature of community corrections is punitive and that community correction is a criminal enforcement activity or an execution system. Compared to traditional institutional revision, community corrections is an emerging way to deal with offenders (Ding, 2003). This is because community corrections, as a punishment, are based primarily on the severity of the offender's crime, not on their need for rehabilitation. Moreover, not all criminals need to be rehabilitated, but all crimes should be punished. Therefore, community corrections as penalty enforcement in the community should still take punishment as the first task (Wu & Liu, 2010).

Scholars who oppose this view argue that the nature of social correction is not a penal enforcement activity. Community corrections are fundamentally aimed at reducing crime, with correctional institutions and the public sharing the responsibility of controlling crime and promoting the resocialization of disciplinary subjects (Lian, 2007). Based on the personal danger of the offender, the offender is given corrective education measures based on the concept of curative education so that the offender can return to society successfully. Education and humanistic care are the main features of community corrections (Cheng, 2006). Zhang (2005) also believes that community corrections have the dual nature of "non-custodial sentence enforcement activities" and punishment of offenders' "criminal consciousness and behavioral viciousness". As a social welfare measure for offenders, community corrections should have the functions of education, discipline, and service, so that offenders can correct their criminal psychology and behavioral vices by

receiving special welfare services (Shi, 2009).

3. Three Models of Community Corrections from a Welfare Perspective

Despite these controversies, the practice of utilizing the welfare nature of community corrections in China has been ongoing. Several typical models of community corrections work in China have developed, and social work has been involved in each of these forms to varying degrees. Community corrections in China have grown to the point where the advantages of the social work profession have been recognized in both legal and practical terms. There are currently several significant models of community corrections work in China. The Beijing model is a government coordinated, centralized deployment of resources to achieve the traditional judicial model of community corrections, in which social work is a relatively marginal and supportive role. The Shanghai model is a restorative correction in which associations operate autonomously. Social work is the leading service provider, giving full play to the part of social groups, so social work is undoubtedly the main working body in this model. The Guangzhou model is a collaborative model in which multiple subjects work together and give full play to their functions. The role of social workers in this model is as important as that of government departments, and both provide direct services and various resources for community correction work, respectively. All three models involve social work, but the manner and degree of involvement vary by cities' economic, political, and cultural differences.

3.1 Beijing Model

As the administrative capital of China, Beijing mainly reflects top-down management characteristics in the management of community corrections. The Beijing model has a solid organizational color, featuring judicial-led penalty enforcement, and focuses on achieving psychological correction for correctional clients through executive education (Jin, 2009). Beijing has built a three-tier community corrections management network at the city, district, and street levels.

At the municipal level, the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Justice is responsible for coordinating the overall situation in the first tier. The Center for Community Served Prisoners is accountable for coordinating and managing the initial educational activities in the city. At the second-tier district level, each district in Beijing has established the Sunshine Correctional Service Center and the Sunshine Halfway House (Xiong, 2020).

The Sunshine Community Correction Service Center was first funded by the Bureau of Justice and hired a counseling service center in Beijing to provide specialized psychological correction services for people serving community sentences. The Sunshine Community Correction Service Center started as a private organization, but gradually its involvement in community corrections was weakened, and eventually part of the judicial administration. The "Sunshine Halfway House" is more of a specialized place to provide initial education and training for community correctional clients and psychological counseling and other services for correctional clients. It also

provides temporary assistance and free technical training for those in need (Zhang, 2013).

The third layer is the primary enforcers of community corrections in Beijing, namely correctional police, judicial assistants, and 40 and 50 full-time assistance administrators. Correctional police officers are mainly responsible for the law enforcement aspect and are involved in receiving, managing, educating, and discharging correctional offenders; judicial assistants are accountable for management and education, etc. (Xu, 2017). The 40 and 50 coordinators are the characteristics of the Beijing model. This group mainly recruits laid-off workers aged 40 to 50 from the streets who have been unemployed for more than one year, and their job content is primarily to organize materials and visit offenders' families to understand offenders' thoughts and living conditions and report to the judicial office (Zhang, 2013).

As the capital of China, Beijing is administrative in all its work and tasks. The Beijing model in community corrections is dominated by government officials (judicial assistants and police officers drawn from prisons), with volunteers involved more to complement the work to provide supplementary assistance. Even though the Sunshine Community Correction Service Center was initially engaged as a "civil organization," it eventually developed into a part of the judicial administration. Therefore, the Beijing model is characterized more as criminal severe law enforcement work. The government's maximum involvement should be the most crucial feature of the Beijing community correction model. It can also be seen that the role of social work has not been effectively played in the Beijing model, and the concept and model of social work have not been reflected in the work process.

3.2 Shanghai Model

If the Beijing model mainly reflects the characteristics of sentence enforcement, the Shanghai model reflects more on the parts of restorative justice. The Shanghai model is primarily led and supervised by the Community Correction Work Office of the Bureau of Justice under the guidance of the Shanghai Political and Legal Affairs Commission and the Comprehensive Governance Office. The operational model of moderate separation between the main body of execution and the main body of work is implemented (Xiong, 2020). The government is mainly responsible for the leadership and management of community corrections work. At the same time, those engaged in services on the front line are social organizations, primarily social workers.

Shanghai's most prominent feature and advantage is the extensive participation of social forces, i.e., the government purchases services, and many social worker groups join. The correctional model of "government-led promotion, autonomous operation of associations, and participation of all social parties" is Shanghai's community correction model (Zhang, 2014).

Shanghai formally began its exploration of community corrections in 2003. As a model with social workers as the leading service provider, the Shanghai model pays excellent attention to the advantages of social work. Shanghai has been

strongly supporting the construction of a team of social work professionals, focusing on improving the quantity and quality of social work talents and ensuring the participation of social workers in all stages of community corrections, including pre-trial investigation, centralized pronouncement, daily management, pronouncement at the end of the period to placement and rehabilitation.

Under the leadership of the Shanghai Political and Legal Committee, the Shanghai Municipal Government established the Xinhang Community Service General Station. This social organization provides professional social work services for community correctional offenders through the government's services purchase. The Xinhang Community Service Main Station set up sub-stations in each district and county in Shanghai. Each street set up a workstation and assisted the judicial administration at the same level in carrying out community correction work (Chen, 2014).

Xinhang Station has integrated the generic model of social work into all aspects of community corrections work after years of practice. First of all, before community offenders are included in the correction, social workers need to understand the ecosystem of offenders and provide professional advice on whether to have them in the community correction. In the community correction process of offenders, social workers assess the needs of offenders by visiting and researching them and use this as a basis to develop a service plan.

Since community corrections in Shanghai have been inextricably linked with universities at the early stage of exploration, social work majors in universities have also been committed to embedding the professional concepts, values, and working methods of social work into community corrections work. After a period of development, the advantages of social work in community correction work have been gradually reflected. Therefore, the Shanghai model has slowly formed a working model mainly based on social workers.

3.3 Guangzhou Model

As the second batch of pilot community correction cities in China, Guangzhou started its exploration path earlier and thus also succeeded in finding a way that suits its local reality. Guangzhou's community correction development model can be summarized as a community correction management and work model with apparent authority and responsibility, clear division of labor, and synergy between professional social organizations and government judicial correction departments (Wang et al., 2011).

There are many government departments, social work agencies, volunteers, and schools as service providers in this model. As the competent government department, the Guangzhou Community Correction Leading Group is mainly responsible for coordinating, coordinating, and planning the implementation of community correction work in the city. A workforce consisting of community correction staff, judicial police, social workers, and volunteers has also been established (Wu, 2015). Each district also recruits social workers to undertake community correctional service projects through the government's purchase of services (Wang, 2014).

As an essential body of community correction work, social work agencies are mainly responsible for providing services directly to offenders and managing and training volunteers. Volunteers are primarily accountable for various professional counseling and pair work. The school and the Sunshine Center work together to provide crime prevention education to reduce the occurrence of crime at the source. Each inter-subject ensures that it can maximize its role and hold regular specialized meetings to maintain adequate information communication (Wang et al., 2011).

Social work organizations are still the central working body in the multi-corporate collaborative work in Guangzhou. The development of social organizations in the Guangzhou model is also inseparable from the support of the Guangzhou government. At the beginning of its story, the Guangzhou Municipal Bureau of Justice vigorously cultivated professional social organizations for community corrections and established the Guangzhou Shangshan Social Service Center. As a social organization fostered by the government, Shanshan Center has maintained consistency with the government's community corrections development plan at a macro level. And as an independent social organization, it can also support the relative independence and professionalism of the institution itself (Wang et al., 2011). In the work of community corrections, social work introduces professional methods such as casework, group work, and community work. It will also use cognitive behavioral therapy and other ways to provide correctional services for offenders (Zhang, 2011). Correctional social workers' benefits cut across the physical, psychological, and social aspects of offenders (Zeng, 2018), and by connecting social resources and social support systems, they enable correctional clients to adapt to society more quickly and have more normal interpersonal interactions.

The Guangzhou model is still centered on the services of social work organizations. Still, the difference with the Shanghai model is that Guangzhou government departments give more support to social organizations and will take the initiative to link learning resources for social work organizations to help them learn more advanced experiences. Social work organizations also hire supervisors from Hong Kong to enhance their practice. The two central bodies divide the work and cooperate, with the government being the policymaker, resource link, and assisting the professionalization of social work organizations. The government is the policymaker and resource link and provides help for the professionalization of social work organizations. In contrast, social work organizations are the direct service provider and are responsible for the training and management of volunteers. The full cooperation between the two is also a key element in the success of the Guangzhou model.

4. Conclusion

This paper has explored the evolving landscape of community corrections in China, particularly focusing on the tension between punitive and welfare-oriented approaches, and the role social work plays in the different models of practice. Despite ongoing debates over the nature of community corrections, the welfare-oriented approach has steadily gained ground, with various models reflecting this shift.

The analysis of three key models - Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou—demonstrates the diverse ways in which social work has been integrated into community corrections. Each model represents a unique approach, shaped by the specific economic, political, and cultural contexts of its respective city. In the Beijing model, social work plays a marginal yet supportive role within a centralized, judicial framework, highlighting the continuing influence of traditional correctional methods. In contrast, the Shanghai model represents a more progressive, restorative approach, where social work assumes a leading role in providing services, reflecting the city's commitment to rehabilitation and reintegration. The Guangzhou model, with its emphasis on collaboration between government departments and social work agencies, highlights the value of multi-sectoral cooperation and the recognition of social work as a core component of community corrections.

Overall, these models illustrate the dynamic nature of community corrections in China and the growing importance of social work in shaping effective, welfare-oriented practices. While challenges remain in harmonizing the welfare and punitive aspects of community corrections, the recognition of social work as a vital component across different models offers valuable insights for future development. As China continues to refine its approach to community corrections, the experiences of these cities can serve as a foundation for broader policy recommendations, emphasizing the need for a balanced, integrative approach that enhances both the rehabilitation of offenders and the well-being of the broader community.

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