

# Public Support of Community Corrections in China

International Journal of  
Offender Therapy and  
Comparative Criminology  
2015, Vol. 59(7) 772–789  
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sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav  
DOI: 10.1177/0306624X13518381  
ijo.sagepub.com



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## Abstract

There are a variety of factors that have been associated with support for the use of community corrections in the West. However, little research has been completed to examine if these same factors are also associated with support for the use of community corrections in China. This exploratory study examined the degree of agreement and support of 764 Chinese citizens on the use of community corrections methods. Results indicated that most respondents supported the use of community corrections methods rather than traditional incarceration methods. In addition, five attitudes (the punishment perspective, the rehabilitation perspective, the humanitarian perception, cost-effectiveness, and risk) toward the use of community corrections methods were examined and all were found to be significantly associated with the support of community corrections in present-day China.

## Keywords

community corrections, public support, attitude, China

## Introduction

As in other societies, the Chinese government often claims that its policies reflect public wills and sentiment. In 2003, China officially used the term *community corrections* and began to systematically use it as an alternative sanction to institutional incarceration. However, it is unknown whether this decision reflects the public's opinions in China or if Chinese citizens support the idea of community corrections. To our best

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knowledge, there is no research on public attitudes toward community corrections in China. Thus, this study can fill this void.

Research on public attitudes toward community corrections and the correlates of the attitudes has practical and theoretical importance. First, public opinions can be influential in sentencing. This influence exists not only in the West (Frost, 2010) but also in China (Jiang & Wang, 2008). Second, public attitudes can affect the implementation of community corrections. Previous literature in the West suggests that community support is critical for community-based corrections programs to be initiated, continued, and successful (Gainey & Payne, 2003; Harlow, Darley, & Robinson, 1995). Since 2003, community corrections in China, on one hand, has moved toward formalization and professionalism; on the other hand, some tasks of community corrections have still been carried out by semiformal organizations such as residents' committees (*juweihui*) in urban areas and village committees (*cunweihui*) in rural areas. Both resident's committee members and village committee members live with the average citizens. The average citizens' attitudes toward community corrections directly affect their work with local correctional agencies and probationers and parolees. Third, research indicates that when a sanction is viewed as punitive and a deterrent, it can lead to general and specific deterrence (Paternoster & Simpson, 1996; Piquero & Paternoster, 1998). Thus, attitudes toward punishment in general and community corrections in particular can have a strong bearing on the willingness of citizens to obey the law (Harlow et al., 1995; Tyler, 2006). Fourth, findings on the predictors of attitudes toward community corrections can guide the corrections advocates or policy makers to enhance public support. Theoretically, findings on public attitudes toward community corrections and their predictors in China are helpful to promote cross-cultural comparisons in public opinions of punishment in general and community corrections in particular. They can also be used to test whether correction-related theories such as the punishment perspective and rehabilitation perspective from the West are applicable to China.

Based on data collected from 764 respondents in 2012, this study attempted to investigate whether Chinese citizens supported community corrections; if yes, how strong the support was, and why they supported it. The article is organized as follows. The next section commences with a review of community corrections in China. It is followed by a section that describes the expectations on possible factors affecting respondents' attitudes toward community corrections. Sections on data, measures of variables used in the analysis and findings are next. A discussion and conclusion section completes the paper.

## History of Community Corrections in China

Generally speaking, community corrections refers to various types of noninstitutional correctional programs for criminal offenders in the community. China had long used community-based corrections but lacked formalization and professionalism. For example, before 2003, the police were in charge of various sanctions such as public surveillance (*guan zhi*), probation (*huanxing*), parole (*jiashi*), the temporary execution

of a sentence outside of a confinement facility (*zanyu jianwai zhixing*) and the deprivation of political rights (*boduo zhengzhi quanli*) within the community. As the police had various responsibilities, community-based corrections largely depended on local communities such as village committees in the countryside and residents' committees in cities. In addition, there were no clear and detailed rules for the community-based corrections; consequently, many offenders often were not supervised (Guo & Zheng, 2004). It is worth noting that even though community corrections before 2003 was not strictly carried out and many probationers, parolees and other offenders were free, the recidivism rate in China was quite low (approximately 8%,<sup>1</sup> see Jin, 1997, and Deng, Zhang, & Cordilia, 1998). The low levels of recidivism had been attributed to low levels of residential mobility and high levels of informal and formal social control and crime prevention (Deng et al., 1998). For example, when offenders were sent back to their communities, local residents knew them well and watched the offenders closely to make sure they did not recidivate. Thus, the recidivism rate did not receive much attention from the public or the criminal justice system.

China's mandatory employment policy within a prison can also partially explain low levels of recidivism. From 1951 to 1953, prisoners with a short-term sentence reentered society, and many of them soon committed crimes again. To solve this problem, the Chinese government adopted a policy requiring those inmates who had no place to live and who were evaluated as likely to recidivate stay within a prison for employment after they finished their sentences (Hong, 2012; Jin, 1997). As prisons in China were usually in remote areas, the mandatory employment policy meant that although offenders did not serve their sentences any more, they were still isolated from society. This practice largely reduced ex-prisoners' opportunity to recommit crime.

China started its economic reform in 1978. From 1978 to 2003, China had experienced significant changes in various aspects. First, China's crime rate significantly increased. The number of prisoners reached 1,562,742 in 2003 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2011). Second, the mandatory employment policy within prison was discontinued after the 1980s (Guo & Zheng, 2004), thus prisoners who completed their sentences needed to reenter free society. In 2003, 342,401 prisoners reentered the community (Guo & Zheng, 2004). Third, during its transition from a state-planned economy toward a market economy, China gradually loosened its household registration system and allowed more people to move from one place to another for jobs. Consequently, the internal migration increased (Jiang, Lambert, & Wang, 2007; Yu, 2011; Zhang, Liu, & Liu, 2011). As ex-prisoners and other offenders had a bad reputation among acquaintances, they faced more obstacles than regular citizens to find a job in their communities. At the same time, in those economically advanced areas, there were more job opportunities. Thus, offenders were likely to move to a remote place for employment. Research has suggested that these offenders disproportionately contributed to crime in China (Tian, Xu, & Tong, 2011). Consequently, a high crime rate, a large number of offenders, and an increase in recidivism rates made the situation serious enough that the Chinese criminal justice authorities needed to pay more attention to those offenders who served their sentences within the local community.

According to Guo and Zheng (2004) and the Supreme Peoples' Court, the Supreme People's Procuratorate, the Ministry of Public Security and the Ministry of Justice

("CPSJ" for short, 2003), cost-effectiveness was another factor that led to the formalization and professionalization of community corrections. Finally, as it was considered a process of civilized criminal punishment, community corrections was promoted by the government (CPSJ, 2003; Guo & Zheng, 2004) in 2003.

Community corrections developed quickly in China. On July 10, 2003, the CPSJ jointly issued Notice on Experimental Programs of Community Corrections (*guanyu kaizhan shequ jiaozhen gongzhuo shidian de tongzhi*) in Beijing, Jiangsu, Shandong, Shanghai, Tianjin, and Zhejiang. The Notice indicated that China moved toward the formalization and professionalism of the community-based corrections. At the end of 2011, 94% of the counties (or equivalents) and 89% of the townships (or equivalents) in China had established community corrections programs (Hao, 2012).

Community corrections after 2003 is built on the previous community-based corrections practice but has been significantly improved in several ways. First, it is more formalized than the past. One aspect of the formalization of community corrections in China reflected in the development of written rules or regulations. Prior to 2003, China did not have clear and detailed written rules on community-based corrections. Since 2003, there have been numerous notices and regulations issued by the CPSJ. The 2012 version of Community Corrections Implementation Measures, along with community corrections related parts in the latest version of Criminal Law, Criminal Procedure Law, and Prison Law, results from the experiments of community corrections after 2003. The development of written rules or regulations has also made progress in local governments. For example, from November 2004 to the end of 2008, The Hubei province formulated 37 regulations, notices, or measures on judicial decisions; offender transformation among criminal justice organizations; supervision, reward, and punishment system; training; and a supporting system in the field of community corrections (Sun & Zhang, 2010). Following the instructions from the Ministry of Justice, local governments also developed various forms/table to collect data ranging from entering community corrections to the completion of the community corrections. All of these laws and regulations did not exist prior to 2003.

The formalization of community corrections is also reflected in China's organizational structure. Prior to 2003, community corrections was carried out by the police. However, community corrections was not a major task for the police department. The role played by the police department in community corrections was to control offenders. There were no special organizational systems or specifically assigned personnel in the public security that were responsible for community corrections. After 2003, however, the Ministry of Justice was placed in charge of community corrections. Within the Ministry, a new bureau was created to be responsible for community corrections. Today, from the central government level to the lowest government level (township or street), there is a vertical hierarchy of bureaus or departments who are responsible for implementing community corrections. Meanwhile, each level of government has officers who are responsible for community corrections.

Professionalism is another important part that makes the new community corrections in China different from the past. The professionalization is reflected in the recruitment and training of community correctional officers and staff. Before 2003, the local justice office was primarily responsible for the promotion of the law and legal

aid. Some offices had one full-time officer while others had only one part-time officer. Since 2003, China has made efforts to have at least one full-time officer in every local justice office who has some educational training in law. Furthermore, certified social workers have been hired as probation and parole officers. They are also required to attend a variety of workshops in law and psychology. Professionalization is also reflected in the usage of unified forms for community corrections procedures. Traditionally, the leaders in the police department, community leaders and community volunteers just used their work experience and morality to control offenders. Their major responsibility was to keep offenders under surveillance so that they would not recidivate. Now, community correctional officers and staff are required to follow the law and governmental policies as well as record their interactions with offenders. In addition, they must complete different forms or tables to assess the offender's needs, correctional process, and correctional outcome. The goals of community corrections are not only to keep offenders under close surveillance but also to educate and treat them.

The third factor differentiating current community corrections in China from the past is the movement toward a separate budget for community corrections. Before 2003, China did not have a separate budget for community-based corrections. Since 2003, government at different levels has gradually established a separate budget for community corrections to hire social workers and other staff members as well as to support operational spending. For example, in Anhui province, Ma'an shang city paid a range of 2,000 to 2,500 yuan per offender annually to support community corrections (Sun & Zhang, 2010).<sup>2</sup>

Compared with the United States, the absolute number and relative proportion of offenders under community corrections in China are small. There is no systematic publication on these types of sanctions. However, scattered resources show that from 2008 to 2010, there were 18,065, 16,833, and 16,171 offenders sentenced to public surveillance, respectively, representing 1.82%, 1.72%, and 1.64% of the total convicted criminals in the three consecutive years; there were 249,111, 250,635, and 265,230 offenders sentenced to probation, respectively, representing 25.16%, 25.59%, and 26.83% of the total convicted criminals in the 3 consecutive years (Jiang et al., 2013). For the same 3 years, China paroled 30,274, 32,704, and 35,724, respectively, representing 1.86%, 1.99%, and 2.16% of the total convicted criminals in the 3 consecutive years (Jiang et al., 2013). From 1996 to 2002, offenders with medical parole ranged from 0.99% to 2.13% of the total prisoner population (Guo & Zheng, 2004).

In sum, China has traditionally relied on the community to help control and reform offenders. Since 2003, however, community corrections has rapidly moved toward formalization and professionalization. It is believed that community corrections in China has citizens' support. Before empirically checking on this belief, the next section reviews what factors may be related to citizens' attitudes toward community corrections.

## **Correlates of Support for Community Corrections**

As noted above, although China has moved toward the formalization and professionalization of community corrections, there is no research on citizens' attitudes toward

it. However, the reasons the West supports the use of community corrections as well as Chinese citizens' attitudes toward other issues with regards to the criminal justice system may be relevant to this study. These reasons include the perspective of the responsibility of the criminal justice system (e.g., the punishment perspective vs. the rehabilitation perspective), cost reduction, the modernization of the criminal justice system, the safety of the community, and having a family member or friend convicted of a crime. Thus, the literature review in this section is primarily from the West and Chinese citizens' attitudes toward other issues in the criminal justice system.

### *Punishment Versus Rehabilitation for Community Corrections*

The punishment perspective and rehabilitation perspective are the two main viewpoints on corrections and community corrections (Clear & Latessa, 1993; DeMichele & Payne, 2012; Miller, 2012). These two perspectives are shared by the general public (Cao & Cullen, 2001; Cullen, Evanskovron, Scon, & Burton, 1990; Lambert & Jiang, 2006) and criminal justice professionals (Clear & Latessa, 1993; DeMichele & Payne, 2012; Miller, 2012). The punishment perspective hails from the classical criminological theory in which a "certain swift and proportionate punishment of crime was a way of influencing the criminal decision making of the would-be offender" (Miller, 2012, p. 2). The punishment perspective focuses on the toughness and certainty of punishment, rigorous law enforcement, and threats of incarceration to deter offenders from committing further crimes. In contrast, the rehabilitation perspective focuses on the treatment and education of offenders to help them successfully reenter society. This perspective has roots in the positivist tradition that "locates the causes of crime in biological, psychological, or social characteristics of offenders" (Miller, 2012, p. 2). Individuals who favor the rehabilitation perspective are more likely to support community corrections because communities are more suitable than prisons/jails to treat, educate and reform offenders. However, people who favor the punishment perspective are more likely to support the use of institutional incarceration rather than community corrections to punish offenders. These individuals (those who favor the punishment perspective) may believe that community corrections sanctions are too lenient for offenders especially those who are violent. It was expected that this study would find similar connections between these two perspectives and attitudes toward community corrections in China.

### *Cost Reduction*

Cost reduction is another factor related to the development of community corrections (Harlow et al., 1995) not only in the United States but also for the Chinese government as well (CPSJ, 2003; Guo & Zheng, 2004). The consideration of the cost-effectiveness of community corrections encouraged Chinese policy makers to utilize community corrections as an alternative to incarceration (Guo & Zheng, 2004). Thus, this study expected that the general public in China would also favor community corrections as it helps reduce costs in the area of corrections.

### *Humanitarian Perception and Modernization*

The humanitarian perception is another important factor to consider when examining the development of community corrections in the United States (Eagleton Institute of Politics, 2002). Generally speaking, humanitarianism means caring, benevolence and sympathy to all human beings. When this ethic is applied to criminal justice, it means to reduce brutality and increase caring and treatment for offenders. The humanitarian perception is also one of the reasons the Chinese government considers community corrections as an alternative sanction to institutional corrections (CPSJ, 2003; Guo & Zheng, 2004). In addition, the Chinese government considered community corrections as a worldwide trend of development in sanctions. As civilization develops, criminal sanctions changed from corporal punishment to institutional incarceration to community-based corrections. This development gives offenders the chance to reform themselves in the community or with the family they lived with prior to incarceration. It can reduce Sykes's (1958) "pains of imprisonment" including the deprivation of liberty, goods and services, heterosexual relationships, autonomy, and security. Thus, the development of community corrections is considered an indicator of modernization and globalization in China. Accordingly, this study expected that the humanitarian perception would be a predictor of support for community corrections.

### *Safety of the Community*

The safety of the community is another factor that may affect people's support for community corrections. When an offender serves his or her sentence in a community, residents may feel that the offender is physically present, and thus may worry about being a victim of a crime. As a result, some people may not support the implementation of community corrections. However, some researchers (Eagleton Institute of Politics, 2002) argue that concern for the safety of the community may be a reason why the public would support community corrections, especially for nonviolent offenders. In other words, the public may believe that relative to institutional incarceration, community corrections is a more effective way to reduce crime or recidivism and thus would lead to a safer community. In today's China, many people lack confidence in the criminal justice system. They fear that money can buy community corrections for some violent offenders although they should be sentenced to prison. Violent offenders under community corrections can increase citizens' risk of being a victim of a crime. Thus, it was expected that people who had a community safety concern would be less likely to support community corrections.

### *Family Member and Friend Convictions*

According to Fei (1985) and his followers (Yan, 2006; Zai, 2009), Chinese society features differential association (*chaxu geju*) where the self is the center of the association. The closer to the self, the more intimate the interpersonal relationship. The closeness to the self is determined by intimate relations (i.e., family members and relatives),

friendly feelings, and interests (Jiang & Lambert, 2012). Consequently, having a family member or friend convicted of a crime may affect citizens' attitudes toward community corrections as community corrections is considered a more lenient punishment than prison in China (Guo & Zheng, 2004). Under the culture of differential association, people's attitudes toward community corrections are likely to be based on self-interests rather than the law or due process. Thus, if a respondent had a family member, relative or friend convicted of an offense, he or she would be more likely to support community corrections, compared with a respondent who did not have a family member or friend who was convicted of a crime.

## **Control Variables**

Age, gender, education, political affiliation and religion were used in previous research to examine attitudes toward crime and punishment; consequently, they were included in this study as control variables. For example, Cullen, Clark, Cullen, and Mathers (1985) reported that males were less likely to support rehabilitation but more likely to be supportive of capital punishment. In addition, younger people were less punitive but more in favor of treatment. Moreover, King and Maruna (2009) revealed that education and levels of religiosity had an inverse relationship with punitiveness; respondents who self-identified as conservative were more punitive. Also, Leverentz (2011) found that those who identified as politically moderate were significantly more punitive toward crime and supportive of harsh sanctions than political liberals in the United States. Finally, the type of respondents such as college students, urban residents and rural residents may also be associated with attitudes toward community corrections. To be more specific, college students are believed to be more liberal and, thus, more likely to support community corrections than urban and rural residents. Therefore, the type of respondents was controlled for in this study.

## **Data**

### *Sample and Data Collection*

Due to the nature of this study as well as a limited number of resources available for the study,<sup>3</sup> data used in this study were collected using a purposive sampling method for a total sample size of 764 respondents, with an estimated 80% response rate. Respondents were selected from two comprehensive universities (students), four communities (regular urban residents) as well as six villages/township communities (rural residents) in Hubei province in China in 2012. These areas and respondents were chosen so that they could reflect opinions from different groups of citizens in China. To increase the representativeness of respondents, the research team required the reviewers to take gender and age into account for the interviewee selection process although there was no fixed proportion for different genders and age groups.

Data collection in crime-related areas was difficult and is still difficult today. As a result of China's economic reform, regular citizens feel today they have more freedom

to express their opinions about crime and other social issues than before. However, most people are very busy and are not willing to do a survey. To collect valid data from citizens, the research team employed the following methods to enter local communities and select respondents. First, the team contacted the communities based on prior research or teaching/personal connections. In addition, some of the research team members belong to a local university, which has a good reputation within the Hubei province. Thus, the research team entered the field under the name of the university, which made respondents feel more comfortable participating in the survey. Finally, in a face-to-face survey, official channels are still a very important method to enter a community. Although some citizens do not care about local authorities or even dislike them, many still take the community leaders' introduction as an indicator of trust or official permission to participate in a survey. Thus, before interviewing individual residents, the research team usually contacted local community leaders to get the community information and to obtain an entry introduction. As official channels could lead to biased answers, the research team made it clear to every respondent that the survey was for academic and policy research purposes only and ensured the survey was anonymous (no personal information will appear in research papers).

To increase validity and reliability of the survey, the research team also took time to design the questionnaire. It was designed based on the literature review. The purpose of the survey was to seek information about citizens' understanding of community corrections, their support (or lack thereof) for community corrections and the reasons for the support (or opposition) in China. As it was the first survey on citizens' support on community corrections in Hubei, the questionnaire was short and covered only questions to meet the purpose of the survey. The first round of pretests of the questionnaire was conducted among college students, faculty and staff at two local universities in Hubei. The questionnaire was then revised (based on the first pretest), and the revised instrument was used for the second round of pretests that was given to urban residents and rural residents in Hubei including people working in the community corrections field. The questionnaire was then revised again to form its final version.

## Measurement

**Dependent variable.** The dependent variable in this study is *support* for community corrections, which was measured by a Likert-type scale question: Overall, after balancing the positive and negative sides of community corrections, I support community corrections. There were five response choices including strongly disagree (=1), disagree (=2), not sure (=3), agree (=4) and strongly agree (=5).

**Independent variables.** The *punishment* perspective was measured by asking respondents how much they agreed or disagreed with the following four statements: (a) Courts generally are not harsh enough with criminals; (b) criminals need to be punished, not coddled; (c) a criminal will only go straight if the punishment is harsh; and (d) incarceration is a powerful deterrent to crime. Response categories were all

measured by a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The four items were loaded on one factor named as *punishment*. The factor accounted for 43% of the variance in the four items. The factor loadings were .51, .68, .69 and .73 for the above four questions, respectively. Regression-based factor scores were created from the factor loadings.

The *rehabilitation* perspective was based on the factor analysis of three statements: (a) The main goals for dealing with criminals should be to treat and rehabilitate them; (b) we need more educational and vocational programs to effectively deal with crime and offenders; (c) helping offenders understand their wrongdoing is an effective mechanism to prevent them from reoffending. The response categories were the same as the *punishment* perspective variable (strongly disagree = 1, disagree = 2, uncertain = 3, agree = 4 and strongly agree = 5). The factor analysis produced only one factor, which accounted for 53% of the common variance in these three items. Based on the above order, their factor loadings were .73, .79 and .67, respectively. Regression-based factor scores were created from the estimated factor loadings.

The *humanitarian perception* was measured by two questions that loaded on one factor. One question was based on the statement, "Community corrections is more humanized than prison" with the following response choices: strongly disagree (=1), disagree (=2), uncertain (=3) agree (=4) and strongly agree (=5). Another question was "Community corrections is an indicator of societal development and civilization" with the same response choices as above. The factor accounted for 75% of the variance in the two questions. The factor loadings were both .87. Regression-based factor scores were created from the factor loadings.

*Cost-effectiveness* was measured by the degree of agreement or disagreement with the following statement "If community corrections is more cost-effective than prison, I support it." The *risk* of community corrections was also measured by the degree of agreement or disagreement with one single statement ("Community corrections is dangerous to the local community"). The response categories for both of these variables (*cost-effectiveness* and *risk* of community corrections) were coded strongly disagree = 1, disagree = 2, uncertain = 3, agree = 4 and strongly agree = 5.

*Conviction* was used to measure whether the respondent had a family member, relative or friend who was convicted of a crime. The responses were coded "1" for yes and "0" for no.

Demographic variables and other individual characteristics were also included in the regression analysis including *gender*, *age*, *education*, *religion*, political status (*politics*) and types of respondents (two dummy variables). Females were coded as "1" while males were coded as "0." Age was measured in continuous years. The highest level of education (including currently enrolled degree programs but not completed) was measured by the following categories: elementary school or below (=1), junior high (=2), high school (=3), vocational school (=4), associate degree (3 year in college =5), bachelor's degree (=6) and graduate school including master's and doctoral studies (=7). Politics was based on the response to the question, "Your political status is: 1. the Chinese Communist Party member; 2. other party member; 3. the Chinese Communist Youth League member; 4. Mass." It was recoded into a dummy variable

with “0” representing “mass individuals” (respondents that chose response category 4) and “1” representing “nonmass individuals” (respondents that chose response categories 1, 2 and 3). Last, respondents were categorized based on the location of where they were given the survey. These categories included current full-time college students, urban residents and rural residents. From these three categories, two dummy variables were created and included in the regression model as *urban resident* and *rural resident* (students were the reference group).

## Findings

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics of the dependent and independent variables. It also includes questions that compose a composite variable or factor. Fifty-two per cent of the respondents were female, and the average age of all the respondents was slightly higher than 34. Thirty-eight per cent of the respondents were college students including both undergraduate and graduate students, 27% were urban residents and 35% were rural residents. Forty-one per cent of the respondents were students at a 4-year college or had a bachelor’s degree or higher (please see the notes section at the end of Table 1) and most respondents were atheists (90%). Moreover, 27% of the respondents were Chinese Communist Party members, 24% of the respondents were the Chinese Communist Youth League members, and 1% of the respondents were other party members (results not shown). The international researchers of the research team were surprised at the number of respondents in each political category. For example, a high percentage of the respondents were considered to be “nonmass,” which was due to a high percentage of college students in this study. The Chinese Community Party and the Chinese Communist Youth League have actively recruited college students into their organizations in recent years.

Table 1 also shows that 60% of the respondents supported community corrections compared with 17% that opposed it. Among the four punishment-related questions, the majority of the respondents agreed with the second (“Criminals need to be punished, not coddled.”) and fourth (“Incarceration is a powerful deterrent to crime.”) statements showing more punitive attitudes toward offenders. There was almost an even split on “agree or strongly agree” and “disagree or strongly disagree” with the first (“Courts generally are not harsh enough with criminals.”) and third (“A criminal will only go straight if the punishment is harsh.”) statements. Although the agreement levels on the punishment questions varied, the majority of the respondents (more than 80%) agreed or strongly agreed with all the three rehabilitative questions. These results indicated that the Chinese respondents’ opinions about punishment and treatment were multifaceted but support for rehabilitation seemed stronger than support for punishment. In addition, the majority (more than 70%) of the respondents believed that community corrections was more humanized than prison and was the developing trend in corrections. However, most (70%) respondents did not consider cost-effectiveness as a reason to support community corrections. Moreover, only 34% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that community corrections is dangerous to the local community.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics of Variables and Related Questions (n = 764).

Variables	Results					
	M	SD	D	U	A	SA
Support for community corrections						
Overall, after balancing positive and negative sides of community corrections, I support community corrections.	3.46	2	15	23	54	6
Punishment ( $\alpha = .55$ )						
Courts generally are not harsh enough with criminals.	3.01	2	31	34	28	4
Criminals need to be punished, not coddled.	3.80	2	8	14	61	16
A criminal will only go straight if the punishment is harsh.	2.97	5	32	33	24	7
Incarceration is a powerful deterrent to crime.	3.50	2	16	21	53	9
Rehabilitation ( $\alpha = .55$ )						
The main goals for dealing with criminals should be to treat and rehabilitate them.	3.80	2	9	8	70	11
We need more educational and vocational programs to effectively deal with crime and offenders.	4.01	1	3	6	74	16
Helping offenders understand their wrongdoing is an effective mechanism to prevent them from reoffending.	3.86	2	4	13	69	13
Humanitarian perception ( $\alpha = .66$ )						
Community corrections is more humanized than prison.	3.76	2	7	14	69	9
Community corrections is an indicator of societal development and civilization.	3.73	2	7	18	62	11
Cost						
If community corrections is more cost-effective than prison, I support it.	2.72	10	40	20	27	3
Risk						
Community corrections is dangerous to the local community.	3.05	4	25	38	30	4
Conviction			Yes (1)	No (0)		
Do you have family members or relatives who were convicted? (yes = 1 and no = 0)		9	91			
Do you have friends who were convicted? (yes = 1 and no = 0)		11	89			
Gender (female = 1)		52	48			
Politics (nonmass = 1, mass = 0)		52	48			
Religion (having religion = 1, atheist = 0)		10	90			
Age (in years)	34.14					
Education	4.27					
Urban resident (dummy variable)		27	73			
Rural resident (dummy variable)		35	65			

Note. The numbers in the table are percentages except means. Percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding. The highest level of education (including currently enrolled degree programs but not completed) was measured by the following categories: elementary or below (=1, 6%), junior high (=2, 25%), high school (=3, 14%), vocational school (=4, 5%), associate degree (3 years in college = 5, 9%), bachelor's degree (=6, 22%), graduate school including master's and doctoral studies (=7, 19%). M = mean; SD = strongly disagree; D = disagree; U = uncertain; A = agree; SA = strongly agree.

Table 2 presents the regression coefficients of predictors of support for community corrections. The first model included seven demographic variables (including *urban resident*, *rural resident*, *age*, *gender*, *education*, *religion*, and *politics*). The second model added six variables. Five of these variables were attitude variables (*punishment*, *rehabilitation*, *humanity*, *risk*, and *cost*), and the other variable was whether a

**Table 2.** Estimated Regression Coefficients of Predictors of Support for Community Corrections.

Independent variable	Model 1		Model 2	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Urban resident	.247	.131	.055	.117
Rural resident	.279	.145	.031	.132
Age	.003	.003	-.001	.003
Gender (female = 1)	.052	.071	.049	.063
Education	.059	.034	-.001	.031
Religion	-.006	.113	.052	.100
Politics	-.072	.104	-.102	.091
Punishment			-.126***	.032
Rehabilitation			.173***	.033
Humanity			.298***	.032
Risk			-.196***	.033
Cost			.196***	.031
Conviction			.136	.081
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.012		.329	

Note. Results in this table were from ordinary least squares regression equations. Ordered ordinal regression was also used for estimating regression coefficients of predictors of support for community corrections. Results from the ordered ordinal regression indicated that the direction of the relationships and statistical significance are the same as those shown in the table.

\*\*\**p* < .001.

respondent had family members, relatives or friends who were convicted of a crime. According to Model 2, five variables were statistically significant. To be more specific, punishment and risk were negatively related to the outcome (i.e., *support*). That is, people who had punitive views about crime or criminals were less likely to support community corrections. When respondents believed that community corrections were dangerous to the local community, they were less likely to support it. The other three significant variables had positive effects on the dependent variable. To be more specific, respondents who had a rehabilitative perspective about crime or criminals were more likely to support community corrections. When they believed that community corrections was more humanized than incarceration and agreed that community corrections was an indicator of modernization, they were more likely to support community corrections. Although most respondents did not consider cost-effectiveness as their reason to support community corrections, those who believed community corrections was more cost-effective than prison were still more supportive of community corrections. Results from the second model revealed that all the seven demographic variables were statistically insignificant. Overall, the independent variables in Model 2 accounted for 33% of the variance in the outcome.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Community corrections has been implemented in the West for about one and a half centuries. It features formalization and professionalism. Its practice is built on comprehensive assessments and scientific findings. In contrast, although China's community-based corrections can be traced back to a long time ago, it was informal, and it lacked professionalism and national coordination. The community corrections as a comprehensive strategy in the People's Republic of China was not officially adopted until 2003. Up to now, China still does not have a community corrections law. Although some community correctional workers have a social work or law background, the vast majority of workers in the field do not have much special training in community corrections. Improvement in the coordination among criminal justice agencies and the power balance between different levels of hierarchy is still needed. As China has a high proportion of migrants, how to equally apply community corrections to them is a big challenge. In addition, a stable budget for community corrections has not been guaranteed yet. Finally, there is a lack of scientific and systematic evaluation of community corrections.

This was an exploratory study to investigate how many citizens supported community corrections in China and why they supported or opposed it. Findings from this study suggested that most residents supported community corrections as an alternative to institutional incarceration. Their views of crime and criminals were more rehabilitative than punitive, but they did not view punishment and rehabilitation as mutually exclusive. This finding is different from that found in the United States where scholars often see them as mutually exclusive (Cullen, Fisher, & Applegate, 2000).<sup>4</sup> The current study also revealed that people's views on crime and criminals were related to their attitudes toward community corrections. People who had punitive views were less likely to support community corrections while those who had rehabilitative views were more likely to favor community corrections. Although the majority of the respondents did not think community corrections was dangerous to society, the perceived risk of community corrections decreased support for it. Similarly, the majority of the respondents did not consider the costs of corrections as a reason for supporting or not supporting community corrections, but the perceived cost-effectiveness of community corrections increased support for it.

The relationship between having a family member or a friend who was convicted of a crime and attitude toward community corrections was also examined. However, this relationship was not significant. Respondents' family/relative and friend conviction background did not affect their attitudes toward community corrections, which is inconsistent with the hypothesis in this study. This finding suggested that respondents put more weight on public interests or law than self-interests when they expressed their opinions on community corrections. In addition, all the demographic variables were statistically insignificant. This is not a surprising finding. In fact, this finding is consistent with other attitude-related findings in which demographics are generally not predictors of crime-related views in China (e.g., Jiang, Lambert, & Nathan, 2009;

Jiang, Sun, & Wang, 2012; Jiang & Wang, 2008; Lambert, Jiang, Wang, & Tucker, 2007; Wu & Sun, 2009).

Findings from this study should be read with caution. Even though the research team selected respondents from different groups with care to explore Chinese citizens' attitudes toward community corrections, the sample was not random. Thus, results from this study are not necessarily generalizable to Chinese citizens. Related to this limitation, the respondents in this study were selected from one province. If conditions are allowed, future research needs to use the random sampling method to select respondents from a broader region. Moreover, reducing prison crowdedness has been found to be an important reason to use community corrections as an alternative sanction in the West (Cullen et al., 2000; DeMichele & Payne, 2012; Harlow et al., 1995; Wodahl & Garland, 2009). However, due to the lack of information on the prison crowdedness in China, the research team did not ask questions on this issue. Future research may use an if-then question to examine whether prison crowding affects citizens' support for community corrections. In addition, the dependent variable in this study was measured by one single question. More questions are needed to measure attitudes toward community corrections to increase its content validity of the measurement. The content validity issue is also applied to other variables including *cost* and *risk*, which were measured by one single question. Another limitation of the dependent variable is that it lumps all forms of community corrections together. Future research needs to separate attitudes toward different forms of community corrections. Studies from the West suggested that although citizens are generally punitive to crime and criminals, many people still support community corrections for nonviolent offenses or offenders (Cullen et al., 2000; Eagleton Institute of Politics, 2002). During the face-to-face questionnaire surveys in Hubei, the research team found that many respondents expressed their support to use community corrections for criminals who committed minor or nonviolent crimes but had reservations to use this type of sanctions for violent and serious crimes. Thus, future research needs to distinguish between violent and nonviolent offenders. Finally, due to the nature of data, this study is not able to distinguish between community correctional workers and regular citizens in attitudes toward the use of community corrections and its correlates. As community correctional officers are crucial to the success of community corrections, future research should study their attitudes as well.

Despite these limitations, the current study made a significant contribution to the community corrections field. It is the first empirical study on Chinese citizens' attitudes toward community corrections. The respondents included different groups of people including students, farmers and urban residents. Findings from the study suggested that people's perspectives about crime and criminals as well as rational perceptions of community corrections affect their attitudes of whether they support or oppose community corrections but their personal interests or individual demographics, however, did not.

Findings from this study have implications for policy makers and professionals in China. This study revealed that the majority of respondents favored community corrections, indicating that the current movement toward formal and professional

community corrections has citizens' support. Thus, policy makers in China should speed up its process in developing community corrections law and train more professionals in the field. This study also revealed that more people in China had a rehabilitative approach rather than a punitive approach toward offenders. However, the proportion of respondents who had a punitive approach was high. As in the United States (Eagleton Institute of Politics, 2002), the field interviews by the research team revealed that Chinese citizens were more lenient toward nonviolent crimes and were more likely to support community corrections for this type of offenses. At the same time, Chinese citizens were more punitive toward those considered to be violent criminals who committed more serious crimes. This study also found that, net of other conditions, sentencing dangerous criminals to community corrections would decrease citizens' support for it. Thus, criminal justice administrators including judges and procurators should be very cautious when they sentence violent or serious criminals to community corrections sanctions. Finally, as cost-effectiveness was positively related to respondents' support for using community corrections as an alternative to incarceration, policy makers should conduct scientific studies to compare the costs between community and institutional corrections.

### **Author Note**

Authors after Jiang contributed equally to this work and are co-second authors. Their names are randomly listed.

### **Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### **Funding**

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### **Notes**

1. There is no scientific verification whether this number is valid.
2. However, thus far, there is no stable and long-term budget for community corrections from the government.
3. According to the information collected by the research team, a questionnaire survey typically costs between 120 and 200 yuan per respondent in a random survey. The research team did not have enough money to support a random survey.
4. Rehabilitation in both China and the United States can be mandatory and voluntary for inmate or offenders. However, mandatory rehabilitation is delivered by the court in the United States while it can be issued by both the court and the central government.

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