

From "Borrowing" To "Localization": The Development Trajectory of China's Social Work Research on Drug Control

Fanxi Dai

Master of Art in Regional Central Sustainable Development (RCSD), Faculty of Social Science in Chiang Mai University, Thailand

ABSTRACT: This article provides a systematic review of the literature on anti-drug social work in China, with the aim of mapping the existing research landscape, identifying its key characteristics, and diagnosing its structural limitations. Since the establishment of the first specialized anti-drug social work organization in Shanghai in 2003, China's anti-drug social work has undergone more than two decades of institutional development. However, academic research has lagged significantly behind practical exploration—a recurring theme that informs the analytical framework of this review.

The review proceeds in three main steps. First, it traces the institutional evolution of anti-drug social work in China, identifying four distinct developmental phases: the early exploratory period (1990s–2003), the institutionalization period (2003–2008), the legalization and expansion period (2008–2015), and the system-building period (2015–present). Second, it synthesizes the existing literature across three thematic areas—practice models, practice methods (case management, group work, and community work), and professional development—highlighting both the contributions and the limitations of each body of research. Third, it critically examines the shortcomings of the current literature, focusing on two interrelated deficiencies: (1) the instrumentalization of social workers, who are treated as stable, impersonal "method deliverers" rather than as agentive subjects with personal judgments, emotional responses, and discretionary decision-making; and (2) the predominance of fragmented micro-level case studies, which produce rich contextual knowledge but fail to generate cumulative, generalizable theoretical insights across different regional and institutional contexts.

Based on this critique, the article concludes by outlining two priority directions for future research. First, scholars should shift their analytical focus from "what methods are used" to "how practitioners exercise discretion," drawing on the street-level bureaucracy framework (Lipsky, 1980; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003) to theorize the role of frontline implementers in mediating between policy mandates and client needs. Second, future studies should complement the dominant case-study approach with systematic comparative and theoretically-driven analyses that can connect micro-level observations to the broader institutional and policy environment shaping China's drug governance. By addressing these gaps, the next generation of research can move beyond the current "practice-heavy, theory-light" condition of the field and contribute to a more robust, policy-relevant body of knowledge on anti-drug social work in China.

KEYWORDS: anti-drug social work; street-level bureaucracy; China; literature review

1. INTRODUCTION

China's anti-drug efforts represent a typical systematic project. Besides the on-the-ground law enforcement and investigation work directly targeting the source of drugs, the scientific detoxification and social reintegration work for drug addicts also require the participation of numerous other social forces, such as anti-drug publicity, medical treatment, employment assistance, and so on. "Drug control social workers, on the other hand, aim to prevent and mitigate the harm caused by drugs. They carry out their work

From "Borrowing" To "Localization": The Development Trajectory of China's Social Work Research on Drug Control

by applying professional skills and methods, promoting the social rehabilitation of drug users and protecting the physical and mental health of citizens. These social workers are the main grassroots personnel who have direct contact with drug users.” (National Narcotics Control Commission of China, 2016)

Influenced by the historical experience of the Opium War, the Chinese government actually showed a concerned attitude towards the drug issue as early as the 20th century. As early as 1991, the Chinese Ministry of Health and the US DAYIYP International Company signed an agreement to establish a drug addiction rehabilitation treatment center in Kunming. The center was officially completed on February 28, 1998. "Yunnan US DAYIYP Drug Addiction Treatment and Rehabilitation Center" is the first detoxification center in China that adopts the community-based treatment model specifically for heroin addiction. (Yang et al., 2002) However, the concept of drug rehabilitation social work was actually introduced much later. Similar to the development process of the concept of social work and related professions in China, as an imported concept, the core value concepts of early Chinese anti-drug social work drew heavily on the experience of Hong Kong. In 2003, it marked the beginning of the institutionalization of drug control social work in the Chinese mainland. That year, Shanghai took the lead in following Hong Kong's example and began to establish relevant frameworks for drug control social work. This was specifically manifested in the establishment of non-profit organizations, the recruitment and training of drug control social workers, and the purchase of social services by the government, etc. (Fan et al., 2011, Zhao & Fu, 2019) The anti-drug work in Shanghai was the first of its kind in China to implement professional anti-drug social work, marking the pioneering step in related work across the country.

Another milestone event was the "Drug Control Law of the People's Republic of China" promulgated in 2008. This law reformed and improved the national drug rehabilitation system, and for the first time in China, it established the community-based drug rehabilitation model, which is a brand-new approach to drug rehabilitation. It clearly stipulated that for drug users, the main approach should be education and reform, embodying the people-oriented concept of drug rehabilitation. (The Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, 2007)

Since then, governments in various regions of China have carried out numerous differentiated explorations in anti-drug social work based on their local conditions. For instance, in 2008, the Shenzhen Municipal Government first purchased positions for anti-drug social work services from "Wenxin Social Work Institution" and "Caihong Social Work Institution", and selected Futian District as the pilot area for the deployment of anti-drug social workers. (Li & Liu, 2022) With the precedent set, the model of Shenzhen has gradually been promoted to surrounding areas such as Dongguan and Guangzhou, etc. The professional training and management of drug rehabilitation social workers is also a notable attempt. Wuyi City, Zhejiang Province, was the first to explore the establishment of a dedicated management system for drug rehabilitation social workers, and has established a "recruitment - training - assessment - incentive" system. (Chen & Liao, 2026) After a certain level of professional social work training has been completed, some regions have begun more systematic attempts, striving to integrate the transformation process from drug users to those who have quit drugs and even those who are involved in drug control into a closely interconnected process. For instance, the Zhangzhou Judicial Compulsory Drug Rehabilitation Center proposed the construction concept of "combining two stations (police and social workers), operating as a single entity, linking the center with the location, and integrating assistance and control measures". (Ministry of Justice of the People's Republic of China, 2024) By deploying police officers to assist community drug rehabilitation guidance stations, over 2,000 drug addicts were effectively controlled. For the first time, a comprehensive approach was adopted, covering three distinct issues: "mandatory control", "drug rehabilitation guidance", and "social reintegration".

However, compared with the rapid development of practical work, the theoretical research on drug control social work is significantly lagging behind. The existing research suffers from problems such as insufficient quantity, weak theoretical construction, and uneven regional development. Therefore, systematically reviewing the research trajectory of China's drug control social work over the past two decades, summarizing the existing achievements, identifying research gaps, and envisioning future directions, holds significant academic value and practical significance.

2. THE DEVELOPMENT HISTORY OF SOCIAL WORK IN DRUG CONTROL IN CHINA

Before delving into the discussion on the theory of drug control by Chinese social workers, it is necessary to have a relatively clear understanding and summary of the overall development process of this theory.

2.1 The conceptual definition of drug control social work

The early exploration of anti-drug social work methods in China had distinct characteristics of "trial and error" and "experimentation", and this was also true at the level of defining such methods. The official authoritative definition did not emerge until 2017. It was stated in the "Opinions on Strengthening the Construction of the Team of Anti-Drug Social Workers" that "Anti-drug social work is an important part of the anti-drug work. It adheres to the value concept of 'helping people to help themselves', follows professional ethical norms, and uses social work knowledge, methods, and skills to prevent and alleviate the harm of drugs, promote the social rehabilitation of drug users, and protect the physical and mental health of citizens." (Office of China National Narcotics Control Commission et al., 2017). This definition clearly defines the identity of its social work professional branch and explicitly states that drug addicts should be regarded as "objects requiring treatment and guidance" as the core guiding ideology.

Based on this definition, the academic community has developed more detailed viewpoints. For instance, Mo (2022) suggested that "Drug control social work is not the same as drug rehabilitation social work. The main service targets of drug rehabilitation social work are drug addicts and their family members. The main content is to help drug addicts overcome their addiction, maintain integrity, and achieve social reintegration. Strictly speaking, drug rehabilitation social work is a specific type of social work specifically carried out for a certain group of drug users, and it is a component of drug control social work." Zhang (2020) believes that more mature experiences in social work should be drawn upon to "build a community rehabilitation social work system for drug addicts, form theories and methods for drug addiction rehabilitation in the community, thereby strengthening the prevention system of anti-drug efforts, optimizing the system functions of anti-drug, drug rehabilitation, and community rehabilitation work in anti-drug efforts, in order to reduce relapse rates and consolidate the anti-drug achievements."

Based on the above official documents and scholars' viewpoints, this article holds that Chinese anti-drug social work can be defined as: under the guidance of the professional values and concepts of social work, with the core goal of preventing and alleviating the harm of drugs, using professional knowledge and skills, conducting drug prevention education for the entire society, providing assistance services for drug users, those in the process of rehabilitation from drug addiction, and their families, and assisting in the management of anti-drug affairs.

2.2 The Development History of Social Work in China's Anti-Drug Efforts

The initial exploration stage (1995 - 2003): The initiation of the anti-drug campaign was driven by the consideration of the harmful effects of drug smuggling, trafficking, transportation, and manufacturing on social security and the physical and mental health of citizens. The "Decision on Anti-Drug Work" issued by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress in 1990 is widely regarded as a landmark policy in China's anti-drug efforts. Many aspects have been given their first clear legal definitions, such as the definition of drugs, the distinction between smuggling, trafficking, transportation and consumption, etc. (Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, 1990) Another important policy was the formulation and announcement of the "Compulsory Drug Rehabilitation Measures", which covered the social purpose of drug rehabilitation, the methods and duration of the rehabilitation process, etc. (State Council, 1995) Moreover, its very existence also symbolizes the attitude of the Chinese government towards treating drug traffickers and drug users differently and separately. The aforementioned therapeutic community-based drug addiction treatment and rehabilitation center in Kunming, Yunnan Province, which was established in 1998, represents the earliest practical attempt of this kind. However, during this period, the efforts mainly focused on the establishment of "drug-free communities" and the separation of the body from drugs. Social work was not systematically applied at this stage; at best, it could be regarded as borrowing some concepts from it. In reality, a dedicated anti-drug social work team was not established. (Yang et al., 2002)

Institutionalization construction stage (2003 - 2008): The year 2003 marked the beginning of the institutionalization of drug control social work. At the beginning of that year, Shanghai proposed the working concept of "government-led promotion,

From "Borrowing" To "Localization": The Development Trajectory of China's Social Work Research on Drug Control

autonomous operation by associations, and participation from multiple social sectors", and in August, it recruited 120 drug control social workers to carry out pilot projects in 4 districts including Pudong. This marked the establishment of the first dedicated drug control social worker team in the Chinese mainland. In December of the same year, the first organization in the Chinese mainland specifically engaged in drug control social work - Shanghai Ziqiang (自强) Social Service General Office - was officially registered, indicating that the institutional framework of government purchasing services, social organizations undertaking, and dedicated social worker services had basically taken shape (Fan et al., 2011). This institutional innovation has pioneering significance nationwide and has provided a model for the subsequent construction of drug control social worker teams in various regions.

legal improvement and large-scale promotion stage (2008 – 2015): The "Drug Control Law of the People's Republic of China" promulgated in 2008 marked a crucial turning point for social work in this field. This law has established the legal status of community drug rehabilitation and clearly defined its core role in the "rehabilitation support" process. Article 33 stipulates that for individuals addicted to drugs; the public security authorities may order them to undergo social rehabilitation treatment. Article 35 stipulates that those undergoing community-based drug rehabilitation must abide by the relevant provisions in the community-based drug rehabilitation agreement and undergo regular testing. (Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, 2007). Subsequently, various detoxification regulations centered around community-based drug rehabilitation emerged one after another in various regions of China. For instance, in November 2008, Shenzhen was the first to carry out an attempt to purchase anti-drug social work services from the government; Guangzhou, Dongguan, Zhuhai and other places successively launched pilot projects for anti-drug social work from 2009 to 2011 (Li & Liu, 2022); Wuyi, Zhejiang Province, explored the professional management of anti-drug social workers in 2010 and pioneered the "3+2" working model. (Chen & Liao, 2026). During this period, China's anti-drug social work expanded from Shanghai to multiple regions such as the Pearl River Delta and the Yangtze River Delta, and the local practice models became increasingly diverse.

Systematical construction stage (2015 – nowadays): "The National Plan for Community Drug Rehabilitation and Community Rehabilitation (2016 - 2020)" is the first comprehensive plan that clearly outlines the implementation of community drug rehabilitation on a nationwide scale. This plan provides overall guidance based on the aforementioned "Drug Control Law of the People's Republic of China" and other regulations. It clearly states that by the end of five years, a comprehensive community-based drug rehabilitation and reintegration system will be established nationwide, while ensuring the complete establishment of a dedicated staff team for community drug rehabilitation and reintegration. Office of China National Narcotics Control Commission et al. (2015)

Reviewing the development process over the past two decades, Chinese anti-drug social work has demonstrated a distinct characteristic of "practical advancement preceding theoretical lag" - institutional construction and practical exploration have always been at the forefront, while systematic theoretical construction and academic research have lagged behind the development of practice. This structural tension constitutes the problem consciousness of this literature review: Before systematically summarizing the research progress of anti-drug social work, it is necessary to first clarify its development trajectory.

3. ANALYSIS OF CURRENT RESEARCH STATUS

3.1 Research on the Practical Model of Drug Control Social Work

The traditional drug rehabilitation system, which consists of three components: compulsory detoxification, labor reform, and voluntary detoxification, has its merits. However, there is a lack of interconnection among these three components, and they all start from the perspectives of law-breaking and patients, violating the principle of people-oriented law. Therefore, some analysts suggest that a more effective approach would be to combine traditional Chinese methods of drug rehabilitation with the establishment of a comprehensive community-based development model for drug rehabilitation social work. (Li & Ma, 2014) The existing research in this area mainly focuses on three aspects: typological patterns, specific method applications, and local practice cases.

In Li & Ma's article, they mentioned five representative operating modes. The first mode is empowerment enabling model, which focuses on highlighting the "empowerment" of drug addicts themselves, the "connection of advantageous resources", and "resilience" and other core values of the individuals. The specific approaches include providing psychological treatment, cognitive changes, resource support and other services to drug addicts, emphasizing the significant role of moral care in facilitating the social

From "Borrowing" To "Localization": The Development Trajectory of China's Social Work Research on Drug Control

reintegration of drug addicts. The next is the comprehensive health medical model, which emphasizes the integration of medical treatment with knowledge and skills in social work services, focusing on the holistic rehabilitation of drug addicts in terms of their physical, psychological and social aspects. The community-based drug rehabilitation model places greater emphasis on intervention at the social work level, emphasizing the use of the community as a platform to integrate various resources for the implementation of drug rehabilitation services. In addition, the psychosocial rehabilitation model also incorporates psychological intervention measures into the rehabilitation process, emphasizing the coordinated advancement of physical abstinence and social function recovery. (Li & Ma, 2014) Finally, the most comprehensive model is known as the Cube model. It integrates various service focuses ranging from families to communities, and considers multiple dimensions from the grassroots level to the deep level to formulate social work plans. It is clearly evident that the overall development trend of China's anti-drug social work is moving towards multi-dimensional and refined approaches. Therefore, different intervention techniques will be developed for different individual cases.

3.2 Research on the types of practice method

The practice method holds a very significant position in the research related to drug control social work. It determines the methodology of social work assistance and the formulation of targeted drug rehabilitation strategies.

The "case management method" is the most widely used approach in China's anti-drug social work. According to Zhong & Liang (2008), case management is a social work approach that provides social welfare assistance to clients with multiple needs who are unable to effectively utilize social resources. Its one-on-one service feature brings numerous advantages. For instance, based on the specific issues, demands and available resources of different clients, customized solutions can be developed. This enables a more comprehensive and accurate assessment of each individual, and also allows for greater respect for the client's autonomy. In the field of drug control, this social work method can be applied in many aspects. In Mo & Jiang's (2024) research, a case management method was used to analyze the employment difficulties of drug rehabilitation personnel in a certain community in Kunming from multiple perspectives. A targeted intervention plan was formulated and implemented to provide a feasible path for their re-employment. Some studies also suggest that this practice method can specifically enhance the social self-confidence of drug rehabilitation personnel in the designated areas. This, in turn, indirectly helps them to actively complete the process of social reintegration. (Zhang, 2023, Liu, 2022)

Although the case management approach can provide more in-depth and customized psychological intervention for clients, it is overly confined to the interaction between "social workers" and "clients", lacking systematic support. To address this deficiency, the group work model began to be applied. In this model, the changes of the clients are not achieved through direct intervention by social workers, but occur naturally through group interactions. Case work involves social workers helping to coordinate social resources appropriately for the clients. The application and research of group work is a model that pursues a virtuous cycle. The basic role of group work is to have professionals with expertise in drug rehabilitation serve as experts, providing professional knowledge and treatment to drug addicts with similar backgrounds. In this application, the role of drug addicts is similar to that in individual case work, mainly existing as "patients in need of treatment" and "recipients of assistance". (Huang, 2007; Xu, 2022) The most crucial advantage and feature of group work is that the drug addicts who have received education and assistance from drug rehabilitation social workers are also potential "helpers". In many studies, the focus has been on the application of mutual assistance among the drug addicts in the group. This kind of mutual assistance can be approached from multiple aspects, such as psychological rehabilitation, improvement of stigmatization, and re-socialization, etc. (Fei, 2011; Wen, 2023; Wang, 2025)

The application of community work methods in the field of drug control refers to using the community as a platform to integrate various resources from the government, community organizations, and community residents. Through professional means such as community development and community education, it assists drug addicts in rehabilitation to restore their social functions and achieve social integration. Unlike the former two, the scope and scale of the community work model are much larger, and it is bound to involve the implementation of relevant government anti-drug policies and measures. In this model, the role of anti-drug social workers is more reflected in resource linkage and community organization. Therefore, most of the research in this field has focused on the assessment and supplementation of community-scale anti-drug social work. For instance, Zhong & Liu (2011) pointed out

From "Borrowing" To "Localization": The Development Trajectory of China's Social Work Research on Drug Control

that at that time, the community anti-drug work faced problems such as a lack of professional concepts, as well as the absence of specialized service organizations and professional talent cultivation. The issue of insufficient professionalization has always been the main challenge in community drug rehabilitation work in China, and this has been repeatedly mentioned in other studies. (Mo & Feng, 2023; Zhang, 2008) Furthermore, targeted improvement measures specifically tailored to the main drug-using groups in different communities are also an important topic to be noted. (Tong & Pan, 2016)

3.3 summary

This chapter has reviewed the existing literature on the practice models and methods of anti-drug social work in China.

The literature on **practice models** (3.1) reveals a rich typological landscape. Scholars have identified five representative operating modes—the empowerment enabling model, the comprehensive health medical model, the community-based drug rehabilitation model, the psychosocial rehabilitation model, and the Cube model (Li & Ma, 2014). These models reflect a clear developmental trajectory: from fragmented, institution-based interventions (compulsory detoxification, labor reform, voluntary detoxification) toward more integrated, community-centered, and multi-dimensional approaches. This shift mirrors the broader transformation of China's drug governance from punitive containment to rehabilitation-oriented social services.

The literature on **practice methods** (3.2) demonstrates that case management, group work, and community work each serve distinct but complementary functions. Case management provides individualized, in-depth intervention tailored to clients' specific needs and circumstances (Zhong & Liang, 2008; Mo & Jiang, 2024; Zhang, 2023). Group work leverages peer influence and group dynamics to generate therapeutic effects through mutual support, addressing psychological rehabilitation, stigma reduction, and re-socialization (Huang, 2007; Fei, 2011; Wen, 2023; Wang, 2025). Community work operates at the broadest level, focusing on resource integration, policy implementation, and the creation of supportive environments for drug rehabilitation, though it remains constrained by professional capacity deficits and institutional fragmentation (Zhong & Liu, 2011; Mo & Feng, 2023; Zhang, 2008).

Taken together, these bodies of research point to a common finding: **the three approaches—case management, group work, and community work—address different layers of the drug rehabilitation challenge**. Case management works at the individual level, group work at the peer/social level, and community work at the environmental/policy level. A comprehensive anti-drug social work system requires all three approaches to be effectively integrated, yet current research tends to examine them in isolation, lacking a coherent framework that explains how they interact and complement each other.

Moreover, despite the growing volume of practice-oriented studies, the literature remains predominantly descriptive and case-based. **Theoretical development lags significantly behind practical exploration**—a recurring theme that echoes the observation made in the historical review of Chapter 2. Few studies have systematically examined the structural conditions—policy constraints, organisational logics, professional discretion—that shape how these methods are actually implemented on the ground. This gap points to the need for a more critical, theoretically-informed research agenda that not only documents what works, but also explains why and under what conditions.

The following chapter will turn to this gap by identifying the limitations of existing research and outlining directions for future inquiry.

4. CURRENT RESEARCH STATUS AND LIMITATIONS

4.1 Research object level: The instrumentalization of social workers

In the majority of studies, social workers have been almost always regarded as a tool-like role that consistently performs its functions. (Zhong & Liu, 2011; Mo & Feng, 2023; Zhang, 2008; Tong & Pan, 2016) However, the actual situation is much more complicated. When social workers make judgments based on the personal information and preferences of the clients, they inevitably are influenced by personal factors. This consequently leads to differences in the discretionary decisions regarding resource allocation and the customization of assistance plans. The majority of research in the literature has focused on the design and application of case, group, and community work methods. In this context, social workers have been assumed to be idealized tools capable of strictly adhering to professional norms when providing services.

From "Borrowing" To "Localization": The Development Trajectory of China's Social Work Research on Drug Control

In addition, compared to other types of social workers, drug rehabilitation social workers have the unique characteristic of having "dual roles". They are often required to make frequent and precise transitions between the roles of "supporter" and "supervisor". Not only should we provide professional rehabilitation services for the clients, but also assist the public security authorities in carrying out supervision and control. Although these factors were mentioned in the research on community drug control, they were rarely actually studied as an issue.

Many studies have clearly pointed out the problem that those who carry out anti-drug social work do not possess the professional knowledge of social workers. However, they have overlooked the fact that there are also differences among anti-drug social workers themselves, and it is not appropriate to simply consider "establishing a professional social worker team" as a universal solution. The image of a social worker should not be reduced to "a professionally trained service provider". Such a simplistic description may overlook the potential key factors that could affect the quality of service (such as ethical concepts, professional burnout, organizational pressure, etc.).

4.2 Research at the scale level: Microscopic cases abound, while macroscopic theories are lacking.

Studies based on the xx community/institution serve as the main body of the literature on drug control social work. (Fei, 2011; Mo & Jiang, 2024; Mo & Feng, 2023; Wen, 2023; Wang, 2025; Zhao & Fu, 2019; Zhong & Liang, 2008) Although these studies are closely related to practice and are specific and reliable, there is a lack of dialogue and comparison among the cases, making it difficult to form a knowledge theoretical system that can be accumulated and promoted, as well as replicable assistance plan templates. Therefore, there are very few studies on the macro theoretical framework that can encompass and explain the overall practice of drug control social work in China.

The reason for this can be attributed to the fact that the development of social work in China's anti-drug efforts shows significant regional differences - places like Shanghai, Shenzhen, and Kunming have each developed their own distinct models. At the national level, there is a relatively open and autonomous guiding ideology for social work practice. However, there are significant differences among various regions in terms of exploration methods, advancement speed, and conceptual understanding. This diversity has left flexible institutional space at the macro-policy level, but it has also led to significant inconsistencies in the professional roles, responsibilities boundaries, and development directions of drug control social workers across different regions. Although individual case studies at the local level have achieved a certain level of sample size, when aggregated, it is difficult to form a comprehensive picture, and even more challenging to extract general applicable theoretical frameworks and guiding principles.

5. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTION

Building on the limitations identified in the preceding chapter, this concluding section outlines two priority directions for future research on anti-drug social work in China.

First, future research must shift its focus from the "methods" of anti-drug social work to the "actors" who implement them. The existing literature has produced a rich body of knowledge on what works—case management techniques, group work interventions, community-based models—but has paid remarkably little attention to the frontline practitioners who actually deliver these services. We know surprisingly little about how anti-drug social workers perceive their dual mandate of "care" and "control," how they exercise discretion in individual cases, how they navigate ethical dilemmas, and how their personal judgments and professional values shape the services they provide. The street-level bureaucracy framework (Lipsky, 1980; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003) offers a productive theoretical lens for addressing this gap. By bringing the discretionary practices of frontline implementers into analytical focus, future research can move beyond the prevailing "tool-oriented" perspective and begin to theorize anti-drug social workers as agentic subjects whose decisions and actions have real consequences for both policy outcomes and the lived experiences of drug users.

Second, future research should complement the dominant micro-level case studies with more systematic macro-level and comparative analyses. While local case studies have generated valuable contextual knowledge, their proliferation has resulted in a fragmented intellectual landscape. We lack an overarching theoretical framework that can explain regional variations in practice models, identify the structural conditions that shape implementation differences, and connect micro-level observations to broader

From "Borrowing" To "Localization": The Development Trajectory of China's Social Work Research on Drug Control

policy regimes and governance logics. Future studies should therefore pursue multi-site comparative designs, longitudinal tracking of organizational and individual change, and theoretically-driven analyses that examine how macro-level securitization discourse and institutional arrangements filter down to shape street-level practice. For example, the "securitization" framework (Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde, 1998), combined with the street-level bureaucracy perspective, could offer a promising theoretical architecture for integrating these different levels of analysis. Such an approach would not only illuminate how national security discourse translates into local practice, but also reveal how frontline practitioners—through their everyday discretionary decisions—may subtly reshape, reinforce, or occasionally subvert the security logic embedded in drug policy.

In sum, the next generation of research on China's anti-drug social work needs to be people centered and theory-informed. It should place frontline practitioners at the center of analysis, attend to their discretionary decision-making and professional dilemmas, and situate their practices within the broader securitization framework that governs drug policy in China. By doing so, future scholarship can move beyond the current "practice-heavy, theory-light" state of the field and generate knowledge that is both analytically robust and practically relevant.

REFERENCES

- 1) Chen, J., & Liao, S. (2026, May 25). The anti-drug defense line behind the "drug-savvy teenagers". Zhejiang Legal Daily. http://zjfbz.zjol.com.cn/html/2026-05/25/content_4488420.htm
- 2) Fei, M. (2011). Meaning construction: A practical study of drug rehabilitation social work services - A case study of peer education in community drug rehabilitation services in Shanghai. *Journal of East China University of Science and Technology (Social Science Edition)*, (2).
- 3) Fan, Z., Jiao, Z., & Zhan, Y. (2011). The indigenization experience of anti-drug social work and its reflection: A case study of Shanghai]. *Journal of East China University of Science and Technology (Social Science Edition)*, 5, 36–40, 104.
- 4) Huang, Y. (2007). Application of the group work treatment model in compulsory drug rehabilitation populations. *Chinese Journal of Drug Dependence*, (6), 476-478.
- 5) Li, J., & Liu, J. (2022). The development process, experience and reflection of anti-drug social work in Guangdong. *China Social Work*, (25). <https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.1674-3857.2022.25.026>
- 6) Liu, D. (2022). Finding oneself and achieving career success: A case study of a drug rehabilitation client. *China Social Work*, (3), 43–44.
- 7) Li, X., & Ma, R. (2014). The historical development and a preliminary exploration on operating mode of social work practice in drug abuse interventions in China. *Social Work and Management*, 14(6), 5–10, 89.
- 8) Ministry of Justice of the People's Republic of China. (2024, November 14). Fujian Zhangzhou judicial compulsory isolation drug rehabilitation center: Actively exploring the new model of "three types of aftercare" and embarking on the path of social extension in the new era https://www.moj.gov.cn/pub/sfbgw/jgsz/jgszjgtj/jgtjjdglj/jdgljtjxw/202411/t20241114_509518.html.
- 9) Mo, G. (2022). What is anti-drug social work? China Anti-Drug News. https://ga.sz.gov.cn/SZJDZX/SZBMFW/content/post_9835498.html
- 10) Mo, G., & Jiang, L. (2024). An empirical study of casework intervention on employment problems of drug rehabilitation clients from an evidence-based perspective: The case of "Xiao X" in P Community, Kunming. *Chinese Journal of Drug Dependence*, 33(5), 436–440.
- 11) Mo, G., & Feng, E. (2023). Localization practice and reflection of anti-drug social work from the perspective of innovative social governance: A case study of Kunming. *Journal of Henan Police College*, (6).
- 12) National Narcotics Control Commission of China. (2016, November 7). An overview and prospect of the development of anti-drug social worker teams. Ministry of Civil Affairs of the People's Republic of China. <https://www.mca.gov.cn/zt/history/workten/20161100887287.html>

- 13) National Narcotics Control Commission Office, Central Comprehensive Management Office, Ministry of Public Security, National Health and Family Planning Commission, Ministry of Civil Affairs, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, All-China Federation of Trade Unions, Communist Youth League Central Committee, & All-China Women's Federation. (2015). National plan for community-based drug rehabilitation and community recovery work (2016-2020) (No. 97 [2015] of the Narcotics Control Commission Office). PKULaw. <https://sfb.pkulaw.com/chl/4008e4b66c81fc08bdfb.html?way=textRightFblx>
- 14) Office of China National Narcotics Control Commission, Central Comprehensive Management Office, Ministry of Public Security, Ministry of Education, National Health and Family Planning Commission, Ministry of Civil Affairs, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, & All-China Federation of Trade Unions. (2017). Opinions on strengthening the construction of anti-drug social worker teams (No. 2 [2017] of the Narcotics Control Commission Office). Ministry of Civil Affairs of the People's Republic of China. <https://www.mca.gov.cn/n152/n167/c53344/content.html>
- 15) Office of China National Narcotics Control Commission, Central Comprehensive Management Office, Ministry of Public Security, National Health and Family Planning Commission, Ministry of Civil Affairs, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, All-China Federation of Trade Unions, Communist Youth League Central Committee, & All-China Women's Federation. (2015). *National plan for community-based drug rehabilitation and community recovery work (2016-2020) (No. 97 [2015] of the Narcotics Control Commission Office). PKULaw. <https://sfb.pkulaw.com/chl/4008e4b66c81fc08bdfb.html?way=textSlc>
- 16) Standing Committee of the National People's Congress. (2007). Anti-Drug Law of the People's Republic of China (Order of the President of the People's Republic of China No. 79). The National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China. http://www.npc.gov.cn/zgrdw/huiyi/cwh/31/2007-12/29/content_1387796.htm
- 17) Standing Committee of the National People's Congress. (1990). Decision of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress on the prohibition against narcotic drugs (Order of the President of the People's Republic of China No. 38). <http://gongbao.court.gov.cn/Details/a8ac4a3940fa55fcbe8605efca3952.html>
- 18) State Council of the People's Republic of China. (1995). *Mandatory drug rehabilitation measures* (Order of the State Council No. 170). PKULaw. <https://ccj.pku.edu.cn/Article/info?aid=310721883>
- 19) Tong, Y., & Pan, D. (2016). Exploration and practice of social work intervention in adolescent community drug rehabilitation. *Chinese Journal of Drug Dependence*, (5), 454-458.
- 20) The Standing Committee of the National People's Congress. (2007). The Narcotics Control Law of the People's Republic of China. Central Commission for Discipline Inspection and National Supervisory Commission Regulations Database. https://www.ccdi.gov.cn/fqk/law_display/1392
- 21) Wen, T. (2023). A study on group work to improve stigma against drug users [Master's thesis, South China University of Technology].
- 22) Wang, Y. (2025). The formation process of collective emotions among drug rehabilitation clients and their positive emotional perception: A case study of peer education in Shanghai. *Social Work*, (6), 132.
- 23) Xu, B. (2022). Research on the group dynamics of therapeutic groups in compulsory isolation drug rehabilitation [Master's thesis, East China University of Science and Technology].
- 24) Yang, M., Feng, Y., Zhang, G., Guo, J., Wu, T., Huang, P., & Li, J. (2002). Rehabilitation model of China-USA Daytop Village on drug detoxification. *Soft Science of Health*, 16(5), 23-26.
- 25) Zhang, Y. (2008). Building a community rehabilitation social work system for drug users: Reflections on the experience of Shanghai's anti-drug work. *Juvenile Delinquency Issues*, (1).
- 26) Zhao, F., & Fu, L. (2019). A study on the classified evaluation of social work in community drug rehabilitation: A case study of social work practice on drug rehabilitation in Shanghai]. *Social Work and Management*, 19(6), 40-47.
- 27) Zhang, Y. (2020). Understanding the ten-step working method of anti-drug social work. [WeChat public post].

From "Borrowing" To "Localization": The Development Trajectory of China's Social Work Research on Drug Control

- 28) Zhang, Y. (2023). A study on improving the self-confidence of drug rehabilitation clients returning to society under identity theory [Master's thesis, Jilin University].
- 29) Zhong, Y., & Liang, G. (2008). Case management: A new model of community drug rehabilitation work. *Journal of East China University of Science and Technology (Social Science Edition)*, (2), 28–33.
- 30) Zhong, Y., & Liu, C. (2011). Community drug rehabilitation work and social work intervention under the background of the Anti-Drug Law. *Journal of Jiangxi Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*, (3).



There is an Open Access article, distributed under the term of the Creative Commons Attribution – Non-Commercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0)

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits remixing, adapting and building upon the work for non-commercial use, provided the original work is properly cited.