

CONSTITUTING 'ADDICTION' IN CHINA'S DRUG POLICY: A CASE STUDY OF COMPULSORY DRUG DETENTION CENTRES

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Compulsory drug detention centres (CDDC) are closed settings where people who use drugs are confined for years at a time.

China and Western advocates are understood to be in direct conflict over the meanings of drug use and addiction underpinning compulsory drug detention centres (CDDC).

This research examines this assumption, exploring the idea that there are commonalities, rather than only differences, in how they make 'real' concepts of addiction and justify certain responses.

Introduction

China's CDDC are a site of political contestation between China's government and Western advocacy organisations. The issue is framed as one between competing 'health' and 'criminal' models.

They are used here as a case study to explore how particular discourses of drug use and 'addiction' create culturally and locally specific treatment rationalities.

Project Objectives

1. To investigate constructions of drug use, drug using subjects, addiction and rehabilitation in China's CDDC policy and practice, national media, and Western advocacy documents.
2. To compare and contrast assumptions and presuppositions about drug use and drug users underpinning national policies and practices, national media, and advocacy strategies.
3. To inform the development of future drug policy advocacy strategies situated within alternative discourses of drug use, drug users, and addiction.

Background

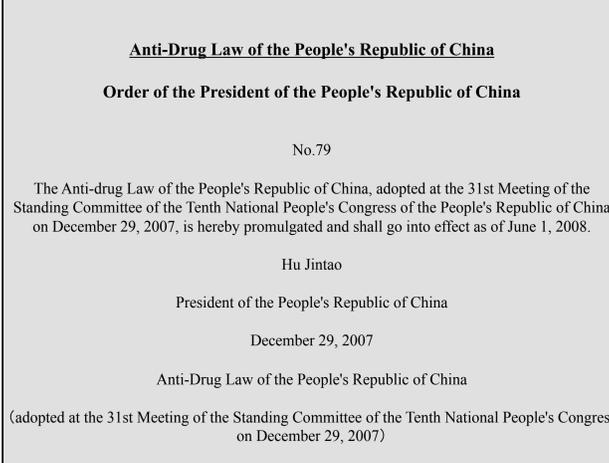
- China has one of the largest and most established drug detention systems in the world, with an estimated 170,000 to half a million people in CDDC.¹
- Human rights violations are widely reported.
- UN agencies, Human Rights Watch (HRW), and Open Society Foundations (OSF) call for their immediate closure.²

Theoretical Approach

The project takes a science and technology studies (STS) approach. This allows for scrutiny of how certain notions of addiction are made 'real', and affect policy and treatment responses.

An STS approach opens up to examination the intricate relations between science, politics, culture and policies.

- The project draws on Annemarie Mol's (1999) '*ontological politics*'. Reality making takes work, and involves political choices. This holds the possibility that with different choices new realities can be made.
- John Law (2004) makes the distinction between primary and secondary realities. A primary reality is the object or representation; secondary realities are the hidden and 'othered' elements assembled in its construction.
- Primary realities appear stable, and are given meaning through their dependence on '*collateral realities*' (Law, 2009). These realities made '*along the way*' order and produce objects and subjects, and '*act most powerfully to do the real*'.³
- Mol and Law conceive reality as multiple rather than singular, enacted rather than stable, 'made up' of constituent elements⁴ that collide and intersect. The reality we take for granted is not inevitable.



Methodology

Carol Bacchi's (2009) 'What is the problem represented to be' (WPR) approach argues that social problems do not pre-exist the policies seen to address them, but are constituted to fit how governments and societies understand available 'solutions'. Her series of six methodological questions are applied to analyse the data.⁵

This project will provide ground-breaking recommendations for how drug use, addiction, and rehabilitation can be reframed to open up new responses.

Preliminary Findings

Addiction

- Sociological analyses of addiction argue that the making of addiction is not politically neutral, but made in tandem with modern societies.⁶
- In China's Anti-Drug Law 2008, drug users are defined for the first time as 'patients' who require 'treatment'. That the same 'disease' model justifies divergent treatment modalities in China and the West suggests that the concept of addiction is not a stable and predictable 'reality', but contingent on political, social and cultural structures situated in time and space.
- The 'making' of addiction in discursive-material practice is performative and has critical implications for responses to drug use (policy, programming and practice), effects and outcomes.

Evidence-Based Policy Making

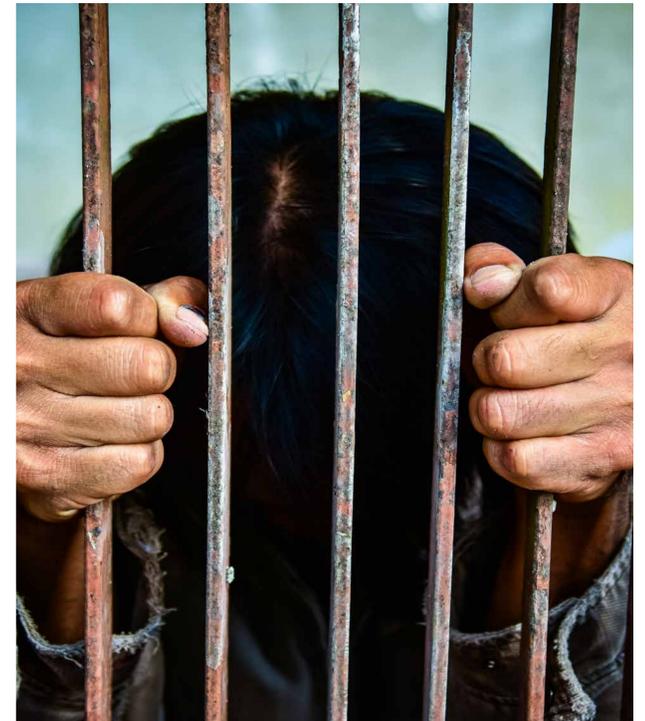
- Qualitative research on drug policy argues that discourse, programmes, and practices do not merely respond to social problems, nor are solely products of rational and linear processes.⁷
- Policy problems are not fixed or objective. They are shaped by broader discourses, politics and socio-economic and cultural factors that produce, and reproduce policy problems over time.⁸
- This complicates demands for evidence-based policy making, which fails to account for the multiple realities of drug use, addiction and drug policy development.⁹

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Despite the tensions between China's approach and Western advocates, both positions share important assumptions.

Both treat the drug using subject as a stable, immutable object requiring the 'right' intervention.

Concepts of addiction and rehabilitation enacted in Chinese drug policies, laws and regulations and Western advocacy reports are multiple and shifting. Drug use and addiction are variously constituted as health, criminal, social, historical and structural issues. These constructions change according to context and intended audience, and are dependent on pre-existing assumptions and presuppositions.

They are always in the making, and open to change.

Collateral realities such as human rights, governmentality, and health play out differently in China, due to different notions of the individual, divergent political systems, epistemologies, and ideas of national identity.

Project Significance

1. To date no research has been conducted on the conceptual underpinnings of China's responses to drug use, or on how these compare with Western drug policy advocacy.
2. This project will provide ground-breaking recommendations for how drug use, addiction, and rehabilitation can be reframed to open up new responses.
3. In doing so, the project will provide a new theoretical framework through which to examine wider advocacy issues and conflicts in China.

References

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