



Photo provided by Guangzhou Juvenile Jail

Juvenile Jail: A Harmful Greenhouse?

Investigation of Juvenile Criminals' Employment Opportunities in Guangzhou

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Team #2

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Ling stood with her head down, her voice trembling and tears shedding from her eyes. The robbery three months ago totally changed her life. Yet, she confidently told us, “I will get a job and live a good life.”

Ling, used to be a good student, was obsessed to computer games in Grade 7 and started to rob with her sophisticated friends. After several heists, she was caught and sentenced to a three-year imprisonment at the age of 15.

In the prison, the windows and doors of the dorm were totally transparent so that guards could see in all directions. There were two cameras in each room—one facing the beds, and the other facing the bathroom. With these cameras, guards supervised criminals at any time online.

Ling is one of the 2000 juvenile criminals in Guangzhou Juvenile Jail, living under constant surveillance. China now faces a serious problem with juvenile crime. Juvenile delinquents are usually defined as people violating laws between the age of 10 and 18. Typical causes of juvenile delinquency include family tensions, financial desires, negative influence from gangs, etc.

For juvenile criminals, how can they integrate into society after released? How will the time in jail affect their career? Will they suffer from discrimination? These questions prompt an investigation of the current employment system of juvenile criminals in Guangzhou.

Life in Jail

Ling was consulted of her experience in jail and her expectations. She followed a strict schedule: getting up at six, working in the morning, and studying in the afternoon. During the working time, she learned to make Cantonese embroidery, a traditional handicraft in the Pearl River Delta region. During the studying time, she continued her middle school academic study and tried to earn her middle school degree. “The vocational training and education offer me practical and academic skills to find a job after rehabilitation,” Ling said firmly.

However, she seemed to be optimistic. How can she adapt to social and professional environment quickly after isolated in jail for three years? In jail, she had not learned how to use a computer to do simple things a job requires, such as write emails to colleagues. Even worse, all TVs broadcasted Xi’s speeches and the Party’s latest news, and all books were about

Chinese culture and communist values. Only gaining these propagandistic messages, Ling may find it difficult to answer job interview questions about free market, financial risks, etc.

With regards to these concerns, Mr. Liu, the warden of Guangzhou Juvenile Jail, assured us, “The daily vocational training (e.g. assembling electronic equipment and making handcrafts) makes these teenagers competent in job market, and there is no need to worry about their adaptation to society.” According to him, three months before their release, the criminals receive adaptive training to reenter the society, including overcoming fear for social members and more specific occupational training of barbers, caretakers, etc.

However, it is doubtful whether they can really adapt to the dynamic, digital society with only three month’s training. Even though criminals can gain basic life skills during the training, they cannot get rid of the psychological impacts shortly. In the interview, Ling’s initial reluctance to talk to us revealed her deep fear of society. If newly released criminals are not mentally prepared for life outside jail, they won’t feel motivated to find a job and might end up back in jail.

This problem is exacerbated by the lack of social organizations that take care of juvenile criminals in China. Juvenile jails aren’t legally responsible to help the released criminals. Also, due to the political sensitivity of the issue, few NGOs are able to guide these teenagers. Thus, there are few for them to seek help.

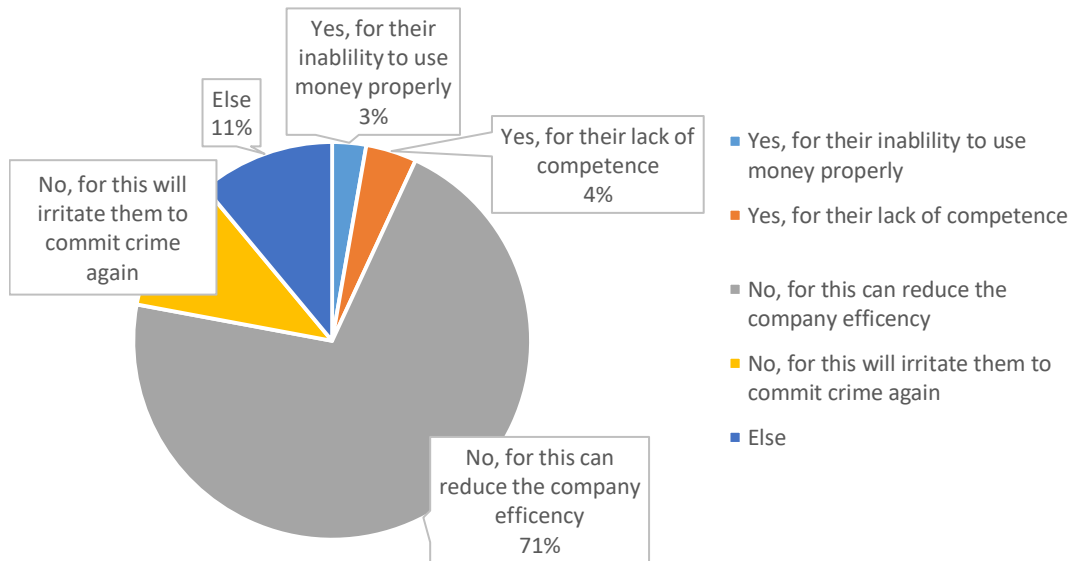
An interview with Wan, another juvenile offender, confirmed our concerns. “This is my third time to be here because of robbery,” he said. Asked about why he committed multiple robbery, he uttered a sigh, “I have to rob to survive. I have no home, no school, and no job after rehabilitation.”

Public Concerns

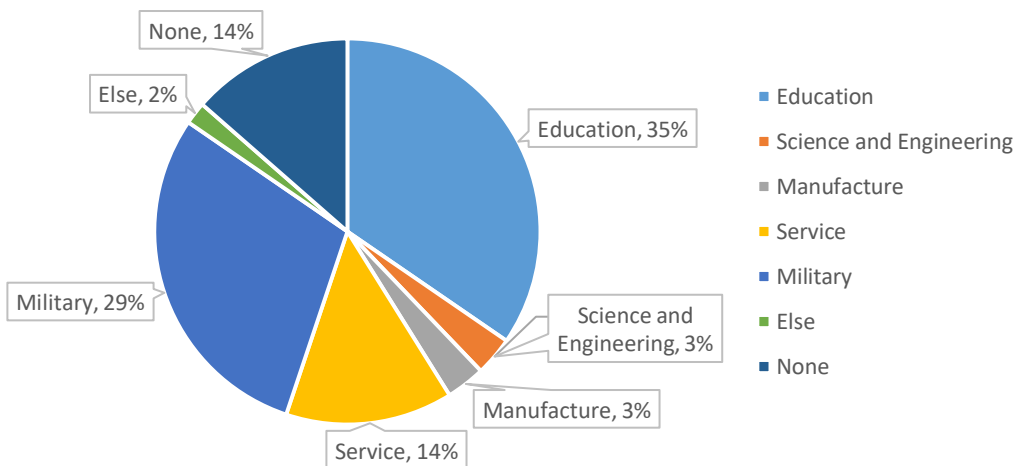
Juvenile criminals’ adaption to society is bidirectional. The public opinion on them is equally important to their own efforts to continue education or find jobs. Therefore, a survey on the current public preoccupation about juvenile criminals was conducted as anonymous online and field questionnaires. There were 145 valid responses. The field questionnaires were distributed at Xi Guan (the old town in Guangzhou) and Zhujiang New Town on July 3rd. Data from people of all age ranges was obtained within these two locations. The following graphs show responses

to selected questions.

Do you think juvenile criminals should get lower wages than normal people? Why?



Which of the following industries should juvenile criminals be prohibited from?

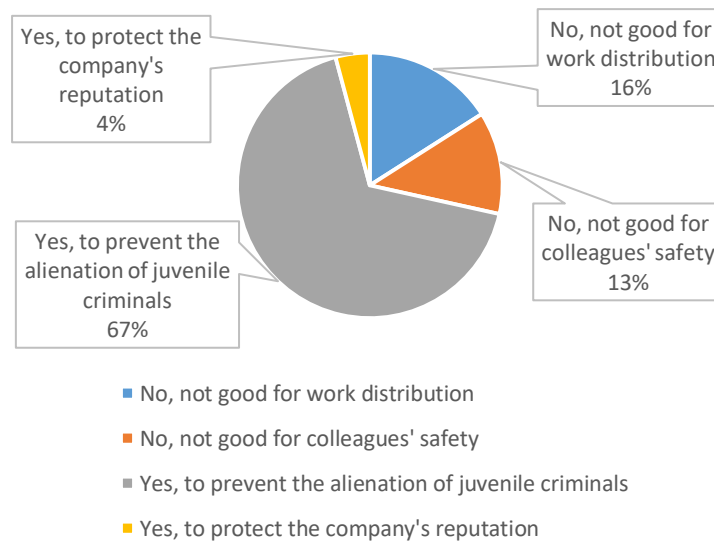


The result of the first question reveals that the majority of people trust the working competence of these juveniles, since only 4% of participants point to the lack of ability. However, as shown, 71% of participants believe that these juveniles deserve regular salaries, because the failure to do so diminishes juvenile delinquents' working efficiency. This indicates that many people consider from the company's perspective rather than the criminals' perspective. The social empathy towards juvenile criminals isn't enough.

The survey also reveals a wide concern about values of juvenile criminals. The concern is evidenced by the result of the second question: 29% of participants believe that these teenagers should be excluded from military and 35% from jobs in education. Meanwhile, only 14% people believe that there should not be restriction on juvenile criminals' career choice. The unfavorable public attitudes pose difficulty for them to find job after rehabilitation.

Record Protection: On Its Way

Do you consider it appropriate to keep juvenile records confidential at work? Why?



Given the existing biases towards juvenile criminals, it is necessary to keep the records confidential. As shown in survey results, 67% of responders believe records should be kept confidential to avoid discrimination against juvenile delinquents.

An interview with Ms. Yu, an experienced judge in Hunan Province, provided information of the record protection system in China. “In court, we can see the young kids’ fearful and nervous expressions,” Ms. Yu said with sorrow, “Luckily, our policies have been improving.”

According to her, before 2015, the juvenile criminal record was not kept private, so most juvenile delinquents failed to get a job after released. In 2015, the record protection policy was written in Law of the Peoples Republic of China on the Protection of Minors, so companies (except government institutions) can no longer recognize the juvenile records of prospective employees. “This policy can protect these teenagers from experiencing negative pressure and

the loss of self-esteem, which may ruin their future,” Ms. Yu commented.

Hao, a former student in a top high school in Guangzhou, benefited from this system. He was given suspend sentence after stealing money six years ago. Back then, without record protection, his classmates and teachers alienated him. “I had no friend because everyone knew I was a criminal,” he recalled poignantly. Thanks to the system, he enrolled in a famous university in Guangzhou after Gaokao and has gotten a job after graduating in 2019, all with his record confidential.

In Guangzhou, record protection has been implemented in major districts such as Tianhe and Yuexiu District by large companies. However, in some remote districts and small companies (or jobs without official companies such as maid), this system is still not well-adopted.

In the Future

The Chinese government has been making progress on human rights protection of juvenile delinquents. The establishment of record protection system is a solid piece of evidence. The confidentiality of records offers the legal foundation for juvenile criminals to get jobs and, more importantly, boosts their self-confidence.

However, the current system still has flaws. Inside jail, many criminals behave well because of the surveillance and punishments. This is problematic because once they are released, without supervision, they are still prone to committing crime. Thus, jails should give criminals more freedom and teach them to hold themselves accountable even without surveillance. In addition, the academic and vocational education is not diverse enough. Rather than propagandistic materials, the jail should provide books on various topics like economics and psychology. To prepare for their career in the digital age, juvenile offenders should also be taught to use computers—rather than assemble products—as AI will eliminate many jobs in the manufacturing industry.

Outside jail, few organizations are now responsible to help juvenile delinquents integrate into society. Given that these teenagers have been separated from society for long, the lack of assistance from social organizations makes them hard to adapt to social life, not to mention find a job. Therefore, the government should specify the responsibility of juvenile jails and

community centers in guiding released juvenile criminals. It should also encourage more NGOs to take care of these teenagers. For the Chinese government, aside from popularizing the record protection system, it could set up Juvenile Delinquents Federation that helps released teenagers, as how it has done for the disabled.

When asked about her prospect of future job, Ling optimistically said, “I wish to work in a business company and become a manger through my dedication.” But there is still a long way for her, and our society, to go.

APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. What is your age range?
 - A. <20 years old
 - B. 20~30 years old
 - C. 30~50 years old
 - D. 50~60 years old
 - E. 60+ years old

2. Do you consider it appropriate to keep juvenile records confidential at work? Why?
 - A. No, in this way we can assign suitable work to these special people.
 - B. No, disclosing criminal records keeps juvenile criminals' colleagues safe.
 - C. Yes, if we disclose the juvenile records, juvenile criminals will be alienated at work.
 - D. Yes, disclosing criminal records ruins the company's reputation
 - E. Other

3. Do you think companies should employ stricter standards when hiring juvenile criminals? Why?
 - A. Yes, juvenile criminals tend to commit crime again, so we should check them more strictly.
 - B. Yes, we need to guarantee that these juvenile criminals do not connect with mafias.
 - C. No, we should treat every applicant equally, no matter whether they have committed crimes.
 - D. No, this destroys juvenile criminals' self-esteem, which harms their future development.
 - E. Other

4. Do you think juvenile criminals should get lower wages than normal people? Why?
 - A. Yes, juvenile criminals may spend their money committing crimes again.
 - B. Yes, going through the rehabilitation process, juvenile criminals are not as capable as normal people.
 - C. No, in this case juvenile criminals are less motivated to work, which is bad for the company.

- D. No, this policy may irritate juvenile criminals so that they commit crimes again.
- E. Other

5. In your opinion, which of the following jobs are not suitable for juvenile criminals?

- A. Jobs related to Math and Science
- B. Jobs related to education
- C. Jobs in the manufacturing industry
- D. Jobs in the service industry
- E. Police and Army
- F. Other
- G. None