Crime, Law and Social Change (2026) 84:2
https://doi.org/10.1007/s10611-025-10245-2

Chinese criminal justice practitioners' death penalty opinion and justifications:

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Received: 22 April 2024 / Accepted: 18 November 2025

Abstract

Criminal justice professionals (CJPs) play a fundamental role in maintaining law and order and their stances on crime, law, and punishment are likely reflected in their profession and affect their work. Though the literature on Western studies of death penalty public opinion is rich, empirical studies that examined CJPs' death penalty opinions remain limited. Based on a sample of 516 CJPs (including judges, prosecutors, police, lawyers, correctional officers, and others) from one city in southern China, this study empirically examines their death penalty opinion and justifications. Although Chinese CJPs hold strong support to capital punishment overall, significant variation is witnessed among these professionals by capital offenses and professions. As expected, CJPs' death penalty positions (approval or disapproval) are significantly correlated with their death penalty justifications, both of which are likely influenced by their professions. This study provides the first in-depth examination of death penalty opinion differences by various Chinese CJPs.

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Published online: 22 December 2025

Introduction

Criminal justice professionals (CJPs hereinafter) play a fundamental role in maintaining law and order in society. Their stances on crime, law, and punishment would likely be reflected in their profession and affect their work, while in the meantime their professional work may also affect their opinions on critical issues such as capital punishment. Though Western studies of public opinion on capital punishment have accumulated a rich body of literature, empirical studies that examined death penalty opinions of CJPs remain rather limited (see review below), especially on comparisons across various professionals (see Whitehead, 1998 for an exception).

In this study, we turn to People's Republic of China (China), a non-Western nation and based on a sample of 516 CJPs from one city in southern China, empirically examine their death penalty opinions. Albeit a small number of studies explored Chinese CJPs' death penalty opinions (He, 2009; Jiang, 2008; Jiang, 2020; Kuang, 2009; Liu, 2022; Mo & Zeng, 2009; Oberwittler et al., 2010; Zhang & He, 2011; Zhu, 2009), their scope of examination is very limited (see review below). While recognizing the unique positions of CJPs, these studies often contrast CJPs' views with that of other populations and reported higher death penalty support rates by Chinese CJPs. Nevertheless, little in-depth comparisons among CJPs are done, thus overlooking potential significant differences in their death penalty positions (approval or disapproval) and justifications for their positions. For instance, Kuang (2009) compared Chinese CJPs' opinions with that of legal scholars based on the Max Planck survey data (detailed below). While the CJPs highly supported capital punishment, Chinese legal scholars led the call to reform and reduce China's use of capital punishment in the new century (e.g., see Liang & Liu, 2021, Chap. 1). Kuang (2009) suggested that such differences are due to the nature of their profession (p. 123). For the same logic, the diverse nature of criminal justice professions would likely make an impact on CJPs' death penalty opinions and justifications.

We argue that China presents a unique setting to examine CJPs' death penalty opinions for three reasons. First, despite efforts to reduce and limit death sentences and executions, China remains the biggest user of capital punishment in the world (Liang & Lu, 2016), with 46 capital offenses. A study in China would allow examination of CJPs' opinions for a broad range of capital offenses, an improvement to Western studies which are often limited to the offense of homicide. Second, China's long history of death penalty use and cultural and traditional emphases on retribution and heavy penalty in governing society have had profound influence on its death penalty practice over time (Liang & Liu, 2021; Liang & Lu, 2016). Politically, the nondemocratic nature of the Chinese government entrenches the use of the death penalty as a tool both for crime-fighting and political purposes (e.g., Johnson & Miao, 2016). China's polity and its history and culture of death penalty use may thus affect Chinese CJPs' death penalty opinion, both positions and justifications for their positions. Third, past studies well documented the unique working relationship among Chinese *gong-jian-fa* (police, procuratorate, and court) workers and described their practice as an assembly-line, which emphasizes on coordination, cooperation, and efficiency instead of detection of errors, supervision, and checks and balances (Chen, 2005; McConville et al., 2011; Mou, 2020). This high degree of mutual trust and collabora-

tion may lead to similar opinions by gong-jian-fa workers despite different natures of their work, which is also subject to empirical testing.

In the remaining of the article, we first review the extant literature. Next, we introduce the data of this study and present main analyses. Lastly, we discuss major limitations and key findings of our study.

CJPs' death penalty opinion

Western studies of public opinion on the death penalty have built a rich literature over time and covered a wide range of topics such as the extent of public support (Harris, 1986), rationales for people's support (Bohm, 1992; Warr & Stafford, 1984), potential factors that influence people's support (Britt, 1998; Tyler & Weber, 1982), whether people's attitudes may change given new knowledge or information (e.g., the famous Marshall hypothesis) (Bohm et al., 1990, 1993; Lambert & Clarke, 2001), and potential impact of public opinion on death penalty practice (Brace & Boyea, 2008; Cullen et al., 2000; Jacobs & Kent, 2007).

While scholars continue to explore various facets of people's death penalty opinions, one consensus reached is that the oversimplified abstract question used in polls (e.g., "Do you favor or oppose the death penalty for persons convicted of murder?") is problematic and fails to uncover the complexities of public opinion (Ellsworth & Ross, 1983; Jones, 1994; Murray, 2003). For instance, Bowers et al. (1994) argued that the general survey question merely reflects people's *acceptance*, but not their *preference* for the death penalty. When presented with viable alternatives (e.g., life imprisonment without possibility of parole (LWOP), people's death penalty support declined significantly. The fact is that people's opinion on capital punishment is mutable and subject to change. One major factor that potentially influences people's death penalty opinion is the nature of their profession, especially when one's profession deals with law, crime, and punishment on a routine basis such as that of CJPs. For instance, as early as 1970s, Davidow and Lowe (1979) already examined attitudes of law students, lawyers, and judges toward capital punishment and explored whether law school training and legal career could have shaped their views.

Surprisingly, empirical studies that directly[1] examined death penalty opinions of CJPs have been rather limited (Hughes & Robinson, 2013, p. 154). Albeit practitioners' opinions on capital punishment were noted early on (e.g., for opinions shared by prosecutors, see McCann, 1996; Gerstein, 1960; for lawyers' opinions, see Reskin, 1985), more in-depth analyses based on refined survey data began to appear and grow in the last three decades, covering various professionals such as police officers (Hughes & Robinson, 2013; Mignon & Holmes, 1999), state legislators (Flanagan et al., 1993; Hamm, 1989; McGarrell & Sandys, 1996; Sandys & McGarrell, 1994), prosecutors and public defenders (Callahan et al., 2000; Whitehead, 1998; Whitehead et al., 1999). Collectively, this small body of literature revealed some important lessons. First, consistent with findings of the general literature on death

[1] We limited our review to empirical studies that directly and substantively examined CJPs' death penalty opinion. Therefore, our review does *not* cover studies that surveyed respondents on a wider range of issues (e.g., punitive penal ideology) in which one's opinion on capital punishment was only a tiny fraction.

penalty public opinion, a great degree of variation was found across diverse criminal justice professions and within one particular profession. For instance, Whitehead et al. (1999)'s survey of Tennessee prosecutors, public defenders, and state legislators found that legislators and prosecutors shared similar levels of death penalty support (in the percentage of 90s), much higher than the 21% support rate of public defenders (see also Whitehead, 1998). In contrast, Callahan et al. (2000) surveyed 191 assistant district attorneys from New York and the results showed that surveyed prosecutors, while doing similar work in the same jurisdiction, held divergent views about capital punishment. Often, police officers report a high level of support for capital punishment (Hughes & Robinson, 2013) but significant variations were also found among police officers based on factors such as gender, race, and education (Mignon & Holmes, 1999). One study of Australian police found that 81% of Australian police opposed the death penalty, despite their similar personality traits with officers from other nations, thus possibly reflecting unique cultural and professional experiences of Australian police (Semrad et al., 2021).

Second, a few studies compared opinions by elite professional groups (especially state legislators) with that of the general public and found that the professionals often overestimated death penalty support levels of the public (Hamm, 1989; Sandys & McGarrell, 1994; Whitehead et al., 1999). For instance, based on survey data collected in Indiana, McGarrell and Sandys (1996) found that Indiana citizens' support for capital punishment decreased from 76% to 26% when the LWOP coupled with work and restitution to the victim's family was offered to survey respondents; in contrast, 40% of Indiana legislators believed that their constituents would still prefer capital punishment when such an alternative was offered. Such a misconception, likely built upon legislators' perception of citizens' death penalty support based on the oversimplified survey question, could have a profound impact on state legislation and policymaking.

Third, limited efforts have been made to examine if and how the death penalty law and practice may impact CJPs' work and their opinions on capital punishment, and the answers are far from clear. For instance, Callahan et al. (2000) situated their study within the context of New York's effort to reinstate the death penalty in 1995 and expressed concerns that such a drastic change may force New York prosecutors to face unprecedented challenges. In contrast, Hawkins (2006) concluded that there were more similarities between death penalty cases and non-death penalty cases from a prosecutor's perspective, thus mitigating concerns about prosecuting death penalty cases. Though the famous Marshall hypotheses have been tested extensively (see Liang et al., 2019 for a review), whether CJPs' experience would lead to changes to their death penalty opinion remains largely unknown. The rare study of Australian police's death penalty opinion discussed above (Semrad et al., 2021) showed that Australian police had a much higher level of opposition to the death penalty compared to new recruits (81% vs. 42%), indicating potential effect of Australian police's professionalization. In comparison, Hughes and Robinson's study (2013) showed that North Carolina police officers overwhelmingly favored the use of capital punishment, albeit they concurrently acknowledged flaws of the criminal justice system (e.g., wrongful convictions and executions). A rare study of judges in India and Bangladesh found a similar paradox in which judges acknowledged systemic prob-

lems but expressed their willingness to retain the death penalty practice (Hoyle & Lehrfreund, 2020). These results showed that people's death penalty opinion, including that of CJPs, is likely an outcome of balancing various factors in a complicated manner.

Studies of China's public opinion on capital punishment

Compared to the Western literature, empirical research on Chinese people's death penalty opinion is still rather limited, though the Chinese government often cites the "overwhelming public support" to buttress its death penalty use (see a review by Liang & Liu, 2021, Chap. 1). The bulk of existing studies can be summarized in two groups: one focused on quantitative survey data; the other turned to people's spontaneous reactions to controversial cases and examined how people's outrage in high-profile cases may have influenced judicial sentencing (see Liu & Liang, 2019; Liang & Liu, 2021). Our review below focuses on quantitative survey studies only.

To date, independent studies have produced more than 30 published studies. While overseas scholars often relied on convenient student samples due to their lack of access to research subjects (Cao & Cullen, 2001; Jiang et al., 2010, 2018; Jiang & Wang, 2008; Lambert et al., 2007, 2014; Liang et al., 2006; Liang et al. 2024, Qi & Oberwittler, 2009; Wu et al., 2011), studies conducted by Chinese domestic scholars reached a broader base of population with larger samples (Jia, 2005; Jiang, 2008; Liang & Ma, 2020; Liang & Chen, 2020; Liang & Wang, 2020; Liu, 2021, 2022; Mo & Zeng, 2009; Oberwittler & Qi, 2009; Oberwittler et al., 2010; Yuan, 2009; Zhao, 2015; Zhu, 2009). Among all, only a few research managed to collect random samples. The first reported effort was made by the Law Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in 1995, but it only covered three provinces and its survey methodology was not disclosed (cited in Liu, 2021, pp. 528–529; see also Hu, 2000).

The next major work was done by the Max Planck Institute and its collaborators in China in 2007 and 2008 (Max Planck survey). Relying on multistage stratified sampling, this study surveyed 4,472 residents in Beijing, Hubei, and Guangdong and produced many publications (He, 2009; Kuang, 2009; Mo & Zeng, 2009; Oberwittler & Qi, 2009; Oberwittler et al., 2010; Zhang & He, 2011). In comparison, Zhao (2015) randomly sampled 1,010 residents in one undisclosed mid-size city in 2013 and limited his study to one capital offense, organizing prostitution (which is no longer a capital offense after the Chinese Criminal Law was amended in 2015). The last known effort was completed in 2014 as part of the China Family Panel Studies conducted by the Institute of Social Science Survey of Peking University (CFPS survey). Using multistage probability sampling, the CFPS survey interviewed 14,960 households with 33,600 adult respondents from 25 provinces (covering 95% of the mainland Chinese population) and produced many recent publications (Liang & Ma, 2020; Liang & Chen, 2020; Liang & Wang, 2020; Liu, 2021, 2022).

Collectively, existing survey studies confirmed the overall majority support for the death penalty in China, though the support rates varied greatly from the 50s to the 90s (in percentages) depending upon the targeted populations (Max Planck survey). Studies that covered a variety of specific capital crimes showed that people's support rates generally declined when the perceived severity of the crime lessened

(Jia, 2005; Liang et al., 2019; Oberwittler et al., 2010; Qi & Oberwittler, 2009). Consistent with Western research, Chinese death penalty supporters embraced major punishment justifications such as deterrence, retribution, and incapacitation (Liang et al., 2006; Jiang et al., 2007, 2009; Oberwittler & Qi, 2009; Wu et al., 2011). Besides demographics, several variables such as one's fear of crime, victimization, and belief in punitive penal ideology were found correlated with one's support for capital punishment (Oberwittler & Qi, 2009; Wu et al., 2011).

Among published studies, nine examined Chinese CJPs' death penalty opinions. As the first effort, Jiang (2008) surveyed 180 lawyers, judges, prosecutors, law students, and urban and rural residents (30 respondents for each group) from Hunan and Hubei provinces and compared their death penalty support rates. The results showed that judges and prosecutors' support rates tended to be higher than other groups, but lawyers' support rates normally ranked in the middle. However, the support rates varied depending on specific capital crimes asked: for instance, judges' support rate was the lowest when corruption crimes were asked (while rural residents opined the highest support rate). Zhu's study (2009) surveyed court and procuratorate workers, police, lawyers, the general public, and inmates (with subsample sizes ranging from 629 to 820) on certain death penalty procedural issues, but not whether they would support capital punishment. Zhang and He (2011) surveyed 3,150 residents from various professions in Xi'an (the capital city of Shannxi province) in 2009, including 300 gong-jian-fa workers and 150 attorneys. When comparing the results across various professions, 73.3% of gong-jian-fa workers supported the death penalty, only trailed by governmental employees (74.7% support rate); lawyers again reported a much lower support rate (58%), only higher than that of students.

By its design, the Max Planck survey targeted both the general public (n=4,472) and CJPs (n=455), and some of its published studies (He, 2009; Kuang, 2009; Mo & Zeng, 2009; Oberwittler et al., 2010) focused on comparisons between these two populations. Albeit higher death penalty support rates were reported for CJPs (e.g., 91.2% overall) than that of the general public (57.8% overall), some similar patterns were noticed. For instance, both groups' support for capital punishment declined when the severity of capital offenses lessened, when they were presented with hypothetical cases and asked to apply proper punishment, and when they were given alternatives such as the LWOP (e.g., He, 2009; Oberwittler et al., 2010). Meanwhile, substantial differences existed. For example, while two-thirds of the general public questioned the fair administration of capital punishment in practice, about two-thirds of the CJPs believed that the system treated all defendants equally; over 50% of the general public believed that wrong convictions are likely, but 81% of the CJPs rejected such a belief (Kuang, 2009).[2] Unfortunately, treating the CJPs as one collective group, studies based on the Max Planck survey did not distinguish various CJPs and explore their differences.

In 2018 and 2019, Jiang (2020) surveyed 222 defense lawyers on their opinions regarding four capital drug offenses (including smuggling, trafficking, transporting, and manufacturing drugs, see Article 347 of the Criminal Law). Given their experi-

[2] In comparison, He's study on wrongful convictions (2016) showed that Chinese CJPs tend to underestimate the extent of wrongful convictions in China.

ence of defending clients who were charged with such crimes, the surveyed lawyers reported rather low death penalty support rates (ranging from 24% to 41%), despite their strong belief in deterrence of capital punishment for drug crimes. Most recently, Liu (2022) managed to combine data from a survey of 160 judges with the CFPS survey. His analysis found that Chinese judges relied on online public opinion to infer public attitudes toward the death penalty. As online opinion is biased and more punitive (witnessed from the CFPS survey), online information may have led to judges' misconception of strong public support and their overestimation of public punitiveness.

In sum, studies of Chinese CJPs' death penalty opinion faced similar challenges as in the Western literature (e.g., relying upon nonrandom samples) and were very limited in their scope of examination. Collectively, they reported CJPs' higher death penalty support rates than the general public, but significant variations were witnessed across capital offenses. Given their interests and embeddedness in the criminal justice system, Chinese CJPs apparently defended capital punishment practice (e.g., on fair administration and avoiding wrong convictions). While there were signs indicating variations across different CJPs (e.g., lower support rates by lawyers), little in-depth comparisons among CJPs are done. Exploring potential opinion differences by various CJPs, we suggest, is meaningful for several reasons. First, it contributes to our general knowledge of death penalty public opinion, potentially debunking myths about invariance of CJPs' opinions. Second, insights gained from various CJPs help shape more informed and effective policies. Albeit CJPs are all involved in the criminal justice system, their various roles and functions (e.g., policing, prosecution, adjudication) demand closer scrutiny. Better understanding of their opinions sheds light on how the death penalty may affect their work in unique ways on issues such as wrongful convictions and sentencing unfairness. Third, given their unique position, CJPs can potentially influence public opinion and legislative decision-making. Nevertheless, endeavors to explore CJPs' opinions should be situated within the cultural, legal and political context of a society. This study turns to China.

Current study

This study aims to explore potential death penalty opinion differences by various CJPs from China. Specifically, we ask the following two related research questions: (1) Are there differences by various CJPs regarding their death penalty opinions? (2) What factors are potentially correlated with CJPs' death penalty opinions?

Unfortunately, as reviewed, very few attempts were made to address these questions empirically, and neither the Western nor the Chinese literature delineated a theory that potentially explains such differences (or lack thereof). As we argued, any attempt should be situated within the specific context of a society. In the case of China, as discussed in the introduction, several factors could lead to similarities of CJPs' death penalty views, including China's long history and cultural 'acceptance' of capital punishment as a legitimate governmental tool (Lu & Miethe, 2007), the non-democratic nature of the Chinese government and its use of propaganda to buttress its death penalty use (Liang & Liu, 2021, Chap. 1), and the unique collaborative working relationship among Chinese gong-jian-fa workers (Chen, 2005; McConville

et al., 2011; Mou, 2020). Meanwhile, there are factors that potentially explain opinion differences by CJPs. First, albeit working in the same system, different roles and duties by CJPs may lead to diverse opinions. For instance, evident from both the Chinese and Western literature (e.g., Jiang, 2020; Whitehead, 1998), lawyers (especially criminal defense lawyers) could prioritize the interests of their profession and clients with a less zeal toward capital punishment. Unlike police and correctional officers who often hold a punitive view collectively (e.g., Hughes & Robinson, 2013), judges and prosecutors play a direct role in capital prosecution and sentencing and may thus be more cautious with the use of capital punishment. Second, the Chinese literature showed variations across different capital offenses. We may expect more opinion similarities for some crimes (e.g., most heinous crimes) than others (e.g., nonviolent crimes) (e.g., Jiang, 2008). Third, potential demographic differences of various CJPs (e.g., sex, education) and their death penalty justifications (e.g., retribution, deterrence) may lead to divergent views. For the former, CJPs' special education and training (e.g., law education) may influence their views; for the latter, Jiang's study (2020) of Chinese lawyers showed that lawyers who held a stronger belief in deterrence lent more support to capital punishment. Differences of demographics and death penalty justifications should thus be taken into consideration.

Data and analytical strategy

Data in this research were collected from one southern Chinese city with a population of three million registered residents by 2020. This city shares many typical characteristics of mid-size Chinese cities in socio-economic dimensions and the structure and operation of criminal justice system. Due to increasing restrictions on studies of sensitive topics (e.g., capital punishment), we avoid disclosing further information that can help identify the city.

To capture CJPs as comprehensively as possible, we conducted surveys on six CJP groups including police, prosecutors, judges, lawyers, correctional officers, and others (primarily consisting of bailiffs and forensic experts). Unfortunately, random sampling is not possible. Instead, we adopted purposive samplings to recruit respondents. Specifically, we consulted key personnel in each profession regarding the best practical means for survey distribution in order to increase the representation of the subsamples. Alongside a copy of the questionnaire, an introduction letter and a confidential and anonymous agreement letter were provided to respective administrators to whom the research team had access and applied for permission and help with survey distribution within their institutions. After gaining approval and support, the final surveys were conducted between April 15 and May 10, 2021.

Due to strict limitations of their internal management systems, the administrative staff of each institution requested on handling the distribution and return of the questionnaires internally, thus allowing no direct contact between the researchers and survey respondents. An agreement was reached that the distributed questionnaires be returned to the researchers in four days. The seven-page Chinese survey questionnaire (with a total of 62 questions) was designed for a bigger project with two versions (A and B): the first 57 questions cover respondents' demographic information, death penalty opinions, and other criminal justice related issues; the last five

questions tap their opinion on five hypothetic cases with the defendants' gender being assigned as either 'male' (A version) or 'female' (B version). To ensure randomness, both versions were randomly distributed to the administrative staff of each institution before they were distributed to respondents. This current study does *not* utilize data based on the five hypothetical cases, thus treating both versions the same. Granted, our research suffered from non-random sampling, and the researchers did not have control over the data collection process, limitations we discuss below. About 700 questionnaires were distributed among six institutions and a total of 516 completed questionnaires were returned (73.7% return rate). Despite our best effort, the subsample sizes were uneven and rather small for some groups: while the 'others' group had the largest number ($n=172$), the 'correctional officers' group had the fewest (n = 31). The small subsample sizes of these groups presented another major limitation, to be acknowledged below.

Analytically, we address our research questions through the following steps. First, we conduct cross-tabulations to examine potential opinion differences by various CJPs and capital offenses. Second, we test bivariate correlations between one's profession and demographic variables and death penalty justifications. Lastly, we turn to regression analyses to assess the independent and net effect of one's profession on death penalty opinions after controlling for demographic and death penalty justification variables.

Death penalty opinions by six professions and capital offenses

To survey respondents' death penalty opinions, we first asked their overall opinion on capital punishment and then solicited their opinions on six specific capital offenses, including homicide, rape, drug offenses, violent crimes with human death(s), nonviolent crimes without human loss, and corruption crimes. The original answers based on a 5-point Likert scale (from 'strongly support', 'support', 'neutral/not sure', 'oppose', to 'strongly oppose') were recoded into three groups ('support', 'neutral/not sure', and 'oppose'), and the data broken down by six professions are presented in Table 1.

As shown, for each opinion variable, a significant proportion of respondents reported a 'neutral' position, more so than respondents who opposed capital punishment. This justifies the necessity of using trichotomized, instead of dichotomized, variables in order to accurately measure Chinese respondents' death penalty opinions (Liang et al., 2019). We also witnessed variations of respondents' opinions by capital offenses: while the highest support rates were reported in homicide, overall opinion, and drug offenses, the lowest rates were found among nonviolent crimes without human loss and corruption crimes, reflecting the lessened severity of crimes perceived by the respondents.

Regarding the correlation between profession and each death penalty opinion, chi-square and post hoc tests were utilized in our cross tabulations, and significant results (at least $p<0.05$) were indicated in Table 1. Albeit no significant chi-square test result was found for the overall death penalty opinion, post hoc test results showed that lawyers were less likely to favor capital punishment and more likely to hold a 'neutral' position compared to other groups. Similarly, no significant chi-square test result was

Table 1 Death penalty opinions by six professions

Capital crime(s)	Judges ($n=66$)	Prosecutors ($n=68$)	Police ($n=124$)	Lawyers ($n=55$)	Correctional officers ($n=31$)	Others ($n=172$)
Overall						
Support ($n=435$)	86.4%	86.8%	84.7%	69.1%*	83.9%	87.2%
Not sure ($n=70$)	12.1%	10.3%	12.9%	29.1%*	12.9%	11.0%
Oppose ($n=11$)	1.5%	2.9%	2.4%	1.8%	3.2%	1.7%
Homicide						
Support ($n=468$)	89.4%	85.3%	91.9%	87.3%	77.4%*	95.9%*
Not sure ($n=33$)	6.1%	8.8%	6.5%	9.1%	16.1%*	2.9%*
Oppose ($n=15$)	4.5%	5.9%	1.6%	3.6%	6.5%	1.2%
Rape*						
Support ($n=383$)	54.5%*	67.6%	86.3%*	81.8%	77.4%	72.7%
Not sure ($n=106$)	34.8%*	25.0%	10.5%*	14.5%	12.9%	23.8%
Oppose ($n=27$)	10.6%*	7.4%	3.2%	3.6%	9.7%	3.5%
Drug offenses*						
Support ($n=428$)	78.8%	66.2%*	89.5%*	80.0%	74.2%	89.0%*
Not sure ($n=61$)	15.2%	20.6%*	7.3%	16.4%	12.9%	8.7%
Oppose ($n=27$)	6.1%	13.2%*	3.2%	3.6%	12.9%*	2.3%*
Violent crime with death*						
Support ($n=391$)	60.6%*	70.6%	79.8%	74.5%	67.7%	82.6%*
Not sure ($n=102$)	31.8%*	26.5%	18.5%	21.8%	22.6%	12.2%*
Oppose ($n=23$)	7.6%	2.9%	1.6%	3.6%	9.7%	5.2%
Nonviolent crime without death*						
Support ($n=301$)	37.9%*	45.6%*	69.4%*	54.5%	64.5%	63.4%
Not sure ($n=164$)	50.0%*	36.8%	25.8%	34.5%	22.6%	27.9%
Oppose ($n=51$)	12.1%	17.6%*	4.8%*	10.9%	12.9%	8.7%
Corruption*						
Support ($n=312$)	56.1%	47.1%*	69.4%*	52.7%	58.1%	64.0%
Not sure ($n=163$)	36.4%	36.8%	25.8%	41.8%	25.8%	29.7%
Oppose ($n=41$)	7.6%	16.2%*	4.8%	5.5%	16.1%	6.4%

*statistically significant (at least $p < 0.05$)

found for respondents' opinion on homicide, but correctional officers were less likely and the 'others' group were more likely to support capital punishment for homicide. The chi-square test result was significant for respondents' opinion on rape, and judges were significantly less likely to support but police were more likely to support capital punishment for rape crimes.

Similarly, significant chi-square test results were found when respondents were surveyed about drug offenses, violent crimes with human loss, nonviolent crimes without human loss, and corruption crimes. For drug offenses, prosecutors were significantly less likely to support capital punishment while police and the 'others' group were more likely to support it. In addition, prosecutors and correctional officers were more likely to oppose capital punishment compared to other groups. For violent crimes with human death(s), judges were significantly less likely to support capital punishment and more likely to be neutral while the 'others' group was more

likely to support capital punishment. For nonviolent crimes without human loss, both judges and prosecutors were less likely to support capital punishment (and judges were more likely to hold a 'neutral' position), but police were more likely to support capital punishment. Lastly, for corruption crimes, prosecutors were less likely to support capital punishment and more likely to oppose it while police were more likely to support it.

In sum, our data showed great variation of CJPs' death penalty opinions, both by capital offenses and by professions. Though respondents reported high levels of capital punishment support for homicide and drug offenses, their levels of support decreased when the severity of capital offenses lessened. Regarding variation across professions, judges and prosecutors were less likely to support capital punishment, especially with less severe crimes. In comparison, police appeared to be the most punitive group (followed by the 'others' group), especially with less severe crimes. Such variations indicate the necessity of exploring the diversity of respondents' opinions across both capital offenses and professions.

Demographic variables and death penalty justifications

As both demographic variables and death penalty justifications could impact one's death penalty opinions, we examine bivariate correlations between them and profession next.

A number of demographic variables were tested in Table 2, including sex, age (in years), one's career length (in years), education level (in three groups), whether one received a law degree, residence location (in three groups), household registration (either local or non-local), marital status (in three groups), ethnicity (Han people or ethnic minorities), and annual income (in three groups). Chi-square, ANOVA (for age and career length), and post hoc tests were run, and significant results (at least $p < 0.05$) were indicated in Table 2. As seen, *all* demographic variables were significantly correlated with profession, and post hoc tests showed that significant group differences were found across different CJPs as indicated.

Regarding sex, prosecutors were significantly more likely to be females while police officers were more likely to be males. Age-wise, judges were significantly older and prosecutors were younger. Similarly, judges had significantly longer career length and prosecutors had the shortest average length. Education-wise, police were more likely to have an education level below the bachelor's, while lawyers were more likely to hold a graduate degree. As expected, judges, prosecutors and lawyers were more likely to have a law degree, compared to other groups. In terms of residence location, police and lawyers were more likely to live in cities, while judges, prosecutors, and others were more likely to live in suburbs. Regarding household registration, police were more likely to hold a local registration, but judges and prosecutors were more likely to have a nonlocal registration. On marital status, prosecutors were more likely to be single while the 'others' group was more likely to have other marital statuses (e.g., divorced, separated, widowed). Ethnicity-wise, correctional officers were more likely to be ethnic minority members compared to other groups. Regarding annual income, lawyers were more likely to have an annual income over

Table 2 Demographic variables by six professions

	Judges ($n=66$)	Prosecutors ($n=68$)	Police ($n=124$)	Lawyers ($n=55$)	Correctional officers ($n=31$)	Others ($n=172$)
Sex*						
Female	33.3%	64.7%*	26.6%*	49.1%	35.5%	47.7%
Male	66.7%	35.3%*	73.4%*	50.9%	64.5%	52.3%
Age (mean in years)*	38.2	29.9	33.6	33.7	30.6	33.4
Career length (mean in years)*	12.5	5.5	7.7	7.0	6.1	7.4
Education*						
Graduate degree	9.1%	10.3%	2.4%*	45.5%*	3.2%	5.2%*
Bachelor degree	81.8%*	80.9%*	63.7%	49.1%*	64.5%	65.7%
Below bachelor	9.1%*	8.8%*	33.9%*	5.5%*	32.3%	29.1%*
Law degree*						
No	31.8%*	38.2%*	78.2%*	32.7%*	71.0%	73.3%*
Yes	68.2%*	61.8%*	21.8%*	67.3%*	29.0%	26.7%*
Residence location*						
Cities	34.8%*	41.2%	74.2%*	72.7%*	54.8%	40.1%*
Suburbs	59.1%*	51.5%*	19.4%*	20.0%*	32.3%	48.3%*
Rural villages	6.1%	7.4%	6.5%	7.3%	12.9%	11.6%
Household registration*						
Local	75.8%*	70.6%*	94.4%*	83.6%	80.6%	86.0%
Nonlocal	24.2%*	29.4%*	5.6%*	16.4%	19.4%	14.0%
Marital status*						
Others	12.1%	11.8%*	17.7%	21.8%	25.8%	29.1%*
Married	63.6%	44.1%	59.7%	54.5%	45.2%	48.3%
Single	24.2%	44.1%*	22.6%	23.6%	29.0%	22.7%
Ethnicity*						
Minorities	18.2%	8.8%	12.1%	21.8%	29.0%*	10.5%
Han	81.8%	91.2%	87.9%	78.2%	71.0%*	89.5%
Annual income*						
>100 K	15.2%	16.2%	12.1%*	65.5%*	9.7%	10.5%*
60–100 K	53.0%*	26.5%	35.5%	21.8%*	58.1%*	32.0%
<60 K	31.8%*	57.4%	52.4%	12.7%	32.3%	57.6%*

*statistically significant (at least $p<0.05$)

100,000 yuan, judges and correctional officers were more likely to have the mid-level annual income (between 60,000 and 100,000 yuan), and the 'others' group has the lowest income level (below 60,000 yuan).

Given suggestions from the literature (Liang et al., 2006; Jiang et al., 2007, 2009; Oberwittler & Qi, 2009; Wu et al., 2011), our questionnaire contained a series of questions that solicited respondents' justifications for their support or disapproval of the death penalty based on a 5-point Likert scale (from 'strongly support' to 'strongly oppose'). Based on the rationales of these justifications, we created six justification indexes after their coding was reversed, including deterrence, just deserts, (maintaining) law and order, (death penalty being) inhumane punishment, inadequacy of the LWOP (as the alternative punishment), and sentencing unfairness (concerns about disparities and unfairness of death sentencing). The reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) of these indexes ranges from 0.567 to 0.759 (see Appendix 1 for variables

Table 3 ANOVA results of death penalty justifications by six professions

	Judges ($n=66$)	Prosecutors ($n=68$)	Police ($n=124$)	Lawyers ($n=55$)	Correctional officers ($n=31$)	Others ($n=172$)
Deterrence (mean)***	3.76	3.63	3.88	3.41	3.57	3.84
Just deserts (mean)***	3.23	3.26	3.58	3.18	3.32	3.47
Law & order (mean)***	3.41	3.40	3.74	3.29	3.50	3.56
Inhuman punishment (mean)	3.17	3.17	3.22	3.02	3.19	3.21
Inadequacy of LWOP (mean)***	2.94	3.28	3.58	3.12	3.37	3.31
Sentencing unfairness (mean)**	2.94	3.15	3.38	3.07	3.42	3.19

** $p<0.01$, *** $p<0.001$

included in each index and corresponding alpha coefficient).[3] Being mathematical means of included items in each index, the index values represent respondents' agreement to each index: the higher the value is, the stronger one's belief is in an index.

To explore potential variation of death penalty justifications by different CJPs, we ran a series of ANOVA analyses of the index values and the results are shown in Table 3. Except inhuman punishment index, significant results were found in other indexes. Specifically, for deterrence, just deserts, and law and order indexes, police and the 'others' group exhibited the strongest belief while lawyers held the least belief. For inadequacy of LWOP index, police held the strongest belief and judges had the least (followed by lawyers). Lastly, for sentencing unfairness index, correctional officers and police expressed the most concerns while judges and lawyers opined the least concerns. The results indicated much variation across CJPs in their death penalty justifications. Apparently, profession not only correlates with one's support (or disapproval) level of capital punishment but also respective rationales and justifications.

Regression analyses

To test if profession has a net, independent impact on one's death penalty opinions, we turn to regression analyses to control demographic variables and death penalty justifications. Specifically, our dependent variables include the overall death penalty opinion and six opinion variables on specific capital offenses in Table 1. The primary variable of our interest is profession. All demographic variables and death penalty justification indexes in Tables 2 and 3 are included as control variables. Multicollinearity diagnostics do not reveal any potential issues.

As our dependent variables are ordinal level variables, we ran ordinal regressions initially (via the PLUM program in SPSS). Nevertheless, the assumption of parallel lines is violated at the 0.05 significance level in several models. As a result, we

[3] We explored factor analysis initially among items utilized in Appendix 1. The results (available upon request) do *not* load neatly as the theoretical meanings of the variables may suggest. The results indicated three components: two were dominated by items of deterrence and inhuman punishments respectively, and one was mixed with items from various indexes in Appendix 1. In creating indexes, we weighed more on suggestions from past studies, the underlying theoretical meanings of these indexes, and the results of reliability coefficient instead of the factor analysis results.

turned to generalized ordered logit models (GOLOGIT). Specifically, presenting a new program (gologit2) in STATA for ordinal dependent variables, Williams (2006, 2016) recommended generalized ordered logit/partial proportional-odds models over either proportional-odds models that violate the proportional-odds assumption or multinomial models that fail to use the information about the proper order of various categories contained in ordinal dependent variables and often generate results less parsimonious. Before the availability of the GOLOGIT, when the proportional-odds assumption (the parallel line assumption in SPSS) is violated, researchers often choose either multinomial models or proportional-odds models despite such violations. Fortunately, the GOLOGIT is able to cope with violations of the proportional-odds assumption, identifying predictors that violate the assumption and allowing these predictors to fit without constraints, and keeping intact predictors that do not violate the assumption at the same time. Technically, the GOLOGIT would be a better model in most situations (Williams, 2006, 2016).[4]

The results of GOLOGIT models (via the gologit2 program in STATA) are presented in Table 4. Given the nature of GOLOGIT, for each ordinal dependent variable, two comparisons were generated between a lower ranked category and a higher ranked category in our case, including (1) the 'support' group (lower ranked) vs. the combined 'neutral' and 'oppose' group (higher ranked) (labeled Model 1) and (2) the combined 'support' and 'neutral' group (lower ranked) vs. the 'oppose' group (higher ranked) (labeled Model 2). For our target variable 'profession', the 'others' professional group was set as the reference group. Besides continuous variables (age, career length, and death penalty justification indexes), the reference groups of all other categorial demographic variables are explicitly labeled in Table 4. Our explanation of the results focused on full models when all variables were entered. A positive significant result of a variable (or a category of a variable) would indicate its correlation with the higher ranked category of the dependent variable (thus, being significantly less likely to support capital punishment given the coding of our opinion variables); in contrast, a negative significant result would indicate one's association with the lower ranked category of the dependent variable (thus a higher likelihood to support capital punishment).

The first two columns of Table 4 detail the GOLOGIT results on the overall death penalty opinion. Only one professional group, lawyers, was significant in Model 2: holding other variables constant, lawyers were less likely to hold an 'oppose' position compared to the 'others' professional group. Among demographic variables, only annual income over 100,000 yuan was significant in Model 1: respondents with an annual income over 100,000 yuan (compared to less than 60,000 yuan annual income) were less likely to support capital punishment. In Model 2, over 100,000-yuan annual income was again significant (exerting the same effect). Moreover, graduate education was significant: respondents with graduate education (compared to respondents without a bachelor's degree) were more likely to hold an 'oppose' position than a

[4] In our diagnosis, we run three different models, including multinomial models, ordinal regression models, and the GOLOGIT models (via STATA). Compared to results of multinomial and PLUM models, the results of the GOLOGIT models (presented in Table 4) are more encompassing and generate the best model fitting. The results of the other two models and our comparisons, albeit not presented, are available upon request.

Table 4 Generalized ordered logit regression on death penalty opinions

	Overall opinion		Homicide opinion		Rape opinion		Drug offense opinion		Violent crime opinion		Nonviolent crime opinion		Corruption crime opinion	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
	B(S.E.)	B(S.E.)	B(S.E.)	B(S.E.)	B(S.E.)	B(S.E.)	B(S.E.)	B(S.E.)	B(S.E.)	B(S.E.)	B(S.E.)	B(S.E.)	B(S.E.)	B(S.E.)
Professions														
Judges	.48(.51)	.48(.51)	1.42(.78)	1.42(.78)	.62(.38)	.62(.38)	1.10(.51)*	1.10(.51)*	.99(.40)*	.99(.40)*	.74(.35)*	.74(.35)*	−.07(.35)	−.07(.35)
Prosecutors	−.48(.52)	−.48(.52)	1.64(.66)*	1.64(.66)*	.09(.40)	.09(.40)	1.20(.48)*	1.20(.48)*	.13(.43)	.13(.43)	.73(.34)*	.73(.34)*	.24(.33)	.24(.33)
Police	.54(.42)	.54(.42)	1.75(.66)**	1.75(.66)**	−.39(.37)	−.39(.37)	.94(.50)	.94(.50)	.55(.37)	.55(.37)	.49(.30)	.49(.30)	.09(.29)	.09(.29)
Lawyers	.55(.51)	−3.37(1.33)*	1.35(.81)	−1.21(1.38)	−.37(.52)	−2.14(.93)*	.16(.57)	.16(.57)	.01(.48)	.01(.48)	.37(.40)	.37(.40)	−.11(.39)	−.11(.39)
Corrections	−.23(.68)	−.23(.68)	2.71(.86)**	2.71(.86)**	−.25(.59)	−.25(.59)	1.12(.66)	1.12(.66)	.70(.52)	.70(.52)	.02(.49)	.02(.49)	.24(.47)	.24(.47)
Others (reference)														
Sex														
Females	.12(.30)	.12(.30)	−.21(.43)	2.62(1.15)*	−.43(.26)	−1.86(.59)**	−.29(.32)	−.29(.32)	−.14(.26)	−.14(.26)	−.04(.22)	−.04(.22)	.06(.22)	.83(.38)*
Males (reference)														
Age	−.01(.04)	−.01(.04)	.08(.05)	.08(.05)	−.0002(.03)	−.0002(.03)	.04(.04)	−.14(.06)*	−.03(.04)	−.03(.04)	.0004(.03)	.0004(.03)	−.009(.03)	−.009(.03)
Career length	−.05(.04)	−.05(.04)	−.08(.06)	−.08(.06)	−.01(.03)	−.01(.03)	−.12(.05)	−.11(.08)	−.006(.04)	−.006(.04)	−.02(.03)	−.02(.03)	.004(.03)	.004(.03)
Education														
Graduate	−.56(.62)	3.85(1.23)**	−1.36(.84)	−1.36(.84)	−.77(.57)	2.00(.80)*	−1.07(.66)	−1.07(.66)	−.33(.56)	1.83(.91)*	−.42(.45)	−.42(.45)	−.14(.43)	−.14(.43)
Bachelor	−.35(.36)	−.35(.36)	−1.34(.50)**	−1.34(.50)**	−.69(.31)*	−.69(.31)*	−.42(.40)	−.42(.40)	−.57(.32)	−.57(.32)	−.37(.27)	−.37(.27)	−.47(.26)	−.47(.26)
Below bachelor (reference)														
Law degree														
No	−.41(.35)	−.41(.35)	−.28(.50)	−.28(.50)	−.16(.29)	−.16(.29)	−.62(.37)	−.62(.37)	−.63(.30)*	1.47(.69)*	−.35(.25)	−.35(.25)	−.61(.24)**	−.61(.24)**
Yes (reference)														
Location														
Cities	−.60(.50)	−.60(.50)	−.75(.70)	−.75(.70)	−.33(.46)	−.33(.46)	−1.7(.5)***	−1.7(.51)***	−.87(.43)*	−2.37(.74)***	−1.3(.4)***	−1.3(.4)***	−.52(.37)	−.52(.37)
Suburbs	−.49(.48)	−.49(.48)	.705(.68)	.705(.68)	.76(.45)	.76(.45)	−.76(.48)	−.76(.48)	−.53(.42)	−.53(.42)	−.28(.38)	−.28(.38)	−.14(.37)	−.14(.37)
Urban villages (reference)														
Household registration														
Local	−.15(.41)	−.15(.41)	−.07(.52)	−3.1(.96)***	−.47(.32)	−2.6(.64)***	−.67(.37)	−.67(.37)	.23(.33)	.23(.33)	−.74(.28)**	−.74(.28)**	−.47(.29)	−1.7(.4)***
Nonlocal (reference)														

Table 4 (continued)

	Overall opinion		Homicide opinion		Rape opinion		Drug offense opinion		Violent crime opinion		Nonviolent crime opinion		Corruption crime opinion	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
	B(S.E.)	B(S.E.)	B(S.E.)	B(S.E.)	B(S.E.)	B(S.E.)	B(S.E.)	B(S.E.)	B(S.E.)	B(S.E.)	B(S.E.)	B(S.E.)	B(S.E.)	B(S.E.)
Marital status														
Others	–.57(.45)	–.57(.45)	–.33(.60)	–.33(.60)	–.41(.38)	–3.3(.95)***	–.09(.45)	–.09(.45)	–.61(.39)	.52(.58)	.02(.31)	.02(.31)	–.08(.32)	–1.28(.61)*
Married	–.17(.36)	–.17(.36)	–.86(.50)	–.86(.50)	–.46(.32)	–.46(.32)	–.31(.38)	–.31(.38)	–.50(.32)	–.50(.32)	–.22(.28)	–.22(.28)	–.06(.27)	–.06(.27)
Single (reference)														
Ethnicity														
Minorities	–.84(.46)	–.84(.46)	–.16(.56)	–.16(.56)	–.51(.39)	3.11(.71)***	.27(.42)	.27(.42)	.31(.34)	1.33(.52)*	–.11(.32)	1.30(.39)***	.02(.30)	.02(.30)
Han (reference)														
Annual income														
> 100K	1.18(.48)*	1.18(.48)*	.32(.65)	2.67(.98)**	.18(.45)	.18(.45)	–.25(.51)	–.25(.51)	.03(.45)	.03(.45)	.22(.37)	.22(.37)	.13(.36)	.13(.36)
60–100K	.35(.37)	.35(.37)	–.50(.52)	–3.52(1.50)*	–.06(.30)	–.06(.30)	–.20(.39)	–.20(.39)	.23(.31)	.23(.31)	.10(.26)	.10(.26)	.22(.25)	.22(.25)
< 60K (reference)														
Deterrence	–1.3(.34)***	–1.3(.34)***	–2.2(.5)***	–2.22(.5)***	.30(.27)	.30(.27)	–1.6(.36)***	–1.6(.36)***	–.40(.27)	–.40(.27)	.46(.23)*	.46(.23)*	.16(.24)	–.49(.33)
Just deserts	.06(.27)	.06(.27)	.77(.38)*	–2.98(1.1)**	–.10(.22)	–.10(.22)	–.39(.27)	–.39(.27)	–.62(.23)**	–.62(.23)**	–.20(.21)	–.90(.28)***	–.80(.20)***	–.80(.20)***
Law & order	–1.21(.43)**	–2.8(.76)***	–1.29(.61)*	–1.29(.61)*	–1.2(.35)***	–1.2(.35)***	–1.42(.46)**	–1.42(.46)**	–.84(.37)*	–.84(.37)*	–1.2(.3)***	–1.19(.3)***	–.61(.30)*	–.61(.30)*
Inhumane punishment	.47(.26)	.47(.26)	1.41(.44)***	1.41(.44)**	–.14(.21)	–1.66(.4)***	.51(.29)	.51(.29)	.24(.22)	.24(.22)	–.19(.18)	–.82(.28)**	–.49(.17)**	–.49(.17)**
Inadequacy of LWOP	.59(.29)*	.59(.29)*	–.27(.43)	2.48(.80)**	–.70(.24)**	.37(.35)	–.24(.30)	–.24(.30)	–.25(.23)	–.25(.23)	–.46(.21)*	.25(.26)	.21(.21)	85(32)**
Sentencing unfairness	–.43(.27)	–.43(.27)	–.24(.38)	2.48(1.19)*	.34(.23)	.34(.23)	.53(.31)	.53(.31)	–.27(.24)	–.27(.24)	.005(.20)	.005(.20)	.05(.20)	.05(.20)
Constant	5.67(1.49)***	7.0(2.1)***	2.7(2.03)	–3.85(3.18)	5.3(1.32)***	5.5(1.96)**	8.9(1.6)***	11.1(2.0)***	8.1(1.37)***	3.95(1.5)**	6.5(1.2)***	5.6(1.5)***	6.0(1.13)***	4.5(1.44)**
Observations	516		516		516		516		516		516		516	
LR chi2	137.77***		148.96***		195.18***		210.35***		176.54***		213.40***		163.03***	
McFadden R^2	.269		.393		.270		.363		.256		.228		.182	

Z score test: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$; Model 1: the 'support' group vs. the combined 'neutral' and 'oppose' group; Model 2: the combined 'support' and 'neutral' group vs. the 'oppose' group

combined 'support/neutral' position. Three death penalty justification indexes were significant in both models: as expected, respondents who held a stronger belief in deterrence or law and order were correlated with capital punishment support. The effect of inadequacy of LWOP, however, was contrary to our expectation: respondents with a stronger belief that the LWOP was an inadequate alternative to capital punishment were *less* likely to support capital punishment.

Next, regarding the GOLOGIT results on homicide, three professional groups, prosecutors, police, and correction officers were significant in both models: holding else constant, they were less likely to support capital punishment than the 'others' professional group. Among demographic variables, sex, bachelor education, household registration, and annual income were significant: having a bachelor's degree (compared to those without a degree), a local household registration (compared to a nonlocal registration), and an annual income between 60,000 and 100,000 yuan (compared to an annual income below 60,000 yuan) were correlated with capital punishment support; being females and having an annual income above 100,000 yuan (compared to an annual income below 60,000 yuan) were correlated with less support of capital punishment. All six death penalty justification indexes were significant in at least one model: in Model 1, respondents who held a stronger belief in deterrence or law and order were more likely to support capital punishment, and respondents who were more likely to believe that capital punishment is inhumane were less likely to support capital punishment (as expected). Nevertheless, respondents who held a stronger belief in just deserts were less likely to support capital punishment unexpectedly. In Model 2, the effects of deterrence, just deserts, law and order, inhuman punishment, and sentencing unfairness indexes were in the anticipated directions: respondents with a stronger belief in deterrence, just deserts, or law and order were correlated with stronger support to capital punishment; respondents with a stronger belief in inhuman punishment or sentencing unfairness were associated with less support to capital punishment. In contrast, a stronger belief in the inadequacy of the LWOP was associated with less support to capital punishment unexpectedly.

Regarding respondents' opinion on rape, only lawyers were significant in Model 2 after controlling for other variables: they were more likely than the 'others' professional group to hold a combined 'support/neutral' position than an 'oppose' position. Among significant demographic variables, being females, having a bachelor's degree (compared to those without a degree), having a local household registration (compared to nonlocal registrations), and marital status being 'others' (compared to singles) were significantly associated with stronger support to capital punishment; in contrast, having graduate education (compared to those without a degree) and being ethnic minority members (compared to Han people) were correlated with less support. Three death penalty justification indexes were significant: respondents who held a stronger belief in law and order or that the LWOP is an inadequate alternative were more likely to support capital punishment, but a stronger belief in capital punishment being inhuman punishment was associated with more death penalty support unexpectedly.

For respondents' opinion on drug offenses, judges and prosecutors remained significant in both models after controlling for other variables: compared to the

'others' group, judges and prosecutors were less likely to support capital punishment. Among demographic variables, age was significant in Model 2 and living in cities was significant in both models: being younger and living in cities (compared to living in rural villages) were correlated with support of capital punishment. Deterrence and law and order were significant in both models: holding a stronger belief in deterrence or law and order was correlated with capital punishment support.

For respondents' opinion on violent crimes with human death(s), judges were the only professional group significant: compared to the 'others' group, they were less likely to support capital punishment. Among demographic variables, graduate education, law degree, living in cities, and being an ethnic minority member were significant in at least one model: living in cities (compared to living in rural areas) was correlated with support of capital punishment, while graduate education (compared to those without a bachelor degree) and being an ethnic minority member (compared to Han people) were correlated with less support of capital punishment. Having a law degree was significantly correlated with more capital punishment support in Model 2, but less support in Model 1. Just deserts and law and order were significant in both models: as expected, holding a stronger belief in just deserts or law and order was correlated with support of capital punishment.

For respondents' opinion on nonviolent crimes without human death(s), compared to the 'others' professional group, judges and prosecutors were again correlated with less support of capital punishment. Living in cities, household registration, and ethnicity were the significant demographic variables: living in cities (compared to living in rural villages) and having a local household registration (compared to a nonlocal registration) were correlated with support of capital punishment, while being ethnic minority members (compared to Han people) was correlated with less support. Five death penalty justification indexes were significant: holding a stronger belief in just deserts, law and order, or that the LWOP is an inadequate alternative was correlated with capital punishment support as anticipated, but holding a stronger belief in deterrence was correlated with less support of capital punishment unexpectedly (in both models) and a stronger belief in the death penalty being inhuman punishment was correlated with more support of capital punishment surprisingly (in Model 2).

Lastly, for respondents' opinion on corruption crimes, none of the professions was significantly different from the 'others' group. Among demographic variables, without a law degree, having a local household registration (compared to a nonlocal registration), and marital status being 'others' (compared to singles) were significantly correlated with support of capital punishment; compared to males, females were less likely to support capital punishment. Among justification indexes, as anticipated, holding a stronger belief in just deserts or law and order was significantly correlated with capital punishment support, but holding a stronger belief that capital punishment is inhumane was correlated with capital punishment support unexpectedly and a stronger belief that the LWOP is an inadequate alternative was surprisingly correlated with less support of capital punishment.

Discussion and conclusion

As reviewed, the research on CJPs' death penalty opinions is very limited, especially on comparisons across various professions. To date, no viable theories have been proposed to explain potential opinion differences by CJPs. Often, theories are proposed to understand decision-making by a unique group of professionals (e.g., judges' sentencing decisions by the focal concerns theory, see Steffensmeier et al., 1998), but their applicability to other groups of CJPs is very limited (e.g., CJPs whose jobs do not involve sentencing). This study aimed to explore death penalty opinion differences across six groups of Chinese CJPs based on a nonrandom sample from one southern city in China. The surveyed CJPs are not statistically representative of the city, let alone the whole nation, although this limitation was a common challenge to all past studies given limited access to CJPs. Another related limitation was small subsample sizes (e.g., correctional officers), which could have affected the statistical results. One other limitation was our lack of control over data collection, as we had to rely on the administration of each professional institution to distribute and collect questionnaires. All these operational challenges to some extent reflected the perceived sensitivity of the death penalty as a topic for research given China's tight control of death penalty information (Smith, 2020). Being explorative and nongeneralizable in nature, the results of our study need to be interpreted with caution.

With these limitations in mind, our study makes a significant contribution to the existing studies with a number of key findings. First, consistent with findings of other populations (Jia, 2005; Liang et al., 2019; Oberwittler et al., 2010), our data showed that Chinese CJPs' opinion on capital punishment varied by capital offenses (Table 1). When the severity of crimes lessened, respondents' level of death penalty support declined, which was evident among all CJP groups. The regression results (Table 4) also showed that the nature of the capital offense mattered, which reaffirms the concern by scholars about using the general abstract survey question as the universal measure for people's death penalty opinion (Bowers et al., 1994), especially when a nation such as China carries a great number of diverse capital offenses. Moreover, for each opinion variable, the percentage of the 'neutral/not sure' group was bigger than the 'oppose' group, and when other variables were controlled for, the regression results showed significant differences between the two full models from time to time, indicating the statistical impact of the 'neutral' group. This finding confirmed the importance of paying attention to the indeterminate group when Chinese people's death penalty opinions are examined (Max Planck survey; Liang et al., 2019). This lesson could be equally applied to other nations where capital punishment is viable for multiple capital crimes and a significant proportion of the general population does not hold unequivocal (favor or oppose) views toward capital punishment.

Second, consistent with Western literature, much variation was found across various professionals (and it also depends on the specific capital offenses surveyed). The bivariate results (Table 1) showed that lawyers were significantly less likely to favor capital punishment (and more likely to be 'not sure') for the overall death penalty opinion, but they were not significantly different from other groups when specific capital offenses were asked. Rather it is judges and prosecutors who were more cautious in supporting capital punishment when specific capital offenses were asked

(especially with less severe crimes). In comparison, police appeared to be the most punitive group (followed by the 'others' professional group). When demographic and control variables were controlled for in regressions (Table 4), compared to the 'others' group, judges and prosecutors were significantly less likely to favor capital punishment in several models (drug, violent, and nonviolent crimes for judges, and homicide, drug, and nonviolent crimes for prosecutors). For homicide, besides prosecutors, police and correctional officers were significantly less likely to support capital punishment compared to the 'others' professional group. For the overall opinion and rape crime opinion, lawyers were the only group significantly different from the 'others' group, showing *more* support for capital punishment when the combined 'support'/'neutral' group was contrasted to the 'oppose' group, likely reflecting the impact of the 'neutral' group in our sample. None of the CJP groups turned out to be significant for corruption crimes, reflecting their relative consensus on corruption crimes in China.

Beyond the variations of capital offenses, these results seemingly reflected the nature and impact of different professions. For instance, judges and prosecutors are the ones that have a direct role in prosecuting and sentencing criminals who might face the death penalty. In particular, Chinese judges have been instructed to strictly control the use of capital punishment with the slogan of 'killing fewer and more cautiously' in the new century under the guidance of a new penal policy of ''balancing leniency and severity' (Liang & Lu, 2016; Trevaskes, 2010, 2012). Though China's Criminal Law still contains 46 capital offenses, great efforts by the judiciary have been made to limit death sentences and executions, especially among less heinous crimes. While the unique working relationship among Chinese gong-jian-fa workers makes them work more collaboratively (Chen, 2005; McConville et al., 2011; Mou, 2020), special duties and personal background (e.g., legal education) of judges and prosecutors likely set them apart from police and the 'others', as witnessed from the data. Lawyers in our sample were unique in their own way: compared to other groups, they had the lowest level of belief in deterrence, just deserts, law and order, and the death penalty being inhuman punishment (Table 3). Lawyers had also the largest indeterminate group for the overall death penalty opinion, which potentially explained lawyers' significant results (compared to the 'others' group) in Table 4. However, in most regression models, lawyers failed to differ significantly from the 'others' group after controlling for other variables. One likely reason for such indifference is lack of detailed information on lawyers' specific practices. Foreseeably, lawyers who predominantly handle criminal cases (not to mention capital cases) could hold different opinions compared to lawyers whose primary practice lies in other fields (e.g., Jiang, 2020). Unfortunately, our survey is unable to distinguish lawyers' practices. Police and correctional officers differed significantly from the 'others' group only in homicide opinions after holding others constant (Table 3). Otherwise, their views were similar to that of the 'others' in other models.

Third, opinion variations by CJPs are significantly tied to their death penalty justifications (Tables 3 and 4), consistent with past studies (e.g., Jiang, 2020; Kuang, 2009; Zhang & He, 2011). The justification indexes we tested can be categorized in two groups: the first group (including deterrence, just deserts/retribution, and law and order) could be labeled as 'core' beliefs that directly and positively buttress peo-

ple's death penalty support and indeed played a much stronger role in the regression results: out of 14 full models, deterrence had a significant result in eight models, just deserts in seven models, and law and order in all 14 models. The second group of death penalty justification indexes (including inhumane punishment, inadequacy of LWOP, and sentencing unfairness) apparently played a lesser role in comparison: the mean values of these three indexes tended to be lower than that of the first group, indicating people's weaker belief in these indexes (Table 3). Further, there were fewer significant results for these indexes among regression models (six for inhuman punishment and inadequacy of LWOP, and one for sentencing unfairness). These results to some extent dovetailed with findings of previous studies (e.g., Max Planck and CFPS surveys), which showed that Chinese citizens (CJPs included) tended to hold a strong belief in deterrence, retribution, and law and order. In comparison, the majority of Chinese CJPs did not see capital punishment as inhumane, and their (weak) assessment of the LWOP as an alternative punishment to capital punishment and (modest) concerns about sentencing disparities were not strong enough to overcome their support for capital punishment otherwise, similar to findings from other nations (Hoyle & Lehrfreund, 2020; Hughes & Robinson, 2013).

One other interesting finding on death penalty justifications was variation by capital offenses. For instance, while respondents' belief in deterrence was significant for homicide, drug, and corruption offenses, it was not for rape and violent offenses; for nonviolent crimes, a stronger belief in deterrence was correlated with less support of capital punishment contrary to the expected direction. This result might indicate how Chinese CJPs evaluate the effect of deterrence differently depending upon the specific capital offenses surveyed: that is, they may believe that deterrence work for certain crimes, but not for others such as nonviolent crimes. In comparison, the impact of just deserts (with one exception) and law and order was consistent: a stronger belief in either was correlated with stronger capital punishment support. Most of the significant results of inhuman punishment were contrary to our expectation, and the impact of inadequacy of LWOP changed directions in several models, producing outcomes difficult to explain. Future studies should make more endeavor to explore how people's death penalty justifications may change when different capital offenses (or crime scenarios) are probed, which may question the assumption that their justifications hold the same effect on their death penalty views regardless the context.

Fourth, among demographic variables that had significant results in regressions, the direction of their impact is rather consistent: graduate education, annual income over 100,000 yuan, nonlocal household registration, and being ethnic minority members were correlated with less death penalty support compared to their reference groups; bachelor education, annual income between 60,000 and 100,000 yuan, living in cities, and marital status being 'others' were correlated with stronger capital punishment support in contrast. The impact of sex hinges upon the specific capital offenses: while females showed significantly less support for capital punishment in homicide and corruption crimes, they were more likely to favor capital punishment in rape crimes (reflecting the nature of such gendered crimes against mostly female victims), a result consistent with the past literature (Hurwitz & Smithey, 1998; Liang et al., 2019; Zhao, 2015). Law degree is the only demographic variable that had inconsistent results difficult to explain: for

violent crimes, having a law degree was significantly correlated with less capital punishment support in Model 1, but more death penalty support in Model 2 (again showing the statistical impact of the 'neutral' group). For corruption, having a law degree was significantly correlated with less capital punishment support in both models. Overall, the results on education and law education are interesting: compared to respondents without a college degree, respondents with a bachelor's degree were significantly more likely to support capital punishment, a result consistent with past studies from China (Liu, 2021) although its interpretation is still subject to debate (e.g., Bakken, 2023, chapter six; Liu, 2021). However, graduate level education and legal education might have played a different role, potentially lowering CJPs' support for capital punishment. This result warrants more future study and, if proven accurate (especially on the effect of legal education), may lend support to the Marshall hypotheses (Liang et al., 2019).

Last but not least, while this study reveals many significant differences across various Chinese CJP groups, the impact of such differences in practical terms might not be readily apparent. Unlike Western democratic nations where public opinion may influence law-making either directly (e.g., via referendums) or indirectly (e.g., via election or petitions) (e.g., McGarrell & Sandys, 1996), the role of public opinion in shaping death penalty laws and policies in China is extremely limited (e.g., Liang & Liu, 2021). As Fu (2016) pointed out, one unique feature of Chinese contemporary 'penal populism' is Chinese citizens' effort to pressure gong-jian-fa workers for more punitive results in individual cases instead of lobbying the legislature for changes of the laws. Chinese courts and judges, in particular, face tremendous challenges in meting out legal rulings that are not viewed satisfactory (e.g., not harsh enough) to crime victims and their families. This phenomenon has much to do with China's unique polity and the nature of its legal system: due to lack of professional independence, gong-jian-fa workers are often forced to answer calls from both top-down and bottom-up. For the former, gong-jian-fa workers follow orders from the government (e.g., maintaining a harmonious society by reducing societal conflicts); for the latter, they need to appease the public to avoid social discord or unrest. Liu's study (2022), in this regard, showed how Chinese judges relied on online public opinion to infer public attitudes toward capital punishment, leading to their overestimation of death penalty public support. Given this reality, Chinese CJPs' own personal opinions might not matter much unfortunately in practical terms. On the other hand, Chinese CJPs are the frontline workers of the criminal justice system. Their death penalty opinions, quite different from either that of the general public or Chinese legal scholars (e.g., Max Planck survey), may put them in a unique position to play a role in death penalty reforms. For instance, Kuang (2009, p. 124) projected how various Chinese CJPs work collaboratively to reduce China's use of capital punishment through careful and arduous investigation in capital cases by police, restrained capital charges by prosecutors, effective defense by lawyers, cautious use of death sentences by judges, and proper treatment of death row inmates by correctional staff. The successful death penalty reform efforts, led by the Chinese judiciary, to reduce the use of capital punishment in the twenty-first century seemingly validated the effect of such administrative agency (Liang & Lu, 2016; Trevaskes,

2010, 2012). Nevertheless, without legislative actions to further reduce capital offenses and limit their uses, such influence from Chinese CJP practitioners might be rather limited and not sustainable (Jiang, 2020). Some specific findings of our data (e.g., little CJP opinion variation in corruption cases and their lack of enthusiasm about the LWOP being an effective alternative in replacing capital punishment) may indicate challenges (if not obstacles) in China's future death penalty reforms, echoing results of past studies (e.g., Max Planck survey). Ultimately, it is the political context of China and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s relentless pursuit of capital punishment as both a legal and political weapon in China that plays the determinative role in various aspects of China's death penalty practice (e.g., Johnson & Miao, 2016), from lawmaking to enforcement, to propaganda, and to (lack of) data sharing (Smith, 2020). Scholars have argued that it has always been the Chinese political elites who set the tone and demand for China's capital punishment use historically (e.g., Bakken, 2023). This "penal elitism" continues in contemporary China and gained support in survey data (e.g., Hu, 2000; Liu, 2021), while in the meantime the CCP deliberately emphasizes the role of Chinese culture and history to justify and buttress its adamant position on capital punishment (Liang & Liu, 2021; Liang & Lu, 2016). Within this context, the groups that are close to the political elite circle would likely exhibit high levels of support for capital punishment. Chinese CJPs, always being one key player of the CCP's governance, represent such a group, albeit this study reveals substantial differences among various players of this group. Given this political reality, it is difficult to envision the CJPs as a fundamental force of change regarding China's death penalty. Judicial reforms in the early 2000 s made some progress under the 'right' political moments (e.g., Trevaskes, 2010, 2012), but the steam ran out quickly when the political environment shifted during the Xi Jinping era. From this perspective, China's death penalty has always been and still is a political issue that sets the legal and cultural norms (instead of vice versa).

In conclusion, our study provided the first in-depth examination of potential death penalty opinion differences by various Chinese CJPs. Although they hold strong support to capital punishment collectively, significant variation was witnessed among these professionals. In addition, Chinese CJPs' death penalty opinions are significantly correlated with their death penalty justifications. Besides the impact of demographic variables, both their death penalty opinions and justifications are likely due to the impact of their professions, although the causal order is subject to testing in the future. Consistent with the general literature on death penalty public opinion, this study affirms that it is critical to consider many different factors such as respondents' demographic background (including their profession) and the nature of capital offenses when we survey people's death penalty opinion and justifications. It is thus misleading to assume that CJPs would hold similar opinions and present their death penalty positions and justifications universally. Although the impact of Chinese CJPs' death penalty opinions is not readily apparent given China's unique polity, differences of CJPs' opinions might have a bigger role to play in other nations where public opinion (CJPs' opinions in this case) could weigh in more and affect lawmaking and operation of the criminal justice system.

Acknowledgements The authors would like to thank Dr. Xiaojin Chen for his help with the gologit2 program in STATA.

Funding The authors did not receive any support from any organization for the submitted work.

Data Availability The dataset generated during and/or analyzed during the current study is not publicly available due to the sensitive nature of the research topic and its form in Chinese but is available from the corresponding author based on reasonable request.

Declarations

Informed consent Proper informed consent was provided during the survey/data collection.

Competing interests The authors have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

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