

The Fallacy of Severity: Chinese Drug Policy

The Chinese government has been an influential part of a draconian trend in S.E. Asian drug policy. Since 1991 drug offenses have been met with mass executions and a policy of widespread governmental secrecy. During this time, drug use has only been shown to increase.

- “Criminals who smuggle, sell, transport or manufacture large amounts of drugs shall be sentenced to death... China's anti-drug law enforcement organs enforce the laws strictly and are waging a fierce battle against all drug-related criminal activities, administering merciless punishment to those involved in such activities.”¹
- The possession of 50 grams of Heroin is punishable by death.²
- Reports indicate that China executes over four times as many prisoners as the rest of the world *combined*.³
- China has instituted a tradition of public executions to celebrate UN’s International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Drug Trafficking. In 2001, over fifty people were publicly executed for drug crimes, with at least one being aired on public television. In 2005, 55 people were reported to be executed leading up to the June 26th celebration.⁴
- The Chinese government refuses to publish statistics pertaining to executions, claiming that such information constitutes a “state secret”.⁵
- Those facing trial in China generally lack a presumption of innocence. In addition, evidence obtained through torture is widely admitted and access to lawyers is often delayed.⁶
- Between 1991 and 2005 the number of illegal drug users in China increased from 148,000 to 1.05 million.⁷
- Police data from 2006 show that the number of Chinese taking drugs increased 35% from 2000 to 2005 alone.⁸
- It is generally accepted that official estimates of drug users vastly under represent the number of users—with some claiming the actual number to exceed reports by 11 to 12 times.⁹
- Those leaving government forced-labor and rehabilitation camps have officially reported relapse rates of between 90-95%; NGO’s report the rate to be closer to 99%.¹⁰
- With 70% of registered narcotic users under age 35, predictions indicate that drug use is not only growing but will continue to grow at rapid rates—regardless of exorbitant punishments.¹¹

¹ “Narcotics Control in China”. Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the United States of America: Information Office of the State Council of the Peoples Republic of China. June 2000, Beijing. <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zt/mzpkz/t36387.htm>

² Decision on the Prohibition of Narcotic Drugs (adopted at the 17th meeting of the Standing Committee of the Seventh National People’s Congress on 28 December 1990 China).

³ Macleod, Calum. “China makes ultimate punishment mobile”. USA Today. 15 Jun. 2006.

⁴ Lines, Rick. “The Death Penalty for Drug Offences”. International Harm Reduction Association. 2007.

⁵ Amnesty International. “UN Anti-Drugs Day: Death Sentences for drug-crimes rise in the Asia Pacific – Action”. 28 June 2007. <http://asiapacific.amnesty.org/apro/aproweb.nsf/pages/adpan>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Malinowska-Sempruch, Kasi, and Bartlett, Nick. “Who Needs Protecting? Rethinking HIV, Drugs and Security in the China Context”. China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly. 4.1 (2006): 25-30.

⁸ “China to ban physical punishment, verbal humiliation of drug addicts”. Xinhua. 25 Aug 2006.

⁹ Swanstrom, Niklas. “Narcotics and China: An Old Security Threat from New Sources”. China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly. 4.1 (2006): 113-131.

¹⁰ Malinowska-Sempruch.

¹¹ Swanstrom.