

# POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY AND THE COMMODIFICATION OF POLICING IN CHINA

## *A Study of Police/Business Posters in Guangzhou*

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*Based on a study of police/business posters in Guangzhou, this paper explores commodification of policing in China. It is argued that, while the commodification of policing in Western societies has its roots in the rise of neo-liberal thinking, it is unique in China for its lack of accountability of police power. Chengguan, the urban management department, is not an effective counter-power to the police in their making of illegal police/business posters due to institutional arrangement and practical reasons. The commodification of police power is not just a local police phenomenon, but a wider police institutional phenomenon. It is also part of the symbiotic relations between state power and economic capital in a wider Chinese society. Data collection involved three years' ethnographic fieldwork, in-depth semi-structured interviews with the police, police scholars, businessmen, urban management officers, ordinary citizens and security guards.*

**Keywords:** commodification, policing, posters, China

### *Introduction*

Since China started its economic reform in the 1980s, the entire society has experienced massive and unprecedented changes. In a short period of three decades, the country has changed from a rigid state-planned economy to a market-driven one, from a backward poor country to the second largest economy in the world. However, economic liberation has not brought the democratic change which many observers predicted (Fukuyama 1992; MacFarquhar 1991; Waldron 1995). On the contrary, the Chinese Party-state proves to be resilient, and its ability to adapt to new challenges is remarkable (Heilmann and Perry 2011; Nathan 2003). In order to promote economic reform and maintain social stability, the Party-state has also actively reformed its cornerstone of state coercive force: the police. Indeed, three decades of economic reform have also witnessed a dramatic change in policing in terms of its role and functions, core values, leadership, organization structure and process, management philosophy and operational procedures and practices (Wong 2002; 2009). However, the current Chinese police was born in the political upheavals of the anti-Japanese war, civil war and revolution, and its task was to defend the revolution against its political enemies (Bakken 2005). Its transformation to a modern police force which emphasizes professionalization and rule of law remains premature (Dutton 2000b; 2005).

While the historical legacy of politicization still exerts its influence on police transformation, the newly emerged market force nurtured by economic reforms also affects

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the establishment of the rule of law for the police and its legitimacy in China. The existing literature has widely documented how the particular history of the Chinese police's subservience to communist dictatorship affects its transformation to a modern police force (Tanner 1999; Dutton 2000a; Trevaskes 2002). However, how market force affects its legitimacy remains underexplored. In this paper, based on the study of police/business posters in Guangzhou, I intend to examine the commodification of policing in China. Police/business posters refer to the posters which contain both crime prevention instructions offered by the police and commercial advertisements by businesses. With the case study of Guangzhou, I argue that the use of police/business posters is a method of commodifying (public) policing in China. The police power has become a commodity, which can be purchased and utilized by businesses for their own purposes. While the commodification of policing in Western societies has its roots in the rise of neo-liberal thinking, the commodification of policing in China has the unique characteristic of the lack of accountability of police power. In regulating illegal police/business posters, the urban management department is not an effective counter-power to the police due to institutional arrangement and practical reasons. In the production of police/business posters, the police and businesses have formed a symbiotic exchange relation. This symbiotic relation between the police and businesses not only exists at the local level, but becomes a wider police institutional phenomenon. I further argue that an understanding of the commodification of policing implied in the production of police/business posters in Guangzhou should be located within the larger social context of symbiotic relations between state power and economic capital in Chinese society.

### *Commodification of Policing in a Global Context*

The commodification of policing, sometimes termed the marketization, commercialization or privatization of policing, has been debated in Western countries during the past three decades. The main focus of the discussion is that policing, or security, is increasingly becoming a commodity, which can be purchased from the market, determined by the people's willingness and ability to pay (Loader 1999: 374). In the existing literature, there are two main discourses. The first is about the expansion of private policing. Although private policing has always been with us (indeed it was the prototype of state policing in the guise, say, of the Bow Street Runners in London), it has changed from being almost invisible just a few decades ago to an almost ubiquitous visibility, particularly in urban environments (Newburn 2001: 830). Indeed, not only has the number of people employed in private security companies outstripped those in public policing, it also covers a wide range of other activities such as the provision of burglar alarms, investigation services, process serving, debt and rent collection, security consultancy, processing of safes and locks, access control and CCTV (Newburn 2001: 832). Second, the growth and pervasiveness of private policing and the spread of new surveillance technologies have been accompanied by the commodification of public policing itself. On the one hand, the public police have gradually retreated from some traditional responsibilities, such as responding to security alarms or guarding police headquarters, leaving the market to provide such service (Ayling *et al.* 2009: 33). Many police organizations also outsource much work to private businesses, including the training of recruits, some traffic functions, audiotape transcriptions, some forensic

investigations, cybercrime investigations and even the provision of prisoner custody and transportation services (Ayling and Grabosky 2006: 667). On the other hand, some police organizations are also actively engaged in the market by selling their own products and services, from renting off-duty police officers to private businesses to offering training for private security workforces, from charging from events organized for profit (such as sports events, parades, festivals and concerts) to consultation in film making, or the commercial use of police images (Ayling *et al.* 2009: 133–67). As a result, the police have developed from being an almost wholly tax-based and state-controlled organization towards a much more entrepreneurial and partnership-oriented mode, who are increasingly transforming themselves into businesses (Ayling *et al.* 2009: 12, 24).

Although the commodification of policing has been explored as the consequence of many factors, such as the fiscal crisis of state, the spread of mass private property, the unmet demands of anxious citizens for protection, the broad transformation of governance and society, or the rise of consumer culture (Jones and Newburn 1998; Loader 1999), scholars generally regard the spread of neo-liberal thinking as the overarching background for the phenomenon in Western societies (Garland 2001: 99; O'Malley 2010: 33). Neo-liberal states often withdraw from many of their traditional roles, leaving them to market for delivery (Ayling *et al.* 2009: 3). Therefore, the logic of market exchange spills over into other domains of life, including the police (Loader 1999: 375). If neo-liberalism is the main reason for the commodification of policing in Western countries, the case of China provides a different story.

### *The Commodification of Policing in China*

Since Deng Xiaoping launched China's economic reform three decades ago, the overarching ideology of Chinese society has changed from one of 'class struggle' to 'economic development'. Under the famous slogan 'getting rich is glorious', the whole society reignited its long-suppressed desire to make money, and the spirit of capitalism and consumerism has spread to every corner of the society (Davis 2005; Ong 2006). The decades of the 1980s have been regarded as a period of 'all people doing business'. The Party, government, army, ordinary people and students were all involved in doing business (Yang 2004: 372). Although economic reform stagnated for a short period after the Tiananmen student movement, it quickly sped up again after Deng's famous south China tour in 1992 to call for further reform. In the national 'fever' of doing business, the army and the police were the two most powerful agents involved in commodifying their power in the market until they were formally prohibited from doing so in the late 1990s (Hu 1999).

The Chinese police's involvement in commodifying their power has been a national phenomenon. It has taken many different forms of institutional corruption. First, instead of using imprisonment, the police widely resort to fine and confiscation for minor offences, especially the case for gambling and prostitution, which to some extent make law enforcement become an economic transaction. Second, the police set up businesses themselves, particularly related to the so-called 'special businesses' which are under their direct supervision, such as hotels, entertainment industries and private security companies. Third, the police intervene in what could be regarded as mere economic disputes and work as debt collectors in order to get financial benefits. Fourth, the police are also involved in acquiring sponsorship from victims for their criminal

investigation, particularly in economic crimes (Fu and Choy 2003). When explaining why the police widely use their power to extort economic benefit, a popular argument is that they are under-funded (Zhai and Zhang 2002). The implicit connotation of this argument is that, although the commodification of police power is not desirable, it is an inescapable choice to keep the police functioning. I will refer to this argument as the fiscal argument.

Although this fiscal argument is insightful, it suffers from several problems. First, the commodification of police power requires at least two conditions, the first being the police's 'motivation' to make money and the second the absence of the capable 'guardian' (Cohen and Felson 1979), which can prevent police from commodifying their power. The fiscal argument explains the 'motivation' but not the 'guardian'. Second, the fiscal argument is also insufficient to explain the commodification of police power as a national phenomenon. Chinese police are funded by local governments. They are well funded in some developed cities, such as Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, but the commodification of police power still exists in these areas. In this paper, with the study of police/business posters in Guangzhou, I intend to explore police accountability and its impact on the commodification of policing in China.

This paper can contribute to the existing literature in the following ways. First, it illuminates how the commodification of policing has been a global trend. While it occurs largely within the rule of law for the police in most Western countries, a case study of China can enrich the literature as lack of accountability of police power is an important aspect of the commodification of policing in China. Second, although Chinese policing research seems to be broad, it remains 'skin-deep' (Dai 2008), or 'sketchy, spotty, and shallow' (Wong 2009: 112), and empirical research is particularly underdeveloped. This paper is a continuation of my ongoing effort to develop the empirical evidence of policing in China (Xu 2009; 2010; 2012; Xu *et al.* 2013). Third, police/business posters are not a unique phenomenon found solely in Guangzhou. They also appear in many other cities, such as Shenzhen, Beijing and Wuhan. The study of Guangzhou police is of particular significance, since the force has been regarded as more 'advanced' and 'civilized' than elsewhere. It may represent the future of Chinese police, as expressed by a police scholar:

Guangdong is relatively civilized. To be honest, Guangdong police, especially in the Pearl River Delta, like Guangzhou, their work is more regulated than other parts of China. The police in the inland area are much worse. (HZ, a police scholar in Guangzhou)

Fourth, traditional criminology research mainly relies on 'words and numbers'. This paper is an effort contributing to the renewed interest in using image in criminological research (Carrabine 2012). As a famous Chinese saying goes, 'a picture is worth a thousand words, so let them speak' (Landsberger *et al.* 2011: 6).

### *Research Questions, Data and Method*

This paper will focus on one type of commodification of public policing: police/business posters. On these posters, commercial advertisements appear along with police warnings. When I presented these posters to my Hong Kong colleagues, they laughed by saying 'this is China'. The implicit connotation behind their laughs is that, given China's social situation, we should not be surprised. In this paper, I intend to offer a sociological



explanation for the widespread use of police/business posters in Guangzhou by locating it in a particular historical and current social structural context (Mills 1959). More specifically, the following questions will be explored: (1) What issues arise from police/business posters? (2) Why do the police and businesses produce these posters together? and (3) What social structural reasons make a symbiotic relation between the police and businesses possible in the production of police/business posters?

The data for this paper come from a larger project that studies crime prevention in Guangzhou, the capital of Guangdong province. Together with Beijing and Shanghai, Guangzhou has been regarded as one of the three most developed cities in China, but Guangzhou is also known for its high crime rate compared with the other two cities. It had a population of 16 million in 2012, with half of population comprising rural-to-urban migrant workers (Zeng and Lei 2012).

Multiple strategies were employed when collecting data. The first set of data came from three years of fieldwork observation in Guangzhou. From 2009 to 2012, I went to Guangzhou on a weekly basis to observe crime prevention measures adopted in public space. I visited most parts of the city, if not every corner, on foot or by bicycle. I particularly visited crime hotspot areas, the so-called 'urban village' ghettos, which are often regarded as the centre for 'prostitution, gambling and drug-abuse' by the police. There are 138 urban villages in Guangzhou and I visited most of them. The overwhelming majority of people living in these sectors are migrant workers. I took photos of anything related to crime and its control, such as crime prevention posters, banners and paintings on the wall, illegal advertisements for recruiting male and female sex workers, making fake documents, private investigation and loan-sharking, and so forth. In total, I produced a collection of roughly 5,000 photos related to crime and its prevention. In this paper, my analysis will only focus on one type of crime prevention poster: the police/business poster. On these posters, police tips of crime prevention and commercial advertisements co-exist. The size of these posters varies from A4 size to nearly ten square metres. The space occupied by commercial advertisement and police warnings also varies across different type of posters, from the police taking up the majority of the space to the business taking up the majority. Eight different types of posters have been identified, including (1) paper poster on a wall/door, (2) advertising boards on a roadside, (3) policing bulletin boards, (4) iron plate on a wall, (5) community police information boards, (6) sun umbrella, (7) big plastic poster on a wall, (8) thanksgiving board (see Figures 1–8). Altogether, 89 different types of police/business posters were collected.

The second part of data collection involved in-depth semi-structured interviews with police (21), police scholars (3), businessmen (5), urban management officers (*chengguan*) (5), ordinary citizens (6) and security guards (2) (a total sample of 42 interviews). Since the police were the main agents in producing police/business posters, interviews with them were essential in figuring out how these posters come into being, and how they perceived the 'cooperation' between the police and businesses. The police were approached through my personal contacts in Guangzhou established in previous research and work. A few of them were from municipal and district-level police bureaus while the majority were from local police stations. Businessmen were approached directly through telephone numbers they provided on the police/business posters, and then recruited for interview with their consent. Since outdoor advertisements were under the jurisdiction of the urban management department, interviews



FIG. 1 A paper poster on a wall. The left half is an advertisement for the Mary Women's Hospital, emphasizing Hong Kong's chain style. The right half is a call for support and cooperation for police work with the local police's phone numbers

with urban management officers could provide key information of how they dealt with these illegal posters in practice. Urban management officers were also recruited for interviews through my personal contacts and a snowball sampling strategy. To achieve a better understanding of police/business posters from different perspectives, three police scholars, two security guards and six ordinary citizens were recruited for interviews. In addition, newspaper reports about police/business posters were searched through Wisenews, a newspaper database covering most Chinese newspapers. Some police documents/directives regarding how to regulate these posters were also collected for examination.

#### *Businesses Sponsoring Police/Business Posters*

Among 89 businesses which were involved in producing police/business posters, the most common one was telephone and internet companies (Figure 9). Nearly one-third (27) of businesses belonged to this group. These posters were most often to appear on the walls and doors of residential areas, and particularly prevalent in urban village ghettos. They could be found at nearly every entrance to buildings. On the one hand, urban villages are crime hotspots. The police believe these posters are helpful in increasing their residents' crime prevention consciousness. On the other hand, since nearly 90 per cent of the population of urban villages is migrant workers, there is a huge demand for internet and telephone services. The high turnover of migrant workers further increases the demand for such services.



FIG. 2 A stainless-steel advertising board. The upper two-thirds consist of police information reminding readers about the risks of late-night robbery in park, car theft and fraud. The below one-third provides the directions to a McDonald's nearby

The second largest group in sponsoring police was private hospitals, taking up 13 per cent of all the data. Posters sponsored by private hospitals also usually appeared in urban villages. Since migrant workers are generally excluded from the state medical care system (Chan and Zhang 1999), these small-scale private hospitals provide relatively cheap, low-quality service for them. As urban villages have also been regarded as the 'centres of prostitution', these private hospitals particularly highlight their service for sex-related diseases and problems, such as STDs, abortion and complications related to giving birth.

The third largest group of businesses (11) included restaurants and hotels, such as McDonald's, KFC, Kungfu and 7-day Inns (a chain hotel brand). These police/business posters were usually set up on main streets and busy commercial districts. Unlike the previous two poster types, which mainly target migrant workers, the main audience for restaurant and hotel advertisements is local residents and visitors who can afford such relatively expensive services.

The fourth type of business was security-related companies, including locksmith (five), private security (two) and anti-theft device companies (two). These posters usually appeared in traditional and modern gated communities where local residents reside.

Besides the above-mentioned four main types of business, there were a large number of other businesses engaged in police/business posters, including providers of





FIG. 3 A police bulletin board. The left side is an advertisement for a private hospital and the right side provides police security tips. The middle posters posted introduce typical crime cases and fraud tricks



FIG. 4 An iron plate on a wall. The left two-thirds are slogans of 'Clean up harm of drugs and benefit future generations' and the right one-third is an advertisement for China Unicom phone service company



FIG. 5 A community police information board containing a community police officer's picture, name, police ID number, phone number and a reminder of the tricks of burglary and fraud. At the bottom of the board is an advertisement for a real estate agency

particular types of commodities (five), travel agencies (four), driver-training schools (four), sports and dance centres (three), software companies (two), car shops and shopping malls (three), real estate agencies (two), advertisement companies (two), a bank card, a law firm, an international consultation company and a railway industry group.

#### *Problems of Police/Business Posters*

There is much concern about the increasing commodification of policing, especially about its role in increasing social inequality in the distribution of police resources and in damaging police's legitimacy (Loader 1999; Ayling and Shearing 2008; Manning 2010). Such concerns are also applicable to the use of police/business posters in Guangzhou. On the one hand, citizens are concerned about police impartiality. It is well known that Chinese police are highly corrupt and their abuse of power is widely documented (Fu 2005). Police/business posters have been regarded as another example of the abuse of police power. There is public concern about whether police can remain neutrality in law enforcement when they receive economic benefits from businesses. This is particularly the case when the police receive sponsorship or donation from businesses which are directly under their supervision, such as hotels, driver-training schools or those whose work is related to the police, such as law firms. There is here a clear conflict of interest. One citizen criticized this police-business relationship in the following manner:

The police are utilizing their public power, and turn it into a commodity. This is very obvious in the case of driver-training schools and law firms. For law firms, if I want to hire a lawyer for a case, I might





FIG. 6 A sun umbrella printed with the name of Yuexie (district) Police and an advertisement for a travel agency during the 2012 Chinese New Year travel rush



FIG. 7 A big plastic poster on the wall, around ten square metres. The left side is the local police station phone number and reminder of fraud tricks such as overdue phone bills, stolen ID information, the unauthorized use of credit cards, winning a lottery, requesting gifts in dating, returning tax in purchasing cars, high-return shares and family members and friends' request for money in the name of being victims of accidents. The right side is an advertisement for a hotel

think, it might be better to hire this one since they have special connections (*guanxi*) with the police ... as a consumer, I definitely think so. (EJG, a citizen)

On the other hand, even the police themselves are concerned about their legitimacy, as these police/business posters can tarnish the police image and undermine citizens'



FIG. 8 A thanksgiving board. On the door to a traditional gated community is the slogan 'You are entering an area under surveillance, please maintain a smile!' The message below states 'The surveillance system in this community is sponsored by the following (four) companies, special thanks to them!'

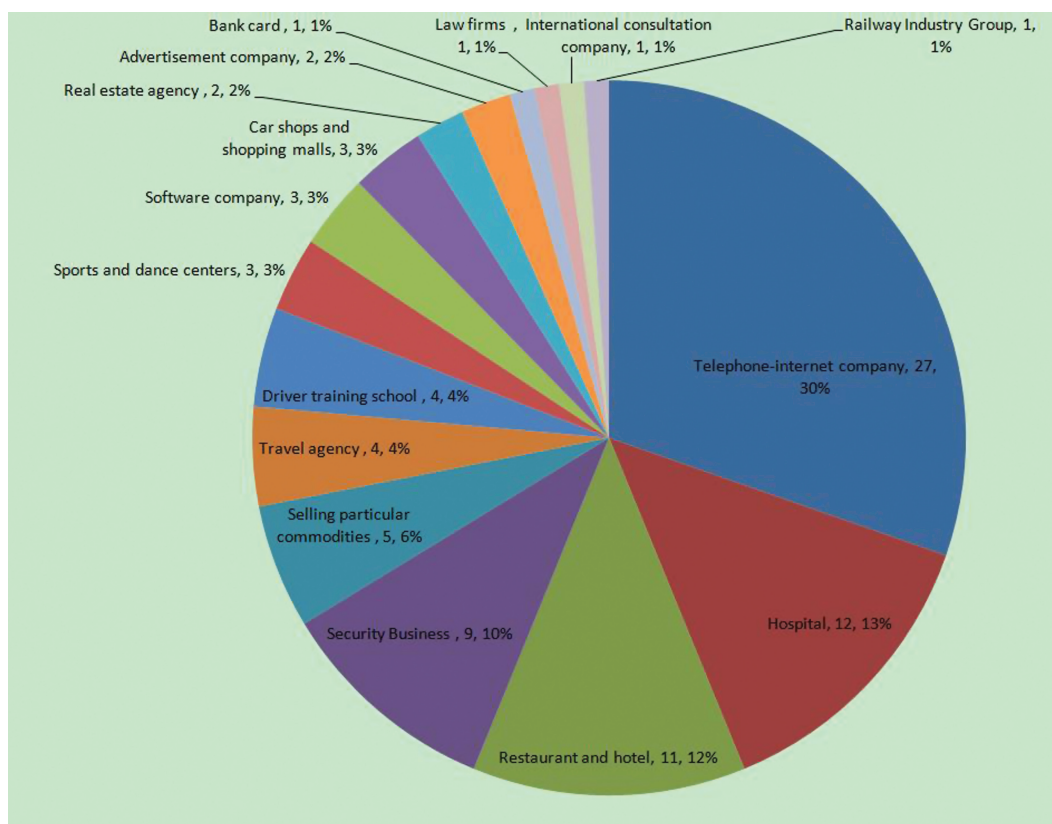


FIG. 9 Businesses involved in sponsoring policing posters (n = 89)

trust towards the police, the basis of police work (Manning 2010: 9). Since most police/business posters were produced by local police stations and community police officers, the police from upper-level departments generally did not support this type of police-business cooperation, although occasionally they were also involved. Even within local police stations, those who were not directly involved in this work might also criticize this type of 'cooperation'. They were particularly sceptical of sponsorship from small-scale and private hospitals specializing in men or women's problems (urology or gynaecology) (Figure 1). Typical concerns were expressed as the following:

Actually, we don't support this. It is local police stations and street committees who do it. Some type of business definitely should not appear on our police warnings, such as hospitals specializing in women's problems. It has a bad effect. (OUL, a police officer from municipal police department)

It is unregulated. The advertisement for Mary Women's Hospital is particularly negative to government and the police's image. (WYX, a police scholar)

Our upper level police department has ever given us directives, not allowing us to do so. It is not good to have commercial advertisements. But when the control is loosened, we do it again. (THL, a police officer)

When requested to refer other police officers for interview, one of my interviewees reminded me in a friendly manner:

You should not show these pictures (police/business posters) to our leaders. You are doing such research in Hong Kong, aren't you exposing the dark side of our Chinese police? (JY, a police officer from a district police bureau)

There are another two more specific problems regarding the use of police/business posters. The first is that they are actually illegal advertisements. In China, all outdoor advertisements must get permission from the urban management department (*chengguan*). Since these police/business posters are set up by the police and businesses without permission from the *chengguan*, they are clearly illegal. In August 2011, Guangzhou *chengguan* launched a one-month campaign to demolish police/business posters in their bid to achieve 'national civilized city' status (Lu 2011), although, most of the time, *chengguan* turned a blind eye to them. The reasons for *chengguan*'s selective law enforcement will be discussed later. The second problem is that some businesses set up police/business posters by themselves without informing the police. They pretend to work with the police by including a police badge, cartoon police image and the police hotline number 110 on their posters and following the same style as other police/business posters to escape the intervention from *chengguan*. Among 89 different types of police/business posters, 16 of them were set up by businesses without the consent of the police. Sometimes, the police will intervene with such 'fake' police/business posters but, more often than not, they were 'too busy' to deal with such minor offences.

#### *'Win-Win' Game: Symbiotic Exchange between the Police and Businesses*

The main purpose of this research is to find out the reasons for the formation of the symbiotic relation between the police and businesses in the production of police/business posters, and to provide a sociological understanding of such a relation in China. Let me start by examining the police motivation for issuing such posters.

*Police*

The most important motivation for the police is to promote crime prevention for free. Usually, businesses cover all cost for the production of posters and the police are responsible for delivery. Guangzhou is well known for its high crime rate in China. Before 2007, the problem of street crime in general, robbery and snatch theft in particular, was rampant. The Guangzhou government resorted to a 'driving-away' policing strategy by banning all motorcycles from the city. As predicted, street crime decreased while burglary and fraud increased dramatically (Xu 2012). In contrast with robbery and snatch theft, which were hard to prevent, the police regarded burglary and fraud as crimes that could be prevented through increasing people's prevention consciousness.<sup>1</sup> Police warnings in the form of big banners and posters were widely used to remind people about such crimes in public spaces. However, police officers often complained they had no budget for crime prevention publicity. One provided detailed information about their cooperation with businesses when facing this problem:

Sometimes we approach businesses actively, and at other times they may also approach us. When we intend to do such posters, we face a problem of lack of money. There is no budget for crime prevention, and we have to seek businesses for help, and ask them to pay for it. Some businessmen are smart enough to take initiatives ... we are not doing pure commercial advertisements, and we only print their names at the bottom of the poster ... the content is provided by us, including crime prevention tips and police phone numbers. (THL, a police officer)

The cost of such policing posters varied from a few thousand *yuan* (10 *yuan* = \$1.6 or £1.2) to around 30,000 *yuan* in Guangzhou, depending on the amount and form of posters. The most expensive poster was on a stainless-steel board erected along a road side (Figure 2). Each of them cost around 1,500 *yuan*. One businessman reflected:

We made this (the posters) according to the requirement of the local police station. They told me the length, width and height. The police said it was not safe in that area and they intended to erect two posters there. It cost us around 3,000 *yuan*. The police approached us. (WU, a company manager)

The cost of paper posters (Figure 1) is much cheaper, with each costing less than one *yuan*. However, the costs of a large quantity of such of posters can be appreciable. One hotel manager proudly said:

Sergeant Wu helped us to design it. We were responsible for making them. We made several different versions and finally decided to use this one. It looked quite clear and comprehensive ... we made 20 thousand copies ... it cost us nearly 30 thousand *yuan* altogether. It covered all public areas, all communities and even the banks, McDonald's, and KFC. (LI, a hotel manager)

In general, the lack of a budget for crime prevention was the most often cited reason for the police to 'cooperate' with businesses. Although it may be the case that, for local police stations, there was no particular budget for promoting crime prevention, Guangzhou police have been well funded. For instance, Guangzhou police had a budget of 5.54 billion *yuan* in 2006, and it was increased by 20 per cent to 6.54 billion *yuan* in 2008, accounting for 10 per cent of the entire Guangzhou government budget (Li 2009: 19–21). Arguably, the Guangzhou police enjoyed a much higher budget than

<sup>1</sup> Interview with QL, a police officer.



the national average. In 2010, China's national expenditure for public security for the first time surpassed the expenditure for national defence. Even in this year, public security expenditure only took up 6.14 per cent among national government expenditure<sup>2</sup> ([National Bureau of Statistics of China 2011](#)). The Guangzhou police budget share was also high internationally. For instance, the Hong Kong police had a budget of 11.91 billion HKD in 2008 (10 HKD = £0.82), taking up only 4.60 per cent in its overall government expenditure budget ([Hong Kong Government 2009](#)). Comparatively, instead of 'under-funded', it might be safe to conclude that Guangzhou police was 'well funded'. Indeed, even the Guangzhou police themselves admitted that all its police departments had been fully funded ([Guangzhou Public Security Bureau 2008](#): 55). Therefore, the issue touches more on the allocation of the budget than lack of budget per se. If the budget is the most obvious reason, the following one is less so.

A second reason for the police's active engagement with business is to reduce the recorded crime rate. The police used police/business posters to promote the local police stations' telephone numbers instead of the centralized police hotline 110. By doing so, local police can reduce reported crime cases in their jurisdictions, and therefore get a better evaluation of their performance, a higher bonus and a greater chance of promotion. In 1986, Guangzhou became the first city in China to adopt a 110 police hotline, and the system was further upgraded in 2003 to have full capacity to receive emergency calls ([Lai and Xiao 2008](#)). Thereafter, cases reported through the 110 hotline became an important indicator to evaluate the crime situation in a local police station. On police/business posters, the police only publicized local police station telephones, phone numbers of self-defence committees or mobile phones of community police officers, and urged citizens to call these numbers if they needed help. Therefore, the recorded crime cases in the 110 system can be reduced. One police officer stated:

There is an important function of these posters. Our local police chief requires our community police officers to reduce the number of cases. That's not to say there will be no cases happening, but to ask victims to call us when it happens. There are three telephone numbers in our police station and they are connected to each other. If one is busy, it will be transferred to another one automatically. We emphasize our 24-hour service .... This is a highlight of us. (LQ, a police officer)

Another police officer complained about reduced efforts in the promotion of the local police phone number and the increased number of cases reported to the centralized police hotline:

We used to hand out pamphlets, asking people to report to our community police office, instead of calling the 110 hotline. For some minor cases, we could handle them in our community police office. You'd better not make our community look very unsafe. The reported cases were lower at that time. Since we haven't strengthened our work on this issue recently, reported cases climbed. (KWX, a police officer)

While most police/business posters implicitly encouraged people to call the local police, others made it explicit by posting messages on posters like 'if you have a case, please first call our number' along with the local police's phone numbers' ([Figure 10](#)).

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that public security expenditure not only included the cost for the police, but also the armed police, the court and the procuratorate. Therefore, the actual share of police expenditure was lower than 6.14 per cent.





FIG. 10 The poster is headed with the police warning 'community police officers are with you', together with their mobile phones and the phones of the local police station and self-defence committee. The big slogan reads 'If you have a case, please first call our number!' The bottom is the advertisement for a detergent product

Sometimes, the duty of reducing reported crime to 110 could even be shifted to landlords who rented their houses to migrant workers. For instance, in 2010, when the Asian Games was held in Guangzhou, a landlord made a poster on the wall to remind tenants 'during the Asian Games period, don't call 110. You will be fined for 500 *yuan* for the first call and 1,000 *yuan* for a second one' (Zhang and Tu 2010). In sum, police/business posters play an important role for local police departments to manipulate crime statistics and, by extension, to get better evaluation for their performance in controlling crime. Here, we see how official crime data are socially constructed in China.

A third reason for police's involvement in producing police/business posters is related to the individual police officers' abuse of power in order to make money. Although Chinese police have been forbidden to do business since the late 1990s, this problem persists (Fu and Choy 2003). In Guangzhou, some police officers are still actively involved in doing business and they use their police power to facilitate their businesses. One police officer revealed:

One of my colleagues opened a hotel and earned much money. He made a number of direction boards (police/business posters) ... when he made those posters, he did not inform the local police station, but did it by himself. (RJL, a police officer)

Although it is hard to know how many police in Guangzhou are involved in doing business and how many police/business posters are made by individual police officers,

my fieldwork did reveal the existence of such cases. The individual police's abuse of power also contributed to the formation of police/business posters. Let me now turn to the business part.

### *Business*

While the police can benefit from promoting crime prevention for free and manipulating crime statistics, businesses benefit from their symbiotic relations in other ways. First, they can 'legalize' their illegal advertisements. Through linking their commercial advertisements with police warnings, businesses can escape punishment from *chengguan*. As mentioned above, outdoor commercial advertisements need to be approved by *chengguan*; otherwise, they will be regarded as illegal and subjected to fines and be cleaned up. One *chengguan* officer explained how they worked:

These illegal advertisements should be cleaned up. Our law enforcement department is responsible for taking photos, and then putting their telephone numbers into our automatic calling system. It will call them continuously until they pay a fine. Otherwise, their phone service will be suspended after a certain time. (WU, a senior urban management officer)

However, *chengguan* usually would not deal with these illegal police/business posters, as the police were involved. A police officer who was experienced in making these police/business posters explained:

Generally, *chengguan* will not intervene if they find these posters linked to police. (THL, a police officer)

Some other police even showed their contempt towards *chengguan* when asked if they were concerned about the latter's intervention. As one of them said:

Chengguan? We don't care! (QL, a police officer)

Indeed, Chinese police are much more powerful than *chengguan*. When seeing my collection of police/business posters, another senior urban management officer commented 'they are all illegal'. But when asked if they would fine those businesses which were involved in sponsoring police/business posters, he replied:

They all violate regulations. But since they are with local police stations, we let them go. (PUN, an urban management officer)

In a nutshell, the symbiotic relation with the police provides businesses with protection from the intervention of *chengguan* in their illegal commercial advertisements. If *chengguan* is the official obstacle that police power could be used to overcome, the market is the other one which police power can help to expand. In the name of crime prevention, the police can help the business post their police/business posters in nearly every single corner of the city, such as train stations, main streets, busy commercial compounds, modern gated communities, urban villages, banks and ATM machines, and even inside some restaurants. One police officer said when I visited his home in a gated community:

You see, in our community, you can see these posters everywhere downstairs. If you don't cooperate with our police, you can never get in this area, let alone to post these posters. (RJL, a police officer)

In that cooperation, while businesses are responsible for producing posters and covering their cost, the police are responsible for their distribution. A hotel manager pointed out:

After we finished (the making of posters), we handed them over to sergeant WU. He asked security guards from property management companies to post them. We were responsible for cost and they were responsible for distribution. They need to reduce the crime rate ... last time when posters were posted in XXX community, the police chief from the local police station also paid a visit to examine whether they were properly made. (A hotel manager)

Actually, the police can not only help to expand the market for commercial advertisements, but also help to sustain the market. Since these posters are linked to the police, it is also less likely to be torn down by citizens or covered by their competitors.

Third, sponsoring police work is a way to cultivate good relations with the police. Chinese police enjoy great power and good relations with the police are crucial for business success. Building *guanxi* with the police is a common practice in China (Zheng 2009). A police scholar said:

To be honest, this (police/business poster) is good for the police; at least not bad ... it is just like after Chinese New Year, some police leaders will ask businessmen to arrange some 'friendship-building' activities, such as singing Karaoke, or having meals. It is very common in local police stations. It is a way of building *guanxi*. (WYX, a police scholar)

This is especially the case for small businesses and businesses which are directly under the supervision of police. Private hospitals may seek protection from the police when they have conflicts with patients. Locksmith companies need to get their licenses renewed from the police. Hotels particularly need police protection for any illegal activities occurring there, such as gambling, prostitution and drugs. Among the 89 businesses involved in police/business posters, there were 12 private hospitals, four hotels, five locksmith companies, two security device companies and two property management companies. For these businesses, sponsoring police's crime prevention was a golden opportunity for them to establish *guanxi* with police.

### *Discussion*

In their symbiotic relations in the production of police/business posters, the police and businesses are in a 'win-win' game. On the one hand, the police as an organization can benefit from promoting crime prevention for free and by reducing recorded crime cases. Individual police officers can also bend the rules for their own purposes to make money. On the other hand, businesses can benefit from 'legalizing' their illegal advertisements, expanding their market and cultivating good relations with the police. The question that remains unanswered is how a symbiotic relation between the police and business can be possible. More specifically, why cannot *chengguan*, the assumed authority to regulate outdoor advertisements, become a counter-power in the control of the illegal police behaviour in making police/business posters? Let me address this question in three ways, including: (1) the de-centralization of police structure and re-politicization of police reform, (2) the institutional symbiotic relation between the police and businesses and (3) the symbiotic relation between state power and economic capital in the wider Chinese society.

*De-centralization of police structure and re-politicization of police reform*

The Chinese police are a very de-centralized force. They are subject to control by both superior-level police forces and local Party and governments (Tanner and Green 2007). Usually, superior-level police give professional supervision and local governments are responsible for financial support as well as personnel control. Despite continuous effort since the 1990s to strengthen central control over police and to make it accountable to law, local government and Party officials still have tremendous power over police. They are requested to do a whole range of ‘non-police work’ by local governments, such as birth control, forced demolition and, more recently, preventing petitions. As one police officer put it simply:

We are running-dogs of local governments. (ZTZ, a police officer)

The local government and Party control over the police have further strengthened in recent years under the overwhelmingly important imperative to ‘preserve social stability’ in China. A process of the re-politicization of police has been evident. Since 2003, police chiefs at all levels are required to become standing committee members of the Chinese Communist Party or main leaders of governments (Fu 2005). The police have expanded their power in this process of re-politicization. The current Chinese police not only enjoy greater power than the courts and the procuratorate, but also more power than many other government organs, including the urban management department, an organization tasked with enforcing non-criminal urban administrative regulations. In Guangzhou, by the end of 2007, all local police chiefs had become a member of leadership committees of Party or governments in towns and street committees, and all community police officers have been either vice secretaries of the Party or vice directors in communities/villages (Guangzhou Public Security Bureau 2008: 55). In other words, the police gained more power than before, and became a key player in the process of making government policy. As one police officer admitted:

Our local police chief was vice secretary of the Party in the street committee. He was a member of the leadership, belonged to leaders group. Any key decisions were made by the Party committee. (LQ, a police officer)

Indeed, the Party has great power, particularly the power in personnel (McGregor 2010). As a (standing) member of the Party committee, police chiefs even have their influence on the appointment of urban management chief officers. In such a situation, institutionally, the urban management department cannot become a counter-power for the police when the latter violate urban management policy by setting illegal police/business posters.

In practice, the urban management department also needs support from the police for their law enforcement, as they do not possess the power to use force. One police officer complained:

The other day I received a document from the urban management department. They asked us to help investigate the loss of manhole covers ... I was very unhappy, did not want to deal with it. But our leaders had to. They have the same boss in street committee. They ask us to do all kinds of things. For example, they often ask us to assist them to demolish (illegal) buildings. (THL, a police officer)

In such a situation, we may not be surprised when some police showed their contempt towards *chengguan* when asked whether *chengguan* would intervene in the regulation of police/business posters. Indeed, the urban management department has long complained about its inability to use force, and the police tolerance of urban management officers' illegal violence in their law enforcement has also been widely documented in China (Human Rights Watch 2012). To enhance cooperation between the police and urban management, some cities have even established special police forces for urban management or made urban management chiefs main leaders of the police (Wang 2012). Therefore, both institutionally and practically, the urban management department cannot be the counter-power for police making of illegal police/business posters.

*Institutional symbiotic relation between the police and businesses*

In Guangzhou, all police departments have been involved in the production of police/business posters, including the municipal police department, district police departments, local police stations and community police offices, although the majority of them were produced by local police stations and community police officers (Figure 11). Among 89 police/business posters, 64 of them involved local police stations or community police offices. Three of them involved district police bureaus and four of them involved the Guangzhou Anti-drug Office, in which the municipal police are the main player. Therefore, the symbiotic relation between the police and business is not just a local problem, but a whole police institutional problem.

Although it was the case that district police and municipal police were less likely to be involved in the making of police/business posters, their symbiotic relation with businesses took other forms. For instance, Guangzhou municipal police continuously received donations of cars, motorcycles and money from businesses. They received 20 cars from Honda in 2003 (Zhao 2003); 140 cars, valued at over 13 million *yuan*, from Guangzhou Global Trade Center in 2004 (Tang and Chen 2004); 100 cars, valued at 10 million *yuan*, from Fuli Real Estate in 2005 (He 2005); 300 motorcycles from Guangzhou Automobile Industry Group in 2007 (Liu 2007); and two million *yuan* from Evergrande Real Estate Group in 2011 (Evergrande 2011). In 2007, Guangzhou started to ban all motorcycles from most parts of the city in order to prevent robbery and snatch theft related to motorcycles (Xu 2009). Some observers criticized that the ban policy was 'plotted' by the local government and car industry in order to create more demand for cars, since they were in a symbiotic relation (Zhang 2007). Indeed, donations from businesses to Guangzhou police were not unique in China. Police in many other cities were also the beneficiaries of corporate largesse. For example, in 2008, Beijing police received 16 cars, valued at six million *yuan* from Toyota (Toyota 2008). In 2012, Yibing Police received 48 motorcycles from XX Motorcycle Group (Qiu 2012). Even the Ministry of Public Security also received donation from businesses. In 2011, it received 25 million *yuan* from Infinitus Nutrition Product Company, in the name of China Police Martyrs and Heroes Foundation<sup>3</sup> (Pan and Wu 2011). Arguably,

<sup>3</sup> But the Foundation was founded by the Ministry of Public Security and a vice minister of public security presented and delivered a speech in the donation ceremony.



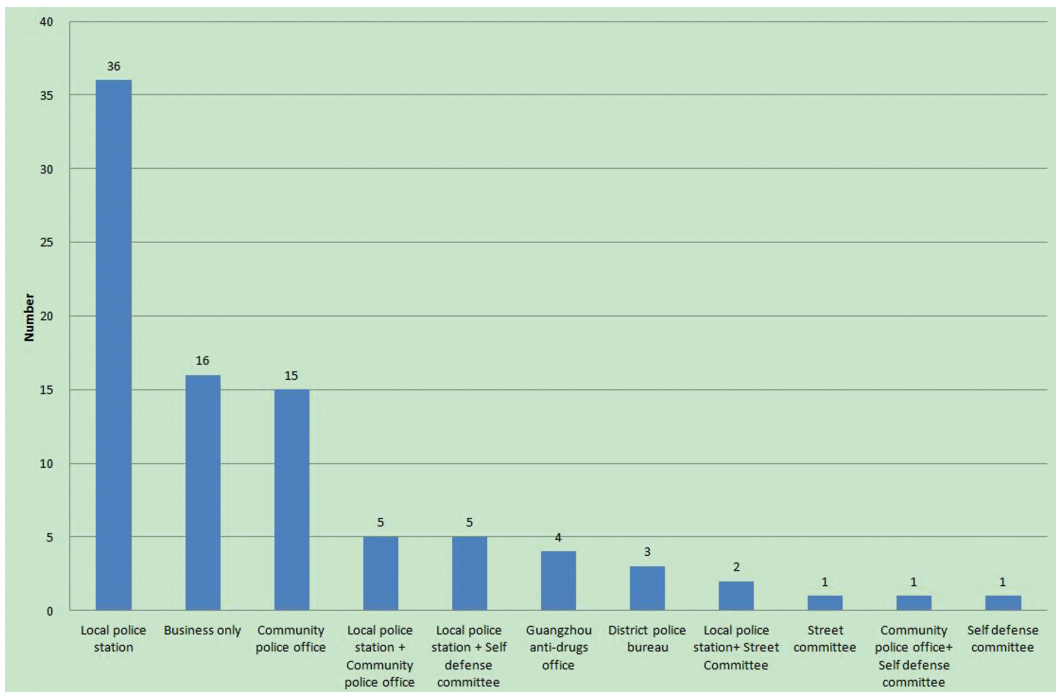


FIG. 11 Different police departments involved in the making of police/business posters (n = 89)

police/business posters are only one example of the symbiotic relationship between police and business mainly at the lowest level with the most visible form.

#### *The symbiotic relation between state power and economic capital in China*

The commodification of police power also has its social foundations in a symbiotic relation between state power and economic capital in the wider Chinese society. Since China started its economic reforms in the 1980s, the commodification of state power became rampant. Instead of a retreating of the state, state and market have formed a new type of symbiotic relation and benefit from each other (Wank 1999; Dickson 2008). The symbiotic exchange between the newly emerged legal market and court is a typical example in this regard (He 2008; Liu 2011). Indeed, the police are not the only government organ receiving donation from businesses. Some other government organs also do so. For instance, in 2006, Guangzhou Environment Protection Bureau received 20 cars from Honda (Honda 2006). Even in the making of posters for propaganda, other government departments also frequently receive donations from businesses and make government propaganda and commercial advertisements together. For example, in the campaign of bidding for the status of 'National Civilized City' in Guangzhou, the posters for such campaigns could also be found everywhere in Guangzhou. More often than not, these posters take the same form as police/business posters, with government propaganda and commercial advertisements on the same posters (see Figure 12).



FIG. 12 The poster calls upon people to build a national civilized city with the following slogans: loving the country; caring about the collective; working hard; abiding with the law and regulations; respecting sciences; helping each other; beautifying the environment; being civilized and polite; build Guangzhou; serving the people; being pragmatic and innovative; preserving stability; overcome superstitions; having a harmonious family and neighbourhood relationship; keeping good mental and physical health; being united and progressive. On the bottom of the poster is an advertisement for a Chinese medicine for stomach ache

### *Conclusion*

Trust is the grounding of the policing (Manning 2010: 186). Although commodification of policing has increasingly become a global trend, it runs the risk of increasing social inequality and reducing citizens' trust towards police (Loader 1999; Newburn 2001). While the commodification of policing in Western countries is more related to neo-liberal thinking of privatization of public sectors and the logic of market extends to security domains, the commodification of policing in China has its uniqueness of lack of accountability to police power.

Based on the study of police/business posters in Guangzhou, this paper explores how the lack of accountability to police power affects the commodification of policing in China. I find that, in the production of police/business posters, the police and businesses have formed symbiotic relations. While the police can benefit from promoting crime prevention for free and reducing recorded crime cases in order to gain a better performance evaluation, a higher bonus and a greater chance of promotion,

businesses utilize this relation to ‘legalize’ their illegal advertisements, expand markets and cultivate good relationships with the powerful police bodies. I argue that the de-centralized police structure and re-politicization of police reform make the police unaccountable to urban management department in their production of illegal advertisements. I further argue that the commodification of police power is not just a local police problem, but a structural and institutional problem for the entire Chinese police force. The symbiotic relation between economic capital and state power in Chinese society also provide a macro-structural environment for the police to commodify their power. Indeed, the commodification of police power in China is not just a problem of individual police’s abuse of power, nor a simple police organization problem. It is a problem of the whole social system. It is structural ‘rotten orchard’ rather than ‘rotten apples’ (Punch 2003; Sherman 1978).

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