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# Drive-Away Policing and Situational Crime Prevention in China: An Analysis of Motorcycle Ban (*jinmo*) Policy in Guangzhou

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## Abstract

Using the example of motorcycle ban policy in Guangzhou, the capital of Guangdong province, this article examines how situational crime prevention strategies are used in contemporary urban China. The article argues that although a motorcycle ban policy may reduce motorcycle snatch theft (*feiche qiangduo*) in Guangzhou, it inevitably caused a problem of displacement. However, some types of displacement are desirable for local government. An argument about drive-away policing is proposed in this article to understand policing styles in contemporary China. In addition, the article argues that motorcycle ban, as a strategy to prevent snatch theft and robbery, is also a strategy to deal with the crisis in police legitimacy. Therefore, crime prevention in China has more social and political significance than just reducing crime.

## Keywords

motorcycle ban, drive-away policing, situational crime prevention, China

## Introduction

The past 30 years has witnessed an economic miracle and dramatic social change in China. Along with all kinds of positive developments, some negative issues are also becoming more prominent than before. The soaring crime rate is one of them. According

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to official police records, the overall crime number has increased fivefold from 1981 to 2006 (*Law Yearbook of China*, 1987-2007). The low crime rate had always been regarded as one of the superiorities in Mao's China. Indeed, prereform China was even regarded as a "crime free" society (Fairbank, 1986). However, contemporary China is far from the supposed "golden age" when no one was supposed to pick up another's things from the road and no one needed to lock their doors (*lu bu shi yi, ye bu bi hu*) (Bakken, 2000, p. 337; Dutton, 2000).

Facing an increasing crime rate, the Chinese government adopted some new strategies in policing and social control. Some strategies are nationwide, such as the campaign to strike hard (*yanda*)<sup>1</sup> against crime. The first wave of strike-hard in 1983 was followed by successive waves in 1990, 1996, and 2001 (Bakken, 2004; Trevaskes, 2007). Other strategies are locally based, targeting specific crimes such as a motorcycle ban policy aimed at reducing snatch theft and robbery (*shuangqiang*)<sup>2</sup> in the southern cities of Guangdong province.

Based on research on the strike-hard policy, an important characteristic of Chinese policing strategy was revealed: campaign-style policing<sup>3</sup> (Dutton, 2000; M. S. Tanner, 2005; Trevaskes, 2007). Some efforts were also made in recent years to disclose the development of the comprehensive management of social order and community policing in China (Zhong, 2009; Zhong & Broadhurst, 2007). However, empirical research about Chinese policing and crime prevention strategies are extremely underdeveloped given the difficulties encountered in doing such work in China (Dai, 2008; Liang & Lu, 2006; Wong, 2007).

This article studies a new crime prevention strategy—the motorcycle ban policy that was adopted to prevent snatch theft and robbery (*shuangqiang*) in southern China. With a careful examination of the motorcycle ban policy in Guangzhou, this article tries to disclose another important characteristic of Chinese policing strategy, drive-away policing, and argues that this strategy is rooted in the Chinese policing structure of dual leadership involving both the upper level police department and local government. Situational crime prevention theory is used for a better understanding of the rationality and limitation of the policy in reducing snatch theft and robbery. Moreover, the article argues that motorcycle ban is not just a crime prevention strategy, but it carries an added social and political significance to legitimizing local government and the police.

## Theory and Previous Research

Different from traditional crime prevention theory, which emphasizes changing the offender of crime, situational prevention theory focuses on the situation in which crime occurs. In criticizing mainstream criminological research, Clarke (1983) argued that most criminological theories seek to explain why some individuals or groups are born with, or come to acquire, a disposition to offend. Their efforts focused on prescribing measures that attempt to prevent such a disposition from developing in the first place or, once developed, to eradicate it or compensate for it. Clarke argued that a criminal act does not result simply and inevitably from the presence of a criminally disposed

individual. The conditions for crime must be right in terms of situational factors such as the availability of a vulnerable target and an appropriate opportunity (Clarke, 1983).

Situational prevention theory aims to be a practical way to prevent crime (Clarke, 1992; Clarke & Cornish, 1983). It is argued that crime can be prevented through reducing the opportunities latent in the situation (Clarke, 1983; Cornish & Clarke, 2003; G. R. Newman, Clarke, & Shoham, 1997). The theory is a combination of routine activity theory (Cohen & Felson, 1979), environmental criminology (O. Newman, 1973), and rational choice theory (Cornish & Clarke, 1986). Some opportunity-reducing techniques were advanced by this theory, including target hardening, target removal, natural surveillance, formal surveillance, surveillance by employees, removing the means to commit crime, environmental management, and reducing pay-off (Clarke & Mayhew, 1980).

As this theory does not aim at changing the roots of crime, such as poverty, social disorganization, or criminal subcultures, it has been widely criticized that displacement will occur when efforts taken to prevent crime in one context may cause an increase in crime in other contexts (Hayward, 2007). Displacement can take the form of geographical displacement, temporal displacement, target displacement, tactical displacement, crime-type displacement (Felson & Clarke, 1998), or some combination of these (Guerette & Bowers, 2009; Hesselning, 1994).

The empirical evidence about whether this method can prevent crime has conflicting implications. On one hand, some “successful” situational crime prevention cases were used in its support (Chaiken, Lawless, & Stevenson, 1992; Clarke, Field, & McGrath, 1991; Ekblom, 1992; Hunter & Jeffery, 1992; Wilkinson, 1986). On the other hand, empirical evidence was also widely found to support the presence of displacement (Chaiken et al., 1992; Clarke et al., 1991; Ekblom, 1992). As some scholars commented, given the fact that displacement may take place in different types, it may be impossible to confirm empirically that displacement will not occur (Barr & Pease, 1992).

Removing the means to commit crimes is one of the most important techniques advocated by situational crime prevention theory. However, whether this method can reduce crime or not still remains questionable because of the displacement problem. Relying on the data about using motorcycle ban policy to reduce snatch theft and robbery (*shuangqiang*) in Guangzhou, this article tries to examine the effectiveness of this strategy and the policing philosophy behind this strategy.

It is hoped that the current study will help to advance the existing literature in the following ways: First, with a deep analysis of the application of the motorcycle ban policy in Guangzhou, the article shows readers how such a policing and crime prevention strategy was adopted by the local government. Disclosing this decision-making process has a particular significance in that it can help us understand the ideology and philosophy of Chinese policing. Second, although situational crime prevention has been widely criticized in the West and the United States, there is no research about how such a theory is applied in China. By locating the motorcycle ban policy in the framework of situational crime prevention theory, this study can disclose how this theory was applied in Chinese policing and the problems that ensued. Third, some research have

pointed out the legitimacy crisis encountered by the Chinese government in general and Chinese policing in particular in the “after-reform period” (Wong, 2004), but there is almost no research into how the Chinese government and police dealt with this crisis. The current article can provide updated information about this matter.

## **Research Questions**

The following questions will be explored in the article: (a) Why did the Guangzhou government adopt a motorcycle ban policy to fight against snatch theft and robbery (*shuangqiang*)? (b) Can this policy serve the purpose of reducing crime in general and reducing *shuangqiang* in particular, or is it just a temporary and not well-considered strategy in reducing crime? (c) What are the Chinese policing ideologies and philosophies behind this crime prevention strategy? and (d) To what extent can such a strategy help the Guangzhou police cope with its legitimacy crisis?

## **Data and Method**

### ***Research Site***

The data of this article come from a larger project that studies crime and the motorcycle ban policy in the Pearl River Delta. The main fieldwork was conducted in two cities, Guangzhou and Tianzhi (pseudonym). Guangzhou is the capital of Guangdong province and it had a population of 9.94 million at the end of 2005. In the whole population, migrant workers accounted for 35% and local residents accounted 65%. Tianzhi is a midsize city, located at the center of the Pearl River Delta and at only 1 hr’s drive from Guangzhou. At the end of 2005, it had a population of 1.95 million and migrant workers and local residents accounted for 41% and 59%, respectively. Guangzhou banned all motorcycles (except for police use) in January 2007 from the roads in all its eight old districts. Tianzhi banned non-local license motorcycles in January 2001, but the policy was not strictly implemented in practice.

### ***Data Collection in the Whole Project***

The research methodology is based on grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). When collecting data, the author was particularly interested in the strategy of “all is data,” which means what is going on in the research scene is the data, whatever the source, whether interview, observations, documents, and in whatever combination (Glaser, 2001, 2002). A comprehensive data collection strategy was used, including (a) a survey with 112 motorcycle taxi drivers in Guangzhou in 2006 before motorcycles were banned in 2007; (b) interview with motorcycle taxi drivers (36), police (8), and other migrant workers (32) in Guangzhou and Tianzhi; (c) 6 months’ participant observation with motorcycle taxi drivers in Tianzhi; (d) a careful reading of official

police-recorded cases of robbery of motorcycle taxi drivers (all 174 cases in 2006) in Tianzhi; and (e) a comprehensive content analysis of 6,462 newspaper articles about motorcycle ban policy published in 168 of China's newspapers in the past 10 years from 2000 to 2009 (J. Xu, 2010). Because the data used in this article are mainly interview data and newspaper content analysis, the author will discuss these two parts of data in detail.

### *Data Used in This Article*

The first part of data came from newspaper articles. To have a comprehensive analysis about the debate surrounding banning motorcycles, the author collected all newspaper articles published in China about motorcycle ban policy in the past 10 years from 2000 to 2009. When searching articles, the author used "motorcycle ban" (*jinmo*) as keyword to search news in the database of WiseNews. WiseNews is a database of full-text newspaper clippings with search capabilities. It includes news from more than 1,500 newspapers, magazines, and websites in the Greater China area (mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, and Singapore). Most of the newspapers published in China are included in this database. The search scope was restricted within mainland China, and search time scope was from January 1, 2000, to December 31, 2009. All in all, the term *motorcycle ban* appeared in 6,462 articles, published in 168 newspapers, varied from the national level (e.g., *People's Daily*, *China Youth Daily*) to regional ones (e.g., *Southern Metropolis Daily*, *Guangzhou Daily*). The author downloaded all 6,462 articles and read them one by one to summarize the main content for each article. With the systematic review of these 6,462 articles, the author tries to figure out how the policy was debated in the mass media and implemented by local governments (particularly Guangzhou government in this article) as well as exploring the consequence of this policy for reducing crime. In addition, whenever necessary, the author resorted to other keywords (e.g., "driving-car robbery" [*jiache qiangjie*]) to search articles related to motorcycle ban in the WiseNews database. Data about the crime situation in Guangzhou came from monthly press conferences about the comprehensive management of social order. The conference was first established in April 2007 and held every month to release the general crime data to mass media.

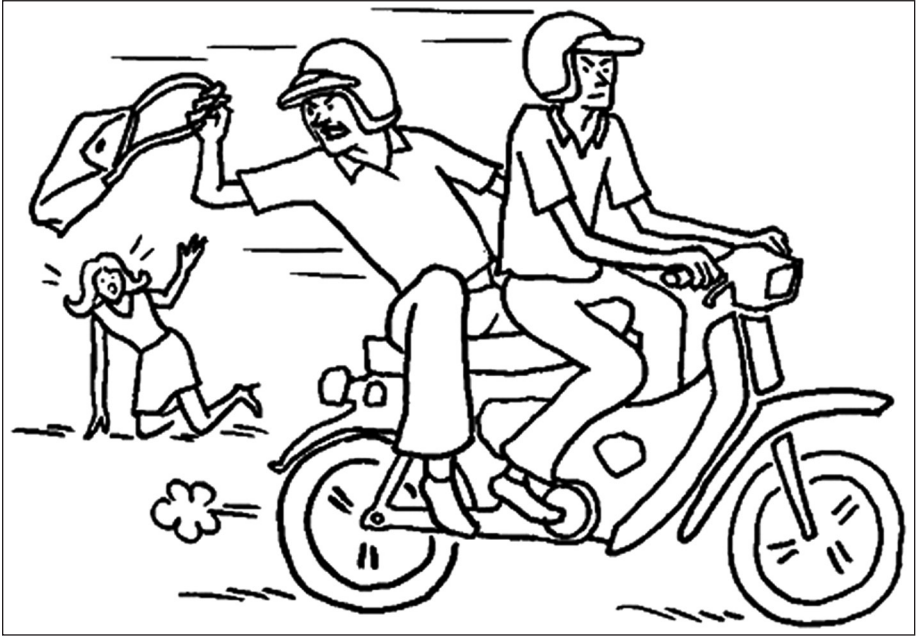
The second part of data used in this article came from in-depth semistructured interviews with the police, motorcycle taxi drivers, and other migrant workers in Guangzhou and Tianzhi. The purpose of interview was to find out how motorcycle ban policy affected work and life for motorcycle taxi drivers and crime situation from different perspectives. There were different sets of questions for each interview group. The author conducted in-depth interviews with 8 policemen, 31 motorcycle taxi drivers, and 6 migrant workers in Tianzhi in 2007 and 2008. The author also conducted in-depth interviews with 5 motorcycle or bicycle taxi drivers<sup>4</sup> and 26 migrant workers in Guangzhou in 2009. Motorcycle taxi drivers were first approached on the street by the author and then recruited for interview with their consent. Police and other migrant

workers were recruited through the author's personal contacts established in past research. All interviewees participated in the research voluntarily. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for later analysis. Information that may have led to violations of personal privacy, for example, names, was deleted from the transcripts.

It is important to note that officially published crime data have their limitations because of an underreport, underrecord practice and political reasons in China. The author was particularly cautious when interpreting these data, and several strategies were used to ensure the reliability of the data. First, the author focused on the general crime trend rather than the concrete number of crimes, for instance, when Guangzhou banned motorcycles and the police announced that motorcycle snatch theft declined by 76% in the first season of 2007 compared with the same period of 2006. Although the concrete number might be questionable, it was reasonable to expect that motorcycle snatch theft did decline as criminals could not use motorcycles as fleeing tools within motorcycle-ban areas. Second, when the official data showed that some types of crime were increasing, they were relatively reliable, as in China local governments usually underreport rather than overreport crime data. For example, when Guangzhou police disclosed that burglary increased after banning motorcycles, the increasing trend was relatively reliable although we might disagree with the degree of increase. Third, the author also interpreted official crime data in the social context of campaign-style policing in China (M. S. Tanner, 2005). When the police started a campaign to crack down on a certain type of crime, the campaign itself could show the concerned crimes from the police, for example, the campaign of cracking down on driving-car robbery in the Pearl River Delta cities. Fourth, to strengthen the argument, the author did not rely on a single evidence but tried to use multiple ones. Arguments made from officially published crime statistics were examined with reference to the interview and observation data where such data are available. Fifth, to minimize the reporting error, the author tried to cross-check the same news from different newspapers if they were available.

## **Plan of Analysis**

Using those data, this article first describes the deteriorating crime situation in Guangzhou and the government's effort to deal with it. Then, the article examines the positive effects of the motorcycle ban policy in reducing crime. This is followed by a comparative analysis of the negative effects of this policy in reducing crime: different types of displacements. Based on these analyses, the article explores the underlying rationality of the motorcycle ban policy and proposes an argument about drive-away policing to make sense of the new policing strategy. The article concludes by pointing out that although the drive-away policing strategy is problematic overall, it is desirable for local government to continue it as it can strengthen the legitimacy of the local government in general and the police in particular. Therefore, crime prevention in China carries more political significance than just the reduction of crime.



**Figure 1.** A scenario of motorcycle snatch theft from Wikipedia ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snatch\\_theft](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snatch_theft))

## Crime and Motorcycle Ban Policy in Guangzhou

### *Motorcycle Snatch Theft (Feiche Qiangduo) and Shuangqiang*

The Pearl River Delta is one of the three economic hubs of China. China has become known as the “workshop of the world” in recent years, and the Pearl River Delta plays the most significant role in making China win such a title. Labor-intensive industries dominate this area and they attract millions of migrant workers in pursuit of their dreams. When the influx of migrant workers provides almost unlimited cheap labor (although the situation is changing in recent years) for the ever-expanding process of industrialization, it also poses a serious threat of public safety in urban society. In the cities of the Pearl River Delta, migrant workers become the majority of offenders and they commit 80% to 90% of crime according to official police records (Z. Wang, 2006). As the Pearl River Delta area is in the frontlines of China’s reform, many new types of crimes first emerged in this area and subsequently spread to other areas. In the early 1990s, a new type of crime emerged and became rampant after the turn of the millennium: motorcycle snatch theft (*feiche qiangduo*) (see Figure 1).<sup>5</sup> In Chinese academic journals, the earliest article studying motorcycle snatch theft can be traced back to 1998, in an article that discussed 111 migrant workers committing motorcycle snatch theft in Guangzhou and Shenzhen from 1992 on (S. Chen, Wan, & Zhuang, 1998). The advanced road system in the Pearl River Delta area and the





**Figure 2.** Typical motorcycles used in the Pearl River Delta, southern China

decreasing price of motorcycles (see Figure 2), facilitated the increase of motorcycle snatch theft.

Basically, motorcycle snatch theft occurs in the following three ways. The first way involves two offenders taking one motorcycle together. One drives the motorcycle and another sits on the backseat. When the motorcycle overtakes a victim, the offender sitting on the back grabs the victim's handbag, cell phone, or other valuables. The driver then speeds up the motorcycle and they flee. The second method has one offender driving a motorcycle, waiting at a nearby road. Another offender looks for victims on foot. After grabbing the victims' property, the offender jumps onto the waiting motorcycle and they flee. The third way sees offenders following a victim's car by motorcycle. When the victim's car stops at a red light, offenders break the car window or open the car door, grab the victim's bag, and flee by means of motorcycle.

Because this offense occurs very quickly—and sometimes before victims realize what has happened to them—the offenders will have fled before a response can be made. In one instance, a CCTV recorded the process of the commission and found that it only took 37 seconds to complete the process (Zhou, 2008). In some other cases, it can take even less time. It proves to be very hard for the police to crack down on such cases, and a claim had been made that less than 20% of cases could be cleared (H. Cheng & Song, 2005). Motorcycle snatch theft has become more serious in numbers and people are panicking over such crimes in the cities of the Pearl River Delta. Snatch theft can easily be upgraded to robbery when victims try to fight back. Snatch thieves and



robbers accounted for more than one third of all offenders from the official police records in Guangdong province over the 3 years since 2002 (Wang & Wang, 2006). According to the 110 police hotline<sup>6</sup> calls in Guangzhou, 100 such cases were recorded per day in 2003. At its peak in August 2003, the recorded cases mounted to as high as 140 per day (Shi, 2005). The deteriorating crime situation severely damaged people's sense of public street safety. A survey conducted by the Guangzhou Public Opinion Research Center in 2004 revealed that only 21% of citizens felt safe in Guangzhou and more than 80% of citizens regarded *shuangqiang* as the most dangerous issue threatening their sense of safety (Tan, 2004). This was not only the case in Guangzhou, as *shuangqiang* became rampant in other Pearl River Delta cities such as Shenzhen and Dongguan as well.

### *Moral Panic and the "Red Button" Case*

Motorcycle snatch theft not only poses a threat to people's property, it also seriously threatens victims' personal safety. In some cases, when victims hold on to their handbags, offenders use knives to cut off victims' hands to commit the crime—termed as "hand-cutting gangs" (*kanshou dang*) in the Pearl River Delta. Some offenders use bricks or other tools to hit victims' heads from the back and then snatch their property. These offenders are called "head-hitting gangs" (*paitou dang*). Even worse, when offenders grab victims' handbags, some victims hold their bags firmly and they often fall and get seriously hurt. Some victims have lost their lives during such incidents.

In August 2006, Deng Zheyu, a 23-year-old female migrant worker fell to the ground and died when she wanted to protect her handbag from being snatched by motorcycle snatchers in Guangzhou. In this case, except for a cell phone, there was only 23 yuan in her handbag (L. Cheng, 2006a). Two weeks later, a similar case occurred and a 27-year-old migrant girl, Zhu Fengmei, fell and died when offenders tried to snatch her handbag from their motorcycle (L. Cheng, 2006b). These cases provoked heated debate in the mass media and pushed the panic over such kinds of crime to its peak.

In May 2006, the laptop of Zhong Nanshan,<sup>7</sup> a medical professor and hero of anti-SARS work in China, was snatched by motorcycle snatchers when he was on his way to the office. This became a big case and the Party Secretary of Guangdong province instructed the police to "solve the case quickly." Guangzhou police founded a "special case team" to clear up this case and 10 days later the offender handed in the laptop to the police (L. Cheng, 2007).

The death of the young girls increased a moral panic (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994) about the motorcycle snatch theft and promoted a widespread debate about the crime situation in the mass media. The case of the anti-SARS hero made the offense catch political attention and served as the "red button" (Simon, 2008) for the later policy of motorcycle ban.

### *Efforts in Preventing Shuangqiang*

Although Guangzhou ranked third, following Beijing and Shanghai, in official recorded criminal cases, the city has always been seen as much more unsafe than

those two big cities. The Guangzhou police argued that it was because of the problem of street crimes. The *shuangqiang* rate was higher than in Beijing and Shanghai (L. Xu, 2007).

To fight against *shuangqiang*, Guangzhou founded a dedicated plainclothes police team (J. Liu, 2006). In addition, police were encouraged by their leaders to fire at offenders if they try to flee from the police. In 2006, Guangzhou police shot 7 offenders to death at crime scenes and wounded 12 others in the campaign against serious crimes (Tian, Wang, & Xiao, 2006). Allegedly, to enhance the deterrence effect, the death penalty was also introduced for motorcycle-snatch-theft offenders in 2006 in Guangdong province (Hu & Yue, 2006). However, these efforts did not solve the serious *shuangqiang* problem successfully. Facing a still deteriorating crime situation, some college students organized themselves to join the “war” against *shuangqiang*. They waited in some hotspot sites at night and tried to catch the offenders themselves. In some cases, the suspects were beaten up heavily by these vigilante groups and bystanders. According to a survey conducted by the Sun Yat-sen University, from 2004 to 2005, there were more than 300 antirobbery teams organized by civilians in Guangzhou (G. Wang, 2006).

### *Motorcycle Ban in Guangzhou, Shenzhen, and Dongguan*

Despite such measures being taken to prevent snatch theft and robbery, the crimes continued to be rampant in Guangzhou and other cities in the Pearl River Delta. From January 2007, the Guangzhou government resorted to a new policy, banning motorcycles. This policy banned all motorcycles from the roads within the city borders. All motorcycles (except police motorcycles) will be confiscated if they are found on the road. They referred to this policy as “cutting the legs” (*duantui*) of criminals because many *shuangqiang* were related to motorcycles. The motorcycle ban policy provoked a heated debate in China as it also caused many difficulties for people’s transport needs. Many citizens depend on their motorcycles for transportation in the city, especially where the public transportation system is not convenient or efficient. This policy also affected the lives of migrant workers as many of them depend on driving motorcycle taxis to make a living. Not only Guangzhou but many other cities also adopted the same motorcycle ban policy as a crime prevention strategy, including Shenzhen and Dongguan. Although it is also valuable to explore how the motorcycle ban policy affected ordinary people’s lives (J. Xu, 2009), this article focuses on how it affected the crime situation in Guangzhou.

### **Positive Effects of Motorcycle Ban Policy as a Method of Crime-Reduction**

One of the techniques proposed by situational crime prevention theory is to remove the means to commit crime, or control crime facilitators. Following this idea, the motorcycle ban policy removed the means to commit motorcycle-snatch-theft offense. Using the police term of “cutting the legs” of criminals, as they can no longer use their

motorcycles as a means of escape, the following is a detailed examination of the positive effects brought on by this policy.

### ***Decline of Motorcycle Snatch Theft and Robbery Against Motorcycle Drivers***

*Shuangqiang* is strongly related to the use of motorcycles in the Pearl River Delta. In the study about these acts in Tianzhi, J. Xu (2006) disclosed that 35.7% of *shuangqiang* were related to motorcycles (motorcycles were used either as escape tools or were targets of theft). It is reasonable to expect a dramatic decrease of *shuangqiang* in Guangzhou after the enforcement of a motorcycle ban policy, at least in a short-term perspective. This is obviously the case for motorcycle snatch theft because there will be no motorcycles left. After its enforcement in January 2007, the Guangzhou police reported:

In the first season of 2007, officially recorded *shuangqiang* cases dropped by 49.9% and “motorcycle-snatch-theft” dropped by 76% compared with the same period of 2006. (Hou, 2007, p.01)

Although the concrete figures of the decline might not be completely accurate from the police report, the declining trend is reasonable for the gradual vanishing of motorcycles. In 2009, 2 years after Guangzhou banned motorcycles, the author interviewed 31 people in the motorcycle ban area of Guangzhou and all interviewees expressed that they never met or heard of a motorcycle snatch theft case again.

In addition, one can naturally expect an equally obvious decrease of robbery against motorcycle taxi drivers. In the cities of the Pearl River Delta, many motorcycle taxi drivers were robbed when they worked at night (J. Xu, 2009). However, this group is generally neglected by the mass media and in academic research. After the motorcycle ban, the chances of this group being robbed were also significantly reduced, simply because the taxi drivers would be out of vehicles and work.

### ***Decline of Motorcycle Theft***

In Guangzhou, there were about 700,000 motorcycles before the government started its new policy in 2007 (Wang & Wang, 2006). These motorcycles were valuable targets for criminals. Removing the target is one of the important techniques advocated by situational crime prevention theory. The vanishing of the target will definitely reduce and even eradicate motorcycle theft. However, it is unclear as to what extent criminals will look for other targets as substitutes.

### ***Decline of Overall Crime in a Short-Term Perspective***

Because of the decline of the *shuangqiang*, the overall crime rate also rapidly decreased in Guangzhou. It is understandable that there may be a lag when crime declines overall

in a certain period before criminals begin to resort to other kinds of crime. According to a Guangzhou police report,

Officially recorded criminal cases dropped by 19.6% in the first three months of 2007 compared with the same period of 2006 after the enforcement of the motorcycle ban policy. (Hou, 2007, p.01)

Again, although we may disagree with the degree of decline from police reports, the pattern of decline of overall crime is also reasonable. However, it is not clear how long this declining trend can continue when crimes are displaced in form, space, and timing.

### *Improvement of the "Sense of Safety"*

*Shuangqiang*, especially motorcycle snatch theft, always occurs on the street. Street crimes are more visible than nonstreet crimes and pose a great threat to people's sense of safety. After the operation of the motorcycle ban, streets become safer and the people's sense of safety also improves. Although street crimes may be displaced to indoor crimes, such as burglary or theft, the transformation from visible to invisible can reduce people's fear of crime. A survey conducted in July 2007 by Sun Yat-sen University disclosed that

people's satisfaction towards public safety increased about 30 per cent and people's sense of safety increased 11.2 per cent compared to September 2006. (H. Wang, Chen, Li, Liu, & Shi, 2007, p.01)

Some criminologists point out that displacement will almost inevitably occur when some situational strategies are implemented (Barr & Pease, 1992). I continue this article by examining how displacement occurred when Guangzhou introduced the motorcycle ban policy to fight against *shuangqiang*.

## **Crime Displacement Caused by the Motorcycle Ban Policy**

Although the motorcycle ban can reduce *shuangqiang* in general and motorcycle snatch theft in particular, there were several instances of displacement.

### *Geographic Displacement*

Geographic displacement can happen within Guangzhou and beyond. As some suburban areas are not included in the motorcycle ban, it is possible that *shuangqiang* will transfer to this area. In addition, such displacement can also happen in other cities in the Pearl River Delta where local governments do not ban motorcycles. When Guangzhou started its motorcycle ban policy, large-scale displacement of motorcycles from the motorcycle

ban areas to non-motorcycle ban areas was observed (Z. Liu, Jun, Xiao, & Hu, 2007). As a result, *shuangqiang* cases increased significantly in these areas. An internal report from an adjunct city in the Pearl River Delta indicated that

after the introduction of the motorcycle ban in Guangzhou, “motorcycle-snatch-theft” increased by 31.3 per cent in the first two months in 2007 [in our city] compared with the last two months in 2006. (Public Security Bureau, 2007, p.1)

A police officer from a suburban area in Guangzhou where there was no ban commented that

non-motorcycle ban areas bear “great pressure” from *shuangqiang* when it dropped in the motorcycle ban areas. (X. Chen, Wang, & Li, 2007, p.A03)

Geographic displacement can even reach as far as thousands of miles away. Some robbers in Shanghai and Hangzhou admitted:

We used to commit crimes in Guangzhou. When Guangzhou enforced a motorcycle ban policy, we had to change place for “motorcycle-snatch-theft.” (Lin & Huang, 2007, p.01)

The author’s interview data in Tianzhi also confirmed geographic displacement. Both motorcycle taxi drivers and the police expressed their concerns about the increasing number of motorcycles in Tianzhi after Guangzhou and Shenzhen banned motorcycles, whereas the former’s concern was about the fierce competition in driving motorcycle taxis, the latter worried about the increasing rate of crime. A police officer in Tianzhi expressed:

Every city only cared about themselves. Guangzhou and Shenzhen banned motorcycles and struck hard against crime. They drove these criminals to nearby cities, including our city. (Interview with a police officer in Tianzhi in 2008)

### *Tactical Displacement*

The purpose of banning motorcycles from the road was to make it impossible for criminals to use a motorcycle as a means of flight. Removing the means to commit crime or controlling facilitator is one of the strategies listed in situational crime prevention theory (Clarke, 1992). However, the motorcycle is only one of many means by which criminals may commit *shuangqiang*. In the Pearl River Delta, after the ban, more criminals start to use cars as their vehicles to rob others, although this type of robbery, namely, driving-car robbery (*jiache qiangjie*), emerged before the start of motorcycle ban policy. Driving-car robbery appears in two forms. First, criminals may use a car. When the car overtakes the victim, the offenders will pull victims into the car and rob them. Second, criminals may create a fake car crash and when the victim gets

out of his or her car, they will pull him or her into their car and rob them. In Guangzhou, a medical professor was killed in just such a driving-car robbery when he refused to give his credit card password to the criminals. This became a big case and greatly increased people's fears about this new type of robbery (Q. Chen, Ma, Du, & Sui, 2007). Driving-car robbery became more and more serious and caused another moral panic for such an offense after the motorcycle ban in the Pearl River Delta. A senior police officer from Guangdong Provincial Department of Public Security revealed:

After some cities banned motorcycles in Guangdong, driving-car crimes increased and the increasing trend will continue. (X. Liu, Lin, Zhang, & Yu, 2007, p.A06)

In August 2007, eight cities in the Pearl River Delta worked together to start a campaign to crack down on driving-car robbery. Later, police reported their "achievements" in fighting against driving-car robbery:

After one and a half months, the police solved over 300 (driving-car-robbery) cases and caught 171 offenders, 42 "driving-car-robbery" gangs. (Yin, Liu, Chen, Xie, & Liu, 2007, p.01)

After three months, 500 cases were solved and 80 "driving-car-robbery" gangs were caught. (X. Liu et al., 2007, p.A06)

Admittedly, because fewer criminals can afford cars over motorcycles at the present time, the "cutting-leg" effect of the motorcycle ban for motorcycle-snatch-theft offenders might reduce the overall number of *shuangqiang* in a certain amount of time.

### *Crime Type Displacement*

Situational prevention focuses on the situation in which offenders commit crime. Through controlling the situation, it aims to reduce crime while offenders are generally neglected. However, when one type of crime becomes more difficult or risky, it is reasonable to suppose that they will change to another type of crime (Hesseling, 1994). When a motorcycle ban makes *shuangqiang* more difficult to commit, burglary and other less difficult types of crime might increase. As streets become safer, houses may become much more unsafe than before. At the Conference of Comprehensive Management of Social Order (*zong zi hui*) in November 2008, the Guangzhou Police Commissioner reported:

Compared with January to October 2007, reported criminal cases decreased by 11 per cent; recorded criminal cases decreased by 14 per cent in the same period in 2008. However, it was very obvious that crime patterns were changing towards burglary and fraud. Burglary has increased by 6.7 per cent and fraud



increased by 13.6 per cent. *Shuangqiang* cases declined by 55.5 per cent when compared with 2005. The percentage of *shuangqiang* has also declined from 31 per cent in 2005 to 15.6 per cent in 2008 in all recorded cases. However, the percentage of burglary has increased from 15.1 to 17 and the percentage of fraud has increased from 6.1 to 9.2 in all criminal cases from 2005 to 2008. (Y. Xu, Zhou, Luo, & Huang, 2008, p.A07)

Another source from the same Conference of Comprehensive Management of Social Order indicated a more serious situation.

From January 1st to November 19th, there were 38,930 recorded burglary cases, a 7.3 per cent increase from the same period in 2007. There were about 3,500 burglary cases every month. At the same time, there were 27,062 recorded fraud cases, which is a 29.8 per cent increase compared with the same period in 2007. (Rong, Yang, Zhao, & Chen, 2008, p.A07)

Although we might question the accuracy of crime statistics given by the police, we have good reasons to believe that burglary did increase as it was less likely for Chinese police to exaggerate the numbers of crime. After comparing the impact of the motorcycle ban on displacement, the author will try to explore the Chinese policing philosophy embodied in such a strategy.

## **Drive-Away Policing and the Crisis of Police Legitimacy in China**

Actually, before the enforcement of the motorcycle ban policy, the Guangzhou police had already realized the problem posed by displacement. They predicted that after introducing this policy, driving-car robbery would increase and the means to commit robbery might escalate. Victims were more likely to be raped or killed in a driving-car robbery than in motorcycle snatch theft as the former offense is often committed in a relatively closed space (L. Cheng, 2007). The government also realized that robbery may be displaced to burglary. In May 2007, the Party Secretary of Guangzhou expressed:

I did worry about the fact that after the motorcycle ban, robbery would be displaced into burglary, from street to house. In that case, it will be more unsafe for people. (G. Li, Huang, Luo, & Huang, 2007, p.01)

Despite such deliberations, the Guangzhou government started this policy in January 2007. Dongguan and Shenzhen have also implemented a motorcycle ban policy and they are also expanding the motorcycle ban scope in their cities. Many other cities are also trying to implement this policy in the Pearl River Delta. Besides the crime displacement problem, there are many other criticisms of the current motorcycle ban policy. This policy not only removed the means available to motorcycle-snatch-theft offenders but

it also removed alternative transportation for people and a means of economic survival for motorcycle-taxi drivers. Even facing all these criticisms, the local government continued to introduce the policy. In such a setting, what might be the real reasons for the local government to implement this policy?

### *Problem-Oriented (or Short-Sighted) Policing*

The above analysis has shown how *shuangqiang* became very serious in Guangzhou and other Pearl River Delta cities. Although some measures, such as implementing plainclothes policing, introducing the death penalty, and firing at offenders, were taken by the police to curb this crime, they did not seem to solve the problem of such crimes. Citizens were dissatisfied with the crime situation, and the victimization of some important figures made governments feel greater pressure. This article argues that the ban, as a strategy of situational crime prevention, may best be described as a problem-oriented type of policing. The purpose of this policy was to reduce a particular kind of crime, *shuangqiang* in China. This was vividly exemplified by the remarks of the Minister of Public Security in China:

The police should solve the public security problems which seriously affect people's sense of safety quickly. The police should strike the crimes which people hate most. The police should concentrate on solving the problem which people think is most serious. (Chai, 2008, p.01)

As a typical example of campaign-style policing, after the enforcement of motorcycle ban policy, the government frequently reported its success in reducing *shuangqiang* in the mass media. Thousands of motorcycles were demolished in public to demonstrate the "success" of the campaign and the determination of the government.

The overall reduction of crime was not perhaps the chief purpose of this strategy, at least the reduction could be said to be questionable. However, the motorcycle ban could show people that the government was making an effort to reduce crime and thus make people more satisfied with the government, at least temporarily. The popularity rating of the administration might be more important than the actual reduction of crime in this manner.

### *Drive-Away Policing Strategy*

Although displacement happens after the introduction of the motorcycle ban policy, some displacements are considered desirable by local governments. Geographic displacement is one of them. Because of the motorcycle ban, some offenders have to transfer to non-motorcycle ban cities for motorcycle snatch theft. This is exactly the strategy of driving offenders away. This drive-away policing strategy is routinely used by the police in China. *Yanda*, the most important crime prevention strategy in the past 30 years, also has the function of driving offenders away temporarily (M. S. Tanner,

2005). One expert in the Guangdong Transportation Administration Bureau expressed his worry about the motorcycle ban policy in the following manner:

Because of the motorcycle ban, the pressure of crime will be displaced to suburban areas and some types of crime will decrease sharply. However, the crime situation in areas surrounding Guangzhou will deteriorate. The strike-hard campaigns, as a method of driving away, makes criminals circulate among cities in the Pearl River Delta. Even though Guangzhou can defend the “enemy” outside its door, it is meaningless for the whole of Guangdong province. (Z. Liu, 2007, p.05)

The strategy of driving offenders away from the city, as exemplified in motorcycle ban policy, is widely used in the cities of the Pearl River Delta. Once one city starts a motorcycle ban, other cities have to follow up. Otherwise, motorcycle snatch theft will be displaced to non-motorcycle ban cities. From the strategy of drive-away policing, it could explain why, despite facing all kinds of criticism, cities in the Pearl River Delta compete with each other to implement the motorcycle ban policy.

This drive-away policing strategy is not only used in preventing *shuangqiang*, it is also used in solving the problems caused by *shuangqiang*. Facing the increasing burglary problem after the motorcycle ban in 2008, the Guangzhou Police Commissioner declared:

We should strike burglary out of Guangzhou by squeezing it layer by layer. (Y. Xu et al., 2008, p.A07)

In addition, in the enforcement of the motorcycle ban, the police resorted to their traditional methods of campaign-style policing (M. S. Tanner, 2005; S. Trevaskes, 2007). The police organized campaigns to catch those who violated the motorcycle ban policy. Campaign-style policing has long proved ineffective in lowering the crime rate. Only temporarily, certain types of crime will decrease and they will resume increasing after the campaign. Some police from local police stations reminded people in 2008:

Recently, *shuangqiang* resumed increasing in some streets. Citizens should not only focus on preventing burglary, they should strengthen prevention of *shuangqiang*. (Y. Xu et al., 2008, p.A07)

Actually, the drive-away policing is not unique to the Pearl River Delta; it is a popular strategy used by police all over China. In April 2007, police from Lvcheng district in Weizhou in Zhejiang province started a campaign to drive away all migrant workers with previous criminal records. This policing strategy was regarded as a model to follow and learnt by other police departments. Police explained that the best way to decrease crime is to drive all these people away from the areas they policed. Landlords and employers were mobilized to achieve this goal under the pressure of the police (Xiang, 2007).

The driving-away policing strategy is related to the particular structure of Chinese policing. Chinese police are under the dual leadership of the Ministry of Public Security and the local government (*tiaokuai jiehe*). When the Ministry of Public Security gives instructions and guidance professionally and administratively, local governments are responsible for financing and implementing the operation. Therefore, the Chinese police is heavily decentralized and local government and party committees exert substantial control over local policing (Dai, 2008; Fu, 2001; M. S. Tanner & Green, 2007). As for the driving-away policing strategy embodied in the motorcycle ban policy, when it is a "rational choice" for one city, the geographic displacement of crime made this policy undesirable for cities nearby. Cities in the Pearl River Delta have to compete with each other to enforce the motorcycle ban when one city started to adopt such a policy. One city's "rational choice" of crime prevention strategy makes it irrational in the larger scope, say at the provincial and national level.

### *The Sun Zhigang Case and Police Legitimacy Crisis*

Since the 1990s, the Chinese police have suffered from a legitimacy crisis (Potter, 1994; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003). The signs of this crisis included (a) a deterioration of public image: In people's minds, the police were engaged in all kinds of illegal, irregular, abusive, and unprofessional police activities; (b) resistance to police power: The police were confronted by threatening crowds and explosive situations when conducting their duties; and (c) mass rebellion against police authority: There were more and more public demonstrations against the police and government that were getting larger and more organized, sophisticated, and violent (Wong, 2004). A recent example of this police legitimacy crisis can be witnessed in the case of Yang Jia. Yang believed he was treated unjustly by the police and killed six policemen and injured another four with a knife in the Shanghai Zhabei Police Bureau on July 1, 2008. However, many people in China did not show any sympathy for the victimized police but regarded Yang as a "hero" (*yingxiong, daxia, daoke*) for taking justice into his own hands (N. Xu & Zhu, 2008).

In Guangzhou, the police legitimacy crisis reached its peak when the Sun Zhigang case occurred in 2003. Sun Zhigang, a 27-year-old university graduate, fashion designer, and migrant worker was detained by Guangzhou police on March 17, 2003, for failing to produce a residence permit. Three days later, he was beaten to death while in custody. The police attempted to cover up the case initially but later admitted to wrongdoing under public pressure (Wong, 2004). Eighteen persons, including 12 state employees, were found guilty in the case. Among them, one was sentenced to death, one received the death penalty with a 2-year suspension, and another received a life sentence later on. This case also promoted the abolition of "Measures for Internment and Deportation of Urban Vagrants and Beggars" promulgated by the State Council in 1982 (Yuan, 2003). Because of the case of Sun Zhigang, the Guangzhou police received widespread criticisms and its image was heavily destroyed in people's minds. An article published in the *Journal of Chinese People's Public Security University* admitted that in some

people's eyes, the police became synonymous with evil and corruption. This case brought a serious crisis of legitimacy for the Chinese police in general and the Guangzhou police force in particular (T. Li, 2003).

The Guangzhou police's legitimacy crisis was further worsened by the deteriorating crime situation. To deal with this crisis and win the people's support, a motorcycle ban policy was implemented to curb the crime problem of most concern, *shuangqiang*. As mentioned above, the people's satisfaction regarding public security in Guangzhou increased in some surveys. Although the political significance of strike-hard campaigns lies as the symbolic reminder of the capacity of the state to contain the negative social effects of rapid economic growth (Trevaskes, 2003), the message of the motorcycle ban policy is that local government is not impotent in the face of crime. Social order is still in the control of the local government. The government believes that the temporary "success" of the motorcycle ban in reducing crime, although the long-term effects are questionable, can improve the relationship between the public and police and maintain its popular legitimacy (H. M. Tanner, 1999; M. S. Tanner, 2005). Popularity was gained both for the regime in general and the police force in particular if people believe "something is being done" to uphold order. What the author observed from the motorcycle ban policy concurred with the conclusion drawn by Bakken (2005) that reactions against crime in Chinese society are not limited to the wish to solve the problem. It has to be seen in terms of defending social and moral order in a society undergoing rapid transformation.

## Conclusion

Situational crime prevention theory has been widely criticized by mainstream criminologists. From the right, the criticism has been that it is an irrelevant response to crime because it neglects issues of moral culpability and punishment (Bright, 1992). From the left, the criticism has focused on the fact that it is politically and socially naive because it neglects the role of social and economic inequities in causation and of political power in the definition of crime (Matthews & Young, 1986). Liberals (and the left) criticize the approach because it diverts attention from the need to tackle the "root causes" of crime, such as unemployment, racial discrimination, substandard housing, inadequate schooling, and inconsistent parenting (Bottoms, 1990). In response to these criticisms, Clarke argues that rather than seeking to improve society through dictates from the top, situational prevention starts at the bottom, by working to solve highly specific problems as experienced by particular communities or organizations (Clarke, 1992, p. 28). The most important feature that makes situational crime prevention popular is that its proposed interventions are attractively short-term in their impact, promising to produce immediate practical results that could be evaluated (Garland, 2000).

In Guangzhou and other cities in the Pearl River Delta, the motorcycle ban was used to curb *shuangqiang* in general and "motorcycle-snatch-theft" in particular. As an example of situational crime prevention strategy, this article analyzes the benefits of the ban and problems of displacement. The thesis of drive-away policing is proposed to

understand the policing style in contemporary China. The article argues that drive-away policing, exemplified in the motorcycle ban policy in the Pearl River Delta, is a short-sighted form of policing, which can neither prevent crime in general, nor prevent it in the long run. The geographic displacement of crime caused by drive-away policing made cities in the Pearl River Delta compete with each other to adopt such a policy. The roots of drive-away policing lie in the decentralized Chinese policing structure, with dual leadership of higher level police departments and the local governments.

Despite the problem of displacement, a situational crime prevention strategy is desirable for local governments in China in order to prevent a specific type of crime. In addition, the temporary success of preventing a particular type of crime can help local governments and local police departments to gain more legitimacy from the public. Therefore, the motorcycle ban is not just an issue of crime prevention; it also carries social and political significance in China.

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### Notes

1. "Strike hard" (*yanda*) is the crime crackdown campaign that emphasizes punishing criminals severely and swiftly. During the campaign, three agencies of criminal justice, including the public security bureau, the procuratorate and the courts, come together for a specified period of time. The due process for trial is always neglected and confession by torture is often used in *yanda*.
2. Snatch theft is called *qiangduo* and robbery is called *qiangjie* in Chinese. Snatch theft and robbery together are called *shuangqiang* in China.
3. Campaign-style policing refers to concentrated, fixed-term, special targeting of particular categories of crime for arrest and severe punishment (especially the use of death penalty). These campaigns are characterized by frenetic overtime police activity, large waves of arrests, swift trials, and weak procedural protections (M. S. Tanner, 2005).



4. Although two-wheeled motorcycles were banned in Guangzhou, the three-wheeled motorcycles for the disabled were allowed and many former motorcycle taxi drivers started to use them or bicycle/tricycle as a taxi after the ban.
5. Similar kinds of crime have occurred in Spain, Italy, Colombia, Vietnam, and Malaysia in recent years.
6. 110 is an emergency telephone number in China. Its counterpart is 911 in America and 999 in some other European countries.
7. Zhong Nanshang is a professor in Guangzhou Medical College and a member of China Engineering Academy. He is regarded as a hero of the anti-SARS campaign in 2003 in China. SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome), a disease for which there is no known cure or vaccination, broke out and spread across the world later on.

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