

THE ROBBERY OF MOTORCYCLE TAXI DRIVERS (*DAKE ZAI*) IN CHINA

A Lifestyle/Routine Activity Perspective and Beyond

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Using official police records, interviews with motorcycle taxi drivers and the participant observation of their working activities in Tianzhi city, China, this paper examines how and why a dimension of social stratification—household registration (hukou)—is related to the risk of robbery victimization and attempts to evaluate the effectiveness of applying lifestyle/routine activity theory to contemporary urban China. It discloses that migrant motorcycle taxi drivers are highly overrepresented in robbery victimization. Their night-time working practices enhance their chances of being robbed by both increasing exposure to likely offenders and reducing the presence of capable guardians. The study further explores how a structural factor—motorcycle ban policy—shapes different routine activities between migrant and resident motorcycle taxi drivers and, by extension, differential risks of robbery victimization. The paper concludes by pointing out the importance of locating lifestyle/routine activities in a larger Chinese macro-social structural context. The outcome is one of the very first ethnographic analyses of crime conducted in situ in China.

Introduction

China is witnessing a dramatic increase in crime as modernization promotes industrialization, urbanization and capitalism. 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 door (*lu bu shi yi, ye bu bi hu*) (Bakken 2000: 377; Dutton 2000*a*).

When explaining the soaring crime rate in China, the influx of migrants from rural areas to cities is always invoked as a main factor by researchers (Ma 2001; Wang 2002). Admittedly, migrants are highly overrepresented as offenders in contemporary urban China, especially in the south-eastern coastal cities. In the cities of the Pearl River Delta, such as Guangzhou and Shenzhen, migrants make up 80–90 per cent of officially recorded offenders (Guangzhou Police Bureau Research Team 2002; Wang 2006*b*). However, when researchers focus on crimes committed by migrants, they have long neglected another equally important, if not more important, social fact: migrants also suffer a lot from these crimes and, especially in terms of violent crimes, migrants account for the majority of victims of homicide, assault, rape and robbery in China (Xu and Song 2005).

The general purpose of this study is to explore the important but under-studied issue that migrants are overrepresented in robbery victimization just as they are overrepresented among robbery offenders in urban China (Xu 2006*a*). Specifically, this study focuses on

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one type of robbery: robbery against motorcycle taxi drivers in contemporary China. With the study of this particular type of robbery in Tianzhi, a pseudonymous city, this research aims to understand differential risk factors in the robbery victimization of motorcycle taxi drivers, specifically comparing the vulnerabilities of migrants and residents and the underlying social mechanisms of such differences.

Lifestyle/routine activity theory is used to obtain an understanding of the phenomenon. In addition, this paper goes beyond lifestyle/routine activity theory and argues that although this theory can explain how specific social situations affect different people's risk of victimization, it cannot offer much insight into the explanation of why the specific situations that affect the chance of being victimized are formed. Through disclosing how a social policy—called motorcycle ban (*jīnmō*)—affects migrant and resident motorcycle taxi drivers' working patterns differentially and thereby results in different risks of robbery victimization, I assume that the application of lifestyle/routine activity theory should be located in the particular macro-structure context in China.

Theory and Previous Research

Some scholars regard lifestyle/routine activity theory as one of the most important developments in criminological explanations of the incidence and risks of victimization (Dugan and Apel 2005; Schreck *et al.* 2002). Different from some other victimization theories that emphasize individual traits as potential contributors to the risk of victimization, lifestyle/routine activity theory focuses on how a situation or social context influences people's vulnerability to crime (Dugan and Apel 2005). This theory focuses on the convergence in space and time of three elements of most criminal acts: (1) likely offenders with (2) suitable targets (3) in the absence of capable guardians against crime (Cohen and Felson 1979). In contrast to an exclusive emphasis on motivated offenders, lifestyle/routine activity theory also focuses on targets and guardians. In terms of victimization, it emphasizes how people's lifestyles affect their exposure to risks and therefore to differences in rates and forms of criminal victimization (Hindelang *et al.* 1978). It maintains that specific social groups, marked by a distinct configuration of age, gender, income and marital status, will engage in distinct patterns of activity and thereby court distinct risks of victimization. Young males, lower-income persons, the unmarried and racial/ethnic minorities have higher victimization rates in part because they have a higher exposure to risk (Hindelang 1976; Hindelang *et al.* 1978).

This lifestyle/routine activity theory has been widely explored in studying the differential risks of victimization in the United States and other Western countries (Andromachi *et al.* 2004; Bernburg and Thorlindsson 2001; Cass 2007; Cohen *et al.* 1981; Debra 1993; Forde and Kennedy 1997; Jackson *et al.* 2006; Kanan and Pruitt 2002; Kennedy and Forde 1990*a*; 1990*b*; Massey and McKean 1985; Miethe *et al.* 1987; Mustaine and Tewksbury 1998; 1999; 2002; Osgood *et al.* 1996; Spano and Nagy 2005; Tewksbury and Mustaine 2001).

The question arises whether such a theory could be applicable to explaining the differential risk of victimization in the social context of China. Some recent studies have attempted to assess just this matter (Messner *et al.* 2007; Zhang *et al.* 2007*a*; 2007*b*). In their Tianjin study, for example, Messner *et al.* (2007) maintain that although lifestyle/routine activity theory is applicable to urban China at a general level, it should be applied flexibly to reflect distinctive features of Chinese socio-cultural context. Tianjin research discloses

that eating out and travelling outside the city for work increase the risk of personal theft and travel for both work and leisure, increasing the risk of being swindled. However, these independent variables do not perform well in explaining either robbery or assault.

In addition, the Tianjin survey reveals that although some demographic characteristics, such as gender, age and education, affect the chance of victimization in the same way as they are observed in the West, marital status does not exert the same effect on victimization as it does in these countries. Being single in Tianjin is unrelated to victimization risk of personal theft, fraud, robbery and assault. Authors argue that this difference may lie in the different social connotation of being single in Chinese and Western contexts. Single people in Western countries are likely to establish their own households and become relatively independent of other relatives, which implies reduced guardianship, less activity restriction and more target attractiveness. However, single people in China are widely involved with their extended families and relatives, protecting them from the 'risky' activities pursued by their Western counterparts (Messner *et al.* 2007).

The applicability of lifestyle/routine activity theory needs more empirical research to examine how and to what extent it applies to China. I hope that the current study will offer an advance over the existing literature in the following ways.

First, the cutting-edge Tianjin research looked at six traditional districts in Tianjin city and its sampling was based on the household registration—a system that excludes migrants who are not so registered in cities. The present study of robbery against motorcycle taxi drivers has a particular significance because it focuses on the victimization of migrants, who were neglected in the Tianjin survey.

Second, the Tianjin research found that lifestyle/routine activity theory did not satisfactorily explain robbery victimization. Its authors admitted that this weak effect might due to a methodological limitation because it used a five-year time scale to capture a sufficient number of instances of victimization for meaningful statistical analysis. People's lifestyle and routine activities might change remarkably during this long period (Messner *et al.* 2007). The current study focuses on robbery exclusively and all cases occurred in 2006, thereby avoiding the time scale limitation of the Tianjin survey.

Third, although the Tianjin study disclosed the importance of locating lifestyle and routine activity in a particular Chinese socio-cultural context, more empirical evidence is urgently needed to explore how macro-structural social factors differentially affect people's lifestyle and routine activities and thereby generate different risks of victimization. The current study has its particular significance in that it will provide empirical data to demonstrate how a social policy—motorcycle ban (*jinmo*)—affected migrants and residents' working activities and their risks of exposure to robbery victimization, respectively.

Hukou and discrimination in Chinese context

Since the reform and opening-up policy in the late 1970s, China started to loosen up its strict control on internal migration. According to the 2005 census, China had a mobile population of 147.35 million.¹ This does not include 'undocumented' internal migrants and the real number is absolutely much higher than that. Although these migrants work and live in cities, their household registration system or *hukou* still remains at their original

¹ See http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200603/17/eng20060317_251506.html, *People's Daily Online*, 17 March 2006, accessed February 2009.

places. The household registration system plays a vital role in people's lives. It was established in 1955 and further tightened subsequently in order to cope with demographic pressures caused by rapid socialist industrialization in China. Although there are some minor changes since the reform, the basic functions of household registration still work today. According to *hukou* policy, people are classified into two categories: those who have agricultural or rural status and those who have nonagricultural or urban status. Dramatic differences in rights and privileges exist between the two statuses and it is extremely difficult to convert from one to the other (Wu and Treiman 2004). Since migrant workers' *hukou* still remains rural, they cannot enjoy the privileges that local residents possess regarding good jobs, education for children, public housing, health care and retirement benefits (Fan 2008; Liang and Ma 2004; Wu and Treiman 2004; Yang 1993).

The migrant workers' right to work is highly prescribed by local government. At an early stage of reform, many local governments imposed all kinds of work restrictions for migrant workers. Some stipulated that migrants could only form a certain proportion of all workers. Some others confined migrants to industries that residents had no interest in entering (Li 2002). Although discrimination against migrant workers is declining, it still persists in many ways and some new forms of discrimination are created from time to time.

Research Questions

The primary purpose of the present study was to discover the differential risks of robbery victimization experienced by migrant and resident motorcycle taxi drivers and the underlining social structural reasons for this difference. To achieve this goal, the following questions will be explored: (1) How are migrants different from residents in their exposure to the risk of robbery victimization? (2) Can lifestyle/routine activity theory be applied to explain this difference in the social context of China? (3) What are the peculiarly Chinese macro-structural factors shaping people's lifestyle/routine activity and, by extension, the different risk of victimization?

Data and Methods

Research site

All data for this study were collected from Tianzhi. It is an economically relatively developed city, located in the centre of the Pearl River Delta in Southern China, and only one hour's drive from Guangzhou, the capital of Guangdong province. At the end of 2005, the population of Tianzhi city was 1.95 million. There were 790,000 migrants (without Tianzhi household registration (*hukou*)), accounting for 41 per cent of the total population, and 1.16 million residents (with Tianzhi household registration (*hukou*)), accounting for 59 per cent of the total population, respectively.

Research subject

This research focuses on the robbery victimization of a particular group—motorcycle taxi drivers (*dake zai*). Motorcycle taxis are widely used in Tianzhi. They are a two-wheel motorcycle and the subjects in this study are those who drive this kind of motorcycle to pick up clients from the road to make money (Figures 1–4).



FIG. 1 Two motorcycle taxi drivers are soliciting a girl



FIG. 2 Two motorcycle taxi drivers are waiting for clients

Data

The data for the study involve information stemming from a combination of three different methods applied in Tianzhi. The first part involved a careful reading of all official police records of robbery against motorcycle taxi drivers in Tianzhi in 2006. Among other items, police records usually contain reported information about the time, location, situational context, economic loss, bodily harm and household registration (*hukou*) of victims. In order to ensure coding reliability, all data were coded by me. All official recorded robbery against motorcycle taxi driver cases were collected, producing a sample of 174 cases. Although the sample is not big, it does include all the cases reported in 2006 and reflects the total picture of official police records in one year.

The second set of data came from my fieldwork observation in Tianzhi. As there is no formal organization representing the motorcycle taxi industry in China, it is impossible



FIG. 3 Many motorcycle taxi drivers are waiting for clients in front of a hospital



FIG. 4 The slogan indicates that non-local license motorcycles are prohibited from the road

to know the exact number of motorcycle taxi drivers in Tianzhi. However, the provision of such an estimate is not the aim of the present study. The aim rather is to study the relative proportions of migrant and resident motorcycle taxi drivers and their distinctive routine (working) activities. In order to achieve this goal, I employed on-site observation to count the number of motorcycle taxi drivers at each hour from 7:00 in the morning to 24:00 at night at four selected observation sites in Tianzhi. These sites include a public square, a hospital and two bus stations. These places are typical sites where motorcycle taxi drivers waited for their clients. At each hour of the day, I counted all the motorcycle taxi drivers who were waiting. As mentioned before, migrant or resident

motorcycle taxi drivers are distinguished by their different motorcycle licenses.² The period of observation lasted for two weeks in August 2007. I obtained two sets of numbers in each observation site on each hour; 1,407 cases were collected altogether for analysis. In addition, when I was in my field trip to Tianzhi in 2006, 2007 and 2008, I took every opportunity to observe motorcycle taxi drivers' working activities whenever I needed to use a motorcycle taxi, which is now the main transportation vehicle in Tianzhi.

The third part of my data collection involved in-depth semi-structured interviews with motorcycle taxi drivers (31), police (eight) and other migrant workers (six). All in all, I had a total of 45 interviews. Since motorcycle taxi drivers are everywhere in Tianzhi, they were first approached on the street by myself and then recruited for interview with their consent. Police and other migrant workers were recruited through my personal contacts established in past research. All interviewees participated in the research voluntarily. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed for later analysis. Information that may have led to violations of personal privacy, such as names, was deleted from the transcripts and only the author has access to the tapes.

Plan of Analysis

I shall first disclose the high risk of robbery victimization for migrant motorcycle taxi drivers by comparing the proportions of migrants in the total population of taxi drivers with that in all robbery victims with data from observation and official police records. After that, different risks will be analysed in the framework of target attractiveness, guardianship and target exposure from lifestyle/routine activity theory. Then, the paper will discuss the motorcycle ban policy applied by local government and its impact on migrant workers' working activity and their chances of being robbed. I conclude by pointing out that, although lifestyle/routine activity theory can be fairly applied to robbery in contemporary urban China, some rather particular Chinese macro-structural factors should be addressed in the interpretation of how people's working activity and, by extension, the risk of victimization are shaped.

Result

The disproportionately high risk of robbery victimization of migrant motorcycle taxi drivers

From official police records, there were 174 cases of robbery against motorcycle taxi drivers in Tianzhi in 2006. Ninety-three per cent of the victims were migrants and only 7 per cent residents (Figure 5).³ However, my field observational data about taxi drivers show that migrants made up 52 per cent and residents made up 48 per cent of the motorcycle taxi industry (Figure 6). What is worth mentioning is that, because of their

²In China, each motorcycle must have a license, composed of seven characters. The first is a Chinese character, indicating the province in which the license is registered. The second character is a capital English letter, indicating which city in that province. The remaining five characters are Arabic numerals. From the first Chinese character and the second capital English letter, we can distinguish which city the motorcycle is from. As the migrants are not allowed to buy a Tianzhi license, we can tell who are migrants and residents from their motorcycle licenses.

³Although it is illegal for migrants to drive non-local license motorcycles, this illegal working status does not impede them from reporting their robbery cases to police, as they will get no punishment if they report the case. Reasons will be discussed later in detail in the paper when analysing campaign-style policing in China.

Robbery Victimization of Migrant/Resident Motorcycle Drivers (n=174)

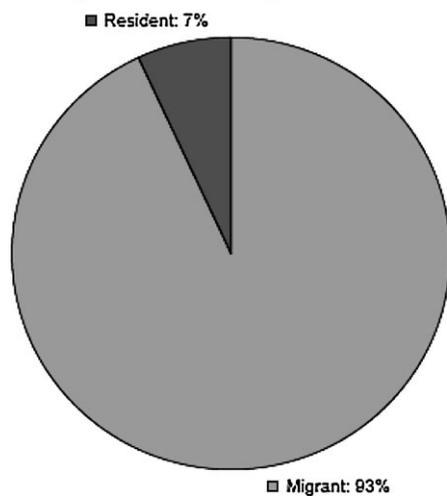


FIG. 5 Proportion of migrant/resident motorcycle taxi drivers in Tianzhi City

Proportion of Migrant/Resident Motor-taxi Drivers in Tianzhi City (n=1407)

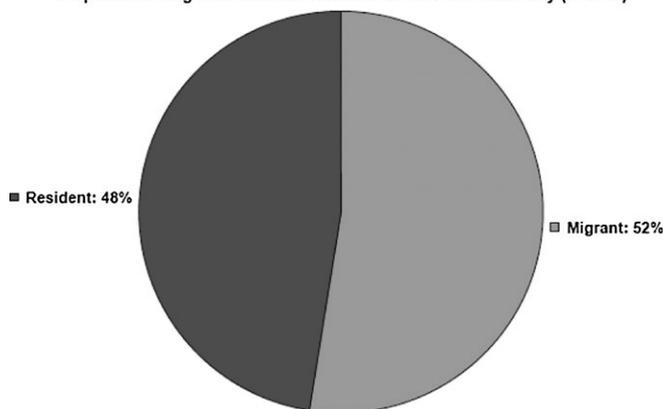


FIG. 6 Robbery victimization of migrant/resident motorcycle taxi drivers

illegal working status, a very small number of migrants might buy a local license or use a false local license. Although it is hard to find out the exact number of migrants who do so, my interview and observation data indicated that this number was quite small. Therefore, the actual proportion of migrant taxi drivers should be slightly higher than I observed. However, this minor measurement inaccuracy cannot contradict the obvious fact that migrants make up a large proportion of robbery victims, their rate of victimization being 12 times as great as that of the resident motorcycle taxi drivers.

Explanations derived from lifestyle/routine activity theory

I was interested in trying to examine whether lifestyle/routine activity theory could explain this difference. Let me consider the three components of the theory in turn.

As for target attractiveness, lifestyle/routine activity theory assumes that the greater the attractiveness of a target, the greater the risk of victimization (Cohen *et al.* 1981). For motorcycle taxi drivers, the motorcycle itself is a valuable target to be stolen, as it is valued at between 3,000 and 10,000 yuan.⁴ The drivers have cash on them because they are doing business. Mobile phones are also commonly used by people in cities in general and by motorcycle taxi drivers in particular, as some known clients will call motorcycle taxi drivers for service. All in all, motorcycles, cash and mobile phones can be targets for robbery. However, from my field observations, it is clear that there is no big difference between migrants and residents regarding these targets, as they use similar motorcycles, similar mobile phones and carry little money with them. It is therefore hard to find an explanation for the differential risks of robbery victimization in the variable of target attractiveness.

As to guardianship, lifestyle/routine activity theory assumes that offenders prefer targets that are less well guarded to those that are better guarded (Cohen *et al.* 1981). When a motorcycle taxi driver takes a client to a certain place, he must work by himself and away from other motorcycle taxi drivers who might provide help when he is in danger. Motorcycle taxi drivers will also be physically distant from the guardianship of police as well as other people on the road if clients ask them to go to some remote area. Official police records indicate that 42 and 37 per cent of robbery cases occur in rural and suburban areas and only 5 and 16 per cent of cases in cities and towns (Figure 7). Obviously, rural and suburban areas are less well guarded than cities and towns from police. This is especially the case at night. As Ganlao, a migrant motorcycle taxi driver from Hubei province, said:

It is very dangerous. At night, I will not go to these dark roads. Usually, I only go to the place we have reached an agreement before. After arriving, I will not go to another place. If he demands that I go to another place, even if I cannot get the money, I will not go. (Ganlao, 42)

In other words, different working hours will affect the level of guardianship confronting likely robbers. Those who work at a 'dangerous time' will run a higher risk of victimization than those who work at a 'safe time'. Because of the local government's motorcycle ban policy, migrants are obliged to work at night. Figure 8 shows this vividly. The reasons why migrant workers are relegated to working at relatively dangerous times will be explored in detail later in this paper.

As to target exposure, lifestyle/routine activity theory assumes that an increase in exposure will lead to an increase in victimization risk (Cohen *et al.* 1981). As long as motorcycle taxi drivers are picking up clients on the road, they will be exposed to potential robbers. This is especially the case when they work at night, as robbery tends to be a form of 'night' crime (Xu 2006b). As such, working at night will increase the chance of victimization, in terms of both exposure to likely offenders and the absence of capable guardianship. It is evident (from Figure 9) that night-time is the peak time for robbery against motorcycle taxi drivers and 77.58 per cent of motorcycle taxi robberies occur from 19:00 at night to 2:00 in the early morning.

⁴1 yuan = \$0.15 or £0.08 at September 2008 prices.

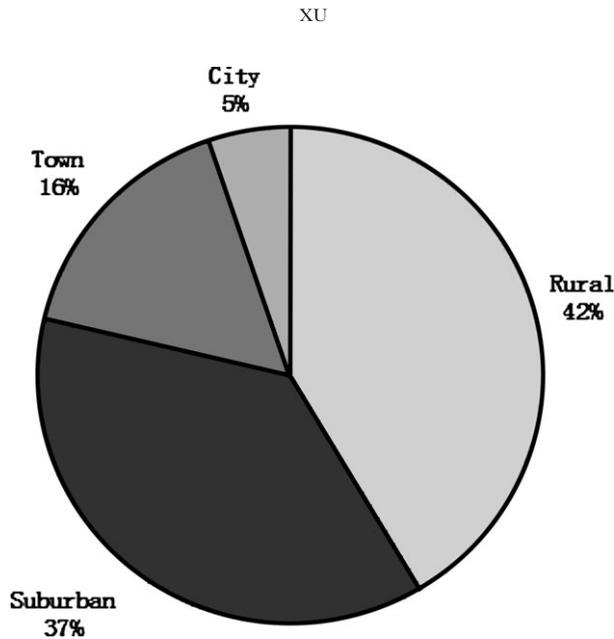


FIG. 7 Crime sites for robbery against motorcycle taxi drivers from police records in 2006 (n = 174)

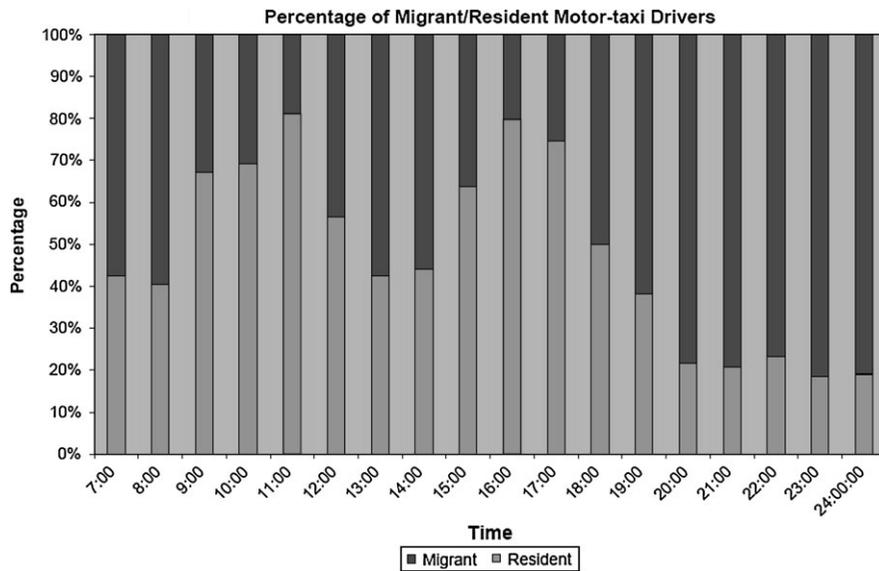


FIG. 8 Percentage of migrant/resident motorcycle taxi drivers in each hour

However, the peak time of robbery coincides with that of the migrant motorcycle taxi drivers' working time, as around 80 per cent of all taxis working at night are driven by migrant motorcyclists (Figure 8). Figure 8 shows the proportion of migrant and resident motorcycle taxi drivers in each hour from 7:00 to 24:00. We saw earlier (Figure 6) that

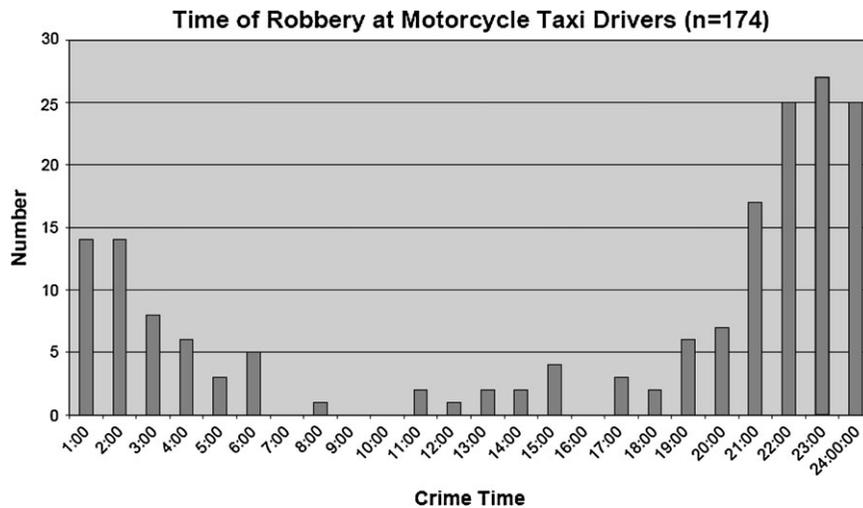


FIG. 9 Crime time of robbery against motorcycle taxi drivers from police records in 2006

the absolute numbers of migrant (52 per cent) and resident (48 per cent) motorcycle taxi drivers were fairly equally distributed. However, their activities take place at quite different times. Ideally, it would have been useful to have also obtained data about the working activities of motorcycle taxi drivers and figured out the proportions of migrant and resident motorcycle taxi drivers who put themselves out for hire between 1:00 and 6:00. However, it is dangerous for researchers to stay in the assigned observation posts late at night, as it is a 'golden time' for street crime. Fortunately, there is an alternative method that can be used to figure out who is working between 1:00 and 6:00. Interview data with motorcycle taxi drivers indicate that almost 90 per cent of motorcycle taxi drivers working after midnight are migrants. As Baoan, a migrant motorcycle taxi driver from Hebei province, who only worked at night, put it:

Usually, I start to come out at 19:00 and go back at 3:00, sometimes 5:00. Late at night, especially after midnight, more than 90 per cent of taxi drivers are migrants. (Baoan, 27)

Dalong, a local motorcyclist said similarly:

Late at night, more than 95 per cent of motorcycle taxi drivers are migrants. This might be explained by two reasons: one is to escape from the traffic police⁵ another is that their motorcycle might have some problems. Maybe they use fake licenses, or do not undergo mandatory annual checks (*nianjian*), or their machines are what are called 'dirty motorcycles' (*zangche*).⁶ (Dalong, 28, resident)

The differential risks of victimization between migrant and resident motorcycle taxi drivers can be fairly easily explained by their different patterns of working time. Working time mediates routine activity and the chance of victimization. The lifestyle/routine

⁵ Because of the motorcycle ban policy in Tianzhi city, it is illegal to drive non-local license motorcycles.

⁶ Dirty motorcycles (*zang che*) refer to motorcycles that are stolen by others and re-sold to taxi drivers.

perspective can also be applied to explaining the robbery victimization of motorcycle taxi drivers in China. Migrant motorcycle taxi drivers are overrepresented in robbery victimization because the majority of motorcycle taxi drivers are migrants at those times when robberies against motorcycle taxi drivers occur. Most of the resident motorcycle taxi drivers will not work during the ‘dangerous hours’, which is at night. Differential working activities affect their differential risk of robbery victimization between migrant and resident motorcycle taxi drivers. I shall now proceed to explore why and how migrant taxi drivers are driven by local government policy into taking these greater risks.

The dilemma of motorcycle ban (jinmo) policy

The motorcycle as the dominant mode of transport in Tianzhi. The motorcycle is commonly used for transportation in contemporary China, especially in cities where the public transportation service is not effective and convenient. Even in most economically developed cities in the Pearl River Delta, such as Guangzhou and Shenzhen, the motorcycle is a very important means of transportation. It has been estimated that there were more than 100,000 motorcycle taxi drivers who made a living by driving motorcycle taxis in Guangzhou⁷ before the enforcement of the motorcycle ban policy in 2007 (Chen 2006). In some other less-developed cities lacking an effective public transportation system, motorcycles play a much more important role in people’s daily life. This is also the case in Tianzhi.

A study from Tianzhi in 2006 revealed that only 4.9 and 1.2 per cent of people use bus and taxi, respectively, as their favoured means of transportation. In contrast, the motorcycle dominates and 36 per cent of residents and 34 per cent of migrants use it as their favoured means of transportation (Mei *et al.* 2006). It is that under-developed character of the system that provides an important job opportunity for motorcycle taxi drivers.

‘Flying motorcycle snatch’ (feiche qiangduo) and the motorcycle ban policy

Although the motorcycle is important for people’s daily life, it can also be used as a means of escape by robbers. With the widespread use of the motorcycle for purposes of flight, a new type of robbery emerged in the Pearl River Delta area and it became rampant after 2000 in southern China—the so-called ‘flying motorcycle snatch’ (*feiche qiangduo*).⁸ In cities like Guangzhou, Shenzhen and Dongguan in the Pearl River Delta, ‘flying motorcycle snatch’ began to pose a serious crime problem. Robbery and ‘snatch theft’ (*Shuangqiang*)⁹ offenders account for more than one-third of all arrested offenders in Guangdong province over three years since 2002 (Wang 2006a). According to the 110 police hotline¹⁰ calls in Guangzhou, there are about 100 recorded *shuangqiang* cases

⁷ Guangzhou, as the capital and the most developed city in Guangdong province, had a population of 12 million at the end of 2007.

⁸ Flying motorcycle snatch (*feiche qiangduo*) is a new type of snatch theft especially in Pearl River Delta cities since 1990s. A typical scenario is that two offenders drive a motorcycle on the road. When they pass by the victim, the offender sitting on the back of the motorcycle grabs the victim’s property and the offender driving the motorcycle speeds up the motorcycle and then they escape.

⁹ Robbery (*qiangjie*) and snatch theft (*qiangduo*) are called *shuangqian* in China. ‘Snatch theft’ is used by the Home Office to refer to robbery that takes property from a victim without the use or threat of force (Home Office 2008).

¹⁰ 110 is emergency telephone number in China. Its counterpart is 911 in America and 999 in some other European countries.

per day. In its peak time in August 2003, recorded *shuangqiang* cases mounted to as many as 140 per day (Shi 2005). A survey conducted by the Guangzhou Public Opinion Research Center in 2004 revealed that only 20.8 per cent of citizens felt safe in Guangzhou and more than 80 per cent of citizens regarded *shuangqiang* as the most dangerous issue threatening their sense of safety (Tan 2004). Not only Guangzhou, Shenzhen and Dongguan were facing a serious *shuangqiang* problem. It was rampant in all cities in the Pearl River Delta.

In order to fight against *shuangqiang*, many cities introduced a motorcycle ban policy, as *shuangqiang* are highly related to motorcycle driving. Research into *shuangqiang* found that 35.7 per cent of robberies were related to motorcycles in the Pearl River Delta (Xu 2006b). It was reported that about 170 cities in China had enforced a motorcycle ban policy as a robbery prevention technique by the end of 2005 (You 2005). Generally speaking, there are two different ways to ban motorcycles in the Pearl River Delta. One is to ban all motorcycles so that none is to be ridden by anyone anywhere, such as in Guangzhou, Shenzhen and Dongguan; another is to ban motorcycles only without local licenses, such as in Foushan and Zhongshan, both cities of southern China. Tianzhi adopted the policy to ban only non-local license motorcycles on the ground that migrants commit most of *shuangqiang* cases. It is illegal for migrant to drive a motorcycle with a non-local license. However, the motorcycle taxi has its particular attraction for migrants.

The attraction of motorcycle taxi driving

In China, there is no formal motorcycle taxi industry under the regulation of the transportation authorities. All people who are allowed to drive a motorcycle are able to make money by taking clients from one place to another as long as they have motorcycle licenses and driving licenses. That means the motorcycle taxi industry is a self-regulated industry, existing outside the administration of government. The self-employed nature of the job has a particular attraction for migrants in cities, as they suffer from comprehensive institutional discrimination in the areas of public housing, medical care, children education, good jobs and retirement pension (Bakken 1998; Wang *et al.* 2002; Xu 2005). From interviews with motorcycle taxi drivers, it is possible to establish how and why motorcycle taxi driving has its particular attraction for the migrant worker.

First, they can enjoy more freedom and independence. The most valued factor for motorcycle taxi drivers is freedom in making a living. They do not have to face their bosses and supervisors in factories. They can decide when to work and where to go by themselves. Although they have to work hard and work overtime to make money, they can, in theory and practice, stop working or go back home at any time. This kind of freedom and independence makes migrants feel less discriminated against and deprived in cities. Some of my interviewees said:

Driving motorcycle taxi, we have more freedom. The income is a bit higher than working in factory. (Ganlao, 42, from Hubei)

We have more freedom! (Agui, 33, from Guangxi)

Second, it is a relatively high income job. For migrant workers, the average salary is about 1,000 yuan per month working in factories in Tianzhi. However, running a motorcycle taxi can earn one about 70–80 yuan per day and 2,000 yuan per month. This

income is more attractive than the average salary from factories, especially for the new and inexperienced migrant workers whose salaries are under 1,000 yuan. Again, according to interviews with taxi drivers:

Salary in the factory is very low. Whatever you do, the boss has calculated it, what you get is about 1000 yuan per month. I work in a furniture factory, it make chairs and sofas. (Ganlao, 42, from Hubei)

I work for the whole day, and will go back home at 22:30. I can earn 60–70 yuan per day, it is a little better than working in a factory. (Feizai, 38, from Hubei)

I work from 10:00 to midnight. Sometimes, I can earn about 100 yuan per day, sometimes only 70–80 yuan. On average, it is about 2000 yuan per month. (Yulinzai, 25, from Guangxi)

Third, they can make extra money after work. Some migrant workers have formal jobs in factories with regular incomes in the daytime. They want to earn extra money after work to make up for a relatively low salary. This extra income can cover their daily expenses for food, house rent, etc. Thus, their salaries can be saved. Donglin, a part-time motorcycle taxi driver from Guanxi province, described his experience vividly:

If I don't have to work over time in the factory at night, I will come out *dake*.¹¹ I usually work until 22:00. The income will depend on your luck. Generally speaking, I can make 20–30 yuan per night. If I have good luck, 30–40 yuan is also possible. What I think about is to make some money for food, rent. Then, salary from the factory can be saved. Sometimes there is no work at the factory, and then we have to drive our motorcycles. (Donglin, 27, from Guangxi)

Fourth, they may drive taxis as a temporary job. In a period of unemployment, or when changing a job, newly arrived migrant workers can earn money by driving a motorcycle taxi (*dake*) and thus survive in cities:

I am still looking for a job to be a security guard. There is no reply from the Security Guard Company. Now, I can drive my motorcycle to make money. (Baoan, 27, from Hubei)

Fifth, driving taxi is a relatively less tiring job. Running a motorcycle taxi is taxing. However, working in factories is more taxing, especially for those who have no special skills and working experience:

When I first came here, I worked as a construction worker for two years. After that, when I have money, I bought a motorcycle. It cost me 7,000 yuan. Construction work is too tiring, and driving a motorcycle is not that tiring. (Yulin zai, 25, from Guangxi)

Driving a motorcycle is also tiring! But factory work is even more tiring. (Agui, 33, from Guangxi)

Sixth, there is no skills requirement for migrant workers as long as they can drive a motorcycle:

In some factories, the salary is very low. It cannot support the whole family. Some jobs are well paid, but I cannot do it. I don't have a certificate (*wenpin*), nor skills (*jishu*). We don't have skills, and we have no choice. (Ganlao, 42, from Hubei)

¹¹ *dake* is the Chinese expression of motorcycle taxi driving and *dake zai* refers to motorcycle taxi drivers.

Seventh, there is no age limitation. For those who are above 40 years old, it is very hard to find a job in a factory. The self-employed motorcycle taxi industry is ideal work for older migrant workers:

I am 42 years old. I have driven my motorcycle taxi for more than one year. I used to work in a factory. It produces plastic. My work is deleterious. It is harmful for the body. I worked there for five years and now I have to quit my job. I cannot find a job in the factory any more, it is very hard. I have no choice. (Ganlao, 42, from Hubei)

Eighth, there is no withholding salary (*tuoqian gongzi*) problem. It is common practice to withhold migrant workers' salary in China. A survey conducted in Shenzhen revealed that more than 40 per cent of enterprises delayed their payment of workers' salary to make more profit (Labor and Social Security Ministry Research Team 2004). Motorcycle taxi drivers get money each time they take clients from one place to another. Work that is paid immediately has its particular attractiveness given the bad payment situation for migrant workers in China.

'Cat and mouse' tactics and their consequences

Although motorcycle taxi driving is an attractive occupation for migrants, it is illegal for them because of the ban policy in Tianzhi. More accurately, it should be called a non-local motorcycle ban policy. According to the operation of the motorcycle ban policy in Tianzhi, non-local motorcycles cannot run legally on the road within Tianzhi, except on national and provincial roads. In other words, only motorcycles with a local license can be used legally in Tianzhi. Non-local motorcycle drivers will be fined 200 yuan per time and motorcycles will be detained for about two weeks if they are caught by police when running illegally on the road. Besides a fine, they must also pay a parking fee to police, which will cost 5 yuan per day. Generally speaking, if migrant motorcycle taxi drivers are caught by the police, they must pay at least a 270 yuan fine per time. In addition, if motorcycle taxi drivers or their clients are caught taking client(s) without crash helmets (*anquan mao*), another 200 yuan fine will be applied per person. Migrant motorcycle taxi drivers thereby run a number of extra risks of being caught by the police if they want to make a living. Yulinzai and Baoan talked about their own experiences in the following way:

Working in a factory (*dagong*) is very tedious. Driving a motorcycle taxi is freer. But the police will arrest non-local license motorcycles. I have been fined about 2,000 yuan in the past. Once, I was arrested by police and fined 200 yuan for having a non-local license, 200 yuan for having no crash helmet, 200 yuan for taking more than one person (*chaozai*). Altogether, it is 600 yuan. This didn't include taking the motorcycle fee (*tuochefei*), 45 yuan; parking fee, 5 yuan per day. Normally, a motorcycle will be detained for 15 days and parking fee is 75 yuan. All in all, it was 720 yuan. I have been caught five or six times. Most of the time, I was fined 200 yuan for my non-local license. (Yulinzai, 25, from Gangxi)

If we are caught, the lowest 'consumption' (*xiaofei*)¹² is 200 yuan. Police will bill us and we need to go to the bank to pay the money. If unlucky, in the time of 'big checking' (*da chache*)¹³, the motorcycle will also be detained. If it is not big checking, motorcycle will not be detained. (Baoan, 27, from Hubei)

¹²Consumption is an ironic expression of fine used by migrants. They regard fine as a necessary cost of their illegal business.

¹³'Big checking' (*da chache*) refers to the campaign that checks non-local license motorcycles during a particular time, such as during festivals or big events.

In law, migrants cannot drive their non-local license motorcycle in Tianzhi because of the motorcycle ban policy. In practice, however, it is impossible to ban the non-local motorcycle completely. I have remarked that the public transportation system is extremely under-developed, and it is a consequence that many migrant workers have to take motorcycles to and from their work places. In fact, the government also realizes that it is impossible to ban non-local motorcycles completely. Non-local license motorcycles can be seen everywhere in Tianzhi. Traffic police only catch non-local motorcycles in their regular working time or when they have police campaigns to catch non-local motorcycles at a particular time. Campaign-style policing is a particular characteristic of Chinese law enforcement (Dutton 2000*b*; 2005; Tanner 1999; 2005). With the routinization of such policing, many criminals have learned to recognize the pattern and timing of campaigns and avoid punishment (Tanner 2005: 179).

With their knowledge of police working schedules and campaign-style policing in China, migrant workers have also developed their own strategies to avoid being caught. They play a game of ‘cat and mouse’ with the police and work when the police are off duty. The regular working times for police are 8:30–12:00 and 14:00–17:30. Thus, most migrant motorcycle taxi drivers come out to work early in the morning before 8:30, between 12:00 and 14:00 and after 17:30. From Figure 8, we can see very clearly the sharp contrast between the working times of migrant and resident motorcycle taxi drivers.

Before 8:30, when the police¹⁴ still have not started work (there are no police working before 8:30), both migrant and resident motorcycle taxi drivers are on the road and the number of migrant motorcycle taxi drivers is a little higher than resident motorcycle taxi drivers. After 9:00, when the police have started work, the number of migrant motorcycle taxi drivers drops rapidly and reaches its lowest point at 11:00. By contrast, the number of resident motorcycle taxi drivers continues to increase from 7:00 and reaches its peak at 10:00 in the morning. At lunch time—from 12:00 to 14:00—many resident motorcycle taxi drivers go home for lunch and have a rest at noon, which leads to a clear decline in their numbers on the road. However, more migrant motorcycle taxi drivers come out to work and the number of migrant motorcycle taxi drivers surpasses that of resident motorcycle taxi drivers at this time. In the afternoon, from 15:00 to 18:00, the number of migrant and resident motorcycle taxi drivers changes in the same way as that in the morning. Many resident motorcycle taxi drivers come out to work after their lunch and migrant motorcycle taxi drivers disappear from the roads as the police start working again in the afternoon. The number of migrant motorcycle taxi drivers reaches its lowest point exactly when the number of resident motorcycle reaches its peak at 16:00 in the afternoon.

It is obvious that when the police start to work, migrant motorcycle taxi drivers begin to hide themselves. However, when the police go off duty again, migrant taxi drivers return to work. The turning points occur at 11:00 and 16:00. Interestingly, some migrant taxi drivers still work on the road even when the police are working. They must run the extra risk of being caught by the police. After 18:00, when there are no police to be seen on the road, the number of migrant motorcycle taxi drivers increases dramatically and

¹⁴In China, police are mainly divided into two categories: traffic police (*jiao jing*) and people's police (*min jing*). Only traffic police have the responsibility of catching non-local license motorcycles. The people's police have no right and responsibility to catch illegal motorcycles. In this research, ‘the police’ generally refers to traffic police.

reaches its peak at 21:00 and 22:00. At the same time, the number of resident motorcycle taxi drivers is much lower than that of migrant motorcycle taxi drivers after 18:00.

As the motorcycle ban policy in Tianzhi bans only non-local license motorcycles, it has no effect on resident motorcycle taxi drivers (Figure 10). On the contrary, this policy can help resident motorcycle taxi drivers to reduce competition from migrants. However, we can see clearly the effect of motorcycle ban policy on migrant motorcycle taxi drivers' working activity from Figure 8. Night-time is a 'golden time' for migrant motorcycle taxi drivers, as the police are off duty. They can come out to make money by picking up clients without worrying about being caught by the police. However, night-time is also the 'golden time' for robbers. This convergence of working time for both migrant motorcycle taxi drivers and likely robbers makes migrants run an exceptionally high risk of robbery victimization.

Compared with police, or even compared with resident motorcycle taxi drivers, migrant motorcycle taxi drivers are the weak part 'in this game'. Facing the motorcycle ban policy in Tianzhi, these migrant workers develop their own strategies to survive. In the study of peasant resistance in their daily life in Malaysia, Scott (1985: xiv) disclosed that these subordinates always avoid any direct or symbolic confrontation with authority. Migrant taxi drivers use similar strategies and just work outside the police regular working time. The game of 'cat and mouse' is one of the weapons used by the weak, migrant taxi drivers to survive in the city. Ironically, this also places them at high risk of robbery victimization. With an expression from Scott, this is a 'weapon of the weak'. Maybe this is not much about 'resistance', but a kind of necessity to get by in a difficult social and economical situation for migrants.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have examined the relevance of lifestyle/routine activity theory to the social context of contemporary urban China. In contrast to the research conducted by

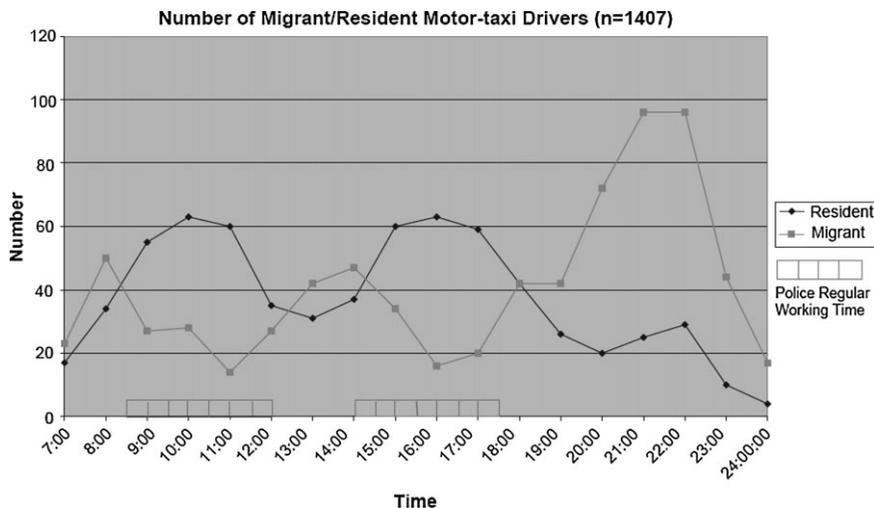


FIG. 10 Working times for migrant/resident motorcycle taxi drivers

Messner (2007), which did not apply lifestyle/routine activity theory to robbery in China, I have revealed that the theory can contribute a good deal to explaining patterns of robbery victimization among different social groups. Based on data collected in Tianzhi in the Pearl River Delta area in China, the study shows that migrant motorcycle taxi drivers are disproportionately vulnerable to becoming victims of robbery. The peak time of robbery coincides with that of the motorcycle taxi drivers' working times. The convergence of likely robbers and migrant motorcycle taxi drivers at night makes migrant motorcycle taxi drivers run a much higher risk of robbery victimization than resident motorcycle taxi drivers. The victimization risk of robbery against migrant taxi drivers is 12 times higher than that of resident taxi drivers. Working at night for motorcycle taxi drivers increases their risk of robbery both from more exposure to likely offenders and in the absence of capable guardians emphasized by lifestyle/routine activity (Cohen and Felson 1979; Hindelang *et al.* 1978).

In their recent attempt at applying lifestyle/routine activity theory in China, Messner *et al.* (2007) have already pointed out that the theory should be applied flexibly to reflect distinct features of Chinese socio-cultural context. With new empirical data, this study further explores how a macro-structural factor—motorcycle ban policy—shapes motorcycle taxi drivers' working time and, by extension, differential risk of robbery victimization between migrants and residents. Because of the enforcement of the motorcycle ban policy in Tianzhi, it is illegal for migrants to drive non-local license motorcycles. In order to avoid being caught by police, migrant motorcycle taxi drivers have to work outside regular police working times and the night becomes a 'golden time' for migrants. However, this 'golden time' is also a 'golden time' for robbers. Therefore, it is the motorcycle ban policy that shapes migrant motorcycle taxi drivers' working activity and further affects their risk of robbery victimization.

From this study, I find that lifestyle/routine activity theory can be well applied to explain robbery victimization in the setting of contemporary urban China. Lifestyle/routine activity theory emphasizes how situation/social context influences risk of victimization among different social groups (Dugan and Apel 2005). However, this theory keeps quite silent in explaining why certain situation or social context is formed. With data about robbery against taxi drivers, the current research demonstrates the importance of macro-social structure in shaping people's routine activities and hence their differential risks of victimization in particular Chinese context.

This study focuses on the robbery victimization of a special group of migrant workers in urban China. Many possible studies can be done in the future. First, it would be interesting if we can continue to explore another kind of victimization of migrant taxi drivers—homicide victimization. When taxi drivers are robbed, some of them will fight back and others will not. From my observation, migrant workers are more likely to fight back than their resident counterparts. The resistance may lead to homicide. More research is needed to understand the mechanism behind this difference. Second, in order to reduce robbery against motorcycle taxi drivers, some people propose that government should regulate the motorcycle taxi industry. It is not clear to what extent this proposed policy can reduce robbery possibility for migrant workers. It would be very useful if future research can explore the robbery victimization of car taxi drivers, who are under the regulation of the Chinese government policy. Third, the taxi industry has both its similarities and differences between China and the West. China has its particular household registration (*hukou*), which does exist in the West. However, immigrants

dominate taxi drivers in many cities in the United States and other Western countries, and they tend to be more likely to drive at dangerous hours and in dangerous places. They do so largely because the reduced competition at those times and in those places with resident drivers makes the work more lucrative. Also, even though taxi services are formally regulated in the United States and other Western cities, there are gypsy cabs that operate in a manner somewhat similar to that of the migrant drivers in China. The comparative study about the victimization of taxi drivers in the West will contribute a lot to existing literatures.

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