

# Crime and the Chinese Dream

Edited by Børge Bakken

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## Social Exclusion and Criminal Victimization

### *Migrant Workers' Risks of Driving Motorcycle Taxis in Urban China*

Jianhua Xu

#### Abstract

This chapter examines the risk and criminal victimization of a group of rural-to-urban migrant workers, namely motorcycle taxi drivers, and their coping tactics in a midsize city, Tianzhi in Southern China. It will first examine five different types of risks motorcycle taxi drivers have to face in their line of work, including robbery, extortion, taking a taxi without paying, witnessing street crimes and traffic accidents. It then moves to examine the tactics used by motorcycle taxi drivers to cope with the most concerning risk: robbery. How do they prevent robbery before it occurs? How do they survive given a robbery case occurs? The thick description of the suffering of motorcycle taxi drivers in their everyday life provides us a unique window to examine multidimensional social exclusion for millions of migrant workers in urban China.

#### Introduction: Three Cases of Robbery

##### Case 1

It was around 2:15 a.m. I was waiting for clients in front of the Baoma entertainment centre. Many motorcycle taxi drivers were there. One young man approached me and asked me to take him to Shanlong (a town). I asked for fifteen yuan and he bargained for thirteen. I asked him the exact address and he told me it was a knitwear mill and would let me know when we arrived. He was about nineteen years old, well-dressed, and did not look like a 'bad guy'. We also chatted on the road. . . . When we arrived at Shanlong, he asked me to go to the back door of the knitwear mill as he would be fined for coming back late if he was found by the security guards of the factory. I trusted him. When we came to a crossroad, I found that the surroundings were a mess. I was quite scared and stopped my motorcycle. The 'client' got off my motorcycle and I realized that another four guys were running towards me. One guy held a big knife and another one mustered an electric prod. They shouted at me, 'Don't move! I dared not fight back. They used tape to gag my mouth and tied my hands. I could not speak. One guy pointed his knife at my back and pushed me to the ground. I was psychologically prepared for that and did not

fall down. After that, they drove my motorcycle away. I removed the gag from my mouth, untied my hands, and ran after them. Then I saw a motorcycle driver on the road and asked him to take me to chase [the criminals]. When we came to Jiangjiu, they disappeared from my sight and ran away. In addition to the motorcycle, all my money, about 100 yuan, my driver's licence, and some invoices for insurance and road fare were stolen. (Jiangyuan, 36, a migrant motorcycle taxi driver from Jiangxi)

## Case 2

That night, it was around 1:30 a.m. I was going home after having a late snack [*xiaoye* 宵夜] with my friend. A man waved his hands towards me on the road. I stopped because I wanted to make some money. I asked him where he was going. He said Gangwang. I asked for twelve yuan and he bargained for ten. When we were bargaining, he got a call and then got on my motorcycle. I am a cook, not a full-time motorcycle taxi driver, and I only drive my motorcycle taxi occasionally. I did not realize the danger that night. I had a cold and took some medicine since it was quite serious that night! On the road, he also made a call and said, 'We are arriving very soon.' When we arrived, he said he had no money with him and asked me to wait for a while and his friend would bring the money. So I just waited there. It was quite dark and there was a house not too far away, some people were playing snooker there. I could see them, but they could not see us. After he made that call, his partner immediately came out with a knife from a cushaw field nearby. The knife was quite long, about eighty centimetres. The one who took my motorcycle also took out a two-edged knife and pointed it at my waist. I dared not move, dared not fight back. You know, these guys are crazy. I noticed that the face of the one who held the big knife was so pale, so he may have been a drug addict. I told them, 'Buddy, tell me what you want, but don't hurt me.' They asked me to give them all my money. I complained that I didn't have much money. The gasoline was so expensive now and there weren't many people taking motorcycle taxis. Some experienced motorcycle taxi drivers told me to say so in case I was robbed. You know, this is about psychology. I took out my money out and put it on the ground. The guy with a big knife said, 'Give me your mobile phone.' I had to do so. Then they pushed me to a corner and drove my motorcycle away. Honestly speaking, I never had such an experience in my life although I heard many motorcycle taxi drivers were being robbed. I was so scared! When they were leaving, I looked around to find some bricks or stones to hit them with. Unfortunately, I didn't find any. In addition, I was also afraid of hitting them with stones. You know, if they were injured or died, I would also be punished. I lost about 200 yuan in cash, a mobile phone, and my motorcycle, which cost about 4,000 yuan. (Chushi, 46, a migrant motorcycle taxi driver from Guangxi)

## Case 3

It was 26 June 2008, just before 1:00 a.m. I took a client near the Jiangjiu Bridge. The client was about 24 or 25 years old. From his accent, he might also have come from Guangxi. He asked me to take him to Shanlong Street. When we arrived

there, he said he needed to go to Gangwang. I asked him where exactly he was going but he said since I was not familiar with the place I should just stop wherever he asked me to. He told me that a girl had called him for a drink and a night at a hotel (*kaifang* 开房). At first, I was a little bit suspicious of him. When he said he was going to *kaifang* with a girl, however, I did not doubt him any more. When we came to a residential area for migrant workers, he asked me to stop there and wait for the girl. There was a stone bridge there. He just sat on the back of my motorcycle and started to smoke. We chatted for about two or three minutes. Suddenly, two men approached me with knives. One held a knife about thirty centimetres long, another held two relatively short knives. They pointed the knives at my neck and waist and asked me to get off my motorcycle. I did not get off until the third time they ordered me to do so. They threatened me and said, 'Will you not get off?' I had to get off and told them, 'If you want the motorcycle, take it!' Then they said, 'Hand over your mobile phone.' I told them I had no mobile phone but they did not believe me. They searched my pockets and took my mobile phone. The offender with the big knife pushed me twenty or thirty metres away from the road and threatened me, 'Don't report this to the police. Otherwise, you will die, we will kill you.' I said I would not report it to the police. The offender who was my passenger drove the motorcycle around to see if there were any plain-clothes police officers around. Later, the three offenders drove away on my motorcycle. I then went to a store nearby. Some migrant workers sat there, drinking tea. I asked them if I could use their phones to call the police as my motorcycle was just robbed. They told me the man sitting under the tree on the other side of the road was a plain-clothes police officer. I ran over to him and told him that my motorcycle had just been stolen. He started up his motorcycle immediately and said, 'Hurry up, get on my motorcycle.' He asked me about the motorcycle licence number and called more policemen. Many plain-clothes police started to chase the offenders on different crossroads, but could not find them. I lost my mobile phone, my motorcycle, and some 100 yuan in cash that night. (Kailong, 39, Guangxi)

I heard these three stories of robbery from motorcycle taxi drivers in 2008 in Tianzhi, a midsize city in Southern China where I conducted my research on criminal victimization of rural-to-urban migrant workers in urban China. Many migrant workers drive motorcycle taxis as a means to earn an income and cope with social exclusion in urban China (Bauman 2004; Young 1999), but driving a motorcycle taxi is far from an easy job. There are many risks related to this work. Besides the risk of being robbed, there are also several other types of risks, ranging from crime to traffic accidents. In the following, I will examine the risks involved in driving a motorcycle taxi in more detail before examining the coping tactics of the greatest risk, robbery.

## The Risk of Motorcycle Taxi Driving

### *Robbery*

The greatest risk for motorcycle taxi drivers is robbery. In Tianzhi, police records showed that there were 174 robbery cases involving motorcycle taxi drivers in 2006. However, due to under-reporting and under-recording of official crime statistics and ideological reasons about crime reporting as well as issues linked to the bonus system linked to crime rates in China, the official data is only the tip of the iceberg (Liang and Lu 2006; Bakken 2005; Xu 2017). In my fieldwork, almost every motorcycle taxi driver could tell me about one or several robbery stories, either from their personal experiences or from fellow motorcycle taxi drivers.

Cash, valuables, and motorcycles can all be targets for robbers. In the face of robbery, motorcycle taxi drivers suffer not only economic losses; their lives are also in danger during violent confrontations with offenders. The most serious result of such robberies is homicide. Kailong, a 39-year motorcycle taxi driver from Guangxi, had just been robbed when I met him in July 2008. He lost his motorcycle, a mobile phone, and some 100 yuan in cash. He used to work in factories which made shoes or furniture. In May 2007 he became unemployed and started to drive a motorcycle taxi. He explained the risks of driving motorcycle taxis to me:

It is quite risky to drive a motorcycle taxi. We often hear stories of robbery of motorcycle taxi drivers. We don't know the exact date [when it will happen to us], but we may all encounter it someday. When I was robbed, I also thought about fighting back. But you know, last year one of my fellow villagers (老乡) took a client to the riverside. It was around midnight. After arriving, the client and his partners wanted to rob his motorcycle and my fellow villager fought back. During the fight, he was stabbed twice and the motorcycle was stolen. Later, a passenger noticed him by chance and called the police. He was hospitalized and spent more than 20,000 yuan in medical fees. He was a solid plasterer and saved 30,000–40,000 yuan working in cities after so many years. He intended to build a house back in his home town. The news spread very quickly, and the next morning we all talked about his case. . . . In July last year, there was another case. A motorcycle taxi driver was murdered. He stayed here with his wife and two babies. The younger one was only two or three months old. That night he picked up a client around midnight and was stabbed to death near Hetai village. Until now, the police have not solved the case. It's really a pity. His wife remarried later. (Kailong, 39, a migrant motorcycle taxi driver from Guangxi)

The robbery of motorcycle taxi drivers became rampant in some cities, and the police had to pay particular attention to this type of robbery. In 2008, when I was doing fieldwork in Tianzhi city, I observed police from a local police station handing out pamphlets to motorcycle taxi drivers in order to teach them how to prevent robbery, and what to do in case they were robbed. The following is a letter handed out by the police at a local police station:

### Letter to all motorcycle taxi drivers

Several motorcycle robbery cases have occurred recently in —— town. These cases mainly target motorcycle taxi drivers, and its nature is vicious [*e'lie de* 恶劣的]. The cases can escalate to very serious ones. In order to crack down on and prevent such cases, all motorcycle taxi drivers should pay attention to the following items, improve self-protection awareness, cooperate closely with the police, and use mass prevention strategies:

1. Do not take clients at midnight; 10:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m. is the peak time for criminals to commit such crimes.
2. Criminals often take motorcycle taxis from other towns and rob drivers in some remote area in —— town with their partners. Please do not take clients from or to remote areas (such as the riverside, fish ponds, or industrial parks).
3. Remain calm after being robbed and try to remember features of suspects and the tools they used on the premises for personal safety, and report incidents to the police as soon as possible.
4. Report any suspicious person(s) or relevant information to the police. The police will reward informants who provide valuable information.

Police hotline: 110

—— Police station: xxxx xxxx [phone number]

—— Police Station

August 2008

### Extortion

The second type of risk faced by motorcycle taxi drivers is extortion. Offenders often use traffic accidents as excuses to ask for money. However, these so-called traffic accidents are usually made purposely by offenders. A typical scenario features two offenders pretending to be clients and asking drivers to go to areas with poor road conditions. On the road, one offender will fake falling off the motorcycle, and they ask the driver to compensate them for the injury. Sometimes they drop their mobile phones (which do not work properly) or scrape their shoes on the ground to ask for compensation. Some drivers would call the police if such a case were to occur. Ah Liu told me a story about two of his fellow villagers who tried to extort a motorcycle taxi driver in Tianzhi:

Two of my fellow villagers have tried to extort others as they lost money in gambling. They hired a motorcycle taxi and asked the driver to go to Liule. When they came to a bridge and curve, the driver slowed down. One of them fell off the motorcycle on purpose. The other one said to the driver, 'You drove too fast and caused my fellow villager to fall off. You need to give us money for this. You can either call the police or give us the money.' You know, it is illegal to take two clients. My fellow villagers asked the driver for 500 yuan in compensation. The driver was reluctant to give money away and called the police. Later, the police took my fellow villagers to a hospital for a check. Actually, nothing was wrong with them. One of

my fellow villager lay on the ground on purpose and did not get up. One of them is also a motorcycle taxi driver and the other worked in a factory. They lost money in gambling. (Ah Liu, 37, a motorcycle taxi driver from Guangxi)

Many others, however, prefer to handle the case themselves by giving money to the extortionists. There are several concerns regarding reporting such cases to the police. The first is the distrust motorcycle taxi drivers have for the police. They do not believe that the police can help them to resolve the dispute. It is not easy for the police to find evidence to prove that the extortionists fell off their motorcycles on purpose. More often than not, the police will deal with the case as a traffic accident. They will arrange for the so-called clients to have a medical check at a hospital. In some situations, the drivers' motorcycles are detained, and they must pay parking fees during the detention period. In addition, they also cannot work as taxi drivers when their motorcycles are detained. If extortionists do not demand much money, calling the police might not be a good choice. Sometimes extortionists do not allow the driver to call the police. They threaten to use violence if drivers insist on reporting to the police. Hannan, a 41-year-old migrant worker from Henan province kept on driving a motorcycle taxi in a suburban area in Guangzhou even though the city banned motorcycles in 2007. He told me his story of being extorted:

One day in October 2008, it was around 6:00 p.m. or 7:00 p.m., I took two men from Beicun to Xialiang. I asked for four yuan, and they agreed. They got on my motorcycle and on the road one of them scraped his sport shoes on a bridge. The shoes were a little damaged, and he claimed that his feet were wounded. They asked me to either give him some money or take him to the hospital. The two men were in their thirties, and we started to bargain with each other. They said the shoes cost more than 300 yuan. If I could give them 200 yuan, there was no need to go to the hospital. I argued that I did not have that much money. Fixing the shoes would only cost ten yuan. No more argument, I would give you 50 yuan. At that time, they threatened to call more of their fellow villagers. At last I gave them 50 yuan. They must have been drug abusers. I never mentioned this to my wife because her health has been poor. (Hannan, 41, a motorcycle taxi driver from Henan)

The second reason preventing motorcycle taxi drivers from reporting to the police about extortion is their own illegal working status. In Tianzhi, where non-local licensed motorcycles are banned, migrant workers would be reluctant to report these incidents to the police as they would be fined for using non-local licensed motorcycles. Motorcycle taxi drivers from Guangzhou, Shenzhen, and Dongguan are also more reluctant to call police in such situations since all motorcycles are banned from these cities. Their motorcycles (or electric bicycles) would be detained or confiscated if they were found on the roads. Li Caifeng, a 42-year-old from Hubei, drives a three-wheel motorcycle for the disabled, using it as a taxi in Guangzhou.<sup>1</sup>

1. Guangzhou banned motorcycles in 2007. However, three-wheel motorcycles for the disabled are allowed for use by disabled persons. Many normal people have started to use three-wheel motorcycles for the disabled as taxis, although they are not allowed to do so.



He experienced several extortions and never dared to report them to the police. Once he was asked for 2,000 yuan, and after a long time of negotiation, he finally paid 1,000 yuan. He explained why he did not call the police:

I told these people I would call the police. But they threatened that if I called the police, my motorcycle would be confiscated. In addition, I also would have to pay the medical fees for them. (Li Caifeng, 42, a motorcycle taxi driver from Hubei)

### *Taking a taxi without paying*

Taking a taxi without paying for the ride (*zuo bawang che* 坐霸王车) is the third risk faced by motorcycle taxi drivers. Although the problem is not widespread, most motorcycle taxi drivers will encounter it once in a while. This is an issue motorcycle taxi drivers have to handle properly as it might cause further conflict between drivers and clients. There are several ways of taking a taxi without paying. The first is to openly refuse paying the fare. As one driver put it,

Shapai is the most chaotic place in this area. Many people take motorcycle taxis but do not pay. They threaten to beat you up [if you ask for money]. . . . We have no way out. These bad guys are always like that. (Ganlao, 42, Hubei)

On other occasions clients will claim that they have no cash on them. They will ask drivers to wait for them as they borrow money from their friends or take the money from their dormitories. However, they will never come back. A motorcycle taxi driver talked about his experience in the following manner:

One night, a couple of days ago, a guy took my motorcycle without paying. At the beginning we agreed on three yuan for the fare. After arriving at the square, he said he had no cash, and that he would borrow money from his friend. [But he never came back.] I could tell from his behaviour that he did not want to pay. On the road, he said he was a gang member. (Feizai, 38, Hubei)

A third situation similar to such cases is where clients give less than the agreed fare before taking the taxi. The following is a conversation I had with a motorcycle taxi driver:

Driver: Sometimes you take them for free. They will not pay for the taxi. We have no way [of dealing with this].

Author: Have you experienced this?

Driver: Yes, sometimes. For example, last year I took a client to Jianglong. I cannot remember the exact place now. We agreed on fifteen yuan. When we arrived, he just gave me ten yuan. I said, 'We agreed on fifteen yuan, why do you only give me ten yuan?' He replied, 'I have no more money. Do you want this ten yuan? If not, I will not give you even this ten yuan.' He was just like this.

Author: What happened next?

Driver: It was late at night. It was not a good idea to quarrel with people like him. I thought it was OK as at least I got some money for gasoline. I did not want to argue with these people. (*Sigh*) We often come across this issue. Sometimes, when we arrive they will not give you even a cent. We still have no way [to deal with it].

Author: Do you dare to argue with them?

Driver: I am not afraid of them, but these bastards always act like this. We could encounter them any time in a year. If I fight them, they might become desperate as they have nothing to lose. (Kailong, 39, a migrant motorcycle taxi driver from Guangxi)

### *Witnessing street crimes*

Motorcycle snatch theft has been rampant in the Pearl River Delta since the late 1990s (Xu 2012, 2014). Because of the nature of their work, motorcycle taxi drivers must always be on the streets, which provides them with many opportunities to witness street robbery and snatch theft. Witnessing street crimes always puts the motorcycle taxi drivers in a dilemma. On one hand, in the exemplary society of China (Bakken 2000), the value of 'doing boldly what is righteous' or 'never hesitating to do what is right' (*jianyi yongwei* 见义勇为) is highly advocated and appreciated (Figure 4.1).

In addition, the 'mass line' of crime prevention advocated by the Chinese government also encourages people to personally fight criminals. In 2009 the popularity of the case known as the 'throwing bicycle boy' (*lunche nan* 抡车男)<sup>2</sup> reflects people's nostalgia for *jianyi yongwei*. On the other hand, *jianyi yongwei* might also put each of them in dangerous situations. Offenders might become desperate fighting with them. In addition, they might also have to bear responsibility if they hurt the offenders. Several motorcycle taxi drivers expressed their concerns:

I have seen people stealing the driver's mobile phone. Two of them work together. I am alone, how can I be expected to chase them? (Ganlao, 42, a motorcycle taxi driver from Hubei)

There are lots of motorcycle snatch thefts here. In one case, a man was using his mobile phone while walking. The phone was taken by motorcycle snatchers and I can still remember their motorcycle licence number. When I asked the victim

2. The 'throwing bicycle boy' case is about a migrant worker called Guo Xiaoling from Hunan who used his bicycle to hit motorcycle snatchers in Wenzhou. Two offenders drove a motorcycle and snatched a girl's handbag in the early morning of 19 December 2009. Guo witnessed the case and threw his bicycle at the running motorcycle. The motorcycle crashed and the crowd caught one offender while the other one ran away. After returning the handbag to the girl, Guo took his broken bicycle away quietly. However, the whole process was recorded by a surveillance camera and the video was uploaded to the internet. Guo suddenly became very famous on the internet. Many traditional mass media outlets also reported his deeds and even the Chinese official media CCTV continuously reported and highly praised his behaviour. Some netizens call him 'China's man of the year in 2009'. Wenzhou police also awarded Guo a Second Prize Medal of Public Security (<http://baike.baidu.com/view/3109686.htm>, accessed February 2010).



Figure 4.1

A banner calling for *jianyi yongwei* in a schoolyard in Guangzhou. Picture taken in 2012 by the author.

whether he wanted to report it to the police or not, he said no. What can I do? . . . In addition, the law also protects these criminals' basic rights. If we hurt them, they can also sue us. Therefore, when we witness them robbing others, we dare not catch them. With a situation like this, who dares to catch thieves? . . . I am only an ordinary citizen, not a policeman. If the police hurt them, they can argue that it is because the offenders resisted. . . . China Central Television always reports that some people were wounded while catching criminals. But nobody cares about them. (Dalong, 28, a local motorcycle taxi driver in Tianzhi)

I saw a girl. She withdrew 800 yuan from the bank. When she just crossed the street, she was robbed. I witnessed the case but dare not speak out. They [the offenders] have several people [backing them]. If I speak out, I might get in trouble. (Jiangyang, 45, a migrant motorcycle taxi driver from Sichuan)

Some offenders pretend to be motorcycle taxi drivers and rob others if they get the chance. Although real motorcycle taxi drivers might know the offender, they also dare not help the victims.

In this society, all kinds of people exist. Last year in Jiangjiu two or three motorcycles always came out to rob others. Once, I saw them snatching a girl's handbag. But the girl held the handbag firmly and fell to the ground. You know, if a car

happens to pass by, how can the girl survive? We often witness such cases but just keep silent. We dare not help the victims. (Kailong, 39, a migrant motorcycle taxi driver from Guangxi)

### *Traffic accidents*

There are two different types of traffic accidents involved in driving a motorcycle taxi. The first is caused by the nature of driving a motorcycle, applicable to every motorcycle user. However, there is a second type of traffic accident unique to motorcycle taxi drivers, from being chased by the police or those who work for the police.

### *Ordinary accidents*

Motorcycle taxi drivers must face the risk of traffic accidents. Chinese wisdom states that driving a motorcycle is different from driving a car in that a motorcycle ‘uses flesh to wrap around iron’ (*rou bao tie* 肉包铁) while a car ‘uses iron to wrap around flesh’ (*tie bao rou* 铁包肉). In other words, motorcycle drivers are very vulnerable when they are involved in traffic accidents. Traffic accidents are one of the major reasons that as many as 168 cities in China have banned motorcycles (Xu 2012). For motorcycle taxi drivers, their risks are much higher than ordinary users as they need to drive motorcycles for long hours every day. In addition, in order to compete with other taxi drivers for clients, some young drivers might drive very fast, which will also increase their risk of accidents. A motorcycle taxi driver talked about his experience in the following way:

Driving a motorcycle taxi is quite dangerous. The risk of traffic accidents is twenty times higher than among ordinary motorcyclists. I am not exaggerating; you can calculate it. If you only use that to and from work, it is only around five kilometres per day. But if you drive a motorcycle taxi, you must drive at least 100 kilometres. The distance you run is more than twenty times longer. That is just the difference between normal driving and driving a taxi. You must face different environments and different crowds. The risk is even higher. (Dalong, 28, a local motorcycle taxi driver from Tianzhi)

### *Being chased by the police*

Besides ordinary traffic accidents, there is an added risk for motorcycle taxi drivers after local governments banned motorcycles. In the Pearl River Delta, although motorcycle ban policies are implemented in many cities, due to market demand and lack of other job opportunities many motorcycle taxi drivers continue to drive motorcycle taxis and play the game of cat and mouse with the police (Xu 2009). However, when the police, auxiliary police, or security guards working for the police or local governments start to chase them, some motorcycle taxi drivers

escape by driving extremely fast. Traffic accidents might occur and drivers' lives would be in danger. In Guangzhou, Shenzhen, and Dongguan, several motorcycle taxi drivers died from crashes following police chases. The most widely reported case is that of Li Guochao. Li, 31 years old, was hit on the head by a local village cadre with a walkie-talkie, crashed to the ground, and died. The case incited a big riot in Shenzhen in November 2008. Table 4.1 lists several such cases reported by Chinese newspapers. They might just be the tip of the iceberg compared to the real situation.

Although motorcycle taxi drivers face many risks in their everyday lives, the main concern is the risk of being robbed, as robbery puts both their property and lives in danger. I will now examine the tactics used by drivers to prevent robbery and the tactics for surviving in the event of a robbery.

### **Weapons of the Victims: Prevention Tactics for Robbery**

In my fieldwork, I found that almost every motorcycle taxi driver knew that driving motorcycles at night was dangerous and that they could be robbed as a result. However, in order to make a living, migrant motorcycle taxi drivers have to work at night in Tianzhi because of the motorcycle ban policy, which bans non-local licences only. During the interviews, many drivers told all kinds of stories about their own or their fellow villagers' experiences of being robbed. From their own and others' experiences, they have developed some tactics to prevent robbery. In this part, I will explore the tactics used by drivers in order to reduce the risk of being robbed. In the analysis, these tactics are categorized into three types according to what criminological 'routine activity theory' describes as the three elements for a predatory crime: likely offender, suitable target, and the absence of capable guardians (Cohen and Felson 1979). Motorcycle taxi drivers thus try to (1) avoid taking likely offenders as passengers, (2) reduce their attractiveness as targets, and (3) avoid situations lacking capable guardianship.

#### **Avoiding Taking Likely Offenders**

The first type of tactic used by motorcycle taxi drivers is to avoid likely offenders. Cohen and Felson (1979) argued that a likely offender is essential for a crime. Without an offender, there will be no crime. For motorcycle taxi drivers, if they can avoid taking on likely offenders they can prevent themselves from being robbed. There are several ways to achieve this goal.

**Table 4.1**

Traffic accidents related to motorcycle taxi drivers chased by the police in the Pearl River Delta

Name/Accident	Accident Date	City	Hukou	Case	Source
Mr. Liang (Died)	15/11/2006	Dongguan	Local	Liang, 19 years old, was hit by an auxiliary police with a crash helmet in the head and then crashing to ground, died.	<i>Nanfang dushi bao</i> , 29/12/2008, A02
Wang Zhefeng (Heavily wounded)	12/12/2007	Guangzhou	NL	Wang was heavily wounded by running into a car when escaping from a police check.	<i>Guangzhou ribao</i> , 13/12/2007, A12
Deng Huanlun (Died)	10/01/2008	Dongguan	Local	Deng, 39 years old, chased by police for four kilometres, fell down a flyover, and died. Local Dongguan government paid 450,000 yuan in compensation and promised to raise his two kids.	<i>Nanfang dushi bao</i> , 09/04/2008
Tang Zeliu (Died)	27/08/2008	Guangzhou	Hunan	Tang, 50 years old, was chased by two security guards, bumped into a tree, and died.	<i>Nanfang doushi bao</i> , 28/08/2008, 07
Li Guochao (Died)	07/11/2008	Shenzhen	Guangdong Meizhou	Li, 31 years old, was hit in the head by a staff from a local village committee with a walkie-talkie, crashed to the ground, and died. The case incited a big riot. Local government paid 200,000 yuan in compensation.	<i>Nanfang dushi bao</i> , 09/11/2008, A01
Taxi driver (Died) Ms. Yang (Died) Mr. Wang (Wounded)	13/02/2009	Shenzhen	NL Sichuan Sichuan	A motorcycle taxi driver took Yang (mother) and Wang (son). They were chased by a police motorcycle and ran into a truck. Driver and Yang died, and Wang was wounded.	<i>Nanfang dushi bao</i> , 14/12/2009, A19

## Looking for Clues of 'Bad' Persons by Screening Clients

In order to reduce the risk of being robbed, motorcycle taxi drivers must be skilled at distinguishing between 'bad' and 'good' persons. Some of them are very cautious when picking up clients.

I have worked here for about five years. Generally, I can tell who the 'good' and the 'bad' persons are. Those who want to make trouble are different. Sometimes we can tell who these bad guys are. I will not take them. (Wuzhouzai, 25, a migrant motorcycle taxi driver from Guangxi)

Some taxi drivers mentioned specific tactics in telling who 'bad' guys are, such as those with tattoos on their bodies. In China, a tattoo is often regarded as a symbol of gang membership.

I don't take those with tattoos on their bodies and arms. (Jiangyuan, 36, a migrant motorcycle taxi driver from Sichuan)

Some others talked about their own experiences in declining to take 'suspicious' clients.

I will not take any suspicious persons. For instance, last year, near Jiangjiu Bridge, there were three people. One stopped me and I asked him where he was going. He said, 'The city square.' I asked him, 'Only yourself?' He thought for a while and said yes. I asked for fifteen yuan. He said he had another two people waiting under the trees. I went there to have a look and felt that something was not right. I said I wouldn't take three people; I would be fined [by the police] for that.<sup>3</sup> There need to be at least two motorcycles for three persons. He thought for a while and didn't choose my motorcycle. That was about midnight, and it was impossible to take three people. I recall it now and it might have been risky to take them. . . . They acted suspiciously. There were some other motorcycle taxis over there and they didn't ask for them. Why should they stop me halfway down the road? I assumed they were not good people. (Kailong, 31, a migrant motorcycle taxi driver from Guangxi)

## Do Not Take Two Males at Night

A successful robbery requires that the offenders' violence overwhelms the victim's capacity to resist. Two male robbers are much harder to deal with than one. The 2006 Tianzhi police data (Table 4.2) showed that 90 percent of robberies of motorcycle taxi drivers (n=174) involved two or more offenders. In practice, many motorcycle taxi drivers realize the risk and try to avoid taking two males at night.

At night, if two young males [were to ask for a ride], I would not take them. If there is only one, it is much better. At least I am in a legal [business]. I can deal with

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3. The maximum number of people using a motorcycle is two according to China's traffic regulation.



him; the evil can't beat the good. I will have more courage and moral superiority. If it's two males, I dare not take them even if they offer a high price. (Ganlao, 42, a migrant motorcycle taxi driver from Hubei)

It is dangerous to drive a motorcycle. There are many cars and people on the road. I have to drive slowly and carefully. Sometimes I worry a lot. At night, if two males want to take my taxi, I dare not take them. I am afraid they will rob me. (Ah Jin, 27, a migrant motorcycle taxi driver from Guangxi)

**Table 4.2**

The number of offenders in cases of robbery against motorcycle taxi drivers

Offender Number	Frequency	Percent
1	18	10.3
2	80	46.0
3	48	27.6
4	13	7.5
5	5	2.9
6	8	4.6
7	1	0.6
9	1	0.6
Total	174	100

Source: Tianzhi police data (2006).

## Don't Take Those with Empty Hands

Experienced motorcycle taxi drivers learn to know that an important tactic in distinguishing normal clients from possible criminals is that possible offenders will not have any baggage with them. Those who come out of shops with bags and those who have just gotten out of coaches with luggage are reliable clients.

I prefer those who come out of shops and have luggage or bags with them. I don't take those with empty hands. You must have good eyes! (Wanchuan, 44, a migrant motorcycle taxi driver from Sichuan)

I wait for clients at the exit of a highway. Usually, I prefer those who just got out of coaches, especially those with luggage. If there is no luggage, I don't want to take them. Those who stop me in the middle of the road, we don't know their background, so I won't take them. On the back road, I don't pick up clients, no matter if they are male or female. Even if they are female, I also dare not [take them as passengers]. I heard that some females use knives to cut drivers' pockets and steal their money. Sometimes, when a girl takes a motorcycle, there are several males who follow them and when they come to a remote area, they will rob the driver. (Yulingzai, 25, a migrant motorcycle taxi driver from Guangxi)



## Those Making Phone Calls on the Road Are Dangerous

In taxi driver robbery cases, many offenders pretend to be clients and ask drivers to go to some remote area where their partners are waiting for them. Offenders need to inform their partners before they arrive. Some taxi drivers realize that making calls on the road might be a signal of a potential robbery. They try to find excuses to drop them off before they arrive at the destination.

Those who make phone calls on the road are dangerous. I have had several bad experiences. They made calls on the road; I drove my motorcycle to a place with many people around or a place with lighting, and dropped them off there instead. I said I wouldn't go and did not ask for their money. (Jiangyang, 45, a migrant motorcycle taxi driver from Sichuan)

One of my fellow villagers once took a client. The man made a phone call and said they would arrive soon. My fellow villager realized that the place mentioned by the client was a very remote area. He shut down the oil valve purposely and said, 'I am sorry, the motorcycle ran out of gasoline.' He did not ask for money. My fellow villager suspected that the client's partners might wait there to rob him. (Pinglezai, 40, a migrant motorcycle taxi driver from Guangxi)

## Reducing Attractiveness as a Target

Reducing the attractiveness of a target is one of the most important means advocated by situational crime prevention theory (Newman, Clarke, and Shoham 1997; Felson and Clarke 1998; Clarke 1995; Clarke and Mayhew 1980). Some drivers try to use less valuable motorcycles in order to reduce their attractiveness for likely offenders. In addition, some strong and tall drivers can make use of their physical power to discourage likely offenders.

## Using Less Valuable Motorcycles

For robbers, new motorcycles are always more attractive than old ones as they are worth more. In order to reduce attractiveness to likely criminals, some experienced motorcycle taxi drivers try to avoid using new and valuable motorcycles, or they make their motorcycles look rundown on purpose.

A few days ago, a young man asked me to take him. He was robbed and his motorcycle was taken. He bought a new motorcycle [valued to 5,000 yuan] just a week before [he was] robbed. . . . At that time, he took two men. When one got off, another one used a knife to threaten him and asked for money. His new motorcycle, 200 yuan cash, and a mobile phone were all taken away. We dare not use good motorcycles. (Kaigui, 35, a migrant motorcycle taxi driver from Jiangxi)

I was very careful at the beginning. Half a year later, my motorcycle looked very rundown, and I don't wash it, just let it be dirty. (Lianzhuang, 42, a migrant motorcycle taxi driver from Henan)

### Tall and Strong Motorcycle Taxi Drivers Are Safer

Robbery always involves some form of physical confrontation. Violence or threats of violence are needed in this confrontation. A successful robbery requires that the offenders' violence overwhelms the victim's capacity to resist. If the victims are very tall and strong (*getou da* 个头大), offenders might need more effort in winning a physical confrontation. Therefore, choosing a tall and strong victim might pose more risks to offenders.

Tall and strong motorcycle taxi drivers will feel much better; they [the offenders] can't defeat them. Short and weak ones might be bullied by offenders. Even if there are two short and weak offenders, if you are tall and strong, they dare not rob you. (Ganlao, 42, a migrant motorcycle taxi driver from Hubei)

Lianzhuang, a 42-year-old taxi driver from Henan explained his advantage by being tall and strong:

My motorcycle is not worth much. I dare go anywhere they want. If they rob me, I will give the motorcycle to them. Damn it, I think so. You are committing illegal acts if you rob me; I give you whatever you want. I only have a phone and thirty to fifty yuan in my pocket. I drive a motorcycle taxi; I have little cash, not more than one hundred, right? [I have] only these things with me. However, I am tall and strong. In addition, I have strength . . . such as two offenders . . . even if you have a knife, I am stronger than you. If I grab the knife, I will stab you. Even if I kill you, I am not responsible for that. The other [offender], he can't defeat me. (Lianzhuang, 42, a migrant motorcycle taxi driver from Henan)

### Avoiding the Situation of Lacking a Capable Guardian

The third type of tactic used by motorcycle taxi drivers is to avoid situations where they lack capable guardianship (Cohen and Felson 1979). Some of them do not go to remote areas and choose to drop off passengers at sites where guardians are available. They also do not receive food or drink from clients as they may be poisoned and may lose their capacity to protect themselves.

### Do Not Go to Remote Areas

Robbery against motorcycle taxi drivers often occurs in remote areas (*pianpi diduan* 偏僻地段). The following is a typical scenario: An offender pretends to take a motorcycle taxi as a means of transportation. Some other offenders hide themselves

with weapons in a remote area. When they arrive at the ‘client’s’ destination, the offender works with his or her partners to rob the driver. The Tianzhi police data in 2006 indicated that among all 174 robberies of motorcycle taxi drivers, 33.2 percent of them occurred in remote areas (Table 4.3).

**Table 4.3**  
Sites of robbery against motorcycle taxi drivers

	Frequency	Percent
Remote area ( <i>pianpi diduan</i> 偏僻地段)	56	32.2
Road ( <i>yiban gonglu</i> 一般公路)	48	27.6
Street and back alley ( <i>jiexiang</i> 街巷)	24	13.8
Uninhabited area ( <i>huangjiao yewai</i> 荒郊野外)	22	12.6
Rural road ( <i>xiangcun gonglu</i> 乡村公路)	13	7.5
Riverside ( <i>hebian</i> 河边)	6	3.4
Park ( <i>gongyuan</i> 公园)	2	1.1
Established residential areas ( <i>wenming xiaoqu</i> 文明小区)	1	0.6
Rented housing for migrants ( <i>chuzuwu</i> 出租屋)	1	0.6
Construction site ( <i>gongdi</i> 工地)	1	0.6
Total	174	100

Source: Tianzhi police data (2006).

In remote areas, the drivers are far away from all kinds of guardianship, such as the police, other taxi drivers, or other civilians. Actually, many motorcycle taxi drivers know that remote areas are dangerous places, and they try to avoid going to such places. As expressed by my interviewees:

- I will ask where they are going. If it is some remote area, I will not go. If not, I can go. (Yulinzai, 25, a migrant motorcycle taxi driver from Guangxi)
- I definitely will not drive them to some remote area. (Jiangyang, 45, a migrant motorcycle taxi driver from Sichuan)

**Choosing Drop-off Sites**

Robbery often occurs in dark places as darkness can serve as a natural shield for offenders as it prevents them from being noticed. Some taxi drivers will try to drop off passengers in bright places or places where many people are gathered. These people can be possible guardians against potential robberies.

- Generally speaking, when a client wants to go to a normal street where there are many people, I don't worry at all. If it is a remote or dark place, I will not go. . . . If

we go to lit places and there are many people around, they dare not rob us. (Ah Gui, 33, a migrant motorcycle taxi driver from Guangxi)

## Do Not Accept Food or Drink from Strangers

As briefly mentioned above, some offenders try to poison motorcycle taxi drivers before robbing them. From others' victimization experiences, some taxi drivers are cautious when accepting food and drinks from strangers.

One of my fellow villagers has the same surname as me and comes from the same place. He just arrived here a month ago. One day, he took a man from city square to the Beiji Flyover. After he arrived, he smoked a cigarette he got from the offender. The offender asked him to wait for him for a while as he would return. My fellow countryman didn't realize that he should not have smoked the cigarette as it was spiked with something. My fellow villager began to lose consciousness and the offender drove his motorcycle away. His motorcycle was worth about 8,000 yuan. It was new. (Wanchuan, 44, a migrant motorcycle taxi driver from Sichuan)

## Survival Tactics during Robbery

Although motorcycle taxi drivers develop some tactics to prevent robbery from occurring, they actually still run a high risk of being robbed and this is especially the case for migrant motorcycle taxi drivers as they have to work at night, which increases their exposure to likely offenders and reduces the protection of capable guardians (Xu 2009). I will next examine the survival tactics used by motorcycle taxi drivers when robbery occurs.

## No Resistance, I Do Not Regard Money as That Important

For motorcycle taxi drivers, their motorcycles, cash and mobile phones are valuable property. When these items become the target of robbers, they must decide how to react. No resistance means they have to carry great economic losses. This is 'blood and sweat money' (*xuehan qian* 血汗钱) for them. Fighting back, however, will increase the risk of bodily harm. Money or life becomes a serious and real question. The 2006 Tianzhi police data (Table 4.4) showed that 32.8 percent of victims fought back to protect their property and two-thirds did not. In other words, the majority of victims did not fight back. In their own words, they argue that one should not regard money as that important, especially when other drivers' victimization experiences taught them important lessons. Kailong, a 39-year-old taxi driver from Guangxi, talked about his own experience of being robbed:

When I was robbed that night, I realized that I can't defeat them. I had no other way but to let them take it, right? We motorcycle taxi drivers have no weapons with

us. If you fight back, you might lose more and that's it. A second-hand motorcycle is only worth about 1,000 yuan on the open market. If I had fought with them and got wounded, I would suffer more. Then, I told them [the robbers] if you want my motorcycle, just take it. I tried to remember their appearances. (Kailong, 39, a migrant motorcycle taxi driver from Guangxi)

If I were robbed, I would not fight back. Want my money? Take it! Want my motorcycle? Take it! If I die, I will have nothing. (Pinglezai, 40, a migrant motorcycle taxi driver from Guanxi)

Although two-thirds of motorcycle taxi drivers did not fight back during robbery, more than half (54.6 percent, see Table 4.5) were still injured to various extents. Some even lost their lives fighting back. What needs to be mentioned here is that because some robbery cases are recorded as homicide if victims die, the actual proportion of deaths should be higher than the official police recorded number of 2.3 percent.

**Table 4.4**  
Motorcycle taxi drivers' reaction in robbery

	Frequency	Percent
Resistance	57	32.8
No resistance	117	67.2
Total	174	100

Source: Tianzhi police data (2006).

**Table 4.5**  
Motorcycle taxi drivers' injury level in robbery

	Frequency	Percent
No injury ( <i>wu shou shang</i> 无受伤)	79	45.4
Scratches, cuts, and bruises ( <i>piwai shang</i> 皮外伤)	43	24.7
Slight injury ( <i>qingwei shang</i> 轻微伤)	27	15.5
Minor injury ( <i>qing shang</i> 轻伤)	11	6.3
Serious injury ( <i>zhong shang</i> 重伤)	2	1.1
Knocked unconscious ( <i>dayun</i> 打晕)	5	2.9
Poisoning ( <i>mazui</i> 麻醉)	3	1.7
Death	4	2.3
Total	174	100

Source: Tianzhi police data (2006).

## **I Fight Back If I Can Defeat Them**

As 2006 Tianzhi police data indicated, 32.8 percent of victims fought back when they were robbed. For some drivers, if they believe they can defeat the offenders, they might fight back. This is expressed by my interviewees clearly in the following:

It will depend on whether I can defeat them. If I can win, I will definitely fight back. If not, I have no way. Generally speaking, two offenders could only be handled with difficulty. I am not afraid if there is only one person. It is harder to beat two persons. (Ah Gui, 33, a migrant motorcycle taxi driver from Guangxi)

Many people will fight back if they think they can beat the robber(s). If not, they will not fight back. (Pinglezai, 40, a migrant motorcycle taxi driver from Guangxi)

## **Breaking the Motorcycle before Escaping**

Some taxi drivers try to break their motorcycles before escaping from the crime scene. That way, offenders cannot start the motorcycle. On some occasions they do so successfully to protect it from being stolen.

One of my fellow villager was quite smart. Once he was robbed by several criminals. He realized that he could not defeat them. He abandoned his motorcycle and ran away. However, before running away, he broke the ignition line, destroying it. Therefore, offenders could not start it and did not get his motorcycle. (Pinglezai, 40, a migrant motorcycle taxi driver from Guangxi)

## **Pretending to Die**

Taxi drivers often get hurt during robberies even if they do not fight back. The 2006 Tianzhi police data indicated that even if only a third of victims tried to fight back, 54.6 percent victims were injured to some extent as a result. To protect themselves from being seriously hurt, some motorcycle taxi drivers pretended to faint or die after being hit.

Several years ago, one of my fellow villagers drove a client to Tanzuo. After arriving, several persons wanted to rob his motorcycle. My fellow countryman fell on the ground and pretended to be dead after being hit. His motorcycle was taken away. Another person fought with them and got seriously wounded. They took two motorcycles at the same time. (Pinglezai, 40, a migrant motorcycle taxi driver from Guangxi)

## **Finding Excuses to Get Away before Being Robbed**

As we have seen, it is important for taxi drivers to notice dangerous signals that suggest possible robbery. These signals include changing destinations or making

calls on the road. Some taxi drivers successfully avoid being robbed by decoding these signals in time. Ah Liu, a motorcycle taxi driver from Guangxi, shared with me his successful escape story:

In 2003 I was nearly robbed once. At that time, I used all my money to buy a motorcycle. It was not long after I bought the motorcycle, so I needed to drive until late at night to make enough money. It was later than 11:00 p.m. and I was about to go home. Then, I saw a girl on the roadside talking to another motorcycle taxi driver. She was dressed very beautifully! I slowed down my motorcycle, and she stopped me. I asked her where she was going. She said some place near Fusha market, and said it was near to her destination and that she would let me know when we arrived. She spoke Cantonese. She asked me to drive her there and that she would come back later. We made a deal of paying eight yuan. As I used to be a plumber here, I was quite familiar with the surroundings. After we passed Beiji Flyover, she asked me to go to the Fusha market. I was a little bit suspicious of why we should go that way. She said her place was near there. So we drove there. When we arrived at the market, she asked me if I had any change since she didn't have any. All she had were hundred-yuan bills. At that time, I hadn't doubted her yet. I replied that I didn't have change with me. She said it didn't matter and we could get change from her friends. She asked me to go with her. Then, we came to Xixi Bridge. It was very dark, and there were no lights around. It was a muddy road and I had to drive slowly. I became suspicious of her. You know, such a beautiful girl, also quite smart, she should not tell me all her money was in hundred-yuan bills. Wasn't she afraid I would rob her? I also recalled that she spoke Mandarin when she made a call on the road. Although I started to doubt her, I had no way out. After we arrived at a pond, there was a ditch. The bridge was made of a narrow wooden plank. I told her I could not pass the bridge and asked her to get off my motorcycle first. She really thought I could not pass it and got off my motorcycle. When she got over the ditch, I turned around my motorcycle and told her I would not go any longer. When she passed the ditch, she made another call and said she was arriving very soon. She threatened me and said if I left, she would throw away my crash helmet that she wore at that time. I told her I didn't want it any more. It was very dark and I was quite scared. I ran away without my crash hamlet. The next morning, I got up very early at 6:00 a.m. and wanted to see what kind of place it was. After I arrived, I found only one small house near the pond and nothing else. Fortunately, I didn't go there. Otherwise, I couldn't have escaped. She definitely had some partners hidden there to rob me. As it was only a narrow bridge over the ditch, it was hard to escape driving a motorcycle. It was a trap! Also, why should a girl come to a place like that? How would she dare say that all she had were hundred-yuan bills? Wasn't she afraid I would rob her? You know, some motorcycle taxi drivers really rob others. How could ordinary people be so bold? If she really only had hundred-yuan bills, why didn't she buy some stuff when we got to the market to get some change? (Ah Liu, 37, a migrant motorcycle taxi driver from Guangxi)

## Conclusion

Although the motorcycle has been used as a weapon to cope with widespread social exclusion of migrant workers, driving a motorcycle taxi is definitely not a romantic job. I explored the risks for migrant workers driving motorcycle taxis. Since motorcycles, cash, and mobile phones are valuable targets for potential offenders, motorcycle taxi drivers are at great risk of being robbed when working on the streets, and this is especially the case at night as working at night-time will increase the exposure to likely offenders and reduce the protection of capable guardians (Xu 2009). Motorcycle taxi drivers also have to face the risk of extortion as some offenders will fall off the motorcycle on purpose and ask for money as compensation. The illegal working status of migrant workers reduces their motivation to report these cases and seek help from the police. They usually handle the case by themselves and some offenders even make use of the drivers' illegal working status to rob or extort them. Taking a taxi without paying is also a problem that motorcycle taxi drivers will encounter in their everyday work. In order to reduce further conflict with clients, most drivers choose to bear the loss of fares rather than argue with these clients. However, it could also be a source of escalated conflict for some drivers. Since motorcycle taxi drivers always work on the street and they witness many street crimes in general and motorcycle snatch thefts in particular, they often have to face the dilemma of *jianyi yongwei* (doing boldly what is righteous) on the one hand, and the risk of injury or becoming victims of revenge attacks from offenders on the other. Driving motorcycle taxis also puts the drivers at risk in traffic accidents. They must face ordinary traffic accidents which all motorcycle users might encounter, and they also have to face an added risk of accidents caused by being chased by the police because of their illegal working status.

Among the five types of work risks for motorcycle taxi drivers, robbery is the most important one as the risk of being robbed is fairly high, and the consequences can be very severe. In this chapter, I explored the tactics used by migrant motorcycle taxi drivers to prevent robbery from occurring. These include (1) avoiding taking likely offenders—the drivers look for clues of 'bad' persons by screening clients, do not take two males at night, do not take those with empty hands, and become vigilant against those making phone calls on the road—(2) reducing their own attractiveness as targets by using less valuable motorcycles and using their physical power to discourage potential offenders; and (3) avoiding situations without capable guardians. They do not go to remote areas, and they try to drop off clients where guardians are present. They are also cautious about taking food or drinks from clients.

All in all, this chapter described the risks of something resembling an illegal economy instigated by the limited opportunities given to hundreds of millions of migrant workers in urban China. Although they have developed street savvy and many tactics in their struggle of everyday life in an often-hostile environment filled



with risks, their street savvy and tactics are heavily constrained by their working conditions and the social exclusion they have to face in urban China.

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