

# POLICE CIVILIANIZATION AND THE PRODUCTION OF UNDERCLASS VIOLENCE: THE CASE OF PARA-POLICE *CHENGGUAN* AND STREET VENDORS IN GUANGZHOU, CHINA

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*Using data collected from systematic social observation, participant observation, interviews, and content analysis of media reports in Guangzhou, this article studies violent confrontation between China's para-police chengguan (urban management officers) and street vendors. We find that most violent confrontations occur between street vendors and civilian staff—auxiliary chengguan—rather than between street vendors and sworn officers—official chengguan. We further reveal that the unequal power structure within the chengguan system shapes the division of labour between official chengguan and auxiliary chengguan, resulting in most of the 'dirty work' of street-level law enforcement being conducted by the latter, the second-class staff in the system. The research contributes to our understanding of pluralised policing and how police civilianization affects a convergence of violence within the underclass as both auxiliary chengguan and street vendors are recruited from urban poor.*

**Keywords:** police civilianization, interpersonal violence, *chengguan*, street vendors

## Introduction

One of the key features of contemporary social life is the reach of markets and market logic into areas that were traditionally governed by nonmarket norms (Sandel 2013: 7). Once mainly regarded as public goods and provided by governments, policing and security are increasingly becoming commodities to be purchased on the market (Loader 1999; Diphooorn 2016). The public police are actively engaged in market activities to sell their own services and apply market logic of cost-saving in managing police force, a trend termed as marketization of the public police by scholars (Loader et al. 2014). On the one hand, along with rapid increase of private policing and security, some services provided by public police become commodified. Not only the police may charge extra fees in some areas (e.g., shopping malls) or some special events (e.g., sports, concerts) for extra patrol in the form of user-pay policing (Crawford and Lister 2006), off-duty police officers may also work for private employees with the full panoply of police powers in the practice of moonlighting (Lippert and Walby 2013). To generate funds for the extra budget, the police may also accept commercial sponsorship (Grabosky 2007; Xu 2013), and in some controversial cases, commercial advertisements can even appear on police cars (Sandel 2013: 195). On the other hand, the market logics of cost-saving and efficiency are widely adopted by public police in their daily work. Two most obvious practices include police outsourcing some key service areas to

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private sectors (White 2014) and the civilianization of police forces (Davis et al. 2014; Cosgrove 2015). Mainly with the rationale of cost-effectiveness, the civilianization of policing has reached an unprecedented level of over 30–40 per cent in many Western countries (including the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada) where neo-liberal thinking has triumphed since the 1980s (Davis et al. 2014; Kiedrowski et al. 2017; Lumsden and Black 2018). Despite various benefits of civilianization, there are several concerns including the poor quality, the low morale and high turnover rate of civilian staff, and the unequal power relationship between civilian staff and sworn officers. It should also be noted that we know little about how police civilianization occurs in former socialist countries such as China where the spread of market logic into social life came much later than its Western counterparts.

Using the case study of China's para-police *chengguan*, this article examines how police civilianization occurs in China, and with what consequences. *Chengguan* (i.e., urban management 城管) officers are China's para-police who are responsible for the enforcement of urban regulations, and one of their main tasks is to regulate street vending in urban China (Hanser 2016). Through the study of violent confrontations between *chengguan* and street vendors in Guangzhou, one of China's megacities, this article examines how the civilianization of para-police *chengguan* affects the occurrence of violent confrontation between street vendors and auxiliary *chengguan* (协管 *xieguan*, civilian staff) and, by extension, the violence within the underclass. On the one hand, the article enriches our understanding of unequal power structure between civilian staff and sworn officers and how this structural force shapes the concentration of violence within the underclass. On the other hand, this article extends current knowledge of pluralized policing and the para-police (Rigakos 1999) in the police extended family.

### *Police Civilianization and Its Concerns*

Police civilianization refers to the practice of hiring nonsworn officers to replace or augment sworn personnel in police force, mainly with the purpose of reducing cost and improving service (Maguire and King 2004). Although there was nothing novel in recruiting civilians in the police department, the percentage of civilians in the police force remained at a very low level in most police forces until the 1980s when commodification, marketization and privatization of policing took shape under the influence of neo-liberal thinking (Jones and Newburn 2002). Currently, there is nearly one civilian employee for every two sworn officers in most police forces in the Western countries. In the United States, civilians in the police force have grown from 2.7 per cent in 1937 (Maguire and King 2004) to 7.5 per cent in 1950s and to over 30 per cent nowadays (Davis et al. 2014). In Canada by 15 May 2015, 29 per cent of the employees (or 28,368 staff) in the police force were civilians (Kiedrowski et al. 2017). In the United Kingdom, by 31 March 2016, among 200,922 total police employees, there were 61,668 (31 per cent) police staff and 11,043 (5.5 per cent) Police Community Support Officers (PCSO) (Home Office 2016). Both police staff and PCSO are civilian officers while the former are non-uniformed personnel who work mainly at the backstage of law enforcement and the latter are uniformed nonsworn officers who primarily work on the street to deal with minor offenses and antisocial behaviours (O'Neill 2014). Altogether nearly 40 per cent of British police personnel are civilian officers.

In earlier days, civilians were hired mainly on the rationale of special skills rather than saving cost. However, cost-effectiveness became the predominant reason for the ever-increasing civilianization when neo-liberal thinking spread over the police (Loader 1999). The operations of the police are increasingly following a 'business-paradigm' to save cost (Ayling et al. 2009). When the demand for police work is constantly increasing but the expansion in budgets cannot catch up with the pace of social needs, and even worse when the police face severe austerity cuts (Lumsden and Black 2018), the extensive hiring of civilians to save costs becomes an inevitable choice. Civilians cost much less than their sworn counterparts, usually around 60–70 per cent of that of sworn officers (Davis et al. 2014). In some cases, the cost can be as low as one-half to one-third (Forst 2000). Indeed, empirical findings also reveal that police forces experiencing more budget constraints witnessed higher level of civilianization of their forces (Crank 1989).

In addition to cost-effectiveness, advocates of police civilianization also emphasize that the practice can make police work more efficient and effective. They argue that the hiring of civilians can free the police from administrative, clerical and routine tasks to increase police professionalism by focusing on the core function of law enforcement for which coercion, arrest and other special police skills are needed (Matrofski 1990; McCarty and Skogan 2013). In addition, while the police are usually trained as generalists, civilians can bring special skills in forensics, intelligence analysis, information technology, training, budgeting, human resource and research (Davis et al. 2014). Civilians are also easier to lay off flexibly when there are budget constraints as they are contract-based (Alderden and Skogan 2014).

However, there are various concerns surrounding police civilianization. The first is about the poor quality of many civilian officers. Although some civilian staff are equipped with special skills, many others may be less competent in the work as they are usually recruited from the bottom end of the labour market. The British PCSO were cynically regarded as 'plastic police' by some critiques (Paskell 2007). Similar to private security guards, the poor quality may also make civilian personnel more likely to become deviant in their work (Diphhoorn 2016). The second concern relates to low morale and the high turnover rate of civilian staff. Civilians usually lack opportunities for promotion and career development. The turnover rate among them is usually high and the long-term retention of highly skilled civilian staff is particularly difficult (Alderden and Skogan 2014). The third concern is about the integration of the civilian staff and sworn officers. While some sworn officers may worry that civilians can take away a number of easy jobs with fewer risks (such as office work) which they regard as a reward or assignment for the sick, the injured, the aged and pregnant officers (Kiedrowski et al. 2017), others are concerned about the possibility of civilians' low commitment to the police force (Dick and Metcalfe 2001). More importantly, civilian staff may not be regarded as genuine and valuable members by the sworn officers and be treated as second-class citizens in the police organization (Alderden and Skogan 2014). The unequal positions and power structure within the police organization deserve serious sociological inquiries.

In the existing literature, some scholars examined how civilian staff work as emotional labour in the force control room (Lumsden and Black 2018), whereas others compared different levels of job burnout and commitment between civilian staff and sworn officers (McCarty and Skogan 2013; Alderden and Skogan 2014). Generally

speaking, empirical research about police civilianization is rather limited. In particular, we know little about how the unequal power between civilian staff and sworn officers plays out and with what consequences. This article provides one of the very first empirical examinations of China's police civilianization. Specifically, through studying China's para-police *chengguan*, it reveals the unequal power relations between official *chengguan* (sworn officers) and auxiliary *chengguan* (civilian staff). It further reveals how such an unequal power relation contributes to a concentration of violence within the underclass as both auxiliary *chengguan* and street vendors are recruited from the urban poor.

### *Interpersonal Violence Within the Underclass*

It has been widely recognized that offenders and victims often come from similar backgrounds. Interpersonal violence usually involves males attacking males, the young attacking the young, the ethnic minority attacking the ethnic minority, immigrants attacking immigrants and the underclass attacking the underclass (Downes et al. 2017: 287–304). Indeed, as Jock Young once vividly pointed out:

What does your likely murderer look like? If you pick up a mirror and look into it, you will see the image of your most likely attacker. He will be of the same class as you, of the same ethnic group, probably the same age, a member of your own social circle – dressing like you, with the same accent and habits. Despite all the talk about intra-racial attack, he will be the same color as you (cited in Rock 1998: 16).

Empirical research has consistently shown that in the United States violent crimes were much more likely to be concentrated within the African-American part of the population (Anderson 1999; Bruce 2000). In Australia, violence was also more likely to occur among aboriginal people (Polk 1994: 58). Similar findings were found in China where a report revealed that a socially disadvantaged group, rural-to-urban migrant workers, accounted for over 80 per cent of police arrests in violent crime incidents. They were also the major targets of homicide, aggravated assault, robbery and rape (Xu 2007).

Although earlier scholarship tend to argue that the distinct subculture of violence among the underclass might be the main reason for the intra-class convergence of violence as people influenced by the violent subculture are more likely to resort to violence in their daily life to maintain dignity and power or to solve conflicts (Wolfgang and Ferracuti 1967), it has now been widely acknowledged that that concentration of violence is highly affected by social structural factors, such as the poverty, unemployment, segregation or discrimination experienced in everyday life (Blau and Blau 1982; Massey and Denton 1993; Venkatesh 2008). Lower class boys may lack the skills to succeed in schools compared to those from the middle class, therefore they develop their own criteria to succeed, such as being tough and possessing fighting skills, something which seems easier to achieve (Cohen 1955). Youth in the disadvantaged neighbourhoods may find it hard to achieve economic success because of a lack of legitimate means, and resort to violence to attain status accordingly. Some lower class people are not only permanently excluded from the job market due to deindustrialization in many Western societies, but are also excluded from the protection of the criminal justice system (Young 1999; Reiman and Leighton 2016). In some disadvantaged

neighbourhoods, the underclass has increasingly become the target of over-policing, and their lives become centred on the avoidance of being caught by the police (Goffman 2014). The limitations of the police may also encourage more violence as offenders are not regularly punished (Desmond 2017). Where the underclass is often over-policed but under-protected by the police, they may become estranged from civil society and find themselves having to solve the conflict by themselves, and violence is always a readily available option (Anderson 1999; Venkatesh 2008; Kirk and Papachristos 2011).

While the existing literature has explored how social structural forces make the underclass population more likely to use violence, they largely focus on offenders. The convergence of opportunities for the underclass to interact with each other, and lead to possible violence among them, is often taken for granted and unexamined. However, it is important to explore what social structural factors contribute to the convergence of likely offenders and possible victims within the underclass (Cohen and Felson 1979). This paper addresses this matter by studying how police civilianization in China contributes to the convergence of auxiliary *chengguan* and street vendors on the street, and by extension, affects the intra-class concentration of violence.

### Chengguan Violence and the 'Rotten Apple' of Auxiliary Chengguan

China's *chengguan*, officially known as the Urban Administration and Law Enforcement Bureau or simply the Urban Management Bureau, is a para-police government department tasked with enforcing non-criminal urban administrative regulations (Zang 2017). One fundamental difference between *chengguan* and the police is that *chengguan* have no arrest power, which is an essential element of police work. Chinese *chengguan* have had a relatively short history, having been established against a backdrop of soaring problems of urban management caused by the rapid urbanization of the past three decades (Hanser 2016). The first *chengguan* force was founded in 1997 in Beijing. By 2015, a total of 3,074 counties and cities in China had created their own *chengguan* departments and 455,000 personnel were employed. Official statistics showed that while half of them were sworn officers, another half were fixed-term (1–3 years contract) auxiliary *chengguan* (Liu 2016). The auxiliary *chengguan* are uniformed nonsworn civilian staff, similar to PCSO in the United Kingdom. The level of civilianization is much higher than that in Western countries. There is a huge difference between the two forces in terms of job security, power and compensations. Generally speaking, the cost of hiring an auxiliary *chengguan* is just roughly one-third of that for an official *chengguan*. Auxiliary *chengguan* become the second-class citizens in the system. They have no independent power to enforce the law but can call upon the support of official *chengguan*'s law enforcement.

Since its inception, *chengguan* have become increasingly omnipresent in domestic governance. For instance, the number of tasks for Guangzhou *chengguan*'s law enforcement has increased exponentially from 5 in 1997 to 321 in 2015. The most commonly known tasks include the regulation of street vending, unauthorized construction, noise and air pollution. Regulating street vending, however, is probably the most widely known task of *chengguan* as it frequently involves the use of excessive violence in law enforcement (Human Rights Watch 2012). A report described *chengguan*'s primary law enforcement methods in controlling street vendors: 'confiscation of goods, kicking vendors' stands,



throwing (vendors') goods to the ground, gang-style beatings, and triad-style protection fee collection' (Zhang 2011). An internal training manual of Beijing *chengguan* on how to use violence in law enforcement went viral online, which instructed *chengguan* to 'leave no blood on the face, leave no trace of injury on the body, and keep away from witnesses' when beating vendors (Zhang 2009). As a result, Chinese *chengguan* has been regarded as the most unpopular government department (People.cn 2014). A survey indicated that less than one-third of citizens were satisfied with *chengguan* law enforcement (Guangzhou Public Opinion Research Center 2013).

Media coverage on *chengguan* violence against street vendors or bystanders has been widespread. For instance, on 17 July 2013, a male street vendor was beaten to death and his wife was seriously injured by six *chengguan* when selling watermelons in Hubei province (Ouyang 2013). On 22 April 2014, a bystander was attacked by a group of *chengguan* as he took some photos of the scene where *chengguan* were driving vendors away in Zhejiang province. Later on, *chengguan* even overturned an ambulance that came to rescue an injured bystander (Zhu 2014). On 16 May 2012, a street vendor was stabbed four times with a knife by a *chengguan* in Guangzhou (Jiang 2012). These cases are just a tip of the iceberg of mounting conflict between Chinese *chengguan* and street vendors or bystanders. In Guangzhou city, it was reported that there were over 2,626 violent confrontations between *chengguan* and street vendors from 2005 to 2009 and more than 1,679 *chengguan* were physically injured (Table 1). A search of 'chengguan violence' (城管暴力 *chengguan baoli*) in Google or Baidu in 2016 both generated more than one million reports.

In *chengguan* violence towards street vendors, the civilian staff auxiliary *chengguan* have always been identified as the culprits by the government. The following case in Guangzhou is illuminating. On an early morning in May 2012, several *chengguan* came to a market prohibiting a vendor from selling vegetables on the sidewalk. Soon after, verbal quarrelling escalated into physical violence. A *chengguan* officer picked up a knife from another nearby vendor and assaulted the vendor four times, resulting in the vendor's skull being exposed. The vendor's possessions were also smashed to pieces on the ground. In response to this case, one government official remarked that: 'The offender is an auxiliary *chengguan*. He is a temporarily-hired staff, not an official *chengguan*' (Jiang 2012). In another case, a male bystander was beaten up by a *chengguan* as he was mistakenly believed to be shooting a video of the present scene of law enforcement. One official from the Urban Management Bureau responded:

Three perpetrators will be punished. Their identities have been identified, and they all are temporary employees (auxiliary *chengguan*) with low education...we will strengthen the education and management of temporary employees to avoid similar incidents in the future. (Chen and Kong 2013)

TABLE 1 *Chengguan's violent confrontations with vendors in Guangzhou from media reports*

Year	Number of violent confrontation	Number of <i>chengguan</i> injured
2004		236
2005	700+	330+
2009 (1–10)	230	86
2005–2009	2626	1679
2013 (1–8)	119	99
2014		390

While the government often attributes the *chengguan* violence to the so-called ‘low quality’ of auxiliary *chengguan*, others argue that these temporary employees might be just the scapegoats for official *chengguan* (Qi 2013; Ji 2014). A survey indicated that 76.8 per cent of respondents believed that temporarily hired auxiliary *chengguan* ‘take a fall’ for official *chengguan* (Lan 2013).

However, it remains uncertain that whether auxiliary *chengguan* are the majority of perpetrators or simply the scapegoats for official *chengguan*. In addition, when the state attributes these violent events to the ‘low quality’ among auxiliary *chengguan*, the constant use of violence in law enforcement appears to be depicted officially as incidents caused by individual ‘rotten apples’ in the *chengguan* force (Sherman 1978). However, the deep root of the problems of *chengguan* system has not been exposed. That is, how the civilianization of the para-police *chengguan* system affects the production of violence.

### *Research Questions, Data and Method*

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the pattern of *chengguan* violence towards street vendors and the underlying social structural reasons for the production of *chengguan* violence. To achieve this goal, the following questions are addressed: (1) To what extent are the auxiliary *chengguan* the major perpetrators of violence towards street vendors? Or are they simply the scapegoats of official *chengguan* as many commentators suggest? The answer to this question is likely to reveal the extent to which violence occurs within the underclass, as both street vendors and auxiliary *chengguan* are commonly recruited from the urban poor; (2) if most violent confrontations occur between auxiliary *chengguan* and street vendors, how does the difference in the power wielded by the official *chengguan* and auxiliary *chengguan* contribute to the observed pattern of violence? Addressing these questions will shed light on some negative consequences of police civilianization.

All data for this study were collected from Guangzhou, a megacity located in south China with a population of around 17 million. Multiple strategies were used in data collection during the research team’s (consisting of two researchers and an assistant) three years of fieldwork in Guangzhou. The first set of data came from systematic social observation (SSO) of *chengguan* law enforcement. SSO proves to be a powerful method in criminology (Reiss 1971; Sampson and Raudenbush 1999). However, compared with survey, interview and participant observation, SSO is an underdeveloped tool (Xu 2009, 2013; Xu et al. 2013). In this study, we developed this method by systematically observing 112 instances of *chengguan* law enforcement during the summer of 2014. The research team coded the following variables for analysis: time, date and place of law enforcement, duration of law enforcement (how many minutes the law enforcement lasted), number of official *chengguan*, number of auxiliary *chengguan*, number of street vendors on the street, incidence of verbal violence from *chengguan* and incidence of physical violence from *chengguan*. Throughout, our main purpose was to identify risk factors for the occurrence of *chengguan* violence.

The second part was devoted to participant observation. The team spent altogether eight months on the street of Guangzhou observing street vending and *chengguan* law enforcement from July to October 2014, and July to August in 2015 and 2016. In particular, the second author also worked as a street vendor for a whole month in September

2014, either independently or working with other street vendors (Figure 1). Other members of the research team, including the first author and the research assistant, engaged in participant observation from time to time. These experiences enabled us to become familiar with street vendors and develop a deeper understanding of their work nature, risks, challenges and daily life. It also provided us with many opportunities to interact with *chengguan*.

The third part of our data collection involved in-depth semi-structured interviews with *chengguan* and street vendors. Making use of the team's extensive network established during a decade of research in Guangzhou, we first interviewed 32 official *chengguan* at the district level, and 20 official *chengguan* and 7 auxiliary *chengguan* from street-level law enforcement branches. These interviews were mainly conducted in a relatively formal setting, usually in a meeting room in *chengguan* departments. To diversify our source of information, we also interviewed an additional 4 official *chengguan* and 13 auxiliary *chengguan* in informal settings, mostly on the street in a relaxed way after the researchers had become familiar with them during the lengthy process of street observation. Altogether, we interviewed 76 *chengguan*. Besides *chengguan*, 31 street vendors were also interviewed about their experience of interactions with *chengguan* in the late stage of fieldwork. Numerous informal interviews were also conducted during our observations. After the first interview in 2014, we kept in regular contact with ten vendors, mainly through social media on Wechat (the most popular cellphone app in China), about their recent experience of street vending (or other jobs after several of them had quit street vending and started other businesses).

The fourth part was devoted to the data mining of media reports of *chengguan* violence in Guangzhou. 'Chengguan or street vendors' plus 'violence or conflict' were used as keywords to search news reports in Wisenews, a database containing most of the newspapers in Mainland China, Hong Kong and Macau. This search was limited to reports about mainland China from 2011 to 2014. Since some news items may not be published by newspapers but can be reported by online media, the above-mentioned keywords were searched in Baidu (the Chinese version of Google) as well. News from different sources was triangulated to ensure reliability and pieced together to get a full picture of each case. Altogether, 37 cases of violent conflicts between *chengguan* and street vendors in Guangzhou were identified. Although the sample may only reflect a tip of the iceberg of all confrontations, and although media reports tend to be pro-government due to the heavy censorship by Chinese government (Xu 2015), some factual variables could be identified for analysis: time, place, type of violence, number, age and gender of street vendors, number of official *chengguan*, the number of auxiliary *chengguan*, reported reasons for violent confrontation, physical injury level of street vendors, physical injury level of *chengguan* and the consequence of confrontation. Among the 37 cases, 25 had detailed information about whether it was official *chengguan* or auxiliary *chengguan* who were involved in violent confrontations with street vendors.

Lastly, this research was informed by the first author's experience of living for over one decade in Guangzhou as he witnessed the daily public performance of the 'cat and mouse' game being played between *chengguan* and street vendors. The interview data and field notes were analyzed through open, axial and thematic coding following the approach of grounded theory (Charmaz 2014) with the assistance of Nvivo 11.0.



*Violence Within the Underclass: Confrontations Mainly Occur Between Auxiliary  
Chengguan and Street Vendors*

We have argued that while Chinese government sources and official media attribute the occurrence of *chengguan* violence to the low quality of auxiliary *chengguan* and tend to individualize the problem of violence, some critical commentators pointed out that auxiliary *chengguan* might simply be the scapegoats for official *chengguan* (Qi 2013; Zhang 2013). The underlying implication of this argument is that it is official *chengguan*, not auxiliary *chengguan*, who perpetrate the violence towards street vendors. To unravel this puzzle, we sought to determine when violent confrontations actually occurred between *chengguan* and street vendors, and the extent to which both official *chengguan* and auxiliary *chengguan* were involved.

Of the 37 cases we collected from Wisenews and Baidu about violent confrontations between *chengguan* and street vendors in Guangzhou from 2011 to 2014, 25 cases contained detailed information about whether it was official *chengguan* or auxiliary *chengguan* who were involved. Among these 25 cases, auxiliary *chengguan* were involved in using violence in every instance, whereas official *chengguan* were only involved in using violence in two cases (see Figure 2). It was quite clear that auxiliary *chengguan* were by far the more common perpetrators of violence on street vendors, and they were not the scapegoats of official *chengguan* as some critical commentators suggested (although auxiliary *chengguan* could have been deployed to do the dirty work that official *chengguan* were unwilling to perform). The finding is also confirmed by our interview with *chengguan* officers (see the analysis in the final part of “Official Chengguan: A Risk Factor of Chengguan Violence” for details).

*Chengguan* may also get injured in violent confrontations. Indeed, it was reported that over 1,679 *chengguan* were physically injured between 2005 and 2009 (Table 1) in Guangzhou. The official data did not report the distribution of victims between official *chengguan* and auxiliary *chengguan*. The limited cases in Guangzhou



FIG. 1 Hundreds of street vendors selling goods on a sidewalk in Guangzhou in 2014

reported from media also did not contain enough data to figure out the pattern. However, the data from extensive interviews with *chengguan* and street vendors indicated that auxiliary *chengguan* were the major victims. Besides, our analysis of more systematic nationwide data also demonstrated that auxiliary *chengguan* were the major victims when there were confrontations with street vendors. A search of media reports through Wisenews and Baidu about *chengguan*–vendor confrontations which resulted in serious injury or death of *chengguan* across China from 2006 to 2017 generated 74 cases that contained detailed information regarding the identity of victims. It was found that among these cases, nearly 80 per cent of victims were auxiliary *chengguan* (Table 2).

One possible explanation for the fact that the majority of violent confrontations occur between street vendors and auxiliary *chengguan*, rather than between street vendors and official *chengguan*, could be the composition of official *chengguan* and auxiliary *chengguan* in the overall *chengguan* force. If auxiliary *chengguan* disproportionately outnumbered official *chengguan*, it might be reasonable to expect that more auxiliary *chengguan* would be involved in violence than official *chengguan*.

However, the composition of the *chengguan* force is only part of the story. Figure 3 showed that in Guangzhou, there were 3,196 official *chengguan* and 6,000 auxiliary *chengguan* in 2015. The number of auxiliary *chengguan* was almost twice as many as

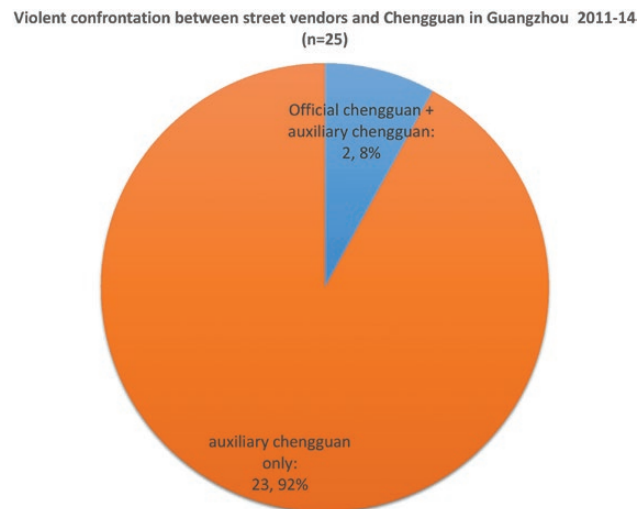


FIG. 2 The involvement of official *chengguan* and auxiliary *chengguan* in violent confrontations with street vendors in Guangzhou from media report

TABLE 2 The distribution of death and severe injury between official *chengguan* and auxiliary *chengguan* from 74 reported cases 2006–2017 in China

	Official <i>chengguan</i>	Auxiliary <i>chengguan</i>	Total
Death	4	7	11
Severe injury	22	87	109
Total	26 (21.67%)	94 (78.33%)	120 (100%)

official *chengguan*. In other words, while auxiliary *chengguan* accounted for two-thirds of the overall *chengguan* force, they participated in all violent confrontations. While official *chengguan* accounted for one-third among the overall *chengguan* force, they only participated in eight per cent of cases in which violence was used on street vendors. In comparison, the likelihood of violent confrontation between auxiliary *chengguan* and street vendors was eleven times higher than that between official *chengguan* and street vendors. All in all, the violence between auxiliary *chengguan* and street vendors can hardly be explained away by the composition of the *chengguan* force.

### *The Convergence of Violence: A Routine Activity Perspective*

While the official discourse attributes the *chengguan* violence to the ‘low quality’ of auxiliary *chengguan*, we argue that the incidence of violence between auxiliary *chengguan* and street vendors is largely to be explained by the convergence of opportunities to encounter each other on the street (Cohen and Felson 1979): Auxiliary *chengguan* are in fact much more likely to interact with street vendors on the street than are official *chengguan*.

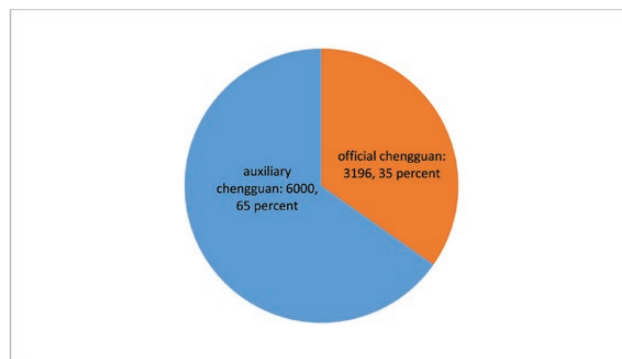


FIG. 3 The proportion of official *chengguan* and auxiliary *chengguan* in overall *chengguan* force

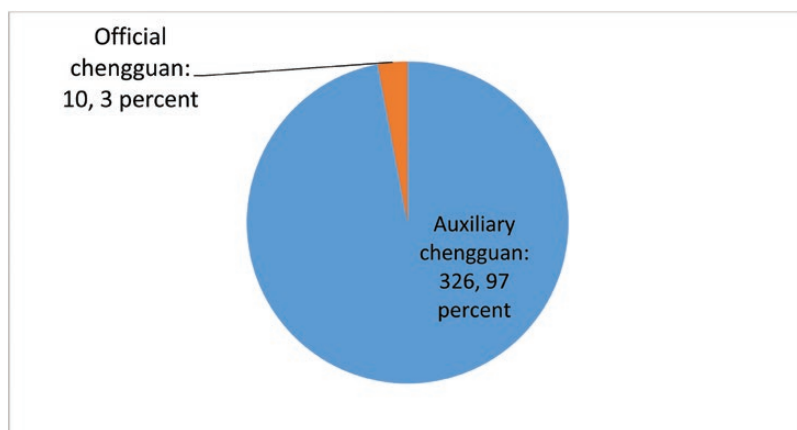


FIG. 4 The proportion of official *chengguan* and auxiliary *chengguan* in street law enforcement from systematic social observation data ( $n = 336$ )

Figure 4 showed the data from our SSO of *chengguan* law enforcement on the street. In the course of 112 episodes of law enforcement, 336 *chengguan* officers were observed on the street. Of that number, 326 of them were auxiliary *chengguan*, and only 10 were official *chengguan*. In other words, in street-level law enforcement, 97 per cent of the force were auxiliary *chengguan* and only three per cent were official *chengguan*. Taking the composition of the overall *chengguan* force into consideration, auxiliary *chengguan* were 17 times more likely than official *chengguan* to work on the street. The high opportunity for auxiliary *chengguan* and vendors to encounter each other on the street inescapably led to the greater possibility of violent confrontation between the two.

That observed division of labour between official *chengguan* and auxiliary *chengguan* was confirmed and elaborated by our interviews. When asked how often they work on the street, an official *chengguan* said:

Not so often, we (*chengguan*) seldom patrol on the street. Auxiliary *chengguan* do the patrol now. Actually, we already have too much administrative work, lots of meetings, preparing for supervision visit from upper level government departments.... (An official *chengguan* from a street-level law enforcement branch, Haizhu District)

His experience echoes that of his colleagues from other districts:

Nowadays, except for special operations, without some newly emerged or urgent tasks, we will not go on to the street for law enforcement... Sometimes we may have big operations and then I will have to join to write out a ticket, take pictures, and video-tape the whole law enforcement process. But for daily work, not big operations, just patrol, there is no plan to write a ticket, we don't go out.... I may probably go for street work only once a month. (An official *chengguan* in Panyu District Bureau)

An auxiliary *chengguan* further explained that:

Every day when we start work, we first report our duty to the office, and then go to our own assigned sites to monitor or our own assigned area to patrol. As for official *chengguan*, they usually stay in the office. Occasionally, they may pay a short visit to us, have a look and then leave. (An auxiliary *chengguan* from a street-level law enforcement branch, Tianhe District)

In a nutshell, instead of emphasizing the low quality of individual auxiliary *chengguan*, our study demonstrates that the convergence of violence between auxiliary *chengguan* and street vendors was largely shaped by the routine (working) activity of auxiliary *chengguan*, itself a result of the unequal division of labour between official *chengguan* and auxiliary *chengguan*. There is still a question to be asked about such a clearly unequal division of labour: Why for most of the time do the official *chengguan* tend to stay away from the street? Or, how is the high convergence of auxiliary *chengguan* and street vendors on the street socially produced?

### *Police Civilianization in China and the 'Dirty Work' of Auxiliary Chengguan*

While police civilianization reaches an unprecedented level of over 30–40 per cent in Western free-market economies, some anecdotal data show that in China over half of the police force are civilian staff and in some big cities the percentage is even higher (Wang 2015). The official statistics collected during the course of our research in Guangzhou show that apart from 31,000 public police officers, there are another

TABLE 3 *The power structure of chengguan system*

	Official <i>chengguan</i>	Auxiliary <i>chengguan</i>
Salary	Around RMB 6,000	Around RMB 2,000
Job nature	Tenure	Short-term
Position	Civil servant	Not civil servant
Power	Holding power, giving order	No power, receiving order
Daily work	Office-based	Street-based, dirty work

30,000 contract-based, temporarily hired, and low-paid auxiliary police. The civilianization level of Guangzhou's para-police *chengguan* is even higher with two-thirds of the force are auxiliary *chengguan* (Figure 3).

One of the main concerns of police civilianization is the unequal power relationship between civilian staff and sworn officers (Alderden and Skogan 2014). In the case of China's para-police *chengguan*, the civilian staff auxiliary *chengguan* are undoubtedly second-class citizens in the force, which can be clearly demonstrated by their differential treatment not only in the allocation of benefits, welfare and power but also in the division of labour between the two groups (Table 3).

First, although the salary awarded to *chengguan* varies across different districts in Guangzhou, it is commonly observed that the compensation for official *chengguan* is around three times as large as that for auxiliary *chengguan*. In Guangzhou, the average monthly salary of an auxiliary *chengguan* was around RMB<sup>1</sup> 2,000 [about £230 or US \$300] whereas it was around RMB 6,000 [about £700 or US \$900] for an ordinary official *chengguan* in 2015. Our analysis of about 56 advertisements recruiting auxiliary *chengguan* in the first half of 2015 revealed that the average monthly starting salary was as low as RMB 1,800 [or £210 or US \$270], just about the level of minimum wage in Guangzhou. An auxiliary *chengguan* complained:

In Tianhe district, there are about 200 people in the Chebei street law enforcement branch, 150 of whom are auxiliary *chengguan*. Official *chengguan* are civil servants. Government pays their salary, about three times more than the salary of auxiliary *chengguan*...auxiliary *chengguan* are temporary employees, who do the same job but are paid less ....Besides, official *chengguan* have very good welfare agreements, while there is nothing for auxiliary *chengguan*... (An auxiliary *chengguan* from Chebei Street-level Law Enforcement Branch, Tianhe District)

Second, there is a defining difference in levels of job security. While official *chengguan* are civil servants with job tenure, auxiliary *chengguan* are hired on a fixed-term basis, usually with a one year to three years' contract, but they could be fired by local governments at will. An auxiliary *chengguan* expressed how they were treated in a campaign period when a zero-tolerance policy towards vendors would be expected:

After our team leader (an official *chengguan*) came back from the meeting (to receive tasks), he scolded us and threatened that we would be fired if we did not perform well. We work overtime every day and suffer from a lack of sleep and psychological pressure.... We could not leave earlier for a single minute before 11:00 p.m. Those who leave earlier would be fired. (An auxiliary *chengguan* from Huangcun Street Law Enforcement Branch, Tianhe District)

<sup>1</sup>1 RMB = \$ 0.153 or £0.128 at 2018 prices



Third, there is a huge power difference between the two groups. Within the *chengguan* system, official *chengguan* are often regarded as the ‘bosses’ who are in charge whereas auxiliary *chengguan* are subordinate and subject to the control of official *chengguan*. The following narratives from an auxiliary *chengguan* are illuminating:

To tell you the truth, official *chengguan* is a much better job than auxiliary *chengguan*. Official *chengguan* earn much more money. As formal staff, they are the core of our team. Besides, they have more power, good welfare and all kinds of subsidies. Nevertheless, they do not have too much work. Nobody could supervise them whatever they do.... The official *chengguan* can decide who is on the night shift and whether they come or not. It is okay even if they do not show up for work. Nobody could supervise them. (An auxiliary *chengguan* from Yangcheng Garden Street-level Law Enforcement Branch, Tianhe District)

A 50-year-old auxiliary *chengguan* with nearly two decades of working experience complained to us when we met him on the street in 2014:

I have to work for 15 hours a day, from 7:00a.m. to 10:00p.m. With over-time working allowance, I can now earn around RMB 100 per day, otherwise, only a bit over RMB 1,000 per month. I also have to work during weekends for extra payment. We got complaints for the chaotic situation on the street, and our team leader asked us to work extra time. We are even not able to leave the supervised spots when having meals. In terms of high working pressure, our former team leader would greet us by saying ‘you have been working hard, well done’, then I will feel much better. However, our current team leader always criticizes us for not doing our jobs well. Even if we have driven vendors to small lanes, he is still not satisfied. There are about 90 plus auxiliary *chengguan* in our branch and their monthly salary is less than RMB 2,000 while the team leader, the official *chengguan*, has a monthly income of over RMB 10,000. This huge gap makes me feel very bad, and most importantly, he always scolds us. We don’t even have some psychological comforting for such a hard job. We are suffering four levels of pressure. Firstly, vendors may say dirty words to us, and even to our family numbers, particularly to our mothers and our children. I feel very bad and upset about that. Secondly, bystanders may also bad-mouth by claiming we are bad and heartless people. Thirdly, some local residents may also complain to us that we are not able to do our job well to leave the street so chaotic. Fourthly and the most depressing experience is that we are always criticized by our boss, the official *chengguan*, even if we have been working very hard for this thankless job. (An auxiliary *chengguan* from Shisanhang Street-level Law Enforcement Branch, Yuxie District)

Fourth, due to the unequal power enjoyed by official and auxiliary *chengguan*, daily street patrol and street law enforcement—tedious and less desirable tasks—are primarily conducted by auxiliary *chengguan*. Figure 5 shows that while official *chengguan* accounted for 35 per cent in the overall force, most of them work in management positions at district- and city-level bureaus. Our fieldwork data reveal that at the street-level law enforcement departments, official *chengguan* only took up 15 per cent, and in the actual street law enforcement, official *chengguan* were even less involved, only three per cent.

In sum, law enforcement against street vendors could reasonably be regarded as ‘dirty work’ as it is physically disgusting and dangerous, socially degrading and morally challenging (Hughes 1958: 319; Löfstrand et al. 2015). The civilianization of the parapolicing *chengguan* force has translated auxiliary *chengguan* into second-class officers responsible for most of the ‘dirty work’ of street-level law enforcement.

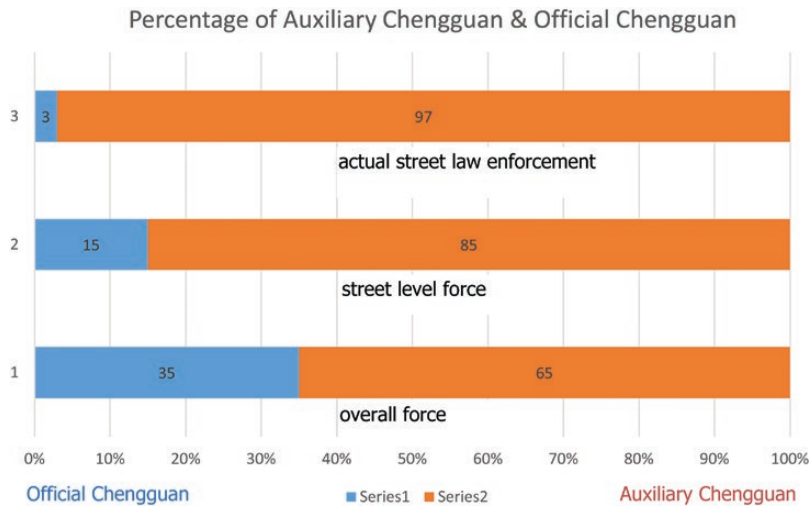


FIG. 5 The composition of *chengguan* in the overall force (official statistics), street-level *chengguan* branch (calculated from 22 street-level law enforcement branches), and actual street law enforcement (SSO data)

#### *Official Chengguan: A Risk Factor of Chengguan Violence*

So far, this research has demonstrated that violent confrontation tends to occur between auxiliary *chengguan* and street vendors, and that the unequal power structure within the *chengguan* force makes the official *chengguan* far less likely to work on the street, and that that, in turn, reduces their likelihood of engaging in confrontations with the vendors. While the official discourse attributes *chengguan*'s violence towards 'low quality' of auxiliary *chengguan*, the underlining implication is that official *chengguan* are of 'high quality', who may well have reduced the occurrence of violent confrontation with vendors had they been on the street. Nonetheless, our SSO data showed that the appearance of official *chengguan* on the street is a risk factor, instead of a containing factor, for *chengguan* violence. Out of 112 instance of *chengguan*'s street law enforcement, we observed the use of verbal violence (shouting, abusive wording) eight times and physical violence (kicking and hitting) on two occasions. All this violence was conducted by auxiliary *chengguan*. However, the logistic regression analysis revealed that the occurrence of verbal and physical violence was positively related to the appearance of official *chengguan* on the street ( $p < 0.05$ ) (available from authors). That is, when official *chengguan* were on the street, it was more likely that auxiliary *chengguan* would use violence. There are several possible explanations. First, official *chengguan* seldom went on the street for law enforcement. When they did appear on the street, it usually meant they were participating in operations or campaign days. On these occasions, more strict law enforcement would be expected and thus the risks of confrontations would be raised. A street vendor remarked that:

Most of time it is auxiliary *chengguan* who work on the street and patrol. Official *chengguan* in white uniforms only come out on special days, such as campaign days. On those days *chengguan* are very strict and we can hardly sell things on the street. (A street vendor W)

Second, when confrontation occurs, official *chengguan* tend to stay away while ordering auxiliary *chengguan* to deal with the conflict. The following description is an excerpt from our field notes in 2016:

It was about eight o'clock at night. A group of *chengguan* (two official *chengguan* and seven auxiliary *chengguan*) drove an electric car towards a crowd of vendors. Among them, an auxiliary *chengguan* took a video camera to record the whole process of law enforcement. Seeing the arrival of *chengguan*, the vendors started to flee in all directions while packing their stuff. In the middle of the vendors, there was a young man, not tall, around 20-year old, selling barbecue chicken. He was caught by two auxiliary *chengguan* as he had to turn the fire off before fleeing but his way was blocked by other vendors. The auxiliary *chengguan* intended to confiscate his tricycle (which he used to sell chicken) but he grabbed it firmly to resist. He was alone, weak and unable to defeat the two auxiliary *chengguan*. The two auxiliary *chengguan* pushed the young vendor to the ground and got his tricycle. Seeing his tricycle was about to be taken away, the young vendor became mad. He took a knife which he used to cut chicken and shouted 'return the tricycle to me, return the tricycle to me'. The crowd started to gather around. Meanwhile, two official *chengguan* stood nearby and watched the process while having their hands crossed behind. After seeing the vendor waving his knife, one of them made a phone call. The auxiliary *chengguan* who was responsible for video-taping came closer to record the scenario of the vendor's waving of the knife. More people gathered, and the situation became tense. The two auxiliary *chengguan* stopped taking the tricycle away and the vendor was surrounded by other auxiliary *chengguan*. They shouted to him: 'What are you doing? Don't make trouble. Take it easy.' At this moment, one auxiliary *chengguan* suddenly grabbed the vendor from behind and took away the knife. The vendor could not move and other auxiliary *chengguan* rushed to knock the vendor down to the ground and started beating and kicking him while shouting 'You Mother-F\*\*ker, how dare you threaten us!'. The auxiliary *chengguan* who was recording the video was summoned by an official *chengguan* to stop video-taping of the beating. The beating lasted for 3–4 minutes. (Field notes, 28 March 2016, in Panyu District)

When interviewed by a journalist, one auxiliary *chengguan* elaborated why it is always the auxiliary *chengguan* who are involved in direct confrontations:

We call ourselves removers. It totally makes sense that why auxiliary *chengguan* often have conflicts with street vendors. It is because official *chengguan* just write tickets but never directly take away street vendors' items<sup>2</sup>. The most dangerous work is done by us. We are the 'hatchet men' ....Confiscation is manual work, and official *chengguan* have a sense of superiority. They think it is our job.... And the official *chengguan* is our leader when coming out with us. How could we let our leader do such kind of work? (Zhang 2013).

Third, auxiliary *chengguan* might also need to perform more aggressively when official *chengguan* were present. An auxiliary *chengguan* said:

Official *chengguan* do not directly ask us to use violence, but you cannot be inactive...when other auxiliary *chengguan* start confiscation, you have to follow up... (An auxiliary *chengguan* Li)

<sup>2</sup>Chengguan have power to confiscate vendors' vending vehicles, tools and goods. Theoretically, upon paying fine, usually RMB 200, the confiscated stuff will be returned. In practice, vendors seldom get them back due to complicated bureaucracy or frustrated former experience.

Sometimes, auxiliary *chengguan* may also feel they are institutionally backed when official *chengguan* are around. Therefore, they are more aggressive in law enforcement. An auxiliary *chengguan* said:

We do whatever the official *chengguan* ask us to do... and the official *chengguan* will protect us. It means we have the official *chengguan* to protect us so that we need not be worried. It means if you get into trouble, they could promise that you will not be punished. We are temporary staff and we only try our best unless they promise us our actions will have no negative consequences, just like the police and auxiliary police ... Once in a campaign, a barbecue vendor resisted our order. The official *chengguan* said 'deal with him (搞定他 *gao ding ta*)', so we take everything away from him. (An auxiliary *chengguan* from Tianhenan street-level law enforcement branch)

When such institutional backing is not available, they feel frustrated. An auxiliary *chengguan* said:

Once, a father and son who sell pork were asked to go away by an auxiliary *chengguan*. Then, they put knives on one the auxiliary *chengguan*'s neck and it seemed a terrible fighting was going to occur. Fortunately, another auxiliary *chengguan* came to persuade them and stopped the conflict. When I reported it to my team leader, an official *chengguan* said we must drive the street vendors away even if we would have to put ourselves in danger. He said we could call for help from the police. We should not be afraid of the street vendors. However, he was not concerned about our safety. I think we would have been dead long before the policemen arrived. I was very sad and angry about his words. (An auxiliary *chengguan* works in Shisanhang, Yuexiu District)

In sum, while the government attributes the *chengguan* violence to the individual officers of auxiliary *chengguan*, this study demonstrates that the concentration of violence between auxiliary *chengguan* and street vendors is largely shaped by the division of labour within in *chengguan* system in which most of the undesirable 'dirty work' of street-level law enforcement is conducted by the second-class officers auxiliary *chengguan*. Therefore, the unequal power structure resulted from commodification of the para-police *chengguan* force shapes the concentration of violence within the underclass.

### Conclusion

Police civilianization, albeit celebrated by some, has attracted various criticisms, and the unequal power relationship within the police system is one of them (Dick and Metcalfe 2001). Although the recent development of police civilianization may put some non-sworn officers in oversight positions (the elected civilian Police Crime Commissioners in the United Kingdom can set objects, allocate funds and hold police accountable with considerable power since 2010 (Lumsden and Black 2018)), the vast majority of civilian staff work as supportive roles for the public police, and in some cases they become second-class citizens in the police force.

By studying violent confrontations between para-police *chengguan* and street vendors, this article reveals how police civilianization has produced unequal power relations within the para-police *chengguan* system in China. The unprivileged auxiliary *chengguan* have to transact most of the 'dirty work' of street-level law enforcement when confronting with street vendors. It is an unequal division of labour that makes the auxiliary *chengguan* far more likely to encounter street vendors in public space, leading to

the possibility of confrontation and violence between the two. While official *chengguan* stay away from street law enforcement most of the time, their occasional appearance on the street actually brings ‘more’ violence to vendors. Since both auxiliary *chengguan* and street vendors are recruited from the urban poor, the article further illustrates how police civilianization unintentionally shapes the concentration of interpersonal violence within the underclass.

My argument not only extends our understanding of the possible negative consequence of police civilianization but reveals a new macrostructural mechanism unexpectedly affecting the concentration of violence within the underclass. It further enriches our knowledge of the pluralization of policing and research in para-police in particular (Rigakos 1999). Future research can examine how police civilianization occurs in other former socialist countries where the adaptation of market logic comes much later than that in Western democracies. It will also be interesting to explore other forms of social inequality caused by the marketization of the public police.

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