

# Crime and the Chinese Dream

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Hong Kong University Press  
The University of Hong Kong  
Pokfulam Road  
Hong Kong  
[www.hkupress.hku.hk](http://www.hkupress.hku.hk)

© 2018 Hong Kong University Press

ISBN 978-988-8208-66-1 (*Hardback*)

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Cover photo by Xu Jianhua, 2016. It shows a city wall displaying legal and illegal ways to the 'Chinese dream'. Here are posters advertising consumer goods and work, but also posters about missing kidnapped children, lewd scam advertisements asking for 'money boys' (male prostitutes) and female mistresses promising astronomic rewards of up to 380,000 yuan per month (!) for successful applicants, scribbled telephone numbers to call about buying stolen motorcycles, etc.

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Printed and bound by Paramount Printing Co. Ltd., Hong Kong, China

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# Preface

This book differs from most edited books in that there has been much more cooperation between the authors over a much longer time than for the usual edited volume. All but one of the contributors, Zelin Yao (who also studied at the University of Hong Kong [HKU] and cooperated closely with the other contributors), were my former students from 2005 to 2014 at HKU, where I worked and taught criminology in the Department of Sociology and served for many years as the director of the criminology programme. I have followed some of my former students, who are now young scholars in Hong Kong, Macao, and South Korea, since they were my students at HKU. In several cases I have been the principal supervisor of both their MPhil and PhD degrees, and in all cases I was the principal supervisor of their final degrees.

I hope this volume shows that we have formed some kind of loosely defined ‘school’ when it comes to attacking problems of criminology and sociology in China. The fieldwork done by my students has been outstanding. The close roots that the authors have had in the ‘field’ would have been impossible to achieve for any outsider. In some instances, the fieldwork was obtained—in one case, literally—by first working in the (rice) fields with the respondents. This book is to celebrate many years of close cooperation. Without my former students, this book would have been impossible to write.

That said, the critical introduction represents the viewpoints of the editor, and none of the individual contributors should be held responsible for the analysis and conclusions I present in it. As the contributors’ former supervisor, however, I have taken the opportunity to summarize the findings they present in their chapters to put it in the overall context of a contemporary China in flux.

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## Introduction

### *'Chinese Dream' and Chinese Reality; Voices from the Margins*

Børge Bakken

While inspecting an exhibition called the 'Road to Revival' at the end of 2012, Xi Jinping—newly appointed chairman of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) but not yet the new president of China—introduced his vision of the 'Chinese Dream' (*Zhongguo meng* 中国梦) (Li 2012). Like the exhibition itself, the Chinese Dream would provide the impetus for a 'great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation', which would be powered by 'socialism with Chinese Characteristics', patriotism, prosperity, and a stronger, more assertive China. Some, however, saw this 'Chinese Dream' as just another official propaganda campaign, an 'emperor's dream' (*huangdi meng* 皇帝梦) preventing the common people from taking part in that dream. This book is about inspecting the rationalities and irrationalities that lurk behind the Chinese Dream.

What is the dream's alleged 'socialism with Chinese characteristics'? Since the 1990s researchers of international comparative economics have been discussing 'variegated capitalism' (Peck and Theodore 2007) where one of the new traits is described as 'the pathological co-dependence of the US and Chinese economies and their respective zones of influence' (Jessop 2012). With a Chinese economy more and more integrated into the world capitalist economy, 'socialism with Chinese characteristics' has been stripped of meaning and has consequently been reduced to propaganda. Simply put, China is now part and parcel of the 'variegated capitalisms' of our era. Interestingly, the slogan of the Chinese Dream and the propaganda surrounding the concept carefully omit the politically incorrect word *individualism*. While the narrative is designed to invoke 'Chinese greatness and prosperity, collective effort, socialism and national glory', there are nevertheless close parallels to the American Dream of individual wealth and prosperity. In fact, the Chinese official version tries to make a distinction between these two 'dreams' by stating:

The American Dream means that, regardless of one's background, with hard work and determination one can achieve whatever one aspires to. The Chinese Dream, however, promotes the concept that what is good for the country will be good for

individuals. It reflects the Eastern culture of collectivism and believes that as long as the country is strong people will benefit greatly. (*People's Daily* 2013a)

What about this 'great benefit' for the people? Propagandistic claims of 'collectivism' aside, the American Dream of individual wealth—and its accompanying problem of wealth inequality—is already embedded into Chinese life, albeit in 'variegated' form. Despite the patriotic and collectivistic taint of the official dream metaphor, the Chinese Dream is essentially a state capitalist dream, embedded within which are capitalism's myriad problems and opportunities. The core of the dreamy thinking of 'blue sky, clear water, and peace on earth' is basically measured in GDP and the ultimate economic principle of the dream was laid down by Deng Xiaoping's reform program in the early 1980s. The economic core of that argument is often associated with the slogan: 'To become rich is glorious' (*zhifu guangrong* 致富光荣) used to justify the establishment of rich entrepreneurial households, the so-called '10,000 yuan households' (*wan yuan hu* 万元户) of the early 1980s reforms.

The present strategy is mapped out in the 'three new steps' (*xin san bu* 新三步) of development, although the dream narrative reaches as far back as the Opium Wars of the nineteenth century. The first 'new step' was from 2000 to 2010 where the aim was to double the GDP rate. The second step (2010–2020) is aimed at achieving, by 2020, a *xiaokang shehui* (小康社会) or a 'moderately prosperous society' (*People's Daily* 2013b). This period is described as 'walking towards the great dream', and then by the middle of the century we will see the Chinese Dream fulfilled. The propaganda texts emphasize that the Chinese Dream is the dream of all Chinese, in particular the 'dream of the *laobaixing*' (the 'hundred family names' synonymous with the Chinese 'masses' or 'common people').

Many of the *laobaixing*, however, have no way of achieving the prosperity of the official dream through legal means, as opportunities are increasingly distributed unequally. In terms of equality measurements, China has moved from one of the most equal to one of the most unequal societies in the world in just over three decades, with an estimated GINI coefficient moving up from an equal GINI of 0.21 in 1978 to an estimated 0.61 in 2010 (only 'surpassed' by Honduras at 0.613 according to World Bank statistics) (Holland 2012; Agence France-Presse 2012). High GINI coefficients are closely correlated to high crime rates, real rates, not official ones.

This book is about how 'the people'—both 'in the streets' and 'in the suites'—try to get by and get rich through illegal or deviant means. It also aims to show an eerie link to the American Dream with its promise of prosperity for those who succeed and harsh punishment for those who err from the narrow path that leads towards the dream. The marginal groups in Chinese society are the first to err—and the first to be punished. The phrase 'the rich get richer and the poor get prison' (Reiman and Leighton 2015) is as true for America as it is for China.

Since the dream is meant to serve them, the promises offered to the *laobaixing* warrant closer attention. A civil society, at least understood as a civic ethos

independent from government definitions and rules, cannot be wished away by banning all talk about it. Neither can the ‘uncivil’ society, which is ‘uncivil’ or ‘bad’ in the eyes of the dream because it seeks unauthorized, even directly illegal solutions to the Chinese Dream. This is nevertheless a real part of society that cannot be ‘denied away’ just because it does not follow the official dream rhetoric.

‘There is no such thing as society,’ former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher famously uttered (Thatcher 1987). In the Party’s quest to eradicate ‘Western ideas’ from the realm of discourse in China through ‘seven prohibitions’ (*qi bu jiang* 七不讲), Xi Jinping is likewise denying the existence of a civil society, by arguing it is a trap set by the West to lure China into. As evidenced by the current crackdown on rights lawyers, the seven prohibitions are an attempt by the Party to assert control over the *laobaixing* by suppressing attempts by the grassroots to influence the future of China. This is also integral to the official Chinese Dream. The dream is a dream of control. This book, consequently, covers not only problems of crime but also discusses problems of deviance and its control.

In early May 2013 the CCP Central Committee issued a central document called ‘Concerning the Situation in the Ideological Sphere’ (sometimes termed the ‘seven do not speak’ document) in which the following seven prohibited areas of ‘Western thinking’ were mentioned in order to keep the purity of the Party intact (Buckley 2013):

- (1) civil society
- (2) civil rights
- (3) universal values
- (4) freedom of the press
- (5) the bourgeois elite
- (6) judicial independence, and
- (7) the Communist Party of China’s historical errors

What was not spoken about was the way this document negates the ‘democratic values’ mentioned in the official propaganda on the Chinese Dream. It has been said that the Chinese Dream would ‘return to the night’ without the fulfilment of these ‘seven prohibitions’ (Buckley 2013; Wu 2013). In this sense we should see these prohibitions as functioning to help maintain the Party’s rule.

In February 2016 Xi Jinping made a visit to the three most important media institutions in China, the state broadcaster CCTV, the official Xinhua News Agency, and the Party mouthpiece *People’s Daily*. During his visit he told assembled journalists to ‘tell China’s stories and transmit China’s voice’ (Wen 2016). This book will follow Xi’s advice. The stories told here, however, are not from the point of view of the powerful but from the margins of society, from that ‘uncivil’ part of society struggling to get by and get rich. In fact, both society and civil society exist independently of the vivid denials of politicians like Thatcher and Xi. This book aims to look at how society reacts to the limited opportunities given to people on the

margins of the Chinese Dream. This does not necessarily mean that the margins constitute a ragtag army, although most of them are made up of the poor and the destitute. The picture is more complex, and in our story we also include some of those who still exploit the loopholes of corruption that exist unscathed by Xi's 'anti-corruption campaign' in the irrational system of law and bureaucracy that defines today's China. We will, in the following chapters, look at how the marginal population is pushed into seeking solutions to the Gordian knot of the irrationalities and contradictions, shades, and mirrors that is the basis of the Chinese Dream.

## Disentangling the Gordian Knot of the Chinese Dream

The Gordian knot, of course, stems from a Greek legend and is about the attempts to disentangle an allegedly impossible knot. The expression is often used as a metaphor for intractable problems that are in fact solved easily by distancing oneself from the accepted ways of solving the problem. The legend refers to such solutions as 'cutting the Gordian knot' (thinking outside the box). It is this type of real existing 'deviant', 'innovative', or 'entrepreneurial' solutions to alleged Gordian knots we want to describe in this volume. Some solutions to seemingly impossible problems are clearly more effective than others. When legal solutions are blocked or ineffective, the alleged 'uncivil' society finds untraditional solutions to problems not even seen as existing in the official rhetoric of the 'Chinese Dream'. In short, this book will present multiple views from the margins of society, using criminology to define problems in China that are often overseen and to give these problems both a concrete face and a theoretical understanding.

We want to emphasize the irrationality or the 'shades-and-mirrors' of the dream propaganda that functions as a veil hiding away the social strains that are nevertheless visible among the corrupt doctors in public hospitals (Yujing Fun and Zelin Yao in Chapter 2) and the fraudulent 'cake uncles' in the hidden rural economy of 'criminal villages' (Zhang Xi in Chapter 3). Moreover, we will investigate the risky lives and coping strategies of the struggling migrants who drive illegal motorcycle taxis (Jianhua Xu in Chapter 4). We will also visit the socially castigated former inmates of the *laojiao* (reform through education) detention centres, who are being 're-educated' for their drug addiction (Vincent Shing Cheng in Chapter 5). And lastly, we will take a closer look at the 'players' of the Internet and the 'method' of disciplining the 'Internet addicts'. This is illustrated by the modern moral panic of alleged Internet Addiction Disorder (IAD) (Trent Bax in Chapter 6). While these groups and their problems are very diverse in origin, and their strategies to cope with survival likewise varied, our cases still focus on the solutions on the margins of society, the ways of escape, but also, and primarily, the ways of achieving the Chinese Dream by employing deviant, illegal, and entrepreneurial means and strategies.

We actually locate this 'uncivil' society, and the sources of crime, in the very same values and behaviours that are advocated in the official Chinese Dream

narrative. This book is about those on the periphery of this society who aim to fulfil the dreams of former leader Deng Xiaoping: to be ‘rich and glorious’. This realization of the Chinese Dream, however, may not run along the lines of order in the way laid out in the ‘harmonious’ prescription proffered by official propaganda. Instead, it takes an entrepreneurial turn of illegality and opportunity. The margins of society seem to find their own way to wealth and the dream, ‘like the tendency of water to float downwards’ as Mengzi (Mencius) famously put it (Legge 1861/1990).<sup>1</sup> This may not be the positive human way towards good as in Mengzi’s optimistic metaphor but rather the way explained by Cloward and Ohlin’s (1960) criminological theory of *differential opportunity*. Again, the ‘perpetrators’ of the official dream are not ‘uncivil’ people doing harm, just people who look for the nearest opportunity to untie the Gordian knot of achieving their own dreams. Following Robert Merton’s (1938/1968) theories of strain, Cloward and Ohlin argued that most crime is primarily aimed at obtaining wealth through illegitimate means. Cloward and Ohlin claimed that an individual occupies positions in both legitimate and illegitimate opportunity structures, and that faced with limitations on legitimate access to goals they are unable to achieve, the actors experience intense frustrations, resulting in the exploration of nonconformist alternatives.

For the population we speak about in this book—corrupt professionals, ‘cake uncle’ fraudsters, and destitute migrant illegal motorcycle taxi drivers—the opportunities are limited, and the downward trend towards illegality thus becomes the only way to achieve the dream. The Chinese Dream may be legitimately achieved by the few only, while for most of the millions of toilers the dream is achievable only by the opportunities of illegality. For other dreamers, perhaps the more rebellious ones, the refuge in drugs and gaming is the way to the alleged dream. It is not a coincidence that one of the standard definitions of criminals and deviants in China is that of people who *chi-he-wan-le* (吃喝玩乐), who ‘eat, drink, have fun, and play’ (Bakken 2000). Such activities are condemned by the official Chinese ‘dream makers’ much like the Catholic Church once raged against such sinful activities. When crime and deviance are the only opportunities open to achieve the dream, the dreamers naturally find their ‘downwards course’ like in Mengzi’s metaphor. In other words, we locate crime in the very same values of prosperity prescribed by the Deng and the Xi regimes.

Access to legitimate means for attaining the dream is vastly unequally distributed in the transitional reality of China today, painfully illustrated by the widening GINI coefficient cited above. The migrant population alone can be counted in the hundreds of millions. These conditions, according to Merton’s theory, produce a tendency for social norms to lose their regulatory force and as a result people

1. In James Legge’s classical translation from 1861: ‘The tendency of man’s nature to good is like the tendency of water to flow downwards. There are none but have this tendency to good, just as all water flows downwards. . . . It is the force applied which causes them. When men are made to do what is not good, their nature is dealt with in this way’ (6 Gao Zi 1:2).

experience anomie as they lose their moral compass (Merton 1938/1968; Yan 2009). In criminology, such sociocultural processes predict high crime rates. The tendencies become the most intense among the lowest levels of the social class hierarchy because obstacles to the use of legitimate means for achieving the prescribed goals of success are the greatest at this level. Even on the middle levels of society, irrational ways of organizing work and salaries lead to 'entrepreneurial solutions'. These broader institutional and social structures, found in most modernizing societies, are what effectively create the crimes and the deviance described in this book, although there are certainly 'Chinese characteristics' involved. In other words, the Chinese Dream in itself creates criminogenic pressures on society. Let us not forget the fact that Chinese official statistics are telling a (very misleading) tale of relatively low crime. In Guangzhou, for example, the official numbers of crime constitute a mere *two* per cent of the number of crimes reported to police (fieldwork notes, forthcoming publication). The remaining 98 percent disappear in irrational bureaucratic incentive structures and outright bans on publicizing data on violent and serious crime that diverges from the official dream logic.

The weakening of the regulatory effect of norms in society is, of course, both sociological and individual. In the broader story of 'cake uncles' there is a clash between the traditional peasant norms of hard work and a frugal life and the entrepreneurial illegality pursued by fraudulent cake uncles. In his broader work, Zhang Xi (2013) has pointed out in much detail this clash of norms in the village he studied. The question on the individual level is why some become cake uncles and some do not, but the machine steering this clash of norms is the big social change described by Émile Durkheim as the change from a traditional *mechanical* solidarity to a modern *organic* solidarity (Durkheim 1893/1997).

In trying to interpret crime in China it is often argued at conferences that the Chinese case is so 'exceptional' that it is 'special' (*tese* 特色) conditions and 'traditions' (*chuantong* 传统) cannot be explained using 'Western theories'. In fact, the Chinese example is very well explained by current criminological theory. A lot of the functions of the Chinese Dream are similar to the problems discussed by Messner and Rosenfeld in their famous book *Crime and the American Dream* (Messner and Rosenfeld 1997/2012), from which the inspiration of this book's title is taken. The traditions of China and America are of course different in many ways, but the plight of the black population in America is reflected in the migrant population in China. Crime takes part among the destitute and the marginalized in America as well as in China, but also in the suites of the rich and the powerful. Surveys have shown that in excess of 80 per cent of violent crime has a migrant worker as both offender and victim in China (Xu and Song 2005). In effect, as already mentioned, 'the rich get richer and the poor get prison' in China as well as in the rest of the world. Conflict theories in criminology have a clear answer to the problem of punishment. The distribution of punishment mirrors closely the distribution of wealth and power in

any society. The powerless are punished, and the powerful go free (Chambliss and Seidman 1971; Vold, Bernard, and Snipers 2002; Wacquant 2009).

The culture of money, both in the American Dream and more recently in the Chinese Dream, is not fundamentally about cultural differences or 'exceptionalism' but rather about cultural similarity. Of course, there are 'special characteristics' within any country, but what is occurring in China and elsewhere is understandable from the current theories and methods of criminology. Any valid theory should be able to handle phenomena of any culture and adjust to the 'special' traits of every culture. Quite simply, in China we see a special form of capitalism with more or less the same consequences for the marginal and the downtrodden as in 'Western' nations.

Stanley Elkins (1968) argued that American society and its institutions were born at the same time capitalism emerged dominant on the world scene. This development was seen in contrast to Europe, where capitalism gradually developed within already powerful institutional frameworks. This development, according to Elkins, made American capitalism take on a 'purity of form' not yet seen in other societies. It is fair to argue that modern Chinese capitalism was born in a rush, and that the entrepreneurial capitalism we see in China today has in some ways, although not all, taken the purity of form seen in American capitalism with its entrepreneurial economy and rush towards the dream of wealth. Yet it is different, and variegated, as many forms of state capitalism are integrated in the Chinese capitalist model (if we can even talk of a 'model'). Deng Xiaoping is famously said to have advocated 'crossing the river by feeling the stones', indicating a cautious development into a more capitalist economy without clearly knowing the consequences of that crossing. Of course, the situation is very different from the American story of capitalism, but somehow China looks more like the United States than Europe in its newfound love for the dreams of wealth and the harsh punishments that befall those who go about the dream in illegal ways (Whitman 2003). The *harmonious* in 'harmonious society' (*hexie shehui* 和谐社会), so central to the Chinese Dream, is often summed up as the eradication of chaos (*luan* 乱) as seen through the prism of order and harsh punishment (Bakken 2000).

The classical strain theory proposed by Merton is often adopted to explain individual approaches to crime and deviance. The disjuncture between culturally approved goals and the means people have to achieve them creates what Merton terms social strain. People in a situation of strain may use different coping strategies, including *rebellion*, *retreatism*, and *innovation*. While innovation (whereby the individual rejects the socially acceptable means but continues to accept culturally approved goals) aptly describes the entrepreneurial illegal strategies explained in the chapters of corruption, cake uncle fraud, illegal motorcycle taxi drivers and (to some extent) Internet addicts (Bax 2014). 'Retreatism' (defined as someone who rejects both the acceptable means and approved goals) is useful in explaining Cheng's chapter on drug-related offences. While Merton obviously did not analyse

Chinese society, we give credit to theories of anomie and strain in this book. More important, there are structural changes in Chinese society in its transition from state socialism to state capitalism that push people on the margins into illegal practices in order to fulfil the Chinese Dream of wealth and prosperity. Some of these structural pushes are explained in the chapters ahead. The chapters in this book are all based on fieldwork and thus ‘tell the Chinese stories’ and ‘transmit China’s voice’ as experienced on the ground.

### **The Corrupt Doctors: Corruption and Medicine in a Beijing Hospital**

This volume opens with a chapter on the corruption of doctors in public hospitals in Beijing. Surveys have repeatedly shown that the two groups most disliked and considered the most corrupt by the Chinese public are, first and foremost, cadres (the government officials of local and central administrations) and, second, medical doctors (Yu 2008). By shining a light on this latter group, we go straight into the minefield of present-day China—the Xi administration’s ‘anti-corruption’ campaigns designed to appeal to populist sentiment and to provide the administration’s legitimacy is especially conspicuous. In Chapter 2, Yujing Fun and Zelin Yao revisit criminological theories and apply them directly to the Chinese realities of corruption and crime within China’s health system. It is a fitting prelude to a discussion that explores the shadier side of the Chinese Dream by linking the discussion to sociological and criminological assumptions of strain.

Considering the perspective of doctors at a Beijing public hospital, Fun and Yao describe the irrationalities of the medical system as well as the contradictions within its ideological value system. Fun and Yao use both institutional anomie theory and strain theory to explain the dilemmas experienced by doctors confronted with contradictory pressures put upon them by an equally contradictory healthcare system. Looking at the interplay between culture and social structure, in their search for a motivation for crime they find, however, that modern Chinese capitalism’s strong cultural emphasis on economic success has led to individuals subjugating all non-economic institutions to that end.

In Chinese, the popular saying *xiang qian kan* (向前看) means ‘to look forward’ or ‘look towards the future’. Yet by simply changing the character *qian* with another character with identical sound and tone but the different meaning of ‘money’, the phrase becomes ‘to look only at money’ (向钱看). This latter meaning has been used as a satirical comment on the phenomenon of money worship so central to the reform era. Indeed, the reality of ‘looking only at money’ has characterized the Chinese reform period, which is represented in the official Chinese Dream narrative. Greed and social mobility has become a very pronounced theme in China during the reforms, and scholars have lamented the sinking moral values and the money worship that motivate individuals to realize their Chinese Dream (Yan 2009).

While the theory of institutional anomie could be used to explain greed, Fun and Yao's study emphasizes (individual and group) survival and the struggles they face with the contradictory demands of the irrational structure of the Chinese healthcare system. Much of the criminal and corrupt behaviour among doctors stems from the fact that they are 'caught in the machine', as the authors succinctly state. The contradictions within an irrational structure have an impact on how hospitals are run and produces a clash between values—which, in turn, leads to strain. While the famous Maoist slogan 'serving the people' (*wei renmin fuwu* 为人民服务) still applies as the leading star of propagated socialist ethics, that dream is constantly annulled by the quest to serve the hospital and its profits. At the same time, there are incentives to squeeze out as much for themselves in a contradictory and irrational incentive system of salaries and bonuses. Corrupt activities are thus seen as systemic failures of the way in which hospitals operate, and are not the result of the morally infused 'bad apples' agenda underpinning the government's 'campaign style anti-corruption'. Of course this argument has little effect on or practical meaning for the many disgruntled patients who are reported to commit considerable violent acts against doctors and staff at hospitals in China. By emphasizing the structural basis for medical corruption, Fun and Yao are not excusing widespread illegal practices, nor are they denying the social disruption caused by such practices. Rather, they are highlighting the structural complexities and coping strategies in what is medical corruption in China today.

By applying strain theory, the authors also emphasize the structural ways in which corruption operates, leaving actors to manipulate the frequently irrational and contradictory rules and regulations that dominate their lives. The authors thus focus both on the structural causes of corruption and the ways in which actors cope with such irrationalities. Their discussion is a much more refined and accurate explanation of corrupt activities in China (and elsewhere) than the often-simplistic political approach of 'anti-corruption campaigns' that seldom, if ever, touches on structural irrationalities. Such an approach sees 'bad behaviour and 'low morality' through the lens of a political struggle and so does not aim to eradicate corruption as such by weeding out its structural causes. Such strategies seek instead to strengthen the power of the ruling faction of the Communist Party. This is especially notable when one observes that none of the forty-eight major cases of corruption Xi brought forward from the time he took office to the end of 2014 involved anyone from China's elite families (Barmé 2014). The issue is not so much about corruption as it is about power. Each group digs out for itself the best position where it believes it will be safest. In this sense, everyone seems to be caught in this machine, and so the strain described in the case of doctors can also be applied to the country's cadres.

Indeed, Sun Liping points out that the modern pressures on cadres in China—one where they are expected to meet strict performance goals while being constantly monitored by the state—have left them feeling marginalized. In his survey

and interviews with those individuals who occupy the upper rung of Chinese society, Sun reported (2011) that 45.1% of Party officials, 57.8% of white-collar workers, and 55.4% of academics feel powerless, vulnerable (*ruoshi* 弱勢), and ‘under attack’. As we can see from Fun and Yao’s chapter, white-collar professionals such as medical doctors are also placed in this position, although the reasons that motivate their corrupt activities and which underpin their strain may differ. The doctors undoubtedly have some power to determine their own course of action according to the needs of their patients, and they are capable of exploiting their positions for personal gain. Yet, like Sun’s officials, they report the pressures of the strict performance evaluations and constant monitoring as a source of great stress and a powerful motivator for bending the rules. We need not be surprised by people’s anger against doctors and cadres, for the practices *are* corrupt whatever the reasons and motivations may be. But the anti-corruption campaigns are not geared to deal with the systemic contradictions experienced in this sector, nor are these political campaigns geared towards finding a solution to the problem that mostly affects the ‘the people’, the *laobaixing*.

### The ‘Cake Uncles’: Fraud, Criminal Villages, and Criminal Economies in China

In the countryside, earning money by illegal means has become common, and many parts of the countryside have come to be described as ‘underworld countryside’. In Chapter 3 Zhang Xi describes nothing less than an emerging criminal economy. China has seen an alarming tendency towards a criminal economy in the form of criminal villages (*fanzui cun* 犯罪村) and criminal towns emerging as people on the margins are struggling to fulfil the dream of wealth and prosperity in the only way available to them. One such village is described in detail here. The so-called cake uncles (*bingshu* 饼叔) of Zhang Xi’s Fang village started their criminal careers delivering cakes while falsifying account books. They then proceeded to take their ‘trade’ outside the village, setting themselves up as criminal entrepreneurs in cities far from their villages and operating a wide array of fraudulent and profitable operations beyond simply cakes. With the irony of history, the peasants-turned-fraudsters readily quoted Deng Xiaoping’s famous saying about the ‘colour of the cat’. It did not matter, according to Deng, whether the cat was black or white; as long as it caught mice, it was a good cat.<sup>2</sup> And the mice, or money, that the peasants have caught has kept true to the core of Deng’s argument. They knew the cat was ‘black’, but it functioned for them. They got rich, they became modernizers of their villages, and as long as their crimes were taking place outside the confines of the village or the county, the local cadres all turned the other cheek. The cake uncles

2. According to *Chambers Dictionary of Quotations* (1993), 315. This quote is from a speech at the Communist Youth League conference as early as July 1962.

also got rich enough to pay off the law, and took collective responsibilities to help out fellow cake uncles who were unlucky enough to be caught for their illegal activities. As 'to become rich' (*facai* 发财) has become the ultimate social goal in China, the cake uncle fraudsters subsequently 'dived into the sea of commerce' (*xiahai* 下海) to pursue the new opportunities of a capitalist economy.

The fraud committed by the cake uncles can be described as 'roving' crime. When the crime is taken out of the village, it no longer becomes the responsibility of a local administration—an administration that has the ability to prevent local initiatives to get rich by illegal means. When the illegal activity took place outside the village (and thus outside the concern of local cadres and police), the fraudsters could even become an asset to the local economy. As a crown of their success, the local girls desired marrying a cake uncle. In criminological 'routine activity theory' crime occurs when *motivated offenders* (cake uncles) come into contact with *suitable targets* (merchants fooled by the cake uncle's falsification of account books) in situations where 'guardians' (the local cadres and the local police) are unable to intervene to protect the targets of crime (Cohen and Felson 1979). More than that, the guardians were even profiting from the illegal activities as the cake uncles' brought 'honour' to the village through economic development. The roving crime of criminal villagers are also not registered by the outside world since it is committed by the transient migrant worker populations who do not possess the household registration (*hukou* 户口) where the crime is committed. They may be caught and convicted but do not appear in the flawed crime statistics because they are not registered outside their *hukou* homestead. The problem with Chinese policing is that as long as the crime does not take part on the turf of the local administration, the law turns its face away from the crime.

Zhang Xi takes us through the decollectivization campaigns of the economic reforms of the 1980s and explains how peasants started experimenting with cash crops to get by. The description of Fang village shows in detail how the legal opportunities to get rich were blocked for the peasants. Tobacco, rice, swine, mushrooms, and the like were all legal ways to earn money but which kept the peasants trapped in a circle of poverty. There was also the heavy pressure of increased population on limited land that held peasants back and prevented them from obtaining even a decent income. Not until the emergence of the cake uncle scams did the village pride themselves on the slogan 'seventy percent of the people in Fang are cake uncles and thirty per cent of them are millionaires.' And indeed, not until the cake uncles had developed their 'trade' into a profitable enterprise could the village share the spoils of the new Chinese Dream of 'getting rich'. The village of Fang even became an unofficial model village for neighbouring villages to emulate. The fraudster became the local hero, representing the local dream.

The changes in rural norms are vividly described in Zhang Xi's account. A cake uncle maintains his 'moral face' by only committed crime in the cities and by being seen as a lawful person in their villages. Criminal behaviour turned into a means

of earning 'social face' and became a symbol to show a person's ability. The added 'bravery' and 'capability' linked to cake delivery was not only a way to morally justify such actions but also created social pressures on the law-abiding peasants to follow their fellow villagers in committing crime to get rich. The Chinese proverb 'Poverty makes people want to change' seemed to work here, as the illegal ladder to prosperity took over all the legal and failed attempts to share the new Chinese Dream of getting rich. Zhang Xi's fieldwork in Fang village thus shows in detail how all the legal opportunities were discarded and how the illegal opportunities gradually became the only viable option to get rich. In a more general sense, this field study shows how an illegal economy was able to prosper in the Chinese countryside. The Fang village is not an isolated case but only one example in a whole genealogy of illegal economies among those on the margins and at the low end of the social ladder in Chinese society.

According to Zhang Xi, cake delivery became a 'spark' that not only changed the economy of rural villages but also the norms and the mindset of those same villages and villagers. Capitalism had come to the Chinese countryside, and illegal entrepreneurialism became the way towards the 'harmonious' Chinese Dream. The government was no longer in control as capitalism went its own way. This situation resembles Marx and Engels's (1888/1932) assessment in their *Communist Manifesto* that bourgeois society is 'like the sorcerer who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells.' Both economies and norms change in this spiral of capitalist economic development, and the 'nether world' in Marx and Engels's account may well be translated to the underworld countryside of Fang village. The clan relationships, instead of upholding a close-knit rural society with its own norms and morals, became a basis—a virtual protection umbrella—for the cake uncles and as a means to spread crime throughout the countryside. The static of Durkheim's traditional *mechanical* society had suddenly merged into the modern *organic* society, albeit not in the pure form propagated by Durkheim, and in ways illegal and hidden from the authorities. Nevertheless, the spread of criminality paradoxically signified the coming of modernity. Fang village reflects the Chinese Dream in ways unintended by the official dream.

### The Modern 'Rickshaw Boys': Migrants and Illegal Motorcycle Taxis

In Chapter 4, Jianhua Xu visits another type of illegal economy. In 2007 a total ban on taxis was introduced in the city of Guangzhou, and except for a few tricycles for handicapped people, all motorcycles were suddenly banned. The argument was that too much theft occurred from thieves using motorcycles to snatch bags from people. In addition, it was argued there were an increasing number of accidents involving motorcycles. The panic about snatch theft and the consequent odd prohibition may have its origins in the automobile industry's economic interests. Whatever the reasons, even when motorcycles were legal, migrant workers were prohibited from

operating a motorcycle taxi. It was, nevertheless, a popular illegal trade supported by the public because of scant public urban transport facilities. The story we are told in Jianhua Xu's example is based on interviews with the taxi drivers themselves. The story of illegal taxi drivers is iconic, perhaps not about getting rich like in the story of the cake uncles, but simply getting by or getting away from the torture of the daily toil at the assembly line and finding their own way to the relative wealth they sought to bring to their lives and families. In other words, how do those on the bottom cope with social exclusion and limited opportunities? How does it feel not to be able to achieve the Chinese Dream depicted in the propaganda posters?

The illegal taxi drivers represent the modern rickshaw boys made famous by Lao She's book *Camel Xiangzi* (*Luotuo Xiangzi* 骆驼祥子), or *Rickshaw Boy* in its English translation (Lao She 1981/1997). The motorcycle taxi drivers, like rickshaw boy Xiangzi, are outcasts of society struggling to get by in a harsh environment, migrant workers who try to pursue the dreams of wealth and a decent life through illegal means. The grudgingly hard work on the assembly line in modern capitalist China's exploitative factories made many of these outcasts into entrepreneurs. Through driving motorcycle taxis they found a meaningful living and gained more control of their own time and economy. It is now an irony that Lao She, on returning to China from the United States after the revolution in 1949, was criticized by the Party for the lack of hope presented in the original edition. He revised the book, and it soon became one of the canonical books of the new society, criticizing the old society, defending the underdog, adding hope about the revolution.<sup>3</sup> In the final sentences of *Xiangzi*, the rickshaw boy is described as 'a dreamer of fine dreams'.

The fine dreams of the modern motorcycle taxi driver differ from the official Chinese Dream narrative. While the latter is unattainable by the laid-off former migrant workers now turned taxi drivers, the illegal trade of buying a taxi and using it to transport people around the streets of the congested cities in China comes with its own risks. The story about the illegal motorcycle taxi drivers is another twist in the attempts of the underdog to attain the Chinese Dream by illegal means. It is a story of social exclusion as well as a story of risky entrepreneurship—another part of the 'uncivil' part of society brought about by the emerging capitalist society that is China today. The story is also one of a dog-eat-dog world which shows how the excluded are also the victims of crime, and how the violence in China today is carried out by the excluded against the excluded. The modern rickshaw drivers have to fend off both attacks from criminals as well as the suspicious ever-present police force. The life of a motorcycle taxi driver becomes the life of the haunted, as criminals as well as the police are haunting them, thus leaving them with no place to rest. A motorcycle taxi driver has to be alert and be prepared for the worst. The story told in the taxi drivers' own words gives evidence of the harsh life at the bottom of society.

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3. Lao She was again criticized during the Cultural Revolution and committed suicide in 1966 after his persecution and humiliation at the hands of the Red Guards.

In Jianhua Xu's text, the taxi drivers are operating as their own Lao She, telling their own stories through the interviews of the sociologist. This is an oral first-hand history about life on the margins. The emphasis in Xu's account is *risk*, which defines motorcycle taxi drivers' new daily trade. It could be the risk of arrest, the risk of confiscation of their motorcycles (their entire source of income), the risk of accidents, or the many risks of injury, theft, robbery and violence. It is the life of the excluded, the life on the side of risk society that is experienced and told in this story of living on the edge. It is also the story of what Xu terms 'the weapons of the victims', the tactics and strategies of survival developed in the illegal motorcycle taxi trade. This chapter invokes both exclusion theory and routine activity theory to explain the lives of and precautions taken by the taxi drivers. Finally, Xu's interviews also tell us the story of rules and tactics of survival.

### The Inmates: Drug Addiction and 'Reform through Education'

In Vincent Shing Cheng's chapter we see the contrast between the official narratives of rehabilitation and the murky realities of pain and punishment at the detention centres. In many ways we look at the control side of the Chinese Dream here. It is also a tale about how deviance is handled, how those who deviate from the norm should be 'taught a lesson'. In both the last two chapters we see this 'method' of punitive infliction of pain and punishment treated as a kind of panacea for everything that does not fit into the official dream picture. Dr Cheng's interviews with forty-six inmates in the *laojiao* (reform through education) institution is, as far as I know, the very first sociological/criminological fieldwork among former inmates in the Chinese detention institution. It is also the first time the voices of the inmates come out in the open more than in just personal one-man accounts of stories from the inside. The *laojiao* detention centres have been under criticism for arbitrary detention for many years, both inside and outside China, and Cheng briefly addresses these changes (that are often a change of name only). But the chapter is not so much about the institution of *laojiao* as it is about the lives of the former inmates, both during and after incarceration. This is a tale of humans, not of institutions. It is about the feelings of betrayal, life in the prison; it is about what the prison-like environment does to the inmate. It is also about the repetitive cycles of criminalization, labelling and stigma imposed on the inmates, and about the daily life experienced by the former drug addicts who make up the mainstay of the inmates in the *laojiao*. It also becomes a story of the 'method' or 'control philosophy' of the 'correction industry' by which deviants are being treated in China. In Cheng's words, the Chinese authorities use 'pain to train' the inmates into supposedly docile and useful citizens. As I have pointed out in my book *The Exemplary Society* (Bakken 2000), in classical Chinese writing the character of 'to educate' (*jiao* 教) is composed of a child holding teaching materials beneath a person holding a whip in the hand. The link between education and pain has always been there, but is developed and

embellished by new methods linking pain and education with rehabilitation and control in today's China. Cheng addresses this phenomenon in more detail when it comes to the educational methods of the *laojiao*. In other words, it is not only the issue of 'just deserts' that inform the paradoxically punitive regime in the *laojiao*; it is pain in itself—pain as rehabilitation. Cheng talks of an alleged 'educative pain'. Tradition is seen as one force to bind and restrain and 'improve' prisoners. In one example, even Buddhist, Daoist, and Confucian doctrines and culture are being deployed in the punitive practices of 'quiet sitting'. Direct violence is also employed both by the prison officers and among the inmates themselves. The experience of the *laojiao* is basically a 'ceremony' of pain and violence.

The prison-like environment of the *laojiao*, however, is that of a real prison, a total institution where inmates are labelled and categorized, and where rehabilitation means suffering and pain. An important aspect of Cheng's analysis of the Chinese correction industry is to show that the very idea of 'rehabilitation' and 'education' is basically about pain. The chapter is also an account of the 'prisonization' of inmates; how every inmate is socialized into a violent and degrading prison culture. Like in the account of the motorcycle taxi drivers, we see the typical scenario that not only are the deviants hunted down by the official authorities but also hunted down by their own class of excluded subjects where the offender is a victim and the victim an offender. This is again the life of the emerging Chinese underclass brought about by the official dream of prosperity and control, for the Chinese Dream is as much about control as it is about prosperity.

Deviance undermines the official dream, and if the corrupt doctors, cake uncles, and motorcycle taxi drivers were entrepreneurial dreamers, the *laojiao* drug addicts may be said to be of another kind, a type of recreational dreamers seeking a way out of a drab and dull life full of pressures and devoid of pleasures. In many ways, these groups resemble the rebellious subject and strategies described by Merton's different adaptations to strain. When we read Chinese criminology and sociology of deviance, and for that matter, cautionary tales about deviance in youth journals and popular literature, one phrase that keeps coming back is *chi-he-wan-le*, to 'eat, drink, play and have fun'. This is said to be typical for the deviant and the criminal who seem to be full of vice and a rebellious 'self' (*ziwo* 自我) running against the collective ethos of the official Chinese Dream. Both self and play (*le* 乐) have negative connotations in official Chinese narratives of modern danger. To play is seen as particularly dangerous, and can only be stopped through pain in these official accounts and dreams of control and 'order'.

The methods of 'correcting' thoughts and behaviour used in the detention and correction system are very much in line with the preoccupation of 'human improvement' (Bakken 2000). Social engineering and human 'quality' (*suzhi* 素质) seem to dominate the 'method' of harsh discipline found here. In Cheng's account we find these methods described in the language of pain, as alleged corrective and educational pain. Both Cheng and Bax, in their accounts of the 'method' of correction talk

about ‘shock and awe’ approaches to pain and correction. In the prisons ‘shock and awe’ is used in the often brutal and violent initiation ceremonies among inmates. These strategies of educative pain apparently dominate the ideology of correction in the detention centres for drug addicts as well as in the boot camp facilities for so-called Internet addicts. Education and rehabilitation are often cast as ‘teaching somebody a lesson’ or ‘beating discipline into’ the inmates. The very idea of rehabilitation is thus more about deterrence than education. In other words, it becomes more important to ‘teach the offender a lesson’ (*jiaoxun* 教训) rather than simply teaching or educating the offender for rehabilitation.

China has been described (for lack of a better word) as a culture of ‘harsh-punishment-ism’ (*yanli zhuyi* 严里主义). The legal system is still much more ancient legalistic (*fajia* 法家) than actually Confucian (*rujia* 儒家). As a result, the brutality and strong belief in sheer deterrence that stem from the legalist school is still evident in the present through modern social engineering techniques. Some of the credo surrounding harsh punishment is explained in detail in Cheng’s and Bax’s chapters. Cheng is also describing a clash between the propaganda of ‘helping the drug addict’ and the painful reality of the detention confinement. The inmates were exposed to the propaganda about the good and caring policeman and prison officer and at the same time faced a very different experience of harsh confinement. Cheng further writes of a ‘production of hypocrisy’ in which inmates are ordered to operate in manners that encouraged ‘fake behaviour’ supposed to produce good reform effects. Much in contrast to the ideas of reintegrative shaming, we see here a system of pain, humiliation, and disintegrative shaming. Cheng describes the daily life in custody as one of a contradictory ‘front-stage ideal’ of ‘acts’ and ‘performance’ in line with official doctrines and a ‘back-stage reality’ of pain, humiliation, and violence. This reality reflects the Chinese Dream’s contrast between ideals and realities.

### **The Players: ‘Internet Addiction Disorder’ and the Method of ‘Correction’**

In Trent Bax’s chapter on Internet addiction disorder (IAD) we meet another group of alleged deviants, those who ‘play’ too heavily on the web. Like the drug addicts in Cheng’s chapter, we are again discussing the educational ‘method’ or the philosophy of correction in China today. Bax’s chapter shows us the initial brutal stages of a very profitable correction industry outside the official apparatus of control. The ‘cure Internet addiction’ centres or boot camps (sometimes referred to as ‘reboot camps’) he describes are often highly profitable private initiatives led by claims-makers with limited medical and psychological skills. The army has often been involved in these initial entrepreneurial ‘corrections’, practising what Bax calls ‘shock-and-awe strategies’, using the all too recent military doctrine as a metaphor in the ‘war with the Internet demon’. It should not surprise us that the leading boot-camp protagonist in the story, Tao Ran, is donning a colonel’s uniform. The Chinese People’s Liberation Army has rented out space for the boot camps, rendering Bax’s military metaphors

here very precise. The picture he paints is a Kafkaesque and Orwellian tale of torture and misuse of power that stretches far beyond the ‘Internet addiction’ facilities described here.

The chapter describes a more sinister underlying ideology—a ‘way of thinking’ or ‘method’ of alleged correction or ‘reform’ which is pseudoscientific in form and ideological in character. Despite being treated like criminals by the system, their only ‘crime’ is going against their parent’s wishes and educational norms of intense cramming and competition. In some ways, the players or gamers are reacting against the same strict evaluation and categorization as the corrupt doctors and cadres, who are plagued by fulfilling their ‘quotas’ and bound by their ‘incentive systems’. There may be another general feeling here of being ‘caught in the machine’ as explained by Fun and Yao in Chapter 2. ‘Socialism’, after all, seems to have become extremely competitive in China today—be it in schools, factories, hospitals, or offices. In terms of Merton’s strain theory and five adaptations to living in an ‘imbalanced’ society (conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism, and rebellion), can we view the so-called Internet addicts as retreatists, where both culturally approved goals and socially acceptable means are rejected? Probably not in the same way as in the case of the drug addicts in Chapter 5, for while they are rejecting the means they are still seeking some of the culturally approved goals (competitively-driven individual success). More than anything, the so-called Internet addicts seem to be youthful ‘players’ (*le 乐*) of that eat-drink-have-fun-and-play category formerly referred to here and so regularly addressed and condemned in the Chinese moral panic about youthful behaviour in general. Their behaviour is least of all about addiction. Even if there are elements of retreatism in their behaviour, in others ways these youths are innovative players and even, to a certain degree, rebels (seeking to change the means and goals they reject). They may not be interested in the Chinese Dream at all, merely in forming another ‘underground’ youth culture in opposition to the official dream, thus becoming ‘uncivil’ players of that underground in the eyes of official China.

Whatever way we categorize these youngsters, there has been a reaction against the dominant pseudoscientific and punitive trend of correction in today’s China, and as the psychological and psychiatric professions are moving out of their former ‘entrepreneurial’ stage where military and correctional personnel dominated the scene, we have seen more stress on family therapy and a more humane treatment of the alleged addicts. It is also a good trend that the Chinese Psychiatric Association has refused to endorse the diagnosis of IAD, in line with the same rebuttal of the term in the American Psychiatric Association’s *DSM-5* manual. Nevertheless, the entrepreneurial approach of non-professional claims-makers has been and still is an important warning against profit-seeking pseudomedical solutions to the modern moral panic of Internet addiction. At the same time, Bax’s chapter takes the story far beyond the confines of the IAD boot or rescue camp, and into a more generalized debate on punishment, harshness, normality and deviance, and the lack of respect

for the deviant other. The chapter navigates the murky waters of what constitutes treatment or punishment and explores the issues of violence, torture, purity, fundamentalism and the excesses of ideology. Let us all hope that these nightmarish aspects of the dream will vanish.

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