

Police supervisors' work-related attitudes in China

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Abstract

While the past two decades have witnessed a fast growing of policing literature in China, officers' job-related attitudes remain severely under-researched. Using survey data collected from 212 police supervisors in a major Chinese city, this study examined the patterns of Chinese police officers' occupational attitudes toward selective enforcement, legal restrictions, community policing, and use of force, and factors that influence such attitudes. About half the respondents were in favor of legal restrictions, and the majority of officers supported the notions of selective enforcement, community policing, and use of force. Male, older officers, those who had no military experience, and officers who worked at field stations favored selective enforcement than their counterparts, whereas supervisor who were younger and worked at nonfield stations were more supportive for legal restrictions. Supervisors' role orientations toward law enforcement and order maintenance influenced their preference for community policing. Implications for future research and policy were discussed.

Keywords

Chinese police, community policing, legal restrictions, police occupational attitudes, selective enforcement, use of force

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Introduction

...from a global perspective, criminology as practiced in the United States... appears to constitute the centre of our discipline, whereas China/Greater China... occupies part of a periphery...in the case of China, those on the periphery face genuine hurdles of regular access to sufficient criminal justice system data to produce work of sufficient quality to meet “international” standards of recognition. More broadly, these external demands often diminish the periphery’s willingness to engage with core local problems, constantly being required to justify their research and findings in a primarily center-focused context (Hebenton, Sun, & Cao, 2014, pp. 344–345).

Although the impediments to conducting criminological research in China have been widely acknowledged (also see Liang & Lu, 2006; Zhang, 2014), the past two decades can be viewed as the golden age of Chinese criminology, with a large amount of studies on various aspects in crime and justice published (Cao et al., 2014). In the field of policing, researchers have investigated how Chinese police strategies and tactics have evolved and, in some cases, revolved under the strong influences of rapid economic and social transformations (e.g., Deng & O’Brien, 2013; Dutton, 2005; Tanner, 2005; Trevaskes, 2003; Xu, 2014). Scholars have also examined how organizational reforms and legislations have been implemented to maintain social stability and the legitimacy of police forces (Fu, 2005; Ma, 1997, 2003; Wong, 2009; Wu, Sun, & Fichtelberg, 2011). Additionally, attention has been paid to the pivotal roles and complex functions carried out by the People’s Armed Police (PAP) (Cheung, 1996; Sun & Wu, 2009). Further, studies have analyzed the guiding philosophies and operational elements of community policing (Jiao, 1995; Wong, 2001; Zhong, 2009), and identified challenges and factors influencing police-community relations and public trust in the police (Du, 1997; Wu & Sun, 2009).

The purpose of this study is to assess the patterns of Chinese police officers’ occupational attitudes and factors that influence such attitudes. While research on Chinese policing has been on the rise in both quantity and quality, this line of inquiry has focused predominately on aggregate-level (e.g., city, province, or nationwide) phenomena with little attention to individual officers’ beliefs, attitudes, skills, and work habits. So far, only three studies have investigated factors related to Chinese officers’ occupational outlooks, all using survey data from cadets in a same police college (Cuvelier, Jia, & Jin, 2015; Sun, Cretacci, Wu, & Jin, 2009; Sun, Sobol, Cretacci, & Phillips, 2010). The generalizability of their findings is limited as cadets are in a very early stage of formal and informal socialization, a process that tends to gradually mold police occupational attitudes over time (Van Maanen, 1974).

Research on police job-related attitudes is instrumental in revealing core elements of police culture and the likelihood of, and key to, successful police reforms, such as the implementation of community policing and the integration of racial minorities and women into police forces (Crank, 2010; Martin & Jurik, 2006; Skogan, 2006). Police occupational attitudes along important issues such as community policing, police-community relations, police roles and priorities, use of force, and job satisfaction, have been the focus of a great deal of Western literature, which tends to see these issues as closely related to one another, constituting the core aspects of policing work. For example, how do officers view their relationship with the community may influence their tendency of

use of force, and how do officers think about law and legal restrictions may affect their ways of enforcing the law. Thus, we set out to examine these core aspects of police occupational attitudes in the Chinese context, particularly from the perspectives of more experienced officers, rather than cadets.

Using survey data collected from police supervisors in a large Chinese city, this study assessed the effects of officers' background characteristics and role orientations on their attitudes toward selective enforcement, legal restrictions, community policing, and use of force. These four aspects of police occupational attitudes are especially worthy of exploration given several considerations. For example, although China has officially endorsed community policing more than a decade ago, evidence on officers' acceptance or support for community policing remains scarce. Similarly, while the authority to use force, particularly deadly force, represents one of the most unique and critical features of the police profession (Klockars, 1985), research examining Chinese officers' perceptions of use of force is lacking. Furthermore, China's recent anti-corruption campaigns and reemphasis on a fair and equal application of the law also cast a legitimate question about the impact of these movements on officers' occupational outlooks and operational behavior. This study attempted to address these knowledge gaps in the existing literature on Chinese policing.

Two research questions guided this study:

- (1) What are the general patterns of officers' attitudes toward selective enforcement, legal restrictions, community policing, and use for force?
- (2) Do officers' demographics and role orientations influence their attitudes toward selective enforcement, legal restrictions, community policing, and use of force?

Findings of this study can not only expand our understandings on the attitudinal propensities of police officers in China but also generate useful implications for policy and future research.

Chinese policing in an era of changes and challenges

Although Chinese police have made significant progress in modernization and professionalization since the 1980s, they also face some tough challenges. First, along with Chinese people's rising rights consciousness during the past three decades (Goldman, 2005), public protests have increasingly become the norms rather than the exceptions for citizens to express their discontent with local governance. The number of protests has risen tenfold from 8700 in 1993 to 87,000 in 2005 (Perry, 2010), threatening social stability and the legitimacy of the Party-state. Police forces, including both the regular police (i.e., Peoples' Police) and PAP, have been constantly mobilized to maintain public order and quell mass incidents. While most incidents were civil, violent and even deadly confrontations occurred occasionally, straining police-community relations.

Second, police legitimacy has been continuously plagued by widespread corruption, brutality, and misconduct. The recent arrest and conviction of China's former public security czar Zhou Yongkang has elucidated that corruption and abuse of power are not limited to lower-level or local police personnel. Consequently, although a majority of protests in China today relate to issues such as labor rights, environmental issues,

land-taking, and social securities, a minority of incidents are directly related to discontent with the police. As scholars pointed out, protests and litigations against the police triggered directly by police abuse of power and misconduct, such as illegal search and detention and torture, are not uncommon (Liebman, 2012; O'Brien & Li, 2006). It is estimated that approximately one-fifth of the public protests were triggered directly by police misconduct (*Legal Daily*, 2012), causing a detrimental impact on police legitimacy.

Third, ethnic unrest poses special challenge for the Chinese police, including both the civil police and branches of the PAP forces that are responsible for internal security. In July 2009, for example, one of the deadliest riots in recent years erupted in Urumqi, the capital city of Xinjiang, where Uyghur demonstrators clashed with police forces and attacked innocent Han bystanders, followed by Hans' retaliation, resulting in the deaths of 197 people (Millward, 2010). A number of deadly conflicts occurred in the years followed, including some suicidal attacks and a series of explosion by Uyghur suspects, promoted the government to launch a counter-terrorism crackdown in May 2014 and the legislature to draft an anti-terrorism law. The government's intense surveillance and control over certain areas and groups may make police-minority relationship extremely fragile.

In sum, during the process of police modernization, professionalization, and legalization, the Chinese police face tremendous challenges that greatly threaten social stability and police-community relations. How to enhance effectiveness, efficiency, as well as integrity, accountability, and legitimacy remains a daunting task for the police. Studying Chinese police attitudes and behaviors should be among the first critical steps in tackling these issues, because sound policy implications related to Chinese policing and police community relations can only be generated based on solid empirical evidence.

Police work-related attitudes

Selective enforcement

Selective enforcement refers to officers' attitude toward the selectivity of law enforcement. Selectivity regards the tendency to range various offences with a scale of priorities and to classify which offences are too minor to be enforced. Selective officers are more likely to give priority to more serious offenses, such as felonies, whereas nonselective officers are inclined to enforce all laws on an equal basis (Brown, 1988). Selectivity thus is a form of discretionary decision-making exercised by patrol officers and supervisors. The level of selectivity may be based upon an officer's individual preference. Research on styles of police officers has shown that some officers, such as old-style crime fighters and service-style officers, tended to give priority to more serious offences, while others, such as clean-beat crime fighters and professionals, were more inclined to equally enforce all laws (Brown, 1988). Selectivity can also be influenced by departmental policies and resources. For instance, police departments that place a lot of emphasis on police-community relations are more likely to enforce the laws selectively than those focusing more on zero-tolerance approaches (Mastrofski et al., 1995).

A few past studies have assessed the connections between officer background characteristics and their perceptions of selective enforcement. For example, studies have examined the impact of race, but the results are mixed. Some found that minority officers were less selective or favored uniform enforcement (Sun, 2003; A. Worden, 1993;

R. Worden, 1990), whereas others showed that minority officers (in one of the two sample departments) held more positive attitudes toward selective enforcement than white officers (Paoline, Myers, & Worden, 2000). Similarly, the influence of experience is equivocal. One study found that experienced officers were less selective (Sun, 2003), while another study reported the opposite (Paoline et al., 2000). The effect of educational appears to be more consistent, with college-educated officers showing more favorable attitudes toward selective enforcement than non-college-educated officers (Paoline et al., 2000; Sun, 2003; R. Worden, 1990). None of the existing studies on Chinese cadets' occupational attitudes (i.e., Cuvelier et al., 2015; Sun et al., 2009, 2010) examined selective enforcement. This current study would shed light on the effects of officer demographics and role orientations on their attitudes toward selective enforcement.

Legal restrictions

Legal restrictions refer to officers' attitudes toward laws and rules, including restrictions that the courts have imposed upon law enforcement agencies and officers to regulate police behaviors and activities. Research suggests that US officers vary in their attitudes toward legal restrictions (Brown, 1988). Some officers are extremely resentful of legal restrictions and allege that their crime-fighting capacity is seriously crippled. Other officers work within the limits prescribed by the courts.

In a small number of studies, officer race, gender, and education were found to be predictive of their attitudes toward legal restrictions. One study showed that black officers were more supportive for legal restrictions than white officers (Sun, 2003), but a second study reported more negative attitudes toward legal restrictions among minority officers (R. Worden, 1993). With respect to gender, female officers displayed more positive attitudes toward legal restrictions than male officers (Eterno, 2006). When assessing racial and gender effects together, both minority women and men held more favorable attitudes toward legal restrictions than white men (A. Worden, 1990). Finally, college-educated officers were more acceptable to legal restrictions than less-educated officers (R. Worden, 1993).

The Chinese police have not been exposed to the concept of legal restrictions in ways that police in democratic countries do. Compared to their American counterparts, the Chinese police enjoy wide discretion and power in performing their work.¹ For instance, police officers are allowed to hand out administrative sanctions, such as fines and detention in police jails, without any judicial review or approval (Leng & Chiu, 1985; Wang, 2000). Only permission from police chief, rather than approval from courts, is required to conduct searches and seizures (Ma, 2003). Chinese police's power to administratively sanction minor offenses and authority over some government administrative functions (e.g., household registration, vehicle registration and inspection, and passport issuance) that are not police duties in Western societies also give officers more room to exercise their discretion. Legal control of police power and authority has increased over the past two decades though. Several important laws, such as the 1995 *People's Police Law*, the 2010 *Evidence Rules*², the 1996 *Criminal Procedural Law* and its 2012 revisions incorporating more elements of due process and human rights, have aimed to enhance police accountability and curb police abuse of power and corruption.

Comparative studies have shown attitudinal differences between Chinese and US officers. Not surprisingly, Chinese police cadets held more negative attitudes toward legal restrictions than their American counterparts (Sun et al., 2010). Similarly, Taiwanese officers and supervisors were more negative toward legal restrictions, compared to US officers (Chu & Sun, 2007; Sun & Chu, 2006). Our study would show not only the general patterns of Chinese supervisors' attitudes toward legal restrictions, but also factors related to such attitudes.

Community policing

Community policing, a philosophy that emphasizes a partnership between community and the police in crime prevention, order maintenance, and the improvement of quality of life, has been a buzz word during the past three decades in the US and also become popular in other countries including China. The concept, however, can be very encompassing and ambiguous, and programs extremely diverse, varying across departments and understood differently probably by every officer. A number of studies have assessed officer attitudes toward community policing (e.g., Adams, Rohe, & Arcury, 2002; Lewis, Rosenberg, & Sigler, 1999; Lurigio & Skogan, 1994; Rosenbaum, 1994; Skogan & Hartnett, 1997). It is often found that officers are generally in support of community policing as a philosophy, but meanwhile, concerned with some specific ways in which community policing was operationalized and structured within their departments (Schafer, 2002).

Several variables may affect officer attitudes toward the global philosophy of community policing, one of the subject matters that this current study explores. Experience working in a community policing assignment, for example, typically results in officers' more positive perceptions of community policing (Sadd & Grinc, 1994; Wilson & Bennett, 1994). Race of officers was also a significant predictor in some studies with minority officers, blacks in particular, holding more positive views than white officers (Lurigio & Skogan, 1994; Skogan & Hartnett, 1997). Age and length of service can also affect officers' attitudes, although the results are less than consistent (Schafer, 2002). In addition, female officers generally express more positive views of community policing than males (Miller, 1998; Skogan & Hartnett, 1997). Education, meanwhile, does not seem to be a significant predictor of officers' attitudes toward community policing (Schafer, 2002). Regarding the effects of police culture and officer orientation, a study of 694 Korean police officers uncovered that officers who reported higher levels of socialization into police culture, which incorporated four dimensions of performance proficiency, politics, people, and organizational values and goals, were more likely to support the philosophy of community policing (Moon, 2006).

China entered a new era of policing in 2002 when the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) officially adopted community policing as the guiding strategy of the police (Sun & Wu, 2010). Under the comprehensive management of social order policy, community policing focused on an integrated system that anchored on crime prevention, control and management, and aggressive enforcement. Under the big banner of community policing, the police's fundamental mission remains largely unchanged, that is, to secure a stable environment for economic development, and to safeguard the privileges and interests of the ruling communist party, and police reliance on traditional mass-line ideologies and

campaign style law enforcement persists as well. There is argument that community policing was nothing more than old wine in new bottles as local policing is still characterized as mass-line ideological underpinnings, crime prevention traditions, and various contracts and pacts (Zhong, 2009).

Two of the three past studies on Chinese cadets touched on cadets' attitudes toward community building, an important pillar of community policing. One study found that Chinese cadets who joined the police force with a stronger motivation toward crime fighting and law enforcement were more likely to think of community building as an important police goal (Sun et al., 2009). A second study reported similar results; cadets who had a strong motivation toward their role to protect and serve held more favorable attitudes toward community building (Cuvelier et al., 2015). Cadets' role orientations or job motivation thus were closely related to their support for community building. This study would assess the connections between officers' role orientations and background characteristics and attitudes toward community policing.

Tolerance for force

Use of force is the most defining characteristic of the police role, and probably one of the most controversial rights granted to this institution (Bittner, 1980). Although police use of force is often measured on a continuum, officers are trained to increase force as circumstances require them to secure a situation or control an individual (Garner, Maxwell, & Heraux, 2002). Use of force thus is closely related to situations and officers' individual judgments of situations. Previous research in the US indicated a lack of shared consensus about what constitutes unreasonable or excessive force, two important terms that are rather difficult to define (Adams, 1999; Johnson & Kuhns, 2009) and subjective in understanding (Alpert & Smith, 1994). Perceptions of reasonable use of force may vary among officers (Weisburd, Greenspan, Hamilton, Bryant, & Williams, 2001), departments (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2001), and between officers and citizens who they interact with (Rojek, Alpert, & Smith, 2012).

Research on police attitudes toward use of force is limited. Based on a nationwide random sample of 925 American police officers from 121 departments, Weisburd et al. (2001) found that the majority of the surveyed officers believed that it is unacceptable to use more force than legally allowable to control someone who physically assaults an officer. Nonetheless, a substantial minority of surveyed officers thought that officers should be allowed to use more force than the law currently permits, and considered it acceptable to sometimes use more force than permitted by the laws. More than 30% of the sample agreed or strongly agreed that police officers are not permitted to use as much force as is often necessary when making arrests. Almost 25% agreed or strongly agreed that, to control a person who is physically assaulting an officer, it is sometimes acceptable for the officer to use more force than legally allowable. Moreover, more than 40% agreed or strongly agreed that always following the rules is incompatible with getting their job done. In addition, the survey revealed that officers' race had a particularly striking effect on their attitudes, with black and nonblack officers differing in their views about the effects of citizens' race and socioeconomic status on the likelihood of police abuse of authority, and the effect of community policing on potential abuse of authority. The effects of officer rank and sex were less evident in that study.

With respect to the effects of officer socialization and orientation, Hunt (1985) revealed that occupational socialization and subculture of the police play an important role in officer understanding of and attitudes toward use of force. She found that rookie police learned much more from the street and fellow officers than from the academy regarding when and how much force is appropriate in specific situations. Recently, a study of police recruits from a regional police academy in the US showed that older recruits and recruits with higher levels of education were less likely to endorse use of force (Phillips, 2015). Based on a sample of 578 South Korean police officers from three police departments, McCluskey, Moon, and Lee (2015) found that officers who reported aggressive attitudes toward law enforcement are more likely to believe that policies are unnecessarily restrictive on police use of force, and support peers' use of force against suspects.

Like corruption, police use of force is a highly sensitive topic in China. It is not a surprise to see the literature carried virtually no information on Chinese police use of force. In China, police use of force is regulated chiefly through the 1996 *Statute of People's Police Use of Police Equipment and Firearms*, which was promulgated to supplement the 1995 *People's Police Law*. According to the statute, the general principle for the police to use equipment and firearms is to prevent and curb criminal behavior, minimize personal injury, and reduce property loss. The statute clearly lists: (1) violent situations and confrontations where incapacitative measures and weapons are allowed to be used, (2) specific targets (e.g., pregnant women and children, unless they engage in violent offending using weapons or explosives) that firearms should not be used, and (3) occasions when officers should stop using their firearms (e.g., suspects follow police orders and cease their criminal behavior). Compared to the use of force rules commonly adopted by the US forces, Chinese police use of force is different in two aspects. First, when using deadly force, the US police follows the general rule of the defense-of-life doctrine, which states that the police may only use deadly force to prevent escape when officers have probable cause to believe that the suspect poses a significant threat of death or serious physical injury to responding officers or others. The Chinese statute doesn't emphasize this rule, but stress more of how to use proper force to successfully carry out police duties. Second, Chinese police are required to issue warning either verbally or through firing warning shots before actual using firearms, but such element is not required for the US police.

As in Western societies, recent police use-of-force incidents in China have drawn greater public scrutiny of the properness of police coercive behavior. For example, two deadly police-citizen encounters happened on May 30, 2014, have caused public outcry over police use of excessive force (Liu, 2014). Chinese police's actions to quell protests in Tibet and Xinjiang also stirred international concerns about police using deadly force against ethnic minorities (Amnesty International Taiwan, 2013). It is thus imperative and timely to study Chinese officers' perceptions of use of force. This study would be a first attempt to report some basic information on Chinese officers' levels of tolerance for use of force.

Methodology

Data collection and sample

Data used in this study were collected from a police college located in a major city in southwest China. Founded in the 1950s as a basic training school for police officers, the

college has gradually grown into a higher education institution that currently offers bachelor's degrees through its eight departments/majors to high school graduates as well as in-service, short-term training courses, or programs to police officers. Assisted by an instructor from the college, one of the researchers collected survey data during the winter of 2014, when a few hundred police supervisors from various units in the city police force attended an on-the-job training course at the college. The survey instrument, which contained 61 items, was designed to obtain information on officers' background characteristics and their attitudes toward community policing, police-community relations, police roles and priorities, and job satisfaction.

In China, police supervisors refer to officers who hold a rank of sergeant or above.³ A group of police supervisors who hold a rank of either police sergeant or inspector attended a mandatory training course at the police college. They were informed by the instructor several days in advance about the opportunity to participate in a research project. Before distributing the survey to officers, the instructor explained the purpose of the study and emphasized the voluntary and anonymous nature of their participation. Approximately 230 surveys were distributed and 219 surveys were returned. Seven surveys were dropped from the analysis because of missing responses, resulting in a final sample of 212 police supervisors.

As shown in Table 1, the majority of sample supervisors was male (76%), Han (ethnic majority) people (92%), and had at least a bachelor's degree (84%). They were an average of 35 years old with approximately 11 years of police experience. About 12% of the sample supervisors had served in the military. In terms of work units, 24% of

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for variables in regression analysis (n = 212).

Variables	M	SD	Range	α
Dependent variables				
Selective enforcement	2.68	0.86	1–4	—
Legal restrictions	2.49	1.04	1–4	—
Community policing	13.71	2.20	4–16	0.76
Tolerance for force	14.41	2.76	6–18	0.70
Independent variables				
Male	0.76	0.43	0–1	—
Age	34.47	2.21	28–42	—
Racial majority/Han	0.92	0.28	0–1	—
Educational attainment	3.94	0.90	1–6	—
Year of police experience	11.52	2.87	1–24	—
Military experience	0.12	0.33	0–1	—
Field station	0.24	0.43	0–1	—
Crime fighting orientation	13.95	1.90	6–15	0.75
Order maintenance orientation	6.70	2.52	3–12	0.75

Note: M: mean; SD: standard deviation; α : Cronbach's alpha.

respondents was assigned to field stations (PCS), 18% came from district bureaus, another 18% worked out of the headquarters, 26% belonged to specialized squads (e.g., criminal investigation, drug, etc.) and 4% manned the detention centers. Because of the lack of official demographic data on officers and supervisors in the city, the representation of the sample officers could not be statistically assessed.

Variables

Four attitudinal measures were used as dependent variables in this study. The *selective enforcement* variable was based on a single item: "Police officers have good reasons for not arresting someone who committed a minor criminal offense (1 = strongly disagree; 4 = strongly agree)." A higher value suggested a positive attitude toward selective enforcement. The *legal restrictions* variable was also derived from a single item: "In order to do their job, police officers must sometimes overlook laws and other legal restrictions (1 = strongly disagree; 4 = strongly agree)." The response was reverse coded so that a higher value indicated a positive attitude toward legal restrictions.

A third dependent variable, *support for community policing*, was an additive scale based on four items: (1) Community policing is useful in reducing crime; (2) Community policing is useful in collecting crime-related information; (3) Participating in community policing activities should be used as one of the criteria of officers' annual evaluations; and (4) Whether community police can be successfully implemented should be an evaluative item of local police bureaus' performance. Possible responses ranged from strongly disagree (=1) to strongly agree (=4). The Cronbach's alpha associated with the scale (=0.76) suggested acceptable internal consistency. A higher score on the scale indicated stronger support for community policing.

The *tolerance for use of force* scale was constructed by summing respondents' answers to three items: (1) With regard to the use of force, the rules regulating police are too restrictive; (2) In some cases the use of more force than is allowed should be tolerated; and (3) Police are not permitted to use as much force as is often necessary. Response categories varied from strongly disagree (=1) to strongly agree (=6). The scale had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.70, indicating acceptable internal consistency. A higher value of the scale reflected a higher level of tolerance for police use of force.

The independent variables were grouped into two categories: background characteristics and role orientations. Officers' gender, ethnicity, military experience, and work unit were coded as dummy variables with one representing male, ethnic majority⁴ (i.e., the Han Chinese), previous military experience, and field station. Officers' age and year of police experience were measured in years and educational attainment was a six-category variable (1 = high school; 6 = master's degree or above).

Supervisors' role orientations were measured through two additive scales. The *crime fighting* scale was constructed based on three items asking respondents to rate the importance of the police to achieve the goals of: (1) fighting against crime; (2) countering terrorism; and (3) seizing drugs, guns, and contrabands. Possible responses ranged from least important (=1) to most important (=5). The scale had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.75, suggesting acceptable reliability. A higher score on the scale indicated a stronger orientation toward crime fighting. Similarly, the *order maintenance* scale was constructed by summing the responses to three items where respondents were asked whether police

should handle: (1) public nuisances (e.g., loud noise from construction sites); (2) neighbor disputes; and (3) family disputes. The response categories included: (1) never; (2) sometimes; (3) much of the time; and (4) always. A Cronbach's alpha of 0.75 signaled acceptable internal reliability. A higher score on the scale reflected a stronger orientation toward order maintenance.

Table 1 reports the descriptive statistics for all variables used in regression analysis. The matrix of two-variable correlations among all independent variables was checked to detect possible multicollinearity problems. The highest correlation between two independent variables (age and military experience) was 0.42, which is acceptable. The variance inflation factors (VIFs) were also examined. All of them were much lower than the generally accepted limit of 10 (Neter, Kutner, Nachtsheim, & Wasserman, 1996), suggesting that multicollinearity was not a concern in this study.

Results

General patterns of occupational attitudes

Table 2 presents the percentage distributions and descriptive statistics of the items that were used to measure officers' attitudes selective enforcement, legal restrictions, community policing, and use of force. To start with, more than 60% of the sample officers expressed a supportive attitude toward selective enforcement. Specifically, 46.3% and 16% of the respondents reported that they "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with the notion of selective enforcement, respectively. Police officers were evenly divided in their attitudes toward legal restrictions, with half of the respondents supporting legal restrictions whereas the other half disapproving legal restrictions.

Police supervisors showed a very consistent and strong pattern of support for community policing across the four survey items. The favorable responses (i.e., "agree" and "strongly agree") ranged from nearly 85% on the fourth item (i.e., successful implementation as an evaluative item of local police) to as high as 95% on the second item (i.e., community policing useful in collecting crime information). Similar to their support for community policing, supervisors displayed a high level of tolerance for use of force. More than 80% of the respondents reported "somewhat agree," "agree," or "strongly agree" to all three items indicating tolerance. Even when the category "somewhat agree" was excluded, over 60% of the respondents reported "agree" and "strongly agree" with more power to use force.

Factors that affect occupational attitudes

Table 3 displays the results from regression analysis. In the first model, four of the predictors, gender, age, military experience, and field station, were significantly related to officers' attitudes toward selective enforcement. Male and older supervisors were more likely than their female and younger colleagues to favor the notion of selective enforcement. Supervisors assigned to field stations were also more inclined to support selective enforcement, but those with military experience were less likely to express preferences for selective enforcement. Officers' role orientations did not affect their attitudes toward selective enforcement.

Table 2. Percentage distributions of items of police occupational attitudes ($n = 212$).

Dimensions and items	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)		Mean	SD
Selective enforcement ^a							
Police officers have good reasons for not arresting someone who committed a minor criminal offense	9.9	27.8	46.3	16.0		2.68	0.86
Legal restrictions ^b							
In order to do their job, police officers must sometimes overlook laws and other legal restrictions	21.7	28.3	29.7	20.3		2.49	1.04
Support for community policing ^a							
Community policing is useful in reducing crime	2.8	5.7	37.3	54.2		3.43	0.72
Community policing is useful in collecting crime-related information	0.5	3.3	36.8	59.5		3.54	0.58
Participating in community policing activities should be used as one of the criteria of officers' annual evaluations	1.4	11.3	31.2	56.1		3.42	0.74
Whether community police can be successfully implemented should be an evaluative item of local police bureaus' performance	3.3	11.8	36.3	48.6		3.30	0.80
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	
Tolerance for use of force ^c							
With regard to the use of force, the rules regulating police are too restrictive	0.5	3.8	5.7	19.3	34.4	36.3	4.92
In some cases the use of more force than is allowed should be tolerated	1.9	7.5	8.5	20.8	32.5	28.8	4.61
Police are not permitted to use as much force as is often necessary	0.5	4.2	6.6	17.5	38.2	33.0	4.88

^a(1) Strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) agree, (4) strongly agree.

^b(1) Strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) disagree, (4) strongly disagree.

^c(1) Strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) somewhat disagree, (4) somewhat agree, (5) agree, (6) strongly agree.

Two of supervisors' background characteristics, age and field station, were significantly connected to their attitudes toward legal restrictions. Older officers were less likely than younger counterparts to favor the idea of legal restrictions. Similarly, supervisors at field stations were less supportive for legal restrictions. Again, supervisors' role orientations were not related to their attitudes toward legal restrictions.

In the third model, none of the supervisors' demographics were predictive of their support for community policing. On the contrary, supervisors' role orientations exerted a significant impact, with broader orientations toward crime fighting and order maintenance linked to stronger support for community policing. All independent variables together explained 10% of the variation in support for community policing.

The last model for explaining supervisors' attitudes toward use of force was the least successful one—neither background characteristics nor role orientation had a significant

Table 3. Multiple regression summary.

Variable	Selective enforcement ^a	Legal restrictions ^a	Community policing ^b	Tolerance for force ^b
Background characteristics				
Male	0.60* (0.31)	−0.33 (0.30)	0.12 (0.36)	0.11 (0.47)
Age	0.14* (0.07)	−0.13* (0.07)	−0.06 (0.07)	0.08 (0.10)
Ethnic majority/Han	0.08 (0.51)	0.13 (0.49)	−0.01 (0.58)	−0.03 (0.76)
Educational attainment	0.13 (0.14)	0.05 (0.14)	0.11 (0.16)	−0.01 (0.22)
Year of police experience	−0.04 (0.05)	0.03 (0.04)	0.10 (0.05)	0.04 (0.07)
Military experience	−1.27** (0.45)	0.01 (0.43)	0.04 (0.51)	−0.08 (0.67)
Field station	0.63* (0.31)	−0.86** (0.30)	−0.10 (0.35)	−0.11 (0.45)
Role orientations				
Law enforcement	0.07 (0.09)	−0.01 (0.08)	0.15* (0.10)	0.05 (0.13)
Order maintenance	−0.00 (0.05)	0.05 (0.05)	0.20** (0.06)	−0.07 (0.08)
Nagelkerke R^2/R^2	0.09	0.08	0.10	0.05

^aEntries are ordered logit estimates, with standard errors in parentheses.

^bEntries are standardized regression coefficients from OLS regression, with standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

effect on supervisors’ attitudes. The independent variables together accounted for only 5% of the variation in supervisors’ attitudes toward use of force.

Discussion

Using survey data collected from a sample of 212 police supervisors, this study examines the patterns and correlates of Chinese police officer attitudes toward selective law enforcement, legal restrictions, community policing, and use of force. These dimensions of police attitudes received limited or no attention in past research on Chinese police, yet they represent some core aspects of police occupational culture, and are essential in understanding police attitudes and behavior in contemporary Chinese society. Several findings emerged from this study. To start with, the surveyed officers hold more ambiguous views toward legal restrictions than selective enforcement, community policing, and use of force. Officers are almost evenly divided on their attitudes toward legal restrictions, with as many as half believing that in order to do their job, they must sometimes overlook laws and other legal restrictions. Thus, it appears that although the rule of law has been the overarching goal of Chinese legal reform over the past three decades, the lack of judicial control over the police and the greater power enjoyed by the Chinese police continue to have a lingering effect on officers’ attitudes toward legal restrictions. That is, the Chinese supervisors appear to show less respect to legal restrictions imposed by the courts. This result is alarming yet not unexpected. Negative attitudes toward legal restrictions have been found in studies on police officers in other Chinese societies, such as Taiwan, where Taiwanese officers, compared to their American counterparts, displayed more negative attitudes toward legal restrictions (Chu & Sun, 2007; Sun & Chu, 2006). In mainland China where the rule of law is underdeveloped, crime control

and public safety are valued over due process and individual rights, and people's legal consciousness, including police officers', remains relatively weak, it is unfortunate that half of the surveyed officers thought it necessary to overlook laws and legal restrictions in order to do their job.

Similarly disturbing is the high level of tolerance for police use of force that exceeds legal restrictions among the sample officers. A range of 60–70% of the officers reported that they strongly agree or agree that rules regulating police use of force are too restrictive, that in some cases using more force than allowed should be tolerated, and that the police are not permitted to use as much force as is often necessary. Police use of force is an important public policy concern in any modern society. Just like in the US where high profile cases involving police use of excessive force can trigger public outcry and undermine public trust in the police significantly, use of excessive force in China can also severely undermine police relationship with communities. As in Western societies, recent police use-of-force incidents in China have drawn greater public scrutiny of the propriety of police coercive behavior. For example, two deadly police-citizen encounters happened on 30 May 2014, have caused public outcry over police use of excessive force (Liu, 2014). Chinese police's actions to quell protests in Tibet and Xinjiang also stirred international concerns about police using deadly force against ethnic minorities (Amnesty International Taiwan, 2013). It is important to continue the study of Chinese officers' perceptions of use of force. As the Chinese public's rising rights consciousness and willingness to challenge legal authorities' decisions, police officers' attitudes toward use of force will continue to be a critical administrative aspect that deserves greater attention.

Noticeably, while the US is presently witnessing a backlash to the militarization trend of the police after such high profile incidents as the shooting in Ferguson, China has just begun new practices to arm its officers with firearms. Since 2014, within the context of anti-terrorism related to the Kunming rail station attack, as part of a national policy change, many provinces announced that they would equip their on duty officers with guns to improve police response to violent incidents, and the MPS has launched training programs to train officers on firearm use (Xin Jing Newspaper, 2014). As China has strict gun control laws and gun-related crimes are deemed rare, the police do not have a tradition of using firearms, and laws and regulations on firearm use are underdeveloped. The police, lack of firearm experience and training, have been under public criticism in cases of accidental injury and improper use of firearms, adding to public mistrust and dissatisfaction. It seems an ironically vicious cycle that when the police believe that they need less restriction on use of force, they may resort to more force when facing a situation, and such actions in turn can create more violent confrontations, which prompt the police to ask for even greater power and lesser restriction.

Meanwhile, the surveyed officers reported most positive attitudes toward the philosophy of community policing. A predominant majority of officers (85–95%) strongly agreed or agreed that community policing is useful in reducing crime and collecting crime-related information, and that community policing activities should be an evaluative item in officer and bureau job performance. The high level of support for community policing philosophy among Chinese officers is expected. China has a long tradition of mass-line policing under the communist ideology, where the police were required to work for the best interests of the people and the people were also expected to be

responsible for fighting crime and achieving popular justice (Wong, 2001). Since 2002, the MPS has started a nationwide popularization of community policing that has brought in many features of Western community policing to the Chinese context (Wu, Jiang, & Lambert, 2011). After over a decade of national and local efforts in promoting community policing philosophy, strategies, and tactics, Chinese police officers seem now well tuned to at least the philosophy of community policing.

Regarding the effect of role orientation on officer attitudes, it is interesting that both crime fighting orientation and order maintenance orientation were positively related to officers' support for community policing. In the US, as community policing usually called for more attention to order maintenance in hopes of enhancing neighborhood quality of life and reducing fear of crime, it is expected that officers who value order maintenance tasks tend to support community policing as well. In contrast, as community policing is thought of as soft policing by some officers, those who have a crime fighting orientation are expected to downplay the value of community policing while prizing hard law enforcement tasks. What we found from the sample of Chinese officers, however, is that both order maintenance and crime fighting orientations were positively related to support for community policing, suggesting that in the eyes of the surveyed officers, the tasks of crime fighting probably do not conflict with the philosophy of community policing. Indeed, Chinese police officers are accustomed to a wide array of responsibilities, such as dispute resolution, household registration, firefighting, and migration/immigration that extend well beyond the traditional Western views of street-level law enforcement (Sun & Chu, 2006).

This study has several limitations that future research should strive to overcome. First, this study only examined Chinese police supervisors' occupational attitudes. As previous research has revealed a weak link between supervisor attitudes and officer attitudes (Engel & Worden, 2003; Ingram, 2013), our findings should be interpreted with caution. More research should include data from both officers and their supervisors to assess the congruence (or incongruence) in their occupational attitudes. Second, some key concepts in this study had weak measures. For example, two dependent variables, selective enforcement and legal restriction, were indicated by one single item, which may not suffice to examine the issues from multiple aspects. Previous research (e.g., Wortley, 2003) has illustrated the multidimensionality of the concept of police discretion, encompassing at least service-oriented discretion and crime control discretion, with both constructed from several-item scales. Future studies should consider adopting similar multi-item scales.

In addition, more aspects of attitudes toward legal restrictions should be explored in future. There are various sources of the laws in China, including statutes enacted by the legislature, administrative regulations made by the executive branch, and Supreme Court decisions that are not considered official sources of law yet are factually used as guidelines in the practice of law when formal laws are obscure or lacking. It will be of value for future research to study the degrees of completeness, clarity, and consistency of these different sources of law in regulating police behavior and assess the levels of understanding that officers have toward these laws.

Third, only a limited number of predictors were examined in this study and their explanatory power was weak. While a low proportion of variance explained is not uncommon in police work-related attitudes studies (e.g., Moon, 2006; Paoline et al., 2000; Sun, 2003),

future research should consider a broader range of predicting variables. For instance, in addition to individual demographic, experiential, and attitudinal variables, police officers' occupational beliefs and outlooks can also be influenced by broader social, cultural, political, geographical, and organizational contexts within which the police work. Future research should examine the influences of these external forces on officer attitudes.

Our findings bear some important messages for policy makers and police administrators. Police supervisors' resentful attitudes toward legal restrictions are undesirable propensities contrary to a fair and equal application of law that has been repeatedly emphasized in recent years by Chinese leaders. Given the tremendous authority that the Chinese police have and the relatively weak court supervision, it is likely that the Chinese police culture and practices will continue featuring police dominance over the populace and use of all necessary means to achieve goals. To change these, Chinese policy makers should seriously consider implementing an independent monitoring and supervising system of the police directed by prosecutors and judges, in addition to the existing training programs and party disciplinary systems aimed at enhancing officers' respect for and adherence to legal restrictions. Civilian review boards or committees and early warning systems could also be effective external and internal mechanisms to control and prevent incidents involving police violations of laws and policies.

Another area that requires greater attention is the high level of tolerance for use of force among surveyed police supervisors. Chinese public's rising rights consciousness and willingness to challenge legal authorities' decisions have made police officers' attitudes toward use of force a critical administrative aspect that deserves greater attention. Our findings indicate supervisors' support for greater flexibility and room for officers to exercise force, which may signal problematic issues or inadequacies in existing policies and regulations on use of force. Chinese police administrators should seek input from street-level officers and supervisors to identify and address their concerns about use of force. In-service training programs and use-of-force guidelines need to be implemented and rehearsed on a regular basis. Effectively controlling police coercive authority without impairing their ability to accomplish mandated goals remains an important goal in any society, particularly in China.

Authors' contribution

JL and IYS contributed equally to this study.

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Notes

1. Compared to their Western counterparts, the Chinese police collectively and individually enjoy wide discretion and power in performing their work. Chinese officers may be subjected to greater

control in terms of their moral, political, and non-enforcement behavioral expectations, but such expectations do not necessarily lead to tighter control over their street-level enforcement. This is partially due to the lack of relevant laws and written policies and/or motivation in regulating officer behavior in many circumstances, such as domestic violence. The existing laws (e.g., Marriage Law) and police regulations fail to clearly stipulate how domestic violence should be handled by officers and aggressively handling domestic violence is not on top of the Chinese police's agenda, leaving wide discretion for individual officers to decide their course of action.

2. The two evidence rules include the *Notice of the Supreme People's Court, the Supreme People's Procuratorates, the MPS, the Ministry of State Security and the Ministry of Justice on Issuing the Provisions on Several Issues Concerning the Examination and Judgment of Evidence in Death Sentence Cases* and the *Provisions on Several Issues Concerning the Exclusion of Illegal Evidence in Criminal Cases*.
3. There are four levels of ranks for the Chinese police: police officer (*jingyuan*), sergeant (*jingsi*), inspector (*jingdu*), and superintendent (*jingjian*). There are two classes (i.e., the first and second class) within the rank of police officers, three classes (the first, second, and third class) within the ranks of sergeant and inspector, and five classes within the rank of superintendent (the first, second, and third class and deputy commissioner and commissioner of the police).
4. The Han Chinese constitutes roughly 91.5% of the total population in mainland China. There are 55 officially recognized ethnic minorities in China, making up another 8.5% (114 million) of the total population. Most of the minority people live in the south, west, and north of China, particularly in remote and mountainous areas where living conditions are harsh. In the sample site, ethnic minorities represented approximately 6.5% of the city population in 2010.

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