

**CRIME PREVENTION IN A
COMMUNITARIAN SOCIETY: *BANG-
JIAO* AND *TIAO-JIE* IN THE
PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF
CHINA***

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This paper examines two important strategies of community crime prevention in contemporary Chinese society: *bang-jiao* and *tiao-jie*. *Bang-jiao* refers to community efforts to reintegrate offenders into the community. *Tiao-jie* refers to community groups designed to resolve disputes among neighbors and family members, and in doing so, to reduce crime. We describe these strategies, discuss their philosophical underpinnings, and identify the features of Chinese society that support their implementation. We also explore their effectiveness with survey data from a sample of offenders in Tianjin, China. Our empirical analyses suggest that *bang-jiao* and *tiao-jie* may indeed be important structural mechanisms for crime control in a communitarian society.

Over the past few decades, community-oriented crime prevention has attracted growing interest throughout the world, especially

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in developed countries such as the United States, Canada, Great Britain, Germany, France, the Netherlands, and Japan.¹ This trend largely reflects a common concern with rising crime rates, combined with the widespread recognition that the capacity of the formal criminal justice system to control crime is inherently limited. Something similar has occurred in the People's Republic of China. In the late 1970s and the early 1980s, the Communist Party and the Chinese government proposed community-based approaches for crime prevention nationwide as a response to perceived increases in crime rates, especially among youths.

In this paper we examine strategies for community crime prevention in contemporary China. China is particularly instructive because of its profound social, cultural, and political differences from the United States. In contrast with the United States, China is a "communitarian" society. Braithwaite (1989) has delineated the key features of such societies and has discussed their general relevance to crime. He explains that communitarianism has three defining elements: "(1) densely enmeshed interdependency, where the interdependencies are characterized by (2) mutual obligation and trust, and (3) are interpreted as a matter of group loyalty rather than individual convenience" (1989:86). According to Braithwaite, these characteristics are conducive to "reintegrative shaming," a societal response to crime that affirms wrongdoing while encouraging the reacceptance of offenders into society (1989:84-97).

The crime control strategies in China reflect its communitarian character; consequently they contrast sharply with approaches taken in individualistic societies such as the United States. We examine two specific components of the contemporary Chinese strategy for community crime prevention: the *bang-jiao*, a means of assisting and guiding those who have misbehaved, and the *tiao-jie*, a mechanism for mediating disputes among members of the community. These two strategies entail the local citizens' active participation in matters that typically are relegated to the criminal justice system in the United States. We describe the nature of these strategies and identify their philosophical, cultural, and social underpinnings.

In addition, we attempt to examine the effectiveness of the *bang-jiao* and the *tiao-jie*. Although official government sources describe these practices in highly favorable terms, virtually no concrete evidence exists to substantiate their claims. Using data from a survey of offenders in a Chinese city, we explore in preliminary

¹ See Graham (1990) for information on strategies of community crime prevention in Europe and North America.

fashion the connections between the operations of these community crime prevention programs and two dimensions of crime: perceptions of neighborhood crime and deviance, and the likelihood of repeat offending.

THE COMPARATIVE BACKDROP: THE U.S. EXPERIENCE WITH COMMUNITY CRIME PREVENTION

Before examining the situation in contemporary China, let us review the experience of the United States with community crime prevention. The phrase *community crime prevention* as used in the United States generally refers to collaborative efforts between formal agencies of law enforcement and local citizens. It encompasses various forms of collective citizen action such as neighborhood watches and civilian patrols, as well as individual initiatives that are encouraged and facilitated by community groups, such as adopting precautionary measures (locking doors, avoiding dangerous places) to lower the risk of personal victimization (Skogan 1990:129). Community crime prevention thus involves efforts to supplement the formal social control normally reserved for law enforcement agencies with various forms of "self-help" by the community (see Black 1980).

The theoretical rationale for efforts at community crime prevention is rooted in one of two perspectives: victimization/opportunity and social disorganization/control. The former perspective focuses on ways in which community action can lower the risk of victimization by enhancing surveillance and by persuading residents to take measures to minimize their vulnerability to criminal attack (Clarke 1980; DuBow and Emmons 1981; Heinzelmann 1981; Lewis and Salem 1981). The latter directs attention to offenders rather than to victims, and attributes high levels of crime to inadequate social organization accompanied by weak informal social control.²

Despite the solid theoretical foundation for strategies of community crime prevention, evidence on their effectiveness in the United States is less than impressive. National evaluations by a division of the National Institute of Justice, based on a series of meta-evaluations, find inconsistent support for such efforts at best. In summarizing the results of these evaluations, Lurigio and Rosenbaum (1986:29) observe that the effects of community crime prevention programs are not well understood. In a more recent

² The classic statement of social disorganization theory can be found in the writings of the Chicago School theorists of the 1920s and 1930s (Park, Burgess, and McKenzie 1925; Shaw and McKay 1942). For more recent reviews and elaborations of this perspective, see Bursik (1988) and Stark (1987).

evaluation of the effectiveness of the community approach to dealing with crime and social disorder, Skogan (1990) also draws pessimistic conclusions. He reviews evidence from two influential experiments in community crime prevention in Chicago and in Minneapolis, and reports that perceived crime or fear of crime evidently was not reduced in either experiment (Skogan 1990:17-18, 125-57).

Skogan identifies certain features of American society that severely limit the potential effectiveness of community crime prevention efforts. Because American society is culturally diverse and highly mobile, neighborhood residents find it difficult to reach consensus about the need to take specific action, to mobilize, and to work together. Skogan also points to the basic value system of American society, particularly "its strong orientation toward individual rights rather than collective responsibilities" (1990:18). Individualism suppresses the sense of "duty" for involvement in community crime control. It similarly inhibits ordinary citizens' willingness to become involved in what they may perceive as private matters (Johnson 1986). Moreover, the "collective" sentiments necessary for effective community action are likely to be weakest in precisely those areas with the highest levels of disorder and crime (see Black and Baumgartner 1980; Rosenbaum 1988).

Chinese society traditionally has differed from United States society on each of the characteristics that Skogan identifies as impeding effective community crime prevention. In China, geographical mobility has been highly restricted, and the job market has been controlled by the government. Housing conditions also restrict population mobility. An employee's housing is generally arranged for by his or her employer, and open housing for rent is extremely scarce. In addition, mobility is controlled by the police; citizens are required to have registration cards (see Troyer 1989a:26-28). Although these conditions have changed somewhat in recent years along with economic reform in China, the contrasts with the United States nevertheless remain striking.

China is also much more homogeneous culturally than the United States. There are few immigrants from abroad, and although diverse ethnic groups inhabit the nation as a whole, communities typically are populated by residents with similar ethnic backgrounds. Such homogeneity is conducive to widely shared values and common definitions of social problems and solutions.

Finally, as explained above, China is a distinctively "communitarian" society in which priority is given to the group rather than to the individual. A strong group orientation has been part of traditional Chinese culture for centuries (Troyer 1989b:46); in recent times, the Chinese Communists have reinforced the belief that a

person has responsibility and commitments to the larger social collective (Dutton 1992). This group orientation in China contrasts strongly with the individualism characteristic of United States society. Indeed, as one scholar puts it (Troyer 1989c:191), China and the United States "represent the extremes on a continuum with respect to emphasis on group versus individual."³

To summarize, the major impediments to effective community crime prevention in the United States as enumerated by Skogan—cultural heterogeneity, high mobility, and individualistic cultural orientation—are much less prevalent in China. Thus it is reasonable to expect that China would be particularly suitable for implementing community-oriented crime control strategies.

SOCIAL CONTROL AND COMMUNITY CRIME PREVENTION IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

Contemporary social control in China reflects both core elements of traditional Chinese culture and more recent political developments. The philosophical underpinnings for a community-based approach to control can be traced to Confucian thought (Dutton 1992; Troyer and Rojek 1989).

First of all, Confucius and his followers were highly skeptical about formal law: "They insisted that the rule of Li (moral code, rite, customary law) through moral example and persuasion was superior to the rule of Fa (formal law) through rigid codes and severe punishment" (Leng and Chiu 1985:8; also see Troyer 1989b:51-52). Confucius stated that "if people are guided by laws and regulated by punishment, they will try to avoid the punishment but have no sense of shame; if they are guided by virtue and regulated by Li, they will have the sense of shame and also become good" (cited from Leng and Chiu 1985:8). In keeping with this attitude toward formal law and morality, the Chinese preferred the informal means of mediation and conciliation to legal measures for resolving disputes and conflicts in traditional Chinese society (Leng and Chiu 1985). Offenses and disputes often were handled by extrajudicial organs such as the clan and the village council through informal means such as persuasion.

A second relevant aspect of Confucian philosophy is a general principle of Confucian cosmology. As Munro (1977:35) explains, this principle holds that "there is an inherent dynamism in all

³ For further discussion of the strong group orientation in China, see Johnson (1986:454) and Klein and Gatz (1989:171). From a Western perspective, this heavy emphasis on collective life has a dark side in that it is accompanied by limitations on individual freedom and personal privacy; see Butterfield (1982) and Simon (1985).

things that permits them to run a course from imperceptible beginnings to publicly observable full development." This principle, when applied to crime and deviance, "means not only that the bad thought occurs before the behavior, but that minor norm violations will develop into full-scale crimes if they are left unchecked. Therefore, early intervention is necessary to prevent crime" (Troyer 1989b:51). The contemporary Chinese phrase "nipping crime in the bud" reflects this traditional philosophy. As Western scholars have noted, this orientation encourages the Chinese to emphasize crime prevention and early intervention (Clark 1989; Munro 1977; Troyer 1989b).

Third, the Confucians believed in the power of education in shaping and influencing people's thoughts and behaviors. According to the Confucians, all human beings are born with an equal potential for moral growth (Dawson 1982). Only proper training is needed for virtue. Further, the Confucians regarded all thoughts and behaviors as changeable in response to proper education (Munro 1977). In the practice of crime prevention and intervention, this belief underlies attempts to guide and instruct people through education and to change bad thoughts and behavior through persuasion and heart-to-heart talks.

Contemporary Chinese Communists have assimilated these traditional attitudes and beliefs in constructing their mechanisms of social control. China's social control system "weaves together a unique combination of formal and informal methods, with a strong emphasis on the latter" (Troyer and Rojek 1989:3). The former involves the operation of the official criminal justice system; the latter refers to the functioning of extrajudicial apparatuses such as administrative agencies and mass organizations of social control (Leng and Chiu 1985:7). The informal model of social control received especially strong priority during Mao's reign, as reflected in his "mass line" strategy.

The mass line idea as applied to crime control emphasized the importance of mobilizing and organizing the masses to participate in the processes of criminal justice. The Party required officials of law enforcement and judicial agencies to stimulate mass support for preventing crime and for punishing criminals (Johnson 1986:452). In addition, a powerful network of social control was formed from a variety of administrative agencies ranging from work units (*danwai*) to neighborhood committees. The principal social control mechanisms used by these agencies were political education and mass mobilization campaigns (for a detailed review, see Bennett 1977:121-39; Leng and Chiu 1985:7-34).

Unique features of the Chinese political system facilitated Mao's mass line strategy. The Party was able to dominate virtually all social units and social organizations. Thus a call from the Party could be answered at every level of society. Moreover, two social units were established at the neighborhood level to facilitate community mobilization: the City Street Offices (the grassroots branch of the Chinese government) and the neighborhood police station (see the description by Johnson 1984). These two units helped mobilize residents to participate in crime control activities as part of Mao's strategy.

In the more recent period following Mao's death in 1976, Deng Xiaoping and other pragmatic leaders have attempted to develop a more stable legal order and a more formal system of criminal justice to advance the policy of economic reform (Troyer 1989c:189). These efforts have included the restoration and expansion of legal education and research, and the reconstruction of the judicial system (Leng and Chiu 1985:35-55; also see Brady 1982; Pepinsky 1982). Yet this developing emphasis on a formal model of social control has not been accompanied by the abandonment of the informal model. The wide-ranging networks of social control based on involvement in mass organizations during Mao's time have been reaffirmed and developed officially (Leng and Chiu 1985:76). As Clark observes, "[I]t appears that, in spite of China's great centralization of power and its accompanying growth of formal social-control institutions, a significant emphasis is still placed on localized control over a large portion of less serious conflicts among individuals, groups, and organizations. Local or people's justice is officially recognized as necessary and legitimate" (1989:59).⁴

Troyer (1989c) reaches a similar conclusion and cautions against a common misconception about varying forms of social control. Western scholars typically treat the distinction between formal and informal models of social control as a dichotomy. They assume that as one model increases, the other must decrease. This is evidently not true in China, however. "In fact, it appears . . . that the relationship between the two opens up the possibility of many permutations" (Troyer 1989c:191; also see Dutton 1992:329-30).

This blending of formal and informal models of social control is reflected in the "total society strategy." Such an approach to social control, which derives to some extent from Mao's earlier mass line strategy, has been developing continuously since 1979 under Deng's

⁴ Troyer and Rojek (1989:6) also call attention to the continued importance of Chinese informal mechanisms; they advise that "in order to understand the dynamics of social control in China, one must begin by examining its informal control network."

leadership and has been promoted largely in response to perceived increases in crime rates.⁵ According to the total society strategy, the Party is to mobilize a wide range of social forces—political, economic, cultural, judicial, educational, and organizational—to combat crime. In essence, the Party strives to wage a “social war” against crime.

The operational features of the total society strategy are summarized schematically in Table 1, which is adapted from the detailed discussion by Chen (1986). This table makes clear that responsibility for crime prevention and control in China is not reserved for judicial and law enforcement agencies but is distributed across a wide variety of social organizations. Generally this strategy includes four dimensions: preventing crime, punishing criminals and delinquents, rehabilitating criminals and delinquents, and assisting criminals and delinquents in their return to normal life by helping them to get jobs or schooling (Guo and Ma 1984; Juvenile Delinquency Study's Commentator 1986). Each of these dimensions entails participation by the various organizations described in Table 1. In practice, the Chinese government attempts to mobilize and organize various social forces to participate in the whole process from the initial prevention of crime to the reintegration of ex-offenders into normal life.

As an illustration, correctional institutions collaborate with work units in efforts to rehabilitate offenders and ease their reentry into the community (see Whyte and Parish 1984:240-43). During the period of incarceration, correctional officials usually invite the leaders of ex-offenders' work units to visit the offenders and engage in heart-to-heart discussions to facilitate reeducation. Leaders of work units also have the authority to influence correctional officials' handling of cases. When offenders are released from correctional institutions, the Chinese government usually requires that work units rehire them to facilitate their return to a normal life.

In addition to work units, the neighborhoods play an active and vital role in crime prevention and control. Neighborhoods are organized by the grassroots branch of the Chinese government mentioned earlier—the City Street Offices—through Neighborhood Committees. At the neighborhood level, two forms of organizations have primary responsibility for conducting the social war on crime: *bang-jiao* and *tiao-jie*. In the present study we focus on these two

⁵ Dutton (1992:327) reports that “throughout the 1960s, no more than .04 percent of the population was ever convicted of common criminal activity. By the early 1980s, convictions were double those of the 1960s, and while the current figure is still low by world standards, it is very high by Chinese standards.”

Table 1. The Operational System of the "Total Society Strategy" of Crime Control in China

Official Agencies and Social Organizations	Function of Crime Control and Prevention
The Central Committee of the Communist Party	Formulating general policies and guiding principles against crime
National People's Congress	Legislation and legal education
The central government	Instruction, coordination, and supervision of efforts against crime
Special Central Committee for Crime Control	Integrating and coordinating efforts against crime
The Central Court, Procuratorate, and Ministry of Justice	Crime control, legal education, and rehabilitation
The Communist Youth League	Legal and moral education for youths; sponsoring entertainment programs and spare-time events; participating in rehabilitation
The Women's Federation	Legal and moral education for women; protecting women's and children's rights; disseminating knowledge about healthy family life
The Labor union	Legal and moral education for employees; helping employees to deal with life problems and difficulties; participating in rehabilitation
Democratic parties	Sponsoring spare-time education for youths; participating in rehabilitation
Other social organizations	Sponsoring spare-time education and events for youths; assisting in youths' education and training; participating in rehabilitation
Media institutions	Legal and moral education; providing high-quality cultural products; establishing healthy cultural and social environment
Educational institutions	Legal and moral education; Sponsoring spare-time education and events; participating in rehabilitation
Criminal justice agencies	Crime control; social security; rehabilitation; legal and moral education for offenders
Branches of the Communist Party and local government	Mobilizing and organizing various social forces in crime control; Dealing with problems and difficulties in ex-offenders' lives
Business, companies, and other economic organizations	Legal and moral education for employees; strengthening administration and decreasing crime chances; dealing with problems and difficulties in ex-offenders' lives; participating in rehabilitation
Neighborhood Committee	Legal and moral education; Neighborhood security; assisting in collaboration with criminal justice agencies; helping to deal with problems and difficulties in ex-offenders' lives; participating in rehabilitation
Family	Legal and moral education; Participating in rehabilitation

Note: The table is adapted from Chen's figure "The Operational System of the Total Society Strategy" (Chen 1986:593).

forms of community crime control that reflect the total society strategy.

Bang-jiao

Literally, *bang-jiao* means assisting, helping, guiding, and directing offenders, especially juvenile offenders. As Mok (1990:12) explains, "[I]mplied in this word is the heavy involvement of the community in rehabilitating the delinquent youth, by accepting them back into the community, and by providing them with various services." *Bang-jiao* is basically a community-based remedial and preventive measure for controlling crime rather than an administrative disposition or judicial punishment.

In principle, the targets of *bang-jiao* include offenders from all age groups. In practice, however, the targets are commonly young offenders between ages 13 and 28. Three specific categories of young people fall under the purview of *bang-jiao*: (1) youths who have committed minor offenses or who have been caught by public security officials for offenses not serious enough to warrant reeducation or punishment in a reformatory or a labor camp; (2) young offenders who have been released from prisons, reformatory, labor camps, and training schools and who are thought to be at risk of further criminal involvement; and (3) young offenders who have received early release from labor camps on the basis of demonstrating great improvement in their thoughts and behavior (see Kang 1985; Ma 1985; Research Group 1985).

Forms of *bang-jiao* vary across China; they encompass programs involving parents, relatives, friends, and neighbors. Neighborhood *Bang-jiao* groups are the most popular form. These groups normally consist of the delinquent's parents, a member of the Neighborhood Committee,⁶ an officer from the neighborhood police station, a head of the work unit where the youth formerly was employed (if the youth is an ex-employee), and the head of the school where the youth (if an ex-student) once was a student.

The basic principles guiding the *bang-jiao* process have been articulated clearly, although the extent to which these ideals are realized in practice is unknown. The first principle is that equality should exist between the deviant youths and the persons who have assumed responsibility for providing help and guidance. This point

⁶ A Neighborhood Committee is formed in an area consisting of 100 to 600 households. Its members are elected from the residents of the neighborhood. The committee is instructed by the grassroots branch of the Chinese government, and its members receive a modest allowance from that branch.

implies that the deviants are not to suffer discrimination. Such discrimination would interfere with realization of the rehabilitative goals because the youths would reject the help and guidance.

Second, the deviant youths are expected to need practical assistance. They may encounter greater difficulties and frustrations in everyday life than nondeviant youths, in areas such as employment, schooling, and marriage because of the stigma associated with their offending. Assistance in dealing with these difficulties is thus a key component in remolding them.

Third, it is expected that the deviant youths will be provided with love, emotional support, and heart-to-heart persuasion (Research Group 1985). They must feel that they are accepted fully by their community in order to encourage genuine repentance.

In short, *bang-jiao* is a community-based approach for rehabilitating young offenders and for intervening in the lives of youths who show evidence of being at risk of becoming offenders, of falling from the proper path. From a theoretical standpoint, this strategy can be viewed as an organizational mechanism to facilitate the process that Braithwaite calls "reintegrative shaming." It provides a concrete "gesture of reacceptance" of the offender into the larger community (Braithwaite 1989:55). Moreover, it relies on the cultivation of a sense of repentance in the offender to "build consciences which internally deter criminal behavior even in the absence of any external shaming associated with an offense" (Braithwaite 1989:75).

Tiao-Jie

Tiao-jie refers literally to mediating and solving disputes that arise in daily life among neighbors and family members. It entails a community effort to deal with conflicts that may lead to crime. In essence, *Tiao-jie* is a mass activity for maintaining good relations among the members of the community (Bracey 1984; Clark 1989; Johnson 1983; and Leng and Chiu 1985).

A basic form of *tiao-jie* is the neighborhood *tiao-jie* committee established under the direction of the grassroots branch of the Chinese government, district courts, and neighborhood police stations.⁷ Its members are unpaid, are elected from residents, and, in most instances, are reputable older citizens who are devoted to community activities. Members receive some training from the City Street Office, the neighborhood police station, or the district court. Persuasion is the principal means used by *tiao-jie* mediators to handle

⁷ The mediation committees set up in work units are another important form of *tiao-jie*.

disputes, although some mediations eventually result in written agreements between the parties (Clark 1989:64-65).

Official government statistics show that in 1985 there were 900,000 *tiao-jie* committees in China, with approximately 5 million members (Wan 1985). These committees evidently have expanded in more recent years. According to a report in the *People's Daily* (1993), China now contains approximately 1,020,000 *tiao-jie* committees, which reportedly mediated more than 52 million disputes and conflicts between 1986 and 1992.

The *tiao-jie* committee has two distinct advantages in dealing with conflicts. First, it can respond quickly because of its location in the immediate neighborhood. Second, members of the committee have a deep understanding and background knowledge of the participants in the conflicts because the committee members themselves have been part of the community for a long time. This intimate knowledge enables them to tailor their mediation strategies to the characteristics and qualities of the disputing parties.⁸

The *tiao-jie* committee is concerned with two general kinds of activities: (1) noncriminal cases such as housing problems, marital disputes,⁹ and uncollected debts; and (2) nonserious criminal cases such as minor property damage and personal injury. The essential role of the committee is to resolve these disputes in an informal, nonbureaucratic setting and to forestall the emergence of more serious grievances. In this sense, *tiao-jie* serves an important function in crime prevention. As Kennedy (1990:125) observes, crime ultimately derives from conflict; hence "the prevention of crime includes a need to deescalate or, at least, contain conflict." The *tiao-jie* serves precisely this function. It is a community-based organization for mediating disputes and managing conflicts without recourse to the formal criminal justice system.¹⁰

To summarize, *bang-jiao* and *tiao-jie* are arrangements for community crime prevention that reflect the communitarianism of Chinese culture and society. The members of these organizations have shared a community life with other residents over an extended

⁸ From the vantage point of the American legal system, a potential danger of such familiarity is the lack of objectivity in evaluating disputes. Mediators in the United States are expected to be disinterested parties.

⁹ The involvement of *tiao-jie* committees in domestic disputes raises some concerns when viewed from a Western perspective. As Clark (1989:64-65) observes, "the omnipresence of mediation services may allow a very deep penetration by outsiders into personal affairs."

¹⁰ China is a large, diverse, and rapidly changing society. The practice of mediation has not been standardized fully throughout the nation; hence our description of *tiao-jie* activities can highlight only selected patterns that are reasonably common. Recently, mediation services have shown signs of greater standardization, such as the founding of the China Mediators Association in Beijing in 1993.

period; they interact intensively with other residents; and they have strong commitments to community life.

The intimate relationship between the participants in the *bang-jiao* group and the *tiao-jie* committee and those under their supervision reduces the likelihood that deviant stereotypes will interfere with the crime prevention process. Members of these groups know the general social identities of wayward youths or of neighbors embroiled in disputes. Consequently a person's involvement in deviant behavior is not likely to overshadow other features of his or her biography. This is important because, as Braithwaite observes, "effective crime control is likely to occur in communities where offenders are not confronted as criminals but as whole persons" (1989:88).

Furthermore, these mechanisms of community crime prevention operate in a supportive political and administrative context. The Communist Party has the power to mobilize a wide range of social forces to assist the *bang-jiao* and the *tiao-jie*. As noted earlier, the government can require work units to hire offenders, and it is likely to do so in response to a favorable recommendation by the *bang-jiao* group. The Party also can ensure that the work unit cooperates with the *bang-jiao* group. Similarly, when conflicts among neighborhood residents are mediated by the *tiao-jie* committee, the committee has the authority to involve the heads of the residents' work units in the mediating process. Heads of work units cannot refuse such requests because the Party endorses the activities of the *tiao-jie* committees.

Administratively, the control of the Chinese government extends to the community level through the City Street Office and the neighborhood police station. The *bang-jiao* group and the *tiao-jie* committee therefore can expect to receive direct and powerful governmental support and assistance. In short, the social, political, and cultural setting for *bang-jiao* and *tiao-jie* has been highly conducive to implementing these mechanisms for community crime prevention.

We should acknowledge an important qualification, however, concerning future developments. *Bang-jiao* and *tiao-jie* emerged when community life was relatively stable. As modernization and reform proceed in China, the character of social life is likely to change, and some of these changes (e.g., enhanced mobility accompanying more open labor markets) may well impede the operation of organizations such as *bang-jiao* and *tiao-jie*. Yet as others have noted, it is not at all certain that these organizations will become

less important.¹¹ Moreover, contemporary Chinese social control practices such as *bang-jiao* and *tiao-jie* differ sufficiently from those in the West to provide social scientists with a "magnificent laboratory" for studying social control (Clark 1989:68).

EMPIRICAL EXPLORATIONS OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF *BANG-JIAO* AND *TIAO-JIE*

Given the formal endorsement of *bang-jiao* and *tiao-jie* by the Chinese government and the Communist Party, it is not surprising that official reports comment favorably on the functioning of these programs. For example, the government reports that from 1982 to 1985, 21,673 deviant youths were assisted and guided by *bang-jiao* in Wu-Han, a large city in central China. An estimated 80 percent of these youths reportedly returned to normal life and were not involved in further deviant activities (Kang 1985). With respect to *tiao-jie*, statistics from the Chinese Department of Criminal Justice show that between 6,000,000 and 8,000,000 civil disputes and conflicts were mediated and "solved" by these committees each year from 1981 to 1985. Minor criminal cases mediated and solved by the *tiao-jie* committees totaled 660,571 nationwide in 1983 and 650,000 in 1984 (Wan 1985:670-71).

These data are suggestive, but obviously they do not constitute unambiguous evidence about the effectiveness of *bang-jiao* and *tiao-jie*. These activities have not been evaluated by studies conducted in China. Indeed, there is little empirical data on these crime prevention strategies other than the official reports cited earlier.

In collaboration with the Tianjin Academy of Social Sciences, we have gained access to data that permit empirical explorations of the effectiveness of *bang-jiao* and *tiao-jie*. In fall 1991 the Academy conducted a survey of inmates in prison and reform camps in the city of Tianjin. Inmates completed a questionnaire with the assistance of a trained member of the research staff.¹²

The Tianjin Academy study was not intended primarily to evaluate community crime prevention; hence our data do not permit a

¹¹ Clark offers the following observation about the prospects for a continued role of informal mediation mechanisms in China, given the changes accompanying economic and social reform: "It remains to be seen how this process will actually develop and what the Chinese response will be. With a healthy partnership forged between neighborhood committees and the formal control organs, the mediation system may contain sufficient capacity and resiliency to manage its out-of-court control, even under these conditions. The Chinese expect it to do so" (1989:68).

¹² The provision of assistance to respondents is a common practice in survey research in China. Such assistance is often necessary because of the respondents' low educational level and because of ambiguities in question wording; these reflect Chinese researchers' limited experience with questionnaire construction. We do not know the extent to which this common practice leads to biased responses.

rigorous empirical assessment of *bang-jiao* and *tiao-jie*. Nevertheless, the survey instrument contained information on the respondents' perceptions of the operation of *bang-jiao* and *tiao-jie* in their communities and on their perceptions of levels of crime and deviance in these communities. Thus we can address the following question: Is there an empirical relationship between the perceived presence and functioning of these community crime prevention organizations and the perceived levels of crime and deviance?

The survey also contained several items referring to previous offenses committed by the inmates. These items allow us to differentiate first-time offenders from repeat offenders. An indicator of repeat offending is particularly relevant to assessing *bang-jiao*. One of the intended functions of *bang-jiao* is to reintegrate offenders into the community and to prevent the development of criminal careers. Thus a second general question informs our empirical inquiry: Is there a relationship between the perceived presence and functioning of the community crime prevention organizations and the likelihood that an inmate will be a repeat offender?

Measures

One of the dependent variables for the analysis is an indicator of perceptions of general levels of deviance. Respondents were asked the following question: "Are there any persons with alcohol abuse, gambling, or other deviant behaviors in your neighborhood?" The available response categories were "No," "Yes, one or two," and "Yes, a few." A similar item asked specifically about criminal behavior in the inmates' neighborhoods: "Are there any persons who have been punished by criminal justice agencies in your neighborhood?" The response categories were the same as for the item on deviant behavior in general.

The remaining dependent variable is the indicator of repeat offending. The survey contained items asking about the total number of punishments received, age at punishment for earlier offenses, and motivations for previous crimes. Because some respondents did not answer all three items, we classify an inmate as a repeat offender if we find an indication of a prior offense on any of these items.¹³

The independent variables are indicators of *bang-jiao* and *tiao-jie*. Respondents were asked whether the *bang-jiao* group was established in their neighborhoods. Response categories were "No"

¹³ The differences in the proportion of the sample identified as "repeat offenders" are rather small, regardless of which of the three items is used. The percentages are 30.3, 35.0, and 36.2 respectively for the items on total number of punishments, motivations for previous crimes, and age of earlier offense.

and "Yes"; accordingly, we treat the measure as a dummy variable with a score of 1 for the "Yes" response. The other independent variable is based on an item asking inmates to assess the extent to which the *tiao-jie* was active in their neighborhoods. This item included three response categories: "No, not at all," "yes, for some [disputes]," and "Yes, for all."

Unfortunately the survey does not provide much information about characteristics of the inmates' neighborhoods, other than *bang-jiao* and *tiao-jie*, that might serve as control variables. Nevertheless one such community-level variable is present: a rough indicator of the socioeconomic status of the neighborhood. Respondents were asked "What kinds of occupations do most of your neighbors have?" The response categories were "Laborers," "Various occupations," and "Officials and intellectuals." We assign scores of "1," "2," and "3" respectively to these categories.¹⁴

The survey also includes information on the inmates' sociodemographic characteristics. We have measures for individuals' gender, age, occupational standing, and education. Gender is a dummy variable scored in the direction of "male." Age is measured in years. Because of the skewness of the age distribution, we truncate the measure and use "40 and over" as the highest age level. The occupational classification includes the following categories with the indicated numerical codes: unemployed (1), peasant (2), self-employed (3), worker (4), student (5), low official (6), and high official (7). The educational categories and codes are illiterate (1), elementary school (2), middle school (3), high school (4), and college (5).

To assess the relationship between community crime prevention and perceived deviance and crime (three-category, ordinal measures), we conduct ordinary least squares (OLS) regression. We employ logistic regression in the analysis of repeat offending, given the dichotomous nature of this dependent variable.

This study contains a significant methodological limitation. The sample is based on inmates of city prisons and reform camps. Obviously, then, such a sample is not likely to represent the larger population of Tianjin on a variety of characteristics. Our greatest concern here is the possibility of bias in perceptions of the degree to which community crime prevention groups are organized and in the

¹⁴ The "various occupations" category is admittedly vague, and some ambiguity surrounds the ordinal ranking between "laborers" and "various occupations." Given the presentation of the response categories on the questionnaire, it seems reasonable to view "various occupations" as an intermediate response in terms of occupational status. We also conducted analyses using a dummy variable for neighborhood status, assigning 1 to "officials and intellectuals" and 0 to the other two response categories combined. The results are generally consistent with those reported below, although the effect of *bang-jiao* on repeat offending decreases slightly.

reports of neighborhood levels of crime and deviance. Although some bias is probably inevitable in the absence of random sampling, the key question is whether the nature of the sample introduces a systematic bias, which leads to confirming a false hypothesis or failing to confirm a true one.

For the relationship between community crime prevention and crime to be an artifact of sampling, the selection bias must be related systematically to both independent and dependent variables—that is, to reports of the functioning both of community crime prevention and of neighborhood crime. Such processes cannot be dismissed *a priori*, but we suspect that any systematic selection bias is likely to operate conservatively. It seems plausible that officially identified offenders will be particularly likely both to come into contact with community crime prevention groups and to be aware of the level of criminal behavior as a result of their own activity and their involvement in criminal networks. If this is true, the selection bias will tend to create an artifactual *positive* relationship between the functioning of community crime prevention and levels of crime. Our hypothesis, in contrast, predicts a *negative* relationship. Nevertheless, in an effort to search empirically for damaging selection biases, we supplement the analysis of perceived crime and deviance for the total sample with separate analyses of subsamples differentiated by offense seriousness, as explained more fully below.

RESULTS

To begin the analysis, we examine the frequency distributions for the independent and dependent variables. The first two panels in Table 2 report frequency distributions for the indicators of community crime prevention. A majority of the subjects (75.7 percent) in the survey reported that they came from neighborhoods lacking a *bang-jiao* group. In contrast, only 13.1 percent reported the absence of a *tiao-jie* committee. The majority (57.1 percent) indicated that the *tiao-jie* was very active and became involved in all disputes.

The third and fourth panels of Table 2 report the frequency distribution for the indicators of perceived neighborhood deviance and crime. The two distributions are very similar: a slight majority of respondents reported the presence of some deviants and criminals in the neighborhood; just under 20 percent reported that there were a “few” (19.8 percent and 18.8 percent respectively for deviance and for crime). Finally, the last panel of Table 2 reveals that slightly over one-third of the inmates in the survey (37.9 percent) were classified as repeat offenders.

Table 2. Frequency Distributions for Independent and Dependent Variables

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Presence of <i>Bang-Jiao</i>		
No	409	75.7
Yes	131	24.3
Activity of <i>Tiao-Jie</i>		
None	90	13.1
Yes, some	205	29.8
Yes, all	392	57.1
Perceived Deviants in Neighborhood		
No	332	41.3
Yes, one or two	312	38.9
Yes, a few	159	19.8
Perceived Criminals in Neighborhood		
No	365	45.5
Yes, one or two	286	35.7
Yes, a few	151	18.8
Repeat Offender Status		
First Offender	658	62.1
Repeat offender	402	37.9

The results of regression analyses for perceived deviance and crime are displayed in Table 3. For the item pertaining to deviance in general, the indicators for both types of community crime prevention exhibit significant negative associations.¹⁵ In other words, in keeping with the view that these organizations exert a genuine controlling effect on deviant behavior, the perceived presence of the *bang-jiao* and a high activity level for the *tiao-jie* are associated with perceptions of few deviants in the neighborhood. These two variables yield the strongest relationships among the predictors. The only other independent variable with an appreciable coefficient is age: older inmates report lower levels of deviance than do younger ones.

The pattern is slightly different for the indicator of criminals in the neighborhood. Although both measures of community crime prevention have negative regression coefficients, only the coefficient for the *tiao-jie* is significant and appreciable. This significant effect for the indicator of the activity level for *tiao-jie* is consistent with the view that these organizations help to contain conflict which otherwise might escalate and be expressed as crime.

Table 4 presents the results for the logistic regression analysis of repeat offending. Of greatest interest is the significant negative

¹⁵ Given the nonrandom nature of the sample, tests of statistical significance are not technically appropriate. Nevertheless, we follow the common practice of reporting such tests to help identify relationships that are unlikely to be the product of chance.

Table 3. Regressions of Perceptions of Neighborhood Deviance and Crime on *Bang-Jiao*, *Tiao-Jie*, and Controls

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	
	Deviance	Crime
<i>Bang-Jiao</i>	-.178**	-.067
<i>Tiao-Jie</i>	-.211**	-.232**
Neighborhood Occupational Status	-.069	.076
Age	-.111*	-.054
Gender (Male)	.063	.050
Education	-.039	.065
Occupational Status	.063	.051
Adjusted R ²	.113	.080
N	360	357

Note: Standardized regression coefficients are reported.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

coefficient for the *bang-jiao* variable. Inmates who report living in communities with this community crime prevention organization are significantly less likely to be repeat offenders than those who live in communities without such an organization. The odds of being a repeat offender for those with a *bang-jiao* in their neighborhood are approximately half of those for inmates without a *bang-jiao* (the exponent of the logistic regression coefficient for the dummy variable = .57). In contrast, the perceived operation of the *tiao-jie* has no appreciable relationship with the probability of being a repeat offender. The difference between the relationship of *bang-jiao* and of *tiao-jie* is theoretically interpretable because the former strategy is designed explicitly to reintegrate offenders into the community and to forestall the development of criminal careers.

Age also yields a significant coefficient in Table 4. Not surprisingly, advancing age is associated with increased odds of repeat offending, probably due mainly to the greater time at risk for repeat offending. The coefficient for neighborhood occupational status is also significant and is unexpectedly positive: inmates from higher-status neighborhoods have higher odds of being a repeat offender than those from lower-status neighborhoods, net of other variables in the equation.

Finally, we return to the issue of sample selection bias in the analysis of perceived levels of crime and deviance. As noted above, the sample is based on incarcerated inmates, an unrepresentative population. We cannot compare these respondents with those from the "civilian" population because such data are not available. It is possible, however, to disaggregate the total sample into subsamples based on the seriousness of the respondent's current offense. This

Table 4. Logistic Regression Analysis of Repeat Offending on *Bang-Jiao*, *Tiao-Jie*, and Controls

Independent Variable	Regression Coefficient	Standard Error	Exp(<i>b</i>)
<i>Bang-Jiao</i>	-.554*	.266	.57
<i>Tiao-Jie</i>	.039	.146	1.04
Neighborhood Occupational Status	.834**	.177	2.30
Age	.043*	.018	1.04
Gender (Male)	1.205	1.139	3.34
Education	-.147	.136	.86
Occupational Status	-.039	.101	.96
Goodness-of-Fit Chi-Square = 404.82; Significance = .38			
<i>N</i> = 405			

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

step is useful because, if systematic differences exist between official offenders and nonoffenders, it is plausible to anticipate that these also will be reflected in differences between serious and minor offenders. In other words, if inmate samples are systematically biased in comparison with more representative (civilian) samples because of their involvement in illegal acts, then the observed relationships among variables for serious offenders should differ from those for minor offenders.

Accordingly we reestimated the regression equations for perceived levels of crime and deviance, for minor and for serious offenders separately. Contrary to the hypothesis of systematic selection bias, the subsample analyses closely mirror those for the full sample. Indeed, the observed coefficients are virtually identical to those reported in Table 3 for the combined sample.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The potential utility of community involvement in crime control has long been recognized in the United States. At the same time, researchers have found grounds for pessimism, particularly that the individualistic nature of American society makes strategies for community crime prevention difficult to implement. These community-based strategies have been carried out vigorously in societies that place a stronger emphasis on the social collectivity—that is, in more “communitarian” societies (see Braithwaite 1989:168-74).

Contemporary China is one such society. Besieged with rising crime rates accompanying profound social changes in the 1970s, Chinese authorities reemphasized and remodeled traditional community-based crime prevention strategies. This policy initiative in

China provides a unique opportunity to examine the effectiveness of the community approach to crime prevention in a highly supportive social and cultural context. We examined two features of the Chinese efforts at community crime prevention: *bang-jiao* and *tiao-jie*. To reiterate, the former refers to community groups designed to reintegrate offenders into the community; the latter refers to community groups designed to resolve disputes among residents (and thus to prevent crimes).

Although Chinese authorities claimed success in their efforts at community crime control, we know of no systematic empirical research to support these claims. We applied data from a unique source—a survey of inmates in prison and reform camps in the city of Tianjin—to address several questions about the effectiveness of *tiao-jie* and *bang-jiao*. These inmates served as informants about the level of crime prevention and the level of crime and deviance in their neighborhoods, and as a sample of offenders with varying degrees of involvement in crime (first-time versus repeat offenders).

Three important findings emerge in our analyses. First, our respondents perceive both of these community crime prevention strategies as having been implemented to a significant degree in China, especially the mediation strategies. Fifty-seven percent of respondents reported that *tiao-jie* groups deal with all disputes in their neighborhoods; 28 percent indicated that *tiao-jie* groups are involved with some neighborhood disputes. Thus 85 percent of the respondents report some degree of activity on the part of these groups. *Bang-jiao* groups, although less prevalent, are also perceived to be reasonably common. These groups are thought to exist in about one-fourth (24 percent) of the respondents' neighborhoods.

Second, when other variables are controlled, *tiao-jie* groups appear to reduce the level of crime and deviance in neighborhoods, at least as perceived by our respondents. These results are theoretically quite understandable. *Tiao-jie* groups deal with social disputes and grievances, which may culminate in crimes as forms of "self-help" (Black 1983). Research in the United States suggests that much crime is an effort to resolve disputes and grievances among acquaintances, friends, and relatives. If we assume similar dynamics in China, it is likely that *tiao-jie* groups alleviate the social situations that give rise to these types of crime. These mediation strategies evidently are less effective, however, in reducing recidivism. Our measure of the functioning of *tiao-jie* exhibits no effect on the likelihood of repeat offending, as measured by the respondents' self-reported behavior.

Third, when other variables are controlled, the perception of an operative *bang-jiao* group is related inversely to the likelihood of

repeat offending. This finding is consistent with the notion that *bang-jiao* is an effective community program for crime control. Organizing people from all parts of an offender's life (family, school, neighborhood, work, police) into a focused group appears to provide a formidable social force for reintegrating offenders into the community. *Bang-jiao* thus might be considered a structural mechanism for facilitating the social control that Braithwaite (1989) calls "reintegrative shaming."

Any conclusions must be regarded cautiously. As noted earlier, China is undergoing profound social transformation. The patterns observed several years ago may no longer apply fully to the current situation, especially in the regions affected most strongly by reforms. In addition, the analysis has methodological limitations. Various aspects of the study design could be strengthened, including sampling procedures and the measurement of key concepts. Finally, the traditional philosophical ideals and values underlying the Chinese system of community crime prevention are to some degree opposite to those in the United States and other Western societies. Hence the desirability of "importing" selected features of Chinese crime control practices into other nations, regardless of their effectiveness, is an open question.¹⁶

Nevertheless it is crucial to discover, as far as possible, how other societies quite different from the United States deal with crime and delinquency. We hope this exploratory study inspires further research on strategies of community crime prevention in communitarian societies, and encourages further theoretical work on their potential applicability to more individualistic societies.

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¹⁶ For further discussion of the "lessons" for Western societies of the Chinese experience with social control, see Brady (1982), Clark (1989), Pepinsky (1973, 1982), Troyer (1989c), and Turk (1989).

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