

The rise of the Red Mafia in China: a case study of organised crime and corruption in Chongqing

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Abstract ‘Red Mafia’ is the collective term for corrupt public officials in mainland China, mainly from the criminal justice system, who attempt to monopolise the protection business in the criminal underworld by abusing power. In contemporary mainland China, the Red Mafia has developed into an alternative system of governance that can control organised crime groups, enable them to flourish, and protect them where strong government and effective self-protection associations are absent. The author examines organised crime and corruption by analysing the Wen Qiang case, one of the most famous and widely publicised cases in Chongqing’s latest crime crackdown campaign. Drawing on interview data and extensive published materials, this paper offers a tentative definition of ‘Red Mafia’, develops a typology of organised crime, describes the emergence of the Red Mafia in China, explores how gangsters developed relationships with public officials, suggests why organised crime groups chose the Red Mafia as their preferred protection and enforcement mechanism, examines patterns of services provided, and explores the differences between the Red Mafia and other Mafia groups.

Keywords Red Mafia · Protective umbrella · Organised crime · Corruption · Extra-legal governance · The Chinese political-criminal nexus

Introduction

Organised crime and corruption have been regarded as an acute problem in mainland China since the country adopted its open-door policy and embarked on its path of

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economic reform in 1979. Since the second national ‘strike hard’ Campaign¹ in 1996, China’s top leaders as well as scholars underlined the links between organised crime groups and the government officials who served as a political back-up to gangsters, and emphasised the importance of cracking down on both phenomena. However, a series of anti-crime and anti-corruption campaigns organised by both central and local governments failed to destroy the links between organised crime and corruption in mainland China.

The collaboration of the political establishment with the criminal underworld has been highlighted in several journal articles. An exploratory study conducted by Chin and Godson, using published materials and a five-month period of fieldwork data collection in three provinces (i.e. Hainan, Guangdong, and Fujian), focuses on the issue of the Chinese political-criminal nexus (the collusion between government officials and criminals), identifies causes and patterns of the political-criminal nexus, predicts its development, and anticipates its threat (Chin and Godson 2006). Chin and Godson conclude that organised crime will still be a problem for many towns and cities in the foreseeable future, and gangsters can only create links with low- and mid-level government officials from the criminal justice system as ‘high-ranking government officials have so many opportunities to make large amounts of money from their associations with legitimate businessmen’ (Chin and Godson 2006: 40).

Chinese criminologist Qiu Geping focuses her attention on the new trend of the links between organised crime and its ‘protective umbrella’ (*‘baohusan’*) in mainland China (Qiu 2008). The term ‘protective umbrella’ describes the practice of officials taking bribes from criminals and providing protection to gangsters’ legal and illegal activities (Chin and Godson 2006; Gong 2002; Qiu 2008; Shieh 2005; Tian 2001; Wedeman 2012; Zhang and Chin 2008). According to Qiu, cases discovered in the early 2000s suggest public officials, especially police officers, not only abuse their power to offer gangsters illegal protection, but also directly participate in criminal activities such as running their own illegal gambling houses and prostitution rings, or controlling companies that engage in criminal business (Gounev and Bezlov 2010; Qiu 2008).

There is still little literature in English on the nexus between criminal organisations and Chinese government officials in the late 2000s. Current research suffers from limitations associated with language, culture and methods. On the one hand, there is a lack of literature in English produced from source countries’ perspectives even though a number of outstanding scholars in China (for instance, He Bingsong, Cai Shaoqing, and Qiu Geping) have conducted extensive research on organised crime and its protective umbrella in post-Mao China. Most Chinese scholars, especially criminologists and historians of crime, lack the capacity to produce academic papers in English, making the Chinese political-criminal nexus an enigma to Western academics.

On the other hand, researchers from overseas institutes may find it extremely difficult to gain access to research sites and to individuals within those research sites,

¹ ‘Strike hard’ is an extreme form of anti-crime policy aiming to maintain social and public order by employing comparatively harsh punishment as well as simplifying and speeding up criminal proceedings. The Chinese government launched three rounds of ‘strike hard’ anti-crime campaigns in 1983, 1996, and 2001.

even though some Western researchers do not regard culture and language as problems. Anti-crime and anti-corruption campaigns in China have been identified as politically sensitive topics, and most data suitable for empirical and statistical analysis are ‘fragmentary in terms of geographical heterogeneity and the lack of longitudinal follow-up’ (Xia 2006: 154). In this case, this paper aims to fill the gap in the literature and suggests how the patterns of Chinese organised crime and corruption have developed, which may become a useful source for Western countries to find out what happens in China today.

This paper focuses on the most influential and widely publicised crime-crackdown campaign, ‘striking black’ in Chongqing, which began in June 2009 and is ongoing as of July 2010.² ‘Strike black’,³ the direct translation of ‘*dahei*’, refers to ‘a ruthless, relentless crackdown on corruption and gangster activities’ (FlorCruz 2012: online). In a marked departure from other strike black campaigns in China, the Chongqing Municipal Government carried out a massive campaign aiming at cracking down not only on the gangsters, but also on the wealthy businessmen and government officials who controlled the gangs and enabled them to flourish (The Economist 2009). This massive campaign was led by Bo Xilai who was Communist Party chief of Chongqing from November 2007 to March 2012, and Wang Lijun who was Bo’s right hand man and police chief in Chongqing from June 2008 to January 2012.

Chongqing’s anti-Mafia campaign helped Bo earn national recognition. It made the public realise how the Red Mafia emerged and highlighted how corrupt and dysfunctional local government had become. However, the ‘Wang Lijun incident’ and the fall of Bo Xilai can be regarded as the biggest political scandal in early 2012. This also gave rise to negative criticism on the Chongqing approach—‘singing red’ (‘*changhong*’) and ‘striking black’ (‘*dahei*’) (FlorCruz 2012; Lafraniere et al. 2012). This paper does not incorporate the ‘Wang Lijun incident’ and Bo’s fall in its analysis of organised crime and corruption in China for two reasons: on the one hand, the Bo Xilai and Wang Lijun incident has been evolving so rapidly and unexpectedly, and the Chinese government has not disclosed enough details about the incident, so it seems too difficult and too soon to comment on it⁴; on the other hand, the fall of Bo Xilai is a political struggle among various political camps in China. This does not influence the author’s understanding of the Chinese political-criminal nexus.

Drawing on interview data and extensive published materials, this paper examines organised crime and corruption and explores the phenomenon of the Red Mafia in China. The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: section 2 discusses definition issues concerning organised crime and the Mafia and suggests a tentative definition of ‘Red Mafia’. Section 3 focuses on data collection and methods. Section 4 offers a general description of crime crackdown campaign in Chongqing. Section 5

² ‘Striking black’ in Chongqing achieved its objective when Wen Qiang, former head of the Chongqing Judicial Bureau (2008–2009) and deputy head of the Chongqing Public Security Bureau (1992–2008), was sentenced to death on July 7, 2009. The death of Wen indicated the end of the massive campaign against organised crime and corruption in Chongqing, but Chongqing’s police officers continue to investigate cases of organised crime and corruption because ‘striking black’ is regarded as a long-term task.

³ ‘Strike Black’ shares a similar meaning with ‘strike hard’. ‘Strike hard’ usually refers specifically to the three rounds of anti-crime campaigns organised by the Chinese Central Government, while ‘strike black’ refers generally to crime crackdown campaigns organised by local governments.

⁴ Xia Ming, personal communication, e-mail message to author, 11 April 2012.

describes the Red Mafia hierarchy, and interprets organised crime groups in Chongqing from three aspects: structure, activities, and the political-criminal nexus. Section 6 analyses how the Red Mafia develops into an extra-legal governance to fulfil local gangs' demand for an alternative source of protection. Section 7 concludes.

The concepts

In order to obtain a proper definition of 'Red Mafia' and have a clear understanding of organised crime, this paper bases itself mainly on a series of publications written by Western academics. Diego Gambetta in *The Sicilian Mafia* suggests that a Mafia group is a particular type of organised crime group specialising in producing, promoting and selling private protection (Gambetta 1996). To be specific, both Mafia groups and drug syndicates can be identified as organised crime groups, but the difference between the two groups is clear: the former attempts to control the industry of private protection rather than the drugs which are controlled and distributed by the latter (Gambetta 1996; Varese 1994). Gambetta's theoretical framework focuses on the supply of extra-legal protection by Mafia groups where state-sponsored institutions are unable or unwilling to provide sufficient protection and effective enforcement for securing private property, which has been called the 'property rights theory of Mafia emergence' (Campana 2011a, b; Chu 2000; Varese 2006, 2011, 2012). Since the 1990s, the 'property rights theory of Mafia emergence' has been applied by a number of scholars to interpret Mafia or Mafia-like organisations in transitional countries or areas, for instance Hong Kong Triads, the Russian Mafia, the Japanese Yakuza, extra-legal protection in Bulgaria, and the Chinese Mafia⁵ (Chu 2000; Hill 2003; Tzvetkova 2008; Varese 2001; Wang 2011).

The latest systematic content analysis of definitions was conducted by Federico Varese (Varese 2010). He conducted a content analysis of 115 definitions originating from more than 25 countries as well as a number of international agencies and institutions in the period 1915–2009.⁶ He suggests a tentative definition: 'an organised crime group attempts to regulate and control the production and distribution of a given commodity or service unlawfully' (p. 14), while a Mafia group is defined as a specific kind of organised crime group that 'attempts to control the supply of protection' (p. 17). A series of publications suggest that mafia protection is a genuine commodity in many circumstances; protection services may include 'the enforcement of cartel agreements' (Gambetta and Reuter 1995), and 'protection against extortion, protection against theft and police harassment, protection of property rights, protection in relation to credit obtained informally and the retrieval of loans, protection of thieves, and the settlement of a variety of disputes' (Varese 2010: 17).

⁵ Wang (2011) focuses on the emergence of a special type of organised criminal group—Mafias which mainly operate protection businesses in mainland China—rather than the rise of organised crime (black societies) in general.

⁶ Varese's analysis is supported by a collection of more than 115 definitions of organised crime and related comments concerning the problem of how to define organised crime. Please see: K. Von Lampe, 'Definitions of Organized Crime', (updated 27 April 2012) <<http://www.organized-crime.de/organizedcrimedefinitions.htm>>.

In addition to organised criminal groups (i.e. Mafias) who sell extra-legal protection in weak states, a series of crime crackdown campaigns in mainland China show that a special type of group—the Red Mafia consisting of a large number of corrupt government officials from the criminal justice system—has also been involved in the business of illegal protection in China.⁷

The concept of ‘Red Mafia’ shares the identical meaning with the Chinese term ‘protective umbrella’, which refers to corrupt government officials who use their power to safeguard organised crime groups and receive payment in money, sex and promotion (Chin and Godson 2006; Zhang and Chin 2008). ‘Red’ is the symbolic colour of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). In contemporary mainland China, the three branches of government (legislative, executive and judicial) are not sufficiently separated, checked and balanced, and the CCP holds a monopoly in an authoritarian regime (Li 2003). In this case, ‘red’ goes beyond the Chinese Communist Party and covers government officials from the legislative, executive and judiciary branches in the People’s Republic of China.

‘Wearing a red hat’, referring to management connections with high-ranking cadres, has become a significant way for privately-owned enterprises to improve their performance in transitional economies. For example, many private enterprises chose to adopt the red hat strategy in order to secure property, reduce transaction costs, obtain sufficient protection from local governments and get access to natural resources (Chen 2007: 55). Moreover, many scholars tend to regard privately-owned enterprises with political connections as ‘red hat’ firms (Du and Girma 2007; Huang 2005). Similarly, ‘wearing a red hat’ has become a safer way for organised crime groups to run illicit businesses in reform-era China. Under such circumstances, the term ‘red hat’ is normally named ‘protective umbrella’ (*baohusan*) in China (Zhang and Chin 2008), and ‘bureaucratic entrepreneurs’ in common law Africa (Joireman 2011), while it is renamed the ‘Red Mafia’ in this paper. The term ‘Red Mafia’ is a more accurate way to describe this aspect of the Chinese political-criminal nexus: it refers to government officials, mainly from the criminal justice system (wholly controlled by the CCP), who provide protection for organised crime groups.

Data and methods

Research site

The majority of data for the study of the Red Mafia was collected from Chongqing. It is one of the largest cities in Southwest China and one of the five national central cities, with a population in 2011 of over 31 million. Chongqing was selected as a research site for several reasons. Firstly, the crime crackdown (i.e. strike black) campaign in Chongqing was regarded as one of the most influential and widely publicised campaigns in China since 2000. A number of cases uncovered during

⁷ Qiu Geping, 11 January 2012, interview, Shanghai, People’s Republic of China; Jin Qigao, 10 January 2012, interview, Shanghai, People’s Republic of China; Qiu, personal communication, e-mail message to author, 22 August, 27 August, and 28 August 2011; Senior manager (A) from a construction company, 17 February 2012, interview, Shandong, People’s Republic of China.

Chongqing's strike black campaign suggest strong links between organised crime and public sector corruption. Secondly, in a departure from most crime crackdown campaigns that disclose very little evidence about the links between organised crime and corruption, the Chongqing Municipal Government has disclosed the details of cases concerning the nexus of organised criminal groups (illegal entrepreneurs) and their protective umbrellas. This makes it possible for researchers to have an in-depth understanding of the growth of organised crime and the emergence of the Red Mafia in contemporary mainland China.

Data collection methods

The information supporting this study comes from two sources. The first is published materials. Apart from internet searches, one significant source is data from the CNKI Database (China National Knowledge Infrastructure Database), which covers journal articles, news reports, doctoral theses, masters' dissertations and conference papers. By using the keywords 'striking black in Chongqing' (*Chongqing dahei*), the author obtained 171 academic papers as well as newspaper or magazine articles from the CNKI Database from 17 June 2009 to 26 March 2012. Significant materials were obtained from Western media such as *The Times*, *The Economist*, *The Guardian*, *TIME*, and *CNN*. In addition, the author conducted online searches using the keywords 'Bo Xilai', and 'Wang Lijun' (the names of main organisers of Chongqing's crime crackdown campaign). In this way, the author added hundreds of news articles to his database.

The second set of data came from fieldwork in Chongqing conducted from December 2011 to early January 2012. The author found it extremely difficult to get access to interviewees in the research site as Chongqing's strike black campaign was regarded as a politically sensitive issue. Public officials as well as journalists were unwilling to disclose information or express personal views on any potentially sensitive matters, such as cases of corruption uncovered in the period 2009–2011 and the political-criminal nexus. In the first couple of days, potential interviewees refused to accept any interviews concerning Chongqing's strike black campaign because they suspected the author might be a plainclothes police officer from the Ministry of Public Security. Moreover, the author failed to gain access to any police reports or court files because officials from the criminal justice system did not trust any researchers from overseas institutions at all. Thanks to the help from Li Ren, associate professor from Southwest University of Political Science and Law, and Wang Jingyi, who was a research assistant for this fieldwork, the author succeeded in conducting semi-structured interviews with two journalists, three academics, two police officers, four prosecutors, three taxi drivers, three businessmen, two government officials, and a lawyer.

Guanxi,⁸ a Chinese form of social network, is an important issue in China. It turned out to be the most important resource for the author in his entire research process, including getting research access, obtaining informed consent and collecting correct and reliable information. Mr. Li used his guanxi to help the author get access to academics and journalists. It was not practical to provide an information sheet

⁸ Guanxi describes the basic dynamic in personalized networks of influence, a central idea in Chinese society.

before each interview because all interviewees felt cautious and reluctant to offer consent even orally after they read the information sheets. Instead, the author explained the research orally (including aims of the research, principal research questions, interviewees' right of withdraw).

'Can I ask some questions?' i.e. an informal way of expressing 'can I interview you?' was frequently used when the author attempted to obtain consent from potential interviewees. The term 'interview' is such a formal word in Chinese. It added so much pressure on the potential interviewees. Most interviewees allowed the author or his assistant to take notes during interviews, but a recorder was strictly prohibited.

Several measures were undertaken by the author to assure the reliability of the data obtained from the mass media. First, the author chose to mainly rely on information disclosed by *XinHua News Agency*, the official press agency of the People's Republic of China. Second, regarding the use of Western media, the author focused on a series of news articles written by journalists or experts, such as Jaime FlorCruz and Malcolm Moore, who have an in-depth understanding of China's political and economic system and have established their reputation in the field of China studies. Finally, the interviewees, especially the journalists and the lawyer, offered valuable insights, which became a key measure to assess the quality of the data from the media. When there was a discrepancy between the two sources, the author chose to rely on interview data rather than the media.

The strike black campaign in Chongqing: a general description

Chongqing is a major city in Southwest China and one of China's four directly-controlled municipalities (the other three are Beijing, Shanghai and Tianjin). Like much of the rest of China, Chongqing's wealth has grown suddenly and dramatically, but the increase in wealth has prompted the return of gangs (Moore 2009b). One point emphasised by most interviewees and a few news reports is that 'Chongqing is far from alone in suffering from organised crime, but has gone further than most cities in tackling it' (Watts 2009: online). Provinces in mainland China, like Yunnan, Guangxi and Guangdong, are suffering from more serious organised crime than Chongqing, but these municipal governments lack the capability of cracking down on these serious organised crime groups.⁹

The man behind Chongqing's latest strike black campaign was its party chief, Bo Xilai. Austin Ramzy characterised Bo as 'an ambitious outsider whose lack of local ties had given him a free hand to pursue his cleanup campaign' (Ramzy 2010b: online). Without Bo's considerable political confidence,¹⁰ it would have been

⁹ *Public security officials and prosecutors*, 20 December 2011, focus group discussions, Chongqing, People's Republic of China; *Lawyer A*, 30 December 2011, interview, Chongqing, People's Republic of China; *Journalist A*, 29 December 2011, interview, Chongqing, People's Republic of China; *Journalist B*, 25 December 2011, interview, Chongqing, People's Republic of China.

¹⁰ Bo Xilai was a member of the Politburo of the Communist Party of China and made no secret of his desire to enter the Politburo Standing Committee in 2012. For more details, please see: Jamie A. FlorCruz (2012), 'The rise and fall of China's Bo Xilai', <<http://www.cnn.com/2012/03/16/world/asia/florcruz-xilai-china/index.html>>, accessed 20 March 2012.

extremely difficult for the Chongqing Municipal Government to launch the war on organised crime.

According to interview data and reports in state-controlled newspapers, such as *China Daily*, organised criminal groups in Chongqing were involved in a wide variety of businesses, from the traditional areas of gambling, prostitution, debt collection, protection, and drug dealing, to the legitimate businesses of the wholesale seafood trade, private bus networks, and nightclubs (Economist 2009; Moore 2009a). The sums of money involved were huge. To take just one example, loan sharking: *China Daily* estimated that ‘the money lent by gangs at exorbitant interest rates [in 2008] crossed 20 billion RMB (\$4.4 billion) or a third of the city’s fiscal income’ (He 2009: online).

The biggest crackdown on Chongqing’s gangsters and their colluding officials aroused particular attention because ‘it was directed, unusually, at the kind of people who count: the wealthy businessmen and powerful officials who controlled the gangs and enabled them to flourish’ (Economist 2009: online). From June 2009, when Chongqing’s crime crackdown campaign began, to March 2010, a total of 3348 suspects were arrested. More than 50 public officials were arrested for allegedly acting as protective umbrellas for local organised criminal groups. Fourteen of these were former high-ranking officials including Wen Qiang, Chongqing’s former director of the municipality’s justice bureau and deputy police chief, and Peng Changjian, deputy chief of the Chongqing Public Security Bureau (Huang 2010b).

Chongqing’s massive crackdown shows the strong links between organised crime and public sector corruption. The protective umbrella, also named the Red Mafia in this paper, is regarded as the most important factor for the resurgence of organised crime groups. The following section discusses the Red Mafia and the political-criminal nexus by analysing one of the most influential protective umbrellas—the Wen Qiang case—uncovered during Chongqing’s strike black campaign.

The Red Mafia and the political-criminal nexus in Chongqing: the Wen Qiang case

This section discusses one of the most influential and widely publicised cases, the Wen Qiang case. Two main aspects are emphasised: the protective umbrella created by corrupt government officials and the Chongqing criminal underworld. This section describes what the Red Mafia looks like in Chongqing, develops a typology of organised crime, and analyses how gangsters develop links with government officials (Fig. 1).

Protective umbrella

Based on information released by the state media source *Xinhua News Agency* between June 2009 and March 2012, this diagram shows how one dominant public official—Wen Qiang—and his seven subordinates established a powerful ‘red umbrella’ providing illegal protection for nine notorious criminal organisations. The operation of this protective umbrella can be dissected as follows.

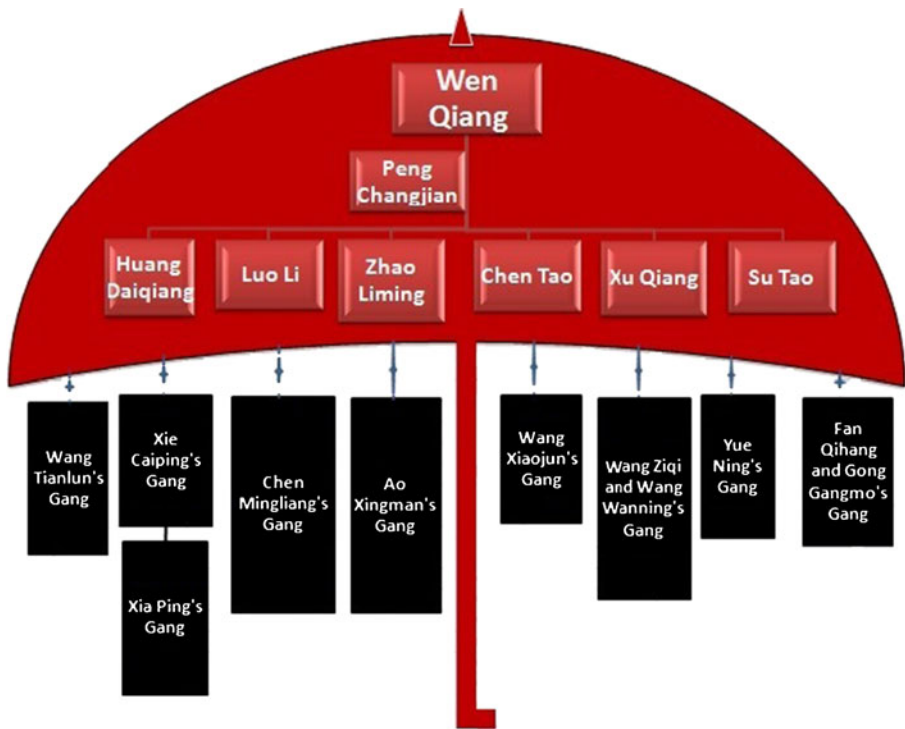


Fig. 1 Wen Qiang's black empire. (Wen Qiang was sentenced to death on 14 April 2010 for a host of charges, including shielding local gangs, taking bribes totalling more than 16 million RMB, failing to account for possessions worth more than 10 million RMB, and rape (Chang 2010). Wen's wife, Zhou Xiaoya, was sentenced to eight years in jail after being convicted of accepting bribes amounting to 4.5 million RMB (Xinhua 2010c). On 24 February 2010, Peng Changjian was sentenced to life in jail for accepting bribes, providing illegal protection for local gangs, and failing to account for his possessions (Xinhua 2010f). Peng's wife, Liu Guanying, was sentenced to three years and six months in prison on 4 April 2010 for accepting bribes and money laundering (Xinhua 2010e). Five senior police officers—Huang Daiqiang, Zhao Liming, Chen Tao, Xu Qiang and Su Tao—were also convicted of protecting gangs, and received jail terms of between 12 and 20 years. Luo Li, former deputy chief of the anti-drug brigade of the Chongqing Municipal Public Security Bureau, was sentenced to death for collaborating with and protecting drug traffickers. Table 1 offers summary information on the nine organisations with an underworld nature that were under Wen's protective umbrella)

Wen Qiang: the 'godfather' of Chongqing's criminal underworld

Wen Qiang served as deputy head of the Chongqing Public Security Bureau from 1992 to 2008 and as director of the Chongqing Justice Bureau from July 2008 to August 2009 (Huang 2010a). Wen was a well-known anti-crime hero before his arrest, as he succeeded in destroying a number of serious organised crime groups, including the infamous Zhang Jun syndicate.¹¹

Wen Qiang became the 'godfather' of the Chongqing criminal underworld and monopolised the business of illegal protection for over ten years due to three main

¹¹ 'The Zhang Jun Syndicate committed crimes in three provinces of China, Hubei, Hunan, and Sichuan... between 1994 and September 2000, the group carried out 12 armed robberies, killed 28 people and injured 20 and looted more 6 million [RMB]' (Zhang 2001: 57).

factors.¹² Firstly, as the senior deputy head of the Chongqing Public Security Bureau, Wen wielded enormous power. He failed to obtain promotion for eleven years, however, which might be the main reason he lost himself in Chongqing's underworld. Secondly, Wen and his subordinates spent their spare time in nightclubs owned by gang bosses, which supplied an ideal opportunity for gangsters to create connections with him. Last but not least, Wen was generous and never broke his promise. He regarded 'the rule of relationship' as being much more important than the rule of law.

Wen Qiang was regarded as 'being at the heart of an extensive network of protection of local gangs for over a decade' (Tran 2009: online). He enabled local gangs who had connections with him or his subordinates to flourish but compelled other gangs who failed to establish such links to withdraw from markets. With assistance from Wen, seven senior police officers not only obtained promotions but also operated their illegal protection business safely and smoothly. Under Wen's umbrella, nine criminal groups had succeeded not only in escaping punishment, but also in regulating and controlling Chongqing's illegal markets, including prostitution, gambling, and drug trafficking (Chang 2010; Xinhua 2010c).

Peng Changjian: Wen's right-hand man

Peng Changjian, former deputy chief of the Chongqing Public Security Bureau, was reportedly a close ally of Wen Qiang. Peng made a significant contribution to the arrest of notorious gangland boss Zhang Jun in September 2000 (Moore 2009c; Wang 2010). Wen rewarded him by promoting him from lowly police officer all the way to police chief, thus making Peng a key member of Wen's black empire.

Prosecutors at the Number One Intermediate People's Court in downtown Chongqing stated that from 1998 to 2009 Peng accepted 4.71 million RMB in bribes, of which over 1.4 million RMB was offered by three gang bosses, Wang Xiaojun, Ma Dang, and Yue Ning (Wang 2010). In order to create a good operating environment for the illegal clubs owned by these gang bosses, Peng ordered police officers not to conduct routine investigations of these clubs but only act if the officers received public tip-offs or obtained evidence. Peng also abused his power to help two senior police officers obtain promotion (Xinhua 2010e, b).

'Six heavenly guardians' of Wen's empire

In Wen's black empire, his subordinates—six senior police officials in Chongqing—were involved in producing and selling protection services to local criminal groups. Wen's black empire was a tightly-knit organisation with a pyramid-like structure: these senior officers acknowledged Wen's hegemony in the structure and worked strictly to Wen's instructions rather than to their job descriptions. Moreover, in order to secure their positions and illegal businesses, these officers kept a good relationship

¹² *Prosecutor A*, 24 December 2011, interview, Chongqing, People's Republic of China; *Prosecutor B*, 21 December 2011, interview, Chongqing, People's Republic of China; *Journalist A*, 29 December 2011, interview, Chongqing, People's Republic of China; *Taxi driver A*, 20 December 2011, interview, Chongqing, People's Republic of China; *Taxi driver B*, 2 January 2011, interview, Chongqing, People's Republic of China.

with Wen by bribing him with large sums of money or expensive gifts.¹³ In return, Wen helped them gain promotion and turned a blind eye to their criminal activities (Zhao et al. 2011).

The criminal underworld in Chongqing: a typology of organised crime

The most powerful protective umbrella in Chongqing was created by Wen Qiang and his subordinates. Under this umbrella, nine organisations with an underworld nature emerged to control the production and distribution of unlawful commodities and services. In order to have in-depth understanding of organised crime in Chongqing, this paper avoids a very detailed description of their criminal businesses and how each gang boss developed relationships with government officials. Instead, it offers a diagram summarising key information on the nine notorious criminal organisations and interprets these criminal organisations from three aspects: structure, activities, and the political-criminal nexus (Table 1).

Structure

Regarding organisational formations of organised crime in China, Xia (2008) suggests that ‘the choice of appropriate organizational form by organized criminal groups is not simple and pure. The organized criminal groups have chosen organizational formations ranging from hierarchic (bureaucratic) structures to market mechanisms and to networks’ (p. 22). This section analyses the structure of the nine organised crime groups under Wen’s umbrella and focuses on three of the most fundamental features: ‘hierarchy’, ‘hermit-crab’-type hybrids¹⁴ and ‘networks’.

Hierarchy Similar to traditional secret societies in ancient China, a hierarchical structure has been adopted by many organised crime groups in contemporary China (Chen 2005; Xia 2008). In response to this phenomenon, the majority of scholars and practitioners tend to regard a pyramid-type hierarchy as the dominant form of criminal organisation.

In Chongqing, the emergence of locally-based criminal groups was largely influenced by the ancient culture of sworn brotherhoods. Moreover, hierarchical

¹³ According to Chinese academic textbook *Xingshi Daan Yaoan Zhongde Fali Zhihui* (Zhao et al. 2011), the information about how Wen’s ‘guardians’ obtained promotions and illegal protection by bribery can be listed as follows. 1) From 2004 to 2008, Huang Daiqiang, deputy head of the criminal police division, bribed Wen and his wife with 90,000 RMB and an Omega watch. 2) Luo Li, deputy head of the city’s drug control department, bribed Wen with 400,000 RMB between 2005 and 2008. 3) In order to obtain assistance from Wen, Zhao Liming, deputy head of the city’s public transport security police division, also bribed Wen with 270,000RMB in the period 2000–2008. 4) Chen Tao, deputy head of the city’s public security police division, bribed Wen with 60,000RMB between 2004 and 2008. 5) Xu Qiang, director of Dianjiang County Public Security Bureau in Chongqing, bribed Wen with 370,000RMB between 2004 and 2008. Moreover, interview data suggests that Su Tao, deputy head of Jiangbei district sub-bureau of the Chongqing Public Security Bureau, had been convicted of offering illegal protection for local gangs and bribing Wen for his promotion.

¹⁴ The term “hermit-crab-type hybrids” was first used by Professor Ming Xia in his 2008 paper titled ‘Organizational formations of organized crime in China: perspectives from the state, markets, and networks’. It refers to criminal groups that ‘take over the shells of legitimate hierarchies’ (p 14).

Table 1 Summary information on the nine organisations with an underworld nature that were under Wen's protective umbrella

Name of gang	Length of activity in years	Start date	Size	Criminal businesses	Main protector
1. Wang Tianlun's Gang	13	1996	23	Monopolisation of the hog slaughtering and pork markets	Wen Qiang and Huang Daiqiang
2. Xie Caiping's Gang	5	2004	22	Gambling	Wen Qiang, Peng Changjian and Zhao Liming
3. Xia Ping's Gang	5	2004	18	Gambling	Xie Caiping
4. Chen Mingliang's Gang	8	2001	34	Prostitution, dispute resolution, gambling and drug trafficking	Wen Qiang, Luo Li and Peng Changjian
5. Ao Xingman's Gang	13	1996	46	Drug production and trafficking, and illegal sale of firearms	Luo Li
6. Wang Xiaojun's Gang	8	2001	24	Prostitution and gambling	Wen Qiang, Peng Changjian, Su Tao and Li Hanbing
7. Wang Ziqi and Wang Wanning's Gang (or Wang Sisters' Gang)	15	1994	Over 20	Prostitution	Chen Tao
8. Yue Ning's Gang	11	1998	31	Prostitution	Wen Qiang, Peng Changjian and Chen Tao
9. Fan Qihang and Gong Gangmo's Gang	3	2006	34	Loan sharking, drug trafficking and gambling	Wen Qiang, Luo Dingjiang, Chen Tao and Yang Zhi

organisations seemed a superior form for many criminal groups, especially those that mainly engaged in locally based criminal activities such as organising prostitution, running gambling dens, and loan-sharking.

For example, Chen Mingliang's gang was regarded as the biggest criminal syndicate in Chongqing's underworld (TimeWeekly 2009; Yi 2010). In common with the typical pyramid structure, there were a variety of ranks and positions within the syndicate. Chen Mingliang was the 'dragonhead'. Lei Deming, an influential underworld figure, was a 'military commander' overseeing defensive and offensive operations. Ma Dang was a financial officer and head of public relations for Chen's group, taking charge of developing relationships with government officials. Key members actively participated in Chen's legal and illegal businesses. The lowest rank consisted of dozens of rank-and-file gang members who carried out routine tasks (Xinhua 2010a).

'Hermit-crab'-type hybrids The existing literature shows that over half the criminal syndicates that were destroyed in Chongqing's latest strike black campaign had legitimate covers. Xia suggests that the primary aim of creating a business front is 'not only [creating] a safe place for the dirty money, but also [providing] a safe haven for criminals through a legitimate gathering site, organizational structure and coherence, and seemingly legal employment' (Xia 2008: 14). Regarding the intermingling of organised crime and public officials, Ko-lin Chin argues that 'the line between legitimate business and illegal conduct had become increasingly blurred' (Jacobs 2009: online). Similarly, Wang Li, a law professor in Chongqing, points out that Chongqing's gangs, like gangs elsewhere in China, are organised around businesses rather than families. He further argues that:

The gangs engaged in the traditional businesses of gambling, prostitution and drug dealing [in the first few years]. But then they set up companies... many of the larger gangs are contained inside legitimate business, with the godfathers also performing the role of chief executive. Inside the business, a small proportion of gangsters were hired in each department, charged with collecting debts and protection fees. The rest of the employees conduct normal business (Moore 2009a: online).

Most of the gangland bosses under Wen's protective umbrella had legitimate covers such as nightclub owners, construction entrepreneurs, motorbike moguls and real estate agents. Some of them were even influential millionaires or billionaires. In addition, a business front also enabled gang bosses to create connections with government officials. For example, Gong Gangmo, a gang boss in Chongqing, bribed former police chief Wen Qiang. Wen admitted in a court hearing that he accepted Gong's bribes, but he emphasised that he did nothing for the gang as he thought Gong was a legal businessman, and he was unclear why Gong offered money to him.

Networks Carlo Morselli defines a network as 'a self-organizing structure that is driven by the emergent behaviour of its parts' (Morselli 2009: 14). A criminal organisation that adopts the criminal network form is able to 'capture "a flexible order", structural arrangements that are lighter on their feet than "slow moving" hierarchies and quick to adjust to changing situations and opportunities' (Varese 2010: 8). The use of networks theory for the study of organised crime has not been widely accepted by most scholars and practitioners in mainland China because they perceive the hierarchical organisation (i.e. pyramid structure) as a superior organisational form. However, based on an enormous number of cases of organised crime exposed during China's anti-crime 'strike hard' campaigns, Xia writes that many hierarchical criminal syndicates evolved into networked forms of organisations to seize the criminal opportunities generated within networks (Xia 2008).

Ao Xingman's gang was the largest drug production and trafficking organisation in Chongqing. The organisational framework created by Ao and his confederates was a powerful criminal network combining the features of two forms, a 'cobweb' and a production and distribution chain.¹⁵ Under the 'cobweb' structure, Ao occupied the centre of the networks. Two other gang bosses, Tan Liren and Li Xiang, ex-members

¹⁵ Xia (2008) offers more detail about 'a cobweb' and 'a production and distribution chain'.

of Ao's gang, developed their own drug production and trafficking organisations (Tian 2012). Tan's gang and Li's gang seemed like second-tier groups and acknowledged the hegemony of Ao Xingman in criminal networks, even though they were loosely connected. Each gang engaged in illegal activities independently and cooperated with each other only when necessary.

Moreover, Ao Xingman succeeded in forming a chain-like structure by linking up supply, demand, and protection lines. The chain began in Burma, from where drugs were smuggled by Ao's gangsters through Yunnan Province to the city of Chongqing. The distribution chain consisted of street gangs as well as 14 notorious criminal groups in Chongqing. The final link in the chain involved distribution in provinces such as Guangdong, Guangxi, and Yunnan. In order to secure his production and distribution chain, Ao also developed a tight relationship with his protector Luo Li, former deputy chief of the anti-drug brigade of the Chongqing Municipal Public Security Bureau (ChinaDaily 2011; Xinhua 2012).

Activities

Two key words, 'monopoly' and 'the provision of illegal goods and services', describe the activities of criminal organisations under Wen's protective umbrella.

Monopoly The word 'monopoly' can be used to describe the activities of Ao Xingman's gang and Wang Tianlun's gang. Ao and two smaller players, Tan Liren and Li Xiang, monopolised Chongqing's illegal drug market with up to an 80% share (Xinhua 2012). Ao's monopoly of the drug market in Chongqing was due to the protection offered by a senior police officer Luo Li. Luo actually helped Ao force his competitors out of the market by arresting other drug traffickers so Ao could expand his market share (Tian 2012). Wang Tianlun, a billionaire and notorious gang boss, monopolised the hog slaughtering and pork markets (41% market share) through threats and violence. Wang's gangsters also forced pig farmers to send their pigs to the slaughtering company owned by Wang, and compelled customers to purchase water-injected meat (Yi 2010).

The provision of illegal goods and services Prostitution is a booming industry in contemporary China. Four out of the nine criminal groups were involved in the prostitution business. Chen Mingliang and Wang Xiaojun, two gangland bosses, organised hundreds of women to engage in the sex trade (Xinhua 2010a, f). Wang and his partners also opened a male prostitution den named '*Luren Gangwan*' (literally, "Traveller's Harbour") in a hotel in central Chongqing (Xinhua 2010f).

Wang Ziqi was regarded as the 'godmother' of prostitution in Chongqing. Ms Wang and her sister Wang Wanning ran a brothel named 'Bright Spot Teahouse' in Chongqing between 1994 and 2009 (Moore 2011). *Xinhua News Agency* disclosed that at least 300 women had been victims of the Wang sisters' gang. Some victims died or went mad (Xinhua 2011b). The mass production of cheap sex was mainly supplied for customers who were not willing or able to spend large amounts of money. By contrast, Yue Ning, a famous figure in Chongqing's entertainment industry, ran two of the most lavish nightclubs and earned a huge amount of money from the business of high-end prostitution (Yi 2010; Yu 2010b).

Gambling is another lucrative business. Five criminal syndicates under Wen's umbrella were involved in running gambling houses. Xie Caiping operated more than 30 gambling dens, including one just across the street from a courthouse (FlorCruz 2009; Ramzy 2010a; Tran 2009; Xinhua 2009). Xia Ping, a friend of Xie Caiping, opened a casino in central Chongqing in 2004 and recruited over thirty members (Xinhua 2010d). In addition, Fan Qihang and Gong Gangmo's gang also operated gambling dens, which contributed over one million RMB to their profits (Feng 2010).

Moreover, these gangs also engaged in online gambling and succeeded in expanding their illegal commercial services in Southeast Asia. For example, Wang Xiaojun's gang obtained 170 million RMB through engaging in organising online gambling between 2001 and 2009. Wang's group also opened four gambling houses in Chongqing in 2003 and expanded its gambling activities to Macau in 2008 (Ma and Wang 2010; Yi 2010). Another gang boss who ran an international gambling ring was Chen Mingliang. Cooperating with gambling casinos in Macau, Chen's gang controlled the 'bate-ficha' business¹⁶ in Chongqing, and took dozens of businessmen (who had to buy chips from Chen) on illegal gambling tours to Macau (Xinhua 2010a).

Dispute resolution became a popular business which also brought huge profits to organised crime groups. Prized for its violent reputation, Chen Mingliang's gang was frequently invited to resolve disputes among private business owners, becoming a well known quasi-governmental organisation (TimeWeekly 2009; Yi 2010). For instance, the dispute over He Lunjiang's alleged 97 million RMB gambling debt was settled after lengthy talks between Chen's follower Lei Deming and gang boss Wang Xingqiang. Due to Chen's outstanding reputation, Wang agreed to reduce the debt to only 20 million RMB. In return, Chen's group levied a service charge of 15 million RMB (TimeWeekly 2009).

Drug production and trafficking in Chongqing were monopolised by three gangs led by gangland boss Ao Xingman. At least 14 criminal organisations were involved in selling and distributing illegal drugs on the streets and in their entertainment clubs. For instance, Fan and Gong's gang engaged in illegally selling 10 kg of methamphetamine (Feng 2010). Yue Ning and Xie Caiping, two gang bosses, provided illegal drugs for their gangsters and customers in their gambling houses and nightclubs (TimeWeekly 2009).

Many gangs in Chongqing under Wen's protective umbrella also participated in loan-sharking, firearms trafficking and distribution, debt collection, and extortion.

The political-criminal nexus

The long-term existence of the nine notorious gangs was largely due to their success in establishing the political-criminal nexus. A nexus is normally created between criminal justice officials and gangsters. Gangsters in Chongqing used four main

¹⁶ The term 'bate-ficha', suggested by Angela Veng Mei Leong, means 'to handle chips, and lots of chips indicate power and profit. So the bate-ficha business simply means the rolling or exchanging of chips between the customers (gamblers) and the bate-ficha guys (dapma-chai) or chip rollers' (p. 86). For more details, please see: A.V.M. Leong, 'The 'Bate-Ficha' business and triads in Macau casinos', *Queensland University of Technology Law and Justice journal*, 2/1 (2004), 83–96.

methods to develop relationships with police officers: kinship ties, bribes, intermediaries or the guanxi network, and infiltration.¹⁷

Kinship ties Kinship or family ties are the most widespread and useful way for gangland bosses to create links with government officials in small towns. However, family ties seem less effective in big cities like Chongqing.¹⁸ Under Wen's umbrella, there was only one criminal organisation—Xie Caiping's gang—creating links with Wen Qiang and his subordinates through kinship ties. Xie Caiping, Wen's sister-in-law, was known as the 'godmother' of the Chongqing criminal underworld. The relationship between Wen and Xie was bad, while Xie had a good relationship with Wen's wife. Thus family ties still worked very well in Xie's criminal business.¹⁹ Thanks to Wen's influence, Xie also maintained a good relationship with local police officers, including Wen's subordinate Zhao Liming, and two other police officers, Guo Sheng and Gan Yong. These ties enabled Xie not only to be an influential female gang boss, but also to be an effective protector who safeguarded the illegal businesses of other gangsters; for example, she offered protection to Xia Ping's gang (Li et al. 2010).

Bribes Bribes in the form of money, free sex, and promotions are frequently used by gangsters to develop friendly relationships with government officials. Chongqing criminal syndicates normally expanded their networks within the Chongqing Public Security Bureau through bribery. For example, in order to secure protection from government officials, Gong and Fan bribed a number of officers, including former police chief Wen Qiang, and three senior officers from the city's public security police division (Yang and Chen 2010). The money offered by Fan and Gong was sent to these corrupt officials as presents for Chinese Spring Festival, the traditional occasion for giving presents and an ideal opportunity to offer bribes.²⁰ Moreover, bribes were offered when money was most needed, for instance when a family member of an official needed medical care, planned to study abroad, or started a new business, or when an official wanted to buy a new house, make some investments, or travel abroad (Chin and Godson 2006; Li 2011).

Chongqing's strike black campaign suggests that sex was also frequently used by gangsters to establish good relationships with police officers. For instance, the Wang sisters provided free sexual services for Chen Tao, former deputy head of the city's public security police division. Chen also asked the Wang sisters to provide sexual services for Chen's colleagues, such as Huang

¹⁷ It is extremely difficult to make distinctions among these four terms. Bribes and guanxi practice are normally used as the fundamental tools for gangsters to infiltrate the political system. Moreover, family or kinship ties are a kind of intermediary or guanxi practice. The reason this paper suggests four distinct terms rather than presenting a general one (i.e. bribes) is that they each play a different role in the formation of the Chinese political-criminal nexus.

¹⁸ *Journalist A*, 29 December 2011, interview, Chongqing, People's Republic of China; *Journalist B*, 25 December 2011, interview, Chongqing, People's Republic of China.

¹⁹ *Journalist A*, 29 December 2011, interview, Chongqing, People's Republic of China; *Journalist B*, 25 December 2011, interview, Chongqing, People's Republic of China.

²⁰ *Prosecutor A*, 24 December 2011, interview, Chongqing, People's Republic of China; *Journalist A*, 29 December 2011, interview, Chongqing, People's Republic of China.

Daiqiang and Wen Qiang (Luo et al. 2010; Xinhua 2011a). Another example was former police chief Wen Qiang, a frequent visitor to Yue Ning's lavish nightclubs. He received VIP treatment—free sexual services—or services charged at 30% discount (Yu 2010a).

Assisting local police officers to attain promotions was the third way to create the political-criminal nexus. It was widely acknowledged that government officials who were bought off by protection seekers were not reliable, while those who became friends of their bribers were more trustworthy, and those who received assistance from gangsters in their promotions were the best and most loyal protectors of all (Pei 2008). Using *guanxi* and money to secure promotion, gangsters in several major cities successfully manipulated rounds of competitions for jobs (Wang 2012). Moreover, the nexus was also created when gangsters provided significant information relating to other criminals' activities or removed the obstacles to promotion for government officials. For instance, Ao Xingman, a notorious gangland boss, provided police officer Luo Li with privileged information about other gangs' involvement in a variety of drug trafficking, distribution, and production activities. With the help from Ao, Luo became a well-known hero in a series of actions against illegal drug activities. In return, Luo overlooked Ao's criminal activities (ChinaDaily 2011; Xinhua 2012). In 2001, following the instructions of Luo, Ao and three confederates murdered Zhang Hao, 'a drug trafficker who threatened to give evidence against Luo after his request for protection was rejected' (ChinaDaily 2011: online). In this case, the links between Luo and Ao were strengthened.

Intermediaries or the guanxi network Examining the links between organised crime and corruption in the European Union, Gounev and Bezlov suggest that 'corrupt exchanges based on [sporadic] relations take place via intermediaries who provide the 'trust' needed for a corrupt deal' (Gounev and Bezlov 2010: 334). Similar to Gounev and Bezlov's arguments about intermediaries, *guanxi* practice in mainland China plays an important role in corrupt exchange. Jones defines *guanxi* practice as 'geared towards the cultivation of long-term mutual trust and the strengthening of relationships' (Jones 1994: 205). As Li (2011: 1) suggests 'it is not that the participants of corruption are compelled to corrupt conduct because of the existence of the *guanxi* practice, but on the contrary, these participants adopt *guanxi* practice as an alternative operating mechanism that facilitates corruption'.

Zhan (2012) analyses the corruption-facilitating roles of the *guanxi* network in post-Mao China. She demonstrates how the communication, exchange, and normative functions of the *guanxi* network facilitate corruption, especially transactional corruption through network ties. Firstly, the *guanxi* network, as the transmitter of information, helps both parties of the transaction secretly find each other, reduces transaction costs, lowers the risks of corrupt exchange and offers a convenient channel of dissemination; secondly, the exchange function of the *guanxi* network enables both holders and receivers to conduct their corrupt transactions within the private club (*guanxi* network), which can significantly lower the risk of being detected by the legal system; finally, the normative function of interpersonal networks can indirectly influence people's susceptibility to corruption and legitimise bribery to a certain extent (Zhan 2012).

Gangland bosses in Chongqing frequently adopted the guanxi network as an important way to facilitate corruption. For example, in mid-December 2003, Wang Tianlun's gangsters killed a pig farmer who refused to send his pigs to the slaughtering company operated by Wang. In order to escape punishment, Wang made use of his guanxi network. With help from a business friend, Wang created links with senior police officer Huang Daiqiang. After accepting bribes, Huang Daiqiang agreed to be an intermediary introducing Wang to police chief Wen Qiang. Wen exerted influence on the Criminal Investigation Department in Chongqing and appointed Huang Daiqiang as a team leader to handle this homicide case (Wu 2009; Yu 2009). As a result, Huang was able to halt the criminal investigation. So Wang and his gangsters temporarily escaped conviction.

Infiltrating the political system Being a member of people's congresses or people's political consultative conferences is a major way for gangland bosses to infiltrate the political system (Xia 2004). In contemporary mainland China, local economic development is inseparable from the entertainment businesses owned by gangland bosses, such as nightclubs, casinos, and the 'red light' districts (Wang 2012). This makes the relationship between the local governments and nightclub managers harmonious rather than hostile. Moreover, illegal entrepreneurs can buy off senior officials and be admitted into people's congresses or people's political consultative conferences.²¹ For instance, Chen Mingliang, a billionaire and notorious gang boss operating prostitution rings, was a member of the People's Congress in Chongqing's Yuzhong District before he was arrested in June 2009. Taking part in people's congresses not only provided Chen with a legitimate cover, but also enabled him to develop friendly relationships with two former police chiefs, Wen Qiang and Peng Changjian.

To sum up, the gangland bosses in Chongqing applied these four methods to establish guanxi with those in positions of power. In return, corrupt government officials secured the nine notorious local gangs' criminal businesses, enabled them to gain access to licit and illicit business opportunities, helped them escape punishment, and assisted them in monopolising local illegal markets. Chongqing's strike black campaign also revealed that high-ranking officials, including members of the Chongqing Higher People's Court, local people's prosecutors, and Communist Party officials, had been detained for their collusion with local gangs (Jacobs 2009).

The Red Mafia and its illegal business: protection as a commodity

Illegal markets, such as prostitution, gambling, and drug trafficking, have increased in China since the early 1990s.²² Qiu Geping argues that China's local governments normally turn a blind eye to illegal markets, such as prostitution and gambling, when the economy of cities is only in its infancy; this has been widely regarded as 'the

²¹ Senior government officer A, 8 February 2012, interview, Shandong, People's Republic of China; Senior manager (B) from a construction company, 9 January 2011, interview, Shandong, People's Republic of China.

²² Federico Varese analyses foreign triads in China in *Mafias on the move* (2011). He offers a similar argument about the development of large illegal markets in China since 1978.

hidden rule’ of attracting foreign investors who are regular consumers of these services.²³

Denizens of the criminal underworld are unable to make use of state-sponsored protection and enforcement mechanisms to safeguard their personal security and guarantee their property rights, or resolve disputes, because they are operating outside the law (Hill 2003; Wang 2011). For illegal markets to operate effectively, criminals must provide governance institutions themselves to ‘define and enforce property rights, adjudicate disputes, and mitigate the harms of externalities’ (Skarbek 2011: 702). However, gangs in China fail to limit negative outside interferences, especially threats posed by the criminal justice system such as police extortion, criminal investigation, and crime crackdowns organised by both central and local governments. The inability of gangs to rely on state-sponsored formal protection mechanisms or to defend themselves leads to a huge demand for protection. As Varese argues: ‘lack of protection implies that there will be more opportunities to meet that demand, and hence that meeting it will be more profitable than elsewhere’ (Varese 2004: 145).

In post-Mao China, the booming illegal markets have created demand for alternative sources of protection. Meanwhile, a supply of people who possess authority and specialise in abusing power is available within China’s socialist market. The extensive literature on the theory of corruption in communist and post-communist countries has established that the Chinese Central Government and the rule of law have failed to control widespread corruption (Manion 2004; Pei 2009; Steidlmeier 1999; Sun 1999, 2004). He (2000: 245) shows that ‘the extent of corruption has increased dramatically and sharply since 1978 with the situation becoming even worse after in the 1990s’. Lo (1993) suggests that the party-state controls the means of production without sufficient supervision, which enables Party cadres to abuse their power for private gain. Moreover, the existence of the *guanxi* network encourages police officers to collude with organised crime groups for private gain as the political and legal system fails to specify and enforce clear criteria for the exercise of police power.

In the absence of strong government and effective self-protection associations, an alternative system of governance—the Red Mafia, consisting of an enormous number of government officials who specialise in abusing power—has emerged to settle disputes for illicit groups and safeguard them against negative outside influences.

The existing literature shows that both centralised and decentralised governance institutions acquire resources in three ways, as Skarbek suggests: ‘relying on people’s inherent cultural preference to contribute, increasing the quality or quantity of the good to entice contributions, abusing threats and violence against people who do not contribute’ (Skarbek 2011: 702; Wintrobe 1990, 1998). Past research mainly focuses on how groups finance governance by loyalty and repression, while this paper reports on the Red Mafia in China and suggests the abuse of power by police officers as a fourth instrument for financing governance.

The Red Mafia successfully obtains resources by increasing the benefits of participation and raising the cost of refusing to participate. To be specific, creating a political-criminal nexus or ‘wearing a red hat’ has become the most effective way for organised crime groups to gain extra-legal protection. Interview data suggests that

²³ *Qiu Geping*, 11 January 2012, interview, Shanghai, People’s Republic of China.

it is impossible for local gangs to have a long-term existence if they fail to create links with government officials, especially those from the criminal justice system.²⁴ Large sums of money, expensive gifts, free sexual services, and assistance with promotion are usually offered by gangsters to public officials, especially police officers (Chin and Godson 2006; Chung et al. 2006; Punch 2009; Punch and Gilmour 2010). In return, corrupt officials offer illegal protection to their bribers, such as protection against extortion conducted by public officials, protection of criminal businesses, protection against police harassment, protection against criminal investigation and protection against legal punishment. Corrupt officials also facilitate the supply of essential information from the criminal justice system, the use of officials' personal networks for gangsters to create extensive links, and the provision of assistance in gangs' market competition.

A case study of Chongqing shows that 'gangs are infiltrating government at ever-higher levels, even into the senior reaches of provincial governments and central ministries' (Economist 2009: online). Interview data shows that the nexus between gangsters and low-ranking government officials seems tight, while the links between gangsters and high-ranking officials are sometimes loose because these senior officials seldom deal protection directly with gangsters. In Wen Qiang case, for example, the gang bosses only obtained protection services directly from Wen if Wen's 'heavenly guardians' were unable to provide sufficient protection.²⁵ In one such incident, gangsters wanted to escape punishment for committing a murder, but Wen's subordinates did not possess the authority to interrupt the criminal investigation. Wen did it instead.²⁶

Moreover, apart from services directly offered by the Red Mafia, for example, 'protecting criminals' businesses', 'protecting the criminals from law enforcement authorities', and 'actively participating in criminals' businesses' (Chin and Godson 2006), protection services are also exchanged within protective umbrellas that are organised as pyramids where high-ranking officials sell protection to the low- and mid-level officials who deal with gangsters directly. The rule of the protection market in the criminal underworld may be as follows: high-ranking officials are top-level producers and sellers, while low-ranking officials buy protection from their 'bosses' and resell it to individuals who are willing to purchase extra-legal protection for their criminal businesses.²⁷

Low- and mid-ranking police officers protect these notorious gangs directly, while high-ranking officers acted behind the scenes guaranteeing the work. This is how the

²⁴ *Senior police officer A*, 12 February 2012, interview, Shandong, People's Republic of China; *Mei Chuanqiang*, 27 December 2011, interview, Chongqing, People's Republic of China; *Public security officials and prosecutors*, 20 December 2011, focus group discussions, Chongqing, People's Republic of China; *Senior official B* from construction company, 07 February, interview, Shandong, People's Republic of China. Links between organised crime and judicial corruption persist even in former communist countries in Eastern Europe. For more information see: Zhillia (2011).

²⁵ *Journalist A*, 29 December 2011, interview, Chongqing, People's Republic of China.

²⁶ *Journalist A*, 29 December 2011, interview, Chongqing, People's Republic of China; *Journalist B*, 25 December 2011, interview, Chongqing, People's Republic of China.

²⁷ *Prosecutor A*, 24 December 2011, interview, Chongqing, People's Republic of China; *Prosecutor B*, 21 December 2011, interview, Chongqing, People's Republic of China; *Journalist A*, 29 December 2011, interview, Chongqing, People's Republic of China; *Taxi driver A*, 20 December 2011, interview, Chongqing, People's Republic of China; *Taxi driver B*, 2 January 2011, interview, Chongqing, People's Republic of China.

Red Mafia controls the production and distribution of illegal protection in the criminal underworld.

Conclusion

‘Red Mafia’ is the collective term, coined in this paper, for corrupt public officials in mainland China, mainly from the criminal justice system, who attempt to monopolise the protection business in the criminal underworld. Since China started its economic reform and opening up policies in 1978, illegal markets such as gambling, prostitution and drug trafficking have been growing in mainland China, and this growth intensified after the 1990s. This has been mirrored by the growth of organised crime groups and the resurgence of the criminal underworld.

Chongqing’s strike black campaign suggests that the failure of organised crime groups to protect themselves leads to a huge demand for extra-legal protection. A steady supply of government officials who specialise in producing and selling illegal protection by abusing power has arisen to meet this demand in China’s socialist market. Although the Red Mafia operates like a Mafia group attempting to control the production and distribution of private protection, there is a difference: Mafia groups mainly depend on the use of violence, while the Red Mafia, i.e. corrupt government officials, produce and sell protection by abusing their power.

After accepting bribes, government officials, acting as ‘Mafioso’, ‘provide regulatory favours to the gangster-businessmen and sometimes even tip-off to those who are under police investigation’ (Zhang and Chin 2008: 187). These corrupt government officials, especially police officers, also make a great contribution to gangs’ monopolisation of illegal markets.

Chongqing’s strike black campaign also suggests that high-ranking officials not only from the criminal justice system but also from the Communist Party have been involved in the protection business in the criminal underworld. This differs from the viewpoint suggested in Chin and Godson’s 2006 paper, which argues that the political-criminal nexus is ‘primarily a nexus between gangsters and low- and mid-level government officials from the criminal justice system’ (Chin and Godson 2006: 5).

High-ranking officials’ involvement in the political-criminal nexus suggests that protection also becomes a commodity exchanged within protective umbrellas. By abusing administrative and law-enforcing power, high-ranking government officials provide extra-legal protection for mid-and low-level officials who provide organised crime groups with illegal protection. Services offered by these high-ranking officials include assisting lower-ranking officials in their promotions, protecting corrupt officials’ illegal protection business, and protecting corrupt officials from punishment. Sometimes these high-ranking officials have no direct contact with gangsters, protecting them indirectly through their underlings.

To sum up, this paper analyses the rise of the Red Mafia and emphasises its significant role in the growth of organised crime and the resurgence of the criminal underworld in post-Mao China. Varese (2010) defines a Mafia group as a special type of organised crime group. He suggests the distinguishing characteristic of the Mafia is its attempts to govern the criminal underworld by supplying private protection services to individuals engaged in illicit markets. The existing literature shows that

many mafia-like organisations have emerged in mainland China to meet the huge demand for private protection due to the corruptibility of government officials as well as a lack of the rule of law (Wang 2011). However, these groups have failed to control the extra-legal protection business. Instead, the Red Mafia, which specialises in the supply of unlawful protection by abusing power, dominates this lucrative business in the criminal underworld. To what extent ‘protection’ offered by the Red Mafia is actually demanded by customers and to what extent it negatively affects on China’s socialist economy are issues that deserve further research.

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