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‘Forget it, Jake. It’s Chinatown’: The policing of Chinese organised crime in the UK

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Abstract

This article outlines the impact and changing nature of Chinese organised crime in the United Kingdom (UK). It reviews the conventional policing approaches to the problem in the UK and in China, and argues they are limited in their scope and could be substantially improved. It suggests this is possible by employing police specialists here and in-country. The evidence for the paper has been collected from interviews with the relevant law enforcement and government personnel in the UK and in China in 2010 and again in 2014–15.

Keywords

The policing of organised crime, Chinese organised crime

Research relating to the threat posed by Chinese organised crime to the UK is scarce, but available evidence (what little there is) suggests that this threat is changing. The lack of recent research hinders definitive judgement, but it seems that these changes have two key dimensions: the first is that the threat from locally based triads (secret societies) closely connected to Chinatowns with transnational links primarily to Hong Kong has diminished and been replaced by mainland Chinese networks which operate across the UK and have transnational links to mainland China (Dees, 2013; Silverstone, 2011; Wang, 2013). The second is that the types of criminality in which Chinese organised crime is involved have expanded. These now range from serious and organised crime such as production and exportation (to the UK) of firearms and new psychoactive substances through to mundane but financially profitable activities of copyright

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infringement through the import and distribution of counterfeit goods. In between these two extremes lie several aspects of criminality which relate to China's emergence as a top sending country for international students and its prominent position as the key manufacturer and exporter in the world: the importation of counterfeit cigarettes and loose tobacco, the smuggling of migrants and criminality connected to illegal immigration such as the setting up of bogus colleges, visa fraud, illegal working and the laundering of the proceeds of crime to China (ECMDDA, 2014; Europol, 2013; Shen et al., 2010; Treverton et al., 2009). This article will first explore how the threat from Chinese organised crime has changed and then show how these changes are confounding an effective policing response.

Methodology

The data for this article were collected during two discrete time periods. The first was in 2010 and accompanied a study of the incidence of Chinese organised crime in the UK. The research involved speaking to (N = 60) law enforcement practitioners, current and retired, who were tasked with combating Chinese organised crime in some capacity. The second batch of interviews (N = 30) were conducted during 2014–15 with, in some instances, the same practitioners who remained in post and also with law enforcement personnel who have been appointed since then and are currently tasked with tackling Chinese organised crime. All the interviews were conducted under the guarantee of anonymity. The interviews were garnered from the key agencies/organisations: the Foreign and Commonwealth Office; non-government organisations; local and specialist law enforcement organisations; Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs; the UK Border Force.¹

The changing nature of the Chinese diaspora

The Chinese diaspora have long been the most successful immigrant group educationally and entrepreneurially in the UK. Descendants of earlier migrants from Hong Kong form a pre-eminent example of ethnic success; these are among the best-educated and highestearning minorities in the UK, often being held up by politicians as an example of industry and ethnic integration (DES, 2006). This success has been attained despite three underlying trends within the broader community, which are not in themselves problematic except within this criminal context: geographical segregation, employment specialisation and income inequalities.

Geographically the separation is apparent in London, as well as in Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool, where there are Chinatowns with concentrations of Chinese supermarkets and restaurants. The relative success of the legal Chinese community masks some marked inequalities which stem from long-standing and ongoing involvement in the catering industries. For example, there are up to 12,000 Chinese takeaway outlets and 3,000 Chinese restaurants in Britain (John, 2001). This has ramifications in terms of wages and, in a survey conducted in London in 2005 on the

subject of migrant employment, 27% of migrants born in China were employed in the hotel and restaurant sector and, for those born in Hong Kong, the proportion was 26%. According to the same survey, pay rates for sectors of employment are lowest in the hotels and restaurants sector and therefore it is unsurprising that Chinese people are also over-represented in the lowest-earning groups (DMAG, 2005).

All of these pre-existing issues of segregation, specialisation and income inequalities have provided cover for, and been exacerbated since the late 1980s by, a rising inflow of low-skilled economic migrants from mainland China, in particular but not exclusively from Fujian and Zhejiang (Kirby and Penna 2012; Liang et al., 2008; Pieke, 2004). Academic interest in this issue peaked subsequent to the tragic deaths of illegal migrants in Dover (2000) and Morecombe Bay (2004). The lack of academic work since might be taken as an indication that illegal migration has decreased, but this would be a mistake. It is estimated that there are between 150,000 and 200,000 illegal migrants of Chinese origin in the UK (Wu et al., 2010). There is an evolving three-way split between the wealthy children of mainlanders here primarily to study, the high-achieving descendants of Hong Kong Chinese and a disproportionately male illegal adult population, predominantly but not exclusively from the province of Fujian. The illegal community is amorphous so there are no definitive figures on its size, but a recent report estimates that the Chinese population in London could be 'as large as 250,000 or it could be greater still, and as many as half this number could be undocumented' (Pharoah et al., 2009: 23).

The changing nature of Chinese criminal networks

It is within the aforementioned Chinatowns, especially in the poorly paid catering industries, that Triad groups have historically been active throughout the UK. However, both interviews with law enforcement personnel and recent academic literature confirm the declining influence of the Triads both in the UK and elsewhere (Chu, 2005; Huisman, 2008; Silverstone, 2011; Wang, 2013; Zhang and Chin, 2003, 2008), even if in the popular imagination their influence persists. As Zhang and Chin (2008: 191) write of human smuggling networks:

Because these networks do not have a turf, or a name, or a leader, or sworn members, they are difficult for law enforcement authorities in host countries to understand or penetrate...as a result the local authorities simply lump all these networks together and call them the 'Chinese mafia', the 'Chinese triad'...

Although there remain criminal vestiges and inflated rumours of Triad influence, their everyday activities have been significantly curtailed.² This is due to the Triads' hierarchical structures being too cumbersome to benefit from transnational criminal enterprises such as people smuggling or counterfeit cigarette selling, which depend on fluid networks. Instead it is new criminal networks of Chinese mainlanders who are the significant actors within many criminal markets.

This is not to say that preformed organised crime groups have arrived from China in a strategic way (due to hostile policing or criminal expansion from the mainland) but rather that the majority of illegal migrants³ become involved in criminal networks here, in response to their need for funds or work (Morselli et al., 2011; Silverstone, 2011). As recent research has made explicit, the pursuit and the subsequent acquisition of money are among the key drivers for these illegal migrants (Pharaoh et al., 2009; Silverstone, 2011). The desire to make money needs to be set against the complex social context within Fujian and Zhejiang but, for the purposes of this article, motivation can be reduced to a simple economic calculation. In research conducted in 2010, within a sample of 25 respondents from the illegal community, the mean fee paid to be smuggled was £15,800, although the fee varied from £8,500 to £24,000. In addition to this, almost all illegal migrants borrow money to fund the journey at commercial rates, which in this sample involved a mean interest rate of 15.6% and varied from 10% to 30%. Generally, faced with a rapidly rising debt, there is a commercial imperative to earn the money back as quickly as possible whilst taking as little risk as possible (Silverstone, 2011).

Therefore it is unsurprising that migrants are involved with illegal businesses, where they can source products cheaply from the mainland and sell at great profit in the UK. For example, they were heavily involved in the wholesale production and street distribution of copied DVDs, the value of which is estimated to run into the hundreds of millions (Treverton et al., 2009). Second, they play a significant role in the production, importation and retail of counterfeit and untaxed cigarettes and tobacco. HM Revenue and Customs estimated that up to January 2012, 50 tonnes of untaxed tobacco were being sent to the UK from China each month by predominantly Fujianese sources. This is 'destalked' by bonded labour and sold on to organised crime groups (HMRC 2008 Research interviews, 2014). Third, Chinese manufacturers are the key providers of synthetic drugs such as ketamine, mephedrone and synthetic cannabis, which have become increasingly popular in the UK (Power, 2013). Currently it is not clear what their level of involvement is within the cannabis cultivation industry, but research indicates that, as the number of cannabis factories within the UK has continued to grow, so has the role of Chinese crime groups (Silverstone, 2011; Wang, 2013).

Finally, as is often the case, those most likely to be exploited within criminal enterprises are women. In a patriarchal society which survives Mao's efforts at reform, they are more likely to be making migrations at the bequest of family members and they form the most vulnerable group within the UK. It is therefore unsurprising that Chinese sex workers and Chinese brothels play an increasing role within the British sex industry. In London this is abundantly clear in the blatant advertisements of 'massage' services in 'Chinatown'. A survey by the Association of Chief Police Officers (as was) identified migrant involvement in the off-street sex trade. Chinese people are also regularly near the top of foreign nationalities featured within the National Referral Mechanism, a mechanism used to identify and support victims of trafficking in the UK (Home Office, 2014). It should, however, be noted that recent research conducted with Chinese sex workers and the networks of agents and pimps around them in America, South East Asia and China concluded that, despite the aforementioned exploitation allegations, Chinese

sex workers are far more likely to be smuggled than trafficked (Chin and Finckenauer, 2012).⁴ Nevertheless, this does not mean that trafficking does not occur and, once they are in the country, a minority of migrants who are vulnerable due to their illegal status may well be subject to trafficking by others based in the UK. As other authors have previously concluded, the two areas of concern in relation to these vulnerable people are housekeeping positions and sex work in brothels, both of which are frequently advertised as potential employment in the Chinese media (Gourdolan and Lalani, 2009; Mai, 2009).⁵

The evidence for criminal activity is evident in the rare moments of internecine conflict which result in murders or other serious violence and therefore prompt police investigations (Dees, 2013) but also in the hundreds of advertisements for semi-legal services, illegal employment and several kinds of businesses which are prepared to subvert the restrictions set up by the British immigration system (Silverstone, 2011). They include, for example, illegal employment and smuggling services, provision of false documents such as driving licences, provision of impostors to pass both International English Language Testing System and Citizenship Tests and commercial sexual services. These are all available through the Chinese press. Meanwhile counterfeit or non-taxed loose tobacco cigarettes can be bought within London's Chinatown with ease, in the way one might access an open drug market. Finally, and perhaps unexpectedly, rather than use the 'hawala' banking systems, many illegal migrants use Chinese-owned money remittances services which advertise openly and are registered legally to launder money back to China (Silverstone, 2011). It is notable that banks in rural areas of Fuqing County in Fujian offer a range of international money transfer services. These banks are often located in rural areas where the lack of development would indicate that such international transfer services are not required by local businesses.

Therefore, it is argued here that the label 'Chinese organised crime' covers several types of crime and obscures four distinct types of criminal networks which can operate independently or join together. First, there are smuggling networks which profit solely from the journey (Pieke, 2004; Soudijn, 2006; Zhang, 2008). Second, there are business entrepreneurs who manufacture tobacco, DVDs and designer drugs in China and look to trade with legal migrants residing in the UK, who might then enlist illegal migrants to distribute them. Third, there are elements of the diaspora population who offer illegal services which can make a migration successful, such as in the provision of illegal employment or false documents. Then finally, there is a revolving population of at least 80,000 migrants, all desperate to earn back their smuggling fee and then make their journey worthwhile. It is these disparate, opportunistic and transnational groups which British law enforcement has to tackle.

Enforcement

Unsurprisingly, given the complexities outlined above, the policing of organised crime has proved a vexing issue for British policing. Since the 1970s successive governments

have acknowledged that local police units are unable to deal with the investigative complexities that it presents. Instead they have repositioned the threat from organised crime as a threat to national security⁶ (Sheptycki, 2007) and therefore deserving of the focus of national policing organisations. First was the National Crime Squad (NCS), followed by the National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS) and then the Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA) and, during the course of the research, the arrival of the National Crime Agency (NCA).

At the same time, between the years 2009 and 2013, the attempt to tackle organised crime effectively has also had to situate itself within the politics of policing austerity. In relation to the specialist policing of organised crime, the budget for SOCA was £476 million in 2009–10, while in its first year funding for the NCA will be approximately £407 million (Sproat, 2014: 255), with the latter having a far broader remit than its predecessor. There has also been a substantial reduction in police numbers, as there are approximately 17,000 fewer police officers at the time of writing since 2010 (Newburn, 2015).

These ongoing changes in the constitution and nomenclature of those tasked with policing organised crime obscure three broader and long-standing tensions which underlie the endeavour. There has been a concerted response from successive governments to increase the legislative powers available to those tasked with policing organised crime in the UK,⁷ thus creating a centralised national policing resource indisputably more powerful than its predecessors. Simultaneously, though, there has also been a countervailing narrative that stresses the Peelian policing principles of community policing and local accountability. For example, on the one hand the same Labour government which created the post of Police Community Support Officers, on the other hand created SOCA. The latter included former senior members of the security services and guarded its intelligence in a similarly defensive way.

The second general tension has been between those who argue that organised crime is best tackled by a multi-agency approach (involving Police, HM Customs and/or private industry) focusing on a specific problem (such as organised immigration crime) and those who think it is best tackled by a singular organisation with its own bespoke organised crime agent. What follows from this debate is a third tension concerning the expertise of those agents. Should there be country specialists, with core expertise in, for example, China, or generalists who are able to tackle organised crime wherever it appears on the globe? Although there has been a clear move towards more multi-agency working (as clearly set out in the 2013 Home Office Serious and Organised Crime Strategy), none of these three tensions had been resolved and, during the course of the research, it was evident that there were both specialist agents and multiple agencies, generalists and country experts (both local and national), all tasked with tackling the different manifestations of Chinese organised crime.

To unpick these broader issues, in relation to understanding and improving the policing response to Chinese organised crime, it is helpful to outline briefly the National Intelligence Model (NIM). The 'NIM is a business model for law enforcement' and provides an intelligence-led approach to policing (O'Connor, 2005). The NIM

configured criminality with a tiered hierarchy reflecting law enforcement territorial infrastructure. 'Level 1: Local issues – usually crime, criminals, anti-social behaviour and a concomitant need for reassurance – that can be managed within a Basic Command Unit (BCU); Level 2: These are cross-border issues; Level 3: Serious and organised crime, terrorism or other extremist activity operating on a national or international level' (O'Connor, 2005: 17). Although much admired (James, 2013), it has been recognised that the implementation of the NIM model can leave gaps in enforcement and therefore every effort should be made to join up the policing of each level (Gilmore, 2008; O'Connor, 2005). Drawing on recent interviews with law enforcing personnel working at all levels of the NIM model, we will review the effectiveness of this current policing response.

Policing at NIM level 1

The policing of ethnic minority communities has proved especially problematic for the British police service (Bowling and Philips, 2002), characterised as it is by an enduring lack of trust between communities and a stubborn inability on the part of the police service to make itself visibly represent the communities which it polices (Rollock, 2009). As a minority community, the Chinese are extremely unusual in having had a specialist units dedicated to their welfare. During the 1980s the police service took the unusual step of setting up specialist units in Manchester, Liverpool and London to police their Chinese communities. By 2009, these units had been reduced to a single unit, the Metropolitan Police's Charing Cross Chinatown Unit. This unit, which had six full-time officers, was active in the borough of Westminster. Despite its immediate policing role being geographically conscribed, the officers' expertise was highly sought after nationally (Dees, 2012) and continues to be so (Research interviews, 2015). An in-depth knowledge and understanding is vital in tackling Chinese criminality, shielded as it is by language and culture that is not well understood by the mainstream Police Service. The unit and its officers were singled out as having provided significant help, advice and assistance to national forces which were unable to make progress in investigations owing to cultural and linguistic barriers (Research interviews, 2015). The research revealed that the unit's community-led approach had also proven effective from 2000 in reducing the impact of existing Hong Kong Triads, as restaurant owners reported to these officers any efforts by the Triads to extort their profits (Dees, 2012; Research interviews, 2014).

This is despite the fact that it is only in the last three years that the Metropolitan police appointed a Chinese (Cantonese)-speaking officer to police Chinatown, the first officer with this skill in 26 years. However, rather than building on acknowledged success and looking to recruit Mandarin-speaking officers who can communicate with the new diasporas from Fujian, there has been a recent retraction of the unit's size and it has now declined to the point where even the Chinatown unit in London has been dismantled. It is argued here that this lack of culturally attuned Chinese-speaking officers is not inconsequential. If, for example, a Chinese person is stop-checked by police and gives 'Li' as their name it will be recorded as such. However 'Li' can be translated into 30–40

different Chinese characters; the value and accuracy of the intelligence collected is then greatly diminished. If this information is subsequently shared or used to cross-reference information with Chinese authorities it will have no value whatsoever. In a recent interview, the challenges faced by the ‘average PC’ in investigating foreign organised criminals were described as ranging from working out whether documents in Mandarin are of evidential value when doing a raid to understanding whether the person speaking to you in the street in Chinese is asking for directions or trying to report a crime (Research interviews, 2015). From this year, as reductions to police budgets are implemented, there remain just two officers to police Chinatown (down from six in 2009) and they form part of a wider West End neighbourhood policing team.

Policing at NIM level 2

According to recent research, ‘the establishment of SOCA exacerbated the problem of intelligence gaps. The organisation deliberately distanced itself from policing. Its leaders chose to distance it from the NIM and in doing so created a Level 2 gap, then attempted to plug it by leaving police forces to fill in’ (Stanier, 2012: 121). The government has responded to this gap by establishing and resourcing Regional Organised Crime Units (ROCU) which operate across England and Wales on a regional basis. These units comprise mainly police officers and staff but can also have embedded representatives from other agencies such as the NCA, HMRC and Border Force. When locally based, uniformed/CID officers in a force identify criminality that they believe ranks highly enough on the National Intelligence Model (NIM) that they can request the ROCU to continue the investigation. As the connection between the majority of police officers and the NCA, the ROCU plays a vital role in countering organised crime. In practice, though, it seems that the links between the ROCU and NCA are not always as strong as the multiagency model would suggest. An interviewee commented that, while the NCA has equipment stationed in an adjacent office to the ROCU, it does not seem to have the personnel resource to use it (Research interviews, 2015). It is also unclear how well equipped these units are to tackle threats from Chinese and, more widely, non-Englishspeaking organised crime groups (OCGs), as this recent, seemingly successful, case study illustrates.

An investigation involved an estimated £14 million money-laundering operation. The modus operandi of the OCG was to control bank accounts set up in the name of Chinese nationals (many of whom were illegal migrants) who worked for the OCG in brothels, on cannabis farms and elsewhere. Money was paid in at locations across England and Wales and withdrawn from specific cashpoints in central London. The investigation found that one of the individuals in the OCG had access to over 15 different accounts into which money had been paid from over 60 locations across England and Wales. This money was then almost all withdrawn from a specific location in central London, with particular proximity to London’s Chinatown. Over the course of two years the same individual who controlled these 15 accounts spent an estimated £4.4 million in one

Leicester Square casino – potentially as a means of laundering the money (Research interviews, 2015).

Two significant challenges were noted by law enforcement personnel involved in the operation: the impact of austerity on policing, and barriers posed by language difficulties. For example, when one of the homes of one of the men involved in the OCG was raided, it was found to have 300 mobile phones. It was thought these were being used to manage advertisements for sex services and other criminal activity. However, only a small number of the phones were investigated for information or links to other criminality/criminals. According to an officer in the case, this was because investigation is expensive and it can take three months for a phone to be forensically examined and the information downloaded. Perhaps more challenging still, the information on the phones was in Chinese. It was too expensive to pay for translation and it would also take a significant period of time for each phone to be examined. As such, a wealth of potential intelligence and information contained on the phones was not thoroughly investigated (Research interviews, 2015).

Nevertheless, the operation resulted in the prosecution of 26 Chinese and Hong Kong nationals, with the sentences ranging from 18 months to 5½ years for offences including money laundering and brothel management. Additionally, £1.6 million was recovered through the Proceeds of Crime Act. This may, then, appear to be a successful operation with a large number of convictions and money recovered while investigating a Chinese OCG operating nationally. However, despite the operation and prosecution continuing over several years and a large number of arrests, it would seem the operation of the OCG itself was not affected. Within days of the raids which led to the prosecutions, raids which saw brothels closed down and ‘key’ figures in the operation seized, the same advertisements for brothels and other services reappeared in the papers. For the operation to resume within such a short period of time indicates either the large scale of the group, or that the key players in the organisation were not identified. Equally, whilst a large amount of money was confiscated, it was acknowledged that a larger amount of money was not, and was suspected of having been remitted to China (Research interviews, 2015). The futility of trying to repatriate this money once it left the UK and reached China was also openly acknowledged. Even if a court makes an order to recover the money, this will not happen as the Chinese do not currently have the legislation, resources or necessarily the will to recover it on behalf of British law enforcement.

Policing at NIM level 3

The NCA came into being in October 2013 and is described as (NCA, 2014: 1):

...an intelligence-led agency driven by a central intelligence hub. This provides a single picture of all the threats from serious and organised crime. This collective intelligence directly informs the decisions of the NCA, allowing it to have maximum impact when it comes to fighting crime.

Its remit is also to improve coordination. The extended powers it has to task local law enforcement in tackling organised crime imply that there were weaknesses in the performance of its predecessor. Certainly within the academic community the general efficiency of SOCA has been cast into doubt from its inception to its demise (Addicott, 2010; Sproat, 2014). Indeed, the recent HMIC (2015: 14) inspection of the NCA concludes 'it inherited, mainly from the Serious Organised Crime Agency, poor information technology, analytical capability, and relationships with the police'.

In our experience the understanding of Chinese organised crime within SOCA was patchy. Its main strength was the employment of staff who had previous experience within the Chinatown unit and therefore had significant operational experience within the community. Research interviews undertaken in 2010 reported that there had been some successes at this level. For example, when the Fujianese first started to arrive in the UK, there was a spate of kidnappings in which local illegal migrants were attacked and then ransoms demanded from relatives in Fujian (Wang, 2013). The then Metropolitan police kidnap unit proved effective at liaising with its counterparts within the Ministry of Public Security, either directly or through the SOCA international liaison network described below, to prevent the ransoms being collected and to arrest the participants. One of SOCA's main weaknesses was the concentration on purported 'Mr Bigs' of organised crime, meaning that it missed networks of Chinese organised criminals who were not involved in class A drugs or activity that did not merit this accolade. Additionally, its air of secrecy meant there was a detachment from local policing where wellinformed sources and expertise are situated.

Internationally, as the NCA has enlarged in scope in the context of aforementioned budgetary constraints, other agencies have reversed their involvement in organised crime: Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs has reduced its workforce significantly and lost approximately 40% of the former HM customs and exercise investigation and intelligence capacity to SOCA (HMIC, 2009). At the same time, with one or two exceptions,⁸ the security services have moved away from organised crime, faced with the serious and sustained threat from violent extremists⁹ claiming to act in the name of Islam. Finally, there are the Home Office Immigration Enforcement, Risk and Overseas Liaison Network (RALON) and Border Force. Border Force enforcement work takes place at the border to deny illegal entry and immigration enforcement target illegal migrants within the UK. The RALON network consists of an international network of immigration officers seconded abroad to tackle organised immigration crime upstream. However, their mandate to combat organised crime is far more constrained than the other agencies and their ability to conduct on-site visits to companies they suspect of fraudulently sponsoring students has been curbed (Research interviews, 2010).

This leaves the NCA's liaison officers in China, who were already conducting a difficult job, relatively poorly supported. As Harfield (2008: 493) has previously observed, 'The role of the liaison officer is not always straightforward and is constrained by the political circumstances of the host nation and the fact that liaison officers have no authority to investigate directly in their host nation...The liaison community operates within a context of routine frustrations and multiple agency agenda'. It could also be

added that there is an element of competition between countries in their efforts to get local law enforcement organisations to cooperate. In a country such as China which has an extremely well-developed security apparatus and still implements the death penalty for a declining but still wide range of offences, this job is even harder (Hogg, 2011). This is especially so when some local law enforcement personnel in Fujian are complicit in the illegal smuggling of people and celebrate their safe arrival as guests at local banquets (Pieke, 2004; Zhang, 2008; Research interviews, 2010). Liaison officers have to be extremely careful in deciding which information to share and then managing its discrete transfer. This problem is compounded by geography: Fujian is far from Beijing and, though the Chinese police are a national organisation, there are significant issues in relation to forming local arrangements within the region. The nearest British base in the region is in the city of Guangzhou, a city of around 10 million, over 600 miles from Fujian.

The Serious Organised Crime Strategy (HM Government, 2013) suggests that overseas resources from UK government agencies will work as ‘a single virtual team’ to join up their working. However, it ought to be mentioned that SOCA had a similar remit but research showed that working relationships, either between agencies or between SOCA officers from different occupational backgrounds, were far from seamless. Differences between occupational cultures which utilise slightly different classification systems and intelligence monitoring can result in services hoarding pyramids of information within discrete silos, despite the criminal networks they are targeting being fluid and willing to operate across multiple commodities (Stanier, 2012). In this instance individual officers were distrustful of each other and not willing to share details of operations or contacts. It is not clear whether this issue was specific to China, but other scholars who have commented on the role and use of police intelligence across multiple law enforcement agencies suggest that this kind of finding is not uncommon (Sheptycki, 2007; Stanier, 2012).

Conclusion

In the recent past, policing scholars have been arguing that perceptions of national security threats have evolved beyond a simplistic dualism between internal and external security towards an increased focus on ‘global’ security threats (Brodeur, 2005; Reilly and Ellison, 2006). This is certainly the sentiment of the latest UK organised crime strategy which, on the one hand mentions the importance of more upstream intervention and cooperation with other countries in combating organised crime (HM Government, 2013), and on the other hand the importance of the local, with ‘organised crime groups having a corrosive local impact, particularly...among some communities which are new to this country’ (HM Government, 2013). However, our work would indicate that the rhetoric belies a more disquieting reality, where local policing (Level 1) resources are reduced and, unless there is investment in specialist policing expertise with the provision of language skills as a key component, the ability to garner local intelligence and to link it to effective action within China will be severely limited. Indeed, it is argued that if

investment were to be made in subject expertise and the NCA provides an opportunity for this, the variety of roles where it could be deployed could make for a varied and interesting career. Again, though, the signs are not positive; in 2015, HMIC observed ‘there was no career structure or training programme for analysts in the NCA’ (HMIC, 2015: 6). Yet if these warnings are not heeded, and as China’s economic strength continues to accelerate and the law-abiding diaspora grows in prowess and achievement, the lack of penetration by law enforcement in both China and the UK will be ever more noticeable. Overall, unless a clear strategic direction emerges, alongside a commitment to appropriate training, it is the broader structural influences such as the macroeconomics of recession and the relative rise and fall in currencies that are as likely to influence the parameters of Chinese organised crime as the efforts of UK law enforcement.

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Notes

1. We have not drawn on direct quotations from the interviews to protect the respondents’ identity further.
2. Research interviews (2010; 2015).
3. With migration this large it must include some active criminals.
4. And, although they did not interview anyone working in the UK, their principal argument, that the additional risks of trafficking (maintaining coercive, exploitative or deceptive control of the migrant sex workers) outweigh the additional profits that can be obtained, is also likely to apply here.
5. As the UK has found out to its cost with the recent convictions of men involved in the internal trafficking of vulnerable girls, this crime is as prevalent within the UK as outside of it. See for example BBC News (2012).
6. Indeed, the latest Home Office organised crime strategy deliberately utilises the same language of Pursue, Prepare, Prevent and Protect as is used in CONTEST, its counter-terrorism strategy (HM Government, 2014).
7. The most recent example being the Serious Crime Act 2015, which contains new legislative measures to combat organised crime and also strengthens and deepens several existing measures.
8. For example, Operation Trinity, which involved the domestic security service (MI5) targeting career criminal Terry Adams (Gillard et al., 2007).

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