

CITY UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

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Crimes in a Village-in-city:

The Case Study of Tang Village in Shenzhen

城中村犯罪研究——以深圳唐村為例

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Abstract

As a special social phenomenon, villages-in-city were created during the rapid urbanization in China. Rapid urbanization brings villages-in-city a high density of population and buildings and a lack of municipal facilities and public services, and all these factors have generated numerous crimes, making villages-in-city the crime hotspots of city.

This study aimed to establish an analytical framework by integrating existing crime theories to analyze villages-in-city. Thus, the individual, community, and macro levels of crime analysis were integrated to establish a comprehensive analytical framework designed to describe the diverse key factors of the causes of crimes at multiple levels.

Among the villages-in-city in Shenzhen, Tang Village, which had 20,737 floating people and 215 residential buildings, was chosen for this in-depth study. The methodological practices used were in-depth interviews, participant observation and archive studies.

At the community level, Tang Village showed obvious features of a socially disorganized community, namely, poverty, high residential mobility, and high heterogeneity. At the individual level, the suitable targets in Tang Village were analyzed in terms of defense awareness, living space, economic prosperity, popularization of electronic products, and routine living. The daily activities of

migrant workers in villages-in-city are very restricted. Making substantial changes may be difficult for migrant workers even though they have been victims of burglary and robbery.

As to the offenders, the monotonous operation of the factories in the village adds pressure on the migrant workers. Two factors play important roles in leading the youths into crime. One factor is the originality and regional network, and the other factor is the influence of gangs. Robbery, theft, fighting, threats, monopoly, and gambling comprise the diversified survival system of offenders.

The crime prevention system comprises various forces in Tang Village, such as the police, comprehensive assistant coordinator (Zonghe Xieguan Yuan, 综合协管员), security guard, landlord and technical prevention. However, every security force seems to be facing its own problems, which have weakened crime prevention in this village.

At the macro level, for over a decade, various external forces have brought great changes to Tang Village. Social policy and social movement can rapidly reduce the number of crimes in Tang Village, however, they lead to the displacement of crimes. Governmental investment and construction projects in nearby areas do not appear to have obvious effects on crime rate in the whole city of Shenzhen, but from the long-term point of view, these two factors will basically destroy the social structure and system that fosters crime in Tang Village.

Crimes in villages-in-city are not driven by simple criminal behaviors. Continuous

construction of buildings, poor economic situation of residents, and limited space have turned these villages into suitable environments for breeding criminals. However, changes in the urban area structure have also changed the population structure of the village, which, in turn, changed the structure of the community. Viewed in terms of life course, the problem of crime in villages-in-city is a problem of community reorganization, not just disorganization, which involves changing an old balanced state to a new balanced state.

In general, villages-in-city are very similar to slums in the West in terms of physical appearance and related social and environmental problems. Nevertheless, villages-in-city are essentially different from slums. Social disorganization in slum areas is caused by economic recession; however, the social disorganization or reorganization of village-in-city community has been caused by fast economic development.

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