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**VICTIMS' REACTIONS TO GANG EXTORTION
IN NEW YORK CITY'S CHINATOWN**

**A public lecture delivered at
the University of Hong Kong
on 11 January 1994**

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Chinese gangs and extortion

Before 1965, except for the "Tong Wars" among adult associations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Dillon 1962; Gong and Grant 1930), Chinese communities in the United States had relatively low crime rates. Chinese people in general, and Chinese youths in particular, were viewed as law-abiding, hard-working, and peaceful (Beach 1932; MacGill 1938). The most common crimes among Chinese immigrants were victimless offenses such as prostitution, opium smoking, drunkenness, and disorderly conduct (Tracy 1980). Offenders were primarily adult sojourners who indulged in these culturally sanctioned recreational activities as a respite from work.

The year 1965 was a turning point in the history of Chinese immigration. The Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 not only placed Chinese immigration on an equal footing with that of "preferred" nations, but also established priorities or "preferences" for admissions based largely on family relationships. These preferences permitted those Chinese immigrants already living in the United States to initiate documents for visas for their families overseas. As a result, immigrants of Chinese origins almost doubled each decade over the past 30 years (Zhou 1992).

With the growth of the Chinese population, a corresponding increase in the crime rates occurred in Chinese communities (President's Commission on Organized Crime 1984). Chinese gangs such as the Wah Ching, Joe Fong Boys, Ghost Shadows, Flying Dragons, Tung On, Fook Ching, Bamboo United, and Green Dragons became active in New York City, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Boston, and Chicago. The gangs were alleged to be involved in gambling, extortion, prostitution, burglary, robbery, aliens smuggling, kidnapping, and violence (Bresler 1981; Chin 1990; Kinkead 1992; Posner 1988; US Department of Justice 1985, 1988; US Senate 1992). Gang shootouts erupted often within the communities, and innocent bystanders were being hurt or killed.

Extortion is reported by the media and law enforcement authorities to be one of the major activities of Chinese gangs (Kerber and Gentile 1982; Louttit 1982; Penn 1980; US Department of Justice 1985, 1988; US Senate 1992). Police estimate that more than 90

percent of Chinese business owners in New York City Manhattan's Chinatown regularly pay one or more gangs (Bresler 1981; Meskil 1989; Posner 1988). Businesses in Queens and Brooklyn Chinese communities also were found to be heavily victimized by members of Chinese gangs (US District Court 1991). When retail businesses refuse to pay, their shops may be vandalized, burglarized, or robbed. Less often, store owners have been beaten, shot at, or killed for refusing to comply with a gang's demands (Scilla and Locksley 1985; US District Court 1991). According to reports, Chinese business owners in San Francisco, Vancouver, and Toronto also have been extorted frequently by Chinese gangs (Dubro 1992; Lavigne 1991).

Prior research describes four types of gang extortion or victimization in the Chinese business community (Chin 1990). The first type, "protection," is a gang's demand for a fixed amount of money from a business owner to ensure that his or her business will not be disturbed by that gang or other gangs. The amount is negotiated between the owner and the gang member; the money then is paid regularly. The second type of victimization, "extortion," is the sporadic and spontaneous demand for money from business owners by gang members.¹ The amount of payment is negotiated on each occasion, and the perpetrators do not promise to provide any service in return. In the third type of victimization, gang members sell items such as firecrackers and mooncakes to business owners at exorbitant prices. In the fourth type, gangs refuse to pay for food and services, or ask for heavy discounts.

With steady income from extortion, Chinese gangs are able to recruit new members. Through extortion, they express their firm control of certain territories. When two or more gangs claim control of a specific territory, store owners within that territory may have to pay more than one gang; in addition, street violence may erupt as a result of the power struggle between the competing gangs. Merchants are reported to be extorted heavily by the gangs, but law enforcement authorities are frustrated because few victims file complaints. As a result, Chinatown residents, especially Chinese business owners, allegedly are living in a "subculture of fear."

Although extortion activities targeted at businesses appear to be widespread in Chinese communities, no systematic data are available with which to validate claims about its prevalence, the dynamics and processes of extortion, or the severity and persistence of extortion-related problems. Most studies on the victims of crime have focused on children, women, the elderly, and the mentally retarded (Kaiser et al. 1991; Viano 1992). Because the phenomenon is relatively recent, few opportunities have arisen to develop theories for explaining the patterns of recurring victimization, to refine methods for study, or to accumulate empirical knowledge. Most information about Chinese gangs and their activities comes from the police and the media. Although some studies have analyzed data from a

small number of gang members or youths at risk (Chin 1990; Robinson and Joe 1980; Sung 1977; Toy 1992), no research has addressed patterns of extortion based on data gathered from representative samples of gang members or their victims.

To examine the patterns of extortion² by Chinese gangs, interviewers spoke with owners and managers of businesses in three Chinese neighborhoods in New York City. The interviews addressed the forms and patterns of gang exploitation of businesses, the social processes of victimization, the social and cultural meanings of extortion, and the business community's reactions to the gang problem. On the basis of data collected from the business community, this paper explores the seriousness of gang extortion in New York City's Chinese communities, the justifications for complying to gang demands, the reasons for resisting the gangs, the prevalence of reporting crime to law enforcement authorities among Chinese victims, the reasons why Chinese business people either approach or avoid the American criminal justice system, and the patterns of adaptation to gang victimization.

Methods

Sample

Interviews were conducted with owners or managers of businesses in three socio-economically different "Chinatowns" in the Manhattan, Queens, and Brooklyn boroughs of New York City.³ We constructed a sample of 888 businesses from the *Chinese Business Guide and Directory, 1990*, and adopted a multistage cluster sampling strategy to ensure adequate representation of 10 types of Chinese-owned businesses.⁴ Businesses uniquely vulnerable to extortion attempts were oversampled. In view of the difficulty of approaching respondents, and because of concerns about interviewers' safety, we excluded locations in the sex (massage parlor) and gambling industries. Thus the estimates of extortion activities were limited to businesses engaged in legal enterprises.

Response rates were high; 580 of the 888 subjects (65.3%) completed the interview. The refusal rate was 11.0 percent (98). The remainder (23.6%) were not interviewed because they could not be found. Some business had moved or closed (93). For others the address was wrong (27) or the owner was not Chinese (38).⁵ In some cases, the business could not be reached by telephone (52). When these cases were excluded from the original sample, 580 of the 678 remaining subjects (85.5%) were counted as interviewed.

To supplement the relatively small number of business owners from Brooklyn's Chinatown in the original sample, an additional 23 business owners in that area were

interviewed. Interviewers went door-to-door along Eighth Avenue in Brooklyn and interviewed owners whose business fit the 10 categories selected for the study.⁶ The final sample thus included 603 businesses.

Most respondents were well-educated young Cantonese men from Hong Kong who had lived in the United States for about 10 years. The businesses were mostly restaurants or retail food or nonfood stores located in the Manhattan and Queens Chinatowns, and were relatively new. Interviewers classified most businesses as small or medium-sized on the basis of their physical size and self-reported volume of activity. Table 1 shows the respondents' personal and business characteristics.

The data also showed that the Manhattan and Brooklyn Chinatowns were dominated by businessmen from Hong Kong, whereas merchants from Taiwan were most active in Queens and in mid- or upper Manhattan. Respondents from China, the newest group, tended to congregate in areas of Brooklyn outside Chinatown. In comparison with subjects from Hong Kong and China, business owners from Taiwan were better educated and spoke better English. Owners of restaurants and supply firms were less well educated than owners of professional offices. Factory and supply businesses were located mostly in Manhattan's Chinatown, whereas professional offices were situated mostly in Queens' Chinatown. Female respondents were involved predominantly in service-oriented businesses or the garment industry.

Data collection

To initiate contact with the interviewee, we sent a bilingual letter to the respondent's business address. The letter described the purpose of the study, how the business had been chosen, the confidentiality of the study, and the voluntary nature of participation. It also stated that a US\$20 stipend would be paid upon completion of the interview. To reassure business owners of the legitimacy of the study, a bilingual letter signed by the director of the sponsoring agency (the National Institute of Justice) was included with the notification letter. After the letters were mailed, interviewers contacted business owners by telephone, reminding them of the letter and asking for an appointment for an interview.

Six of the seven interviewers were female college students or social workers. They read the questions aloud to the respondents and encouraged them to respond in their own words. Responses were recorded in Chinese and were summarized later by bilingual analysts. The interviews took place from April to September 1990.

Gang victimization was measured for each of the four types of gang exploitation of businesses: protection, extortion, forced sale of goods, and theft of goods or services. The prevalence, frequency, and amount of payment for each type were recorded, as was any

violence associated with each of these dimensions. Respondents also were asked to recount the patterns of typical encounters with gangs and their

Table 1. Respondents' Personal and Business Characteristics (N=603)

Personal			Business		
Sex	No.	%	Type of Business	No.	%
Male	472	78.3	Restaurant	211	35.0
Female	131	21.7	Retail food store	101	16.7
			Retail nonfood store	95	15.8
			Professional office	33	5.5
Age			Service	69	11.4
Mean	43		Wholesale/retail supply	46	7.6
Median	42		Garment factory	37	6.1
Mode	41		Other	11	1.8
Country of origin			Location		
Hong Kong	324	53.8	Manhattan's Chinatown	335	55.6
Taiwan	104	17.3	Queens' Chinatown	129	21.4
China	85	14.1	Brooklyn's Chinatown	42	7.0
Other	89	14.8	Outside Chinatown	97	16.1
Ethnicity			Age of firm		
Cantonese	332	55.8	Mean	8	
Fukienese	44	7.4	Median	5	
Chiu Chao/ Hakka	29	4.9	Mode	3	
Taiwanese	44	7.4			
Shanghaiese	45	7.6	Size of firm		
Other Chinese	73	12.3	Very small	55	9.3
Other	28	4.7	Small	172	29.1
			Medium	253	42.8
			Large	111	18.8
Education			Sole owner of business?		
No formal schooling	8	1.3	Yes	283	48.1
6th grade or less	55	9.3	No	305	51.9
7th to 9th grade	68	11.5			
10th to 12th grade	198	33.4			
College	230	38.8			
Graduate school	34	5.7			
Number of Years in US			Also own the property?		
Mean	16		Yes	80	13.6
Median	14		No	508	86.4
Mode	10				

reactions to gang extortion (see Chin et al. 1993 for further information on sampling design and research procedures of this study).

Validity and reliability

The measurement of gang victimization appeared to have high face validity and reliability. The interviewers were asked to rate the subjects' honesty and memory; interviewers' ratings thus provided assessments of the respondents' honesty in answering the questions. The interviewers reported that most subjects were either "very honest" or "honest" in their accounts of their victimization and appeared to have a clear recall of specific events and interactions. According to the interviewers, many owners kept records of extortion payments or received a receipt from the gang members for each payment. These records or receipts help the owners to keep track of their payments and (for the purpose of this study) their victimization. Because few merchants report gang intimidation to the police, and because only victims who are heavily extorted or physically assaulted are likely to contact law enforcement authorities, the police do not maintain any systematic data on gang extortion in the Chinese community. Accordingly it is almost impossible to cross-validate self-reports of victimization with official statistics.

We computed reliability (Cronbach's alpha) for each of the three dimensions of victimization: prevalence, frequency, and monetary costs. For each dimension, we calculated the coefficients for reliability among the four types of extortion. The coefficients were satisfactory: .697 for prevalence of victimization, .601 for frequency, and .633 for monetary costs.

Results

Seriousness of gang victimization

Seriousness of gang extortion is measured by the prevalence and annual incidence of gang extortion, economic loss due to victimization by gangs, and use of threats by gang members against victims. Forced sales were reported to be the most prevalent type (51.1% attempted and 40.8% completed), followed by extortion, theft of goods or services, and protection (see Table 2). Overall, approximately seven subjects in 10 (69%) had been approached by gang members, and slightly more than one in two (54.7%) had been victimized.

Table 2. Seriousness of Gang Extortion in New York City's Chinese Communities (N=603)

Type of Extortion

	Protect-ion	Extortion	Forced sales	Theft of goods or services	All types
Lifetime prevalence					
Attempted	21.6	40.8	51.1	17.1	69.0
Completed	11.6	26.5	40.8	15.7	54.7
Annual incidence					
Mean	14	5	2	17	10
Median	12	3	2	7	3
Mode	12	1	1	3	1
Maximum	52	52	12	104	145
Costs per incident (US\$)					
Mean	129	76	51	119	
Median	65	30	40	45	
Mode	100	20	50	30	
Maximum	1,000	1,300	200	3,000	
Threats					
Did they threaten you?	33.8	19.1	9.8	16.7	
What type of threat?					
Threaten to disrupt business	15.7	11.4	4.1	4.3	
Threaten to damage property	8.6	7.0	1.6	2.1	
Reprisal from gang leader	7.1	2.5	1.2	4.3	
Threaten with violence	8.6	5.7	1.6	2.1	
Threaten to hurt your family	1.4	0.6	0.4	1.1	
Show weapon	1.4	1.3	0.8	0	
Other threats	12.9	3.8	3.3	6.4	

Table 2 also shows that the annual incidence of gang victimization varies by type of crime. Merchants paid protection money an average of 14 times a year; most paid monthly. Extortion money was paid substantially less often than protection money. Although forced sales were the most prevalent type of gang extortion, most businesses were asked to buy items only once or twice a year. Theft of goods or services was the second most frequent type of victimization.

Table 2 further illustrates the economic loss per incident. On the average, the victims paid US\$129 each time for protection, US\$76 for extortion, US\$51 for forced sales, and lost US\$119 worth of goods or services whenever gang members refused to pay. Overall, victims lost an average of about US\$615 a year as a result of gang extortion.

Only two subjects reported having been physically assaulted by gang members. In comparison, according to the 1980 National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), one robbery victim in three was assaulted (Karmen 1984). Chinese gang members tend to use verbal threats rather than physical violence to coerce business owners (see Table 2). Merchants were most likely to be threatened by gang members when they were approached

for protection money and least likely to be threatened when gang members came to sell items. Even when subjects were threatened, warnings were rarely directed against them or their families. More often than not, offenders harassed the owners with threats against their property or businesses. Weapons rarely were shown to the victims when threats were made (see Chin et al. 1992 for further information on the seriousness of Chinese gang extortion).

In sum, the prevalence of gang victimization appears to be relatively high among Chinese business owners, even though it is lower than the police estimate. Although most victims are exploited no more than three or four times a year, attempts at victimization are more frequent. Monetary loss due to gang extortion is less severe than suggested by law enforcement authorities (see, for example, Bresler 1981; Posner 1988). Victims rarely were threatened by gang offenders; when threats were made, no weapons were displayed.

Justifications for complying with gang demands

Most subjects (72%) cooperated when they were approached by gang members. Victims offered many reasons for conceding to gang demands. The first rationale is socio-cultural; some business people construed extortion demands not as criminal per se but as consistent with Chinese customs and social traditions. So long as gang members made claims during Chinese holidays and behaved deferentially, many merchants seemed willing to comply. When asked why they paid the gangs, victims often cited the following reasons:

When they asked for money, they didn't physically attack me. Besides, they were very polite. This [asking for money by gang members] is expected in Chinatown. Nothing unusual.

It was Chinese New Year, and it is a tradition to give lucky money during the New Year. For Chinese, it is quite natural and normal. If they came other time, then it is something else.

It's [gang extortion] part of doing business, period.

When gang members come to sell items on Chinese New Year, it is culturally almost impossible for merchants to refuse. For Chinese business owners, "harmony" is a prerequisite for prosperity. That is, without harmony there will be no prosperity. To refuse a request from a well-wisher during Chinese holidays, even if the person is a gang member, is to disrupt harmony at the beginning of a year, and this might bring bad luck throughout the coming year. Besides, Chinese merchants believe that everybody is entitled to make a little extra money during the New Year. Under these assumptions, when gang members appeared with tangerines⁷ and said "Happy New Year; we wish you prosperity," the owners would rather

give out US\$50 to US\$100 than refuse to accept somebody's "goodwill."

Giving money to the gangs is also rationalized by the business owners as "reciprocal face-giving behavior." Among the Chinese, people are expected to know how to "give face" to other people, especially to those who deserve it or are in a position to demand it. Not giving face to a person, especially in response to an overt request, is a serious humiliation to the person who expects it. When face is given, the person who receives it should reciprocate. Gang members normally demand to be given face. Some owners, knowing the rule, may take the initiative and offer the gang members a discount without their asking. In this manner the owners express their understanding of *jo yan*, "how to behave like a person." In return, gang members are supposed to be more "reasonable" in dealing with their victims.

Other merchants were willing to pay because they saw payment as a practical way to deal with the problem. They realized that the police could not protect them or their business 24 hours a day, and they believed that if they refused to pay the gang, the gang might damage their property or disrupt their business. They calculated the costs and benefits of not paying and concluded that in the long run, it might be cheaper to pay. The following reasons were mentioned often by merchants who viewed their compliance with gang demands as a prudent decision:

I paid because I am afraid of their retaliation. I own a small business.

I cannot afford to pay for any damage to the store.

I was afraid they will come and sit in the restaurant if I refuse to pay. If that happened, customers will be afraid to come into my restaurant.

Can't fight directly with the gang, otherwise, can't do business because we are easy targets.

A third reason for giving in to gang members' demands rested on superstition or folklore. Many Chinese people follow the folkloric custom of "converting big problems into small problems, and small problems into no problems." According to this saying, no one should create a big problem out of a small problem. Others believe that disaster in life is inevitable for everybody, but that money can be spent to prevent the disaster. Many owners see the gangs as potentially disastrous to them and their businesses, so they are willing to spend a small amount of money to send them away. The following views, expressed by some merchants, exemplify Chinese people's unique feelings about the relationship between money and disaster:

Losing some money helps avoid misfortune.

Spend some money to avoid bigger trouble.

For Chinese store owners, the opening ceremony of their businesses is symbolically important because they believe that the first day of business dictates the future. Everything must go smoothly at the opening celebration, they assume, to ensure a good future. If something goes wrong, it implies bad luck. Consequently, Chinese merchants are careful in picking the day for the occasion; some even consult a fortune teller to choose the right day. For this reason, Chinese merchants are most vulnerable during the opening ceremony. If gang members appear and congratulate the owners, the owners are unlikely to refuse a demand for money. They regard the payment as a way to generate "luck"; the money paid is known as *lai si*, money that is "good for the business."

Resistance and avoidance

Chinese business owners offered relatively little resistance to gangs. Only 86 of 306 proprietors who had been approached by the gangs said they had not been victimized. In comparison, according to the NCVS data, the victim took some self-protective measure in slightly more than one-half (51%) of all personal victimizations (Hindelang et al. 1978). Chinese business owners were least likely to refuse gang demands for free food or services (4%), followed by forced sales (20%), extortion (34%), and protection (46%). The respondents may have been most reluctant to succumb to gang demands for protection money because in the case of protection, unlike other types of victimization, once the victim agrees to pay the gang, he or she may have to pay regularly for a long time.

Merchants reported many reasons for refusing to be victimized by gangs. Some respondents willingly gave gang members money during major Chinese holidays but persistently refused to be exploited if gang members approached them at other times. A 43-year-old proprietor from Hong Kong expressed his feelings about being asked for money during the Christmas holiday:

When these gang members came during Chinese New Year, I always paid them *lai si* [lucky money]. This is our custom, that's fine. However, when they showed up for money during Christmas, I told them, "This is not Chinese holiday, come back on Chinese New Year." Also, when these kids came to sell firecrackers and mooncakes on Chinese festivals, I normally bought them. Once they came to sell turkey on Thanksgiving and I said, "This is not our holiday, I am not celebrating. You have to wait until Chinese New Year." They left without a word.

Other business owners refused the gang because they believed that once they conceded, systematic exploitation would become the norm. A 45-year-old Taiwanese store owner in Flushing, Queens told one of our interviewer why he was determined to fight against the gang:

A group of gang members came for extortion money. They showed up three times, but I refused. I even called the police. At one time, a couple of police officers were inside my store, but the gang members still came in and said, "You got to pay us, you should know that there are three guns pointing at you from the outside." They dared to do that because they knew the police didn't understand Cantonese. I didn't want to pay because I know that there is no end to this once you start paying. The third time they were here, the police arrested them.

Most store owners who refused to pay were more subtle in their rejections than the Taiwanese respondent quoted above. Many business owners simply told the offenders that the owner was not in the store, and asked them to come back later. If gang members came to sell items, an owner might tell them that they had already bought the items and would show them the tangerines, firecrackers, or mooncakes that were placed in the store for that purpose.

Some store owners offered gang members food and drink instead of money. A 58-year-old woman who owned a small store in Manhattan's Chinatown explained how she always tried to cajole the perpetrators with smooth talk and soft drinks when they came for money:

I can't speak English and I don't have the time to seek help from the police. On the other hand, I can't afford to pay them whenever they come and say, "Auntie, one of our brothers just got out of jail, we need money to eat." What am I suppose to do? What I did was, I always asked them to sit down and take a rest, say nice things like "Big Brother, have a bottle of bean milk." They drank the milk, hung around for a while, and left. I saw this as a way to send away the *win san*.⁸ They also came to sell a tangerine plant during Chinese New Year. I pointed at the entrance to the basement and said, "Big Brother, we already got the plant right there." They left. You can't be outright blunt in dealing with these youngsters, you know.

Some merchants declined the gangs' demands because they were irritated by gang practices. They regarded themselves as law-abiding, hard-working business owners who had nothing to fear, and viewed gang members as a bunch of parasitic street thugs who prey only on those who do not dare to stand up to them. A 45-year-old woman from Hong Kong told us how she refused to pay protection money to a group of teenagers:

Members of the XX gang showed up and asked for \$300 a month for protection. I replied, "I can't pay you this

kind of money. Business competition is fierce here, I am barely surviving." They threatened to disrupt my business and hurt me. I said, "Look, I am not going to pay no matter what. You guys are so young, why don't you go to school or find a job?" Two of them appeared to be upset, but the rest of them didn't say a word. They left me alone.

Some merchants resisted because they were active or former members of a gang or tong.⁹ One store owner in his early thirties, who acted as if he were part of the gang subculture, claimed that he was not intimidated at all by gang members:

A group of XX came and wanted extortion money from me. I said, "No money, get lost right away." They left the store immediately. They should have figured out who I was before they approach me for money. I am amazed that they had the guts to come before they even know anything about me. These XX are all garbage.

A tong member who owned a store in Manhattan's Chinatown was approached by a gang for protection money. The owner, a 63-year-old man, was quite bold in dealing with the gang:

A clique of gang members asked me for protection money. I said "no" to them and they threatened me. "We'll burn your store and kill you," they said. I told them, "Do what you have to do; I'm waiting for you, anytime!" These guys thought that everybody in Chinatown was afraid of them. The more you pay them, the more you are afraid of them, the more they harass you. I've been in Chinatown for so many years, I've experienced every circumstance you can imagine; I'm not afraid of them. In fact, if they act arrogantly, I'll call the police and arrest them. If they are polite and humble, I may let them survive.

In examining the association between a merchant's personal and business characteristics and the likelihood of his or her resistance to gang demands, we found that variables associated with resistance were not the same for all forms of extortion. In comparison with business owners in Manhattan's or Queens' Chinatowns, merchants in Brooklyn's Chinatown were significantly more likely to resist when gang members approached them for *protection* money. Younger business owners were more likely to resist than older merchants when gang members asked for *extortion* money. Also, people who speak English fluently were less likely to comply with extortion. People who owned the building where the business was located also were more likely to resist extortion. Food retail stores and garment factories were more likely to resist *buying items* from the gangs than were other businesses such as restaurants and wholesale supply firms. Finally, merchants who had lived in the United States longer were more likely to resist than those who had arrived here more recently.

Overall, restaurants were least likely to resist gang extortion; factories were most resistant. The more highly educated business people were more likely to resist than the less well-educated merchants. The use or absence of threats by gang members was not associated with store owners' resistance.

Reporting crime to the police

Law enforcement authorities often have attributed the pervasiveness of Chinese gang extortion to Chinese victims' reluctance to report crime (Kinkead 1992; US Senate 1992). Table 3 shows the report rate by type of victimization. Only 4.2 percent of the victims reported forced sales from gang members. When respondents were approached for protection money, they were more likely to contact the police (24%). The overall reporting rate among victims of Chinese gang extortion (21.6%) was substantially lower than the reporting rate for all personal crimes (37.7%) and for robbery (50.1%) as disclosed in the 1990 NCVS report (Bureau of Justice Statistics 1992).¹⁰ Chinese store owners, however, were more likely to report robbery (73%) and burglary (84%) to the police than were the NCVS respondents (50% and 51% respectively). Because the NCVS data do not include the reporting rate for extortion, it is not known whether Chinese victims are less likely than members of other ethnic groups to report extortion. Nevertheless, a comparison with the 29.4 percent reporting rate of extortion among small business owners from various ethnic groups in Hawaii (Hawaii Crime Commission 1980) suggests that the Chinese merchants were not significantly less likely than others to approach law enforcement authorities when they were extorted. Therefore this study does not support the assumption that Chinese are the ethnic group least likely to report crime.

Why were so many Chinese business owners reluctant to contact the police when victimized? The police speculate that this is the case because the merchants, many of whom come from Asia, were exploited by law enforcement authorities in their own countries. As a result, they tend to distrust the police in the United States (US Senate 1992). Other observers believe that the language barrier is the main reason why Chinese victims avoid the police (President's Commission on Organized Crime 1984). Table 3 illustrates and compares the reasons given by respondents in this study and in the NCVS study on unwillingness to contact the police.

The major reason why the Chinese victims were unwilling to report was that they did not consider the crime important enough. Many business people were annoyed by the gang practices of asking for money or free food but did not view them as a serious threat because little money was lost or because they were not harmed or threatened by the offenders. This reason was rarely mentioned in the NCVS data. Chinese victims frequently gave the

following reason for not reporting:

I paid them a small amount of money and they didn't hurt me. Besides, they

Table 3. Percentage Distribution of Reasons for Not Reporting Victimization to the Police, by Type of Gang Victimization

	NCVS personal robbery	Protect-ion	Extortion	Forced sales	Theft of goods and services
Number of victims	1,149,710 ^a	130	246	308	103
Report rate	50.1	24.0	17.6	4.2	15.6
Number of reasons stated for not reporting	714,480	126	312	354	120
Object recovered/offender unsuccessful	19.4	13.4	12.5	5.4	-
Lack of proof/insurance would not cover/unable to recover property	14.0	15.8	21.8	17.5	21.7
Police ineffective, inefficient, or biased	11.3	8.7	6.7	1.4	5.8
Private or personal matter	8.7	3.2	-	-	-
Police would not want to be bothered	8.3	3.9	7.7	3.4	0.8
Fear of reprisal	7.1	20.6	5.8	5.6	19.2
Too inconvenient or time-consuming	6.8	4.8	7.1	2.3	1.7
Reported to another official	7.2	-	-	-	-
Not aware crime occurred until later	1.4	-	-	-	-
Crime not important enough	0.9	23.4	28.2	29.3	34.2
It's a way to generate luck	-	1.6	3.8	0.8	-
This is expected in Chinatown	-	4.0	0.9	1.4	0.8
Will report if happens often	-	1.6	2.2	0.3	1.7
I can handle it myself	-	-	2.2	3.9	11.7
We need the items anyway	-	-	-	3.4	-
See it as gift giving	-	-	-	9.3	-
See it as ordinary sale	-	-	-	9.0	-
Other reasons	15.1	2.3	0.9	6.7	3.3

a. Number of victimizations.

propose it in such a polite manner. This is expected in Chinatown, nothing extraordinary.

The second most frequently mentioned reason was "uselessness." Victims assumed it was useless to approach the police because there was no proof of crime, the loss was not covered by an insurance company, or the victims were convinced that the police would not recover the money or goods. This also was found in the 1990 NCVS study to be the second

most frequent reason for not reporting robbery to the police.

Fear of reprisal was quoted as the third major reason for not reporting gang victimization. Respondents were concerned that if they approached the police, gang members might return and harm them, damage their property, or disrupt their business. In the NCVS survey, this reason ranked only seventh.

Others did not report to the police because they did not pay the gang. They did not view the attempted extortion as a complete crime, and thus, saw no reason to contact the police. Also, many respondents thought extortion was not worth reporting because they believed the police did not consider gang extortion serious in comparison to violent and drug crimes. Some respondents also stated that contact with authorities did not necessarily result in police action. Even when the police arrived, they advised owners to comply with gang demands, or told them that the police could do nothing about it because there was no proof of criminal victimization. On most occasions, the police filed a report and told the owners to call when gang members approached again.

Contrary to speculation by the police, no respondent mentioned distrust of the police as a basis for not reporting gang extortion. Language barrier, another frequently offered reason for non-reporting of crime by Chinese, also was not a factor. Thus the current police programs, which aim to improve the relationship between the police and community residents (as in monthly meetings between senior police officers and business owners) and to cross the language barrier (as with a bilingual police hot line) may not be the most efficient ways to enhance crime reporting among Chinese victims. Rather, programs are needed to educate Chinese victims about the social significance and policy implications of gang extortion and to assure them that their cooperation with law enforcement authorities will not result in reprisal by gangs.

Table 4 shows the reasons given by Chinese victims and NCVS respondents for reporting victimization to the police. Victims of gang extortion approached law enforcement authorities mainly because they wanted to prevent the offenders from committing further crimes against them, to stop or prevent gang extortion, or to improve police surveillance.¹¹ Unlike NCVS subjects, Chinese victims were motivated neither by the recovery of property nor by the conviction that extortion is a crime for which the authorities need to be notified. Yet when asked why they notified the police when their businesses were robbed or burglarized, most respondents replied that these were serious crimes which must be reported. Table 4 illustrates that Chinese business owners and NCVS subjects appear to have significantly different reasons for reporting victimization to law enforcement authorities.

Associations between crime-reporting behavior and merchants' personal and business characteristics are presented in Table 5. One of the most accurate predictors for reporting crime is the offender's use of intimidation or threats when demanding money. The data

suggest that if victims were threatened, regardless of the form or the seriousness of the offense, they were more likely to contact the authorities. In cases of protection, merchants born in Taiwan were most likely to report; Hong Kong-born respondents were least likely. When owners of large businesses (those with branches) were approached by gang members for extortion money, they were more likely to report than small business owners.

The last column on Table 5 indicates the association between store owners' personal and business characteristics and overall crime-reporting behavior. It shows that Chinese merchants who speak fluent English reported at a higher rate than those who speak little English. Also, respondents who operate businesses outside the Chinese communities were more likely to report than store owners within the Chinese communities. Among the three Chinese communities, merchants in Manhattan's Chinatown were least likely to contact authorities. In sum, the data suggest that situational (threat) and social (neighborhood) factors are more accurate indicators of crime-reporting behavior among

Table 4. Percentage Distribution of Reasons for Reporting Victimizations to the Police, by Type of Victimization

	NCVS personal robbery	Overall gang extortion	Robbery	Burglary
Number of reasons stated for reporting	531,890	105	46	67
To recover property	17.9	-	-	-
To catch or find offender	14.4	9.5	4.4	7.5
Because it was a crime	12.7	3.8	-	-
To prevent further crimes by offender against victim	10.2	23.8	-	-
To punish offender	9.5	0.9	-	-
To prevent crime by offender against anyone	9.3	0.9	2.2	-
To stop or prevent this incident	8.2	20.0	-	-
Duty to notify police	6.9	3.8	-	1.5
To improve police surveillance	2.5	17.1	30.4	25.3
Needed help because of injury	1.4	-	-	-
To collect insurance	0.7	-	4.3	7.5
Good relationship with police	-	5.7	-	-
Being threatened	-	3.8	-	-
A serious crime; must be reported	-	-	54.3	38.8
To have a police record	-	-	4.3	13.4
Some other reason	5.9	9.5	-	6.0
Not available	0.6	-	-	-

Chinese business owners than personal characteristics (education and English proficiency).

Reducing risks

Respondents were asked whether they changed their lifestyles, altered their business practices, or increased their business security measures because of gang harassment. Twenty-two percent of the respondents stated that they changed their lifestyles. The adjustments mentioned most often included dressing in ordinary clothes, not wearing jewelry, carrying little money, and driving inexpensive automobiles. In short, the common strategy was to maintain a low profile and to avoid being noticed as a business owner.

Twenty-nine percent of the respondents said they altered their business practices to avoid being victimized by gangs. These practices included closing stores earlier than usual, hiring only acquaintances or friends, keeping only a small amount of cash in the store, and doing business only with regular customers.

Almost six respondents in 10 revealed that they increased business security measures for crime prevention. Many owners installed alarm systems, video cameras, or iron gates on their business premises. In order to discourage gang members with beepers from hanging around, some stores removed public phones. To avoid the possibility of gang members' robbing customers in restrooms, the owners locked the restrooms or remodeled them so they could not hold more than one occupant at a time.

Other measures adopted by the store owners were (1) to hire only workers who spoke fluent English. When gang members came, the workers were instructed to communicate with gang members only in English, thus deterring offenders; (2) to hire managers who could deal with gang members; (3) to leave the business premises in a group at closing time; (4) to carry guns; and (5) to hire non-Chinese employees.

In sum, many Chinese merchants changed their lifestyles and business practices or increased their security measures because of the gang problem. Many respondents were reluctant to discuss what they did because they did not want outsiders to know what risk management tactics they used. After all, some of the adjusted behaviors might not be viewed as socially desirable. For example, some merchants initiated contacts with tongs for protection. Under these circumstances, store owners might be obligated to donate a certain amount of money to the tongs as a membership fee. The tongs issue a receipt to the donor, and the receipt is posted at the business entrance as a deterrent to gangs. Tong membership or a receipt from a tong, however, was by no means a sure way to avoid gangs. Even some owners who joined the tongs or offered them money suffered extortion by gangs.

Table 5. Personal and Business Characteristics, by Crime-Reporting Behavior (N=603)

	Type of extortion^a			
	Protection	Extortion	Theft of goods or services	All types
Number of subjects being approached	130	246	103	416
Sex (%)				
Male	21.7	18.7	14.0	43.3
Female	34.8	14.0	25.0	38.2
Country of Birth (%)				
Hong Kong	4.3**	17.2	12.5	36.0
Taiwan	57.1	19.2	16.7	50.0
China	25.0	17.7	17.5	43.5
Other	18.8	17.2	11.8	38.8
Education (%)				
Low	12.5	7.9	11.8	36.2
Middle	22.7	15.1	21.4	38.6
High	29.5	23.7	11.9	47.9
English Proficiency (%)				
Not at all	0.0	14.3	0.0	19.0*
Not very proficient	20.6	6.3	12.5	32.6
Somewhat proficient	28.3	18.1	16.7	47.8
Very proficient	25.0	22.7	18.9	45.2
Type of Business (%)				
Restaurant	24.5	21.7	18.3	50.6
Retail food	22.2	8.9	8.3	41.1
Retail nonfood	15.0	22.6	17.6	33.3
Office & service	50.0	10.0	14.3	35.7
Wholesale & other	14.3	16.7	0.0	34.2
Factory	33.3	23.1	none	29.4
Neighborhood (%)				
Manhattan's Chinatown	23.9	13.0	14.5	34.9**
Queens' Chinatown	22.7	23.8	14.8	50.0
Brooklyn's Chinatown	18.8	14.3	25.0	37.5
Other Manhattan	33.3	33.3	none	53.8
Other Queens	33.1	25.0	none	75.0
Other Brooklyn	27.3	27.8	20.0	64.0
Any Branches? (%)				
Yes	22.9	28.6*	20.0	46.7
No	24.5	15.1	14.6	41.1
Were You Threatened? (%)				
Yes	35.7*	34.0***	20.0	65.9***

No	17.4	13.9	13.4	35.6
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a. Data on forced sales are not presented because only 13 subjects (4.2%) reported the crime to the police.
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

The data show no appreciable differences between victims' and nonvictims' reactions to the gang problem in the Chinese community. Respondents in Brooklyn's Chinatown, however, were more likely to alter their lifestyles than merchants in other areas. Business owners in the core area of Manhattan's Chinatown were less likely to adjust their lifestyles in the face of gang threats. Respondents in Queens' and Brooklyn's Chinatowns were more vigilant and more cautious than merchants in Manhattan's Chinatown. Business owners outside the three Chinese communities were more likely to do something to protect themselves from the gangs. Even within Manhattan's Chinatown, however, business people on the outskirts of the community were more circumspect than those in the core areas, where the tongs exert tighter control. Perhaps the merchants in the core area of Manhattan's Chinatown realized that in a close-knit community, where personal identity and wealth are difficult to conceal, there is not much they can do about the situation. Also, business owners inside the tongs' territories were less concerned about being hurt or threatened by local gang members with whom they were familiar.

Conclusions

Chinese merchants can be categorized according to their reaction to gang extortion. Those who comply with the gangs include four basic groups. The first, the "weak," pay the asking price almost every time to almost anybody. Very few people belong to this group because most business owners do not pay on every occasion, or they barter and negotiate with the gangs. The second group, the "smart," pay only reputed gang members, but do not pay every time and certainly do not pay the asking price. The third category, the "wise," engage in a dialogue with gang leaders before the business opens and pay a lump sum once and for all. They negotiate the "rules of the game" with gang leaders; if the rules are violated by young gang members, they speak directly to the leaders. The fourth group, the "invisible," consists of owners who are known to few people. These operators may delegate responsibility to a manager with possible gang ties, and the manager deals with the gang by himself.

Merchants who are not victimized also may be categorized into four groups. The "forgotten" are small business owners who operate their businesses at a considerable distance from the community, or locate in obscure places at the outskirts of the community and have little cash flow and light customer traffic. As a result, these store owners are very unlikely to

be noticed by gangs. The second group, the "players," distract gangs with dodges and subterfuges. They are seldom on the business premises; they close their stores on major holidays; they repeatedly delay payments; they plead for mercy when gang members demand immediate payment. They are always smiling and seem very patient, but they avoid shakedowns. The "bullies" bluntly reject the gangs; they are not concerned about gang reprisals because they are determined to fight back if reprisals should occur. Finally, the "own" are powerful community leaders or former gang members who know the gangs well and can instill fear based on their reputation. They can make remarks such as "They [the gangs] should feel lucky if *I* don't bother *them*."

In general, if a businessman is too soft and too pliable, he might be heavily victimized; on the other hand, if he is too tough, the gang members may feel offended and may be challenged to act out their threats. The trick is to avoid paying the gangs without offending them. The merchant also needs powerful tong members to vouch for him if he is approached by the gangs. In sum, being in business in Chinatown requires a repertoire of skills and connections that go beyond mere commercial talent. One also must be a psychologist and a politician in order to cope with constraints and problems in the business environment. Not every business owner, however, possesses the resources, determination, or presence of mind to survive or neutralize the gang threat.

After careful examination of the quantitative and qualitative data collected for this study, we find that gang extortion in the Chinese communities is both institutionalized and normalized. Institutionalization occurs when certain behavioral patterns are integrated into the social routines and customs and are expected by individuals, groups, and organizations in a specific community. That is, gang extortion in the Chinese community has become so common and so pervasive that residents, business owners, community leaders, law enforcement authorities, and various community associations have come to take it for granted. Many Chinese business people stated that they have become so accustomed to being approached for money that they now view it as part of doing business in their communities. Some owners revealed that after discussing the gang issue with their business partners before a grand-opening ceremony, they and their partners decided to put aside a certain amount of money as a gang offering.

The tongs and other community associations are fully aware of the gang extortion problem in the community. Yet, leaders of these organizations say that it has existed for a long time and there is little they can do about it. In fact, many community associations have benefited indirectly by the threat of gang extortion because some owners either "donate" money to these associations or maintain a good relationship with their officers, believing that this will provide protection. In other words, the vulnerability of Chinese business people to gang victimization somehow legitimizes the status of certain community associations and

their leaders.

Gang victimization of business owners is not only institutionalized but also normalized or regularized. That is, certain local norms shape the behavior of gang members; they tend to follow these norms ritualistically when they approach merchants for money. The norms concern the amount of money to be requested; the demeanor to be displayed by gang members; and the timing and frequency of extortion attempts. As long as gang members adhere to these norms, their activities fit the pattern of acceptable behavior not only from the victims' standpoint but also from the standpoint of the law enforcement community and certain powerful community leaders. The latter are in position to punish gang members whose extortion activities are not regularized.

^Notes

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¹. Chinese business owners made a distinction between "extortion" and "protection," whereas the New York State Penal Code does not.

². Demanding money or the provision of goods and services to avoid violence or harassment is the working definition of extortion adopted in this study. Chinese gangs use different methods to extort, but all involve the use of threats of violence or mayhem to illegally obtain money, services, and other property of value.

³. The Chinatown in Manhattan is a well-established social and commercial center. It is located on the lower east side of Manhattan and is surrounded by City Hall, "Little Italy," and the East River. Approximately 80,000 persons now live there; the population is growing quite rapidly as a result of China's open-door policy and the political instability in Hong Kong. Residents are mostly working-class Cantonese-speaking immigrants from China or Hong Kong (Kwong 1987; Zhou 1992). The Chinatown in Queens is located in the Flushing section, where thousands of Chinese have settled along Main Street and the No. 7 subway route through Jackson Heights and Elmhurst. Residents are predominantly new immigrants from Taiwan or Korea (Chen 1992). Brooklyn's Chinatown is situated along Eighth Avenue in the Sunset Park section and in neighboring Bay Ridge and Borough Park. It is connected to

Manhattan's Chinatown by the N and B subway trains, which serve as social and economic lifelines between the two communities (Smith 1988).

⁴. More than 5,000 predominantly Chinese-owned businesses were listed in the 1990 edition of the *Directory*. The 10 types of businesses included in this study were: restaurant, retail food store, retail nonfood store, professional office, service, wholesale/retail supply, garment factory, entertainment, vocational training, and cultural recreation. In the *Directory*, 4,290 firms were listed under these business categories for Manhattan, Queens, and Brooklyn.

⁵. We intended to interview only Chinese business owners, assuming that Chinese gangs victimize only Chinese businesses. After the sample was drawn, we tried to exclude businesses that were apparently non-Chinese firms or known to be owned by non-Chinese. Even so, we encountered several businesses that we learned were non-Chinese only after we arrived for the interview. As a result, a number of non-Chinese firms were included in the sample.

⁶. This study initially planned to interview about 50 subjects from Brooklyn's Chinatown. Because Chinatown's commercial center is relatively small (not more than several blocks along Eighth Avenue), only about 100 firms from the area were listed in the *Directory*. As a result, only 36 businesses in Brooklyn's Chinatown were included in the original target sample. Of these 36 firms, 19 were interviewed. We decided to supplement the original sample with stores located in the area that were not included in the original sample. The interviewers were instructed to approach one of the 10 types of businesses selected for the study. Eventually, we included 23 additional stores in Brooklyn's Chinatown in the sample. A comparison between sampled and nonsampled businesses in Brooklyn's Chinatown reveals no difference in subjects' characteristics, such as age, sex, country of origin, length of residence in the United States, English proficiency, and educational level. Also, we found no difference in business characteristics, such as the type of business, age of the firm, and size of the firm.

⁷. Tangerine is called *kat* in Cantonese and *kyi* in Mandarin, which are synonymous to the pronunciation of the word "luck" in Chinese. Tangerine trees are one of the major items of decoration for Chinese during the Chinese New Year.

⁸. Most Chinese gods or spiritual figures are considered to be friendly and bring good fortune to people. However, there is a small number of ferocious gods who symbolize disasters. These gods are generally known as *win san*. One way to deal with these gods is to offer them food and ask them to go away.

⁹. Tongs were established as self-help groups by the first wave of Chinese immigrants in the United States during the mid-nineteenth century (Dillon 1962). Vicious group conflicts among the tongs are known as "tong wars" (Gong and Grant 1930). Historically, the tongs have been very active in operating or providing protection for opium dens, gambling places, and brothels in Chinese communities in the United States (US Senate 1978). The tongs have thousands of adult members, predominantly male, from all walks of life, but very few are involved in criminal activities. Most well-established Chinese gangs in New York City are affiliated with one or more tongs (Chin 1990b).

¹⁰. The crime reporting rate between NCVS data and this study are not entirely compatible. The NCVS asked respondents whether they reported their victimizations in 1990 to the police. This study asked Chinese business owners whether they had ever reported gang extortion to law enforcement authorities. The reporting rate for Chinese victims could be lower if the time frame were limited to one year.

¹¹. Chinese victims appeared to be aware that if the gangs were not stopped, they would have to be paying money to them for a long period of time. As a result, they have a strong desire to stop this before it becomes a regular victimization.

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〈幫會敲詐的受害者研究〉

（摘要）

美國華人社區的商戶受幫會敲詐的情況是頗普遍的現象，並已超過了二十年。這種敲詐有不同的形式：勒收保護費、索取金錢、強迫商人購買貨物，及要求免費服務或商品。本文旨在探討受害者的反應——順從或反抗的發展過程、個人與社會因素在這過程中起的作用、及受害者向警方求助的方式。研究指出警方一般高估了幫會敲詐的普遍性及嚴重性。相比其他受害人，華人受害者的報案率並不特別低。語言隔膜及對警方的不信任也不是受害人不願意報案的主要原因。主要的原因是受害者並不視敲詐為嚴重的罪行。在他們眼中，幫會敲詐是華人社區的一種制度化及「正常化」的現象。