

## **Claws of the dragon**

### *Chinese organised crime in the UK*

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#### **Abstract**

The phenomenal expansion of the legitimate economy of the People's Republic of China (PRC) has been accompanied by an expansion in illegitimate activities by Chinese criminal groups. This paper discusses the activities of criminal groups from the PRC in the UK which have evolved from high profile violent offences to activities such as DVD counterfeiting and smuggling. It includes a significant amount of information gathered by Greater Manchester Police in the enquiry into the murder of a PRC national. Narratives from members of the illegal Chinese community and accounts of other violent incidents supported the contention that although the groups were entrepreneurial by nature and selected commodities that were less likely to attract the attention of law enforcement they would not hesitate to use extreme violence when required.

**Key Words:** Organised Crime; Chinese; Homicide; DVD counterfeiting

#### **Introduction**

The phenomenal expansion of the legitimate economy of the People's Republic of China (PRC) has been accompanied by an expansion in illegitimate activities by Chinese criminal groups throughout the world. (Zhang, 2004; Ganapathy and Broadhurst, 2008). Historically, the majority of research into Chinese Organised Crime (OC) has been carried out in the United States and Hong Kong but the PRC's increasing openness has led to a major increase in research there in recent years. Much of this research points to recurring themes such as structures, offence types, organisation and use of violence (Kleinknecht, 1996; Finkenauer and Chin, 2007; Finkenauer, 2007; Wing Lo, 2010; Xia, 2008).

This article reviews the current available research worldwide into the structures of Chinese OC groups and their incredible range of illegal

activities and commodities. It highlights the recurring themes and 'usual suspects', such as protection rackets, as well as unique or unusual aspects. The reasons for the selection of these activities and the factors that influence that selection are also explored. These factors are wide ranging and demonstrate an amazing flexibility and entrepreneurial spirit. The murder of a young PRC national in Manchester in October 2004 is then used as a case study to examine the operations of Chinese OC groups in the UK. Because of the nature, length and depth of the enquiry a significant amount of information was gathered that has utility for academic study. Of particular significance was the fact that both the deceased and his attackers came from Fujian province in the PRC, the province that it is home to the vast majority of the illegal Chinese community in the UK (Institute of Migration, 2006). This information is summarised and then compared with the worldwide activities of Chinese OC groups. The nexus between academic research and law enforcement research or intelligence gathering is considered. The article concludes with recommendations for further research.

## **Method**

The initial information regarding Chinese OC groups and their activities came to the author's attention in his capacity as a Senior Investigating Officer in Greater Manchester Police (GMP) responsible for investigating the murder detailed in the case study below. The author also had some knowledge of the Chinese community in London as a result of working as a police officer in central London in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The complex nature of the investigation required accessing a number of specialists in the investigative arena to expand the collective knowledge of the enquiry team. The team developed their knowledge over the period of the investigation by consulting with other policing agencies and members of the extended investigation 'family' such as the Assets Recovery Agency, the Immigration Service and the Chinese Desk at the National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS) - all of whom, coincidentally, have been subsumed into other organs in the last few years. The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) were exceptionally helpful as were Lancashire Constabulary's staff on the 2004 Morecombe Bay cockle pickers' enquiry. This tragedy had preceded the case study murder by nine months and that enquiry team had an impressive knowledge of the illegal Chinese community in the UK that served GMP well and saved countless hours of repetition.

This learning was, of course, gathered for a murder enquiry and not an academic purpose. Nevertheless its utility for academic research was considerable and comparisons with existing research are extremely interesting. Unfortunately much of the information gathered is, by its very nature, confidential and consequently cannot be utilised in the public domain. This creates problems for authors when trying to integrate academic and police sources into one paper; academic sources can of

course be cited whereas intelligence sources generally cannot. That is not to say that intelligence-based assertions lack validity as each piece of information is assessed by the '5x5x5 system' in which the source of the information is evaluated on a range of A ("always reliable") to E ("untested source"), each piece of information evaluated on a range of 1 ("Known to be true without reservation") to 5 ("Suspected to be false"), the final field consisting of a 'handling code' ranging from 1 to 5 in which restrictions or permissions are placed on the dissemination of the information (NCIS, 2003). All information utilised in this paper had a source classification of A or B and an information evaluation of 1 or 2. Information with a handling restriction has not been used. The subjective nature of this assessment procedure is acknowledged, but is inescapable.

References to HOLMES refer to the nationally utilised police ICT system HOLMES 2. The acronym stands for Home Office Large Major Enquiry System, an incongruent term that highlights a particular sense of humour. Each enquiry has its own database that is known as an 'account' into which every item of information is uploaded.

The author's second career in academia has facilitated a literature search across a variety of books and academic journals on OC generally and particularly Chinese OC and its history. There is a paucity of related academic research on the issue in the UK and historically most research into Chinese OC has been carried out in the United States (see for example Chin, 1990 onwards; Zhang, 1995 onwards), and Hong Kong (Wing Lo, 1993 onwards) although the PRC's increasing openness has led to a major increase in research there recently (see Xia, 2008). Latterly research has supported the view that there has been a massive expansion in illegitimate activities by Chinese criminal groups throughout the world (Zhang, 2004; Ganapathy and Broadhurst, 2008).

A good summary of this expansion is contained in a report for the Library of Congress by Curtis et al. (2003). The report's sources are diverse citing several monographs, journal articles and Internet reports by journalists and law enforcement agencies:

In the past decade, law enforcement authorities in many countries have come to the conclusion that the transnational activities of ethnic Chinese criminal groups constitute a serious threat to the societies where such groups have gained a foothold. Those societies are now found on every continent because criminal groups arise in virtually all the major centers of ethnic Chinese population worldwide (2003:47).

The third main source of information, face-to-face interviews and conference attendance has given brief access to experts in the field<sup>1</sup>. The author has also carried out interviews with a senior Home Office civil

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Professors Ko-Lin Chin and James Finkenauer

servant in the OC area and a senior officer attached to the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) in early 2012.

## **Structures and norms of Chinese OC groups**

Historically Chinese OC has been dominated by the Triads who originated in Hong Kong, and their related organisations, the Tongs, in the United States (Chin, 1990; Wing Lo, 2010) and it is only in recent years that groups from the PRC have come to prominence (Zhang and Chin, 2003). The Wo Shing Wo Triad group, for example, can trace their roots back to 1908 and the 14K to the early 1950s (Chu, 2005). They originally had elaborate initiation ceremonies and structures but these have been streamlined in recent years. Nevertheless, loyalty and ritual remain extremely important factors, (*ibid.*)

Understandably, a number of less sophisticated sources, particularly the media, incorrectly use the term 'Triad' whenever Chinese organised crime is encountered. For example an article in the local newspaper, the Londonderry Sentinel (24 April 2012), used the terms "Triad" and "Chinese mafia" and also "....Chinese 'snakehead' gangs - a branch of the notorious Triad organised crime group" (*ibid.*). This labelling is inaccurate and unhelpful. Despite this mis-labelling it is clear that the Triads are active in a number of countries worldwide. At least two groups that are active in London and Manchester, the 14K and the Wo Shing Wo, are reportedly active in Australia, Canada, Czech Republic, Russia, Slovakia, Southeast Asia, the United States, and all West European countries (14K) and Benelux, France, Germany, and Portugal (Wo Shing Wo) (Curtis et al., 2003). They are also described by Finekenauer and Chin (2007), along with the Sun Yee On, as Hong Kong's three largest Triad groups. This 'blurring' by some sources is largely irrelevant for the purpose of this analysis but its existence should be borne in mind.

The structures and norms of Chinese OC groups are evolving and widely commented on in the research. For example, Zhang and Chin (2003) opine that the established Triad structures are waning, "...Triad's entrenched culture and patterns of organization...are incompatible with conditions for entering into present day transnational criminal activities" (*ibid*:478). There is widespread agreement that newer Chinese OC groups have embraced globalisation and are of a more flexible nature than the traditional Triads. They are also more entrepreneurial and not bound by traditions but are still willing to use violence to achieve their ends. Indeed the variety of criminal activity engaged in by Chinese criminal groups worldwide is staggering (Zhang, 2004; Xia, 2008; SOCA, 2009).

The activities of 'snakehead' groups that facilitate illegal migration have also been the subject of much debate, particularly by US law enforcement who feared massive illegal immigration organised by and therefore profiting established OC groups (Zhang and Chin, 2008). These fears have been largely unfounded however and the evidence seems to

point to the involvement of a much wider range of individuals, many of whom rely on familial or community networks and do not participate in other forms of illegal activity (Zhang and Chin, 2008; Zhang and Gaylord 1996). Indeed Finkenauer and Chin in a National Institute of Justice report (2007) in which they visited the PRC and seven of its neighbours<sup>2</sup>, are firmly of the view that there is no evidence of links between Triads or established OC groups and the illegal movement of people (*ibid*:16,21). They do however refer to “mom and pop groups” (*ibid*:16) and illustrate the report with a news item involving such a group in which an ethnic Chinese couple smuggled thousands of illegal Chinese into the US using their son and six fellow co-conspirators.

The loyalty demanded by Chinese OC groups and Triads in particular can be found within their network structures in which trust and reciprocity are paramount. This is not unique to Chinese OC and is often found within other ethnic networks (Levi, 2012). In the wider world this may be referred to as ‘social capital’ (Von Lampe, 2006) but ‘guanxi’ - a Chinese cultural concept - takes this to a higher level (Forbes, 2012) and successful dealings with Chinese organisations, whether legal or illegal is near impossible without it (Forbes, 2012; Huisman 2008). Similarly the apparent shift in working practices of Chinese OC groups from the old hierarchical structures to more flexible networks is not unique and reflects the “dominant academic and law enforcement opinion” on OC generally (Levi, 2012:615).

## **Range and selection of illegal activities**

In considering the range of illegal activities discussion of the illegal movement of people is deliberately minimised in this article because it is an entire subject in its own right. Although it figures prominently in the ‘portfolio’ of Chinese illegal activity the debates around people trafficking and people smuggling, although very interesting and stimulating (see Silverstone, 2011), would be a (long) distraction from the main purpose of the piece.

The differences between ‘people trafficking’ and ‘people smuggling’ need to be stated here for clarification purposes. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) differentiates between the categories as follows:

“Human trafficking is the acquisition of people by improper means such as force, fraud or deception, with the aim of exploiting them”;

“Smuggling migrants involves the procurement for financial or other material benefit of illegal entry of a person into a State of which that person is not a national or resident” (UNODC, 2012).

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<sup>2</sup> Including Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan and interviewed local law enforcement officials, academics and US officials based in those countries

Also prominent among Chinese OC offence types is drugs smuggling which has been evidenced worldwide. The long list of countries includes those large markets such as the United States that might be expected and also comparatively obscure countries such as Paraguay and Belize (Curtis et al., 2003) but not the UK where Chinese OC drug activities seem to be confined to cannabis cultivation (SOCA 2009, Silverstone 2010). Huisman (2008) gives an account of an unusual but highly effective network of Hong Kong Chinese who smuggled vast loads of precursor chemicals into the Netherlands for the manufacture of MDMA and methamphetamine. Credit card fraud is widespread in Chinese OC as is illegal gambling, prostitution and counterfeiting of DVDs (Curtis et al., 2003; Finkenauer and Chin, 2007; SOCA, 2009; IPO, 2010).

Where there are large settled Chinese communities or significant communities in a very lawless area Chinese OC groups prosper on protection and extortion with its attendant violence. Such countries in the former group include the United States, particularly New York (Finkenauer and Chin, 2007), the UK (MPS, undated) France (Curtis et al., 2003) and in the latter Paraguay (*ibid.*) This notion of 'embeddedness' is discussed below.

Interestingly, Chinese OC often shows its entrepreneurial abilities in relatively obscure commodities such as abalone smuggling from Australia and South Africa. Marine poaching and the smuggling of raw materials such as timber, gold, non-precious metals and agricultural products are all profitable enterprises in Russia with which the PRC shares a long border (Curtie et al., 2003).

The selection of illegal activities by Chinese OC groups would seem to involve a number of factors, which are often multi-faceted. These include availability and geographical factors, such as the proximity of Russia, law enforcement activity and its avoidance, the extent of the rule of law (including corruption opportunities), the presence of local competition or 'opposition' and cultural factors such as the size and make up of local Chinese communities or its embeddedness.

Geographical factors mainly centre on exploitation of neighbours, for example, according to Curtis et al. (2003) Chinese OC groups exploit neighbours in South East Asia and Russia. The proximity allows Chinese OC groups to exploit both the Chinese communities in neighbouring countries and the local populace, entering via poor immigration controls or by easily bribed officials (*ibid.*). In a reversal of normal people trafficking practices a Russian expert, Professor Lyudmila Yerokhina, estimated that there as many as 15,000 Russian women in China as slaves, working in the sex industry and drug dealing (*ibid.*).

There are significant geographical factors at play in these areas but they are also affected by the other factors such as the lack of rule of law and corruption opportunities which can be illustrated by reference to the

Transparency International indices<sup>3</sup>. Law enforcement activity has had a negative effect on Chinese OC groups in France (Curtis et al., 2003), Indonesia (*ibid.*) the UK (Silverstone, 2011; MPS, undated) while the lack of effective systems has been helpful in such countries as Paraguay, Russia, South Africa, and the Philippines (Curtis et al., 2003).

The presence of local opposition or competition is also a significant factor in the operations of Chinese OC groups who appear willing to negotiate with anyone, including established enemies. In the UK, as stated above, the MPS Chinese Unit has a strong feeling that the Fujianese crime groups have negotiated with the established Triads to leave their income sources, mainly protection rackets, alone and follow their own activities unhindered (GMP, 2004) (also see Huisman, 2008, for similar views in the Netherlands). Silverstone (2010) has found several instances of Chinese OC groups co-operating with Vietnamese groups in the UK in cannabis cultivation. Historically different Triad groups have always co-existed in London, Hong Kong and elsewhere but disputes over territory can be violent (MPS, undated, Huisman, 2008). This is reflected in research into other OC groups, but when peaceful negotiation fails firearms are frequently resorted to (Finkenauer and Chin, 2007; Huisman 2008).

It was the firm belief of the Liang murder enquiry team that the murder was one of these territorial disputes that had escalated - in this case the commodity being DVDs. The size and the length of time the local Chinese communities have been settled also have a bearing on the selection of criminal activities. In areas like London and Manchester in the UK (MPS, undated), New York (Finkenauer and Chin, 2007), Paris (Curtis et al 2003), Ciudad del Este Paraguay (*ibid.*), Sydney Australia (*ibid.*), and Russia (*ibid.*) Chinese OC groups utilise the fear that exists within the Chinese communities to exploit them in protection rackets and unofficial taxation. This 'embeddedness' is essential for this parasitic relationship to continue and is not unique to Chinese ethnic groups (Varese, 2012) but as the Chinese diaspora is the world's most widespread (Cheung, 2004) it may be more relevant to those groups.

### **Case study: The murder**

The murder in Manchester's Chinatown on 19 October 2004 brought the activities of Chinese criminal groups in the UK into focus. It was also the start of a steep learning curve for members of Greater Manchester Police's (GMP) Force Major Investigation Team (FMIT) who were tasked with investigating it. The investigation was difficult from the start. The victim was unidentified, indeed he had a National Insurance card in his possession in another's name, there was another young ethnic Chinese man in hospital with knife injuries and a third in custody for possessing an offensive weapon. Neither of the latter could speak English and their identities were unconfirmed. There were also reports of fights between large groups of

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<sup>3</sup> <http://cpi.transparency.org/cpi2011/results/>

ethnic Chinese men in the vicinity just before the murder, including one in a Chinese bar and one in a casino.

Fortunately for the investigative team, the victim also had the name and address of a woman in a nearby city who transpired to be his employer and was able to provide a tentative identification approximately 24 hours into the investigation. She also stated that she believed he had gone to Manchester for a pre-arranged fight as he was a Triad member, a 'big brother' or 'dai lo' and that they were ambushed by another gang. This was clearly a significant and challenging development.

Despite the fact that the Chinese community in Manchester was long established and the police had good informal and formal networks with them very little information came from them. This was not due to a lack of a desire to help but a genuine lack of knowledge as the vast majority of the embedded Chinese community in Manchester are of Hong Kong origins and speak Cantonese. The deceased, his associates and his attackers were from Fujian in the PRC and spoke their own dialect and Mandarin. Indeed they were seen as trouble makers by the settled community who referred to them as 'reds', partly for the PRC's political affiliation and partly because they frequently dyed red streaks in their hair (GMP, 2004). Some information was forthcoming however, mainly from anonymous sources and the PRC consulate in Manchester and it was established with some degree of probability that the murder was the result of a dispute between two groups from Fujian province, one from Chang Le and one from Fuqing (see Finkenauer, 2007 *The Fuk Ching*).

Struggling for lines of enquiry, actionable intelligence and background information the enquiry team turned to the Metropolitan Police Service's (MPS) Chinese Unit based at Charing Cross Police Station in central London. The knowledge of the Chinese Unit was impressive and they knew the Fuqing group to be based in London and heavily involved in counterfeit DVDs, smuggling cigarettes and prostitution. Their value increased further when, six weeks into the enquiry, one of the unit identified a suspect (C) from still photographs obtained from CCTV as a leader of a known gang. C had not been mentioned to this point, the identification gave the investigation a completely new focus and London became a crucial part of it.

This focus included surveillance by MPS surveillance teams who were able to observe C entering an address with a key. The address was observed by GMP officers and on one occasion C was seen to emerge from the address with 15 other men. He was carrying a number of baseball bats which he distributed among the group which he was clearly directing. All 16 got into four cars and left. This activity was significant evidence of C's leadership position and corroborated the information from the Chinese Unit.

The Chinese Unit were also instrumental in arranging a meeting between a prominent member of the Fujianese community in London (N739) and the Force Major Investigation Team Senior Investigating Officer (SIO) and deputy. N739 was in the UK legally and spoke good English



which made him unique of the Fujianese encountered by the enquiry team. He offered to assist the enquiry team but unfortunately he was a suspect in other unrelated matters and therefore deemed unsuitable for further contact. Significantly, when seen by the officers and the purpose of the meeting was explained he simply said “Ah, the DVD murder” (GMP, 2004, HOLMES 2 Account) which lent considerable credence to the hypothesis the enquiry team had been working on for some time as thousands of DVDs had been recovered in addresses searched, some of them still in packing cases bearing Chinese postal markings.

To enhance the co-operation of the Chinese community the enquiry team devised a witness strategy that included securing agreement from the immigration authorities that the details of people volunteering information would not be passed to them and that the team could state this on publicity materials. This was helpful but of more substance was the feedback via sources in London and Manchester that members of the community were both pleased and surprised about the amount of effort that the team were making into the murder of someone that many would regard as insignificant. The strategy had a major success when a further victim came forward several months into the enquiry and alleged he had been seriously assaulted by C just prior to the main incident. His allegation was corroborated and C actually pleaded guilty to causing him grievous bodily harm.

The enquiry progressed significantly from this point but the purpose of this article is to analyse the activities of Chinese criminal groups and any further discussion of the enquiry will not progress that aim.

### **Summary of the learning by the enquiry team in relation to the Chinese community in the UK**

The vast majority of the community are based in London and almost every illegal Chinese national encountered by the enquiry team was from Fujian province. The fact that very few of them spoke English is a significant barrier for investigation and research. For instance, according to Pharoah et al. (2009: 50), ‘58% of undocumented migrants claimed that their level of English was “none” whilst 30% rated their level of English as “survival”’. The majority of the community are in the UK illegally, which exacerbates their distrust of authority, extending to most things official. Of significant importance though is the fact that this distrust can be overcome by an effective strategy such as the witness strategy above.

The gangs encountered followed the Triad model to some extent but were not truly Triads in that they used some of the rank structures, loyalty and brotherhood aspects of Triad culture but not the elaborate initiation ceremonies.

Because of the unique nature of the British Chinese community the Hong Kong/PRC dynamic that existed in Manchester was replicated in London, but the Fujianese community was more settled in London. The

Fujianese gangs had originally worked for the established London Triads but had become large enough to go 'solo'. The established Triad groups such as the Wo Shing Wo and the 14K continue to operate throughout the UK. Whether or not there were formal agreements with the Fujianese groups was unclear but the Chinese Unit were firmly of the opinion that there must have been at least some form of understanding or a lot of bloodshed would have ensued (MPS, undated; see also Huisman 2008).

When murder and the use of violence were researched it was found that extreme violence was common but murders rare. The murder of He You Yi in London's Chinatown in June 2003 was the only other organised crime-related Chinese murder for several years in the UK. The victims of this violent crime and other crime were exclusively from the Chinese illegal community. They were rarely reported which poses significant issues for the MPS and raises some major human rights issues.

On the issue of previous gang affiliations it was found that the majority of gang members in the UK were not gang members in the PRC. There was an element of job selection on arrival in the UK, which was not always voluntary, to pay off their transportation debt. According to research by Silverstone (2011) this can take up to three years. Common 'jobs' were gang enforcers, DVD sellers, kitchen work and prostitution, although the enquiry did not find anyone physically forced into prostitution.

Issues with the immigration authorities included the wealth of intelligence that they held on the community and their frustration that they were unable to deport them because the PRC would not accept them back if they were unable to prove their nationality. This was well known and many deliberately destroyed their papers. Interestingly this lack of co-operation by the PRC government was also reported by Finkenauer and Chin (2007) as a concern to the authorities in Taiwan. This learning was, of course, gathered for a murder enquiry and not an academic purpose. Nevertheless its utility for academic research was considerable and comparisons with existing research are of great interest. Unfortunately much of the information gathered is, by its very nature, confidential and consequently cannot be utilised in the public domain.

## **Comparison of Chinese OC groups in the UK and worldwide**

It is clear that the Fujianese groups encountered in the murder enquiry had a number of common characteristics with their counterparts worldwide whether Triads or not. Regardless of whether the group in question is Triad or not it is clear that there are a great number of common features between the activities of Chinese OC groups worldwide and those in the UK. Disregarding the illegal movement of people, there is clearly much overlap in terms of modus operandi, types of offences, structures and norms, exploitation of the local Chinese community, maximising local opportunities and the use of extreme violence when considered necessary.

It is also clear that the Chinese OC groups in the UK mirror the entrepreneurial spirit of their international counterparts in their choice of commodities and activities and avoidance of law enforcement (Silverstone, 2011).

The choices and tactics of Chinese OC groups may be a conscious response to the priorities of UK law enforcement because the resources dedicated to combat organised crime are spread thinly and allocated mainly by reference to the United Kingdom Threat Assessment which is published annually by the Home Office and prepared by the Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA 2012, Gilmour, 2008). The assessment informs SOCA's 'Strategic Priorities' which are currently "drugs, cyber crime, firearms, organised immigration crime, and fraud" (SOCA 2012:1). With the exception of immigration crime, which as described above is a very complex picture indeed and the intellectual property aspect of fraud, there is no evidence of significant involvement in any of the other categories. Indeed the absence of reported use of firearms by Chinese OC groups is the one unique factor of any significance in the UK. It is submitted that this is a clear example of tactical adjustment to avoid law enforcement as firearms are widely available and used by Chinese criminal groups in the PRC (Finkenauer and Chin, 2007), the USA (Chin, 1996) and The Netherlands (Huisman, 2008). Coupled with their well established smuggling routes for a number of commodities there is little doubt that, should they be desired, firearms could be imported in significant numbers. This is difficult to substantiate empirically but is supported by the observations on their versatility noted above and their flexibility shown in changing of routes or commodities to avoid law enforcement contact (Finkenauer and Chin, 2007; Huisman, 2008; Silverstone, 2011). The desire of Chinese criminals to avoid unnecessary contact has long been observed by police in the UK and still persists. (GMP, 2004; MPS, undated).

### **The nexus of academic research and law enforcement research or intelligence gathering**

Historically law enforcement agencies have ignored or even derided academic research because the demands of intelligence-led policing require timely information that can be quickly processed. But there is an increasing realisation that academic research can be valuable, particularly in respect of culture and background (personal interviews with senior Home Office and ACPO4 staff). The research above illustrates there is a clear role for law enforcement as well as academics and this is clear from the Home Office publication 'Future Directions for Organised Crime Research' (2011) and their recently established Organised Crime Virtual Research Network whose aims are to:

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<sup>4</sup> Association of Chief Police Officers

- “improve communication and enable collaboration between experts from government, academia, industry, and law enforcement;
- enable better dissemination of science and research outputs; and
- support discussion of current and future priorities for science and research” (Home Office 2012:1).

These developments are welcome in that they demonstrate that the UK government is giving the issue of organised crime some thought and they are a follow up to the government’s strategy document ‘Local to Global: Reducing the Risk from Organised Crime’ (Home Office, 2011). Laudable efforts to demonstrate ‘joined up thinking’ that they are, none of them offer any additional funding for research purposes which might reasonably have been expected, or any clue as to how the issues can be progressed. In fact, Home Office research funding has been reduced as part of the current government austerity packages.

Perhaps the preparation for and the inception of the UK’s National Crime Agency (NCA) by December 2013 will provide some welcome impetus, with its stated mission of being “ ... an operational crime fighting agency that will tackle organised crime, strengthen our borders, fight fraud and cyber crime and protect children and young people” (Home Office 2012b:para.3). As a Home Office organ it should share their new enthusiasm for the collaboration between academia and law enforcement and how the agency and the strategy progress could be seen as an indicator of how serious the government is to push this ‘joined up’ agenda.

The NCA will consist of four ‘commands’, one of which will be an ‘Organised Crime Command’ (Home Office, 2012b) and “an intelligence hub, which will build and maintain a comprehensive picture of the threats to the UK from organised criminality” (*ibid*:1). There is no great detail yet published on how the command or the hub will operate but it will have an official link with the US (Levi, 2012). Perhaps when gazing westward the planners would be well directed to the US National Institute of Justice. With its strategic goals that include “Translating knowledge to practice — disseminating rigorous scientific research to criminal justice professionals to advance what works best in preventing and reducing crime.” (NIJ 2012: Strategic Goals). The institute seeks to achieve this with an impressive array of resources, including a director who is an academic - the current director Dr. John Laub is an expert in OC and James Finkenauer (see above) was formerly director of its International Center - but more importantly a large research budget. In the financial year ending in 2012 the NIJ awarded 363 grants and co-operative agreements for a total of approximately \$168 million.

The British government has approved the formation of a new ‘College of Policing’ by the end of 2012 (Home Office, 2012c) with five strategic goals, the third of which is “Identify evidence of what works in policing and share best practice: by providing access to a body of knowledge that is informed by evidence-based research and best

practice;...” (*ibid*:2). Without being too presumptuous this must surely indicate a role for academic research which, for example, is a key part of the Netherlands Police College (Netherlands Police and Safety Regions Department, 2009).

The Netherlands is also home to the ‘Organized Crime Monitor’ an ongoing research project which collects “files of closed Dutch police investigations of criminal groups, often spanning a period of several years” (Kleemans et al., 2002). Levi (2012) opines that the monitor is “the best public knowledge of criminal careers of organized criminals” (*ibid*:607). This method of data collection would appear superior to a similar exercise recently commissioned by the Home Office using the Police National Computer (PNC) to map careers of organised criminals (interviews with Home Office staff, 2012). The PNC is a powerful tool but it only contains data on persons convicted in the UK thereby excluding most foreign criminals and others as yet unconvicted.

## Conclusion

As noted above there is a paucity of academic literature on illegal Chinese activities in the UK and those that are published, although well researched and informative, tend to be restricted to singular issues (for example McEwen and Strauss, 2009; Silverstone 2010, 2011). The case study included in this article has shed some light on the wider aspects of the activities of Chinese criminal groups in the UK and their structures and norms. It is also clear from the information that only emerged months into the murder enquiry that even a lengthy, in-depth examination of the illegal Chinese community was only ‘scratching the surface’ of the true nature of criminal activity and perhaps more importantly, victimisation. The Chinese community in the UK is not unique in being exploited by its countrymen (see Varese, 2012, on the activities of Russian OC groups in Italy) and this debilitating practice is clearly continuing. Neither is its participation in organised crime unique as there are many ethnically based OC groups operating in the UK (SOCA, 2009). However, the size of the community, which may be as large as 420,000 (Institute of Migration, 2006) and the illegal community within that, which itself may number as many as 100,000 (Pharoah and Lau, 2009) make it numerically as well as culturally significant and deserving of serious consideration by government agencies and policy makers.

The problems associated with the illegal Chinese community, are multi faceted, complex and in some cases serious as illustrated above. Not only are a minority engaging in serious criminal activity but it would seem that the majority are exploited financially, sexually, in their working conditions, and are frequently subject to violence (GMP, 2004, Silverstone, 2011). These issues alone are of sufficient significance to justify further, in-depth research to determine the true extent of illegal activities and victimisation in the interests of equity and human rights as well as the rule

of law. There are trust issues in the Chinese community but these can be overcome by a sensitive approach. The Association of Chief Police Officer's concept of 'Harm' may be of great utility as it can highlight the economic aspects alongside the human rights or moral motivations for the research. Briefly, 'Harm' from OC is "...characterised by one or more of the exercise of control, significant profit or loss, serious violence, corruption, and/or having a significant impact upon community safety" (Gilmour, 2008).

It is clear that the activities of Chinese OC groups in the UK cause harm to the UK Chinese community and to the economic wellbeing of the UK in terms of lost revenue from smuggled goods such as cigarettes (McEwen and Strauss, 2009), unpaid tax and national insurance in the grey economy (Silverstone, 2011) and reported massive losses in terms of Intellectual Property. The Intellectual Property Office, for example, cite criminal gain in the UK at £1.3 Billion and identify China as the source of 54 percent of all counterfeit goods seized in the EU in 2007 (IPO, 2010). Although the methodologies of these assertions are not made clear, the Federation Against Copyright Theft (FACT) estimate the loss to the exchequer and copyright owners for the illegal sale of DVDs may be as much as £600 million (FACT, 2005). Whatever the true figure, it is clear from the literature review and the case study that their involvement in counterfeit DVDs is significant.

A true assessment of the issues will undoubtedly be a difficult task. Perhaps, as Levi opines, "it is better to start with an awareness of what we do not know" (2012:616), which is considerable. The coincidence in the formation of the NCA and the College of Policing present a huge opportunity for UK law enforcement and its political masters to identify and shape their intelligence requirement for years to come. Rather than the current (unresourced) aspirations in terms of academic research and the Organised Crime Virtual Research Network, there is a once in a decade chance to integrate academic research and police intelligence, taking into account the good practice in the USA and the Netherlands above. After all the subtext behind these developments is the professionalisation of policing and law enforcement. For example the vast repository of knowledge gained by Lancashire Constabulary in the Morecombe Bay enquiry is probably lying dormant within a HOLMES account rather than be readily available for subsequent enquiry teams. No doubt costs will be an issue in these times of financial austerity but in his report into 'Police Leadership and Training' Peter Neyroud (2010) has already identified savings of millions of pounds made by the demise of the National Police Improvement Agency that could be earmarked for the proposed project.

The findings above demonstrate that Chinese OC is durable, flexible, well resourced and well established in the UK and a major threat to the UK economy and human rights. These are major issues that require serious consideration. Economics aside, when the huge number of victims and potential victims of the most horrendous crimes - albeit hidden from official figures - is calculated the failure of the Home Office or its law enforcement arms to explore these issues thoroughly, or sponsor that

exploration, would be an abrogation of their responsibility and an abject failure in protecting the fundamental rights of a huge number of people residing in the UK. The forthcoming changes in UK law enforcement is an unprecedented opportunity to really grasp this particular societal nettle.

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