

# THE POLICING OF A SOUTH CHINESE COUNTY, 1929–1949

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*In 1927, when the Nationalist Party under Chiang Kai-shek established a republic, they also established a list of urgent duties. One was to reform the government structure from top to bottom so as to show the rest of the world its capability to govern the country in a modern way. While big cities were the showplaces for modernization and state-building, down at the county level, Chiang Kai-shek proclaimed Zhongshan in Guangdong the “model county.” To maintain this honor and its benefits, the local authorities made special efforts to restructure the government; reforming and retraining the police force was one important aspect of this attempt. While it is commonly held today that in the 1930s and 1940s county governments in the Pearl River Delta had disintegrated and were dominated by “local bosses,” this article uses previously inaccessible local records to examine Zhongshan County government and reform to answer one particular question: whether Zhongshan was successful in forming a modern police force. It examines a number of problems related to inefficiency and ineffectiveness in government administration, but at the same time also discusses why many civilians were welcoming, rather than suspicious, of the police. The answers to these issues suggest that the overall structure and management of the Zhongshan government (and even social integration) was to some extent consolidated in this period.*

**Keywords:** Nationalist government; county administration; police system/policing; Zhongshan; Guangdong

## INTRODUCTION

It is a conventional belief, especially for Cantonese people today, that during the 1930s and 1940s the Nationalist government in Guangdong recruited armed local bosses who scrambled for petty bureaucratic positions in towns and villages as well as in the security forces that controlled the counties. According to Helen Siu, the central authority in Xinhui county (Xinhui xian 新會縣) located west of the Pearl River Delta had disintegrated in the 1940s, and:

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Security forces and local police contributed their share to the county's disorder. With the authority of their uniforms and the power of their guns, they plundered the city neighborhoods and the surrounding townships. Policemen forcibly entered homes and made arbitrary arrests, extorting money from those whom they accused of being Communists. Others took the liberty of stopping and searching passersby on the street and then robbing them . . . In the eyes of the public in Huicheng (in Xinhui) and its vicinity, the Nationalist government was not only unable to provide basic security, its agents were also the major sources of violence. Four years after the Japanese surrender, even the most unconcerned among the public seemed skeptical about what remained of a state structure.<sup>1</sup>

The complicated political setting of Xinhui, and this description of the situation there, might give us the perception that the authorities in the rest of the Pearl River Delta area also disregarded local security, and ignored or even encouraged corrupt policemen.

Making use of police records and court cases, local journals and records, especially magazines published in villages, along with county newspapers, this article provides a new look and a controversial picture of the policing of a Pearl River Delta county in the decades before 1949. For this purpose, I focus on the police system in Zhongshan county located immediately east of Xinhui. In 1933, Zhongshan was about 8,671 square miles in size with a population of over 1.1 million people.<sup>2</sup> It was a relatively prosperous southern Guangdong county with (at a rough estimation) over ten thousand Zhongshanese overseas who sent home huge remittance payments every year. Since the county had also been home to Sun Yat-sen, the Nationalist government hoped to make it a showplace for innovative, modern thinking and administration. After the Nationalist government was established in Nanjing in 1928, Chiang Kai-shek, agreeing to a proposal from Sun Fo 孫科 (1895–1973), promulgated Zhongshan as the “model county” (*mofan xian* 模範縣).<sup>3</sup> This classification put Zhongshan under the direct jurisdiction of the Nanjing government. This honor included the granting of tax exemptions, extra budget allocation and approval for the construction of a tax-free harbor. Such recognition and rewards elicited a conscious effort among local political leaders to modernize the county.<sup>4</sup>

1 Siu 1989, pp. 106–7.

2 The population of Zhongshan declined after the Sino-Japanese War. Figures in 1947 indicate that there were 747,527 people in Zhongshan. See *Zhongshanxian Tudiju* 1933, section “Zhuan’an,” p. 13; *Zhongshanshi zhi* 1997, p. 224.

3 Guangdongsheng Dang’anguan 1987, vol. 2, p. 159.

4 *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 241, 316, 362, 380, 392; vol. 3, p. 134. Although between 1929 and 1936 Guangdong province was under the control of Chen Jitang, he was not able to interfere in the everyday administration of Zhongshan, which was to a large extent in the hands of the Political Tutelage Committee under the Nanjing government. During Chen’s reign, financial matters in Guangdong were mainly in his hands and beyond the reach of Nanjing, yet, Chen was only able to gain control over Zhongshan’s fiscal budget in 1934, until he resigned his position as chairman of the Guangdong government in 1936. For a more detailed political study on Chen Jitang’s reign and the relations between the Guangdong provincial and Zhongshan county governments, see Lin 2002, pp. 177–212, *Zhongguo Di’er Lishi Dang’anguan* 1994, vol. 5, no. 1, p. 130 and Cheng 1989, pp. 49–51.

As Frederick Wakeman tells us, the making of a modern police force in Republican Shanghai was much more complex than simply modernizing the city. Chiang Kai-shek was using Shanghai as a showplace to demonstrate to foreigners the capability of the Chinese to govern a city in the Western way: “The most persuasive argument for abolishing extraterritoriality would be a demonstration of effective law enforcement within the Chinese sectors of the divided city.”<sup>5</sup> The case of Zhongshan was less international and dramatic, but still important in China in that the administrative apparatus of the county was made to serve as a model for other counties in the rest of the country.

Unlike Xinhui in the same period, in Zhongshan, the county government led by magistrates Tang Shaoyi 唐紹儀 and Yang Ziyi 楊子毅,<sup>6</sup> who were directly appointed by Nanjing, invested considerable effort in restructuring the local government, including the development of the police system. Zhongshan reformed the complaints system for civilians and by doing so strengthened trust in the police and in people’s rights to legal process and fair treatment. Were efforts of the “model county” able to help Zhongshan form a modern police force? Or were the Zhongshan policemen like those in Xinhui, as described by Helen Siu, who were themselves major sources of violence? This article also studies the Zhongshan police force from the civilian perspective. Did civilians welcome the police system or were they skeptical? What do the answers to these questions suggest about the structure and integrity of the Zhongshan government?

## RE-INVENTING THE MODERN CHINESE POLICE FORCE

The first effort in organizing a modern police force in China took place in 1898 during the Hundred Days Reform. By 1901, orders were issued by the imperial court to governors and viceroys to establish “police brigades” in each province.<sup>7</sup> Viceroy Yuan Shikai immediately saw the benefits of the Western or Japanese model of the police system and brought it into practice in Beijing and Tianjin in 1902. The model “provided a means of formally centralizing or integrating the political system, bypassing locally entrenched officials to connect directly with the vast, scattered, rural population of China.”<sup>8</sup> In Guangdong, a Central Police Bureau (Xunzheng Zongju 巡政總局) was established in Guangzhou in January 1903 and policemen began to patrol the city the following March.<sup>9</sup> By 1906, Guangzhou had twenty-eight precinct stations and in the same year, various Guangdong counties began to establish their first police forces.<sup>10</sup> Some positive perceptions were found in the municipal police forces when they were newly established. Beijing achieved a well-

5 Wakeman 1995, p. 14.

6 Tang Shaoyi (1862–1938), served as magistrate between 1931 and 1934, and Yang Ziyi (1878–1953) occupied office from 1935 to 1937 (*Zhongshanshi zhengquanzhi* 1989, pp. 95–97).

7 During the Hundred Days Reform, a Tokyo police officer named Nagatani Ryūchū was appointed to set up a police force in Yangshupu. As the Reform movement failed, Nagatani packed up and left. Bureaucratic initiative resumed during the second Qing reform movement after April 1901. See Wakeman 1995, p. 19.

8 Wakeman 1995, p. 19.

9 Rhoads 1975, p. 59.

10 Wang 1984, p. 71.

trained police force, and by the second and third decades of the twentieth century, the city earned the distinction of being “one of the best-policed cities in the world.”<sup>11</sup> Tianjin’s new police successfully brought law and order to the city, and its police academy became the training center for police personnel throughout north China.<sup>12</sup> In Sichuan, the Chengdu police force also found acceptance within large sectors of the community and built a reputation for self-discipline and public service.<sup>13</sup>

The big cities of Beijing, Tianjin and Chengdu offer examples of success but those at the county level provide a different story. Kristin Stapleton tells us that “the ‘official mind’ had not yet been fully seduced by the new Western principles of centralization – specialization and professionalization of low-level bureaucrats and close surveillance....”<sup>14</sup> County magistrates made decisions outside the legal boundary of the central government. Although magistrates formulated rules to control policemen, these rules were not consistently implemented. Policemen who were not permitted to make an arrest or search for stolen goods without a warrant were sometimes rewarded for their hard work in the form of warrants which might be used as means of extortion. According to Ch’ü T’ung-tzu, this practice was not unusual.<sup>15</sup> Police reports of thirty-one counties in Sichuan in 1908 claimed that only eight counties were judged to have fairly acceptable forces. The others either had too few policemen or were seriously undisciplined. They kept prostitutes, falsely accused people of crimes in order to extort money and many merely served as bodyguards for the county magistrate.<sup>16</sup> These statements and examples suggest that the county governments in the Qing dynasty were not quite ready for a modern police system.

The absence of the principles of centralization and the approval of extortion were perplexing problems for modernization, and the collection of customary fees was also a Chinese traditional administrative practice that was very different from the Western model. In the Qing dynasty, customary fees were collected to help cover administrative expenses. Many Qing essayists were opposed to their collection because they were immoral and harmful to the commoners. Other writers maintained that salary paid to government officials was inadequate so they had no choice but to collect customary fees. The problem about customary fees was their ambiguity. They were not properly distinguished from corruption and were neither formally approved nor prohibited.<sup>17</sup> As we shall see later, this old Chinese problem was carried forward to Republican Zhongshan.

While the concept of modern police forces in Yuan Shikai’s time was closely related to reforming local governments and local society, the Nationalist government’s concept of a modern police system was rather different. They required the police forces to consider themselves part of a nationwide police system; they were an instrument of national ruling

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11 Strand 1989, pp. 71, 83–84.

12 MacKinnon 1980, p. 153.

13 Stapleton 2000, pp. 80–84, 110.

14 Stapleton 1997, p. 119.

15 Ch’ü 1969, pp. 70–73.

16 Stapleton 1997, p. 106.

17 Park 1997, pp. 979–80.

power. They were the state, at least as far as governing the street and neighborhood were concerned.<sup>18</sup> Now back in Guangdong, the authorities made a considerable effort to build a reputation for self-discipline and public service. They named the police “the police of the people” (*renmin de jingcha* 人民的警察).<sup>19</sup> Along with their duty to guarantee public security, the police were also entrusted with the task of encouraging citizens’ morality. Police cadets were expected to become “tutors of society” (*shehui daoshi* 社會導師).<sup>20</sup>

To make an ideal modern police force, against the old practice of court officers who extorted and collected customary fees, the Nationalist authorities were aware that it was important to pay policemen regularly and adequately.<sup>21</sup> When salaries were low due to budgetary problems, the police chief had to remind policemen to pay attention to discipline,<sup>22</sup> implying that the collection of customary fees and extortion were not allowed. The Wang Jingwei government too was aware that police discipline and salary were closely related. While visiting the Guangdong Police Academy (Guangdong Jingguan Xuexiao 廣東警官學校) in Guangzhou in 1941, the secretary of the Executive Yuan, Chen Chunpu 陳春圃 (1900–1966) told the cadets that the government was in “extraordinary times” (*feichang shiqi* 非常時期) when the fiscal budget was extremely tight so that their salary had to be limited. Chen reminded the cadets that the police force was the government department that had the most interaction with civilians. For the sake of people’s livelihoods, it was most crucial for policemen not to act like Qing officials who were corrupt and oppressed the public.<sup>23</sup>

In order to ensure the quality of policemen, the Nationalist government required constables to be recruited from ordinary upright families, and they had to have a minimum of six years of primary school education. Recruits ranged between twenty-three and twenty-six years of age and were at least five feet two inches tall and physically and mentally healthy. They had to undergo a six-month training program offered by the Police Academy (Jingshi Jiaoliansuo 警士教練所) supported by the county or municipal government. Police cadets were taught Republican law, policemen’s appropriate manners, administrative and judiciary procedures, public health practices and so on, and had to pass an exam before becoming police constables.<sup>24</sup>

18 Wakeman, 1995, p. 21.

19 Li 1922, pp. 34–36.

20 *Guangdongsheng Jingcha Xuexiao* 1948, pp. 2, 8.

21 Stapleton 2000, pp. 80–84.

22 *Guangdongsheng Jingcha Xuexiao* 1948, p. 1.

23 *Guangdongsheng Jingguan Xuexiao* 1942, pp. 38–39. During the Sino-Japanese war, the Wang Jingwei regime established its police force together with a police academy in Guangzhou. The academy’s first batch of 110 policemen graduated in 1942 after one year’s training (*Guangdongsheng Jingguan Xuexiao* 1942, p. 7). At the same time, the Guangdong Nationalist government under Chiang Kai-shek, which had fled to Shaoguan in northern Guangdong, had also established a police academy which operated for one year between 1942 and 1943 before it was destroyed by Japanese troops; *Guangdongsheng Jingcha Xuexiao* 1948, pp. 4–5. As for Zhongshan, the government under Wang Jingwei took over administration in April 1940. The police forces continued to operate until April 1943 when the county government faced severe budgetary problems and the police bureau ceased operation. In ZSMA 1943, 1/1/2/465/13, 1/1/2/570/2; *Guangdongsheng wei jiquan ren yuan diaocha lu* 1945, pp. 10, 25.

24 *Guangdongsheng xingzhengrenyuan* 1937, p. 302; *Guangdongsheng Jingcha Xuexiao* 1948, pp. 11–13.

So the plans and targets were set, but what was the making of a modern police force like in a Republican county such as Zhongshan?

Like the big cities of Beijing, Chengdu and Guangzhou, Zhongshan established its own police force at a very early date. The number of police stations and policemen suggest that it was expanding rather rapidly over the years. In 1906, the Guangdong provincial government required all counties to establish their own police forces. By 1910, Zhongshan had eleven police stations and 150 policemen. Among these police stations, seven were located in Shiqi town (Shiqizhen 石岐鎮), the county capital. The other four were located each in one town. Villages did not have police stations.<sup>25</sup> By 1934, there were forty-five police stations all over Zhongshan with 950 constables and sergeants.<sup>26</sup> In 1947, there were thirty-five police stations and ninety-seven precinct stations,<sup>27</sup> and figures in 1948 show that there were 1,013 policemen.<sup>28</sup>

Sergeants in Zhongshan were well trained. They were normally promoted from outstanding constables who would first become trainee-sergeants in the Guangdong Police Academy (Guangdongsheng Jingcha Xuexiao 廣東省警察學校), in Guangzhou before they passed another examination.<sup>29</sup> Trained sergeants were assigned to various Guangdong counties and cities depending on the funds available for policing and the need for sergeants in the locality.<sup>30</sup> For instance, in 1948, after graduating from the Academy, eight non-Zhongshanese sergeants were transferred to work in one of the Zhongshan police stations.<sup>31</sup>

Some highly educated inspectors of police were found in Zhongshan too. Out of four inspectors employed in the Zhongshan police headquarters in Shiqi in 1945, two graduated from military academies and two were university graduates. One of them was inspector Yu Bingnan 余炳楠, age thirty-four. Yu was a Zhongshanese and had graduated from St. John's University in Shanghai with a Bachelor's Degree in Engineering. Before working as an inspector in Zhongshan, he had been teaching in a high school in Macau.<sup>32</sup> The other inspector was Yang Ruisheng 楊瑞生, then aged thirty, who graduated from Wuchang Huazhong University (Wuchang Huazhong Daxue 武昌華中大學) in Hubei and had been working in the Product Inspection Bureau (Shangpin Jianyanju 商品檢驗局) of Hankou.<sup>33</sup> Besides these inspectors, Gao Bao 高苞, 34, the head of Shaxi Police Station

25 Wang 1925, pp. 2228–29.

26 *Guangdong quansheng difang jiyao* 1934, p. 77.

27 *Zhongshan minguo ribao tekan* 1947, p. 15.

28 ZSMA 1948, 1/5/327/4/105–6.

29 *Guangdongsheng xingzhengrenyuan* 1937, p. 299.

30 According to the requirements imposed by the Nationalist government in 1928, one police bureau should be established in each city and county, and in each district within a city or a county, there had to be at least one police station. However it was up to the local government to decide on the need to establish sub-police stations and the number of policemen to be employed (*Minguo zhenxi duankan duankan* 2006, Guangzhou series, vol. 2, p. 709).

31 ZSMA 1948, 1/5/12/15.

32 ZSMA 1945, 1/5/27/1.

33 ZSMA 1945, 1/5/27/1.

(Shaxi Jingchaju 沙溪警察局), earned a Bachelor's degree in Politics from Guangzhou University before returning to Zhongshan.<sup>34</sup>

However, in the rush to expand its police forces, the Zhongshan authorities set aside some of the training requirements imposed by Nanjing. Supplementary evidence suggests that constable training in Zhongshan did not last for six months. During the nine months between September 1931 and June 1932, there were three batches of graduates from the Zhongshan police academy, so it might be inferred that each batch of cadets was trained for only three months.<sup>35</sup> Age requirements were also not met. There were policemen in Zhongshan who were as young as sixteen years old. Jiangweitou precinct station (Jiangweitou Jingsuo 江尾頭警所), for example, had two sergeants, aged thirty-two and twenty-nine years old, but there were nineteen constables who were aged between sixteen and forty.<sup>36</sup> Huangpu precinct station (Huangpu Jingsuo 黃圃警所) had two sergeants, aged forty and forty-one, but fourteen constables between twenty and forty-five years old.<sup>37</sup> Besides being a model county where there was a rapid need to expand its police forces, there were other possible reasons to explain these half-measures. First, full-course training was too expensive for the county. Magistrate Huang Suju 黃素居 mentioned that due to budgetary problems, some constables in various precinct stations in Zhongshan were not trained at all.<sup>38</sup> As we shall see later in this article, the budget was so tight in some police stations that paying salaries was unaffordable. A possible reason for precinct stations to recruit under-aged policemen is that the county lacked Zhongshanese men of working age. This is not surprising because around one-seventh of the Zhongshan population, all of whom were adult males, had gone overseas. Police offices that had to compete with both the domestic and overseas job markets would find it difficult to recruit the best people. Furthermore, according to the Guangdong Police Academy, the fiscal budget was tight and they were unable to offer attractive salaries for the most suitable police candidates.<sup>39</sup> If that was not a nationwide phenomenon, it was at least a provincial problem.

After the Nanjing government was established in 1928, they gradually standardized the structure of local governments. Like other counties, the Zhongshan County Public Security Bureau (Zhongshanxian Gong'anju 中山縣公安局) was incorporated into one of the four bureaus directly under the supervision of the county magistrate. Below the Public Security Bureau, there were five departments each assigned specific duties.<sup>40</sup>

34 ZSMA 1946, 1/5/27/4/17.

35 *Zhongshan Xianzhengfu jikan* 1930, section "Kewu," p. 19. In the early 1930s when the Nanjing government newly unified the police system, not all policemen had the opportunity to undergo proper training. Partly due to financial problems and partly from suspicions entertained by provincial authorities, not all provinces had police academies. Fewer than 60,000 out of 190,000 policemen throughout the nation received either advanced, elementary or technical police education. And the Nanjing government saw police education as the most pressing reform needed in the police system. See T'ang 1935, pp. 158–59.

36 ZSMA 1945, 1/5/780/4/2-6.

37 ZSMA 1948, 1/5/1007/10/10.

38 *Jianshe* 1930, pp. 18–19.

39 Guangdong Jingcha Xuexiao Jiaodao Zu 1948, pp. 2, 8.

40 *Zhongshan Xianzhengfu jikan* 1930, section "Fagui," pp. 5–8. Under the Public Security Bureau were the Administration Department (Xingzheng ke 行政課), Police Affairs Department (Jingwu ke 警務課), Health



The government structure was designed in such a way that a vast variety of law enforcement and public work was assigned to the Public Security Bureau. This suggests that the government was allowing policemen to permeate society and play a prominent and influential role in the everyday life of the common people. In practice, policemen not only patrolled the streets, maintained social order and prevented crime, but since the Health Department was under the Bureau, they also managed sanitary problems, licensed Western and traditional Chinese doctors, and monitored epidemic prevention. To investigate and arrest opium users was also their particular duty. Furthermore, the policemen in the Administration Department of the Bureau were responsible for fire prevention, enforcing business regulations and closing unlicensed businesses. No wonder, then, when a rickshaw puller in Beijing was asked what the national government was, he responded, “the public security bureau.”<sup>41</sup>

After a few months of training, if there was any, that is, the Zhongshanese police constables, some of whom were under age, were given enormous powers and responsibility. The local government was clear that they had to invite people of “good quality” in the first place. In 1932, magistrate Tang Xiaoyi issued a decree to village offices ordering them to recommend one or two eligible people to attend the entrance examination for the Zhongshan police academy.<sup>42</sup> This was followed by a sequence of police training that was intensively designed to teach policemen the proper way of coping with everyday matters on the streets. Magistrate Yang Ziyi prepared a list that he named the Police Services Guidelines (*Jingcha fuwu xuzhi* 警察服務須知) in 1936.<sup>43</sup> For the first time, standards that taught Zhongshanese policemen to perform and serve as civil servants were formally recorded on paper. The Guidelines required policemen not only to stop any threats to public order in the form of criminal activities but also to act as a moral example. It reminded policemen that corruption and unnecessary use of violence were serious offenses. Policemen were instructed to be kind, ideally, and to give help whenever they could. To show kindness, as the Guideline requires, policemen should answer civilians’ inquiries politely. If policemen found rowdies on the streets, policemen should quiet them courteously.

Nanjing successfully unified the structure at various levels of government. The roles and targets of government departments were also brought into line. From central to local, the authorities had common expectations of what was needed to maintain a modern police force. New standards for police were created, policemen in training were taught not only to maintain public order but also to work as civil servants for the people and, above all else, to act as moral exemplars. Nevertheless, hidden anxiety was there in the county. Training for Zhongshan policemen was shorter than the time period required by the central government; some policemen were not trained at all; and some did not meet the age requirements. With this first glimpse, we are seeing the fact that the problems found in

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Department (Weisheng ke 衛生課), Superintendent Division (Ducha chu 督察處) and the Crime Investigation Unit (Zhenji dui 偵緝隊).

41 Strand 1989, p. 65.

42 ZSMA 1932, 1/3/125/30.

43 *Zhongshan Xianzhengfu niankan* 1937, section “Minzheng,” pp. 34, 38–39.



the Qing police administrative system as stated by Kristin Stapleton were also found in Republican Zhongshan, that is, the effort to standardize police administration succeeded in forcing localities to adopt centrally-drafted regulations and terminology but did not result in direct central supervision of the local police.<sup>44</sup>

## LAWS AND REGULATIONS AGAINST LAW-BREAKING AND MISBEHAVING POLICEMEN

To make a police force that was modern, the Zhongshan government exerted itself both in eliminating undisciplined policemen and corruption, and in preventing the solicitation of bribes. At times when they believed it was necessary, Zhongshan even went beyond the Republican code in imposing punishments against law-breaking policemen despite the anomalous fact that Zhongshan produced their own *Police Reward and Punishment Ordinances* (*Jingcha shangfa zhuan zhang* 警察賞罰專章) which were much more lenient than those stipulated in the Republican code.

A careful look at the Republican code tells us that preventing government officers from committing crimes was a great concern for the state. Nanjing compiled a set of laws on the crime of malfeasance (*duzhi zui* 瀆職罪) in Chapter Four of the criminal code. The chapter targeted corruption and abuse of authority committed by government officers. For instance, Article 121 stated that government officers who were guilty of asking for or receiving bribes connected with the performance of duties for which they were responsible could be sentenced to a maximum of seven years' imprisonment.<sup>45</sup> Government officers who were found guilty of receiving bribes for not performing their duties faced a maximum of ten years' imprisonment (Article 122).<sup>46</sup> Other chapters of the criminal code tell us that for the same crime, punishments imposed on government officers were heavier than on civilians, thereby placing stricter control on the former. In Article 162 of Chapter Eight (concerning the crime of escaping from legal custody, *taotuo zui* 逃脫罪) of the criminal code, anyone who assisted an arrested person to escape was subject to a maximum penalty of three years' imprisonment.<sup>47</sup> But if the person who illegally released the criminal was a government officer, the maximum penalty was seven years' imprisonment (Article 163).<sup>48</sup> Officers who harbored opium dealing and gambling were subject to half as much again of the relevant punishment than a common offender. Maltreatment of suspects or criminals was also outlawed. Officers guilty of these crimes were sentenced to a maximum of seven years' imprisonment (Articles 125 and 126).<sup>49</sup>

One thing is certain: Zhongshan was aware of the existence of policemen who were misbehaving or even breaking the law. In a written statement, police sergeants wrote: "... the police force has to interact very closely with civilians; any police misconduct would be

44 Stapleton 1997, p. 104.

45 Zhongguo Fagui Kanxingshe 1948, p. 213.

46 *Ibid.*

47 *Ibid.*, p. 216.

48 *Ibid.*

49 *Ibid.*, p. 213.

immediately felt by them. As a result, rules and regulations against policemen who committed crimes had to be implemented properly, preventing civilians from being harmed.”<sup>50</sup> Regarding the behavior of policemen, in 1936, the county government issued a prohibitory edict on twenty-five things that the police should not do. There were also regulations for recording demerits for their wrongdoings, even if the demerit system more often encouraged professional comportment than it prevented abuse. Aside from one edict that required policemen not to hit people with their truncheons, the other edicts emphasized the appearance of the policemen, requiring them, for instance, to wear tidy uniforms with hats tilted, and to bathe and cut their fingernails frequently. When on duty, policemen should not eat, drink or smoke and should not lean against walls, nor play with truncheons as if they were toys.<sup>51</sup>

The Zhongshan government produced the *Police Reward and Punishment Ordinances* for the Zhongshan police forces. Whereas the Republican code imposed stricter punishments on government officers than on civilians who committed the same crime, punishments specified for Zhongshanese policemen were actually ridiculously more lenient. The *Ordinances* stated that policemen were subject to three types of punishment depending on the heinousness of the offense. In the most serious circumstances, they would either be taken to the judiciary or military tribunal for trial, or they would be dismissed. If policemen committed less serious crimes, they would have a demerit recorded against them. For minor faults, they would receive a reprimand.

Article 11 of the *Ordinances* stated that a policeman who committed heinous crimes including receiving bribes, extortion, theft, involvement with known gangsters, rape, trafficking of humans and the injury of another person not for the purpose of self-defense would be given an “exceptionally serious” demerit (*yichang daguo* 異常大過), when in effect that meant little more than imposing a fine of two silver dollars if the offender were a police constable. A police sergeant committing the same crimes would be fined four silver dollars.<sup>52</sup> The final sentence of Article 11 declared that only if a policeman committed a crime that was more serious than those stated in the articles, the policeman would be dismissed or sent to the judiciary or the military tribunal for trial.<sup>53</sup> According to the Republican code, however, offenders of these crimes would be subject to at least seven years’ imprisonment. The inconsistencies between the legal code and the local ordinances reflected serious coordination problems between the central and local governments over legislation. Such problems seem ridiculous, but more importantly, they actually reveal the uneven progress of the idea of modernization and the idea of discipline in Chinese criminal codes and in the minds of local authority.

If the Zhongshan government worked according to the *Police Reward and Punishment Ordinances* in handling crimes committed by policemen, then it was giving a loose rein to those who might inflict harm on civilians. However, as we have seen earlier, the

50 *Zhongshan Xianzhengfu niankan* 1937, section “Minzheng,” pp. 43–44.

51 *Ibid.*, pp. 40–41.

52 *Ibid.*, pp. 43–44.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 30.

authorities had given much consideration to the discipline of local policemen. One example can tell us that actual punishments were not only more severe than those stated in the Ordinance but they were harsher than punishments specified in the Republican code. In one incident that occurred in 1948, a gang of people headed by a policeman named Cai Sanzai 蔡三仔 was found guilty of robbing the house of a retired overseas worker. Cai and his gang were arrested and Cai was sentenced to death. Executioners were sent to his home village to make a positive identification of him. Cai was executed on the spot.<sup>54</sup> The local government claimed that by imposing severe punishment on law-breaking policemen, they could admonish the police forces and other government officers, in a demonstration of their fate if they committed such crimes.

It is doubtful whether sentencing Cai Sanzai to death was lawful. The Republican code did not state the level of punishment a policeman should bear if he committed robbery. Article 134 of the criminal code states that if a government officer abused his authority in committing a crime not listed in any of the articles in the criminal code, his punishment would be half as heavy again as that for a criminal who was not a government officer. In the context of the law regarding the particular offense described above, Cai would not have suffered more than seven and a half years' imprisonment (Article 320 states that the maximum penalty for a robber was five years' imprisonment or a fine of 500 yuan).

Here, the local ordinance, the state's law and the punishments actually implemented were all inconsistent. In order to maintain a disciplined police force by executing a policeman who committed an atrocious crime, the Zhongshan magistrate imposed a punishment far beyond the severity approved by the Republican code. Again, the local authorities were given a free hand to make decisions and in this case, decisions that were against the law. This is another consequence of a county government rushing to establish a disciplined police force with inadequate consideration of a number of other factors, including consistency in the formulation and implementation of laws and regulations.

## UNIFYING POLICE SURCHARGES, SURCHARGE ARREARS AND OFFICIAL REMEDIES

At the time Zhongshan was proclaimed the model county, the local government had up to then depended mainly on private donations to support the police forces. However, seeking such donations was not easy, and they were insufficient to maintain a well-trained and well-equipped police force. As a result, in 1930, magistrate Huang Suju proposed a police

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54 JYB 1948, vol. 4, p. 35. This and a number of cases of police corruption described in this article were found in village-published magazines that became popular in Zhongshan in the first half of the twentieth century. The monthly JYB, for instance, had both articles written by hired reporters and the public. Editors were the "elites" in the villages, and these magazines were registered under the local government. Apparently, articles were censored. All authors had to register their full names and addresses with the publisher and authors were responsible for what they wrote. Subverting the Nationalist government was impossible and pro-Communist writings never appeared in these magazines. However, since the target readers of these magazines were fellow Zhongshan natives outside the country, censorship was less harsh than for local newspapers. Bold critiques on political affairs were frequent. For instance, a volume in JYB consisted of a three-page-long ironic critique of the Nationalist government's disrespect of the freedom of speech in the country (JYB 1947, vol. 5, pp. 1–3). Reports on local corruption, unruly officials and inefficient bureaucratic arrangements were also not uncommon.

surcharge (*jing fei* 警費). Huang proposed that the owner of every *mu* of land in the county pay thirty cents, shop owners pay 15 percent of the amount of their rent, while residents of houses pay between ten and thirty cents, depending on the size of their house.<sup>55</sup> By the time the first Zhongshan government's financial budget was prepared for the 1929/30 fiscal year, surcharge items for financing the Zhongshan police forces were already included in the budget.<sup>56</sup> Surcharges that supported the Zhongshan police forces yielded an income of 84,000 yuan while the total expenses of all the police stations were 74,000 yuan.<sup>57</sup> Information tells us that in 1934 the Zhongshan police forces were still financed through these surcharges.<sup>58</sup>

The police gross annual revenue of 84,000 yuan was collected only with much difficulty. As we shall see later, police assistance and protection were services demanded by civilians, but their willingness to pay for these services was another matter. Tax and surcharge arrearage was a knotty problem for the local government. Collecting the police surcharge was a difficult task, and probably one of the assignments that policemen were the most unwilling to perform. In 1930 when Huang Suju first standardized police surcharges, the police bureau did not wish to undertake the collections themselves. They claimed that sending troops into villages might frighten villagers and cause public resentment. The police bureau called for a meeting with representatives of various villages hoping that they could help. However, with the same worries of frightening villagers, these representatives declined to comply with the authorities' request.<sup>59</sup> In the end, the police bureau had to take charge of collecting the surcharge from all households, shops and landowners.

In order to keep their profile as low as possible, the police bureau instructed precinct stations to send only one office assistant into the villages. But two months after their first attempts, the police bureau realized that surcharge collection by lone office assistants was yielding far less than the expected receipts. The police bureau had to offer rewards to these assistants: for every one hundred yuan they collected, they could keep eight yuan for themselves.<sup>60</sup>

In 1936, changes in the police surcharge were made when the Guangdong provincial government decided to eliminate all legal and illegal surcharges imposed by county authorities. Taxes were restricted to twenty-four types, and the power to collect tax was reserved to the provincial government, which in turn would redistribute funds to various counties. In the four years between 1937 and 1941, the provincial government eliminated over six thousand types of surcharges in various counties.<sup>61</sup> Regarding surcharges for the police, the provincial government introduced a standardized one that was similar to that suggested by Huang Suju in 1930. Twenty percent of the amount of the rental payments

55 *Jianshe* 1930, section "Tiyi shu," pp. 8–19.

56 *Zhongshan Xianzhengfu jikan* 1930, section "Banshibaogao: caizheng," pp. 9–22.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

58 *Guangdong quansheng difang jiyao* 1934, p. 77.

59 HMXB 1930, vol. 77, pp. 100–101; vol. 78, pp. 97–98.

60 HMXB, 1930, 77: 78.

61 *Guangdong caizheng* 1943, p. 183.

from shops was collected as “shop-keepers’ surcharge for the police” (*dianhu jingfei* 店戶警費).<sup>62</sup> Households and landowners no longer paid the police surcharge. However, the following incidents tell us that the reduced number of surcharge payers did not ease its collection.

After the reform, arrearage remained a serious problem, which was to continue during the Japanese occupation. For instance, in 1941, local authorities were still attempting to collect business and profit taxes overdue from 1939, two years previously.<sup>63</sup> After the war, surcharge collection was still proving difficult, and the Zhongshan magistrate and the police bureau received a number of complaints from precinct stations and tax offices (Shuijuanchu 稅捐處).

The Haizhou precinct station in Xiaolan town (Xiaolanzhen Haizhou Fensuo 小欖鎮海洲分所) provides an example. In January 1946, the police chief in Haizhou petitioned the Zhongshan Police Bureau hoping to borrow from them 150,000 *fabi* 法幣 to make ends meet because their financial condition was so bad that they were unable to pay the policemen’s salaries.<sup>64</sup> Whether they succeeded is not known, but another petition they sent to the Police Bureau suggests that their financial condition remained as poor two months later. In March 1946, Haizhou wrote to claim that due to financial difficulties, they had had to dismiss five policemen.<sup>65</sup> Later, a meeting was held among the Police Bureau, the Haizhou station and village heads regarding the seriousness of surcharge arrears.<sup>66</sup> In the meeting, the Haizhou station could only urge the Police Bureau to order villagers to pay their overdue surcharges.<sup>67</sup> It seems that nothing else could be done.

A similar example occurred in Qianshan town (Qianshanzhen 前山鎮) in southern Zhongshan. In January 1947, the Qianshan precinct station wrote to the Zhongshan Police Bureau requesting them to order villagers to pay their surcharges for the police forces. The precinct station claimed that surcharges due between June 1946 and January 1947 had not been received.<sup>68</sup>

According to Frank Yee, the Republican government did not provide sufficient financial support for police forces, and as a result at the village level all over China it was very common for the local police to be given a free hand to raise enough money for the support of their force through levying extra taxes and surcharges.<sup>69</sup> Frank Yee was only partially correct. As far as the available information tells us, the provincial government allocated some funds to county police bureaus, but with limited funding, precinct stations in towns and villages had to cover their own expenses. For instance, in 1948, each Guangdong county police bureau was allocated 136,190 yuan.<sup>70</sup> However, with prices rising ten times in

62 *Ibid.*, p. 185.

63 ZSMB 1942, April 30, p. 3.

64 ZSMA 1946, 1/5/319/8.

65 ZSMA 1946, 1/5/319/12.

66 ZSMA 1946, 1/5/319/13.

67 ZSMA 1946, 1/5/319/24.

68 ZSMA 1947, 1/5/319/29.

69 Yee 1942, pp. 353–54.

70 *Guangdongsheng gexianshiju* 1948, section 1, p. 2.

half a year, the budget of 136,190 yuan was hardly enough for 1.2 *dan* 擔 of rice, at 115,000 yuan per *dan*.<sup>71</sup> As a result, Zhongshan precinct stations were, as usual, financing their expenses through collecting the “shopkeepers’ surcharge for the police” in their respective localities. Nevertheless, the following cases show that even at times when surcharge collection shortfalls were so serious that precinct stations were facing severe financial difficulties, there were limits on the collection of extra surcharges. Contrary to Frank Yee’s claims, these police were not allowed their old freedom to raise money. Nor did they attempt to collect extra surcharges without the approval of the county magistrate and police chief.

The Shaxi precinct station (Shaxi Jingsuo 沙溪警所), like the Haizhou case discussed earlier, was in financial trouble because of the difficulties in collecting the surcharges. Each retail shop, depending on revenue, was supposed to pay between one hundred and three hundred *fabi* as a surcharge for the police. However, the police chief of Shaxi claimed that many of these businesses did not fulfill their tax obligation. In April 1946, the precinct station petitioned the Zhongshan magistrate and the commissioner of the Zhongshan Police Bureau, explaining their financial difficulties. The police chief asked permission to collect a surcharge from the Shaxi periodic market and also from the pier. He suggested that each person who entered the periodic market and anyone crossing the river pay five *fabi* and for each pig carried through these two places a forty *fabi* surcharge be levied for the Police Station.<sup>72</sup> We do not know the outcome, but a few days after he petitioned, the magistrate replied, promising to investigate their financial condition and that he would consider approving their request if necessary.

So, the traditional administrative practices found in the police system in the Qing dynasty, of the sort Kristin Stapleton notes, were still found in the Republican period. Magistrates were given a fairly free hand to fund the police. They would be the ones who made the final decision on whether a police station could collect customary fees. Not only that, but the police bureaus were also given the freedom to provide incentives to tax collectors by allowing them to pocket some of the tax collected. However, the problem was a complex one. The development of the police system had been sudden and fragmentary. These difficulties involved not only the inability of the state to monitor closely and to professionalize low-level bureaucrats, as Stapleton claims, but also problems that arose from the state–society relationship of a modernizing government.

In this transitional period between tradition and modernity, the financing of the police forces was difficult for two possible reasons. First, tax collection was inefficient and arduous. Tax collectors, being the policemen themselves, were disciplined to treat civilians in the proper way. Other than politely knocking at the door of every villager and reminding them to fulfill their tax obligations, any aggressive approaches were prohibited. And to eliminate the extractive and coercive powers of tax collectors, the state minimized the number of staff in tax bureaus.<sup>73</sup> At least, that was how the Nationalist state distinguished themselves from the legendary corrupt officials of the Qing. (It is worth noting that the degree of violence in tax collection in the Qing dynasty should be doubted. This is because

71 In 1934, the police budget was 84,000 yuan. With this amount of money, one could buy 24,299 piculs (*dan*) of rice (84,000 yuan/3.457 yuan per *dan*). See *Zhongshanshi wujia zhi* 1987, pp. 6, 11–12.

72 ZSMA 1946, 1/5/319/14.

73 Mann 1987, p. 168.

tax arrears were also a chronic feature of Qing fiscal administration. If the authorities really were harsh enough, tax arrears should not have been a problem. More importantly, it was good government upon which the dynasty's legitimacy depended.<sup>74</sup> What is crucial here is that the making of a modern police force in Republican Zhongshan did not come along with a well-planned and efficient tax collection system. Second, to the Zhongshanese, like any other Chinese, the imposition of surcharges must not have been new and to some of them, the police and the corresponding surcharges were likely just another extra financial burden without immediate benefits. We should also bear in mind that the surcharge for the police was imposed after it had been financed through donations for two decades. It would not be surprising to find that people were unwilling to pay that surcharge. Furthermore, there was a lack of education provided to citizens regarding their responsibilities and obligations to society, and Zhongshanese taxpayers had not learned to fulfill their tax obligations like any other citizens in the modern world.

## THE COLLECTION OF ILLEGAL SURCHARGES AND CONSEQUENT ACCUSATIONS

Although the county magistrate approved the collection of surcharges by precinct stations, counter to the theory of a modern government in which decision-making should be centralized, this does not mean that policemen were given enough freedom to extort from the public. Extortion, especially when accompanied by violence, was strictly prohibited.

In one incident, a policeman from the Doumen<sup>75</sup> precinct station (Doumen Jingsuo 斗門警所) entered a periodic market hoping to extort money from hawkers in 1947. The policeman asked a hawker named Kuang Ji 鄺紀 to prepay five days of customary fees, which was equivalent to 2,500 *fabi*. However, the hawker was only willing to give him 500 *fabi*. The policeman began to strike Kuang Ji with his rifle. Other hawkers ran to help Kuang and drove away the policeman. Twenty minutes later, the policeman returned with a troop of policemen who then beat Kuang Ji and other hawkers. They stopped only after about twenty hawkers were severely injured. A crowd of passersby approached the injured hawkers and tried to help them, but the Head of the Doumen precinct station arrived with another troop of policemen. They beat everyone they saw and arrested a large number of hawkers including ones who were badly wounded.

Reports of the incident soon spread among the public, and over five hundred villagers from two nearby villages began to gather, planning to march into the police station to save the hawkers. After being persuaded by the heads of the villages, the mob abandoned the plan and agreed to send the heads of the two villages as representatives to the county magistrate Sun Qian 孫乾 (1908–1999), and to the county chief prosecutor Lin Chongken 林崇肯 in Shiqi. The prosecutor, accompanied by police sergeants from the Zhongshan Police Bureau, went to Doumen to ascertain the situation.<sup>76</sup> By the time this news was published in the village magazine, these officers from Shiqi were on their way

74 Zelin 1984, pp. 72–73.

75 Doumen district today is located in western Zhuhai. It was one of the towns of Zhongshan during the Republican period.

76 JJYB 1947, vol. 12, p. 29.



to Doumen, and in the absence of a published follow-up report we do not know whether the villagers' wrongs were redressed with the legal assistance of the county government. Still, this example tells us that although the government was not always able to prevent local police forces from collecting customary fees, the government did not tolerate clearly unlawful acts when they were brought to official attention. Unlike some Qing magistrates who turned a blind eye to extortion, the upper levels of Zhongshan government officials, including the magistrate and the judge, condemned it.

Other government departments aside from the police also illegally collected extra surcharges. As in the Doumen episode above, civilians in the Maowan periodic market (Maowan Xu 茅灣墟) complained about a case which finally commanded serious attention from the government. In Maowan, militiamen employed by the civil affairs division of the village office in Wuyue village 五岳鄉 gathered at the entrance of the market to inspect the identity cards of villagers on one market day in March 1948. A fine of one Macau pataca<sup>77</sup> (the legal tender of Macau) was imposed for every villager who was unable to present identification. Upon payment, a temporary identity card was issued. Those who did not have Macau patacas had to pay in Hong Kong dollars.<sup>78</sup> A villager, Chen Taimian 陳泰棉, who was neither able to present an identity card nor any money to pay to the militiamen, was bullied until Chen left his clothes as guarantee for the money. Some villagers were angered by this and reported the situation to the village police station. As a result, the militiamen were arrested and the head of the civil affairs division was dismissed and sent to trial.<sup>79</sup> This case tells us that the authorities not only forbade police forces from collecting illegal surcharges, but also held the relevant government departments responsible when they did.

An ideal modern Chinese police force was one without policemen like the reviled yamen runners of the Qing, yet these examples tell us that at the bottom of the bureaucratic hierarchy, there persisted abuses of authority by individual policemen even after forty years of development in the police system. Nevertheless, local authorities in Zhongshan showed an eagerness to handle and investigate cases of policemen making illegal demands when civilians lodged complaints. Some rules of modern institutions indeed applied. The Zhongshan police forces and the Zhongshan government were not as disorganized as we thought, and unlike Helen Siu's Xinhui county, the Zhongshan government was far from disintegrating even towards the end of the Republican period. Examples show that precinct stations could not collect surcharges without the consent of the Zhongshan Police Bureau and the magistrate. And violence was not allowed. Precinct stations only applied for permission to collect surcharges under grave financial difficulties, for example when tax arrears delayed for months the payment of policemen's salaries.

It is extremely difficult to determine with any precision the scale of police extortion, corruption and the abuse of authority. We do not know how many such criminal cases

77 To give an approximation of the purchasing power of Macau patacas in the 1940s, a first-class movie ticket at the Apollo Cinema (located at the central district of Macau) was thirty avos (cents). A third-class movie ticket was ten avos. See Fu 2002, pp. 94–95.

78 In 1948, HK\$1 was equivalent to 480,000 *fab*. With this amount of money, one was able to buy a little over half a catty of pork or two catties of kerosene. See Xiao 1989, pp. 61–63.

79 GZYB 1948, vol. 6, 7, 8, p. 17.

were never brought to light and how many civilians instead had put up with them. However, the example below provides further evidence that in the 1930s and 1940s, civilians in Zhongshan did not tolerate crimes committed by policemen or submit to injustice and abuses. At the very least, when they were mistreated to a point they found intolerable, they utilized various channels to make complaints.

A police sergeant, Li Dingyi 李鼎彝 of Nanlang precinct station (Nanlang Jingsuo 南荫警所), was accused of extortion, and the victim filed a complaint directly with the county magistrate. In 1936, Jian Qiaozhi 簡翹芝 had borrowed one hundred silver dollars from Liang Minghao 梁名灝 to use as traveling expenses to the United States of America. Jian agreed to pay monthly interest of 10 percent and return the money in silver dollars. When he reached America, Jian was denied entry by the immigration office and immediately sent back to China. One month later, Jian repaid his loans to Liang, but what Jian returned was *fabi* (then the legal tender) and Liang refused to accept the money. Jian refused to return his loan in silver dollars. As a result, Liang reported the case to the Nanlang precinct station hoping that they would make Jian return his loan in silver dollars. However, despite the contract, it was actually illegal to refuse payment in legal tender. The tables were turned on the plaintiff, and so Sergeant Li, who heard Liang's complaint, threatened to have Liang detained unless he was willing to bribe him with 150 *fabi*. Liang did not wish to be arrested, so he agreed to pay. Liang did not have the money with him and so Sergeant Li led his troop to accompany Liang home to collect the money from Liang's wife. Unfortunately, Liang's wife was not at home and so they all waited outside Liang's home. The crowd of police officers standing in the village attracted the attention of Liang's neighbors and relatives, who soon found out that Li was extorting Liang. Sergeant Li was frightened by Liang's relatives and so he and his troop left the village. The next day, Liang reported the extortion case directly to the county magistrate, Yang Ziyi, who later had Sergeant Li arrested.<sup>80</sup>

Although there were similarities between Qing practice and the Republican police system, especially on the negative side, one thing became less "traditional," that is, how the authorities dealt with accusations against officials. In the Qing dynasty, as Nancy Park tells us, involvement in any legal proceeding was dangerous especially when official misdeeds were involved. The investigative and trial process often involved unwelcome probing into the personal affairs of all the concerned parties, and it was not uncommon for plaintiffs as well as defendants to be questioned under torture. Furthermore, plaintiffs who lacked wealth and status, or connections, were at a severe disadvantage in a legal system that tended to favor the rich or well connected.<sup>81</sup> In Republican Zhongshan, as we saw in the previous examples, accusations against officials were dealt with promptly and seriously. Cases of police extortion were investigated, and those who were found guilty were arrested unless they fled. Although we do not know how many cases were not brought to light, at least in the cases shown here, plaintiffs did not have to be questioned under torture, and involvement in legal procedures was no longer dangerous in the way it had been in the Qing dynasty.

80 QSBYB 1936, vol. 11, pp. 17–18.

81 Park 1997, p. 988.

Another incident that occurred in June 1936 shows that several policemen had forced civilians to pay bribes. Yet this offense, once exposed, was not tolerated by the local authorities. The bribery incident occurred in Lanbian market (Lanbian Xu 欖邊墟) in a town in eastern Zhongshan during the time when the nationwide currency reform was being enacted.<sup>82</sup> The authorities in each locality in Guangdong were ordered to eliminate the circulation of local notes and require that all transactions were to be made in *fabi*. This order gave an opportunity for policemen in Zhongshan to extort money from civilians.

A customer went into a grocery store in Lanbian market. Before he bought anything from the store, he put a silver dollar coin on the counter. Immediately, a few policemen, headed by a police sergeant, He Xizhi 何錫之, who were patrolling the streets, ran into the store and claimed that the shopkeeper Ma Yao 馬堯 was accepting currency prohibited by the Nationalist government. Sergeant He pointed his rifle at Ma and claimed that he had to be arrested. Other policemen searched the store for illegal currency. The owner immediately sent his assistant for the village head. The village head arrived soon and began to negotiate with the policemen. Sergeant He told the village head that if Ma was willing to pay a fine of two hundred silver dollars, he would not take him to the police station. After more bargaining, Sergeant He finally accepted ninety *fabi* and left.

The incident attracted a large crowd of spectators. Many of them were owners of neighboring stores who believed that continued police extortion of the same type could become an extremely serious problem if they did not take action. These merchants called for a meeting that night to discuss the matter. The next day, shopkeepers, together with the village head, went to the police station and reported the incident to the police commissioner, Chen Zhuolun 陳卓倫. They requested the authorities to arrest Sergeant He and return the ninety *fabi* to Ma Yao. Commissioner Chen was astonished and immediately sent his assistant to the precinct station where Sergeant He was posted. However, by the time the assistant reached the precinct station, He Shizhi had already absconded to avoid punishment.

The head of the precinct station offered to return forty *fabi* to Ma Yao and asked him not to pursue the matter further. Ma agreed, but when Commissioner Chen Chuolun heard about the offer, he disapproved of the arrangement. Chen believed that the corruption committed by He Shizhi was a very serious crime and if it were not handled properly, the reputation of the Zhongshan police force would be damaged. Prohibiting any private settlement, Chen ordered the case to be brought before the higher authorities.<sup>83</sup> The case was transferred to the county magistrate. The victim, the village head, and colleagues of He Shizhi were all summoned for questioning. We do not know whether the superior and other colleagues of He Shizhi collaborated with him and covered up his wrongdoing, nor are we told whether He Shizhi was finally arrested. Nevertheless, this incident shows that commissioner Chen had indeed at least upheld the law with a mind to protect the reputation of the local police force.

82 In Guangdong, the circulation of *fabi* was delayed due to administrative confusion. When silver was nationalized in November 1935, Guangdong acted independently making local notes legal tender and requiring silver to be turned over for notes. The Nationalist government did not take over till June and July 1936 when the local notes were still in circulation. See Young 1971, pp. 255–56.

83 QSBYB 1936, vols. 5–6, pp. 9–10.

This incident reveals specific characteristics of local authority in Zhongshan. First, the store-owner's claim that they had to stop police extortion before it became too serious suggests that prior to that incident, extortion cases of similar severity were not common. Second, the effort commissioner Chen made to combat corruption and his success in bringing the case to the county magistrate tells us that the Zhongshan government was far from disintegrating. Third, if civilians were skeptical about the local government, they would not have reported the case to the police commissioner and requested the authorities to deal with the matter. Also note that when the offending sergeant heard he had been exposed, his first impulse was flight, suggesting he knew he would be prosecuted.

## SOME POSITIVE PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF THE POLICE FORCES

It is noteworthy that in village magazines, civilians offered unprejudiced or at least localized views of the police forces. Their comments were not exclusively or even generally fault-finding. They showed appreciation and expressed gratitude to the police forces because they were kind and efficient in dealing with cases of crime. Some found a few government officers so good that they did not want them to leave their positions. These perceptions show that the disreputable behavior of some of the policemen did not engender universal popular cynicism.

According to police regulations, if they saw domestic animals roaming unattended, it was their responsibility to bring them back to the police station. Indeed, policemen were performing roles for which their training had prepared them, and they were publicly praised. In one case, a policeman on duty walking past a farm saw a cow on the loose. The policeman believed that it was a lost cow and if he had not taken it away, it might have destroyed crops in the fields. The policeman led the cow back to the police station and kept it until the owner claimed it.<sup>84</sup> In another instance, an insane woman often visited Jiangbian precinct station (Zhangbian Jingsuo 張家邊警所) and interrupted the policemen there. According to the village report, policemen showed sympathy and never blamed her for being troublesome.<sup>85</sup> Whether civilians were highly appreciative of these small matters might be questionable, and we do not know who wrote articles to praise these policemen so lavishly for their patience and for offering help. Yet, in a year-end volume of a village magazine, inhabitants of Shabian village (Shabianxiang 沙邊鄉) jointly wrote an article to thank the local policemen for their hard work in combating crime, and for the peace they brought to the village throughout the year. They also expressed their gratitude to policemen who were willing to work without being properly paid.<sup>86</sup> In another example, chief constable Li Zeping 李澤平 of Dagang village (Dagangxiang 大崗鄉) also gained much popularity in Zhongshan. Li was promoted to the Huangpu precinct station and so had to resign from Dagang. When the news about his resignation

84 SXYB 1947, vol. 6, p. 4.

85 *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 10.

86 The article mentions that villagers were extremely pleased with them because they had eliminated robbers and thieves from the district. They were also glad that all the policemen in the village had had their contracts renewed that year. See SBYB 1947, vol. 11, p. 3.

became public, the villagers were alarmed. Through the village office in Dagang, they signed a petition to the police bureau in the hope of persuading Li to stay.<sup>87</sup>

It was not only policemen from the lower ranks who were publicly praised. The chief constable of Shaxi precinct station, Gao Bao 高苞, was extolled for his achievements: Gao not only arranged for the restoration of street lights in Shaxi after the Japanese occupation but also took special notice of sanitation problems in the Longdu 隆都 area (west of Shiqi, the county capital) and publicized, in various villages, the importance of hygiene. He was also thanked for being aware of the chaos in crowded bus stops along the highways in the district and for arranging for policemen to keep order. He traveled to Hong Kong and arranged meetings with overseas Zhongshanese for the purpose of soliciting donations and eventually obtained funds for making police uniforms.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, Gao was praised for having launched a successful campaign against rice speculators when there was a food shortage in Zhongshan.<sup>89</sup>

For an unknown reason, the Zhongshan Police Bureau decided that Gao Bao was to be replaced by another person as the chief constable. Villagers of Shaxi thought Gao had done tremendous work for the district and believed him supremely capable in the maintenance of public security. As a result, they were displeased with the county police for having Gao replaced. They were anxious that as soon as the redoubtable Gao was dismissed, local bandits might appear again. Local elites, village heads, retired overseas workers, and a number of “educated people” went to the government headquarters of Zhongshan in Shiqi to protest against the arrangement.<sup>90</sup> Official letters written by Gao Bao, and matters he dealt with in his police station in 1948 and 1949, suggest that he was retained in his position up until “liberation,” when he moved to Hong Kong.<sup>91</sup>

These examples are evidence of some positive relationships between civilians and policemen at various levels of the police hierarchy and of concomitant respect for more distant and higher county government officials. They tell us that the Zhongshanese were sincerely pleased with the local government officials, many of whom they believed had performed their duties properly.

## CONCLUSION

Returning to the characterizations and questions posed at the beginning of this article, we should remember that Zhongshan’s population was mostly rural and these people would have had little previous experience to guide them in developing and promoting modern Western-style government institutions. One might ask whether overseas Zhongshanese

87 ZSYK 1947, vol. 9, pp. 17–18.

88 LDQB 1947, vol. 1, p. 7.

89 LDQB 1947, vol. 4, p. 9. In another report, the head of Fungfu precinct Station (Fengfuxiang Fensuo 豐埠鄉分所) was publicly recognized for exceptional diligence, and for paying special attention to the public security of his district. Under him, the Fungfu village police force was said to be well trained and the village was reported to be peaceful. Seeing that the village policemen were living in an abandoned nunnery that was in very poor condition, he decided to organize fundraising campaigns to build proper living quarters for the village police force. Because of this, he was recognized for consideration of his subordinates. See DZXB 1948, vol. 43, p. 13.

90 ZSYK 1947, vol. 2, p. 20.

91 ZSMA 1948, 1/5/78/6; 1949, 1/2/359/4; Lu 1989, vol. 10, p. 34.

had helped to modernize the county and its government structure. Although Zhongshan was well known for producing pioneers who developed modern enterprises, these were people who established businesses in Shanghai and Hong Kong. They had much less involvement in modernizing Zhongshan. There were over one hundred thousand overseas Zhongshanese who might have brought back funding and their everyday experience from the West, but it was not sufficient. What was needed involved the Western ideology of policing, the making and proper implementation of laws and regulations and so on. Such knowledge could hardly be transferred by commoners who had been working abroad but only as casual labor or merchants. So then, in order to appraise both the situation and the development of modern public safety administration in Zhongshan, we may be able to see the effectiveness of administration and related civilian acceptance by answering two rather narrowly relevant questions. One, was the idea of a modern institution of the Nationalist government properly implemented in the county? Two, since misbehavior by policemen, overtly sanctioned or just tolerated, was the legendary root of popular dissatisfaction with local law authority under the Qing dynasty, what was the practical outcome of the Nationalist local government's handling of reported cases of police corruption?

As we saw in this article, in the making of a modern police force, some management problems persisted from the days of the empire. As in the Qing dynasty, magistrates in Republican Zhongshan made decisions in addition to and sometimes beyond the scope of centrally-drafted laws and regulations. Local regulations were in conflict with the law too. The unwanted customary fees were collected while tax collection for supporting the police forces was extremely inefficient. All these were the consequence of a lack of coordination among three things: the pace of development of the police forces, the fiscal budget, and the modernization of the state–society relationship.

Nevertheless, in the 1930s and 1940s, Zhongshan was not entirely without accomplishments. As a matter of record, there were enthusiastic and efficient policemen, and their names are found in the magazines of Zhongshan county. These published contemporary examples also remind us that not every place in the Pearl River Delta was like Xinhui, as described by Helen Siu. There is good evidence that in Zhongshan, civilians had recourse to complaint processes, and that at least some of their complaints were based on technical matters of policemen's noncompliance with published policy. Although I would say the model county government was not quite able to prove to the rest of the country that they were capable of making a perfectly efficient modern police force, yet in its making, and in the process of moving from tradition to modernity, the published accounts of actions by local government provide enough evidence to show that they were by no means disintegrating. We saw how officials at various levels of the government worked together to identify and discipline unruly policemen. These efforts by various magistrates, judges and police commissioners were recognized by civilians, and documented in local publications.

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