



Community policing in Hong Kong:

Transplanting a questionable model

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Abstract

Originating in Britain and the USA, community policing has been a growth industry internationally. However, studies have shown the model to be problematic, and questioned whether it is transplantable to other societies without regard to their different environmental contexts. This article provides a case study of community policing initiatives undertaken in Hong Kong from the 1970s to today, showing that they have largely failed, and have dim future prospects. In explaining why this is the case, it is argued that these initiatives have not only been bedeviled by factors which have proven so troublesome for the community policing model elsewhere, but also by the socio-cultural ethos of Hong Kong's population, the territory's unique political and economic position and the institutionalization of the Hong Kong Police's paramilitary traditions. The study not only provides a further illustration of the questionable nature of the community policing model, but also illustrates how and why policy making should always take into account local conditions instead of simply borrowing foreign models.

Key Words

community policing • Hong Kong Police • para-militarism • service culture

Community policing has spread internationally almost as a creed of enlightened police thinking and policy since originating in Britain and the

USA in the 1970s. No police organization can afford not to pay service to it, lip or real. Skolnick and Bayley's (1988) statement that it had become a growth industry remains true today. Besides western countries, non-western countries such as Singapore (Bayley, 1989a) have also adopted the model.

The story told by most extant western research, however, has not been encouraging. Reviewing the literature, Waddington concludes: 'There is a general agreement that [community policing] suffers from serious flaws both practical and conceptual' (1999: 213). Klockars even argues that community policing 'is best understood as the latest in a fairly long tradition of circumlocutions whose purpose is to conceal, mystify, and legitimate police distribution of nonnegotiable coercive force' (1988: 240). Further, Brogden suggests that, as a model that arose in a particular Anglo-American context, 'Community policing . . . is not a model that can be culturally transplanted to domains with different structures and traditions' (1999: 170).

This article examines the experience of community policing in Hong Kong. After Britain colonized Hong Kong in 1841, the Hong Kong Police (HKP)¹ developed along paramilitary lines up until the early 1970s. In 1974, the Government took investigation of endemic police corruption from the HKP and entrusted it to the newly formed Independent Commission Against Corruption. It also directed the HKP to implement reforms to improve police-public relations and to engage the community in crime prevention. Twenty-eight years on, police-public relations have much improved. However, a large part of this may be attributable to the uprooting of syndicated police corruption. Schemes to engage the community in crime prevention have failed. In 1995, the HKP launched its 'Quality of Service Initiative' in order to establish a customer-service culture. Achievements so far have been negligible with little prospect of future improvement.

Why has community policing in Hong Kong largely failed? This article argues that the initiative to engage the public in crime prevention has not only been defeated by Hong Kong's socially divided environment (a common factor that explains the failure of similar initiatives elsewhere), but also by the local population's specific socio-cultural ethos. The extant literature shows that it is generally difficult to instil a service mentality among police. In the case of Hong Kong, the institutionalization (in the neo-institutionalist sense) of the HKP's paramilitary traditions, reinforced by Hong Kong's unique political and economic position, constitute additional contextual factors that account for the secondary priority given to police-public relations by the HKP and create obstacles to the establishment of a service ethos. In sum, community policing in Hong Kong faces similar problems generally encountered elsewhere, as well as contextual problems specific to the territory because it is a transplanted alien model.

Previous research into community policing in Hong Kong or related areas (Ip, 1990; Grant, 1992; Cartwright, 1994; Chan, 1998; So, 1999) has

exclusively been conducted by police officers as post-graduate dissertations. All except So (1999) are concerned with the pre-1995 initiatives only. There are some useful insights here and there, which will be referenced where appropriate, but there is a general lack of theoretical conceptualization and, in some cases, adequate data.

Other than the existing literature, the empirical data for this research come from a variety of sources which are of equal importance for the substantiation of this article's thesis, namely, official documents, published and internal police data, miscellaneous non-police documentary data, personal communications from various police sources, interviews with 12 anonymous police informants (three having retired recently) and informal discussions with a number of other serving police officers. The interviews and informal discussions were held between late 2001 and early 2003. The interviews, arranged through personal networking, were of a loosely structured qualitative nature based upon an interview guide. The nine male and three female anonymous interviewees ranged from inspectors (who first joined the HKP as constables) to senior officers. Each came from diverse police units with varied experience. They did not constitute a statistically representative sample, but such a sample is unachievable since the HKP is extremely sensitive to this research's subject matter and officially arranged interviews are likely to produce less than authentic data. The interviews lasted for an average of around two hours, while the informal discussions were mostly held over private lunch or coffee meetings. In the following, quotations are mostly taken from the interviewees, but for convenience, data obtained from them and from the informal discussions and personal communications from police sources will all be referenced as 'fieldwork data'.

What is community policing?

Known under various descriptions, community policing is a decidedly vague notion. Manning (1998) discerns four meanings of it, and the label has been attached to the most disparate initiatives and programmes. Even militarized tactics have been justified in its terms (Kappeler and Kraska, 1998). As Bayley noted, community policing 'means different things to different people' (1988: 225). Because of this vagueness, it 'enables senior police officers to assert that their policies—whatever they happen to be—are those of "community policing" without fear of contradiction' (Waddington, 1999: 217). Our purpose here is not to define community policing in general, but to specify it with reference to the HKP's initiatives. Hence, some aspects generally associated with the notion, but to which no corresponding initiatives have been undertaken in Hong Kong, will not be considered.

Skolnick and Bayley (1987) define community policing as first and foremost a philosophy, whose themes include problem solving of non-crime

issues; police–public partnership; power sharing between community and police in police decision making; and emphasis on service and customer-responsiveness. Trojanowicz et al. (2001) adopt a similar approach. For the purpose of this article, we adopt a narrower understanding of the philosophy of community policing, which is seen as comprising three principles: (1) to establish a closer police–community relationship in general and specifically for the purpose of point 2; (2) to engage members of a community (meaning those living, working or otherwise associated with a specific geographical area) in crime prevention without implying power sharing in decision making in policing matters; (3) to establish a service-oriented culture at the expense of the culture of a coercive law enforcer. Any schemes or programmes designed in the spirit of these principles are regarded as community policing initiatives, whether or not they are implemented under that label.

The HKP's paramilitary traditions

The HKP's traditions require examination for they have great bearing on its community policing initiatives. The following examination will be descriptive but its theoretical significance will become evident in due course. From 1841 to 1997, Hong Kong was a British colony. According to Jeffries' (1952) orthodox thesis, colonial police forces went through three phases, the first two of which were: (1) improvised arrangements to secure basic law and order; and (2) establishment of a paramilitary force. The paramilitary model was based upon the regulation of a hostile population ruled by an alien power primarily by coercion by means of a police instead of the military. The Force was directly accountable to the head of the state executive. The principle of policing strangers (the indigenous population) by strangers (the police staffed and controlled by aliens) was practised. Police lived mainly in barracks, and police stations were heavily fortified. Public order maintenance constituted the primary function (Andrade, 1985).

Upon Hong Kong's colonization in 1841, policing arrangements began haphazardly with the recruitment of British and Indian rejects from the local garrison. The HKP was formally established in 1844. The Commissioner was directly accountable to the governor in operational matters. Its officers' ranks (inspector and above) were filled with Europeans, while the rank and file (station-sergeant and below) were recruited mainly from the Indian sub-continent (up until India's and Pakistan's independence in 1947) and, for a period after the 1890s, the British concession of Weihaiwei in Northern China. Local inhabitants were also recruited into the rank and file, but not until the mass departure of South Asians in 1947 did they constitute the majority. For decades, only European officers carried firearms. Unmarried European officers and the alien rank and file were housed in fortified barracks. Police stations were built like fortresses with high

walls and barbed wire (Crisswell and Watson, 1982; Gaylord and Traver, 1995).

After the communist-led general strike in 1925–6, the Emergency Unit (EU)² (to deal with civil disturbances and take control at the scene in major incidents) and the Anti-Communist Squad (a political police unit) were formed. The Anti-Communist Squad was reconstituted into the Special Branch (SB) in 1938, headed by a Deputy Commissioner who reported directly to the colonial governor instead of the Commissioner. Later, the Police Training Contingent (PTC) was created to provide anti-riot training. All new recruits underwent PTC training early in their career, and refresher training was provided periodically to serving police. When required, the Force could switch to full Internal Security Structure by instantly mobilizing PTC graduates serving at local formations into anti-riot squads. Police stations underwent regular ‘station attack’ dry runs (hypothetical scenario of a police station being attacked by a mob). After the occurrence of major civil disorder in the late 1960s, the Police Tactical Unit (PTU) replaced the PTC. PTU graduates were deployed to a PTU company for a period of time before serving at local formations. Thus, PTU became a permanent anti-riot unit, with the EU as a further backup. Training at both the Police Training School (PTS, for new recruits) and at PTC/PTU was militarized. Trainees were bare-chested, subject to physical punishment and held collectively responsible for colleagues’ infractions. Discipline, loyalty and group solidarity were emphasized.

Crime was a secondary priority up until the early 1970s, as strikingly evidenced in the existence of the police–triad symbiosis (Sinclair, 1983; Gaylord and Traver, 1995), in which police kept crime ‘under control’ by protecting triad-operated vice trade and establishments in return for bribes paid and shared by locals and Europeans alike in an organized manner.

There were some changes over the decades, such as the replacement of barracks after the departure of the South Asians, and the gradual increase in the local ratio at the inspectorate level. Moreover, since no long-term, mass-based insurgent movement ever existed, much of police daily activity, except in politically turbulent times, was civilian (i.e. non-public order and non-crime related) in nature. But all the other paramilitary features remained.

Community policing initiatives

In the early 1970s, the colonial government took a strategic turn in its governance style. Consultant surveys undertaken for the Government showed that the public ‘hated’ the police (cited in Grant, 1992: 70). In 1974, the Government took investigation of corruption from the HKP and entrusted it to the newly formed Independent Commission Against Corruption. It also directed the HKP to implement several reform schemes transplanted from the London Metropolitan Police. The previous Police

Public Information Bureau was reconstituted into the Police Public Relations Branch (PPRB), commanded by a Chief Superintendent and consisting of the Community Relations Bureau (CRB) and the Information and Publicity Bureau. At the District level,³ the Police Community Relations Officer (PCRO) was established at Chief Inspector rank, responsible to the District commander for liaising with the community and improving police–public relations by taking into consideration ‘public opinion’, and to ‘advise, assist and guide’ the community. Establishing the PCRO post at Chief Inspector rank indicates the emphasis placed upon police–public relations by the reform. At that time, the District commander was of Superintendent rank. Besides the PCRO, only the Divisional commander and the commander of the District’s CID were of Chief Inspector rank. For several years after its establishment, only officers groomed for promotion were posted to the PCRO.

Neighbourhood Police Units (NPU) were set up. Unlike the American practice of randomized motor patrols, the HKP had long established foot beats, and experienced police became ‘beat owners’, i.e. they walked certain beats over long periods of time. NPUs were first meant to bridge the police–public gap and promote mutual relations. It was also felt at the time that the police were under-strength in areas of high population density and high crime rates but which lacked a police station. NPUs would hopefully engage the public in the fight against crime. A small team was attached to the NPU for a minimum tour of duty of 12 months to undertake both community relations and constabulary duties. By 1983, 90 NPUs were in operation taking up 5.8 per cent of the total Force strength (HKP, 1983).

The NPU scheme was reviewed in the early 1980s, revealing extremely low public use. The scheme was deemed to be ‘an overwhelming success’ in public relations, but resource intensive and inflexible, hence detrimental to ‘effective’ policing, as well as duplicating the PCRO’s work. The beat radio’s introduction in July 1977 diminished the need for a physical presence in the form of the NPU (HKP, 1981, 1983). As a result, the scheme was revised in 1984. NPU staff were re-integrated into local sub-units. A Neighbourhood Police Co-ordinator (NPC) was created to serve the whole District under the PCRO. The NPU itself was abandoned and its premises renamed Neighbourhood Police Offices (NPO). Most NPOs, however, were abandoned by local commanders. Today, the few NPOs that remain have been turned into ‘Reporting Centres’ used for operational, not community relations, purposes.

Even before the establishment of the Independent Commission Against Corruption in 1974, under government pressure, the HKP had stepped up investigation into police corruption, as a result of which the police–triad symbiosis began to break up. For this reason, among others, the violent crime rate soared (Traver, 1991). In 1973, the Government established what subsequently became the Fight Crime Committee (FCC). District Fight Crime Committees (DFCC) were formed in 1976, with members appointed by the Government from local leaders. Both the FCC and DFCC

remain functioning today with representation from the HKP. The FCC is a policy steering group. The DFCC monitors the local crime situation, co-ordinates anti-crime campaigns and promotes police–public relations in the fight against crime. Hence, though the FCC’s establishment was originally unrelated to police reforms, subsequent developments, especially at the local level, have provided a channel for the police to liaise with local leaders, both to promote mutual relationships as well as to engage them (and through them, the community) in crime prevention.

Today, police–public relations work is carried out by the PPRB’s CRB and the PCRO. Under the PCRO are several posts. The School Liaison Officer (SLO) promotes police–school children relations, warns school children against crime and triads and gathers intelligence of triad and gang activities at school. A sergeant is responsible for Junior Police Call (JPC) and youth work. The JPC was established in 1974 to promote police–youth understanding and relations, and organize various recreational activities to help prevent youths from getting associated with criminal elements (HKP, 1991). Membership in recent years has declined, from 183,247 in 1999 to 157,607 as of early 2002. The NPC functions analogously to the SLO in relation to all local community organizations and business operators. It also assists the PCRO to organize police campaigns, transmits local opinion on Force policies up the police hierarchy, organizes local recreational activities, pays ‘comfort visits’ to crime and/or accident victims and/or their families and so on. The PCRO operates independently of the CRB, whose role is to provide policy guidelines, organize training and ‘ideas-exchange’ sessions for PCRO staff, co-ordinate inter-District PCRO activities and disseminate best practices.

In the wake of the NPU’s demise, the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme (NWS) was transplanted from Britain in 1985 with three objectives: to draw residents’ attention to the importance of communal surveillance; to organize mutual aid groups; and to report suspicious characters and activities to the police. The PCRO, in consultation with the DFCC and the Government’s District Office, selected locations to set up Neighbourhood Watch Units under police guidance. By 1989, a total of 8000 building blocks involving 14,000 households had been involved. However, the police found the scheme resource-demanding and ineffective, as a result of which its steering and co-ordinating role was transferred from the PCRO to the DFCC in 1990. Soon afterwards, the scheme became defunct. In 1994, the FCC revived the scheme on a trial basis for six months in three Districts. The trial period has subsequently been extended indefinitely. Nominally still under review, the scheme has again become defunct.

Overall, it seems certain that, compared to the pre-1974 situation, police–public relations have much improved, as shown in the findings of the HKP’s opinion surveys to be discussed later. How much of this is actually due to the HKP’s community relations work, however, is less certain, for it seems reasonable to attribute much of this improvement to the uprooting of syndicated police corruption given the fact that endemic

and highly visible police corruption constituted a major reason why the police were widely hated prior to 1974. On the other hand, the NPU and NWS schemes have failed.

In 1995, the HKP launched its 'Quality of Service Initiative' (QSI). Described by a serving police officer (So, 1999) as a 'cultural revolution', QSI aims to transform the Force from a colonial police into a 'service of quality' and develop a customer-service culture. A series of 'Awareness Roadshows' was organized, followed by video presentations at police formations. In 1996, the *Force Vision* and *Statement of Common Purpose and Values* (HKP, 1996), collectively known in the Force as 'the Values', were promulgated. Three Force-wide series of 'Living-the-Values' workshops have since been held, and from 1997–9 the Customer Service Improvement Programme was implemented with the avowed purpose of changing the Force's culture (Hui, 2001). Concretely, the latter programme amounted to no more than upgrading the physical appearance and facilities of police stations and reception areas of other police premises with which the public come into contact.

The Recruit Police Constable (RPC) syllabus, which had remained unchanged since the early 1980s, was revised in 1998 so as to instill 'the Values' in new recruits (HKP, 1998, 1999). Previously, as Grant (1992) notes, the predominant focus was on legal education, weapons training, internal security training and drill. In the new syllabus, six sessions (out of a total of 1053) of direct or indirect relevance to 'the Values' were added. As the officer responsible for the review admitted, the other changes mainly represented a rationalization of the syllabus and redesign of the instructional and assessment structure and methods. In early 2001, the Commissioner adopted the slogan 'We Serve with Pride and Care'. As a result, plans to add two extra sessions relating to service culture were developed (HKP, 2002).

To gauge the public's perception of the HKP, opinion surveys were carried out in 1995, 1999 and 2001 by the HKP. Furthermore, Customer Satisfaction Surveys were carried out in 1998 and 2000 (HKP, 2000, 2001, c. 2001).⁴ The opinion surveys showed respondents being most satisfied with the HKP's professionalism and efficiency. Satisfaction is also reported for attributes such as 'willing to offer assistance' and 'caring'. In the 2000 Customer Satisfaction Survey, respondents were sampled through five channels of contact with the police: 'Report Room', 'dialling the emergency 999', 'crime office' (i.e. criminal investigation departments located in police stations), 'contact at scene' and 'dialling police station'. A high general level of satisfaction was reported.

Interestingly, a political party, the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment of Hong Kong (2002) or DAB, conducted its own attitudinal surveys on the HKP and other law enforcement agencies in 2000 and 2001. On both occasions, the HKP made far and away 'the worst impression' on the public. From a list of possible reasons for the bad impression, 'bad attitude

towards the public' and 'less than satisfactory ethical conduct' were by far the most often cited.

The HKP takes comfort in the findings of its own surveys. Given that the HKP has declined to let us have access to either the reports or questionnaires, it is difficult to assess accurately their findings. But the HKP's confidence in them may be misplaced in view of the contradictory findings of the DAB surveys. Moreover, based upon the data available (HKP, 2000, 2001, c. 2001), it does, for instance, seem that the five contact channels chosen for the Customer Satisfaction Surveys are very selective. For example, one of these channels concerns crime offices, with respondents being asked such things as whether or not they are satisfied with the 'clarity and accuracy of signage leading to crime offices'. While this is certainly part and parcel of service quality, it is equally certain that a question about it can measure service culture only in the most superficial way. Indeed, the Commissioner who launched QSI subsequently remarked that the Customer Service Improvement Programme resulted in no more than 'a major Force-wide initiative to improve the physical environment within police stations' (Hui, 2001: 189). If, instead of the above channels, contact points where conflicts with the public are more prone to arise were chosen, the findings would likely be significantly different.

Transplanting a questionable alien model

Some scholars regard community policing as being underpinned by certain assumptions, such as a harmonious, consensual community as the basis of policing and the Peelian assumption that 'the police are the public and the public are the police' (Klockars, 1988; see also Waddington's (1999) account of these views). The argument is that because these assumptions are unrealistic, community policing is seriously flawed conceptually, and hence also practically when attempts are made to implement it. This article generally shares this view and sees community policing as a questionable model. Thus, it is argued that community policing initiatives in Hong Kong have either failed or have dim future prospects partly for reasons that also explain the failure of community policing elsewhere. Further, it is argued that there are also specific contextual factors at work that aggravate the problems faced by community policing initiatives in Hong Kong. In other words, the model is not only questionable in itself, it is doubly questionable for Hong Kong because it is an alien model that has been transplanted to Hong Kong without regard to its local context.

The NPU and NWS provide a good illustration. Two senior commanders separately told us that these schemes have failed due to the local population's lack of a sense of neighbourhood and community. Similar problems can be found in different places to varying degrees. Thus, research (e.g. Grinc, 1994) has cast serious doubts on the feasibility of such schemes in socially divided environments. As Waddington sums up, the 'sad conclusion

is that neighbourhood watch works best where it is needed least [e.g. white middle class suburbs in the US], and vice versa' (1999: 213). In some places, such hostile environments may largely be restricted to urban ghettos. In Hong Kong, they exist on a society-wide scale as a result of Hong Kong's socio-economic conditions and the local population's socio-cultural ethos.

Socio-economically, Hong Kong's rich-poor gap is wider not only in comparison to wealthier countries, but even in comparison to less wealthy ones. Thus, in 1996, for instance, its gini coefficient (which measures the rich-poor gap from a scale of 0—indicating perfectly equitable income distribution—to 1) stood at 0.520, compared to Latin America's 0.490 and Britain's 0.346 (cited in *Mingpao*, 25 August 2000). Though Hong Kong is relatively ethnically homogenous, in the past two decades, new immigrants from mainland China and their children have been encountering serious integration problems. This problem is due not only to cultural differences, but also to the view, regularly aired in radio phone-in programmes, of the 'indigenous' population⁵ that new immigrants are contributing little to the economy but consuming welfare benefits at their expense. Whether or not such a view is actually justified is irrelevant, what is relevant is that it is widely held by the 'indigenous' population. A rough calculation based upon the post-1980 daily quota shows some 800,000 (of a population of 6.7 million in 2001) new immigrants having settled in Hong Kong since then, while much of the population's natural increase over the same period is due to the new arrivals. Significantly, new immigrants are residentially dispersed among the 'indigenous' population. In recent years, close to half of all new arrivals live in public rental housing estates with family or relatives (Home Affairs Department, various years).

Further, Hong Kong is a society that changes at a dizzying pace. Developments required for economic, social and other purposes are so perennially extensive that Hong Kong has sometimes been described as 'one vast construction site'. These developments regularly uproot inhabitants and disperse them to various other parts of the territory. Many of the displaced are offered public rental housing. Hence, residents of these housing estates contain a mixture of resettled people coming from different parts of the territory in addition to new immigrants. Over the years, between one-third to one-half of the entire population are housed in public rental housing (Census and Statistics Department, 2002). This provides an indication of the extensiveness of the population's high geographical mobility. Clearly, such a situation is not conducive to building a sense of community.

Colonial Hong Kong was described as a 'borrowed place' living on 'borrowed time' (Hughes, 1976). As a result of this and other factors, short-termist thinking and behaviour are rife and there is a distinct lack of even minimal civic-mindedness. Lau and Kuan (1988) characterize 'the ethos of the Hong Kong Chinese' as a socially apathetic 'utilitarian

familism' or 'egotistical individualism', which is certainly a major reason for the absence of a feeling of neighbourhood and community. Despite Hong Kong's return to Chinese sovereignty in 1997, this socio-cultural ethos has changed little since then. For reasons beyond the scope of this article, it is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future.

In sum, one of the most common factors that account for the failure of neighbourhood watch (the existence of a socially divided environment) is also found in Hong Kong, perhaps to a more extensive degree than many other places. In addition, the problems faced by neighbourhood watch are aggravated by the local population's specific socio-cultural ethos.

Paramilitarism and the service ethos

Let us now consider the HKP's 'Quality of Service Initiative' (QSI). In this regard, of major importance is the specific context of the HKP's paramilitary traditions. How and why these traditions impact on the HKP's community policing initiatives can be analysed from the neo-institutionalist perspective. March and Olsen (1984, 1996) analyse how institutional members act in the institutional context.⁶ In their view, there are two common types of theories of action, namely, what they refer to as 'contextual' and individualistic theories. 'Contextual' theories focus on factors such as ethnicity and class. Thus, organizational members are theorized as acting on the basis of these factors within organizations. For instance, in an organization with members belonging to different ethnic groups, members of the same ethnic group act differentially towards themselves and members belonging to other ethnic groups. As to individualistic theories, the most prominent is rational choice theory. According to this theory, organizational members act as individuals (instead of as members of groups) rationally calculating the potential costs and benefits of each single possible course of action before committing to the one that maximizes net benefits. In March's and Olsen's view, both 'contextual' and individualistic theories regard the interests of organizational members as being exogenously given; for instance, ethnicity in the one case, and man as a rational choice being in the other.

In contrast, March and Olsen see an organization's past policies, outcomes and the like becoming institutionalized into structures, procedures and practices, which shape members' interests and identities endogenously. Members are 'co-opted' into the organization's beliefs and commitments, and 'socialized' into organizational roles, rules, norms, aspirations and the like. In other words, organizational members act because of their commitment to such things as organizational beliefs and adoption of organizational norms. These courses of action may contradict hypothetical courses of action that would have been taken on the basis of 'contextual' or

individualistic rational-choice factors, but in their view they constitute the predominant type of actions in the organizational context.

March and Olsen were partially preceded by Selznick's (1949, 1957) 'old' institutionalism. For all three scholars, commitment to organizational beliefs and the like is fundamentally normative. That is to say, organizational members consciously make such commitment because they uphold these beliefs as positive values. In contrast, some recent sociological neo-institutionalist analyses (Powell and DiMaggio, 1991) de-emphasize this normative aspect. Inspired by social phenomenology, these analyses regard members' adoption and following of an organization's goals, rules, norms and the like as being matter-of-factly, routine and non-reflective, without any normative attachment, or, in short-hand social phenomenological terminology, dispositional.

The above approaches complement each other, since the normative and the dispositional can co-exist with one another, not only within the same organization (some members acting out of normative commitment, others dispositionally), but also on the individual level (acting normatively in some respects, dispositionally in others). Hence, integrating the above approaches, the ensuing analysis adopts the following framework: an organization's history (policies, outcomes and the like) is institutionalized into premises (goals, values, beliefs), structures, processes (e.g. procedures), practices (e.g. norms) and attitudes, which shape organizational members. This shaping process strongly influences how organizational members act within the organizational context. Moreover, because the institutionalization process shapes the ways in which organizational members act, it thereby greatly constrains the organization's future development.

Analysing QSI and police-public relations work from the neo-institutionalist perspective, it is instructive to note that the Force's vision is stated to be: 'That Hong Kong remains one of the safest and most stable societies in the world'. That the programmatic statement of QSI should completely ignore civilian police work illustrates a fundamental premise (historically derived from the HKP's paramilitary public order priority and its concern with crime since the police-triad symbiosis' break-up) that such work is not 'real' policing. This premise permeates the entire Force. Thus, in the early 1990s, there was 'a virtual consensus [among senior commanders] that . . . the Force should reduce its commitments in the Community Relations field' in order to economize (cited in Grant, 1992: 109). 'The police is not a service trade', states one officer. Another concurs: 'putting service first is like turning priorities on their head' (fieldwork data). As a matter of fact, some previous studies (e.g. Guyot, 1991; Fielding, 1994) have also reported entrenched police views and disdain for community policing work elsewhere. What we are arguing is that, as the following will show, such views and the associated processes and practices are all the more ingrained in the HKP because of its paramilitary traditions.

The above premise has been institutionalized structurally. In 1974, the PCRO was established at the same rank as the Divisional commander and

head of the District's CID. However, the latter two posts were later upgraded to Superintendent rank, whereas the PCRO's rank has remained unchanged. Initially the PCRO post was a promotional route. However, that soon changed and today, it carries heavy duties (due to the greatly politicized social atmosphere in recent years), but little promotional prospects.

As part and parcel of the aforementioned premise, there is an informal distinction between 'core' and non-'core' duties. Frontline operational duties such as PTU/EU (public order-related) and crime (law enforcement-related) are 'core'; non-operational duties such as training and police-public relations are non-'core'. This distinction is institutionalized into a vital practice. Officially, there is no distinction between 'core' and non-'core' experience in promotion, but it is general knowledge in the Force that informally 'core' duties count for much more (fieldwork data).

The same institutionalization process is evident in training. In the old RPC syllabus, there were 39 sessions on Children and Juvenile subjects. In the 1998 revision, these subjects were integrated into the new syllabus elsewhere. With the total number of sessions remaining unchanged, this means that 39 sessions were released for other purposes. But, as seen, only 6 sessions were added for subjects related to service and police-public relations. This clearly shows, as several informants agreed, that while a service culture and improved police-public relations are seen as desirable, they are not allowed to interfere with the operational priority. While we emphasize that the HKP's paramilitary traditions play a crucial part in the formation of such core beliefs, similar beliefs are also found elsewhere. For instance, Bayley observes in his appraisal of community policing in Australia: 'To most police officers, community policing . . . represents "soft" policing, extraneous to the "hard" work of protecting people and catching criminals. Community policing is seen generally as an expensive add-on, irrelevant to the main purpose' (1989b: 79).

Organizationally, with the exception of the dissolution of SB in 1995, all the HKP's public order-related structures remain: PTU, EU and the ready mobilization into full Internal Security Structure. In terms of processes, 'station attack' dry runs are still conducted annually or bi-annually. The constable's process of on-the-job 'initiation' into the Force is telling. Upon graduation from PTS, constables are assigned to a Division. They first work in the Report Room under close supervision, and are then assigned on 'double beat' under experienced guidance. Within a couple of years, they undergo PTU training for three months. Up until a few years ago, they then deployed to do a tour of duty first attached to the Field Patrol Detachment (FPD), a purely paramilitary unit dealing with illegal immigration, and then to a PTU company (note the military terminology). With the establishment of the Border Division, which replaced the FPD, they are now directly deployed to a PTU company. Upon completing the tour of duty, they return to a Division and the smarter ones are immediately attached to the local vice squad.

Clearly, the 'initiation' focuses on frontline operational duties. Moreover, in the view of our informants, PTU training and deployment constitute a police officer's real 'baptism' into the Force. The sense of group loyalty and solidarity is established much more strongly in PTU training-deployment than at PTS. All police recall with pride and delight their PTU class and company. While PTU deployment normally does not involve dealing with disorder, the sense of coercive power gained from group street policing (a classic paramilitary practice), the routine resort to militarized tactics such as sweeps and searches are highly instrumental in forming the coercive mentality among police. 'PTU is not about service at all', states one informant. Another agrees: 'PTU is antithetical to the service ethos'. It is hence not surprising that Ip (1990: 68–9), measuring attitudes quantitatively, found that police, having gone through PTU training, were more likely to opt for the use of 'power/authority'. PTU training receives high priority. All rank and file serve in PTU at least twice, often more, in their career (fieldwork data). From the 1980s to today, the number of PTU trainees (inclusive of those attending refresher training) has remained steady, averaging 1845 yearly from 1984–90 and 1827 from 1995–2002 (calculated from fieldwork data and HKP Annual Report, various years).

Rich in paramilitary traditions, the HKP has long relied on the routine, widespread use of hard anti-crime tactics such as PTU saturation policing, stop and search procedures and roadblocks. One tactic widely used is 'carpet-checking' of nightspots, in some cases involving hundreds of police. This has once been justified in the following terms: 'thousands of premises have been visited by Police, and numerous people have been checked . . . The crime preventive and deterrent value of such measures is incalculable' (HKP Annual Report for 1990: 5).

Discussing hard tactics, a recently retired informant remarked that from a retrospective vantage point, he now regards much of what the Force does as 'legal but often not very reasonable'. Among the various illustrations he cited, the following is especially interesting. In checking nightspots, which can easily take over an hour, police command patrons to remain in their seats or separate them into two groups by gender ('men on the left, women on the right'), and then proceed with identity checks, as though everybody is a potential suspect. In a similar discussion with another informant who has had extensive experience in checking nightspots, he was initially very defensive. 'When we visited nightspots in Tsim Sha Tsui [an expensive nightspots area], we were very polite'. When asked 'Might this not be because you wanted to avoid complaints, given the kind of patrons [of high social status] there? Were you as polite in visits to [low class] nightspots in Shum Shui Po?', he admitted the point, but went on:

Sometimes, we had information that certain particular patrons had drugs on them, and if we did not forcefully take control of the situation right from the first moment, it would be very easy for them to dispose of the drugs.

When asked whether or not the same practice was adopted even when there was no prior intelligence of the kind mentioned by him, he admitted that it was and eventually agreed that hard tactics might not always be reasonable. In contrast, yet another informant defended hard tactics from start to end, commenting: 'if the police are able to pick up some criminals, I don't think inconveniencing innocent patrons is a big deal'. Hong Kong has enjoyed a comparatively low official crime rate. While this may have little to do with hard tactics, from the neo-institutionalist perspective, there exists no external stimulus that might trigger a reconsideration of them.

In sum, the institutionalization of the HKP's paramilitary traditions into structures (PTU etc.), processes (training, 'station attack' dry runs, rookies' 'initiation') and practices (hard tactics, etc.) directly impact upon the formation of police mentality in a way that does not dispose officers to prioritize civilian work, and is antithetical to the establishment of a service ethos.

Thus, a serving officer (So, 1999: 75–7) unsurprisingly reports from an insider's vantage point of 'skepticism about the viability of consumerism in policing' and the 'cognitive inability to change among some high ranking and experienced police officers', which result in 'half-hearted effort[s]' in implementing QSI, an observation confirmed by our informants. 'To improve station appearance is the easy part', observed one informant, 'but police attitudes towards the public are very difficult to change'. Another stated: 'we are now polite towards ordinary citizens, that's mainly to avoid complaint . . . Deep down, there's no concept of service at all. That's very hard to acquire'. As far as police are concerned, added a third, 'police are police, if we have to arrest you, we arrest you, nothing more needs to be said'. Our informants all agree that superficial politeness in civilian work is easy to achieve, and in Hong Kong's present socio-political climate accepted as necessary, but we discern no belief in the necessity of basic attitudinal change towards the public. In this connection, it's instructive to note that the informant who sees 'no big deal' in hard tactics at the same time accepts the need to be polite.

The institutionalization of the HKP's paramilitary traditions is reinforced by an external factor that results from Hong Kong's unique position. The local population generally hold the view, justifiably or not, that Hong Kong has thrived economically on the basis of its post-1960s political stability and comparatively low crime rate since the mid-1970s. Thus, both the public and the Government demand the HKP to continue to keep Hong Kong safe and stable. This is all the more so because Hong Kong's ability after 1997 to maintain its leading economic position in relation to the rest of China is also seen to depend on its continued stability. Moreover, when 'the Values' were formulated, Hong Kong's return to China was impending. Political stability in the run up to the return until now is a top priority for the Government. Hence, the HKP's operational priority is exogenously reinforced.

Conclusion

The meagre achievements of the HKP's community policing initiatives stem from two sets of factors: (1) the problematic nature of the community policing model itself; and (2) the disregard of local conditions. The failure of the initiative to engage the public in crime prevention is unsurprising since it has been widely reported elsewhere as well. In Hong Kong, the common factor that explains such a failure elsewhere (a socially divided environment) has a reach that is perhaps more extensive than many other places. Moreover, the problems of social division for the initiative are rendered more acute by the local population's socio-cultural ethos. Police-public relations have improved but this seems to have been less a result of community policing reforms than the uprooting of syndicated police corruption. In fact, the HKP's institutionalized traditions do not dispose it towards prioritizing police-public relations. Hence, though in the reforms of the mid-1970s, the PCRO was created at a relatively senior rank with bright promotional prospects, police-public relations work was soon downgraded as shown in the relative demotion of the post. This downgrading itself became institutionalized as in the distinction between 'core' and non-'core' duties and its implications. Given the institutionalization of the HKP's paramilitary traditions, it is unsurprising that QSI has so far achieved very little other than some superficial changes. This is especially because Hong Kong's unique position exogenously reinforces the HKP's institutionalization process. For the same reasons, future prospects do not look bright for QSI. Hence, it can be seen that whereas instilling the service ethos has also been found to be difficult elsewhere, the situation in Hong Kong is again aggravated by the specific context of the HKP's paramilitary traditions and Hong Kong's unique political and economic position.

List of abbreviations

CRB	Community Relations Bureau
DFCC	District Fight Crime Committee
EU	Emergency Unit
FCC	Fight Crime Committee
FPD	Field Patrol Detachment
HKP	Hong Kong Police
JPC	Junior Police Call
NPC	Neighbourhood Police Co-ordinator
NPO	Neighbourhood Police Offices
NPU	Neighbourhood Police Unit
NWS	Neighbourhood Watch Scheme
PCRO	Police Community Relations Officer
PPRB	Police Public Relations Branch
PTC	Police Training Contingent

PTS	Police Training School
PTU	Police Tactical Unit
QSI	Quality of Service Initiative
RPC	Recruit Police Constable
SB	Special Branch
SLO	School Liaison Officer

Notes

The author is grateful to David Dixon and the reviewers for their helpful comments on the initial draft of this article. The usual caveat applies.

- 1 The name of the HKP and its commander's title have changed over the decades. For convenience, we refer to the HKP (or the Force) and its Commissioner throughout.
- 2 A list of abbreviations is appended.
- 3 In the 1970s, the HKP's territorial structure comprised District (of which there were four), Division and Sub-Division. In the early 1980s, the structure was overhauled to comprise of Region (of which there are now six), District (equivalent to previous Division) and Division (equivalent to previous Sub-Division). For uniformity, we use the current nomenclature throughout.
- 4 The references refer to two police press releases on two of the surveys, and a set of internal management information materials on another survey informally made available to us by a police contact.
- 5 A substantial proportion of Hong Kong's population has always been mainland immigrants. Up to 1980, the Government allowed illegal immigrants to stay. Since then, they have been repatriated and the number of new legal arrivals has been subject to quota. For our purpose, 'indigenous' population is loosely understood in a negative way as excluding post-1980 immigrants and their children (whether or not born after their parents' immigration into Hong Kong).
- 6 An institution is not necessarily an organization. Thus, market institutions span diverse business organizations. In this article, though, the term 'institution' is used with reference to the organizational context.

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