CONTACT WITH POLICE: A COMPARISON BETWEEN CHINESE AND AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS

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While police-citizen contacts have been the subject of a number of studies conducted over the past three decades, very little is known about the frequency and nature of encounters between Chinese and their local police. Using survey data collected from 868 students from several Chinese and American universities, this study answers two research questions: (1) Do Chinese and American college students differ in the occurrence and number of their contacts with police; and (2) Does country affiliation significantly influence levels of police-citizen encounters controlling for demographic characteristics, college major, and family/friend experience with police? Frequency distributions indicated that Chinese students were much less likely than their American counterparts to have contacts with their local police. Chinese students' contacts with police were most frequently due to having casual conversation with police and asking police officers for information or advice, while American students' contacts often resulted from traffic violations and accidents. Regression results showed that country affiliation, gender, age, college major, and family/friend contact with police significantly influenced the occurrence of contact with police. In addition, country affiliation, age, income, and family/friend contact with police affected the number of contact with police. Implications for future research and policy are discussed.

Along with China's open-door policy adopted since the late 1970s, studies on Chinese policing have increased steadily over the past two decades. While still under-researched, Chinese policing have been the subjects of a vein of investigation that assessed police policies and strategies (e.g., Dutton, 2005; Fu, 1990a; Jiang & Dai, 1990; H. Tanner, 1999; M. Tanner, 2005; Sun & Wu, 2010; Trevaskes, 2003), reform (Fu, 1990b; Wong, 2009), legislations (Biddulph, 1993; Ma, 2003; Wong,

2005), and education and training (Sun, Cretacci, Wu, & Jin, 2009; Ward & Bracey, 1985). Research efforts have also been devoted to police-community relations (Du, 1997), community policing (Jiao, 1995; Johnson, 1984; Wong, 2001; Zhong, 2009), and misconduct and accountability (Fu, 1991; Wong, 1998). Nevertheless, one of the most common and highly important forms of street-level policing, citizen contacts with the local police, has yet to be touched by previous inquiry into Chinese policing.

The primary purpose of this study is to examine Chinese contacts with the police, compared to those of their U.S. counterparts. In addition to filling the knowledge gap of Chinese-police encounters, this study also addresses two common limitations associated with previous studies on Chinese policing. First, the majority of existing studies were descriptive in nature. While they provided some useful information on the Chinese police, they contributed little to the development of theories of Chinese policing. Second, very few studies were conducted from an international, comparative point of view. With less than a handful of exceptions (e.g., Jiao, 1995; Sun & Chu, 2008a, 2008b), comparative studies of policing in Chinese societies and other countries are nonexistent. This may be, in part, attributed to the difficulty of conducting research in mainland China, which involves the unwillingness of government officials to share unpublicized information with outsiders, the hesitance of Chinese scholars to cooperate with foreigners, and the lack of reliable statistical data (see Chen, 2004; Liang & Lu, 2006; Wong, 2002).

Using survey data collected from students in several Chinese and U.S. universities, this study empirically compares and contrasts the frequency and nature of contacts with police between Chinese and Americans. Specifically, this study can answer two questions: (1) Do Chinese and American college students differ in the frequency and nature of their contacts with police; and (2) Does country affiliation significantly influence levels of police-citizen encounters controlling for demographic characteristics, college major, and family/friend experience with police? A study of this kind will promote a better understanding of the extent and characteristics of citizen-police encounters in China and how these patterns differ from those in the U.S.

CONTACT WITH POLICE

Police-citizen contacts represent one of the most common and visible forms of policing in any society. A substantial number of studies have been conducted since

the 1970s to examine various aspects of contacts between police and the public in the U.S. For the purpose of this study, the following review concentrates on three dimensions of police-citizens contacts: the frequency of contact, the nature of contact, and factors that influence the likelihood of contact.

Frequency of Contact

Several nationwide surveys conducted mainly in Western countries have reported the frequency of police-citizen contacts. For example, the most recent data from the Police-Public Contact Survey (PPCS) revealed that 19% of U.S. residents had at least one face-to-face contact with police in 2005, a slightly decrease from 21% in 2002 (Durose, Smith, & Langan, 2007). In Australia, an estimated 47.8% of respondents in the 2002-03 National Survey of Community Satisfaction with Police (NSCSP) reported having contacts with police during that year (Sced, 2004a). Findings from the 1992 British Crime Survey (BCS) showed that more than half of those interviewed (54%) had some encounters with police during the previous year (Skogan, 1994). It appeared that police-citizen contact rates varied across countries, which might result from the differences in sampling strategies and questionnaire items of these studies as well as distinguished law enforcement practices. Nevertheless, data from separate waves of these national surveys suggested that the percentages of citizens who had recent police contacts remained fairly constant over time within each country.

Variation in the rates of police-citizen contacts was also observed on the city level. For instance, a study of criminal victimization and perceptions of community safety in 12 U.S. cities found that the percentage of police-citizen contacts ranged from 29% in New York to 44% in Savannah and Tucson (Smith, Steadman, Minton, & Twonsend, 1999), with an average of 40.5% contact rate across these cities (Wu, 2009). A 2001 survey of over 2,500 respondents in Chicago actually found that as high as half of Chicagoans aged 18 and older had initiated contacts with police and another 20% of Chicagoans recalled having been stopped by police during the year (Skogan, 2005). These findings implied that variations in city-level structural characteristics, such as racial composition, crime rate, and socioeconomic status, and law enforcement philosophies and strategies, such as community policing orientations and practices, might all influence the rates of contacts with police.

In terms of the number of encounters for individuals, survey data indicated that the majority of citizens experienced only one contact with police over a 12-month

period of time. For example, of those who had contacts with police in the U.S. PPCS data, 71.5% had one encounter, 17.5% had two encounters, and the rest 11% had three or more encounters, averaging approximately 1.6 face-to-face encounters per resident (Durose et al., 2007). Although respondents in the BCS and NSCSP surveys were more likely than their U.S. counterparts to have multiple encounters with police, the majority of respondents still had just one encounter rather than multiple ones (Skogan, 1994; Sced, 2004a).

Nature of Contact

Another important, commonly reported aspect of police-citizen encounters was the nature of such encounters, which normally involved two questions: who initiated the contact and what was the reason for the contact. Regarding the question of who initiated the contact, previous studies distinguished between two types of encounters: citizen-initiated or voluntary contacts and police-initiated or involuntary contacts. The former refers to contacts that are voluntarily initiated by members of the public, whereas the latter is defined as encounters initiated by police officers. The 2002 PPCS data revealed that 58.5% of contacts were police-initiated and 41.5% were citizen-initiated (Durose, Schmitt, & Langan, 2005). Identical percentages were reported in the Australia NSCSP data (Sced, 2004a), but a higher percentage for citizen-initiated contacts was documented in the BCS data (Skogan, 1994).

For the question of reasons for contacts, mixed findings were obtained from U.S. data. For example, the PPCS data found that traffic-related incidents, including traffic stops and accidents, represented the most frequent reason for contacts, constituting 56% of all contacts in 2005. Other common reasons included reporting a crime/problem to police (23.5%), police providing assistance or service (6.2%), and police investigating crime (5.6%) (Durose et al., 2007). Another national data source, the 12-City Survey, however, documented a much lower percentage of traffic-related contacts. Traffic violations and accidents together represented only 14% of all contacts, lower than having casual conversation with police (20.4%) and calling police for service (18.4%). The Chicago study mentioned earlier did not have a category of traffic-related contacts, but it recorded that 19% of respondents initiated contacts with police because of reporting a traffic accident or medical emergency to police and another 16% of respondents had police-initiated encounters because of traffic stops (Skogan, 2005).

Regarding other countries, the BCS data showed that traffic stops were the most

frequent reason for contacts initiated by police, although they made up only 16% of such encounters. Another 14% of police-initiated contacts involved ringing alarm, asking for information about crime, or returning recovered property. Among citizen-initiated contacts, reporting a crime (16%) was the most common reason, followed by giving police information (14%) and reporting some kind of disturbance (14%) (Skogan, 1994). Therefore, it seemed that American citizens were more likely than their foreign counterparts to have traffic-related police encounters, which might, in part, due to a heavier reliance of motor vehicles as transportation among Americans. It should be noted, however, that direct comparisons across different surveys and datasets could be problematic because the classifications of reasons were not standardized. Thus, any comparison regarding the relative rankings of various types of contacts across different studies should be interpreted with caution.

Factors Shaping Likelihood of Contact

Previous studies have clearly shown that contacts with police were not evenly distributed across segments of society. Several demographic characteristics, such as gender, race, and age, have been consistently found to shape the likelihood of contacts with police. Males, Whites, and younger persons tended to have higher rates of police-citizen encounters. For instance, the 2005 PPCS data showed that males (21.1%), Whites (20.2%), and persons aged 18 to 24 (29.3%) experienced higher rates of contacts with police than females (17.2%), Blacks (16.5%) and Hispanics (15.8%), and persons aged 65 or older (8.3%), respectively (Durose et al., 2007). Similar patterns of the gender and age effects were also found in the Australian NSCSP data (Sced, 2004a, 2004b). In addition, it was found that the effects of race, age, and gender were conditional based on whether contacts were citizen-initiated or police-initiated. For example, Skogan (2005) found that while males (28%) were much more likely to be stopped by police than females (12%), gender difference was not evident in citizen-initiated contacts. Meanwhile, African Americans and English-speaking Latinos reported higher frequencies of being stopped by police than Whites and Spanish-speaking Latinos, and Spanish-speaking Latinos had a much lower rate of citizen-initiated police contacts than Whites, African Americans, and English-speaking Latinos. In addition, older residents were less likely than others to either have contacts with or get stopped by the police. Finally, interactional effects of age, race, and sex were also observed, with young Black males the most likely to be stopped by police.

Socioeconomic status (SES) sometimes made a difference too. For example, the BCS data indicated that citizens with higher levels of income and educational attainment were more likely to contact the police, while unemployed people were much more inclined to be contacted by the police (Skogan, 1994). Skogan's (2005) study in Chicago, however, found that lower income respondents were significantly more likely to contact the police, but being in the labor force and having a job was associated with a higher stop rate by the police. More empirical investigation is needed to understand better the relationship between SES and police contacts.

In sum, previous research has shown a substantial variability in the rate of contacts with police across cities and nations, with percentages ranging from approximately 20% to 70%. The vast majority of respondents reported having only one encounter with police during the previous year. About 60% of police-citizen contacts were initiated by police, and the rest by citizens. U.S residents were more commonly to have contacts with police for traffic-related reasons, while British and Australian residents were more likely to have encounters due to crime-related reasons. Concerning who among the population are more likely to have police encounters, the effects of gender and age were more consistent with males and younger people having higher contact rates, while the effects of race, income, and education on contact rates vary depending on the types of contact. Therefore, while the nationwide surveys reported a higher contact rate for Whites in general, socially disadvantaged groups including racial/ethnic minorities were likely to be over-represented in police-initiated contacts. These findings were not surprising given the results from studies on police behavior that minority, poor, and younger citizens were much more likely to be subjected to higher levels of coercive actions (e.g., Smith & Visher, 1981; Worden, 1995).

Although police-citizen contacts have been well-documented in the Western literature, very little is known about similar information in China. This study addresses this concern by establishing the benchmark values of Chinese citizen-police contacts and comparing them with data on U.S. citizen-police encounters.

METHODOLOGY

Research Project and Sites

This study was based on part of the data collected by the International Project on Attitudes toward Criminal Justice (IPACJ) initiated in the summer of 2008.

IPACJ is an on-going project directed by two researchers in the U.S. and involves collaborative efforts from several other Chinese and American scholars. Using college students as samples, IPACJ was designed to compare and contrast Chinese and American citizens' attitudes toward and experiences of an array of crime and criminal justice issues, such as contact and satisfaction with the police, perceptions of domestic violence, victimization and fear of crime, and perceptions of capital punishment and correction.

The part of IPACJ data used for this study was collected from respondents in three Chinese universities at two cities and one American university. Two of the Chinese universities were located in a large, cosmopolitan city in northern China (thereafter "the northern Chinese city"), and the third university was in a mid-size, more homogeneous costal city in southeastern China (thereafter "the southeastern Chinese city"). Both universities in the northern metropolis were large-size, high-ranking institutions with students who were originally from different areas of the country, while the university in the southeastern city was a medium-size, middle-ranking institution with predominant majority of students being local, in-provincial students. The American university was housed at a small college town in a mid Atlantic state. It was a large-size, nationally-ranked public institution, with the majority of its students (about 65%) coming from neighboring states.

Data Collection and Samples

The first wave of data collection by the IPACJ was conducted during the summer and fall of 2008. An English survey questionnaire that included approximately 60 items was first developed and then translated into Chinese by IPACJ researchers. Using the method of back translation(Brislin, 1970), the Chinese survey questionnaire was translated back into English by a project member in China to ensure the translation was accurate. Both English versions were then compared and minor revisions were made to enhance the comparability between the survey items in English and Chinese. The English survey was also pre-tested on a small group of American students.

Using convenience and snowballing sampling strategies, three data collection methods were employed to reach potential respondents. The primary approach to administer the survey was through college classes. About one-third of the Chinese data and all of the U.S. data were collected via this method. In both countries, IPACJ researchers obtained support and assistance from their colleagues who were faculty members in these universities. The survey was distributed to and collected

from students either through faculty members or by IPACJ researchers, who introduced the project to students, answered any questions that students might have, and especially emphasized the completely voluntary nature of participation and assured students that non-participation would not bring any negative consequence to their performance in these classes.

A second way to distribute the survey was through dormitory rooms. Most Chinese college students lived in on-campus dorms. One of the researchers went to dozens of dorm rooms in the two metropolitan universities at evenings when students were more likely to be there, introduced herself, explained the project, and asked the students if they were willing to participate in the study. If the students agreed to fill out the survey, the researcher would return to the room in about half an hour to collect the completed survey. Considering that all students were assigned to dormitory buildings based on their grade, major, and gender, samples were drawn from different dorm buildings.

The last channel to recruit respondents was through personal connections. Based on snowball sampling techniques, one of the researchers asked her friends who were students in these universities to introduce her and this project to their friends and in this way had more students participated. This sampling strategy proved to be helpful in recruiting students from different majors and grades. In addition, being referred to the research project by friends or classmates that the respondents knew and trusted upon gave them more comfort to reveal true opinions.

For each questionnaire to be given out through dormitory visits and personal connections, the researchers had informed the participants, either directly or indirectly, about the issues of voluntariness and anonymity, which were also clearly stated in the cover letter of the survey. The respondents were also told that they could withdraw from the study at anytime or skip any questions as they wanted. The researchers reminded the participants that they should not write their names anywhere on the questionnaires and the researchers did not want to know who they were. The researchers were also the only ones able to see the completed questionnaires.

A total of 1,025 surveys were collected through the three data-collection methods. Unusable surveys and cases with missing data were dropped from the analysis, resulting in a final sample of 868 students. An analysis of the data indicated that there were virtually no differences between respondents included and excluded in the sample and the exclusion did not confound the results in any significant way. Among the final sample, 432 were Chinese students and 436 were American students. While the Chinese and American samples were not randomly selected from the population, there was a high degree of congruence in terms of student

sex, age, and class status between the samples and the populations of sample universities.

Variables

Three dependent variables were constructed to measure the occurrence and count of contact and reason(s) for contact with police. The occurrence of contact referred to whether the respondents had contact with the police over the past twelve months. It was coded as a dummy variable with 1 representing the presence of the contact. The count of contact measures the total number of contacts that the respondent had with police over the past twelve months. The variable had a Poisson type of distribution with a high count of small numbers (e.g., 0, 1, and 2) and a low count of large numbers. The reason for contact indicated why the respondent had contact with police during the last twelve months. Eight different reasons were reported, including (1) traffic violations and accidents; (2) officer responding to my call for service; (3) I was the victim of a crime; (4) I was an offender; (5) I was a witness to a crime; (6) casual conversation with a police officer; (7) asked the police for information or advice; and (8) other.

Independent variables used in the regression analysis included country, gender, age, college major, family income, and family member and friend contact with police. A preliminary analysis indicated that city effect did not exist among Chinese students from the northern city and the southeastern city. The variable city thus was not controlled in the analysis. Country and gender were coded as dummy variables with 1 representing China and female. The variable age was measured in years.

The variable of college major was coded into a dummy variable with 0 representing non-criminal justice and non-law and 1 representing criminal justice or law. It should be noted that all criminal justice majors were American students in the sample because Chinese universities did not offer the criminal justice major while all law school students were Chinese students in the sample because the American university in this study did not have a law school. Family income was also coded as a dummy variable with 0 representing mid and high income (annual income equal to or higher than RMB20,000 for Chinese and $30,000 for Americans) and 1 representing low income (annual income less than RMB20,000 or $30,000). The last variable, family member and friend contact with police, was coded as a dummy variable with 1 representing respondents whose family mem-

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Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for All Variables (N=868)

Variable	Coding	Range	Mean	SD
Dependent Variables				
Occurrence of contact	0=no, 1=yes	0-1	.41	.49
Number of contact	--	0-5	.66	.96
Reason for contact	1=traffic violations/accidents	--	--	--
	2=officer responding to call			
	3=I was the victim of a crime			
	4=I was an offender			
	5=I was a witness to a crime			
	6=casual conversation with police			
	7=asked police for information			
	8=other			
Independent Variables				
Country	0=U.S., 1=China	0-1	.50	.50
Gender	0=male, 1=female	0-1	.58	.49
Age	--	16-38	20.20	2.41
Major	0=non-criminal justice/law	0-1	.32	.47
	1=criminal justice/law			
Family income	0=mid/high, 1=low	0-1	.28	.45
Family/friend contact with Police	0=no, 1=yes	0-1	.38	.49

bers and/or close friends had contact with the police over the past twelve months. Correlation coefficients among independent variables were examined (results not shown). None of the correlations exceed .35. Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics for all variables used in the regression analysis.

Analysis Plan

Both bivariate and multivariate analyses were conducted in the research. The former focused on the relationships between country affiliation and the occurrence, number, and type of(i.e., reason for) police contacts. Frequency and percentage distributions of the occurrence, total number, and type of police contacts across countries were reported and significance tests were discussed. Multivariate regression analysis was used to assess the effects of country affiliation and

demographic and other factors on the occurrence and number of police contacts simultaneously. Specifically, binary logistic regression was appropriate for the occurrence of contact with police model since the measure was a dummy variable. Poisson regression was appropriate for the number of contact with police model since the variable involved count data with large counts being rare events. Under this model, the probability of a count was determined by a Poisson distribution where the mean of the distribution was a function of the independent variables. It should be noted that negative binomial models were not used because the count data were not over-dispersed (i.e., variance not much larger than the mean). Also, regression analysis was not conducted on the reason of contact because the small number of police contact among Chinese students did not allow further analysis of factors that might lead to variation in causes of police contact.

RESULTS

Bivariate Analysis

Table 2 demonstrates the comparison between Chinese and the U.S. students in the occurrence and number of contacts with police. The upper panel of the table clearly indicated that American college students were much more likely than their Chinese counterparts to have contacts with their local police. Two-third of the American students (66.2%) reported having recent contact with police, compared to only 16.2% of Chinese students. In others words, American students were four times more inclined than Chinese students to engage in contact with police. The chi-square test (not shown in Table 2) suggested that the difference was significant at the .05 level.

The lower panel of Table 2 showed that, among those who had face-to-face contacts with police, the majority of them (85.7% Chinese and 52.4% Americans) had only one contact over the past twelve months. American students were more likely than Chinese students to have multiple encounters with police. Specifically, 47.6 % of Americans had more than one contact with police, compared to only 14.3% of Chinese. The highest number of contacts was five, reported by one student from each country. The chi-square test revealed that the distinction between Chinese and American students' frequency of contact was statistically significant. Table 3 illustrates the type of or reason for contacts with police. For Chinese students, the most common reasons for contacts with police were having casual

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conversation with police and asking police officers for information and/or advice. Both were also frequent reasons for American students, ranking second and third among all types of contact. Nevertheless, three obvious differences were observed between Chinese and American students. First, nearly one-third (32.7%) of Amer

Table 2: The Occurrence and Number of Contact with Police

	China		U.S.	
	%	N	%	N
Occurrence of contact				
Had police contact	16.2	70	66.5	290
No police contact	83.8	362	33.5	146
Total	100.0	432	100.0	436
Number of contact				
1	85.7	60	52.4	152
2	7.2	5	30.3	88
3	4.3	3	13.5	39
4	1.4	1	3.5	10
5	1.4	1	.3	1
Total	100.0	70	100.0	290

icans' contacts resulted from traffic-related violations and accidents, whereas such encounters constituted a much smaller portion (8%) of all contacts between Chinese students and police. Heavy involvement in traffic-related incidents, particularly traffic violations, among American students had contributed to the high level of police-initiated or involuntary contacts between American college students and police. A further analysis (results not shown in Table 3) revealed that nearly 60% of the American students reported that their last contacts were initiated by the police, compared to only 25% of Chinese students who reported so. In other words, American students were more than twice likely than their Chinese counterparts to have involuntary contacts with police.

Second, more than 20% of the Chinese students reported having contacts with police because they were victims of crime, while only about 5% of Americans had contacts with police because of victimization. Finally, compared to their Chinese counterparts (1.1%), American students (10.4%) were more likely to report being the offenders during encounters with police.

Multivariate Analysis

Table 4 summarizes findings from the multivariate regression analysis.[1] Looking

Table 3: Reason for Contact with Police

Reason for contact	China		U.S.		
	%	N	%	N	X^2
Traffic violations/accidents	8.0	7	32.7	160	171.8*
Officer respond to call for service	6.8	6	6.5	32	18.3*
I was the victim of a crime	20.5	18	5.3	26	1.4
I was an offender	1.1	1	10.4	51	50.7*
I was a witness to a crime	4.5	4	5.2	25	15.5*
Casual conversation with police	21.6	19	19.8	97	59.7*
Asked police for information	21.6	19	12.1	59	22.1*
Other	15.9	14	8.0	39	12.3*
Total	100.0	88	100.0	489	

*p<.05

at the first model, Chinese students were significantly less likely than their American counterparts to have contacts with the police, which was consistent with results from the bivariate analysis. Specifically, the odds for Chinese college students to get into contact with local police during the past year were 10% those of American college students. Four other variables were also significant predictors of the occurrence of contact with police. As predicted, female students were less likely than their male counterparts to have contact with police. The odds for female students to have police encounters were 66% those of males. Age also made a difference, although the direction was somewhat contradictory to the expectation with teens and younger adults less likely than young adults to have contacts with police (odds ratio = 1.09). Students with a major in either criminal justice or law were more inclined than non-criminal justice or law students to have contacts with police. The odds for criminal justice/law majors to have police-citizen encounters were 1.7 times higher than those for non-criminal justice/law majors. Finally, students were more likely to have encounters with police if their family

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members and friends had contacts with police. The odds for those who had family member or friend who had recent contact with the police were three times the odds for those whose family member or friend did not have recent police contact. Together, the explanatory variables accounted for 39% of the variation in the occurrence of contact with police.

Table 4: Multivariate Regression Summary

Variable	Occurrence of Contact[a]			Number of Contact[b]		
	B	SE	Exp(B)	B	SE	Exp(B)
China	-2.32***	.23	.10	-2.13***	.14	.12
Female	-.40*	.17	.66	-.07	.08	.93
Age	.09*	.04	1.09	.28***	.01	1.32
Criminal justice/law major	.52**	.19	1.70	-.01	.09	.99
Low family income	-.03	.24	.97	-.80***	.15	.45
Family/friend contact with police	1.10***	.17	3.01	.48***	.09	1.62
Constant	-1.47***	.80	.22	-5.60***	.14	.00
R^2	.39			--		

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

a: Estimates of binary logistic regression

b: Estimates of Poisson regression

Moving to the model for the count of contacts with police, the variable country continued to be a significant predictor. After controlling for all the other variables, Chinese students still tended to have significantly fewer police encounters than American students. Specifically, compared to Chinese, Americans were expected to have a rate about 9 times greater for having higher numbers of police encounters. The significant effects of gender and criminal justice/law major disappeared, while age remained a significant predictor. For a one year increase in age, the rate for having police contacts would be expected to increase by a .32 units, given other predictor variables held constant. In addition, family income became a significant predictor. The rate for students who came from low-income families to have contacts with police was almost half as that for students from middle- and high-income family backgrounds. Finally, students whose family members or close friends had recent contacts with police were expected to have more contacts with police.

DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this study is to compare contacts with police between Chinese and American college students. Several major findings and their associated implications for future research are worthy of discussion. First, compared to their Chinese counterparts, American college students had a much higher prevalence of contacts with police. Two out of three American students reported having face-to-face encounters with police during the past twelve months, whereas less than one in every five Chinese students reported so. The American police-citizen contact rate found in this study was higher than those reported in nationwide surveys(e.g., the PPCS and the 12 City Survey), which did not come as a complete surprise given that the research sample in this study was comprised of young individuals who had been consistently found to have more police contacts than older people.

Future research should continue to examine police-citizen contacts across countries. Information like the extent and rate of police encounters might seem basic and preliminary, but it can establish the critical baseline for a better understanding of police-citizen contacts in any country. Meanwhile, future studies should extend their research samples to include the general public, and examine whether or not findings based on data from college students can be applied to the general population as well.

Second, traffic-related incidents appeared to be a key factor that accounted for major country differences in the nature of contacts. The majority of Chinese college students, especially those who are enrolled in urban universities, come from out-of-town. They are living on campus and normally do not need a vehicle or cannot afford one. The convenient and economic mass transportation systems in major Chinese cities also reduce the need for a car among college students. Vehicle ownership, on the other hand, is much more common among American college students, which significantly increases their chances of having traffic-related contacts with the police. As long as the social organization of campus life does not change much for Chinese students, it is safe to predict that they will continue to have fewer contacts with police than their American counterparts.

Future studies should investigate the possible consequences of the differential rates of police contacts, especially involuntary encounters, on Chinese and Americans' perceptions of the police. For example, does the higher level of involuntary contacts that resulted from traffic violations lead to more negative evaluations of police among American students? One needs to be cautious to assume that U.S. college students would rate police less favorably than their

Chinese counterparts because of their higher levels of involuntary contacts. In fact, recent studies have reported that Chinese citizens in general had lower levels of confidence in police than the U.S. citizens did (Cao & Hou, 2001; Wu & Sun, 2009). More research efforts should be devoted to untangle the complex connections between contact with police and evaluation of police. Equally important, more attention should be paid to examining factors that are beyond the individual-level predictors(e.g., personal experience with the police) and at the country-level (e.g., political democracy and legal culture), which might explain better the distinct collective sentiments and opinions toward the police held by citizens of two countries. .

Another interesting finding is the different roles played by Chinese and American college students in crime-related contacts with local police. Victimization was a common reason for Chinese students to have contacts with police, while criminal offending was more frequent among American students. How can these distinctions be explained? Was victimization a more prevalent experience for Chinese students than Americans in reality, or it was just that American students were less likely than their Chinese counterparts to report their victimization? In addition, were U.S. college students involved in a higher level of criminal activities, or it was just that Chinese students were less willing to reveal criminal offending to survey studies than their American counterparts who were more used to self-reported studies of delinquent and criminal behavior? There is not enough information in hand to answer any of these questions, which should be investigated in future research.

Finally, police contacts varied across different segments of the society. The results of this study confirm the findings from previous research that certain background characteristics subjected individuals to different levels of contacts with police. Moreover, some college-specific factors also surfaced. For instance, college major made a difference, with criminal justice and law school students more likely to have contacts with police. This finding may be attributed, in part, to course-related work (e.g., conducing internships in criminal justice agencies) and career planning activity (e.g., seeking professional advice from criminal justice practitioners) that lead to an increased possibility of contact with police for both majors. In addition, although the effect of age seemed to be inconsistent with those from previous research, a very narrow range of age distribution of college students in this sample might account for this. Younger adults may be more active than late teens in various on and off campus activities that expose them to possible higher levels of contact with police.

Future research should extend this line of inquiry by taking more non-demographic characteristics into consideration. For example, lifestyle variables

(e.g., daily routine activity engaged in) may influence individuals' likelihood of having contact with the police. Contacts with police may be also a function of neighborhood structural characteristics (e.g., racial composition and crime rates). A more complete model of police-citizen encounter should include more theoretically relevant variables.

Before discussing the implications for policy, several limitations associated with this study should be acknowledged. First, non-random, convenience samples were used in this study. Second, college majors (i.e., criminal justice and law) used in the analysis were not entirely comparable. Future study should attempt to draw random samples from college populations with comparable majors. Third, the results of this study were generated based on sample students from a handful of colleges. Whether findings of this study can be applied to students of colleges with different characteristics (e.g., smaller colleges in rural areas) is an open question. Another related point is that although findings about the American police-college student encounters obtained by this study are largely in line with those from other studies based on the general U.S. population, whether findings about the Chinese police-college student encounters can be appropriately used as the proximity for the general Chinese population is still an open question. Finally, while race has been proved to be an important predictor of police-citizen contacts in the U.S., it was not included as a predictor because race is not an applicable variable in China. Future studies can examine the effect of ethnicity by including more ethnic minorities into the sample and testing whether or not the majority Han people differs from minority ethnic groups in having police encounters.

Several implications for policy emerge from the findings. First, since traffic-related incidents appear to be the main mechanism for police-college student contacts, American police administrators should constantly monitor officers' performance during this type of encounters. Police managers need to set up clear policies and guidelines to ensure that polite and professional manners are displayed and fair application of the law and procedural justice are rendered in handling college students for traffic violations and accidents. Second, Chinese police should pay attention to their contacts with college students who are victims of criminal behavior. College students are educated individuals who are more sensitive to human right and fair treatment issues and generally critical of police services. Through regular in-service training sessions and routine staff meetings, police administrators could cultivate a tragic perspective (see Muir, 1977) that allows a better understanding of and sympathy toward mishaps and human sufferings. Finally, police managers in both countries need to encourage officers to actively engage in non-enforcement related encounters, such as initiating casual

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conversations with citizens and offering assistance to citizens, since this kind of contacts constitute a large part of police-citizens encounters and tend to increase citizens' satisfaction with police.

NOTES

1 The influence of possible outlier cases was checked. Standard scores were computed and ten outliers that have z-scores larger than three were identified. We ran the regression analysis with and without the outliers and the results remained the same in terms of the strength and direction of the relationships between independent and dependent variables.

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