

Chapter 2

Disciplined Mobility and Migrant Subalternity: Sketching the Politics of Motorcycle Taxis in Guangzhou

Junxi Qian

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Abstract This chapter examines the regulation of motorcycle taxis in Guangzhou and its implications for the construction of migrant identity. The motorcycle taxi refers to a motorcycle used to provide commercialised, highly flexible and door-to-door transport service. In Guangzhou, this informal taxi service plays a notable role in sustaining the livelihood of a subgroup of urban migrants. However, alongside the ambition of local officials and elites to rationalise and sanitise urban space, motorcycle mobility fell victim to discourses and representations which constructed its unruliness, incivility and disorderliness. Eventually, the use of motorcycles was outlawed from the central city of Guangzhou in 2007 by the municipal government. As a result, the motorcycle taxi, as the only form of motorcycle mobility which persists on Guangzhou's streets to this day, has become a primary object of state disciplinary power. This chapter first frames the regulation of motorcycles within debates on the politics of mobility and speed. It then outlines the context of the regulation of motorcycle mobility in Guangzhou, with a specific focus on the ways in which discourses and knowledge rendered the problematic of motorcycle mobility narratable and intelligible. It then moves to document and reflect upon state regulatory practices directed towards motorcycle taxis, which are operated at the street-level. Engaging with the notion of *motility*, this chapter argues that the curtailing of *physical mobility* at the street-level constrains migrants' access to socioeconomic resources and hence sabotages their prospect of *social mobility*. Finally, this chapter investigates the street-level, largely improvised tactics deployed by motorcycle taxi drivers to eschew state regulation. It analyses street encounter with state policing power as formative of the migrants' identity and subjectivity. However, instead of celebrating such tactics as romantic resistance to

J. Qian (✉)

Centre for Cultural Industry and Cultural Geography, School of Geography,
South China Normal University, Guangzhou 510631, China
e-mail: junxi.qian@gmail.com

hegemonic power, it contends that street-level negotiation with state power contributions to the consolidation, rather than alleviation, of a subaltern identity experienced among migrant motorcycle drivers.

Keywords Mobility • Politics of speed • Discourse • Regulation • Subalternity

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 *Towards a Politics of Mobility*

Reflecting upon the recent ‘mobility turn’ that attempts to recast the epistemological foundation of the research of movement, transport geographers Shaw and Hesse (2010) appeal for attention to the links between transport activities and ‘their socio/cultural/political meanings and representations, and corporeal and (en)gendered experiences’ (307). Elsewhere, Shaw and Sidaway (2010) also spotlight the ways in which specific modes of transport are imbricated in the transformations of social, cultural and political relations. Both works, in light of this chapter, attest to an imperative for scholars of urban transport to move from the conception of transport as the rational, effort-minimising means for moving between Points A and B (Cresswell and Merriman 2011), to a socially and culturally meaningful activity *sui generis*, which is heavily invested with desires, intentions and symbols, and thus constitutive of social relations and power.

This point of view is precisely what is proposed in the rapidly expanding literature following what Sheller and Urry (2006a) have termed the ‘new mobilities paradigm’. Movements organise and structure dynamics of hierarchisation, stratification and differentiation in the domain of the social (*ibid*). As Adey (2010) contends, mobilities are always positioned in relation to something else or somebody, and involve multiple ways in which we form, and make sense of, relations with others. Thus, there is an intrinsically social and political dimension in diverse actors’ inhabitation and appropriation of mobilities, which throws into sharp relief the constraints, power dynamics and social norms that determine whether or not particular mobility practices can be allowed in specific social, political and institutional conditions.

Cresswell (2010) has proposed three problematics that constitute a politics of mobilities. First, mobility is a resource to which the access is unevenly distributed, and not all movements can be realised to the same extent. Second, there is a need to take into account how particular mobilities are represented by dominant discourses, and how associations are built up between given mobility practices and ideological connotations. Finally, the politics of mobility revolves around *embodied* experiences of mobilities, *inter alia* the joy, comfort and pleasure, or the pain, fear and coercion that are encountered and experienced during physical movements.

With regard to urban politics and the governance of cities, many commentators concur that, ‘those who ultimately control channels of movement in the city constitute a powerful urban elite’ (Hubbard 2006: 137). Much of this argument is enlightened by the French cultural theorist Paul Virilio and his idea of *dromocracy*, a terrain of politics which places at its centre the promotion, management or/and regulation of speed and movements (Clarke and Doel 2011). As Virilio (1986) brings forth, in dromocracy social order converges with the control of traffics, namely, the flows of goods and people. To expedite certain circulations while impeding others both manifests and constitutes political authority and power. Interestingly, even though the modern city consecrates accelerated paces of daily life, it does not ‘speed everything up’, but rather ‘accelerate some flows at the expense of others’ (Hubbard and Lilley 2004: 277). As Virilio (1986) and Scott (1998) have both touched upon, the elite classes have a tendency to create a rational nomenclature that endows carefully *planned* circulations with privileged access to speed, only by disrupting and slowing down *unplanned* movements. To sum up, technologies, social norms and institutional arrangements that enhance mobilities of certain social groups may concomitantly reinforce the *demobilisation* of others (Adey 2010). This is precisely the central point in Cresswell’s (2010: 21) contention that ‘one person’s speed is another person’s slowness’, and ‘some move in such a way that others get fixed in place’ (also Cresswell 2006; Hannam et al. 2006).

Of particular relevance to the management and governance of mobilities is the argument that all practices of mobility reside within intricate webs of representations, discourses and knowledge (Cresswell 2001; Frello 2008). Because these representations and discourses claim to reflect the ‘nature’ of mobile practices, mobility is inevitably interwoven with ideologies, and evaluated in tandem with predominant identity categories and social norms: mobility ‘means different things, to different people, in differing social circumstances’ (Adey 2006: 83). Thus, how we think about and act towards particular forms of mobility is, in various circumstances, utterly contingent upon discourses that take pains to ascribe meanings and values. Concurrently, the act of naming and representing mobility itself is constitutive of power, as the agency of making things ‘sayable’ and visible feeds into projects of control (Deleuze 1988). In the planning and governing of cities, knowledge serves particularly salient and abiding roles in legitimising or curtailing certain groups’ rights to mobility (Jensen 2011). Therefore, the meanings ascribed to mobilities become sites of ongoing social struggles (Cresswell 2006, 2010).

Extant literatures in urban studies have offered ample evidence of how individuals or groups differentially positioned in social hierarchies have highly stratified access to the right of mobility. Via the operation of constructed knowledge and discourses, technocrats and elites tend to situate certain forms of mobilities in tensioned relationships with dominant visions of order and civility. From constraints imposed upon the mobility of shopping containers (Cidell 2012), to the

attempts to civilise young drivers boasting subcultural mobility practices, the urban setting acts as a vivid testament to Binnie et al.'s (2007: 169–170) incisive argument that for ‘those who are differently habituated to particular ways of travelling and follow contrasting cultural conventions’, the scope is enlarged for ‘contestation over how to move, by what means and according to what norms’. Perhaps, what Cresswell (2001), (2010) characterises as the dialectics between speed and slowness is most lucidly mirrored by the embarrassed status of cycling vis-à-vis the dominant automobility. As various commentators have noted, mainstream urban policies show a tendency to reinforce the use of automobiles at the expense of other forms of mobilities, especially cycling (and walking) (Meneses-Reyes 2013). Not only is cycling relegated to marginalised access to urban spaces, but also stigmatised as a disorderly, law-trespassing and dangerous conduct that disrupts the normal operation of urban traffic (Fincham 2006; Blickstein 2010).

Last but not least, it is essential to note that politics of mobility has profound implications for issues of well-being and quality of life. Following the framework proposed by Phillips (2006), this chapter suggests that the idea of quality of life, which is also a central tenet of this book, needs to encompass both an *objective* and a *subjective* dimension. On the one hand, quality of life refers to the improvement of the material aspects of life, including, to name a few, incomes, longevity, material welfare and, more importantly, equal access to social resources. On the other hand, the quality of life perspective also underscores subjective well-being, namely the prospects of having pleasurable experiences and therefore a sense of happiness.

Notably, this twofold conceptualisation corresponds well with the recent debates on the ways in which mobilities constitute relations, emotions and identities. To begin with, mobility needs to be viewed as a crucial site whereby social inequalities are produced. Physical mobility and social mobility are inextricably intertwined, as potentials to move physically open up new possibilities for individuals to access social resources. Therefore, to restrict particular mobilities generates new forms of inequalities and disempowerment (Cresswell 2010). The notion of *motility* is illustrative of the entanglement between mobility and a broader distributive system of social resources. This concept foregrounds the ways in which spatial mobility and social mobility can be translated into each other (Kaufmann et al. 2004)—spatial mobility may advance upward social mobility; social mobility, in turn, enhances competences to move physically. Musing on this concept, Kaufmann et al. (2004), Flamm and Kaufmann (2006) and Kaufmann and Montulet (2008) have already made substantial efforts to reconceptualise mobility as a means whereby individuals or groups develop personal or collective projects to enhance well-being.

On the other hand, embodied experiences of mobilities, as Cresswell (2010) has emphasised, involve a subjective and *emotional* dimension, which is neatly intertwined with the construction of identities and subjectivities. As Adey (2008) argues, the situational context of mobility, enmeshed in rationalities and technologies of

control and management, summons up emotional repercussions (also Bruno 2002). Subject well-being, needless to say, is closely connected to how pleasant one's situated mental state is (Phillips 2006). This is probably the most straightforward way in which the embodied experiences of mobility register significant implications for the subjective well-being. More profoundly, drawing from Sheller's (2004) discussion of emotions of automobile movement, Jensen (2011) makes gesture to the view that mobility takes part in the self-formation of its initiators, via embodied and emotion-laden experiences. The comfort and happiness, or depression and nervousness that characterise the embodied inhabitation of mobilities project back onto more transcendent issues, such as self-identities and values of being, writing and rewriting our views of both the self and our locations in an unsettled social world.

2.1.2 *Introducing This Study*

Building upon the abovementioned theoretical framework, this chapter aims to bridge the research of urban transport activities with social and political sensitivities inherent in debates on mobility. To substantiate this claim, I present a study of the regulation of motorcycle taxis in Guangzhou. As a means of transport that emerged with Guangzhou's economic take-off in the 1980s, both motorcycles in general and motorcycle taxis in particular acted notable roles in the provision of faster, more flexible mobility that catered to accelerated paces of economy and daily life. Yet, with car-based mobility becoming the new *zeitgeist* in the elite's imagination of urban modernity, the municipal government of Guangzhou, in 2004, made a move to outlaw motorcycle mobility all together, although this policy was implemented to the full extent not until 2007.

The regulation of motorcycle taxis was a direct consequence of the outlawing of motorcycle mobility in general. In this chapter, I narrate a story of the stigmatisation, exclusion and regulation of motorcycle taxis and analyse motorcycle mobility as a site of contestation that is scripted by discourses, state regulatory power and embodied experiences. The empirical research serves two purposes. On the one hand, I argue that, in Guangzhou, the governance of movement is centrally implicated in the ordering impulses of the dominant power, by drawing from a rich repository of representations and meanings. Also, my argument is in congruence with the claim that restriction imposed upon the right to mobility constitutes new parameters of disempowerment and inequality (Adey 2010).

On the other hand, informed by the view of mobility as a constitutive dimension of subjective well-being, I also view mobility as integral to processes of subject formation. I adopt Rose's (1995) conceptualisation of subjectivity as the complex and contradictory *projection* of our lifeworlds. In particular, this chapter analyses

how a sense of *subalternity*¹ is articulated by the motorcycle taxi drivers, as a result of their encounter and negotiation with dominant discourses and street-level police actions. For motorcycle taxi drivers, to label themselves as a subaltern group expresses not only emotional feelings of fear and anger in response to revanchist police actions, but frustration with entrenched social marginality. If a sense of being subaltern, as Spivak (1998) has noted, stems from the absence of one's voice in the structure of social power and blueprint of collective future, this subjectivity is strikingly visible in the motorcycle taxi drivers' understandings of their marginalised and stigmatised position in society and their lament over collective inability to make legitimate their views, concerns and interests.

2.2 Methods

Data in support of this research are garnered from two sources. First, this chapter reviews all the articles and editorials related to motorcycle mobility and motorcycle taxis in three major local newspapers, namely *Yangcheng Evening News*, *Nanfang Daily* and *Guangzhou Daily*, from 2002 to 2006, right before the outlawing of motorcycles was fully implemented in 2007. I chose these three newspapers because they were locally influential and, very often, acted as spokesmen of the local state. *Guangzhou Daily* is sponsored directly by the Guangzhou Municipal Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). It has continuously enjoyed the largest circulation among all newspapers distributed in the city, and its readership covers people from all walks of life. The circulation of *Yangcheng Evening News* ranks the second. *Nanfang Daily* is also characterised by wide circulation, and its readership consists mainly of government officials, business people and urban professionals. It is under direct sponsorship of CCP's Provincial Committee of Guangdong Province.²

Meanwhile, I collected publicised government documents, and applied via official channels for relevant information on government rationalities in the regulation of motorcycles and motorcycle taxis, which resulted in three Responses to

¹While I acknowledge that the term 'subaltern' has rich colonial and postcolonial connotations, I use it in the same way as Gramsci (1971) initially developed this idea, which was to generically refer to social groups that are oppressed and/or at the margin of social structures. I use this term to describe not only actually existing disempowerment, but also migrants' *self-definition* of their status. I find this term useful because, in both Gramsci's original conception and its later application in postcolonial studies, its conceptualisation centres on particular groups' inability to exercise agency and the deprivation of one's voice within the hegemonic structure of social power. In other words, this term underscores a state of *domination*, instead of merely economic or material inequality. Anthropologist Pun (2005), for example, uses the conception of subalternity to characterise the situation of domination inflicted on female migrant workers (*dagongmei*) in China, offering a vivid example of the application of the term beyond postcolonial contexts.

²Data on the circulation and readership of Chinese newspapers can be found in the website: www.chinesebk.com/.

Requests of Government Information from Police Department of Guangzhou (hereafter *Responses* 1, 2 and 3).

In addition, from September 2011 to February 2012, I conducted 27 in-depth interviews with key actors involved in the regulation of motorcycles. All the interviews were recorded with the informants' consent, and transcribed. The cohort of interviewees included 16 motorcycle taxi drivers, 2 government officials and 9 police officers in Guangzhou Police Department of Traffic, the police organ that specialised in the management of urban traffic.

2.3 Setting the Scene: The Regulation of Motorcycle Taxis in Guangzhou

The motorcycle taxis refers to the short distance, flexible and door-to-door transport service that employs motorcycles as vehicles, carrying both people and cargos. Not constrained by regularised timetables and routes that public transport needs to comply with, the motorcycle taxi has been a preferred means of transport for those demanding flexible, door-to-door mobility but feel reluctant vis-à-vis the costs of car-based taxi service. Meanwhile, nowadays operated almost exclusively by rural migrants, motorcycle taxis make an essential contribution to the livelihoods of a social group marginalised in mainstream urban political economy (Fig. 2.1).



Fig. 2.1 Concentration of electrically propelled motorcycle taxis at a roadside

The flourishing of motorcycle taxis in Guangzhou was situated in a broader context of the city's post-reform economic development and the *speeding-up* of urban mobilities that ensued. In the pre-reform period, non-motorised travel, such as walking and cycling, constituted the bulk of everyday commuting and mobility in Guangzhou. From the mid-1980s to early 1990s, however, the use of motorcycles remarkably compromised the centrality of walking and cycling. In 1990, approximately 200,000 motorcycles ran in Guangzhou's streets and the number rose exponentially to 800,000 in 1998 (*Response 2*). Motorcycles were used by households for daily mobility, as well as by motorcycle taxi operators as a means for earning a living. During more than a decade, the motorcycle was emblematic of accelerated paces of life that characterised Guangzhou's emerging urban modernity, and celebrated not only as a conspicuous status symbol, but also an emotionally laden signifier that bore collective memories of the city's inhabitants.

However, as Guangzhou's urban economy continued to boom during the past two decades, the status of motorcycles as a hallmark of progress and development has almost entirely given place to car-based mobility. Dramatically enough, the motorcycle is now viewed by many urban inhabitants as an eyesore, and alleged by urban technocrats and elite to be at odds with efficient and ordered urban traffic. The primary reason for this radical change in popular attitude is not hard to identify. Along with the rapid spread of car ownership, people who use motorcycles nowadays tend to concentrate in relatively lower strata of society, such as laid-off workers and rural migrants. As the association between motorcycles and economic success has sundered, social prestige is now exclusively attached to automobility. Meanwhile, in the early 2000s, the use of motorcycles to conduct street robberies began to haunt local policy makers. It eventually culminated into a generally adverse, even hostile, attitude towards motorcycles among the general public. In sum, Guangzhou urbanites' evolving attitudes towards motorcycles encourages us to conceive of 'ordered and efficient mobility' as a social construct that resides within complex systems of representations and meanings, rather than an absolute reality that complies merely with objective criteria.

As early as 1991, the municipal government started to restrict the number of licenses issued every month to motorcycles. In 1998, the local Urban Transport Administration stopped licensing new motorcycles. In 2001, the local government of Guangzhou implemented a municipal by-law prohibiting all motorcycles from entering two major blocks and two traffic arteries in the urban centre. In 2004, the municipal government finally issued an ordinance that announced the decision to cleanse the city's streets of motorcycles. To alleviate the impacts of this policy upon those who had been habituated to motorcycle travelling, the same ordinance stated that the outlawing would be implemented by following two steps: since 2004 motorcycles had been prohibited to use 24 major urban traffic arteries (Motorcycle traffic, however, was allowed between 5:00 and 9:00 am, and between 16:30 to 20:30 pm, to offer some convenience to motorcycle commuters). In 2006, the



Fig. 2.2 The three phases in which motorcycle ban took effect in Guangzhou

outlawing was expanded to include three more traffic arteries; eventually, in 2007, the use of motorcycles in the urban centre was utterly outlawed on a 24-h basis³ (Fig. 2.2).

The regulation of motorcycles in Guangzhou offers a telling case of the *dromocratic* dimension of urban governance: the question of which *mobile technologies* (Sheller and Urry 2006b) or social groups are endowed with the right to move freely becomes part and parcel of the government of spatiality (Huxley 2008), which is innately sensitive to discourses and knowledge. Blueprints of mobilities, in this sense, necessarily stand out in all visions of urban orders.

The exclusion of motorcycles has gone hand-in-hand with a private car-cum-public transport urban future that the city administrators in Guangzhou envisage. On the one hand, the increasingly pervasive influence of the car as a privileged means of mobility offers important justification for the demobilisation of motorcycles. As Seiler (2012) already points out, in contemporary urban China,

³After 2004, many motorcycle riders—in particular motorcycle taxi drivers—began to use what were called electric motorcycles, a design of motor-vehicles upgraded from human-powered bicycles but propelled by electronic motors rather than fossil fuel. However, in 2006 the municipal government of Guangzhou also outlawed the use of electrically driven motorcycles in the entire metropolitan area of Guangzhou, based on the same reasons as outlawing conventional motorcycles. In this chapter, the term of motorcycle taxi refers to taxi service provided by both types of vehicles.

people celebrate the car not only as an indispensable marker of middle class membership, but also an emblem of the country's embrace of Western modernity and global economy. Zhang (2009) also underlines that the car refashions the notion of citizenship in the post-reform China, cultivating individuals as self-reliant, self-motivated and, foremost, self-interested. In Guangzhou, regulation of motorcycles bears a detectable subtext that cars embody a more ordered, efficient and secure mobility, attuned with standards of modern, global urbanism. In fact, shortly before the first phase of motorcycle outlawing, which was implemented in 2004, the local government of Guangzhou clarified explicitly that this policy did not target ownership of all private vehicles, but aimed to 'making more space' for private cars (Yangcheng Evening News, 6 October 2003).

On the other hand, Guangzhou municipal government's ambitions to construct a modernised public transport system also worked to devalue motorcycle mobility. For example, many accounts in Guangzhou's local media lent support to the outlawing of motorcycles by drawing from the Ninth 5-Year Plan of Economic and Social Development of Guangzhou, which, as early as in 1996, advocated the large-scale construction of public transport facilities and elimination of 'less efficient' means of private transport, with specific reference made to the motorcycle. The efficacy of public transport in relieving the pressure posed by private transport is widely concurred among policy makers of Chinese cities (Pucher et al. 2007; Wang 2010). Yet, as Richardson and Jensen (2008) indicate, public transport plays a no less remarkable role in cultivating social subjects that conform to state-sanctioned notions of order and civility. From 2002 to 2006, Guangzhou's media were stuffed with optimistic accounts, applauding how those who were habituated to disorderly mobilities based on motorcycles would eventually be channelled into ordered and civilised traffic flows premised on state-of-the-art public transport facilities. Public discourses demeaned cycling and motorcycling as 'inefficient means of private transport' to be replaced by rapidly optimising public transport systems (*Response 1*), while accounts from grassroots urban inhabitants tended to spotlight demands for 'last mile' commuting (e.g. *Guangzhou Daily*, 16 January 2004; *Nangfang Daily*, 1 December 2006), which rationally planned public transport systems could not effectively meet in a foreseeable future.

It is against a broad backdrop of the outlawing of motorcycles in general that the motorcycle taxi becomes a primary object of state regulatory power. Due to illegalisation of the motorcycle, its use by ordinary households for individual mobilities has almost completely disappeared. But motorcycle taxis have persisted even in face of draconian police regulation. The persistence of motorcycle taxis is attributable to, on the one hand, a market niche that demands cheap, flexible transport and, on the other hand, rural migrants who exploit motorcycle taxi service as the route to a less disciplined job and better incomes. It is also thanks to the relative flexibility of motorcycles, which allows the drivers to dodge police actions in swift ways. The motorcycle taxi service is particularly favoured by the working class and early career white-collars. It serves to bridge major nodes in public transport networks with less connected neighbourhoods and workplaces, and is thus largely concentrated in more recently urbanised districts with less sophisticated

transport infrastructure and numerous informal settlements, inter alia the districts of Haizhu, Baiyun and Huangpu.

As a tactic of survival that capitalises on motorcycle mobility for incomes, motorcycle taxis elucidate vividly the intersection of mobility and more substantive, material interests and concerns. Motorcycle taxis have not only inherited stigmatising representations of motorcycles as a whole, but are always morally judged by value-laden convictions regarding what are socially appropriate ways of earning a living within a dominant and totalising structure of order and power, as the next sections will show.

2.4 Representing and Regulating Motorcycle Mobility

2.4.1 *The Motorcycle as Discursive Construction*

In *Lost Geographies of Power*, John Allen (2003) conceives of power as a relational effect which emerges from entangled networks of social interactions. Power is instantiated in, and produced by, social actions, and it mobilises situated resources to advance specific purposes. In Guangzhou, the regulation of motorcycles is in essence a process in which empowerment and disempowerment are instantiated—the urban technocrats and elites mobilise ideology-laden representations as critical resources to exclude motorcycles and promote other forms of mobilities. Invoking a Foucauldian conception of power, Allen (2003) also contends that the constitution of spatiality is intrinsic to the exercise of power. If, in the Foucauldian sense, power does nothing more than prescribing appropriate conducts by working through ‘the techniques and practices which compose the texture of daily life’ (ibid: 66), it wields significant impacts over the spatial-temporary arrangements of activities; or, in Allen’s (2003: 70) view, power is imbricated in ‘the imposition of certain forms of conduct through the spacing and timing of activities’. Space is always coded by shared norms that specify whose visibility should be acknowledged and socially approved more than the others; and, ‘[e]xcluded from the ‘membership’ of such a space, then, are those whose rhythms and movements do not accord with the dominant representation and use of such spaces’ (ibid: 164).

With regard to the outlawing of motorcycles, the coding of space enables acts of ordering *not* by way of authoritarian rule, but a sophisticated system of discourse and knowledge that legitimise and naturalise the exclusion of motorcycle mobility. In fact, the policy-making process regarding motorcycles draw much legitimacy from ostensible flavours of democracy and public participation, with local media sparing no effort to spotlight the local state’s keen adoption of public opinion consultation, in the forms of opinion polls and public hearings. However, these polls and hearings tended to reproduce dominant visions of order and civility, instead of giving genuine voices to different social strata. For example, in a survey-based research published in 2004 by Guangzhou Public-Opinion Research

Centre (GPORC), a state-run survey institute, all research findings were carefully organised under the overarching conclusion that most Guangzhou citizens were supportive of the outlawing policy. Curiously, only 34 % of the survey respondents were actual motorcycle users. Resultantly, while it was reported that over 60 % motorcycle users surveyed were against the outlawing of motorcycles, this dissident group accounted for less than 20 % of all respondents, and was submerged under an overwhelming project of consensus-building. With specific reference to motorcycle taxis, the same research estimated that only 10 % of all motorcycles in Guangzhou were used for earning a living, ignoring largely migrants who were not counted as potential respondents as well as their motorcycles which were commonly unlicensed. Given that motorcycle users constituted the single most impacted group vis-à-vis the outlawing policy, the rendering-invisible of their interests, concerns and claims is the de facto reification of privileges of those who had nothing to lose, but would potentially gain from the demobilisation of motorcycles, making the survey ethically problematic. The bias towards the non-users' opinions and the under-representation of motorcycle users' voices also characterised public hearings that were devised to collect public opinions on the outlawing of conventional and electric motorcycles (*Nanfang Daily*, 15 January 2005; *Response* 1).

No less biased and distorted were the central conclusions foregrounded in a survey of public opinions on outlawing electric motorcycles, conducted in 2006 by Guangzhou Urban Social and Economic Research Team, another state-led research organ. This study, apart from the customary under-representation of motorcycle users and rural migrants, stated that only 1 % urban inhabitants in Guangzhou listed the electric motorcycle as a means of daily transport, and that the majority of respondents concurred that to outlaw electric motorcycles would improve urban traffic conditions. Obvious absurdity in this line of argumentations is detectable: on the one hand, if such a small proportion of urban residents depended upon electric motorcycles, why did the latter's presence warrant direct state intervention in the first place? On the other hand, the single premise that cleansing urban streets of motorcycles would improve traffic condition does *not* justify policies enforcing exclusion, as access to mobility is not a utilitarian resource to be distributed rationally, but a crucial arena whereby the right to the city (Lefebvre 1996) is enacted.

Nonetheless, all these inconsistencies and lack of rigour, which haunted state-initiated public opinion consultation, were relegated to invisibility by morally and politically correct vocabularies of order, civility and collective goods that grassroots urban citizens could hardly resist. Indeed, the cleansing of motorcycles was viewed by the state as a *pre-destined* end of societal development, for which public polls and hearings were only to provide further affirmation (e.g. *Nanfang Daily*, 9 January 2004; 16 January 2004).

Compared to the two opinion polls, the newspaper representations constituted a slightly less monolithic field of discourses. None-stigmatising accounts of motorcycles did exist; yet, most news articles within the category were neutral by nature (regarding the development of motorcycle manufacturing industry, for instance), while representations that added to a positive public image of motorcycles are

strikingly scarce. Particularly noteworthy, though, is the news coverage of a public hearing held on 15 January 2004 (e.g. *Nanfang Daily*, 16 January 2004), whereby the local media openly conveyed forceful claims voiced by local residents, which contravened the totalising representations of motorcycles as danger, sources of disorderliness and an out-dated means of mobility. These claims emphasised the role that motorcycles played in sustaining the livelihoods of a significant proportion of urban inhabitants, and criticised a tendency to uncritically associate motorcycles with accidents, pollution and violation of rules. Above all, however, these resistive claims tended to be submerged by an overarching consensus that worked to justify the regulation of motorcycle mobility.

In sum, representations of motorcycle mobility in Guangzhou's media and public discourses pivoted around four major themes. First, the media discourses built up a naturalised connection between motorcycle mobility and accidents, injuries and even deaths. Media representations portrayed motorcycle mobility as a major threat to security and constructed the taken-for-granted 'truth' that motorcycles were necessarily associated with higher probabilities of traffic accidents. As *Response 1* from Guangzhou Traffic Police puts it:

In 2002, 6,760 traffic accidents involving motorcycles took place in Guangzhou, accounting for 50.4% of total traffic accidents. These accidents resulted in 905 deaths and 8,987 injuries, making up, respectively, 47.3% and 61.8% of all traffic-induced deaths and injuries. In 2003, 6288 motorcycle-related accidents took place in Guangzhou, resulting in 755 death and 8405 injuries. These three figures accounted for, respectively, 54.37%, 43.95% and 62.30% of the corresponding totals.

One article in *Yangcheng Evening News* even labelled the motorcycle as the "biggest killer on streets":

The motorcycle has already become Guangzhou's "No.1 killer on streets". During the first half of 2003, there were totally 3044 motorcycle accidents in Guangzhou, with 363 deaths. Those who were killed in motorcycle accidents accounted for 43.61% of all deaths in traffic accidents. (*Yangcheng Evening News*, 15 January 2004)

At the same time, however, we may also be surprised at how vaguely the notion of 'motorcycle accident' was defined in those number-based narratives. In fact, all three newspapers tended to define motorcycle accidents so broadly as to refer to all traffic accidents involving the presence of a motorcycle. What was neglected was nuanced examination of the distribution of responsibility in any given case of accident. In reality, both media accounts and police officers that I interviewed acknowledged frankly that motorcycles were not responsible for all those accidents. Meanwhile, this rhetoric sidestepped any consideration of how biases towards the culture of automobility in urban planning restricted the possibility for motorcycle users to manoeuvre mobility in safer ways. During the interviews, many motorcycle taxi drivers complained about the failure of the local state to implement efficient management for reconciling motorcycles with other forms of transport.

Nonetheless, instead of scrutinising closely at the immediate contexts of specific accidents, newspaper representations turned out to highlight the *physical vulnerability* of motorcycle riders, in *all* accidents involving motorcycles. This trope of

vulnerability involved two facets. On the one hand, media representations portrayed motorcycle riders as more susceptible to injury or death in face of clashes with vehicles built with more robust physical structures, such as cars and trucks, as well as steel-and-concrete road infrastructures. On the other hand, the representations scrutinised closely the alleged ‘under-controllability’ of motorcycles due to their smaller weight, mechanical uncertainty and lack of technological sophistication. Anecdote-style stories flourished, depicting how motorcycles suddenly lost balance or control of direction, eventually resulting in clashes and casualties (e.g. *Nanfang Daily*, 13 October 2003). A reversed image of motorcycle users’ constant exposure to danger, unsurprisingly, was proclaimed to be embodied by the private car, which the interviewed police officers avidly celebrated, in congruence with the normative assumptions undergirding the dominant automobility (Sheller and Urry 2000), as more adaptable to modern traffic and infrastructural conditions, and as a heavily equipped and protected shelter for bodily security.

Second, local media also portrayed motorcycle mobility as incompatible with values of order, controllability and efficiency. In these narratives, motorcycles mobility not only created threat to bodily security, but also fundamentally jeopardised desirable order and efficiency of urban roads: it resulted in disorderly and chaotic use of urban space, and impaired the ability of other social members to enjoy uninterrupted flows. A plethora of media discourses, for example, blamed motorcycles for Guangzhou’s notoriety for chaotic traffic conditions:

[Mr Zhang:] It was only after I began to drive the car that I found how annoying motorcycles were. Someone may argue that motorcycles are fast and convenient. But this is at the expense of the convenience of others, and made possible by violating traffic rules. Now some lanes have been designated specifically for motorcycles, but how many motorcycle riders would conform to this arrangement? (*Guangzhou Daily*, 17 January 2004)

For this reason, the three newspapers frequently portrayed the motorcycle as an ‘out-of-date’ means of transport, which should naturally die out in the linear process of social progress. They claimed that the role which motorcycles played in facilitating everyday mobilities could be more efficiently fulfilled by more ‘respectable’ ways of urban mobility, such as public buses, the newly constructed metro system and private cars. Soon after motorcycles were partly outlawed in 2004, several newspaper representations featured how major traffic arteries had been ‘cleaned up’ and restored with rational and uninterrupted flows. The municipal government of Guangzhou claimed, in various occasions, that after the outlawing of motorcycles, the average speed for cars in major urban arteries had increased at least by 5–10 km per hour (*Guangzhou Daily*, 28 October 2006).

Pertaining to both rhetorics of security and efficiency were representations of the unruliness of motorcycle users. These representations highlighted how motorcycle riders lacked compliance with traffic codes, and how unruly mobilities of motorcycles increased possibilities of congestion and accidents. They portrayed motorcycle drivers as those who sabotaged the normative ordering of urban traffic by driving faster than they should, driving the opposition direction in a given traffic lane, competing with cars for lanes or carrying too many passengers. Particular

stress was given to the ‘extreme flexibility’ of motorcycles, which resulted from the relatively small sizes of motorcycles and, more relevantly, motorcycle users’ unruliness, with media accounts condemning motorcycles for constantly changing lanes and bypassing freely via small interstices between cars.

Notably, these accounts served to stigmatise motorcycle drivers as an essentially chaotic and unruly group. During the interviews, the police officers often invoked the Chinese word *suzhi* (literally meaning ‘quality’). To them, it was motorcycle drivers’ lack of personal qualities that had contributed to their intrinsic inability to move with order and safety. In contrast, owners of private cars, thanks to their higher status and *suzhi*, were thought to be more attentive to protocols of order and civility, and thus deserve secured and protected access to uninterrupted mobilities.

To summarise: the representations propagated by local media saw the motorcycle as a hybrid of out-dated technology and unruly social bodies, reflective of the naturalised association between motorcycles and underprivileged social status. Technological malfunction and human unruliness, in this sense, were regarded by the urban elite as entangled, even mutually reinforcing. The joint product, as the representations claimed, was the high probability of accidents and traffic disorder. In other words, social and political sensitivities to *physical* mobility are contingent upon the public perceptions of those who are more likely to utilise it, and, in turn, have impact over the prospect of their *social* mobility.

Third, the local society’s hostile attitudes towards motorcycles were also associated with the perceived connection between motorcycle mobility and street criminality. Since the late 1990s, the motorcycle had been heavily used by street criminals in Guangzhou as a means to conduct robbery. In usual cases, the criminals would ride a motorcycle with high speed, approach a pedestrian from behind, and then unexpectedly grab the victim’s handbag, earrings, necklace or mobile phone. Throughout the late 1990s and the early 2000s, the motorcycle-based street robberies contributed significantly to the perceived insecurity and chaos of Guangzhou’s public space. According to the local Police Department, in 2002 alone, totally 9668 motorcycle-based street robberies happened in Guangzhou, accounting for 52 % of all robbery offences. The number and percentage in 2003 were, respectively, 10,210 and 47.2 % (*Response 1*).

As a result, the local state targeted both motorcycles and motorcycle drivers for stern street policing. The municipal Police Department, in particular, launched a series of campaigns against motorcycle-based robberies. The police not only invested a tremendous amount of material and human resources, but also devised an exhaustive set of tactics to fend off street crimes. Given that the police themselves share a collective identity as defender of the ‘good’, the ‘ordered’ and the ‘respectable’ (Blomley 2011), it is arguable that one cumulative effect of these campaigns was the essentially antithetical stance that police officers adopted towards motorcycles as a whole.

Media representations continuously portrayed criminals riding motorcycles as desperate street villains who brutally violated ordinary pedestrians’ bodily security and property right. Their disobedience and inconformity to the legal regime were spotlighted, as flourishing news reports depicted in detail how these street criminals

desperately resisted police actions. The local police, on the other hand, showed an extremely high morale in battling with the criminals on motorcycles. Sensational photographs appeared very frequently, portraying police officers' heroic crackdown of motorcycle-based robberies and street criminals. Local newspapers also featured several stories of ordinary residents who voluntarily united and fought valiantly against motorcycle-based crimes. In this vein, media representations reified street criminals not only as a hostile force against state power, but also common enemies to the respectable part of the general public.

It is certainly not the aim of this chapter to justify street robberies or to criticise the local society's attempts to suppress it. But at the same time we need to note that to represent motorcycle robberies as immediate, de-contextualised street-encounters was also to disarticulate them from structural factors of social inequalities which contributed to crimes. Indeed, even the local police were fully aware that the outlawing of motorcycles could make no contribution to the reduction of crimes, but only channel criminals into other forms of unlawful activities (e.g. *Nanfang Daily*, 23 December 2014). Nonetheless, without any close scrutiny of the historical contingencies of crimes, this policy regime failed to consider the street crime as a product of structural social changes, and ran the risk of universalising motorcycle users as an innately dangerous and threatening group.

The final, and relatively less central, rationale assumed that motorcycles constituted a major source of urban pollution, thanks to its emission of noises and toxic exhaust gas. On the one hand, local media spotlighted motorcycles as an out-of-date mobile technology that burned fossil fuel inefficiently, and hence exacerbated air pollution. While this claim might bear some reality, it was not built upon any reliable comparison with pollution induced by automobiles, and refused to recognise any possibility for motorcycles to be technologically optimised. With regard to noise pollution, on the other hand, media accounts tended to make the rather blank statement that the motorcycle necessarily made a greater contribution to noise pollution, without ever subjecting different modes of transport to an unbiased framework of assessment.

2.4.2 *Encountering the State on the Street*

After 2007, the motorcycle taxi became the only use of motorcycle mobility that persisted to make a visible presence on the streets of Guangzhou. As a result, the local state not only singled it out as the primary inheritor of the disorderliness and unruliness associated with motorcycles in general, but also subjected it to new rhetorics which contributed to the production of its otherness in a post-motorcycle Guangzhou. These more recent anxieties also appear to dovetail with the negative stereotyping of migrant bodies in the public discourses of contemporary China, which highlights the rhetorics of unruliness and low *sushi* (Zhang 2001).

On the one hand, although the motorcycle taxi drivers were not often associated with street robbery before 2007, now the state increasingly see them as potentially

dangerous and threatening to street security. In part because of the iron-handedness of state regulation, migrant motorcycle taxi operators are now strengthening mutual ties to tackle street-level police actions. For example, they are prone to use communication devices such as mobile phones to circulate information on the locations of police assaults. Communal solidarity and shared identity, consequently, are also being forged among motorcycle drivers. Interestingly, such strengthening of mutual connections is now interpreted by police officers as evidence of motorcycle drivers' 'gradual transformation' from 'individual business runners' to 'collective street gangs' (interview with Mr D, Police Supervisor, December 2011), which has further added to the local state's anxiety over this mobile social group.

On the other hand, police discourses now tend to focus on the relatively *higher incomes* that migrants earn from motorcycle taxi service. These rhetorics portray motorcycle taxi operators as selfish social members who sacrifice the 'collective interests' of the city for the sake of personal gains. Indeed, the interviewed motorcycle drivers were reasonably outspoken in acknowledging that motorcycle taxi service could provide a monthly income of approximately 3000–6000 RMB, much higher than what manufacturing jobs in factories offered. Meanwhile, interviewed migrants underlined the relative flexibility and freedom endowed by motorcycle taxi service as a vocation, in contrast to the discipline and labour alienation that are typical of the manufacturing sector in post-reform China.

It is precisely by seeing through the tension between dominant visions of street order and the motorcycle mobility seen as a route to economic welfare that my analysis comes to terms with the outlawing policy as mechanism of disempowerment and disfranchisement. It needs to be noted that rationales undergirding the outlawing of motorcycles in Guangzhou do not fit squarely with what Smith (1996) once analysed as the revanchist mode of urban governance. In policy rhetorics undergirding the outlawing agenda, traces of the will to class domination are at best obscure. Rather, this policy appears to reify purely *technological* lexicons of order, civility and collective good. In fact, outlawing of motorcycles in Guangzhou went hand-in-hand with the local state's efforts to offer cash compensations, job opportunities and skill trainings to who used motorcycles for breadwinning purposes, with migrants actually *accepted* to the schemes in most circumstances. However, at an operational level, the outlawing policy has without doubt led to the privileging of the interests of certain social classes over those of others, as it forestalls migrants' endeavour to exploit alternative possibilities of livelihoods. For example, a telling rhetoric, circulating within the local media after the outlawing was implemented, stated that the state's generous offer of job opportunities was conditioned upon 'reasonable' migrants being neither captious nor 'picky'; and, unsurprisingly, these re-employment opportunities only provided incomes much lower than those from motorcycle taxi service.

With their collective values interpellated by the hegemonic discourse that income gained at the expense of normative social order is morally despicable, the police officers I interviewed find it more than justifiable to crack down the motorcycle taxis by means of force and sometimes even violence. It needs to be noted that the local police's regulation of motorcycle taxis should not be interpreted

in terms an intrinsic inclination to dominate or oppress those under their jurisdiction. In fact, several police officers expressed sympathy with motorcycle taxi drivers' socioeconomic marginality, albeit merely at a *personal* level. As the agents of law enforcement, however, they are uncompromisingly convinced that income which is gained 'at the expense' of normative social order is morally despicable:

They say that they are socially vulnerable groups. Yes, I admit it. But if you need to survive and support your family, why not pursue a legitimate career? Most of them are migrants from rural areas. Why did you come to Guangzhou in the first place? Why not just stay in your hometown so that it might be easier to find a more decent and morally blameless job?

Interview, Mr D, Police Supervisor, December 2011

Sociologist Xu's (2012), (2014) recent works have indicated that street-level regulation of motorcycles in Guangzhou exhibits key characteristics of campaign-style policing (*yundong shi zhifa*), in which legal norms are temporarily suspended, and rights and dignity of those targeted for policing may be relegated to thorough oblivion.⁴ According to the local police, in 2011 alone, the police confiscated over 255,000 motorcycles used for taxi service via street-level regulation (*Response 3*). Indeed, the local police force is keen on devising an exhaustive set of tactics to be adopted at a street-level. At an earlier stage, the police's tactic of street-level regulation was quite simple. One police officer riding a police motorcycle would watch at a specific spot by the roadside, and chase on sight any motorcycle taxi. But, soon, this watch-and-chase approach was criticised as too passive. Then, the police decided to set up observation points at the intersections of main traffic arteries so that motorcycle taxis could be much more easily caught when they slowed down for traffic lights. Subsequently, this tactic was considered equally passive, since motorcycle taxi drivers would simply turn around to drive in the opposition direction when they sighted police officers at certain intersections or crossroads. Eventually, the police realised that it was precisely the flexibility of motorcycles and their non-routinised mobilities that had raised difficulties for regulation. Hence, the local police now prefer targeting upon the moments of the relative *immobility* of motorcycle taxis: the moments when motorcycles taxis are parked or awaiting potential passengers at certain 'concentration points'—metro station entrances, entrances to residential communities or pavements alongside busy

⁴The regulation of motorcycles is enmeshed in a broader project of cracking down on street nuisances, including street robberies, unlicensed/untaxed transport services, the violation of traffic rules and road accidents. Numerous police campaigns have been launched to regulate not only gasoline- or electricity-propelled motorcycles, but also tricycles, motorised wheelchairs operated by disabled people and self-modified vehicles. Regulation of all these sorts of vehicles are based on very similar rationales, framed in terms of security, traffic order, robbery, and, sometimes, illegal parking (source: <http://www.gzjd.gov.cn/gzjdw/gaxw/ztbd/zzwlc/20141205/detail-264674.shtml>). These vehicles are lumped together into the category of 'five types of vehicles' ("wulei che") in local police vocabulary.

urban roads. To act upon the moments of immobility requires joint actions of several local government departments, since the traffic police have no jurisdiction in regulating immobile vehicles parked at public spaces. In normal cases, the police would seek permission from other government departments and then a squad of police officers would unexpectedly raid those sites. Such tactic has significantly reduced the chance for motorcycle taxis to escape police actions, and result in considerable increase in the number of motorcycles confiscated during police campaigns.

However, the increased alertness of motorcycle taxi drivers soon began to compromise the police's ability to successfully and effectively locate and act upon specific 'concentration points'. As a result, regulation of motorcycle taxis is now increasingly conducted by police staff in plain clothes rather than uniformed officers. Such a tactic is aimed to reduce the possibility that motorcycle taxi drivers detect police actions in advance. Besides, the police have adopted more flexible schedules of working time to implement a 24-h policing system. Overall, as the police officers suggest, the combination of plainclothes policing and flexible timing has proved to be immensely effective.

Indeed, one motorcycle taxi driver describes a deep sense of powerlessness in regards to the encounters with police officers in plain clothes:

If the police officers come in uniforms, we can still have some time to react before they come close to you. But now they are dressed just like everyone else. They approach you slowly and no one can tell that they are actually police officers. Sometimes, they even lie to you that they want to buy motorcycle taxi service. Then they suddenly hold your motorcycle firmly and identify themselves to you. What can you do then? When things turn out to be that situation, you cannot resist at all because in China you do not dare to attack a police officer. (Interview, November 2011)

Abrupt encounters between the police and motorcycle taxi drivers can easily end up in violent conflicts. For police officers, face-to-face encounters with deviant migrant others are emotionally charged experiences that re-assert collective morale of the police. Police officers often cannot help trespassing on the boundaries between the identity as agents of law enforcement and their personal loath of migrant motorcycle drivers. Resultantly, elevated motives to defend order and 'collective goods' of the society often lead to excessive use of violence in tackling disobedient motorcycle drivers. During the interviews, a number of motorcycle taxi drivers complained about the frequent occurrence of bodily collision and even beating during police actions; and several informants also suspected that the police even hired ruffians and gangsters to harass motorcycle taxi drivers. Also, while the Police Department of Guangzhou forbids police vehicles to chase motorcycle taxis, in prevention of unexpected accidents, most interviewed migrants nonetheless suggest that racing between motorcycle taxis and police motorcycles has persisted and even gone rampant; and the experience of extreme fear and nervousness, which results from being chased by police vehicles, is now increasingly innate to motorcycle mobility as a mundane, embodied experience.

2.5 Motorcycle Mobility as Experience of Subaltern Identity

The policing of motorcycle taxis, in the meantime, registers notable significances for the migrant motorcycle taxi drivers to negotiate identities and subjectivities. This section examines briefly the ways in which motorcycle taxi drivers interpret and negotiate the rationalities of regulation; and it argues that subalternity is a self-experienced subject position contingent upon social relations and the asymmetrical geometry of power. As various commentators have argued, travelling time is not passive or empty, but full of sensuous engagements with diverse people, objects, meanings and practices (Sheller and Urry 2006a; Jensen 2009; Cresswell 2010). In the case of motorcycle taxi drivers, understanding and interpreting their identity is engraved in rich, if often psychologically disturbing, experiences of mobility, space and social relations. The police's regulation of urban streets has transformed motorcycle travelling into a temporality fraught with constant alert, with chasing and being chased, and with potential conflict with state power. Thus, I view motorcycle mobility as a key site whereby dominant relations of power are experienced and understood by the migrants.

Motorcycle taxi drivers' subjectivity is shaped by both dominant discourses of motorcycle taxis and their diverse tactics in counteracting state power at the street-level. While the former has been discussed in detail so far, it is equally important to note that street-level interactions between motorcycle taxi drivers and police force also contributes to the production of subaltern social and cultural experiences. To keep providing transport service, motorcycle taxi drivers have adopted various tactics to play a cat-and-rat game. 'Escaping the police' for sustaining a living, for them, has become as essential as making a living per se. These daily tactics include constantly watching around when riding motorcycles, identifying locations where police officers are likely to appear, doing taxi business at night when there are fewer police officers, and using small lanes rather than main traffic arteries. Many motorcycle taxi drivers have developed sophisticated knowledge of the networks of small lanes and pathways which can help them more easily get rid of police chasing. In particular, many motorcycle drivers now restrict their business to places subject to less strict or frequent police intervention, such as underdeveloped areas where the police set foot less often, or urban villages, spatial legacies of former rural settlements in which regulation exercised by rural collectives is often stronger than that of formal state apparatus. Some others have even developed sophisticated skills to distinguish police in plainclothes from real clients.

However, from the perspective of motorcycle taxi drivers, these resistant tactics are far from transgressive appropriation of spaces that leads to romantic empowerment (*à la* de Certeau 1984). Rather, moments of tackling state power are mentally disturbing processes which have enhanced the self-experience of marginality. During the interviews, it is not uncommon to hear motorcycle taxi drivers commenting that their means of earning a living is also a source of endless fear, stress and frustration. In other words, for motorcycle taxi drivers, immediate

socio-spatial contexts of motorcycle mobilities bear negative implications for subjective well-being. A more far-reaching effect of these negative emotional experiences, however, lies in the construction of identities and subjectivities.

To begin with, many motorcycle taxi drivers have internalised stigmatising representations of motorcycle mobility. Hence, many of them also view motorcycles as a disorderly, unruly and potentially dangerous means of mobility. Inadvertent acts of breaking traffic codes, in particular passing through the red light and driving the opposite direction, are mentioned as manifestations of their failure to comply with institutionalised social norms. Yet, motorcycle taxi drivers refuse to portray themselves as essentially dangerous or threatening. Instead, their rhetoric seeks recourse to the notion that they are 'less educated' and not yet adapted to urban living. Also, they tend to see the breaking of traffic rules as an outcome of inter-personal interactions rather than manifestation of essential nature of unruliness. As some motorcycle drivers suggest, many minor transgressions of traffic codes are actually at the request of passengers for the purpose of saving time:

You know, what we are doing is a business and you need to obey the passengers' requests so that you will be able to make money. Many people choose motorcycle taxis precisely because they are more flexible and can save them some time by breaking some traffic rules, in cases that they are in a hurry. In most cases we do resist those requests, but we also need to keep rapport with our passengers, because we need to make a living. (Interview, September 2011)

As I have put earlier, in hegemonic discourses there is unsolved tension between rural migrants' aspiration for relatively better incomes and the hegemonic visions of ordered urban space. Notably, to reconcile their intention of sustaining a living with widely accepted notions of order and civility has actually prompted many migrants to contest stigmatising representations of motorcycle taxis through diverse rhetorical formulation. While most of these narratives seem to be compatible with hegemonic conceptions of order, efficiency and security, they also provide alternative frameworks to ground those abstract terms into concrete everyday practices. These narratives hint at the fact that the dominant notion of motorcycle mobility is abstracted out of heterogeneous experiences of everyday practices; and they also downplay the agency of motorcycle drivers to navigate street security and efficiency in ways that are different from rationalities promoted by the state.

First, motorcycle taxi drivers contest the definition of motorcycles as a homogeneous system of mobility. For example, many motorcycle drivers make a clear distinction between motorcycles propelled by gasoline and those by electricity whose maximum speed is much lower. To them, the motorcycle propelled by electricity is a compromise between high speed, potentially dangerous motorcycle mobility and an increasingly complex traffic system.

Second, motorcycle taxi drivers also contend that random violation of traffic codes does not necessarily mean lack of attention to security. With regard to traffic codes, motorcycle taxi drivers tend to switch between compliance and violation. Whether or not to respect a traffic rule is a decision based on immediate micro-level contexts of mobile practices, rather than essential human nature. Bodily security is

always at the heart of decision-making processes. Such an argument can be seen as an attempt to disconnect particular mobile technologies from taken-for-granted malign human intentions. This attempt can also be glimpsed from many motorcycle taxi drivers' view that motorcycles are not naturally related to crimes. They insightfully view criminality as the product of structural factors such as inequality and welfare dysfunction, rather than the technological means which may or may not facilitate criminal behaviours.

Finally, motorcycle taxi drivers also propose a different perspective to envisage the efficient use of urban roads. For them, the small size of motorcycle taxis enables them to achieve mobility by occupying limited space of urban roads. Also, the flexibility of motorcycles also allows them to devise more diverse routines. As a result, many motorcycle taxi drivers suggest that they only use 'residual' spaces between larger vehicles, which actually renders the use of urban roads more, rather than less, efficient.

This view of 'not-so-bad' motorcycle mobility, apparently, contradicts the representations in mainstream discourses. Indeed, it is through the motorcycle taxi drivers' interpretation of this contradiction that a subaltern identity is articulated. They unequivocally understand the outlawing of motorcycle mobility as the urban elite's endeavour to impose hegemonic spatiality upon urban spaces by excluding marginal groups. This opinion, unsurprisingly, feeds into a strong feeling of being dominated and oppressed. It also enables motorcycle drivers to capture the unequal structure of power underlying street-level regulation:

At least in this case, I dare to say that the local government has served only the interests of the rich. It is true that now in Guangzhou there are so many rich people but there are even more who are poor and powerless... The local government has no ability to regulate the rich, so they prefer regulating the poor, because the poor have no power or resource to resist. Also, this policy has a large influence on us migrants. We have also made our contribution to building up the prosperity of this city, but the government just ignores the difficult situation we are now facing because of this policy. (Interview, November 2011)

But, in the meantime, motorcycle taxi drivers also recognise their collective inability to contest the local state. In the political milieu of China, there appears to be little space for subordinate groups to directly question or challenge particular government policies. This unique political environment significantly enhances the state's ability to enforce socially unjust programmes of governance. Because of the perceived inability to voice concerns and interests within the system of dominant discourses and the processes of policy-making, the motorcycle taxi drivers tend to undertake no individual or collective action to voice counteracting claims to the state rationalities. To reconcile their indignation over social injustice with feelings of disempowerment, many motorcycle taxi drivers end up in self-devaluation, blaming themselves for 'not being rich enough' to be respected by the society and state. In many interviewees' accounts, it is motorcycle drivers' own lack of personal qualities that has led to their subaltern status in the social hierarchy; and it is the poor, the marginal who are responsible for their inability to pursue more decent and respectable ways of life:

I don't know whom I can blame for this. The only thing that is to blame is that you are not doing well and you are not rich. In this world, you can only rely on your own labour and your own ability. They say motorcycles are illegal, and then be it. The rich people contribute to this society more than us, and the government makes policies in their favour. This logic is not entirely unreasonable in fact. (Interview, November 2011)

Such narratives re-assert the taken-for-granted equation of personal wealth and economic power with individual merit and respectability. It also speaks to how the hegemonic value of personal merit and individualist conception of responsibility are contributing to intensifying hierarchisation of Chinese society and the displacement of concerns over social injustices entrenched in China's emerging capitalist mode of production and consumption. This mentality of self-blaming needs to be understood in the context of China's political environment and, more importantly, the dominant *zeitgeist* in post-reform Chinese society, in which ascending logics of private success and wealth are re-shaping the subjectivities of both the dominant and subaltern social classes. Such rhetoric re-inscribes the existing dichotomies of poor/rich, order/disorder, respectable/unrespectable, and also constrains marginal groups' agency to envisage alternative social relations and fully realised right to the city.

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to use the outlawing of motorcycle mobility and the regulation of motorcycle taxis as a case study to foreground and elucidate two points of view. On the one hand, I appeal for urban scholars to attend to the multifarious ways in which transport mobility entangles with the production of meanings, discourses and, eventually, relations of power. While safety and efficiency are thematics that are essential to the geographical study of urban transport, it warrants special note that the ways in which the urban polity and policy makers come to terms with these catchphrases are rarely value-neutral, but, more often than not, embody hegemonic visions of an ordered system of mobility, to which ordinary citizens are expected to get habituated. What Scott (1998) has so adeptly analysed as the view of the state supposes that by inhabiting state-approved systems of mobility, urban citizens 'become part of a mobile citizenry that responds to the new travel and lifestyle opportunities that are enabled' (Richardson and Jensen 2008: 218). Failing to be incorporated into the systems, therefore, is seen as justification for oppressive state responses. Given that, against the backdrop of global-scale competition for footloose capital and investment, the governing of cities has become inseparable from the management of order and civility (Flusty 2001; Bannister et al. 2006), the positivist view—which states that the promotion or devaluation of specific forms of movements is nothing but the outcome of rational, value-neutral calculation—can no longer hold ground. Mobility practices, as the state policing of motorcycles in Guangzhou indicates, are *produced* by symbols and discourses that give meanings to them and thereby make them intelligible objects of the programmes of government.

On the other hand, this chapter stands in line with the view that mobility is constitutive of both objective and subjective well-being; hence, unequal access to mobility crosscuts, and in many cases reinforces, pre-existing structures of hierarchisation and social differentiation. The notion of mobility as capital, as Kaufmann et al. (2004) put forward via their conceptualisation of motility, holds that mobility is a medium through which resources and opportunities are distributed. For the operators of motorcycle taxis, being mobile within networks of urban spaces is a critical resource from which economic value is extracted. In this sense, to relegate motorcycle taxis to the state of mooring further adds to the institutionalised marginality of migrants in post-reform urban China. Subjectively, vis-à-vis ironhanded state regulation, embodied experiences of motorcycle mobility are deprived of any possibility to generate senses of happiness and satisfaction; in other words, the risk associated with motorcycle mobility is so high that it neutralises the satisfactions brought by material gains. Indeed, during the research, many motorcycle taxi drivers likened themselves to beggars, whose means of making a living was devalued and discriminated. Can people dwelling in this mentality of self-demeaning possibly have a high level of subjective well-being? The answer may be indefinite, but the question nonetheless poses a challenge, not only to urban policy makers, but also to scholars who attempt to rethink the intricate intersection of mobility and the healthiness of our society.

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