

Asian crime tainting Chinese community's reputation

by Marc Checkley

The recent killing of a Chinese international student has members of Auckland's Asian population fearing high profile crimes will damage the reputation of their community.

The body of 19-year-old Wan Biao was found inside a suitcase floating in the Waitemata Harbour on Good Friday.

A week later police revealed he had been the victim of a ransom demand by three Chinese classmates.

While some are saddened by the event, other Chinese have little sympathy towards Biao and his family.

Rong Qi, 21, an international student from north-eastern China, says Biao was killed because he was young and naïve.

"They're young, rich and not used to living away from their parents. They have lots of money and use it to their advantage. By showing off their wealth, they buy their own coffin."

Qi says triad-linked gangs like 14K, named after a street address in Hong Kong, target students in popular Asian hangouts, such as snooker halls and karaoke bars.

Kevin Huang, 25, originally from Canton, says he knows of students who spend their weekends gambling away their tuition fees at the casino.

"In China, life is strict. New Zealand is considered very free. Many get here and feel like a bird released from a cage. They have lots of money but no sense."

Biao's death is the latest in a series of crimes hitting the Chinese community in the past 12 months.

Last year a number of gang-style "hits" were in the news. In March, a Chinese woman was



PHOTO: MARC CHECKLEY

TARGETS: Students in popular Asian hangouts such as snooker halls are targets for triad gangs.

kidnapped from her home in east Auckland. In May, there was an extortion attempt made on two Chinese nationals.

A month later, Tam Yam Ah, a known triad enforcer, was shot at point-blank range outside his karaoke club in Symonds St.

Martin Shew, 32, a second-generation Chinese New Zealander, feels this new wave of crime is damaging the reputation of the greater Asian commu-

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nity.

"We're lumped all together, just like the reputation of Asians being bad drivers. It raises negative stereotypes and segregates us."

Shew says many Asian criminals are opportunists and take

advantage of the more liberal laws in New Zealand.

"They feed off the Asian fear of losing face. Some crimes don't even get reported."

Inspector John Mitchell, Auckland's policing development manager, says there are concerns about international students but Asian crime must be kept in perspective.

"Asians make up 30 per cent of Auckland's population but only account for six per cent of offenders. They are seriously under-represented in crime stats.

"Chinese students, males particularly, suffer from the little red emperor syndrome.

"They are doted on by their parents. Suddenly they find themselves 5000km from home with \$100,000 in their back pocket and unprepared for life in New Zealand."

Mitchell says it's understandable a small number stray onto the wrong side of the tracks.

Huang spent two years living

in a Kiwi homestay.

He thinks all international students should do the same to help them acclimatise to life here.

Meanwhile, Shew says a lot of new Asian immigrants have a pack mentality and don't mix with non-Asians.

This has caused a rift in members of the Chinese community. Many feel they should just go back to where they're from.

Mitchell understands the resentment. He says many generational Chinese and Indians see themselves as Kiwi but are identified by the media as simply Asians. The problem suddenly seems bigger.

Since 2003, the police and Land Transport New Zealand have been trying to educate new Asian students on how to adapt to life in New Zealand.

"We've been working with the Asian media to get our message out there, both in print and in ethnic radio," says Mitchell. "I think our efforts are paying off."

Lender of last resort

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budgeting advice before signing any loan agreement.

"Within some of these clauses are very cleverly written legal terms which ramp up the interest every time you default. They can then call in the assets, which force you to take out another loan to cover just the penalty - and then you're back on the treadmill again. I find it very sad."

Editor-in-chief of *Taimi 'o Tonga*, Kalafi Moala, says he will continue to publish his client's ads because money lenders such as the Funaki brothers are providing a service that the people of the Tongan communities "want" or in some cases "need".

"The issue here is not advertising tactics but rather the abuse people make of these services. If the loan sharks are charging too much interest, the people should not be borrowing from them."

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SPCA needs volunteers

The Auckland SPCA is having trouble keeping quality volunteers to care for the animals at its shelters.

Volunteer co-ordinator in Auckland Lorien Doherty says volunteers are imperative to the success of the operation. Without them, the SPCA struggles to care for the large number of animals that get taken in.

"Volunteers are used to support the SPCA's work in a variety of ways, from helping take care of animals needs at the animal village, to driving the animal ambulance to helping spread our message at events."

- Vicki Waterhouse

Dog snatching for blood sport on the rise

by John Whiting

Dog thefts and illegal dog fighting rings are increasing, according to animal protection groups.

In the North Island, the numbers of dog thefts and incidences of cruelty to animals have risen, according to the New Zealand crime statistics for 2005.

Rotorua, Waikato and South Auckland are becoming problem areas for dog theft, according to the police website.

A spokesperson for the police was not available for comment.

The *Waikato Times* recently uncovered an organised crime group which was stealing dogs from people's backyards by posing as council animal control officers.

When dog owners called the Hamilton City Council to get more information they were told the council had no involvement in the impounding of their dogs.

Animal control officer Michelle Goodin, of the Hamilton City Council, says the same thing is happening across the Waikato region.

She says people should be extra vigilant if anyone is snooping around, or trying to impound

their pets, but processes are in place to stop this happening.

"All our staff have distinctive photo ID cards and drive clearly marked council vans," she says.

Breeders and pet store owners have assumed that the increase in theft of puppies and small designer dogs is because thieves can make a profit from their sales.

But Taupo poodle breeder Heather Valtorta says stolen dogs are usually not designer breeds.

She says thieves would find it too difficult and time-consuming to sell the stolen dogs for what would be a small profit.

"I have heard of dogs being stolen but they are usually not puppies, and are most likely to be breeds that are used in illegal fighting circles.

"With dogs of all ages and breeds now being stolen all over the place, it is probable that a number of them are being exploited in ways which threaten their lives," says Valtorta.

Historically, dog fighting has been linked with gangs.

A 49-year-old former member of the Mongrel Mob, who wishes to remain anonymous, says fight



PHOTOS: JOHN WHITING

CAGED IN: Innocent dogs like this Staffordshire cross (left) and this 10-week-old mastiff cross are being transformed into vicious killing machines.

organisers have no regard for the well-being of dogs and it is not only the historical "vicious breeds" which are being targeted by thieves.

"What [fight organisers] do is starve and taunt the bigger dogs which they use to fight each other, usually until one is almost dead.

"Small dogs get thrown in with them to get them worked up. It's brutal. They put them in there knowing they'll die a

painful death," he says.

SPCA chief executive Bob Kerridge says although it is difficult to say whether the number of victimised dogs is growing, the severity of injuries that fight dogs have sustained is definitely getting worse.

"This is a problem that we need to get rid of as a society. To have such disregard for life is disturbing and wrong."

Under the Animal Welfare Act 1999, the maximum penalty

for those convicted of organising dog fights is six months imprisonment and a fine of up to \$25,000.

Kerridge says these penalties are simply not harsh enough for what is such an inhumane and cruel act.

"It is unfair that the humans convicted of these crimes get a maximum of six months jail, but the dogs they have used can't be rehabilitated and have to be put down."