

Asian Criminology – Challenges, Opportunities, and Directions

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Abstract Despite considerable advances in the field of criminology in Asia over the past few decades, the pace of growth has been quite slow compared with the rapid development of the field in North America and Europe. This paper discusses key features of the Asian context as they are related to the development of criminology in Asia. The paper examines the major challenges that Asia's diverse culture, legal traditions, crimes, and crime control pose for development of criminology in Asia. It also discusses the opportunities afforded by the Asian context. The paper proposes general strategies in response to the challenges. The author suggests the importance of moving towards a unified paradigm of Asian Criminology. The *Asian Journal of Criminology* aims to play an instrumental role in this process of advancing Asian criminology.

Keywords Asia · Criminology · Crime and justice · Asian criminology · Paradigm · Research methodology · International criminology · Comparative criminology

Introduction

Today, under the context of globalization, Asia has become a focal point of scholarly examination. Globalization has brought us both intensified contacts and cultural conflicts, to a greater scope than ever before seen in the history of humankind. Global businesses, global consumption, and the flow of migrants around the world have given rise to new experiences of difference and diversity, as well as common ground (Karstedt 2001). The past century witnessed the rise of Asia in both economic and political importance in the context of globalization. Since the postwar era, economic miracles in Japan, and later in Taiwan, Hong Kong, South Korea, and Singapore, the four 'little dragons', have set new examples of economic prosperity. Now, China and India's performance in the world market as new economic engines has demonstrated that they have their own ways of growth and has presented them as a hope to help with the current world financial crisis.

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The increasing interdependency of the world economy and politics has also driven an increasing need to understand the global diversity of social life, including social control and crime. Globalization has brought nations to rely more on mutual cooperation to control and combat crime and solve crime-related problems. Political and economic change in Asia has contributed to changes in crime and crime control in Asia. For example, accompanying China's rapid economic growth in the past three decades, scholars are increasingly concerned with the impact of the market transition on changing crime and social control (Liu, Zhang, and Messner 2001; Liu 2005).

Over the past few decades, criminology in Asia has grown considerably. However, the pace of growth is quite slow compared with the rapid development of criminology in North America and Europe. Understanding the developing criminology in Asia requires an equally good understanding of the status of criminology in Asia, of the features of Asian cultures and societies, of the special features of crime and crime control in Asia, and of the challenges and opportunities for criminology in Asia. This editorial note discusses these issues, and explores strategies and directions for a more effective development of criminology in Asia. With these considerations, the *Asian Journal of Criminology* under its new editorship wishes to work with criminologists and policy makers to make meaningful contributions to the advancement of Asian criminology.

Criminology - Western versus Asian

The origin of modern criminology in the West is largely covered in standard textbooks. Criminology as a modern social science discipline was primarily developed in North America and Europe. In the United States, contemporary criminology has become an independent academic discipline, with scholars from multiple disciplines and practitioners in various crime control-related professions. The dominant paradigm of criminology stresses the use of scientific approaches to achieve an objective understanding of crime and crime control. Empirical methods, particularly quantitative methods, have become core components of criminology in North America, especially in the United States. Prominent institutions in criminology, such as the State University of New York–Albany and later the University of Maryland at College Park, have graduated generations of students who pursue criminology as a science based on empirical methods. Along with the growth of the American Society of Criminology and the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences, and the publication of influential academic journals, this tradition has led to great achievements and has produced a generally shared concept of criminology. Criminology has been institutionalized in North America. The term “American criminology” can be used to reflect this tradition and its contemporary institutionalization.

In Europe, criminology has been primarily developed in law schools as a subfield of criminal law, as scholars of criminal law have recognized the complexity of crime and crime control which cannot be accomplished solely through the application of law and punishment. Qualitative approaches were dominant in this tradition, but in recent years the quantitative methods that are prevalent in North America have also been adopted by many criminologists in Europe. Similar to American criminology, empirical methods have become the major approach in criminological research. The establishment of a common organization, the European Society of Criminology, and extensive discourse among criminologists within Europe and with North America has helped European criminology to develop towards a more unified concept and has institutionalized criminology as a field of study. Among these processes, the establishment of English as a primary language in

discourse and in scholarly publications has been a particularly decisive contributive condition to unifying criminology. Most major criminologists in Europe can speak and write in English, and they publish their research not only in their native languages, but also in English. The European Society of Criminology holds its conferences in English and publishes its official journal in English. Several of the most highly regarded journals of criminology in Europe, such as the *British Journal of Criminology*, are published in English. The minimization of the language barrier has afforded the opportunity of extensive and timely discourse with North American criminologists which also contributes to rapid growth and enhancement. These regular exchanges between European and North American criminologists, as well as with criminologists around the world, have helped to form an international community of criminologists. The development towards relatively unified concepts, approaches, and institutionalization of criminology has led to a common paradigm for dialogue, debate, and discussion, as well as generally shared standards for evaluation of research and programs and a relatively clearer direction for advancement. This has certainly contributed greatly towards the rapid development of criminology in North America and Europe.

In contrast, in Asia, criminology has yet to become a mature field with consensus in its paradigm and institutionalization. Tracing the development of criminology in Asia, two major sources are most notable. One source of development is from the West: in this regard, Asian criminology is an extension of Western criminology. The other source is the interest of Asian scholars and policy makers as the need rises for the study of crime and for its control in Asian countries.

Western influence in the development of criminology in Asia came about in two ways. One is that scholars studied in the West and brought what they learned in Western universities to Asia, teaching criminology courses and organizing programs in Asian countries. Starting from the beginning of the twentieth century, a number of Asian scholars with graduate degrees from Western countries returned to their motherlands and brought with them new concepts and particularly scientific methods for studying crime and crime control. Taiwan, Hong Kong, South Korea, and Japan led the trend. These scholars' early efforts mainly focused on translation of criminological books and research articles (Cao 2008); later, a series of scientific studies were carried out. These scholars with a Western academic pedigree built some of the earliest criminology degree programs in Asia.

In addition to the efforts made by Asian scholars returning from the West, Western criminologists interested in international and comparative criminology conducted some of the most important criminological research in collaboration with scholars in Asia, and greatly contributed to the development of Asian criminology. They studied crime and crime control in Asia either to test so-called "general theories" in non-Western contexts or to gain a better understanding of the low crime rates in a number of Asian countries/regions. For example, a number of studies were carried out by scholars from Western countries in collaboration with scholars in China. Some of these studies have produced influential findings (Liu 2008).

Besides the influences from Western criminology, scholars and policy makers in Asian countries have paid great attention to the study of crime and criminal justice policies. Many Asian countries, such as China, Japan, and South Korea, have offered courses and programs studying crime and criminal justice in law schools, established national organizations, and held national conferences. In China, for example, both the Chinese Society of Criminology and the Chinese Juvenile Delinquency Research Association are national organizations, each with several thousand members. Other areas, such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, and India, have established programs considering criminology as an independent scholarly field and have produced research published in local and international journals.

Compared with criminologists in North America and Europe, one of the most significant differences is that criminologists in Asia engage in their research work and study policy-related topics most often concerning only their own countries and in their own language. Many of them rarely read English criminology literature due to language barriers and resource limitations. Discourse between Asian criminological scholars tends to be sporadic; there is no Asia-wide criminology organization. A major feature of the Asian context is diversity across Asian societies and cultures, with different languages, different legal systems, and diversity in crime and crime control systems and practices. To further develop criminology in Asia, we need to develop a basic understanding of the features of Asian cultures and societies, and of how these key features are related to crime and crime control practices.

Special Features of the Asian Context – Culture, Law, and Crime and its Control

The word that we use most often to address the special features of a society or a region in the world is perhaps “culture.” Culture, as defined by Alexander and Smith (1993), is a set of meanings, values, and interpretations that form a specific social force independently of and partially autonomous of social structure and institutional contexts. Western criminologists have long been puzzled by the low crime rates in both industrialized (such as Japan) and developing (such as China) countries in Asia. They “look in awe to Asia, and try to solve the enigma of modern, affluent societies with low rates especially of violent crimes” (Karstedt 2001, p.285).

Asian societies present distinct and unique social and cultural characteristics that differ significantly from their Western counterparts. For instance, when talking about Asian culture, people (especially those from Western societies) often think of Confucian doctrines, which were handed down for generations in many Asian societies. However, while Asian cultures share commonalities, it is most important to recognize the diversities within Asian culture. Despite certain values shared by many Asian societies (e.g., elements of Confucian philosophy are often shared by Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Singaporeans), cultures and societies within Asia differ considerably. Confucian philosophy does not influence every country in Asia. Indeed, a number of Asian countries/regions are under the influence of widely differing cultures, for example, Hinduism (e.g., in India), Islamic culture (e.g. in Pakistan), and Buddhism (e.g., in Thailand). In addition, Asian societies vary significantly with regard to collectivism and interdependence, as do Western countries with regard to individualism and independence (Karstedt 2001). To understand the conditions and context for Asian criminology, we must recognize the dynamics of commonalities and diversities of Asian cultures, which are the foundation upon which legal philosophies, laws, and crime and its controls in Asia are built.

The diversity of legal systems in Asia derives from the diversity in cultural traditions in Asia. In countries where Confucianism was a major tradition, such as China, Japan, Korean, Vietnam, and Singapore, the impact of Confucianism on its contemporary legal philosophies and laws persists in modern times. For example, Liu (2007) identified links to modern legal practices that are consistent with the principles of restorative justice promoted in ancient Confucian philosophical ideas. In Muslim countries, such as Pakistan, Islamic culture has a paramount influence over the legal system (Farrar 2007).

As a result of the cultural differences within Asia, crime and crime control methods in different Asian countries vary considerably. Variations of crime and crime control can be seen through variations in incarceration rates across countries. Scholars have attributed

differences in incarceration rates to differences in the character of society or differences in governance (Zimring and Hawkins 1991, p. 222). The differences in imprisonments reflect the differences in laws and punishments. Broadhurst (2006) presented incarceration rates for several Asian countries, compiled by the Asian and Pacific Conference of Correctional Administrators (APCCA 2005). He pointed out that the Philippines, Indonesia, and Japan have lower rates of incarceration while Singapore has the highest rate of incarceration. Mongolia, Thailand, and Taiwan also qualify as having high rates of imprisonment by Western standards. Despite difficulties in collecting accurate official data, scholars also report variations in crime rates within Asian countries. Newman (1999) analyzed data compiled by the United Nations and concluded that considerable variation exists, although Asian rates of recorded crime are still considerably lower than in the United States. Considerable variation has also been found based on data from the International Crime Victimization Survey sponsored by the United Nations.

United Nations data on the size of total recorded police forces and number of professional judges/magistrates (2009) suggest considerable variations in formal crime control across Asian countries. Hong Kong, Thailand, and Malaysia had greater per capita sizes of police forces compared with the United States, while Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore all had relatively larger police forces than Japan, South Korea, and Philippines. China has the highest per capita level of professional judges/magistrates, followed by Thailand, South Korea, and other nations, while the level in Pakistan was low. With regard to the number of professional judges/magistrates, only China has a greater rate of professional judges/magistrates than that of the United States (United Nations 2009).

The wide variation and diversity in legal philosophy, in laws, and in crime and criminal justice processes and practices among Asian countries provide disadvantages for a more unified criminology paradigm and the institutionalization of criminology across Asian countries, compared with that of Western countries. In many Asian countries, criminology is considered a marginal, rather than a mainstream, academic discipline.

The Challenges of Asian Contexts

As modern criminology developed in the last century, particularly in the United States, it was aimed at becoming a modern social science. It stresses the use of “scientific approaches” to empirically study crime and criminal justice. Like all other sciences, criminology stresses the development of a general theoretical understanding of crime and criminal justice, and the employment of scientific approaches to search for general knowledge via cumulative empirical evidence. This understanding and knowledge is then helpful for improving policy making. In this direction, contemporary criminology has created a general paradigm that includes a set of well-known perspectives and theories, shared research methodologies and approaches, and shared evaluation criteria and quality standards. Despite debates among criminologists with different perspectives, this general paradigm has contributed to rapid growth of the field over the past few decades.

Within this framework of mainstream criminology, an increasingly important component is international and comparative criminology, whose development was driven by two factors: firstly, by the need to examine and extend theories and findings to a broader scope and contexts, and secondly, by the practical need to combat criminal activities that occur across national borders, such as terrorism, human trafficking, and drug trafficking (Bennett 2004). International and comparative criminology has developed into an important subfield of modern criminology. Efforts to achieve generality in international and comparative

criminology are most significantly reflected in cross-national studies. Cross-national studies use datasets that compile information about crime and justice from multiple nations to study patterns and relationships between crimes and other predictive national indicators. This research has produced the largest literature in international and comparative criminology (LaFree and Kick 1986; Messner 1982; Anderson and Bennett 1996; Krahn, Hartnagel, and Gartrell 1986; Krohn 1976; Messner 1989; Avison and Loring 1986; van Dijk, Mayhew, and Killias 1990; van Kesteren, Mayhew, and Nieuwbeerta 2000; Lee and Earnest 2003; Schaefer and Lynch 2001). The cross-national approach has produced theories and findings that are general to the extent that many nations are covered by the data, extending knowledge of criminology at the national level.

The pursuing of general criminological knowledge at the national level encounters a major challenge in the Asian context due to the wide diversity in culture, laws, and in crime and its controls. For one thing, the cross-national approach is not feasible when data from Asian countries are based on diverse definitions of crimes and laws and on diverse interpretations of meaning by different cultures. Incompatibility of data will be a difficult obstacle to overcome in the near future.

Another major challenge is the collection and sharing of data. It is well known that, in many Asian countries, data available for research use are very limited. Liu (2008) reviewed major criminological data collected in China over the past several decades and found that only a few quantitative criminological datasets are available. Frequently, governments consider crime-related data to be politically sensitive and are reluctant to disclose them to researchers. Data collected by scholars are also limited. “Studies have been scattered and intertwined in other areas of study, such as law” (Liu 2008, p.131).

A most important challenge is the language barrier. Use of a common language greatly facilitates the exchange of ideas, research methodologies, and research findings, as well as the creation of a unified paradigm that cumulates the wisdom of criminologists to allow systematic growth of Asian criminological knowledge. However, as explained before, Asian criminologists typically publish their work only in their native languages and only in their local journals.

Opportunities for Criminology in Asia

Despite the challenges criminology faces in Asia, the value of criminological studies in Asia is indisputable. Diversity presents difficulties, but also advantages and opportunities. General criminological theories can be examined under more diverse contexts and conditions, and new theoretical elaborations and new theories based on evidence supplied from Asian context can be established, enriching human knowledge based on Asian contexts. Asia offers opportunities for comparative studies between the West and Asia. Karstedt pointed out that comparative studies “offer new insights, fresh theories and chances of innovative perspectives” (Karstedt 2001, p.285). Adler (1996) argued, “Globalization affords us the opportunity to do cross-cultural testing and development of criminological theory” (p.5). Asian contexts provide indispensable opportunities to develop modern criminology.

Diverse Asian contexts provide us with important information about crimes and justice systems in particular countries. This suggests broader thinking about crimes and justice. Asian legal traditions have some of their own effective ways of dealing with crimes, which are often overlooked in contemporary Western criminology and criminal justice thoughts and practices. For example, as a response to the problems of traditional justice, the

restorative justice movement in recent decades in the West has received a great deal of attention. However, many of the principles and practices of restorative justice have been found to exist in Asian countries for centuries (Liu 2007a), and continue to be a component of their contemporary practices. Many practices in Asian countries that may not look “orthodox” to Westerners, or may even seem unacceptable from established Western perspectives, may provide insights when examined as established perspectives and may even provide suggestive ideas for reforms. A generalized understanding of crime and justice is not achievable without fully examining and considering diverse contexts. Information about systems and practices of justice in Asian countries is valuable for accumulating generalized human knowledge about crime and justice. Asia is an excellent context to compare with the West because of the large differences.

Asia is particularly important in certain topics of research and policy making, including terrorism. It is reasonable to say that, without an understanding of the cultural context behind the terrorism, it will not be possible to win the “war on terror.” Other topics where Asia is particularly relevant that have attracted the attention of criminologists around the world include transnational crimes, such as drug trafficking, and human trafficking from Asia to other destinations of the world.

Asian Criminology - Strategies and Directions

Broad diversity in aspects of Asian societies, including crime and study of crimes, poses a serious challenge for a united scholarly concept of criminology and a contributive paradigm that promotes development of criminology. Do we question the possibility or the value of a unified paradigm for criminology in Asia? As the history of science has demonstrated, a mature science is typically supported by its paradigms as it develops. Shared conceptual frameworks, research approaches, and institutionalization under a unified paradigm greatly promote the rapid growth of a science. The development of criminology in North America and Europe also supports this pattern of growth. Our strategy for criminology in Asia should consider these historical experiences, while also taking advantage of the diversity in Asia.

Crime is a general and human problem that troubles every country. Thus, criminology is an academic response of mankind to the crime and justice problems. It is a general social science, an international science, which addresses the common human behavior of crime and its control. Despite the wide diversity of nations and cultures, there are enough common features in human criminal behavior and crime control to call for the study of shared experiences and the exchange of knowledge in dealing with crime problems in different nations and cultures. Research and practices in Asian countries should be part of the literature of international and comparative criminology.

With this concept of criminology, our efforts should fully consider diversity, the key feature in Asia as explained above. For example, when cross-national studies are difficult, a case study approach is an appropriate method for diverse data (Liu 2007b). We need to take advantage of the opportunities that diversity affords us, overcome the difficulties resulting from diversity, carefully study special models of crime and justice in different regions and cultures, and introduce unique models existing in Asian cultures to the world to enrich the human experience and our collective knowledge of criminology. To fully consider diversity while locating studies in the general literature of criminology should be the general strategy of developing criminology in Asia. The cumulative research in Asia as a whole should move towards the formation of an Asian criminology, which is on the one hand “Asian” while also part of criminology as an international body of knowledge.

The paradigm of Asian criminology will take a general methodological approach established in contemporary criminology. This approach stresses the fundamental importance of an empirical basis for academic knowledge and evaluation. It promotes evidence-based studies, while encouraging diverse research methods which are appropriate for diverse situations and contexts, including quantitative and qualitative, historical, comparative, cross-national, and case study methods.

The paradigm of Asian criminology should fully consider the diversity of Asia, particularly encouraging the in depth study of particular Asian contexts, traditions, and theoretical or practice models, as well as topics that are particularly Asian. In the meantime, it should also stress the importance of linking Asian research to international literature, locating the Asian experience in the international literature.

One practical strategy is to promote dialogue among Asian criminologists and with criminologists around the world, and to promote dialogue between scholars and policy makers and practitioners, in order to establish and consolidate a criminologist community across countries in Asia. There are many roles the *Asian Journal of Criminology* can play in promoting criminological studies in Asia and in contributing to the development of Asian criminology.

Since its establishment in 2006 with Professor Roderic Broadhurst as the first Editor-in-Chief and Professor Jianhong Liu as the General Advisory Editor, the *Asian Journal of Criminology* has published three volumes (two issues per volume), covering a range of Asian-Pacific countries/regions including greater China, India, Japan, South Korea, Israel, Philippines, Thailand, Turkey, Pakistan, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Australia, the Golden Triangle, Southeast Asia, and the Asia Pacific region as a whole. In addition to its wide geographical coverage, the journal studied a broad range of crimes/offenses such as white collar crime, organized crime, transnational crime, homicide, suicide, piracy, terrorism, drug offenses, human trafficking, and juvenile delinquency. It discussed the construction of pieces of the criminal justice system and related legal issues, including policing, criminal courts, imprisonment, and juvenile justice systems. Comparisons of crime and crime control between Western and Asian societies were also made. The journal has built an academic platform for criminologists to exchange academic views with the aim to “advance the study of criminology and criminal justice in Asia, to promote evidence-based public policy in crime prevention, and to promote comparative studies about crime and criminal justice.” (Asian Journal of Criminology 2008). The readers, authors, and reviewers of the *Asian Journal of Criminology* together form a free and friendly academic community which will contribute to the advancement of Asian criminology. Starting with Volume IV, the new Editor-in-Chief will continue to build the *Asian Journal of Criminology*, with the further understanding of the special challenges, opportunities, and the direction for criminology research in Asia discussed in this paper to make best efforts to promote Asian Criminology with scholars, policy makers, practitioners, and others from various disciplines and professions to enhance the academic quality and utility of the *Asian Journal of Criminology*.

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