

Beyond Western-centrism: Exploring Asian contributions in global comparative criminology

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Abstract

The Western-centric nature of comparative criminology has been widely acknowledged, promoting a growing call for increased attention to be given to Asia within the field. However, there is a lack of comprehensive quantitative assessments of the extent of Western domination and the contributions of Asian research material in existing literature. To fill this gap, this study conducts a quantitative literature review of English-written journal articles in the Social Sciences Citation Index Criminology & Penology category. The objective is to provide an overview of the degree of Western domination in global comparative criminology and to examine how Asia contributes to rectifying this domination. Additionally, the study explores the substantive contributions of Asia to helping to ease the over-centring on Western perspectives in this field. The findings reveal a prevailing Western domination and highlight the leading role of Asia among non-Western regions in comparative criminology. Based on these findings, the article concludes by discussing some implications for the development of global comparative criminology.

Keywords

Comparative criminology, criminology and criminal justice, Western-centrism, quantitative literature review, Asia, non-Western

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Introduction

The issue of Western domination in criminology has garnered strong attention within academia (Carrington, 2017; Carrington et al., 2016; Carrington & Hogg, 2017; Cohen, 1998; Dimou, 2021; França, 2021; Liu, 2021; Moosavi, 2019a, 2019b), like the rest of the social sciences (Connell, 2007; Graham et al., 2011; Gunaratne, 2009). Western-centrism in criminology highlights the marginalisation or neglect of non-Western criminological research (Moosavi, 2019a). Even the field of comparative criminology, which should be expected to engage in international comparisons across multiple nations, suffers from a significant domination by the West, resulting in a notable imbalance between Western and non-Western perspectives (Aas, 2012; Agnew, 2014; Carrington et al., 2016; Connell, 2007; LaFree, 2021; Lee & Laidler, 2013; Liu, 2007, 2009, 2017; Liu et al., 2017; Moosavi, 2019b; Young, 2011). Despite having a long history dating back to the inception of criminology itself (Howard et al., 2000), comparative criminology has consistently exhibited Western-centric tendencies. Research in comparative Criminology and Criminal Justice (CCJ) primarily focuses on comparisons within Western social contexts (Alatas, 2003; Liu et al., 2017; Nelken, 2010), with limited attention given to non-Western perspectives, except for a few cases such as Japan (Johnson, 2002). However, the development of non-Western criminology in recent decades has provided an alternative voice, suggesting that Western-centrism is gradually diminishing and that comparative criminology is part of this transformation (Eisner, 2023). These critiques in comparative criminology rely heavily on subjective assessments and require more empirical evidence for substantiation.

Given the current predominantly Western-centric character of comparative criminology, the ensuing question is, how is non-Western comparative criminology faring? Scholars have contended that the advancement of global comparative criminology relies on the development of non-Western regions, particularly Asia (Braithwaite, 2015; Liu, 2007, 2009, 2017; Messner, 2014, 2015). Comparative studies have the potential to “offer new insights, fresh theories and chances of innovative perspectives” (Karstedt, 2001, p. 285). Asia, with its diverse and distinct characteristics varying both externally from other continents and internally within the region, offers favourable environments and opportunities for comparative analyses (Braithwaite, 2015; Liu, 2009; Suzuki & Pai, 2019). While the criminology discipline in non-Western peripheral regions may not be as well-developed as in Western metropolitan centres, Asia stands out as an exception (Carrington et al., 2016). With the expansion of criminology in Asia, the number of Asian criminological publications has substantially increased (Belknap, 2016; Suzuki et al., 2018). As Messner (2015, p. 118) aptly concluded, “the utility of comparing Asian and Western societies to develop criminological theory given the pronounced institutional and cultural differences has been widely recognised”. Considering diverse and distinct particularities in Asia as well as the recognised development of Asian Criminology, this article selects Asia as a representative non-Western region to explore in-depth the current state of non-Western comparative criminology.

This paper aims to address four important research questions: (a) What is the extent of Western domination in global comparative criminology? (b) What is the trend of interest in comparative studies involving Asia, and what role does Asia play in these comparisons? (c) What is the role of Asia in non-Western comparative criminological research? (d) What is the substantive contribution of Asian comparative research to global comparative criminology? Subsequently, we will discuss the implications of the research findings for global comparative criminology.

Overview of Western-centrism in comparative criminology

In recent times, academia has identified a significant issue of Western domination in the field of comparative criminology. As Cohen (1998, p. 290) observes, comparative criminology is often “little more than the euphemism used when Anglo-Saxon academics look at societies other than their own”. Similarly, Liu (2017, p. 74) points out that “in general, comparative criminology is largely a Western enterprise”. Such comparative studies have primarily been conducted by researchers from the wealthier, English-speaking Global North, who use forms of justice measures from this region as the benchmark against which all other societies are compared (Carrington et al., 2019; Liu, 2017).

While this Western domination is not a new observation, few scholars in the field can fully grasp its implications in the current knowledge context (Bui, 2024; Faraldo-Cabana & Lamela, 2021). In comparative research, the boundaries of Western-centrism are sometimes blurred, but two notable characteristics stand out. First, there is a general tendency to focus on comparisons among Western countries while neglecting non-Western contexts (Eisner, 2023; Lee & Laidler, 2013; Liu, 2016; Liu et al., 2017; Moosavi, 2019a). This domination is particularly evident in sample selection for comparative studies, which mainly include highly industrialised Western countries and overlook non-Western nations (LaFree, 2021, p. 60; Liu, 2007, p. 7). Lee and Laidler (2013, p. 142) observe an inherent centre-periphery gradient, where “countries on the periphery are referenced and comparatively understood in relation to the North”. Aas (2012) also notes that significant regions, including the Middle East, Asia, Latin America and Africa, have largely been overlooked in comparative criminological traditions. Second, Western perspectives are perceived as superior in comparison to those of non-Western countries. This is not only manifests itself in the unidirectional and uncritical flow of knowledge production (Aas, 2012; Karstedt, 2001), but also in the claims of universality and superiority of theories produced in the West (Aas, 2012; Cunneen & Rowe, 2014). A paradox in criminology is that while there is a strong need for comparative research, the production of knowledge is still largely confined to a few geographical areas. As a result, interpretations of non-Western crime and criminology are often shaped by a Western lens (Fraser, 2013). Western criminologists frequently claim that their theories are universally applicable, yet they often fail to rigorously test or assess the validity of these theories in non-Western contexts (Zhang et al., 2025). The complex of idolising Western knowledge as necessarily superior is even common in non-Western societies that Alatas described as “captive mind” (Alatas, 1972, 1974).

Western-centrism in criminology is widely considered to be a problematic domination, as it not only marginalises non-Western perspectives but also hinders the progress of international and global criminology, along with effective approaches to transnational crime (Liu, 2021; Moosavi, 2019a, 2019b). In the context of comparative criminology, which is supposed to be an approach that seeks to compare criminological issues across multiple countries, the flaws of Western-centrism become even more pronounced (Moosavi, 2019b). A significant deficiency in this field is the lack of studies that incorporate non-Western contexts (Liu, 2021). This gap has been recognised by prominent scholars, who argue that the development of non-Western criminology is crucial for advancing global criminological scholarship (Belknap, 2016; Braithwaite, 2015; Carrington et al., 2016; Walklate, 2016; Young, 2011). Therefore, accurately identifying Western-centrism and integrating more non-Western perspectives into comparative studies will undoubtedly contribute to a more balanced advancement of comparative criminology.

Growing demands for countering Western-centrism have prompted the production of some empirical evidence to substantiate these assertions. However, existing research has only touched upon the state of comparative criminology in a peripheral manner and focuses predominantly on conference papers, specific topics, or particular journals. To date, a comprehensive evaluation of comparative CCJ research is yet to be undertaken. For example, Barberet (2007) conducted a content analysis of presentations at the annual conferences of the American Society of Criminology (ASC), which stands as one of the pioneering works. Based on her data, further exploration revealed that out of 405 presentations, 255 involved a comparative analysis with the USA, while 150 did not.¹ Similarly, Kim and Merlo (2014) analysed presentations on women and crime at ASC and European Society of Criminology (ESC) annual meetings. Their analysis found that at the studied ACS meetings, 51 comparative presentations were centred around the United States (USA), while 27 were not related to the USA. At the ESC meetings, 36 comparative presentations involved European countries, while only two were unrelated to Europe. In another study, Kim and his colleagues (2015) reviewed juvenile justice specialist journals and found only two comparative articles, one comparing Europe with the USA and another comparing Canada with the USA. In 2021, Messner (2021) conducted content analyses of empirical articles published in *Criminology* from 2000 to 2019, revealing that out of the 22 comparative articles, 16 included data from the USA, while the remaining six did not incorporate USA data.

Criminologists have consistently emphasised the importance of giving more attention to Asia in the field of comparative criminology to rectify its Western-centric nature. Many scholars have made valuable efforts to explore this issue. For example, the book *Comparative Criminology in Asia* edited by Jianhong Liu, Max Travers and Lennon Y. C. Chang (2017) is a representative example of such efforts. It examines comparisons between East and West as well as among Asian countries, exploring theoretical approaches and methodologies employed in these comparisons. Studies dealing with Asian comparative criminology can also be found in many other books, articles and other sources. Nevertheless, there has been a dearth of comprehensive assessments regarding the state of comparative criminology in Asia and its contributions concerning that continent and criminological comparison in general.

In summary, the systematic overview reveals a significant shortcoming in the literature: although previous comparative studies have been dedicated to promoting the development of global comparative criminology, few have quantitatively examined how comparative analyses are centred around Western countries, reflecting a Western domination. Furthermore, systematic investigations into Asia's potential role in countering this domination remain limited. To address these gaps, this study employs a quantitative literature review approach to explore the state of comparative criminology and summarises the contributions of Asian research in enhancing the knowledge of global comparative criminology.

Methodology

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

This paper focuses on comparative CCJ studies and applies the following criteria for screening the relevant literature:

1. Sources of publications. High-quality and peer-reviewed studies are selected to ensure credibility (Hebenton & Jou, 2013). Journal ranking indicators like the Web of Science

Journal Citation Reports (JCR) published by Clarivate and *SCImago Journal & Country Rank* (SJR) published by Scopus are widely recognised (Jacsó, 2010; Zhang, 2017). JCR is preferred over SJR for this research because it offers a dedicated category for Criminology & Penology, which provides a more convenient and precise research object. The journals included in this category are sourced from two reputable citation indexes: the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) and the Emerging Sources Citation Index. SSCI is widely recognised as a quality screening criterion for CCJ journals, as highlighted in the studies conducted by Cohn et al. (2018) and Corey and Sanders (2023). Therefore, this study primarily selects journal articles included in the SSCI index.

2. Topics related to CCJ. Articles primarily focused on psychology, forensic science and psychiatry, rather than specifically on CCJ topics, are excluded from this research, even if they are included in the Criminology & Penology category.
3. Comparison between nations. Comparative criminology has traditionally focused on comparing societies defined by the boundaries of nation states (Bennett, 2004; Eisner, 2023; Kohn, 1987; LaFree, 2021; Nivette, 2014). Thus, this paper selects the articles that conducted comparisons between nations as the target articles. For the nations and their corresponding continents, this paper adheres to the M49 standard provided by the United Nations Statistics Division (1999) (for a full list of the M49 standard, please refer to Appendix Table A1).
4. Language. Though there are many excellent academic publications in local languages, English is presented as a worldwide language and serves as the lingua franca in academia (Mazenod, 2018; Ross et al., 2014). This study only focuses on English-language publications.
5. Publication date. According to Joanne Belknap (2016), Asian criminology has experienced rapid growth, particularly since the establishment of the Asian Criminological Society in 2009. Therefore, this paper will focus on publications finally published since 2009.

Search strategy

The literature search was conducted between August and September 2023 and January 2026 using the Web of Science search engine. We utilised the term “compar*”² in the topic search field³ and selected “article” as the document type. The search was restricted to the field of “Criminology & Penology” within the Web of Science categories, specifically for the SSCI journals. To ensure consistency, we limited the language to “English”. The publication date range was set “from January 1, 2009, to December 31, 2025”. This initial search yielded 8,025 articles.

Following the initial search, a further screening process was carried out to identify articles that met the abovementioned inclusion and exclusion criteria. Initially, the titles and abstracts of the articles were assessed to determine their eligibility. Articles that appeared to meet the criteria underwent full-text screening. Two reviewers independently evaluated the articles against the predefined criteria. In cases where discrepancies arose in their selections, a third reviewer assisted in resolving the disagreements. Ultimately, a total of 436 articles were found to meet the criteria. The article search and screening process are illustrated in Figure 1.

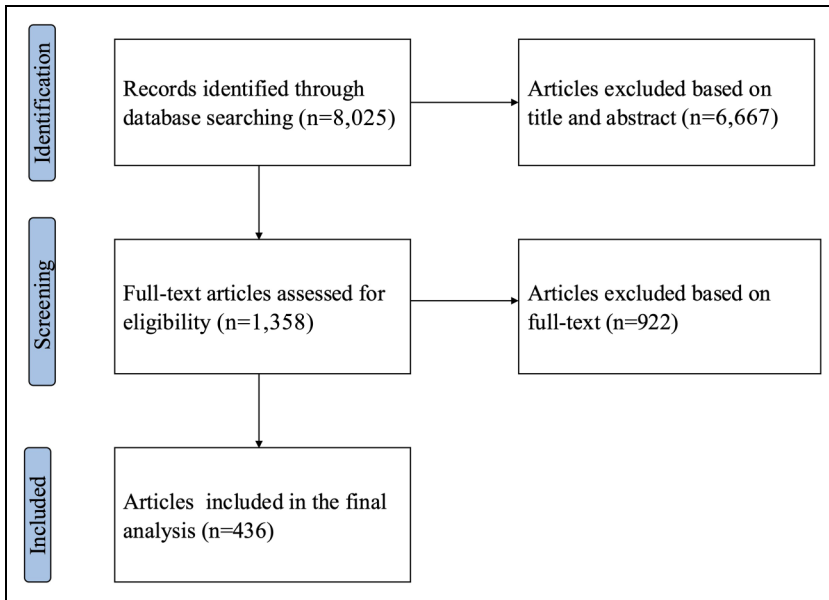


Figure 1. Article search and screening process.

Results

The Extent of Western-centrism in comparative criminology

This section presents the research findings based on a comprehensive analysis of 436 high-quality journal articles, referred to above, in the field of comparative CCJ. The findings are organised to address the four research questions posed in this paper, providing insights into each question sequentially.

Regions involved in comparisons. In comparative CCJ research, it is crucial to identify which areas are included in the comparison. As depicted in Table 1, among the total of 436 articles, the majority of comparative criminology studies involved Europe, accounting for 64.68% ($n = 282$). North America was also a significant focus area, with 46.56% ($n = 203$) of the total studies. Asia was another region of interest, with 36.93% ($n = 161$) of the total studies. Latin America and the Caribbean ($n = 80$, 18.35%), Oceania ($n = 69$, 15.83%) and Africa ($n = 50$, 11.47%) had fewer studies involving comparisons.

To address criticisms about Western-centric approaches, we grouped the continents into two categories: North America, Europe and Oceania (NEO) and Asia, Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean (AAL). The data in Table 1 show that a significant portion of studies ($n = 388$, 88.99%) focused on comparisons involving NEO, suggesting a strong emphasis on Western contexts. In contrast, 47.71% ($n = 208$) of the studies involved comparisons involving AAL, highlighting a significant difference in the attention given to these regions.

Comparison pathways. Although Table 1 provides general information about the occurrence of continents in comparative CCJ articles, it does not explicitly show which regions are being

Table 1. Frequencies of continents involved in comparisons.

Type of comparison	Frequency	Proportion of total studies
Studies involving EU	282	64.68%
Studies involving NA	203	46.56%
Studies involving AS	161	36.93%
Studies involving LAC	80	18.35%
Studies involving OC	69	15.83%
Studies involving AF	50	11.47%
Studies involving NEO	388	88.99%
Studies involving AAL	208	47.71%

AAL: Asia, Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean; AF: Africa; AS: Asia; EU: Europe; LAC: Latin America and the Caribbean; NA: North America; NEO: North America, Europe, and Oceania; OC: Oceania.

Note: Due to the possibility of multiple continents being involved in each study, there may be overlap among the various categories. The percentages presented are calculated by considering the proportion of each type within the total study ($N = 436$).

Table 2. Comparison pathways at the continent level ($N = 436$).

Comparison pathway	Frequency (%)
Within EU	129 (29.59)
Across NA and AS	57 (13.07)
Across NA and EU	44 (10.09)
Across all continents	24 (5.50)
Within AS	22 (5.05)
Across EU and AS	21 (4.82)
Across NA and OC	18 (4.13)
Across EU and OC	13 (2.98)
Within NA	12 (2.75)
Within LAC	12 (2.75)
Across NA, EU, and OC	10 (2.29)
Across NA and LAC	10 (2.29)
Across NA, EU, and AS	9 (2.06)
Across EU and LAC	8 (1.83)
Across AS and LAC	5 (1.15)
Other pathways across NEO-AAL (<1% each)	42 (9.63)
Total	436 (100.00)

AS: Asia; EU: Europe; LAC: Latin America and the Caribbean; NA: North America; OC: Oceania.

compared with each other. When examining the comparison pathways at the continental level (see Table 2), it is possible to identify where the interactions predominantly occur. Evidently, the most frequent comparisons occur within Europe, accounting for 29.59% ($n = 129$) of the total. The next common comparison pathway is across North America and Asia, comprising 13.07% ($n = 57$). The third most prevalent comparison is across North America and Europe, representing 10.09% ($n = 44$). Comparisons across all continents are also frequent, accounting

Table 3. Comparison pathways at the group level ($N = 436$).

Comparison pathway	Frequency (%)
<i>Within NEO</i>	
Within EU	129 (29.59)
Across NA and EU	44 (10.09)
Across NA and OC	18 (4.13)
Across EU and OC	13 (2.98)
Within NA	12 (2.75)
Across NA, EU, and OC	10 (2.29)
Within OC	2 (0.46)
<i>Subtotal</i>	228 (52.29)
<i>Within AAL</i>	
Within AS	22 (5.05)
Within LAC	12 (2.75)
Across AS and LAC	5 (1.15)
Within AF	3 (0.69)
Across AS, AF, and LAC	3 (0.69)
Across AS and AF	2 (0.46)
Across AF and LAC	1 (0.23)
<i>Subtotal</i>	48 (11.01)
<i>Across NEO-AAL</i>	
Across NA and AS	57 (13.07)
Across all continents	24 (5.50)
Across EU and AS	21 (4.82)
Across NA and LAC	10 (2.29)
Across NA, EU, and AS	9 (2.06)
Across EU and LAC	8 (1.83)
Other pathways across NEO-AAL (<1% each)	31 (7.11)
<i>Subtotal</i>	160 (36.70)
Total	$N = 436$ (100.00)

AAL: Asia, Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean; AF: Africa; AS: Asia; EU: Europe; LAC: Latin America and the Caribbean; NA: North America; NEO: North America, Europe, and Oceania; OC: Oceania.

for 5.50% ($n = 24$). There were also 22 comparisons within Asia (5.05%). The remaining pathways are all below 5%.

The comparison pathways are further divided into three categories: within AAL (comparisons conducted among countries within the AAL group); within NEO (comparisons conducted among countries within the NEO group); and across NEO-AAL (comparisons involving countries from both the AAL and NEO group). Table 3 presents the frequency of these comparison pathways.

Specifically, most comparisons occur within the NEO group ($n = 228$, 52.29%). This includes comparisons within Europe ($n = 129$, 29.59%), across North America and Europe ($n = 44$, 10.09%), across North America and Oceania ($n = 18$, 4.13%) and other pathways. Comparisons among countries in the AAL group are fewer ($n = 48$, 11.01%), including comparisons occurring within Asia ($n = 22$, 5.05%), within Latin America and the Caribbean ($n = 12$, 2.75%), across Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean ($n = 5$, 1.15%) and other pathways.

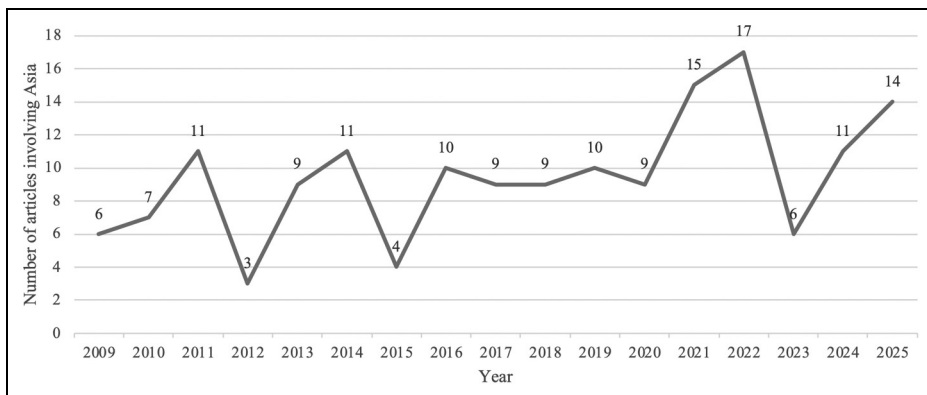


Figure 2. Numbers of articles involving Asia by year ($n = 161$).

Furthermore, 160 (36.70%) studies involve comparisons across NEO-AAL, indicating that these studies examine nations that span both Western and non-Western countries. Among these 160 articles, the three most common pathways all include Asia: the pathway between North America and Asia ($n = 57$, 13.07%), between all continents ($n = 24$, 5.50%) and between Europe and Asia ($n = 21$, 4.82%).

The trend of interest in Asia and Asia's role in comparisons

Tables 1, 2 and 3 present the status of comparative criminology research on all continents with respect to the numbers involved and comparison pathways used. To investigate the trend of interest in comparative studies involving Asia and Asia's role in global comparisons, we further refine the scope of this study to 161 articles that have conducted comparisons involving Asia.

The trend of gradually increasing research interest. Figure 2 presents the annual publication trends in comparative research involving Asia. The number of articles exhibits a varying pattern from 2009 to 2015, between three and 11 articles per year. Subsequently, it stabilises during the 5-year period from 2016 to 2020, with nine or 10 publications per year. It is worth noting that there is a significant increase in publications in 2021 ($n = 15$) and 2022 ($n = 17$) compared with earlier years. Following a brief decline in 2023 ($n = 6$), the number of publications rebounded in 2024 ($n = 11$) and reached 14 in 2025. Overall, the data suggest an overall rising interest in studying Asian comparative criminology, with sustained productivity in recent years.

The role of Asia in comparisons. When selecting countries or regions for cross-national comparisons, researchers can follow either the “most different approach” or the “most similar approach”. The most different approach aims to include countries with distinct structures and cultures to maximise diversity, while the most similar approach focuses on selecting countries that are as similar as possible (Aaltonen et al., 2016; Light & Singh, 2022; Westfelt & Estrada, 2005). Asia is viewed as offering rich environments and opportunities for comparative analyses due to its diverse characteristics varying both externally from other continents and

Table 4. Reasons for choosing Asia for comparison ($N = 161$).

Reasons	Comparison across Asia and other regions ($n = 139$)	Comparison within Asia ($n = 22$)	Total
Similarity	11 (7.91%)	9 (40.91%)	20 (12.42%)
Difference	68 (48.92%)	2 (9.09%)	70 (43.48%)
Both similarity and difference	20 (14.39%)	10 (45.45%)	30 (18.63%)
International data inclusion	28 (20.14%)	1 (4.55%)	29 (18.01%)
Unsure	12 (8.63%)	0 (0.00%)	12 (7.45%)
Total	139 (100.00%)	22 (100.00%)	161 (100.00%)

Note: The percentages in each column sum up to 100%.

internally within the region (Braithwaite, 2015; Liu, 2009; Suzuki & Pai, 2019). In the 161 articles identified above, what role does Asia play in comparisons? In other words, does Asia present contextual differences that enhance comparative research? Among the 161 articles analysed, 149 articles present explicit justifications for the selection of countries for comparison. These 149 articles highlight various aspects of similarities or differences, primarily including cultural, historical, political, legal and economic factors. The rationales for country selection by the authors of these 149 articles can be classified into four main categories: (a) similarity; (b) difference; (c) both similarity and difference and (d) international data inclusion, where Asia is included based on the availability of international data.

From the findings presented in Table 4, it is evident that among the analysed articles, 20 (12.42%) articles selected countries for comparison based on similarity, 70 (43.48%) articles based on pure differences, 30 (18.63%) articles based on both similarities and differences and 29 (18.01%) articles based on the inclusion of international data. These findings indicate that similarities and differences exist both within Asia and between Asia and other continents.

Among the 139 articles that make comparisons across Asia and other regions, relatively greater numbers provide reasons emphasising differences ($n = 68$, 48.92%), while fewer consider reasons involving both similarities and differences ($n = 20$, 14.39%) or pure similarities ($n = 11$, 7.91%). Conversely, among the 22 articles that compare countries within Asia, relatively greater numbers provide reasons considering both similarities and differences ($n = 10$, 45.45%) or pure similarities ($n = 9$, 40.91%), with only two articles (9.09%) focusing solely on differences.

The role of Asia in non-Western comparative criminological research

Additionally, we calculate the relative proportion of articles involving AAL (see Table 5). Out of all comparative articles, approximately 36.93% (161 out of 436) involve Asia, which is higher than the proportions of articles involving Latin America and the Caribbean ($n = 80$, 18.35%) and Africa ($n = 50$, 11.47%). When focusing specifically on articles that involve AAL ($n = 208$), articles involving Asia account for 77.40%, articles involving Latin America and the Caribbean account for 38.46% (80 out of 208) and those involving Africa account for 24.04% (50 out of 208).

Table 5. Proportions of studies involving AAL.

Type of comparison	Frequency	Proportion in all studies (N = 436)	Proportion in studies involving AAL (N = 208)
Studies involving AS	161	36.93%	77.40%
Studies involving LAC	80	18.35%	38.46%
Studies involving AF	50	11.47%	24.04%

AAL: Asia, Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean; AS: Asia; LAC: Latin America and the Caribbean; AF: Africa.

Table 6. Numbers and proportions of studies involving Asia by year.

Year	Studies involving Asia	Studies involving AAL	Proportion in studies involving AAL
2009	6	7	85.71%
2010	7	7	100.00%
2011	11	12	91.67%
2012	3	3	100.00%
2013	9	9	100.00%
2014	11	13	84.62%
2015	4	10	40.00%
2016	10	11	90.91%
2017	9	11	81.82%
2018	9	11	81.82%
2019	10	13	76.92%
2020	9	12	75.00%
2021	15	18	83.33%
2022	17	24	70.83%
2023	6	10	60.00%
2024	11	17	64.71%
2025	14	20	70.00%
Total	161	208	77.40%

AAL: Asia, Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

As shown in the overview of the yearly proportions of studies involving Asia within the AAL group (see Table 6), in 2011 and 2016 these proportions exceed 90%. Remarkably, in 2010, 2012 and 2013, the proportions even reach 100%, indicating that every article involving AAL includes Asia as a comparand.

Substantive contributions of comparative studies involving Asia

The previous section has provided a quantitative perspective that objectively assesses the degree of Western-centrism and the position of Asia in the field of comparative CCJ research. While quantitative data provide valuable insights, they cannot provide comprehensive answers to the complex issue of rectifying Western-centrism and advancing global comparative criminology. Therefore, we further review the content of the 161 articles involving Asia to identify the substantive contributions they offer to the field.

Contribution to theoretical research. The comparative analyses of theory applicability offer valuable insights and enable direct comparisons of analysis and findings, without the potential influence of methodological artefact (Kobayashi et al., 2011; Lambert & Jiang, 2006). Comparative studies on Asia have explained some shortcomings in the applicability and explanatory power of some mainstream Western theories. The first issue concerns the applicability of theories across countries. Some mainstream Western theories have been proven to have inconsistent applicability in the West and Asia. For instance, the self-control theory's "prediction of an inverse correlation between low self-control and criminality was largely supported by the USA data but only weakly supported by the Malaysian data" (Ellis et al., 2015, p. 1429). And Kobayashi et al. (2011) found mixed support for social learning theory from Japan, but general support from the USA. Additionally, the widely recognised idea that crime rates follow a consistent age pattern (Hirschi & Gottfredson, 1983) has been challenged by comparative studies in Asia. Age-crime patterns in Asian areas diverge significantly from those in the USA (Steffensmeier, Lu, & Kumar, 2018; Steffensmeier, Lu, & Schwartz, 2021; Steffensmeier & Schwartz, 2025; Steffensmeier, Zhong, et al., 2017).

The second issue, explanatory power, examines how well a theory explains variations in deviance among diverse social groups (Fukushima et al., 2009). It has been found that social control theory has limited explanatory power when it comes to explaining the differences between Asia and the West. For example, research has shown that Japanese students exhibit higher compliance with norms compared with their American counterparts. However, despite having weaker social bonds overall, Japanese students do not engage in significantly less deviant behaviour. This discrepancy suggests that the levels of social bonds do not adequately account for the observed differences in deviant behaviour between the two countries. This highlights the limited explanatory power of social control theory (Fukushima et al., 2009, p. 460).

Contribution to crime research. There are significant differences in some crimes between Asia and other continents. For example, violence against women appears to be more prominent in Asia than in the West, which could be attributed to cultural factors. In the Philippines, Hawkins et al. (2021) and Tuliao et al. (2019), respectively, discovered that their Filipino samples exhibited more sexually aggressive perpetration compared with their USA counterparts. The difference may be explained by cultural norms in the Philippines, where certain forms of verbal sexual coercion are acceptable behaviours. In addition, Li et al.'s (2020) study observed that Chinese college students exhibited a higher level of tolerance for Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), which potentially reflects the influence of Chinese patriarchal cultural contexts. Within Asia, there are also notable differences in IPV. For example, Emery et al. (2021, p. 4662) conducted a study comparing Korean and Chinese cultures, both of which emphasise the importance of "face". However, the study suggested that the impact of face culture on totalitarian partner control "may be substantially different in the two cultures". In addition to this, there are other studies highlighting intra-Asian differences in IPV (Ali & Watson, 2020; Bhardwaj & Miller, 2021; Rani & Bonu, 2009).

Contribution to criminal justice system research. Differences between Asia and other continents can be observed with respect to criminal justice systems, particularly concerning policing. In terms of community policing (COP), Wang and Zhao (2016) contended that COP in China

exhibits a more holistic mode of operation than USA. This difference may be attributed to the grassroots nature of COP in China, where neighbourhoods and mediation committees play an important role in supporting the police in reaching their crime control objectives. Similar variations have been noted in studies comparing COP in India versus the USA (Lambert et al., 2014), Turkey versus the USA (Nalla & Boke, 2011) and South Korea versus the USA (Lee & Jang, 2012), highlighting differences between East and West. For citizen participation in COP, collectivism is likely to play a key role in South Korea, while personal interests are a primary influence in the United Kingdom (UK) (Choi & Lee, 2016). In terms of police ideology, one case study argued that Taiwan emphasises “policing through virtue” compared with Western countries such as the USA, the UK and France (Martin, 2014). Further differences can be observed in research such as concerning volunteer policing in Malaysia, the UK and the USA (Cheah, Britton, Callender et al., 2021; Cheah, Britton, Wolf et al., 2024), police worker politics in India and Brazil (Jauregui, 2022), citizens’ confidence in South Korea and the USA (Boateng et al., 2016), policing activities in pandemic management in Hong Kong and England (Chan et al., 2023) and the effect of organisational support on police effectiveness and behaviour in China and Ghana (Boateng & Wu, 2018).

Contribution to criminal justice policy and practice research. Regarding death penalty policy, Jiang et al. (2010) examined public attitudes toward the death penalty in East Asia and the USA. Their findings indicated that deterrence plays a more significant role in shaping attitudes toward the death penalty in China and Japan than in the USA. This may be attributed to the collectivist nature of Chinese and Japanese societies, which have a tradition of trust in government; here, the government often justifies the death penalty based on its deterrent effect. Consequently, this dynamic may influence public perceptions of the death penalty. Another research comparing China and the USA also found the differences in the public attitude towards penalty policy (Wu et al., 2011). Regarding the abolition of death penalty, unlike the UK and Canada which view it as a marker of “civilisation”, Asian cases like the Philippines and Myanmar demonstrate the fragility and reversibility of such reforms. These contexts reveal that the death penalty is often used to reframe state sovereignty during political instability, highlighting the complex interaction between political power and criminal justice policy (Strange et al., 2025).

In terms of formal and informal crime control, Chinese and Japanese societies place greater importance on formal and informal control and their combination in crime prevention than the Americans, which might be “due to a cynicism brought on the higher level of crime in the United States” (Jiang et al., 2014, p. 42). A similar discovery was presented in India and the USA, suggesting that “there can be differing balances of the use of each form of crime control within a culture. It is up to each society to determine the mixture of formal and informal control in dealing with crime” (Lambert et al., 2012, p. 1252).

Contribution to victimisation research. Comparative studies on victimisation suggested victimisation dynamics may be influenced by the context (Tan et al., 2019). Nguyen et al. (2020) examined bullying victimisation in India, Vietnam, Ethiopia and Peru. An intriguing finding was that Vietnam exhibited a higher reporting of individuals feeling uncomfortable due to staring than other countries. This may be seen as an example of a victimisation experience that carries different meanings across cultures. In Vietnamese culture, avoiding eye contact is considered a sign of respect, while direct eye contact may be interpreted as confrontational or challenging. This finding highlights the significance of cultural context in understanding and addressing

these issues. Regarding burglary victimisation, Park et al. (2016) conducted a study comparing burglary victimisation in South Korea and the USA. They found that in the USA, income had a negative effect on high risk of burglary victimisation, while in South Korea, operating a business significantly increased the odds of burglary victimisation. These findings “may imply that different lifestyles between two countries generate a distinct causal mechanism of burglary victimisations” (Park et al., 2016, p. 55).

Discussion

The prevailing Western-centrism in comparative criminology

By mapping out the distribution and pathways of comparison, we aim to shed light on the extent of Western domination in global comparative criminology. Regarding the frequencies of continents involving comparisons, our findings reveal that 88.99% of the examined comparative CCJ studies involve countries in NEO, while only 47.71% involve areas in AAL. At the continent level, the most frequent comparisons occur within Europe (29.59%), across North America and Asia (13.07%) and across North America and Europe (10.09%). At the level of the West and the non-West, more than half of the comparisons (52.29%) are made within NEO countries, only 11.01% comparisons are made within AAL, and another 36.70% of the comparisons are made across the two groups. These findings indicate a prevailing Western domination in comparative criminology, with a strong focus on the West and comparisons among Western countries. Non-Western countries have received relatively less attention in the field, which aligns with previous research on the topic (Aas, 2012; Agnew, 2014; Carrington et al., 2016; Connell, 2007; LaFree, 2021; Lee & Laidler, 2013; Liu, 2007, 2009, 2017; Liu et al., 2017; Moosavi, 2019b; Young, 2011).

Several potential factors may explain this phenomenon. Notably, knowledge production in the social sciences is predominantly dominated by the Global North (Alatas, 2003; Collyer, 2018; Graham et al., 2011; Warczok & Beyer, 2021; Zhang et al., 2025). The 2010 World Social Science Report reveals that North America accounted for over half of the social science articles published in SSCI journals in the preceding decade, while Europe was the second-largest contributor, producing nearly 40% of global social science articles during that time (International Social Science Council, 2010). This imbalance in knowledge production and dissemination contributes to a relative lack of research on non-Western social-scientific issues, including in the field of comparative criminology (Zhang et al., 2025).

The language barrier is also a significant potential reason. English serves as the lingua franca in academia (Mazenod, 2018; Ross et al., 2014) and is regarded as the common language in criminology as well (Ignatans et al., 2023; Pease, 2021; Suzuki et al., 2018; Zhang & Liu, 2023). However, it is crucial to highlight that the majority of scholars worldwide are not native English speakers (Flowerdew, 2008). Consequently, many non-native English speakers face challenges in publishing their research (Flowerdew, 2019; Ignatans et al., 2023). As a result, comparative studies focused on non-Western regions often go unpublished in English-language journals, limiting their visibility and recognition.

Moreover, in cross-national comparative studies, researchers need to understand different cultural backgrounds, languages, legal systems and so on, which typically necessitates international collaboration. However, the collaboration among criminology scholars tends to take

place among those who share the same language (Ignatans et al., 2023), further hampering comparative research in regions where English is not the official language.

To address future challenges and better reflect the diverse global landscape, researchers could allocate more attention and resources to non-Western research areas within comparative criminology.

Rising research interest in Asia and its crucial role in comparisons

Asia ranks third among all continents in terms of its involvement in comparisons, following Europe and North America, but surpassing Oceania, Latin America and Africa. Regarding comparison pathways, the comparative interaction across Asia and North America is particularly prominent in all comparison pathways. This regional influence is further evidenced by the overall trend from 2009 to 2025, during which the number of articles focused on Asian comparisons has followed a progressive upward trajectory.

The results also suggest that comparisons involving Asia are primarily motivated by its differences from other regions. Within Asia, “both similarity and difference” between nations is the major reason for conducting comparisons. These findings highlight the different characteristics of the Asian context and the diversity within the Asian context. In global comparisons, Asia plays a crucial role by providing a wealth of contextual differences, reinforcing previous scholars’ assertions that Asia offers indispensable opportunities for advancing modern criminology (Braithwaite, 2015; Karstedt, 2001; Liu, 2009).

The leading role of Asia in non-Western comparative criminological research

Concerning comparisons involving countries in AAL, 77.40% of those examined are related to Asia, compared with 38.46% for Latin America and the Caribbean and 24.04% for Africa. This highlights Asia’s significant advantage over Africa and Latin America in terms of article publications, positioning it as a leader in non-Western comparative criminological research. Future research could promote comparisons with Asia and other non-Western regions to cultivate new knowledge and foster innovation. By expanding the focus beyond Western perspectives – specifically, by broadening theoretical approaches and incorporating more non-Western indigenous perspectives – it is possible to develop a more nuanced understanding of criminological phenomena and contribute to advancing the field of criminology.

Substantive contributions of comparative studies involving Asia

While our understanding of the effects of culture, family, religion and other social institutions on criminality is still limited (Bennett, 2004, p. 7), comparative research in Asia can provide valuable insights. To develop criminology, it is essential to develop a fundamental understanding of the interconnections between the key features of Asian cultures and societies as well as crime and crime control practices (Liu, 2009). Findings in this research expose that Western criminological knowledge and experience are not always universally applicable and that Asian experiences and perspectives should not be ignored. Comparative studies on Asia and the West have revealed certain differences in the applicability and explanatory power of criminological theories, underlining the importance of considering cultural and social contexts. In

addition, differences can also be found in studies about crime, criminal justice systems and the dynamics of victimisation across nations.

As Posick and Gould (2015) contended, “the importance of culture in shaping systems of criminal justice and responses to crime cannot be overstated”. Social and cultural factors play a crucial role in shaping the criminalisation of specific actions, the responses of legal systems to criminal activities and considerations of criminal justice (Karstedt, 2001). Future comparative studies can focus on further understanding of this complex topic, namely how culture, society, or other factors influence crime and criminal justice. Recently, the relationism theory of criminal justice developed by Jianhong Liu has gained wide attention (Liu, 2024), and the theory is expected to “explain multiple criminal justice outcomes at the system, institutional and individual levels across cultures” (Liu, 2024, p. 1). While Western criminological theories have been extensively tested and developed, theories from the non-West may require some additional testing in the future. As Braithwaite (2015) concluded, Asia’s most important contribution to global criminology is therefore in opening its eyes to completely new ways of seeing. In the process of globalisation of criminology, it is expected that Asia will play a greater role in transcending Western-centrism.

Limitations

This paper has several limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, the selection of articles was limited to English-written journals within the SSCI Criminology & Penology category. While this approach ensures higher quality of research findings and more reliable conclusions, it may exclude potentially valuable studies published in journals from other disciplines, local journals, or non-English publications.

The second limitation pertains to the exclusion of conference papers, books, book chapters, reports and other literature. While Linnenluecke et al. (2020) proposed “there is not necessarily a ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ way to make these decisions” for the inclusion/exclusion of these publications, it is important to acknowledge that their exclusion may have an impact on the conclusions drawn in this study.

The third limitation is that this research concentrated on the geographical level of the data, exploring the extent of Western countries’ central position in the field of comparative criminological research. While this approach captures patterns of geographical centrality, it does not assess the extent of superiority of Western perspectives in this field. Moreover, this study does not identify transnational collaborative institutions or publishing networks within comparative research. Future research could address these limitations to gain a deeper understanding of the issue of Western centrism in comparative criminology.

The fourth limitation is related to the scope of comparative CCJ research in this study. In this paper, we have focused on comparative research at the nation-state level, excluding studies comparing at subnational levels, or studies comparing large supranational spaces without explicit country-specific analysis, among other criteria. In future research, it would be worthwhile to consider broadening the scope to encompass a wider range of comparative CCJ studies.

Conclusion

While previous studies have touched upon the issue of Western-centrism in comparative criminology, they have been limited in scope and lacked a focused examination of this domination,


relying on specific conference papers or journals that address specific topics. In contrast, this study has conducted a comprehensive analysis with the method of quantitative literature review of English-written journal articles in the SSCI Criminology & Penology category. The findings confirm the existence of Western-centric domination and highlight the increasing research interest in Asia. In addition, Asia plays the leading role in non-Western regions. Findings in this study also reveal the substantive contribution of Asian research in enhancing the knowledge of global comparative criminology.

Moving forward, further comparative studies are necessary to examine the intricate relationship between culture, society and other factors with crime and criminal justice. Though Asian criminology has made valuable contributions in exploring this question, there is still much progress to be made. By expanding the scope of comparative studies to include more non-Western regions, researchers can gain deeper insights into these complex dynamics.

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Ethical considerations

This article does not contain any studies with human or animal participants.

Consent to participate

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Data availability statement

All data generated or analysed during this study are included in this published article (and its Supplementary Information Files).

Supplemental material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. These numbers were recalculated based on the data in Barberet's (2007) article.
2. Asterisk (*), as a wildcard in the Web of Science search engine, represents any group of characters, including no character. The term "compar*" allows for the inclusion of variations, such as "compare", "comparative", "comparison", "comparing", "comparability", "comparatively", and so on. For the definition

and usage of wildcards, please refer to: https://support.clarivate.com/ScientificandAcademicResearch/s/article/Web-of-Science-Definition-and-Use-of-Wildcards?language=en_US

3. Topic includes title, abstract, and author keywords.

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