

# **Developing Asian Criminology Paradigm: Theoretical Strategies and Future directions**

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## Introduction

- In his famous book, “The Structure of Scientific Revolutions”, **Thomas Kuhn**, a influential philosopher of science, uses the word of **Paradigm** to refer to the set of concepts and practices that define a scientific discipline at any particular period of time. (Kuhn 1997, page 10)
- He stresses the important role of scientific paradigm in the development of science through providing **models** and patterns of doing science.
- He analyzed the role of paradigm change in the scientific revolution, the role played by new scientific paradigm in the rapid growth of new scientific knowledge.

- In my 2009 paper “Asian Criminology – Challenges, Opportunities, and directions” (Liu, 2009), I briefly reviewed the growth experience of Western Criminology and proposed that “Shared conceptual frameworks, research approaches, and institutionalization under a **unified paradigm** greatly promote the rapid growth of a science”.
- I suggested that the strategy for developing criminology in Asia is to developing an **Asian criminological paradigm**. (p.3).

- Western criminology has become mature disciplines. “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.” (Liu 2009 p.3).
- In contrast, there was a lack of an Asian Criminology Paradigm, and a lack of platforms and institutions for exchange and share ideas among Asian criminologists and with criminologists in the world.
- **Development of an Asian Criminology Paradigm** will significantly influence the growth of Asian criminology.
- We would like to promote “a scientific revolution” in Asian Criminology it is important to promote a development of Asian Criminology Paradigm

# **Dominance of Western Criminology**

- In the literature of comparative criminology, the dominance of Western research and the underdevelopment of non Western comparative research is a major reality.
- In general, the discipline of comparative criminology has been largely a Western enterprise. This is also the case in comparative law, socio-legal studies, comparative sociology.

- Recently an influential development in criminology is “**southern criminology**”. Carrington et al. (2016) pointed out the impact of **global divide** in criminology.
- They point out there is a power relations embedded in the hierarchal production of criminological knowledge that privileges theories, assumptions and methods based largely on empirical specificities of the global North.
- Global North criminology has led to the serious under-development of criminology in the global South. But they also point out, an exception is “in Asia, with the establishment of the Asian Criminological Society and its journal (Liu 2009).”

- Sandra Walklate (2016), the Editor in Chief of British Journal of Criminology, in her keynote speech “Weathering Criminology?” in the seventh Asian Criminological Annual Conference in Hong Kong in 2015, also analyzed the problem of dominance of Western criminology.
- Walklate (2016) also commented that “Asian criminology, in being neither here nor there (Carrington et al., 2016), stands at the positive intersection of the north-south and east-west in terms of geography and culture.

- Both of Carrington and Walklate's highly the usefulness of reviewing and understanding the development processes in Asian Criminology for constructing strategies to develop non Western Criminology.
- My 2009 paper (Liu 2009) propose that a primary strategy is to develop an **Asian criminological paradigm** and to establish platforms of exchange and institutions for Asian Criminologists.
- I stressed that "The paradigm of Asian criminology should 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." (Liu 2009)



- Asian Criminological Paradigm (Liu, 2009) includes key concepts and theories as the core component, as well as research strategies and approaches. Given the limited space, this presentationh focuses on the conceptual and theoretical growth and the recent conceptual innovations from Asia.
- I briefly review the development of criminology and Asian Paradigm in recently years, summarizes the models of development of new theoretical knowledge in Asian Criminology, present the three models as the three primary strategies of theoretical growth in Asian criminology.

# The Development of Asian Criminology and Asian Criminology Paradigm

- Scholars in Asia talk about crime and crime control from Ancient times. For example, Confucius (551-479 BC) argue that there are two primary causes of crime. One is poverty, the other is lack of moral education. He also argued that the preferred strategy to control crime is by means of “Li”.
- In modern times, scholars in Asia studied crime and its control in early 1900s. The earliest publication related to crime is from India in 1913 and the average year of the earliest publication across the Asian countries was 1970 (Belknap 2016).
- However, the development on crime in Asian has been slow for many decades before the establishment of ACS in 2009.

- Belknap (2016) collected data from Web of Science by using the academic search engine, the ISI Web of Science, to identify criminology articles across a variety of Asian countries and time. She has found that all of countries had a 50% or more of the criminology articles about their countries published in 2010 or later.
- Establishment of ACS, its annual conferences and Asian Journal of Crimiology, as well as other major progress in Asian Criminology promoted a development of Asian Criminology Paradigm, which significantly helped the growth of criminology in Asia in recent years.

- From December 17-20, 2009, about 50 criminologists from 14 countries and areas in Asian Pacific region gathered in Macau and established Asian Criminological Society (ACS) and held its first Annual Conference.
- Since then, seven more annual conferences of ACS have been successfully held, in Chennai (2010), in Taipei (2011), in Seoul (2012), in Mumbai (2013), in Kobe (2014), in Hong Kong (2015) and in Beijing (2016). The registered number of participants goes as high as 575 people in Kobe, Japan.
- The ACS annual conference has become a most important event in criminology in Asia, we are looking forward the 2017 conference in Brisbane, Australia, and 2018 conference in Malaysia.

- *Asian Journal of Criminology*, the official journal of Asian Criminological Society, has played an important role to contribute to the development of Asian Criminology as an important platform for scholars worldwide to exchange ideas and publish their research on Asia criminology.
- *Handbook of Asian Criminology* (Liu, et al. 2013) and other Asian works.
- Prominent scholars have recognized the importance and contributions of Asian Criminology in recent years. (Messner 2014, 2015, Braithwaite 2014 2015, Walklate 2016, Sampson 2015, Agnew 2014, Belknap 2015, Carrington et al. 2016).

- Within the development of Asian Criminological Paradigm, so far the most significant growth is the conceptual and theoretical contributions. Bellow I review these conceptual and theoretical contributions.

# Models of theoretical Development in Asian Criminological Paradigm

- Asian Criminology Paradigm provides three models for developing theories, summarizes from the three type of theoretical projects which have been conducted. These represent three different strategies and also three different stages of the development in terms of how far it moves towards Asian theories.
- The first model or stage is transportation, the second is elaboration, the third is to propose Asian concept and theories, as John Braithwaite (2015) promoted.

- The first model is to extend the established Western criminology paradigm to Asia contexts. That is to transport the theory established in the West to apply them to Asian Contexts, to evaluate its feasibility and to generalize it to broader scope if they are applicable.
- The second model is to transform the theory or theories to a new form under Asian contexts. This involved in create and incorporate new concepts that are more faithful to the social realities of non-Western societies such as Asia.
- The third model is to establish distinctively different theory that is based on the comparative and Asian realities, that answers distinctively important questions that Asian criminology more naturally ask and answer. It analyzes the special features of Asian contexts and conceptual processes to establish new concepts and theories.



- The third strategy differ in many ways from the dominant Western conceptual and methodology tool box. It establishes an Asian discourse, which is based on empirical reality of Asian contexts. The eventual objective is to contribute to the world criminology theories through comparative studies and integrate them with Western paradigm.

## *The First Model: Transportation, Evaluative Testing, and ad hoc Elaboration*

- Theory testing is a major enterprise in establishing a theory. A valid theory must stand repeated testing to establish applicability and generalizability. As discussed before, a growing amount of research has been done to test well established Western criminological theories and elaborating them under Asian contexts. This research literature has made many important findings. In many cases, they confirmed the applicability of a theory, in other cases, they suggested modification or elaborations of criminological theories.

- *Differential Association/ social learning theory*
- The theory predicts that associations with criminal or delinquent others increases the likelihood of deviant behavior. The theory has found support from many studies using various data from China.
- *General strain theory*
- Agnew's (1992; 2006) general strain theory (GST) focuses on negative experiences that increase strain or stress and in so doing serve as the impetus for crime and delinquency in the absence of effective coping mechanisms. Not all claims of GST have been confirmed in the empirical literature, but "there is consistent evidence that exposure to strain increases the likelihood of criminal offending" (Lilly et al. 2011:77). An interesting study is Lin's (2012:50) application of general strain theory (GST) to Taiwanese youth using a longitudinal, panel design. His finding suggested that "whereas depression may play a central role in the GST in the East, anger may be the focal emotion in the West." His finding suggest the need to consider the influence of the tradition even in most developed Asian areas when applying Western criminology theories and empirical work to Asian contexts.

- *Self-control theory*

- The theory postulates that all crime, at all times, in all places, can be explained with reference to a single, overarching propensity – low self-control (Gottfredson 2006:83). Much evidence has been reported that low self-control is a salient predictor of crime and delinquency. Measures of low self-control are consistently related to increased risks of criminal offending. For example, Jo and Zhang's (2012) South Korean test of the theory and found that consistent with U.S.-based studies, relative stability in self-control trajectories for attitudinal measures among youth has complex effects.

- *Social Control theory*

- Jiang and colleagues' (2013:220) study of social control theory in China found that consistent with Western studies, collective efficacy “was related to perceived neighborhood property crime.” However, semi-formal controls were inversely related to property crimes indicating that “social organization theory needs to be modified when it is applied to China” (2013:220).

- *Social capital theories*
- Takagi and Kawachi's (2014) study of social disorganization/social capital in Japan was consistent with Western studies regarding the influence of strong friendship social ties on crime control, but inconsistent with Western studies they did not find that neighborhood-level social ties impacted crime or the fear of it. Indeed, Jiang and colleagues (2013) warn that borrowing theories from the US should be done with caution. "Before adopting them, China needs to consider its cultural and other characteristics and conduct its own empirical research" (2013:220).
- **In sum**, the strategy of transportation of the Western theories to Asian contexts has found supportive evidence in some studies, and little support or no support in some other studies. Researchers have made interesting ad hoc explanations to the findings in referencing to the Asian contexts. The research has made important contributions to criminological theories.

## *Second Model: Transforming Western Theory under Asian Context*

- Despite many studies provided supportive findings to influential theories for their applicability in nonwestern contexts, there are serious questions about the feasibility of simply transporting the perspectives established in the West to Asia contexts.
- Elaboration of a theory is to identify scope that a theory is applicable, which reflect the contexts and use the scope as moderating variable in the model to elaborate the theory under different contextual conditions. However, transformation of a theory will be a fundamental reworking of the theory itself. I review a few examples which take the strategy of transformation that creatively consider the features of contexts of Asia societies and human cognitive processes, rather than simply transported and applied to Asian context.

- *Reworking of Routine activity theory*
- Several major studies found that the application of the theory only performs well for developed countries, not for developing countries. (Bennett 1991; Anderson and Bennett 1996; Stein 2010). For example, Messner et al. (2007) found that in China, being single was not associated with any indicator of victimization risk (Messner et al. 2007:515). This finding is contrary to the widely reported finding of relatively high victimization levels for the unmarried in Western societies.
- Messner suggests a theoretical elaboration that situates routine activities theory in a multilevel institutional context. Using the language of hierarchical causal modeling, the argument implies a cross-level interaction. The impact of marital status (being single) on victimization risk is stipulated to be contingent on the degree of familism.

- ***Reworking of Self Control Theory (General Theory of Crime)***
- Messner (2015) proposes that a cultural orientation towards collectivism and the accompanying institutional patterns grounded in webs of interpersonal relationships become relevant to self-control. Kitayama and Uchida (2005:141) argued that while the “self” is an intrinsic feature of human psychology, the way that the self is constructed varies depending on how personal “agency” is exercised. Moreover, two distinct forms of agency can be differentiated, which they refer to as “independent agency” and “interdependent agency.”
- The style of independent agency tends to be “dominant” and “widespread” in European-American cultures, whereas the style of interdependent agency is “quite dominant in East Asian cultures” (2005:157). Thus, a reconceptualization of the very concept of “self-control” might yield a transformed theory that could prove to be more universally applicable than is the current General Theory of Crime.



- *Situational Action Theory (SAT) and its transformation*
- Messner point out that the SAT theory it devotes scant attention to the role of the larger cultural and institutional context. This approach to theorizing implicitly adopts the “universalistic” position with respect to human psychology. the accumulated body of evidence that has documented pronounced cross-cultural variation in social orientations and cognitive styles implies that the “bracketing” of features of the sociocultural context as mere “inputs” into the mechanism of crime causation is likely to be unsatisfactory if SAT is to offer an adequate explanation of crime in East Asia. Rather, the insights from cultural psychology implies that SAT needs to be transformed in significant ways to accommodate the reality that the nature of psychological processes, including the perception-choice process, is culture-bound.

- ***Institutional Anomie Theory (IAT) and its Transformation***
- Messner (2015) pointed out a primary question is: To what extent can a theoretical perspective on crime that has been formulated with reference to the inherent tension between social solidarity and individualistic cultural values be applied to societies that are characterized by collectivistic cultural values? He points out that in the current formulation of IAT, the macro-dynamics of crime are explained with reference to the core features of social organization—pervasive cultural values, the balance among social institutions, and the vitality of the normative order. The content is nevertheless quite different, highlighting opportunistic collectivism, political dominance, and neutralized moral norms.

## *The Third Model: New Concepts and a New Theory from Asia*

- “Asia and the Pacific embrace the regions of greatest cultural and linguistic diversity in the world. Asia’s most important contribution to global criminology is therefore in opening its eyes to completely new ways of seeing, as opposed to adjusting, testing, or revising western theories in light of eastern experience.” (Braithwaite 2015) “It is time for a new era of criminological theory that was given birth in Asia by Asian scholars.”
- Braithwaite proposed five restorative hypotheses based on his observations of Asian restorative justice. He declared that “The hope is that they may be useful for constructing the kind of relational theory of crime control advocated by Liu (2014)...” In these sections, I review examples that new concepts and new theoretical work from Asia that reflect what John consider the “new ear of criminological theory that was given birth in Asia by Asian scholars”

- *Conceptual innovations in Restorative justice*
- For Asian countries, restorative justice is typically considered as “Western import”, despite many of the practices such as conflict resolution and reconciliation process between victims and offender as well as their families and community in Asian countries share the same spirit and principles of restorative justice (Liu 2007).
- John Braithwaite’s theory of crime and re-integrative shaming (1989) provided a strong theoretical foundation for the restorative justice movement and practices. In his paper (2015), John Braithwaite made seven new innovative conclusions about restorative justice models. He proposed very important innovative conceptual contributions to the concept and approaches to restorative justice based on the Asian contexts. He provides good examples of how Asian philosophy and practice can enrich western criminal justice in ways that enhance crime control and respect for rights in the west.

- *A Theory of Relational Justice (Liu 2014, 2016)*
- The theory states that there is a significant variation along an index measuring the concept of “collectivism/relationism”, reflecting the cultural differences produced by the differences in the social organization and cultural traditions. The variation in “relationism” produces variation in dominant cultural values relevant to the concept of crime and justice.
- At one end of the relationism index, Asians tend to stress three important cultural values: attachment, honor, and harmony. At the other end, Western society tends to stress independence, materialistic success, and individual rights. Besides, Asian subjects tend to employ “holistic thinking mode”, while Western counterpart tends to employ “analytical thinking mode”. I hypothesize that the differences in cultural values and thinking modes produce differences in concept of crime and justice. Asians tend to conceive the concept of crime and justice as relational concepts and Westerner tends to conceive the concept of crime and justice as individualistic concepts.
- My theory elaborates how these conceptual differences produce important differences in the criminal justice systems and behavior (Liu 2014b)

# Future Directions

- The history of development points out the importance of developing an Asian criminology paradigm. Despite the current paper focus on the review and summary of conceptual and theoretical development, I would like to stress that this is only one dimension of the Asian criminological paradigm.
- To move the development forward, I would like to stress the importance of developing research questions that are salient and highly important in Asia, developing research strategies and methodology that response best to the special features of Asian contexts and conceptual processes. These will be critical in developing concepts and theories that reflect and guide studies of crime and crime control involving in Asia.

- **First**, we should stress the importance of developing research questions that are salient and highly important in Asia. For example, Corruption may be considered more concerned as a crime than violent crimes in China. Environment pollution more concerned in China and India than in Europe and North America. Asia is in a different stage from the West and develop under different historical, cultural and international contexts, thus has different problems. Industrialization and urbanization for example, lead to internal migration rather than international migration as a major process. New crimes and conventional crimes are different.

- **Secondly**, we should stress the importance of developing research strategies and methodology that response best to the special features of Asian contexts and conceptual processes, that will be important for developing concepts and theories that reflect and guide studies of crime and crime control involving in Asia. The dominant methods may not be easily applied due to the nature of the problem, the nature of the data. The answers may not be understanding the same as in Chinese thinking. Much issues in research strategies and methods need to be researched in the future directions.



- In sum, the task of bridging the north and south is a real challenge and a real opportunity. Developing a criminology paradigm that fits the contexts will help to take the challenge and grow criminology.

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