



# The Theoretical Contributions of Asian Criminology in Reconstructing Criminology

**Pin Yu and Jianhong Liu**

University of Macau, Macau

## Abstract

A recent primary development in criminology is a growing recognition that there has been Western domination in knowledge production and dissemination. The imbalance of knowledge in criminology is a significant weakness of the discipline. Prominent scholars have called for the decolonisation of criminological knowledge to correct this bias. Asian criminology and Southern criminology are the latest developments and promising forces in decolonising criminology (Liu 2018; Moosavi 2018). One of Asian criminology's exceptional contributions to the current decolonisation movement is its significant theoretical achievements. This paper reviews theoretical efforts in Asian criminology and the theoretical innovation of the theoretical works, particularly those developed by Liu (Liu 2014; 2016; 2017; 2021a; 2022; 2023). It shows how theory development in criminology can gain insights from observations based on Asian contexts. The paper provides an update on these developments and their contributions to the reconstruction of criminology.

**Keywords:** Asian criminology; Asian criminological paradigm; Asian paradigm theory; decolonisation; Southern criminology; relationism theory.

## Introduction

Criminology as a discipline originated and largely developed in Western countries, primarily in North America and Europe (Liu 2009; 2021). Along with the growth of the discipline, most modern criminological knowledge has been produced in the West (Liu 2021; Moosavi 2019). The well-known criminological societies, the influential criminology journals and the classic academic institutions predominantly reside in Western countries. Overall, most criminological studies are based on Western data, by Western scholars and about Western concerns. Comparative criminology, which supposedly compares criminological issues across countries internationally, also tends to primarily compare crime and justice between Western countries (Aas 2012; Liu 2018; Liu et al. 2017; Moosavi 2018).

With the spread of globalisation and growth of criminology, criminologists have increasingly started to pay attention to and criticise the weakness of the Western dominance of criminology. A recent significant development in criminology is a growing recognition of the imbalance in knowledge production and dissemination between the West and non-West. Studies concerning crime and justice systems in non-Western societies have significantly grown in number. Non-Western criminology can no longer be ignored (Smándych and Larsen 2008). As the former President of the American Society of Criminology, Joanne Belknap (2016: 250), commented, '[w]e are in an exciting time for criminology, as the scholarship is becoming more global, collaborative, and interdisciplinary'.

The imbalance of knowledge is still a significant weakness in the discipline of criminology (Aas 2012; Agozino and Pfohl 2003; Blagg and Anthony 2019; Cunneen 2011; Messner 2015; Walklate 2016). Stanley Cohen recognised criminology's



Western-centric character. He raised this issue in his notable work *Against Criminology* and explicitly objected to the way in which Western criminology was uncritically applied to non-Western contexts (Cohen 1988). Liu (2021; 2022) summarised several main shortcomings of Western dominance within criminology. Scholars have also pointed out that the weaknesses of Western-centric criminology include 'its active engagement in silencing and downplaying non-Western knowledge' (Agozino and Pfohl 2003; Carrington et al. 2016; Dimou 2021; Kitossa 2012) and that it 'unnecessarily excludes alternative accounts that may be useful for informing criminological scholarship' (Moosavi 2019) through 'discrimination and denial' (Dimou 2021).

In analysing the source of Western dominance in criminology, Agozino and Pfohl (2003) argued that criminology has been intrinsically linked to colonialism since its origins and this relationship is now reflected in the expansion of criminological knowledge. Criminology and other social sciences in general present a concentration of knowledge production, with some central countries having a privileged position to develop knowledge of theories, discourses and methods. These countries also have an influence on knowledge-production, exporting information to non-English speaking countries in the periphery/ global South/ East, and this unidirectional expansion of knowledge continues to this day (Connell 2014; França 2021). Today, decolonisation has become an influential movement in criminology.

Among all the new efforts to decolonise criminology and develop non-Western criminology, Asian criminology and Southern criminology are considered the most influential forces (Moosavi 2018). Both Asian criminology and Southern criminology oppose the uncritical and automatic extension of Western theories to non-Western regions, but they differ in their specific approaches. Asian criminology seeks to establish a conversation with Western criminologists and to demonstrate that Western theories are not universally applicable by testing them outside the West. Instead of applying theories imported from the Global North, Southern criminology discourages the importation of Northern criminology and argues for the generation of its own theories (Carrington et al. 2019; Carrington et al. 2018). However, there are far more commonalities than differences between the two projects, which share the same objective of correcting the Western bias in criminological knowledge. Both contend that more scholarly attention needs to be paid to Southern or non-Western contexts, which have long been marginalised in the Northern- or Western-dominated disciplines. Both Asian criminology and Southern criminology aim to reconceptualise social sciences and democratise knowledge on a global scale (Connell 2007). These projects of reconceptualisation will assist in countering the trend of universalisation in social sciences (Carrington et al. 2016). The consensus between Asian criminology and Southern criminology is that both projects have observed the weakness of the Western-centrism of criminological knowledge, critiquing the largely unidirectional and uncritical flow of criminological knowledge. The joint effort of both is to correct the Western dominance of criminological knowledge over the periphery and to try to find approaches to develop non-Western criminology to reconstruct global criminology (Liu et al. 2013; Moosavi 2018). As Moosavi (2018) commented, the primary difference between Asian criminology and Southern criminology is that Southern criminologists have not conducted in-depth theoretical research but have taken Raewyn Connell's (2007) *Southern Theory* as the theoretical basis of their projects. Conversely, Asian criminology has engaged in an array of efforts to develop criminological theory. Liu developed the 'Asian paradigm theory,' 'relational justice theory' and 'relationism theory' (Liu 2016; 2017; 2018; 2021; 2022), forming a systematic theoretical framework. Asian criminology is committed to contributing Asian experiences and insights to the field of criminology and thus addressing the long-term failure to consider of culture and context in the development of criminology. Through its theoretical contributions, it has made significant progress in the construction of universal criminological theories and the development of the discipline of criminology worldwide.

This paper discusses Asian criminology as a new paradigm and the theoretical contributions of Asian criminology and their implications in reconstructing criminology. The theoretical contributions of Asian criminology highlighted in this paper are mainly reflected in three areas. First, Asian criminology provides evidence from empirical studies that Western criminological theories are not always applicable to Asian contexts, which refutes the uniform applicability of Western criminological theories typically claimed or implied by Western theorists and confirms the need for Asia to develop theories that fit its cultural and social characteristics. Second, Asian criminology enhances the strength of Western theories by testing, revising and elaborating on the concepts and the scope of the application of original Western criminological theories. Third, the Asian context emphasised by Asian criminology reveals a new direction for the development of global comparative criminology and improves the literature on comparative studies within Asia and between Asia and the West. The final part of the paper addresses some potential criticisms of Asian criminology.

### **Asian Criminology as a New Paradigm**

In the efforts to develop the non-Western discipline of criminology, there is a lack of epistemological and methodological reflections on the decolonisation of criminology. This is a theoretical weakness of non-Western criminology. As Aliverti et al. (2021: 308) commented, 'the impetus to decolonise (and democratise) criminology has yet to be comprehensively and more

actively theorised and embraced, since what we have today is closer to a patchwork of different approaches and often competing claims'. Theoretical weakness has always been a prominent feature of criminology (Matthews 2017), thus, the crucial effort in the reconstruction of criminology will be to create a new agenda for criminological theory and knowledge production. Liu (2009; 2014; 2016; 2017; 2021a) has notes that criminology theory must recognise the striking characteristics of cultural, political, economic and social influences from Asian and other non-Western societies to form a theoretical foundation for the unique contributions that thus far have been ignored or overlooked by mainstream or Western criminology.

Liu (2009) pointed out that a significant characteristic feature of the Asian context is diversity. Asian countries have different cultures and social systems, languages, legal systems and crime and crime control practices. It is this great diversity that makes Asia an excellent place for conducting criminological research, and which makes its foundation different to that of Western criminology. Liu (2009; 2022) emphasised that Asian criminology should take full advantage of Asian diversity, especially by encouraging the in-depth study of specific Asian contexts, traditions, theoretical or practical models and Asian topics (Liu 2009). Despite their diversity, Asian societies also share some common features and characteristics. For example, some Asian societies share certain values, such as harmony and honour. Confucianism has had a continuous influence on the legal philosophy of Asian countries, such as China, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam and Singapore (Liu 2009). The common characteristics and diversity of Asian contexts make it necessary to generate a unified paradigm to guide the study of Asian criminology and lead the development of the discipline of criminology in Asia.

The recognition of diversity in Asian contexts provides a theoretical foundation for the construction of criminological theory. Criminology can gain insights by studying crime and criminal justice in Asia. First, the diversity of Asian societies provides advantages and new opportunities for criminological research, enabling criminological theories to be tested and examined in various contexts and conditions and enabling theories to be elaborated on and developed according to the characteristics of the Asian context.

Second, the Asian context has produced criminal justice and crime control experiences that are different from those of the West. These experiences can provide new perspectives on Western criminology and criminal justice practices. Specifically, there are approaches to dealing with crime effectively in the Asian legal tradition, such as that of restorative justice, that could inform modern judicial reform. Recognition of diversity in crime, justice and social control provides an impetus for decolonising criminology and developing diversity-based criminological theories.

Another foundational theoretical contribution of Asian criminology is to provide a 'context-focused approach'; that is, an approach that seeks to reach a higher level of general understanding by extending novel insights, knowledge and implications derived from one particular place, country or group in Asia or the whole of Asia (Liu 2022). The concept of Asian criminology is 'the study of crime and justice in the Asian context' (Liu 2022; 2023), which stresses the central importance of the Asian context in generating important knowledge for criminology. This definition implies that Asian criminology gains insight from specific contextual features of Asia. It can be said that the approach focusing on the Asian context is a theoretical foundation of Asian criminology.

To understand the concept and content of Asian criminology, it is necessary to first understand the differences between Asian and Western criminological characteristics. The most obvious manifestation of these characteristics is the cultural differences between Asian and Western societies. According to Liu (2016), 'the Western concepts of crime and justice are individualistic concepts, and the Asian concepts of crime and justice are relational concepts, supported by different value systems'. Individualism is prevalent in the West, while collectivism is prevalent in the East. Three key cultural values in Asia are attachment, honour and harmony. These cultural values influence the ways in which Asians think and behave, as well as the system and operation of the criminal justice system in Asian societies (Liu 2016). Recognition of the importance of contextual differences also provides insights into the value of comparative criminology in the discipline of criminology. These differences highlight that as a social science discipline, criminology is inherently comparative in nature (Heidensohn 2008; Nelken 2010). Comparison is a foundational growth point for reconstructing criminology. The differences between Asian and Western contexts also provide new opportunities for comparative criminological research.

Asian criminology, based on a deep understanding of the Asian context, provides new insights and voices for the decolonisation process of criminology and is a valuable resource for the innovation of justice and crime control models. The importance of the Asian context for Asian criminology and the development of criminology in general has also been noted by Western scholars. As Moosavi (2018) commented, 'Asian criminology is often justified on the basis that Asian culture contains exclusive, timeless and valuable insights that is based on a perception of Asia as distinct from other parts of the world, especially the West'. Walklate's (2016) assessment of Asian criminology is that '[i]t is well placed to think differently, both conceptually and methodologically, about the criminological enterprise and the debates that such different thinking might generate'.

With its theoretical emphasis on diversity and context-focused approach, Asian criminology provides an impetus and innovative agenda within the current decolonisation movement. Given that the Asian context presents unique social and cultural characteristics that differ from those in Western societies, these foundational theoretical identifications of Asian criminology also provide an impetus and future directions for the growth of Asian legal philosophy, Asian law and Asian studies of crime and its control.

### **Empirical Studies on the Non-Applicability of Western Theories**

It used to be common for criminological theories developed in the West to claim to be universal. However, with the development of comparative studies, some scholars showed that these theories were not always applicable when they were tested and applied outside the West. Many studies, especially those conducted in the Asian context, have provided evidence that does not fit well with existing criminological theories. One of the theoretical contributions of Asian criminology is that it has provided a large amount of evidence that shows that Western criminology theories are not always applicable to Asian countries (Liu 2017; 2018).

Some studies have systematically reviewed the extent to which Western mainstream criminological theories can be applied to the Asian context and concluded that while some theories have been fully or partially applied to the Asian context and other theories have not obtained supportive findings in Asia, only a few studies have discussed the cultural uniqueness of the Asian context (Belknap 2016; Liu 2022a, Suzuki et al. 2018). To extend the understanding of the importance of the Asian context in the development of criminological theories, this section cites some examples in which Western criminological theories are not supported in Asia due to the cultural characteristics of Asia.

An interesting finding is exemplified in the study of Lin (2012), which applied general strain theory (GST) to Taiwanese youth using a longitudinal panel design. His findings suggest that while ‘depression may play a central role in the GST in the East, anger may be the focal emotion in the West’ (Lin 2012). Lin (2012) noted that social systems in the East that are considered ‘developed’ (such as the social system in Taiwan) ‘still conserve some deep-rooted cultural heritages, such as the Confucian ethos and a collectivist view of the world’. Gao et al. (2016) undertook a similar study with a sample of over 1,000 young people in other parts of China that replicated Lin’s (2012) results but refrained from calling into question the relevance of the GST to a collectivist culture vastly different from that of the United States. Some preliminary findings in India also suggest that the correlation between family strain or school strain and crime may be related to culture (Hartjen & Kethineni, 1999). The GST cannot directly explain the crime rates in India, while the socio-economic and cultural differences between India and the United States are important reasons that might explain the differences in the crime rates between the two countries (Hartjen and Kethineni 1999).

Studies examining self-control theory in different socio-cultural contexts have shown that cultural characteristics may influence the level of self-control and the relationship between variables in self-control theory (Hwang and Akers 2017; Jo and Zhang 2012; Wang et al. 2002), countering Gottfredson and Hirschi’s argument that the relationship between self-control and criminal behaviour is constant across cultures (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990). Other research reported more complex results. For example, Jo and Zhang (2014: 1355) examined the applicability of self-control theory in South Korea, and found that ‘[p]arenting has only an indirect effect through self-control on delinquency’ and gender differences exist in criminal involvement in South Korean culture.

Some studies in Asia have revealed cross-cultural differences in terms of the effects of social learning variables on crime (Antonaccio and Botchkovar 2015). Some studies have shown that the relationship between social learning variables and delinquency in Asian samples is significantly weaker than in Western samples (Hartjen and Kethineni 1999; Kobayashi et al. 2011). Kim et al. (2010) sought to compare the predictability between peer influence and parental influence on adolescents’ substance use in South Korea and found that parental factors were slightly more influential than peer factors, which is inconsistent with the findings of previous studies. The authors also used the duality of Korean culture to explain this difference (Kim et al. 2010).

In relation to the routine activities theory, Messner et al.’s (2007) study in China showed that being single was not associated with an increased risk for any type of victimisation, which is inconsistent with earlier study in Western nations (Lauritsen 2001). Messner et al. (2007: 515) noted that ‘the implications of marital status for living arrangements and social ties differ between the Chinese and Western contexts, reflecting the high degree of “familism” in China’. Messner et al. (2007) also suggested a theoretical elaboration that situates the routine activities theory in a multilevel, institutional context. Using the language of hierarchical causal modelling, the theory implies a cross-level interaction (Messner et al. 2007; Messner 2014).

## Criminological Theory Building and Elaboration

Another significant contribution of Asian criminology to global criminology is its enhancement of original criminological theories. The formulation of the Asian criminological concept and the Asian criminological paradigm is a valuable theoretical advancement for both local and global criminological development.

For local criminological development, given the vast differences between Asian and Western contexts, some influential theories cannot be applied to Asian contexts even after the elaboration stage. Thus, the development of new concepts and theories in local Asian contexts becomes an important task. For example, the development of relationism theory and the conceptual innovation of restorative justice, both of which are new theoretical products based on the Asian experience, have undoubtedly contributed to the advancement of local criminological knowledge in Asia.

In terms of global criminological development, the conception and development of Asian criminology do not seek to refute the achievements of Western criminology but to accept the great importance and the valuable experience and research methods of Western criminology and to advocate for learning from Western criminological knowledge. Indeed, testing Western criminological theories in the Asian context as one of the important strategies in the development of Asian criminology. For example, Asian criminologists often pay homage to Western criminology, positioning Asian criminology as ‘an extension of Western criminology’ (Liu 2009). Asia’s most important contribution to criminology has been to test and revise the constraints and the scope of the application of criminological theories developed based on Western contexts (Liu 2022). In the process of continuous testing and elaboration to enhance Western theories, contributions from Asian contexts have significantly expanded the original Western criminological toolbox (Liu 2018).

Recognising the partial inapplicability of existing criminological theory in Asia, scholars have begun to reconsider the original theoretical concepts. For example, Messner (2015) pointed out that the application of established criminological theories to East-Asian societies is problematic, as some concepts are not suitable, or the concepts needed to understand crime-related phenomena are completely missing. Further, Messner (2015) proposed that ‘the perception-choice process at the core of SAT [situational action theory] will have to be more systematically embedded in cultural and institutional context for it to be able to explain crime in Asian societies’. To be more specific, systematic discussion of the role of socio-cultural backgrounds to understand the perceptual selection process in East-Asian societies is necessary (Messner 2015).

Similarly, institutional anomie theory (IAT) attaches primary importance to the understanding of the social and cultural backgrounds of the causes of crime. The IAT focuses on the characteristics of large-scale social systems, such as the basic cultural orientation, institutional structure and institutional norms. Based on the logic of the IAT with cultural colour, Messner (2015) asked a fundamental question: ‘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 characterised by collectivistic cultural values?’. Messner (2015) suggested that ‘the abstract analytic framework embodied in IAT has general applicability, but the content of the theoretical argument needs to be recast to capture the distinct features of the differing sociocultural contexts’.

Based on a profound analysis of the ‘cultural psychology’ interface by Kitayama and Uchida (2005), Messner suggested that ‘culturally nuanced’ self-control theory could serve as the basis for a multilevel, institutional elaboration of social control theory. Messner (2014) proposed the reconceptualisation of self-control to provide the possibility for multilevel theory. Specifically, the self-control theory includes two forms of conceptualisation of self-control that correspond to their respective agent forms: independent self-control and interdependent self-control.

Previous studies have shown that the GST has certain applicability in Asian contexts; however, it is also necessary to revise the theory ‘to best explain crime in Asian societies’ (Agnew 2015). Notably, social and cultural differences between Asian and Western societies must be taken into account (Agnew 2015). Wang et al. (2022) applied the GST to corruption among China’s grassroots public officials. Their research included three kinds of strain that have not been integrated into the GST; that is, resources strain, deviant subcultural strain and *renqing* (personal interests) strain. Compared with Western societies, as reflects China’s politics and culture, these three strains ‘rooted in the unique political system and cultural values were also shown to be significantly associated with corruption’ (Wang et al. 2022). Thus, the authors called for further revision and the expansion of the GST, especially with respect to the special cultures and structures of non-Western societies (Wang et al. 2022). Moon et al. (2008) examined the effects of key characteristics of seven strains on delinquency among Korean adolescents, focusing on recent strains, persistent strains and the perceived injustice of strains, and found that parental punishment cannot predict juvenile delinquency, which is inconsistent with previous research results (Alfaro 1981; Cohen & Brook 1994; Widom 1989). A reasonable explanation is that due to cultural differences, Korean culture emphasises the necessity of affirmative and autocratic

parenting. Korean youth might think that parental punishment reflects their parents' love for them. Thus, Moon et al. (2008) indicated the importance of incorporating culturally unique types of strain into the GST.

Jiang et al.'s (2013) study in China showed that semi-formal control in neighbourhood mediation committees is an important type of crime control in China; however, 'since this type does not exist in the West, social organisation theory needs to be modified when it is applied to China'. Jiang et al. (2013) also warned that theories from the United States should only be borrowed with caution and noted that '[b]efore adopting them, China needs to consider its cultural and other characteristics and conduct its own empirical research'.

He and Messner's (2020) research applied social disorganisation theory in China. Their literature review listed a series of traditional hypotheses about the theory of social disorganisation, identified results inconsistent with the results generally reported in the West, and problematised the feasibility of simply transporting the theoretical framework from the West to China. Based on this, the authors proposed that the neighbourhood boundaries, temporal dynamics and interpenetration of levels of social structures should be adjusted to better apply the theory in China.

## Discussion

### *Contribution to Comparative Criminology*

In general, comparative criminological research is conducted mainly by researchers in Western countries. The research mainly compares criminal justice systems between Western countries and aims to reflect on how Western criminal justice systems have developed (Liu et al. 2017). In the field of comparative criminal justice, the majority of studies have sought to compare Western countries, with a few studies involving Japan (Johnson 2002). Thus, 'comparative criminology is largely a Western enterprise' (Liu 2018). The dominance of comparative criminology in the West has resulted in a gap in the study of non-Western criminology and a lack of knowledge about non-Western regions in global comparative criminology. Many scholars have recognised this limitation and have suggested that the development of non-Western criminology is crucial to the advancement of global criminology (Carrington et al. 2016; Young 2011). Asian criminology is part of comparative criminology. The inclusion of Asian criminology in comparative criminology reflects the new development of comparative criminology spreading from the West to the East, represents a new direction for modern comparative criminology and provides a new way of updating knowledge. Asian criminology can be seen as a strategy for developing comparative criminology in Asia, while comparative criminology can be seen as a bridge between Western and non-Western criminology.

As mentioned above, the Asian context is diverse; different Asian countries have different politics, cultures and institutions. Compared with Western countries, there are significant differences inherent within Asian countries, especially in terms of crime and criminal justice processes, for which each country has unique practices and experiences. This provides the necessary conditions for the comparative study of criminology and criminal justice within Asia. However, the diversity also creates challenges, due to the 'diverse definitions of crimes and laws and on diverse interpretations of meaning by different cultures' (Liu 2009) within Asian countries, which hinders the research of cross-national criminology. Thus, Asian criminology and the Asian criminological paradigm have made great contributions to the research in Asian countries under a unified criminological paradigm, and the unification of theoretical and institutional levels has promoted the institutionalisation and formalisation of criminology in Asian countries.

More importantly, Asian criminology has provided excellent opportunities for comparative studies between the West and Asia to advance the development of comparative criminology globally. In the past, under the dominance of Western criminology, comparative criminology has been primarily conducted in Western countries at the expense of non-Western contexts. However, the fact that Asia differs significantly from the West in terms of its political organisation, criminal justice systems, cultural values and practices and economic systems, makes it impossible to ignore the Asian context. The Asian context introduces a new perspective to global criminology, and by focusing on crime and criminal justice in Asia, Asian criminology can make a unique contribution to the broader comparative criminology literature. The development of Asian criminology has built a bridge between Western criminology and non-Western criminology, effectively promoting the renewal of comparative criminological knowledge, expanding the scope of the research and proposing a new direction for the development of modern comparative criminology.

The diversity of Asian contexts and the substantial differences with Western societies make Asia an excellent focal point for comparison with the West (Liu 2009). Many scholars have affirmed the significant contribution of Asian criminology in comparative research. Karstedt (2001) pointed out that comparative research 'will offer new insights, fresh theories and chances of innovative perspectives'. Braithwaite (2015) emphasised that:

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.

It is the right time in the development of criminology in Asia to move away from an international division of scholarly labor whereby influential theories are developed in the west, while Asia's role is to apply or test those theories in Asian contexts or adapt them to Asian realities. It is time for a new era of criminological theory that was given birth in Asia by Asian scholars.

Promoted by Liu and others, Springer has published a series of books on criminology and criminal justice in Asia, including *Comparative Criminology in Asia* (Liu et al. 2017), which takes a comparative research approach focusing on theoretical and methodological issues and to some extent, practical and political issues. The project's most significant contribution has been to make it possible for scholars outside Asia to see the differences and similarities between the criminal justice systems of Asia and the West. By promoting the unique value of conducting comparative criminological research in Asia, the book aims to encourage more criminologists to engage in comparative criminological research both within the West and within Asia (Liu et al. 2017).

With the expansion of the scope and influence of Asian criminology, more and more articles and research on crime and criminal justice in Asia have sprung up. The Asian Criminological Society (ACS) and the *Asian Journal of Criminology* also provide valuable exchange platforms for scholars concerned with crime and criminal justice issues in Asia. Data show that crime and criminal justice research in Asia has increased rapidly since the ACS was founded (Belknap 2016; Liu 2022a). International scholars have witnessed the growth of Asian criminology over the past years (Belknap 2016; Carrington 2017; Zhong and Zhang 2021), which is evident in the growing empirical literature on criminological theories, with increasing numbers of literature originating from Asia (Antonaccio and Botchkovar 2015; Heberton and Jou 2013; Suzuki et al. 2018).

### ***Reconstructing Criminology***

Asian criminology has made many efforts to reconstruct criminology based on the insights gained from salient features in Asian contexts. Specifically, at the institutional level, academic societies and other academic networks, academic journals and educational programs have been established to facilitate communication between the Asian criminological community and the rest of the world. At the methodological level, Asian criminology adopts the current methods widely used in criminology, emphasising empirical research, such as quantitative and qualitative research methods and attaching importance to evidence-based analysis. However, the most prominent contribution of Asian criminology lies in its theoretical contributions. The core component of the Asian criminological paradigm is its key concepts and theories, as well as its research strategies and methods.

The concept of Asian criminology has been developed and perfected since Liu first proposed it in his article, 'Asian Criminology-Challenges, Opportunities and Directions' in 2009, and has established itself as a recognised theoretical system and methodological toolbox. Some scholars from outside Asia have acknowledged the importance and growing contribution of Asian criminology to global criminological theory (Agnew 2015; Messner 2014; 2015; Sampson 2015). The theoretical framework of Asian criminology is developing continuously and dynamically. This section mainly reviews the theoretical paths proposed in Asian criminology.

Asian criminology initially emerged in response to the problem of the Western dominance in criminology and the marginalisation of non-Western criminology. In the 2009 article, Liu introduced the diversity and characteristics of culture and law, compared crime and its control in the Asian context with its Western counterparts and identified the challenges and opportunities these characteristics bring to Asian criminology. The article preliminarily put forward the concept of Asian criminology and the framework for developing Asian criminology. The concept of Asian criminology is based on the Asian context and emphasises the value of ideas and theories rooted in the Asian context that have been missed or ignored by conventional criminology (Liu 2022).

Thirteen years after the concept of Asian criminology was put forward, Liu (2022) further explained its meaning in a recent article and clarified the confusion and misunderstandings surrounding the concept. The scope of the Asian context is not limited to a geographical or group boundary but concerns more Asian content and knowledge. Methodologically, Asian criminology is a 'context-centered approach' (Liu 2021a; 2022a). This approach seeks to gain insights from the study of the Asian context and gain a new understanding of criminology from these facts. Liu's 2022 article further emphasised the mission of Asian criminology and discussed the future development of its approaches. As Zhong and Zhang (2021) commented, '[t]hese conceptual developments with insights from Asian contexts can make important contributions to the general knowledge of the social control of crime'.

The developmental path of Asian criminology is summarised in the ‘Asian criminological paradigm’ (Liu 2023). The framework of the Asian criminological paradigm is derived from the concepts and approaches of Asian criminology, which is defined as ‘a framework that consists of a set of relatively unified concepts, approaches, and institutionalisation of criminology, and which forms a common basis for dialogue, debate, and discussion, as well as some generally shared standards for evaluation of research and programs and a relatively clearer direction for advancement’ (Liu 2018). The establishment of this paradigm is based on the experience in the history of science that successful disciplines are usually supported by a unifying paradigm during their rapid development (Kuhn 1996) and on the combination of the characteristics of Asian diversity. The development of the Asian criminological paradigm has a three-stage path. The first stage is to test and examine most of the theories established and developed in the West in the Asian context and conditions, and to test their applicability to non-Western contexts. The second stage is to develop theoretical elaborations of the existing theories and revise them for application in the Asian context. The third and most promising phase is to propose new theories based on evidence found in the Asian context. New theories will enrich human knowledge and enhance criminology in broader contexts (Liu 2018; 2022; 2023).

After the concept of Asian criminology and the paradigm of Asian criminology was introduced in 2009, the concept was further developed in the field of criminal justice. The Asian criminological paradigm focused on explaining crime and criminal justice in Asia and put forward a hypothesis based on the historical experience of Asia that ‘[i]n Asian societies, there is a different objective than punishment. The purpose of the justice system is to heal society, provide compensation and restore harmony in social relations’ (Liu 2017). Based on this hypothesis, Asian criminologists have started to develop new theories (Zhong and Zhang 2021). A theory of relational justice was proposed with the mission of examining the criminal justice systems of Western and Asian societies from a cross-cultural perspective and systematically explaining the different concepts of justice. Liu (2014) initially introduced the theory of relational justice in the keynote speech at the Sixth Annual Conference of the Asian Criminological Society in Osaka in 2014 and formally detailed the theory in his article titled ‘Asian Paradigm Theory and Access to Justice’ published in 2016. The central argument of this article is that there are significant differences in the conceptions of justice under Western and Asian criminal justice systems and that these differences arise from differences in social organisation and cultural traditions (Liu 2016). The theory argues that ‘the Western concepts of crime and justice are individualistic concepts, and the Asian concepts of crime and justice are relational concepts, supported by different value systems’ (Liu 2016). In Liu’s (2014a) view, a central value of the concept of relational justice is truth, with a holistic goal of achieving a lasting harmonious relationship with peace and order. Liu further identified two ideal types of individualist justice and relationist justice in response to the individualistic concept in the Western context and the relational concept in the Asian context, which serve as ‘a conceptual and theoretical toolbox under the Asian criminological paradigm’ (Liu; 2017; 2018).

With the development of theory, the relationist justice theory has been further theorised and elaborated into the ‘relational theory’ (Liu 2017) and ‘relationism theory’ (Liu 2021a). The relationism theory constructs an ideal type–based model of how relational and individualistic justice affect the construction of a criminal justice system in the context of the interactions between personality traits and concepts of justice. In other words, relationism theory ‘constructs an abstract continuum with relationism justice as a pole at one end of the continuum and individualism justice as another pole at the other end’ (Liu 2018a).

The theoretical efforts in Asian criminology have been recognised and appreciated by many scholars. Braithwaite (2015) notes that theoretical developments ‘may be useful for constructing the kind of relational theory of crime control advocated by Liu’. As the ‘most vocal advocate’ (Moosavi 2018) of Asian criminology, Liu was invited to deliver a speech at Cambridge University on *A Theory of Relational Justice—Asian Criminology’s Approach to Decolonizing Criminology* (Liu 2021a), confirming the growing interest in this theory in Western countries.

### ***Some Potential Criticisms***

Unsurprisingly, there will be criticisms in the development of Asian criminology. Moosavi (2018) has expressed confusion about the concept of ‘Asian’, querying whether Asian criminology was produced by Asians, influenced by Asian culture, about Asia or a combination of all three. Further, Moosavi (2018) has raised concerns that Asian criminology is overly focused on East Asia and not representative of Asia. These criticisms can be summarised as the question of how to define ‘Asian’. Liu responded to this criticism in 2022, explaining that the concept of Asia does not represent geographical or group boundaries but emphasises context and in-depth content. Similarly, Asian criminologists do not necessarily have to be Asian or have any geographic connection to Asia but only need to be studying Asian criminology or criminal justice (Liu 2022). The boundaries of these geographical or group concepts are only labels for the more convenient expression of scholarly views and are not boundaries or divisions of knowledge.

Moreover, Moosavi (2018) warned of the risk of falling into another colonialism by overemphasising non-Western criminology or ignoring the contributions of the Western criminological paradigm. This kind of concern is mainly related to a lack of a deep understanding of the mission and development approaches of Asian criminology. Asian criminology recognises and appreciates



the achievements and knowledge of Western criminology. On this basis, Asian criminology relies on the Asian perspective to discover overlooked information in certain regions or groups in Asia and provides perspectives and knowledge from Asia for the development of global criminology (Liu 2022). Indeed, rather than create divisions, Asian criminology seeks to establish conversations with Western criminology, bringing new insights and knowledge from Asia to enhance general criminological knowledge.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has reviewed the theoretical development and theoretical contributions of Asian criminology. The emergence of Asian criminology was not accidental, but the product of an attempt to overcome an apparent weakness of the discipline of criminology, as it is dominated by Western criminology and the marginalisation of non-Western criminology. The diversity of Asian contexts and the appropriate approach form key theoretical foundations of Asian criminology. These contextual features and the context-focused approach offer great advantages and opportunities to advance the criminological discipline. Asian criminology has developed rapidly under the theoretical framework of the Asian criminological paradigm, and has made great theoretical contributions to non-Western criminology, the revision of Western criminological theory and global comparative criminology. These theoretical contributions represent productive responses to the call to correct the weakness of Western-dominated discipline and the call by prominent criminologists to further criminological theories with Asian criminology. The future theoretical contributions will continue to move forward along the direction that Asian criminology sets out and will continue to build theoretical frameworks and strategic toolboxes associated with the Asian criminological paradigm to produce more theoretical contributions for reconstructing global criminology.

*Correspondence:* Jianhong Liu, Ph.D. Distinguished Professor Faculty of Law, University of Macau, Macau.  
[jliu@um.edu.mo](mailto:jliu@um.edu.mo)

## References

- Aas F (2012) The Earth is one but the world is not: Criminological theory and its geopolitical divisions. *Theoretical Criminology* 16(1): 5–20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362480611433433>
- Agnew R (2015) Using general strain theory to explain crime in Asian societies. *Asian Journal of Criminology* 10: 131–147. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11417-014-9198-2>
- Agozino B and Pfohl S (2003) *Counter-colonial criminology: A critique of imperialist reason*. London: Pluto Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt18fsbt7>
- Alfaro D (1981) Report on the relationship between child abuse and neglect and later socially deviant behavior. In R J Hunner and Y E Walker (eds) *Exploring the relationship between child abuse and delinquency*: 175–219. Montclair, NJ: Allanheld Osmun.
- Aliverti A, Carvalho H, Chamberlen A and Sozzo M (2021) Decolonizing the criminal question. *Punishment and Society* 23: 297–316. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14624745211020585>
- Antonaccio O and Botchkovar EV (2015) What international research has told us about criminological theory. In Piquero A R (ed) *The handbook of criminological theory*: 475–496. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118512449.ch24>
- Belknap J (2016) Asian criminology's expansion and advancement of research and crime control practices. *Asian Journal of Criminology* 11: 249–264. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11417-016-9239-0>
- Blagg H and Anthony T (2019) *Decolonising criminology: Imagining justice in a postcolonial world*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-53247-3>
- Braithwaite J (2015) Rethinking criminology through radical diversity in Asian reconciliation. *Asian Journal of Criminology* 10: 183–191. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11417-014-9200-z>
- Carrington K (2017) Asian criminology and southern epistemologies. In Liu J, Lennon M T and Chang Y C (eds) *Comparative criminology in Asia*: 61–69. Switzerland: Springer International. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-54942-2\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-54942-2_5)
- Carrington K, Hogg R, Scott, J and Sozzo M (2018) Criminology, southern theory and cognitive justice. In Carrington K, Hogg R, Scott J and Sozzo M (eds) *The Palgrave handbook of criminology and the global south*: 3–17. Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-65021-0>
- Carrington K, Hogg R, Scott J, Sozzo M and Walters R (2019) *Southern criminology*. New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315622040-6>
- Carrington K, Hogg R and Sozzo M (2016) Southern criminology. *The British Journal of Criminology* 56: 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azv083>
- Cohen P and Brook J (1994) The reciprocal influence of punishment and child disorder. In J McCord (ed.) *Coercion and punishment in long-term perspectives*: 154–164. New York: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511527906.009>
- Cohen S (1988) *Against criminology*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.
- Connell R (2007) *Southern theory: The global dynamics of knowledge in social science*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Connell R (2014) Using southern theory: Decolonizing social thought in theory, research and application. *Planning Theory* 13: 210–223. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1473095213499216>
- Cunneen C (2011) Postcolonial perspectives for criminology. In Bosworth M and Hoyle C (eds) *What is criminology?*: 249–266. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199571826.003.0018>
- Dimou E (2021) Decolonizing Southern criminology: What can the “decolonial option” tell us about challenging the modern/colonial foundations of criminology? *Critical Criminology* 29: 431–450. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10612-021-09579-9>
- França LA (2021) How international should international criminology be? *International Criminology* 1: 46–57. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43576-021-00008-z>
- Gao Y, Wong S and Yu Y (2016) Maltreatment and delinquency in China: Examining and extending the intervening process of general strain theory. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 60: 38–61. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624x14547495>
- Hartjen A and Kethineni S (1999) Exploring the etiology of delinquency across country and gender. *Journal of Crime and Justice* 22: 55–90. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0735648x.1999.9721095>
- He D and Messner SF (2020) Social disorganization theory in contemporary China: A review of the evidence and directions for future research. *Asian Journal of Criminology* 15: 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11417-019-09291-2>
- Hebenton B and Jou S (2013) Taiwan's criminological ‘footprint’—a review and analysis of English-language publication trends for Taiwan and selected Asian comparators (2000–2010). *International Journal of Comparative and Applied Criminal Justice* 37: 159–173. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01924036.2012.714532>
- Heidensohn F (2008) International comparative research in criminology. In King R and Wincup E (eds) *Doing research on crime and justice*: 199–228. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Gottfredson MR and Hirschi T (1990) *A general theory of crime*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781503621794>
- Hwang S and Akers RL (2017) Substance use by Korean adolescents: A cross-cultural test of social learning, social bonding, and self-control theories. In Akers R L and Jensen G F (eds) *Social learning theory and the explanation of crime*: 39–63. New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315129594-2>
- Jiang S, Land KC and Wang J (2013) Social ties, collective efficacy and perceived neighborhood property crime in Guangzhou, China. *Asian Journal of Criminology* 8: 207–223. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11417-013-9167-1>
- Jo Y and Zhang Y (2012) The stability of self-control: A group-based approach. *Asian Journal of Criminology* 7: 173–191. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11417-012-9128-0>
- Jo Y and Zhang Y (2014) Parenting, self-control, and delinquency: Examining the applicability of Gottfredson and Hirschi's general theory of crime to South Korean youth. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 58: 1340–1363. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624x13494670>
- Johnson DT (2002) *The Japanese way of justice: Prosecuting crime in Japan*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Karstedt S (2001) Comparing cultures, comparing crime: Challenges, prospects and problems for a global criminology. *Crime, Law and Social Change* 36: 285–308. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1012223323445>
- Kim E, Kwak DH and Yun M (2010) Investigating the effects of peer association and parental influence on adolescent substance use: A study of adolescents in South Korea. *Journal of Criminal Justice* 38: 17–24. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2009.11.003>
- Kitayama S and Uchida Y (2005) Interdependent agency: An alternative system for action. In RM Sorrentino, D Cohen, JM Olson and MP Zanna (eds) *Cultural and social behavior: The Ontario symposium*: 137–164. NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Kitossa T (2012) Criminology and colonialism: Counter colonial criminology and the Canadian context. *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 4: 204–226
- Kobayashi E, Akers RL and Sharp SF (2011) Attitude transference and deviant behavior: A comparative study in Japan and the United States. *Deviant Behavior* 32: 405–440. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01639621003776002>
- Kuhn TS (1996) *The structure of scientific revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lauritsen JL (2001) The social ecology of violent victimization: Individual and contextual effects in the NCVS. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 17: 3–32. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1007574114380>
- Lin W H (2012) General strain theory in Taiwan: A latent growth curve modeling approach. *Asian Journal of Criminology* 7:37–54. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11417-010-9101-8>
- Liu J (2009) Asian criminology—challenges, opportunities, and directions. *Asian Journal of criminology* 4: 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11417-009-9066-7>
- Liu J (2014) Culture and criminal justice—A theory of relational justice [Keynote speech]. The 6th annual conference of Asian Criminological Society, Osaka, Japan, June 27–29, 2014.
- Liu J (2014a) Culture and comparative criminal justice—An analytical framework. Annual Conference of European Society of Criminology, Czech Republic, September 10–13, 2014.
- Liu J (2016) Asian paradigm theory and access to justice. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* 32: 205–224. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1043986216656681>
- Liu J (2017) The new Asian paradigm: A relational approach. In JH Liu, M Travers and Lennon YC Chang (eds) *Comparative criminology in Asia*: 17–32. Switzerland: Springer International Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-54942-2\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-54942-2_2)
- Liu J (2018) The Asian criminological paradigm and how it links global north and south: Combining an extended conceptual tool box from the north with innovative Asian contexts. In Carrington K, Hogg R, Scott J and Sozzo M (eds) *The Palgrave handbook of criminology and the global south*: 61–82. Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-65021-0\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-65021-0_4)
- Liu J (2018a) A theory of relational justice – a cultural perspective. The luncheon seminar held by the Department of Sociology, Macau, October 17, 2018.
- Liu J (2021) Asian criminology and non-western criminology: Challenges, strategies, and directions. *International Annals of Criminology* 59: 103–118. <https://doi.org/10.1017/cri.2021.16>
- Liu J (2021a) A theory of relational justice—Asian Criminology's approach to decolonizing criminology. Invited online seminar by the Institute of Criminology, Faculty of Law, Cambridge University, May 28, 2021.
- Liu J (2022) Asian criminology—Elaborating its concepts, approach, paradigm, and future. *Asian Journal of Criminology*: 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11417-022-09375-6>
- Liu J (2022a) The state of criminology in East Asia. Invited online seminar by Faculty of Law, Oxford University, June 22, 2022.
- Liu J (2023) Asian criminology—concept and development. *The Criminologist by American Society of Criminology* 49(1): 42–43.

- Liu J, Heberton B and Jou S (2013) Progress of Asian criminology: Editors' introduction. In JH Liu, BH and Susyan Jou (eds) *Handbook of Asian criminology: 1–7*. New York: Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-5218-8\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-5218-8_1)
- Liu J, Travers M and Chang LY (2017) *Comparative criminology in Asia*. Switzerland: Springer International Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-54942-2>
- Matthews R (2017) False starts, wrong turns and dead ends: Reflections on recent developments in criminology. *Critical Criminology* 25: 577–591. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10612-017-9372-9>
- Messner SF (2014) Social institutions, theory development, and the promise of comparative criminological research. *Asian Journal of Criminology* 9: 49–63. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11417-013-9175-1>
- Messner SF (2015) When west meets east: Generalizing theory and expanding the conceptual toolkit of criminology. *Asian Journal of Criminology* 10: 117–129. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11417-014-9197-3>
- Messner SF, Lu Z, Zhang L and Liu J (2007). Risks of criminal victimization in contemporary urban China: An application of lifestyle/routine activities theory. *Justice Quarterly* 24: 496–522. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07418820701485429>
- Moon B, Blurton D and McCluskey JD (2008) General strain theory and delinquency: Focusing on the influences of key strain characteristics on delinquency. *Crime & Delinquency* 54: 582–613. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128707301627>
- Moosavi L (2018) A friendly critique of 'Asian criminology' and 'Southern criminology'. *The British Journal of Criminology* 59: 257–275. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azy045>
- Moosavi L (2019) Decolonising criminology: Syed Hussein Alatas on crimes of the powerful. *Critical Criminology* 27: 229–242. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10612-018-9396-9>
- Nelken D (2010) *Comparative criminal justice: Making sense of difference*. London: Sage. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446251546>
- Sampson RJ (2015) Crime and the life course in a changing world: Insights from Chicago and implications for global criminology. *Asian Journal of Criminology* 10: 277–286. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11417-015-9220-3>
- Smandych R and Larsen N (2008) *Global criminology and criminal justice: Current issues and perspectives*. Canada: Higher Education.
- Suzuki M, Pai CF and Islam MJ (2018) Systematic quantitative literature review on criminological theories in Asia. *Asian Journal of Criminology* 13: 129–151. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11417-017-9262-9>
- Walklate S (2016) Whither criminology: Its global futures? *Asian Journal of Criminology* 11: 47–59. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11417-015-9223-0>
- Wang GT, Qiao H, Hong S and Zhang J (2002) Adolescent social bond, self-control and deviant behavior in China. *International Journal of Contemporary Sociology* 39: 52–68.
- Wang K, Ma Z and Xia Y (2022) General strain theory and corruption among grassroots Chinese public officials: A mixed-method study. *Deviant Behavior* 43: 472–489. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2020.1839818>
- Widom CS (1989) Child abuse, neglect, and violent criminal behavior. *Criminology* 27: 251–271. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9125.1989.tb01032.x>
- Young J (2011) *The criminological imagination*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Zhong H and Zhang SY (2021) Social control of crime in Asia. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Criminology and Criminal Justice*: 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264079.013.623>