



# Social Disorganization Theory in Contemporary China: a Review of the Evidence and Directions for Future Research

Dan He<sup>1</sup>  · Steven F. Messner<sup>1</sup>

Received: 9 October 2018 / Revised: 14 March 2019 / Accepted: 10 May 2019 / Published online: 1 June 2019

© Springer Nature B.V. 2019

## Abstract

This paper assesses and synthesizes the cumulative results from the empirical research on social disorganization and crime-related phenomena at the neighborhood level in China. Our review identified 17 relevant quantitative, qualitative, and mixed method studies published in journals and books from the late-1990s to date. Our goal is to take stock of the cumulative knowledge to inspire future research in China, thereby advancing social disorganization theory. We synthesize the main findings about the effects of structural factors and intervening mechanisms from quantitative studies, summarize briefly conclusions from qualitative and mixed methods research to crosscheck our synthesis, and identify methodological and theoretical limitations. Our conclusions point to promising directions for future research with special attention to prospects for theory development through comparative criminological inquiry.

**Keywords** Social disorganization theory · China · Empirical research · Literature review

## Introduction

According to the formulation from the classical Chicago School, social disorganization emerges when social change undermines and destroys “the authority and influence of an earlier culture and system of social control” (Park 1985:47). For the last three decades, social changes in China resulting from economic reform, an open-door policy, urbanization, and housing reform have altered the traditional system of social relations (Curran 1998) and generated increasing crime rates (Liu and Messner 2001). Criminologists have accordingly recognized the potential utility of China as a strategic setting for the application of social disorganization theory, and the empirical research has been accumulating for over two decades. When looking to the past, it is perhaps too

---

✉ Dan He  
dhe5@albany.edu

<sup>1</sup> Department of Sociology, University at Albany, State University of New York, 351 Arts & Science Bldg, 1400 Washington Avenue, Albany, NY 12222, USA

easy to be critical of flaws in research when judged by contemporary standards. Before making this type of judgment, however, we should be mindful of the constraints on research associated with the Chinese context. Now is a propitious time to learn from both the insights and limitations of predecessors who have pioneered criminological research in China.

The Chinese case is also quite instructive about a field of long standing interest in criminology—cross-cultural research. Social disorganization theory has developed over a century in the West, yet there remains substantive and methodological deficiencies in the theoretical and empirical work (Kubrin 2009; Kubrin and Weitzer 2003; Messner and Zimmerman 2012). Conducting research beyond the Western countries can change the “parochialism of past theoretical effort,” to borrow a phrase from Bennett (1980:265), and it can enrich our knowledge about universal laws of human conduct. By traversing the national boundaries and addressing distinctive values, institutions, and practices in an alien social-cultural context, criminologists can examine the applicability of theory and get inspiration for theoretical elaborations (Liu et al. 2017:196).

The purpose of this paper is to assess and synthesize the results of the empirical studies on social disorganization theory and crime-related phenomena at the neighborhood level in China. Our overarching thesis is that insights can be extracted from these studies to help realize the promise of transforming social disorganization theory in fundamental ways. To orient our discussion, we will begin with a brief overview of social disorganization theory in the West and extant research in China. Then, we will synthesize the main findings guided by the theoretical framework of social disorganization theory. We will also identify a set of methodological and theoretical problems that limit our capacity to draw firm conclusions. Finally, we will highlight promising directions for future research.

## Social Disorganization Theory in the West

The theoretical foundations of community and ecological approaches to the study of crime emerged with the classical Chicago School of sociology. Researchers identified social structural characteristics that aligned with high rates of crime and other social problems (Kornhauser 1978; Park and Burgess 1925; Shaw and McKay 1942, 1972). The most prominent of these social structural characteristics were low economic status, high residential mobility, and high racial/ethnic heterogeneity. The Chicago School researchers concluded that the empirical associations between indicators of social structure and crime/disorder supported their theoretical claims about the effects of social disorganization, defined as the incapacity and inability of residents to implement and maintain public norms (Bursik 1988; Sampson and Groves 1989; Shaw and McKay 1942, 1972).

A fundamental limitation of the Chicago School tradition was the confusion of the presumed outcomes of social disorganization with disorganization itself (Bursik 1988). To address this limitation, “neo” social disorganization perspectives emerged that focus on explicating the processes that link the structural characteristics of neighborhoods with crime. One approach is the systemic model formulated by Bursik and Grasmick (1993), which redefines social disorganization “as the regulatory capacity of a neighborhood that is imbedded in the structure of that community’s affiliational, interactional and communication ties among its residents” (Bursik 1999: 86). The systemic model provides a theoretical framework that explicitly identifies intervening mechanisms (Kubrin and Weitzer 2003; Messner and Zimmerman 2012). This approach continues to guide Western research on social disorganization (e.g., Browning et al. 2004; Steenbeek and Hipp 2011; Wickes and Hipp 2018; Velez 2001).

The role of social ties that underpin spheres of social control as explicated in the original systemic model, however, has been challenged by findings that social ties are not inherently pro-social (e.g., Warner and Rountree 1997; Browning et al. 2004), and that weak ties can also be efficacious (e.g., Bellair 1997). To further elaborate the ways in which informal control can be built upon social networks, Bursik (1999) articulated a social capital theory that differentiates the “ties per se” and the resources transmitted through social ties. Despite critiques in the literature, variants of social capital theory continue to influence research on social disorganization (Sampson 2012; Sampson et al. 2002).

What is largely missing in the systemic model and social capital theory is the purposive action residents adopt to confront neighborhood problems (Kubrin and Weitzer 2003; Taylor 2002). This has stimulated another variant of “neo” social disorganization theory that assigns a key role to the concept of “collective efficacy.” Spearheaded by Sampson and his colleagues, collective efficacy differentiates neighborhoods with reference to the mutual trust among neighbors and their willingness to intervene for the common good (Sampson et al. 1997). Research has provided consistent supportive evidence for the effect of collective efficacy on crime at the neighborhood level (Sampson et al. 1997; Kubrin and Weitzer 2003; Sampson 2012), revealing that collective efficacy operates as a particularly important intervening mechanism that explains the effects of structural factors and social ties on crime (Morenoff et al. 2001; see Sampson 2006/2009 for a review).

Another important development in recent years has been the “process turn” in neighborhood effects research. This approach seeks to revitalize the core theoretical spirit of the Chicago School, which focused on “social structure embedded in time, a structure in process” (Abbott 1997: 1158). The “process approach” puts forth a unifying framework that links higher-order structures, neighborhoods, and the micro foundations of action, with an emphasis on elaborating “the middle range of neighborhood structures and processes that mediate and are mediated by individual and societal forces” (Sampson 2019: 9; see also Sampson 2012).

These theoretical elaborations of traditional social disorganization theory in the West have been accompanied by research findings that call for more nuanced interpretations of the structural correlates of neighborhood social control and crime. For example, concentrated poverty in some racial minority neighborhoods does not necessarily cause high crime rates because extended kinship and friendship networks within these neighborhoods often decrease residents’ motivation and opportunity to engage in delinquency and crime (Sampson et al. 2005). As another example, the prediction in classical social disorganization theory that high levels of immigration would be associated with high rates of crime has been challenged empirically. This has stimulated the emergence of the immigrant revitalization perspective, which can account for relatively low levels of crime in neighborhoods with high concentrations of immigrants (Kubrin 2009).

Theorizing and empirical research on social disorganization in the West has thus evolved considerably since the inception of this perspective in the Chicago School. Recent formulations direct attention to both features of the social structures of neighborhoods and the social processes that accompany them that are hypothesized to be conducive to crime. The research in China informed by the general social disorganization perspective has focused on these social structural conditions and concomitant processes, adapting them to the Chinese context as appropriate. We have accordingly organized our compilation of empirical findings with reference to social structural conditions and intervening processes. As our review reveals, several studies have explicitly attended to both types of variables in their statistical models.

## Search Strategy

We performed a systematic search for studies that are relevant to social disorganization theory and that investigated variations in crime-related phenomena, such as criminal offenses, victimizations, and disorder across ecologically defined units of analysis (e.g., neighborhoods, streets) in China. We initially searched with keywords using the following combinations: (Abstract for social disorganization theory or social disorganization) AND (Abstract for China or Chinese) AND (Abstract for crime or offense or delinquency or victimization or disorder) at two databases that cover most of the relevant studies in sociology and criminology: Sociological Abstracts and Criminal Justice Abstracts. After conducting our review in this manner, however, we found very few empirical studies conducted in China. Moreover, this criterion excluded many studies that did not specify the theory but actually examined the phenomena of interest.

We thus cast a wider net to capture empirical studies of crime-related phenomena at the neighborhood-level in China, as long as they examined some dimensions of neighborhood characteristics or intervening social processes. First, we searched with keywords using the following combination: (Abstract for neighborhood or neighborhoods or community or communities) AND (Abstract for China or Chinese) AND (Abstract for crime or offense or delinquency or victimization or disorder) at Sociological Abstracts and Criminal Justice Abstracts. We then searched for articles published in Chinese journals in a database that includes the most comprehensive academic journal list in China: Cnki (*zhongguo zhiwang*) with keywords using the following combination: (Abstract/All Text for social disorganization (*shehui jiezhu* or *shehui jieti*) AND (Abstract/All Text for crime or offense or delinquency or victimization or disorder (*fanzui/beihai/shixu*)).<sup>1</sup> The literature search was conducted between April and July 2018. After removing duplicates and filtering articles by reading full text, we identified 9 original empirical studies in English and 4 in Chinese that meet our selection criterion. To get a comprehensive literature list, we also took advantage of the references of identified articles, and added 4 more studies published as book chapters or in other databases beyond our search scope.

**Caveats** To formulate a coherent synthesis, we focus on the empirical studies conducted in Mainland China. We aimed to take stock of the cumulative knowledge generated from original empirical research that has met the rigorous standards of academic research and yielded final results, so our search scope is limited to literature published in books and academic journals, and excludes the studies in progress and those not readily available to the public, such as presentations at conferences, or working reports from administrative sources.

## Taking Stock

### Overview of the Extant Research

We briefly summarize the identified studies and provide an overview in Appendix 1 Table 3. From the perspectives of research sites, research design, and research questions, we can sketch

---

<sup>1</sup> We used the same combination of keywords in the Chinese database as we did in the two English databases, and got voluminous articles, most of which were irrelevant to social disorganization theory or did not examine the phenomena of our interest. Thus, we changed the search strategy by using a different combination, and also expanded the search scope to all text besides the abstract to get as many relevant studies as possible.

a general picture of the empirical research on social disorganization and crime-related phenomena at the neighborhood-level in China.

**Geographic Distribution and Temporal Change of Research** The research starts from late 1990s, the early phase of economic reform and urbanization, and then spurts in 2010s, when half of the population has been urbanized in China.<sup>2</sup> Studies are clustered in the cities mainly situated in the Eastern and Southern China. Guangzhou, the vanguard city of economic reform and open door policy, accounts for about one third of the studies.

**Research Methods** Over two thirds of the studies apply quantitative methods. The survey approach is the most widely used tool to collect data, followed by existing statistics, documents, and secondary data analysis. Out of eight quantitative studies whose dependent variables are crime or victimization rates, half acquired the data from surveys, and only three from official records.

**Research Focus** Based on research design and questions, the extant research can be classified into the following six categories: (a) formulating hypotheses, and directly assessing the applicability of the theory by analyzing data from surveys (Lu and Miethe 2001; Zhang et al. 2007; Jiang et al. 2010; Jiang et al. 2013; Messner et al. 2017; Zhang et al. 2017); (b) examining the spatial distribution of crime, and then assessing if the covariates identified by the theory are related to the spatial patterns (Song and Liu 2013; Liu et al. 2016; Liu and Zhu 2016); (c) comparing different types of neighborhoods, and utilizing the factors proposed by the theory to account for the differences (Zhong 2009; Xiong 2016); (d) focusing on one particular area and applying the theory to explain the phenomena of social disorganization in the area of interest (Liu 2010; Mao and Jin 2014; Cui and Shi 2017); (e) describing and assessing the neighborhood-based crime prevention programs (Situ and Liu 1996; Zhong and Broadhurst 2007); and (f) using the structural covariates of social disorganization to predict crime rates and identify high risk areas (Wang et al. 2017).

## Summary of Results

The spatial analyses have documented a consistent spatial pattern of crime in contemporary urban China such that crime tends to decline with increasing distance from the downtown towards the periphery in the city; it is clustered in the areas where the land is used for business and public transportation, and also concentrated in the zones in the suburbs which have just completed or are undergoing the transition from rural to urban neighborhoods. These spatial patterns in the Chinese context are in many respects similar to those in Western cities, which lends credibility to social disorganization theory.

In Tables 1 and 2, we summarize the major findings from quantitative studies, organized with reference to findings that pertain to the effects of neighborhood structural factors and

<sup>2</sup> According to the Fifth Census, the nation-wide average of urbanization rate was about 36% in 2000. In 2011, the annual report from National Bureau of Statistics indicated that it had exceeded 50%. Data resources: National Bureau of Statistics of China.

Fifth Census: <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/renkoupucha/2000pucha/html/append21.htm>

Annual report in 2011: [http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/tjgb/ndtjgb/qgndtjgb/201202/t20120222\\_30026.html](http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/tjgb/ndtjgb/qgndtjgb/201202/t20120222_30026.html)

Last retrieved on September 23, 2018.

**Table 1** Summary of main findings from quantitative studies—effects of structural factors

Location	Study	Poverty	Residential stability	Rural migration	Other structural factors
Tianjin	Zhang et al. (2007) Messner et al. (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ (n.s.) burglary risk, before and after controlling for neighborhood effects</li> <li>■ (n.s.) collective efficacy</li> <li>■ (n.s.) property victimization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ (+) burglary risk, even stronger after controlling for neighborhood effects</li> <li>■ (n.s.) property victimization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ (n.s.) burglary risk, before and after controlling for neighborhood effects</li> </ul>	
Guangzhou	Zhang et al. (2017) Jiang et al. (2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ (n.s.) perceived total disorder/criminal activity/social disorder/physical disorder</li> <li>■ SES (n.s.) informal control</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ (n.s.) perceived total disorder/criminal activity/social disorder/physical disorder</li> <li>■ (+) informal control, not mediated by social ties and neighborhood attachment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ (n.s.) perceived total disorder/criminal activity/social disorder/physical disorder</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Political capital</li> <li>■ (-) perceived physical disorder</li> </ul>
Changchun	Jiang et al. (2013) Song and Liu (2013) Liu et al. (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ (+) perceived property crime, mediated by neighborhood social process</li> <li>■ Concentrated disadvantage (+) property crime</li> <li>■ Concentrated affluence (-) violent crime</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ (-) perceived property crime, not mediated by neighborhood social process</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(n.s.) on property crime:</li> <li>■ Urban residents</li> <li>■ Bachelor's degrees or higher</li> <li>■ population density (+) violent crime</li> </ul>
Wenzhou	Mao and Jin (2014)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ (n.s.) victimization</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On victimization:</li> <li>■ Fluency of local dialect (+)</li> <li>■ Living with family (-)</li> <li>■ Satisfaction with neighborhood infrastructure and recreational facilities (n.s.)</li> </ul>
Wuhan	Liu and Zhu (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ SES (n.s.) burglary risks</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On burglary risks:</li> <li>■ population density (-)</li> <li>■ Bar density (+)</li> <li>■ Department store density (+)</li> </ul>

The summary in Table 1 and Table 2 does not include one study in Guangzhou conducted by Wang et al. (2017) because it used the structural factors and socio-demographic data to predict crime rather than examining the effects of these factors on crime. "n.s." indicates the relationship between the two variables is not statistically significant. The relationship between two variables that is significantly positive/negative is denoted by +/–

**Table 2** Summary of main findings from quantitative studies—effects of social processes and other covariates

Location	Study	Collective efficacy	Semi-public control	Public control	Other covariates
Shanghai	Lu and Miethel (2001)				Community integration ■ (+)effectiveness of informal/ formal control
Tianjin	Zhang et al. (2007)	■ (-)burglary risk	■ (n.s.)burglary risk	■ (-) burglary risk	
	Messner et al. (2017)	■ (n.s.)property victimization On semi-public control: ■ Social cohesion(+) ■ Intervention(-)	On property victimization ■ <i>Tiao-jie</i> (-) ■ <i>Bang-jiao</i> (-) ■ Neighborhood watch (-) (+)perceived total disorder/ criminal activity/ social disorder/ physical disorder	■ (n.s.)property victimization	
	Zhang et al. (2017)	■ (-)perceived social disorder ■ (n.s.) perceived total disorder/ criminal activity/ physical disorder		■ (-)perceived total disorder/ criminal activity/ social disorder/ physical disorder	Market-based control ■ (-)perceived physical disorder ■ (n.s.)perceived total disorder/criminal activity/ social disorder
Guangzhou	Jiang et al. (2010)				On informal control: ■ Social ties(n.s.) ■ Community attachment(n.s.) ■ Satisfaction with police(+) ■ Legal cynicism(n.s.) ■ Social ties(n.s.) perceived property crime, even controlling for collective efficacy
	Jiang et al. (2013)	■ (-)perceived property crime	■ (-)perceived property crime	■ (n.s.)perceived property crime	
Changchun	Liu et al. (2016)	■ (-)violent crime			
Wenzhou	Mao and Jin (2014)				
Wuhan	Liu and Zhu (2016)			■ (n.s.)burglary	On victimization: ■ Sense of neighborhood belonging(n.s.) ■ Satisfaction with public safety(n.s.)

neighborhood social process variables. To crosscheck our synthesis, we also summarize briefly conclusions from qualitative and mix-methods research (see Appendix 2 Table 4). We refer the reader to these tables for detailed findings of each study.

**Mixed Evidence Linking Neighborhood Characteristics to Crime-Related Phenomena** The traditional structural predictors of social disorganization in the West, e.g., poverty, residential instability, and population heterogeneity (with rural migration as an analogue for racial heterogeneity in China) seem not to have the expected effects in Chinese urban neighborhoods. Even though a few quantitative studies yield results in the theoretically expected direction, the dominant pattern is that these factors do not exhibit consistent effects on outcome variables, e.g., crime, victimization, disorder. In addition, economically disadvantaged neighborhoods do not necessarily exhibit low levels of collective efficacy or informal control (social process variables).<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the study in Tianjin even reveals a positive effect of residential stability on burglary risks, opposite to theoretical expectations and generally reported findings in the West.

Although the quantitative research does not accord very well with predictions derived from traditional social disorganization theory, the findings from the qualitative and mixed-methods research have revealed images of neighborhood differentiation reasonably consistent with this perspective. Those studies have discovered that some structural factors, including poverty, high population turnover, rural migrants, are the plausible correlates of social disorganization processes. The spatial analyses have also identified hot spots of crime, some of which correspond to the urban areas with concentrated poverty as manifested in the Chinese context, e.g., traditional old housing areas in the city center, “urban villages” (see Wang 2004: 52–56). Some researchers focus on “urban villages” with concentrations of rural migrants after observing the extraordinarily high crime rates in those areas (e.g., Liu 2010; Cui and Shi 2017).

Besides the commonly examined structural factors, researchers have also explored other neighborhood-level covariates, e.g., political capital, education, population density, fluency of local dialect, land-use. Political capital has been found to reduce physical disorder in Tianjin, and it has been characterized as bridging social capital that benefits crime prevention programs in Shenzhen. Neighborhoods that have high levels of population density are reported to have reduced burglary risks in Wuhan, while increasing violent crime rates in Changchun. In Wenzhou, the fluency of local dialect that should have increased interaction among residents and enhanced informal control in the neighborhood unexpectedly increased victimization.<sup>4</sup> Only with respect to the use of public space can we identify a preliminary pattern that commercialized land use increases victimization and crime rates.

<sup>3</sup> As noted above, the relationship between poverty and neighborhood crime rates in the West is more complicated than depicted in the classical social disorganization perspective. For example, Sampson’s observations on Mexican communities reveal that although such communities are characterized with concentrated poverty, the extended kinship and friendship networks within neighborhoods provide various aspects of protection to these newcomers who have very low language and working skills in the hosting area and thus, decreased motivation and opportunity to engage in delinquency and crime (Sampson et al. 2005).

<sup>4</sup> One potential explanation provided by the authors to the peculiar finding is residents who cannot speak fluently local dialects have limited connection with others outside of the neighborhoods, thereby reducing their exposure to risk of crime. Recent findings on migrants’ everyday life experiences in Wenzhou have identified the socio-spatial segregation in terms of spaces of work, housing and commuting, consumption, leisure, and social networks (Lin and Gaubatz 2017). Such soio-spatial segregation may serve as a protector in Chinese context as observed in the West (Sampson et al. 2005).



**Discoveries About “Neighborhood Effects”** Early research in Tianjin found that the neighborhood social control variables account for an appreciable proportion of the variance of crime rates across neighborhoods not explained by compositional differences and the neighborhood structural variables, demonstrating the explanatory power of neighborhood effects. Only a few following studies, however, have considered the complete range of neighborhood social processes. Most studies focus on only one facet or two. Consequently, our synthesis here is preliminary and tentative.

- A. Informal control. The effect of informal control, e.g., social ties, collective efficacy, is generally consistent with theoretical hypotheses, even though there are minor exceptions.
- B. Public control. In research conducted in the 2000s, public control has the expected negative effect, but it exhibited null effects in most cases in 2010s. Some researchers speculated that reciprocal causal processes with counterbalancing implications might account for the null effect of public control (Messner et al. 2017), and findings from qualitative and mix-method research seem to corroborate the conjecture. Increasing the presence of police in neighborhoods is a conventional measure adopted by local governments to enhance neighborhood control and fight against crime (Situ and Liu 1996; Zhong and Broadhurst 2007), which means that public control is quite likely to be a response to crime in China.<sup>5</sup> As time goes by, public security agencies, due to limited resources, focus more on those neighborhoods with high crime rates or severe disorder, and withdraw police officers from the neighborhoods where the public order is well maintained. Thus, residents in the well-organized neighborhoods are likely to perceive a rare presence of police (Zhong 2009; Xiong 2016).
- C. Semi-public control. The activities performed by neighborhood committees have been conceptualized as “semi-public control” (or “semiformal control”) to capture the characteristics of neighborhood governance in China. Only research in Tianjin and Guangzhou has examined its effects (Zhang et al. 2007; Jiang et al. 2013; Messner et al. 2017; Zhang et al. 2017). The results are puzzling so that we can only generate a tentative synthesis. Unexpected by researchers, some research indicates that semi-public control has no contextual effect on victimization, and it is even surprisingly positively related to perceived disorder, such as social disorder and criminal activity. Zhang et al. (2017) suspected that neighborhood committees serves as “a key ‘communication vehicle’ that is likely to spread information about neighborhood disorderly conditions and the related work/activities to residents” (p. 640).

The qualitative research concerned with neighborhood committees has yielded mixed evidence. On the one hand, community-based prevention strategies necessitate active neighborhood committees to mobilize resources and disseminate information in the neighborhoods; on the other hand, the inability of neighborhood committees to implement those programs due to financial difficulty in disorganized neighborhoods implies that inaction of neighborhood committees would exacerbate the problems in the neighborhoods. Put another way, neighborhood committees mobilized by local governments to participate in crime control programs would become active insofar as they are able to secure resources; the more actively the neighborhood committees plays its role in crime control programs, the more likely crime-related phenomena would decrease, but residents would

---

<sup>5</sup> A personal consultation with a police officer working in a police station (*paichusuo*) of Beijing confirms this interpretation. It is a routine practice for local police station to review statistics of the numbers and types of offenses and crimes in each neighborhood within a jurisdiction every month and assign more police officers to the neighborhoods with higher crime rates, or initiate a campaign against the most common crimes.

get more information about these phenomena since neighborhood committees usually encourage residents to participate and guard the public space in the neighborhoods. However, the neighborhoods with inactive neighborhood committees due to a shortage of resources to adopt crime prevention activities would exhibit high levels of crime-related phenomena that can be perceived by residents in their daily lives, even if they do not get the information disseminated by the inactive neighborhood committees. Consequently, residents' perceptions of crime-related phenomena are not likely to depend solely on whether the neighborhood committees are active or not. An important take-away of qualitative and mixed-methods research that examined different facets of neighborhood committees is that they are versatile in urban neighborhood governance. Since few quantitative studies have been able to test the potentially widespread effects of neighborhood committees on neighborhood social control, our knowledge about the impact of semi-public control on crime-related phenomena is limited.

D. Market-based control. The involvement of the market in neighborhood control complicates the picture of urban governance in Chinese context. A few studies have shed light on the complexity of neighborhood control in China stimulated by the development of market-based control implemented by property management companies. Whereas market-based control has been shown to only affect physical disorder in Tianjin, the qualitative and mixed-method research in Guangzhou and Shenzhen has revealed its comprehensive impacts. The property management companies help to build gated neighborhoods and guard the places by security staff, which significantly reduces crime and victimization rates.

**Tentative Conclusions** Despite the inconsistencies noted above, it is possible to draw from tentative general conclusions from the research about neighborhood social processes in urban China: (a) the observed effect of interactions among residents on enhancing informal control appears to have become weaker over time, as reflected in the contrast between older studies and those conducted more recently<sup>6</sup>; (b) neighborhoods with high levels of social cohesion and social capital, especially bridging capital, are likely to possess active neighborhood committees that have the capacity to implement crime control activities, which may, in turn, enhance residents' abilities to exert informal control; (c) neighborhood-based crime prevention programs initiated by the local government and satisfactory service from the police may enhance residents' willingness to intervene in public affairs in the neighborhoods; (d) the role of the neighborhood committee and public security agency has diminished somewhat over time due to involvement of the property management company in neighborhood social control.

## Limitations

For over two decades, empirical research informed by the general social disorganization perspective has made rapid progress in China. Scholars have succeeded in collecting original data through the application of sophisticated survey designs. Some researchers have explicitly

<sup>6</sup> In late 1990s, the frequency of residents' interactions among neighbors had a positive effect on informal control in Shanghai's urban neighborhoods (Lu and Miethe 2001); One decade later in Guangzhou, it did not have significant relationship with informal control (Jiang et al. 2010).

taken into account the sensitivity of the theory to the institutional context and introduced new concepts to accommodate the Chinese context (e.g., Zhang et al. 2007; Jiang et al. 2010; Jiang et al. 2013; Messner et al. 2017; Zhang et al. 2017). Despite recent progress, however, several limitations remain.

## Geographic Coverage

Bursik (1988) identified some of the formidable challenges for any research informed by social disorganization theory. The collection of original data amenable to quantitative data analysis “entails a very intensive series of interviews, surveys, and/or fieldwork... The logistical and economic problems of such an approach are obvious in large metropolitan areas... Unfortunately, a full test of the model on the scale of the traditional studies will be impossible without an enormous outlay of funds for data collection by an interested funding agency” (p. 530). Information relevant to intervening neighborhood-level processes cannot be readily gained from administrative sources, and thus it usually is obtained through surveys. In China, researchers have to glean the measures of socio-demographic characteristics of residents typically available in census sources in the West from surveys due to confidentiality of most official data and administrative records in China. As a late-comer to global comparative criminology, the criminological research still develops “within the very particular regulatory context of China’s social, economic, and political trajectory,” which “provides contextual understanding and meaning for how criminological knowledge is produced” (Cao and Heberton 2018:5). Researchers are only able to conduct empirical research where they are good at dealing with the politics of gaining access and trust with either the study population or the gatekeepers of the data because of the sensitive nature of crime and social control in China.

The extant research is clustered in the cities that possess extremely higher urbanization rates than the nationwide average.<sup>7</sup> The administrative experience and financial resources gained through urbanization and economic development differ across cities, and, in turn, determine the level of local governments’ involvement in neighborhood governance. Compared to other cities eager to urbanize the countryside and expand the urban territory, the municipal governments of advanced cities have begun to gentrify the neighborhoods and promoted good citizenship among the residents (e.g., Wei 2008; Yan and Deng 2014). As a result, the effects of some structural factors on outcome variables may be offset by the strong control on neighborhoods from local governments in advanced cities.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, researchers have not had the opportunity to study the distinct ecological patterns in those cities where local governments have not focused on community construction. Even among the cities with the same level of urbanization, the variation of administrative control can also change the ecological pattern of the city that may affect the distribution of crime-related phenomena. In cities with a more open economy, e.g., Guangzhou, Shenzhen, some structural factors, such as

<sup>7</sup> In 2000, the sizes of population urbanized in most research sites have exceeded the nation-wide average of 2010. Data resources: Fifth and Sixth Census released by National Bureau of Statistics of China.

Fifth Census data of provinces: [http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/tjgb/rkpcgb/dfkpcgb/index\\_2.html](http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/tjgb/rkpcgb/dfkpcgb/index_2.html)

Sixth Census: [http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/tjgb/rkpcgb/qgrkpcgb/201104/t20110428\\_30327.html](http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/tjgb/rkpcgb/qgrkpcgb/201104/t20110428_30327.html)

Last retrieved on September 24, 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Park (1929:30) recognized the potentially counterbalancing effect of administrative control on the differentiation of natural areas in the city. “In any case, it appears that when natural areas, rather than formal and administrative districts, are made the basis for statistics inquires, the different regions display unexpected and significant divergences; divergences which were concealed when the statistics were distributed over areas not naturally defined.”

income and socioeconomic status, may be more valid predictors for neighborhood differentiation than those in which state sectors still dominate, e.g., Beijing (Li 2005:157–160).

## Units of Analysis

As shown in Appendix 1 Table 3, some studies use streets (*jiedao*) as units of analysis, even though their ecological units of interest are neighborhoods (Song and Liu 2013; Liu et al. 2016). In China's urban areas, sub-district offices (*jiedao banshichu*) are set up as agencies of local governments of municipal districts or cities not divided into districts and are responsible for the administration of neighborhood committees within their jurisdictions.<sup>9</sup> Aggregation of data to the street level has broadened the geographic scope, but it may not direct researchers to the social reality most relevant to processes of social disorganization. Whereas most studies take “neighborhood” or “community” as the stated unit of analysis, the two words may represent distinct ecological units in China. Community, *shequ* in Chinese, is “generally describing the territory and people under the administration of a resident or community committee” (Tomba 2014:4). It is the ecological unit of research in Shanghai (Lu and Miethe 2001), Tianjin (Zhang et al. 2007; Messner et al. 2017; Zhang et al. 2017), and Guangzhou (Jiang et al. 2010; Jiang et al. 2013). Small area (*xiaoqu* in Chinese), “a residential compound, either private or run by a company” (Tomba 2014:4), is the unit of analysis in Xiong's (2016) research although she named it as neighborhood. Her field research included a *xiaoqu* governed by two neighborhood committees. The inconsistent use of “neighborhood” in extant research may be responsible for inconsistent and sometimes contradictory findings.

## Measurement

We summarize the measurements of key concepts used by quantitative studies in Appendix 3 Table 5. The conceptualization of some key variables is ambiguous and overlapping. For example, the survey item, “residents' interaction,” has been used to measure “neighborhood attachment” in Shanghai and “social ties” in Guangzhou. It is unclear whether researchers regarded the two as being identical in conceptual meaning, or treated them as two separate concepts with overlapping meaning. The item inconsistency may also produce uncertainty about the setting being assessed and have implications for research findings. Besides the reciprocal causal processes with counterbalancing implications noted above, we suspect that inconsistent survey instruments used to measure public control are also responsible for the mixed findings across studies. The survey items in the 2017 Tianjin research captured a broader scope of public control activities than one decade ago; how much policing and monitoring occur in the neighborhoods is definitely different from residents' satisfaction with police and perception of police presence. Consequently, although researchers use the same concept across studies, they actually refer to different facets of public control.

Some concepts with clear meaning and consistent indicators, e.g., rural migration, residential stability, semi-public control, crime and victimization rate, are measured by survey data aggregated from individual responses. Ecological constructs need not be merely the aggregate of individual properties, and the reliance on resident reports would possibly create a “same-source” bias (Raudenbush and Sampson 1999). The uncertainty of neighborhood residents

<sup>9</sup> See Article 68 of Organizational Law of the Local People's Congress and Local People's Governments of the PRC.

about survey research under Chinese social and political contexts may also entail a substantial proportion of “do not know” answers that affects data quality (Shen et al. 2018).

Moreover, concepts with Western operationalizations may not capture their distinct manifestations in the Chinese societal context, a point that has been recognized by scholars in the field (e.g., Zhang et al. 2007; Zhang et al. 2017). The reason why residential stability did not exhibit expected effects may be attributed to the distinct pattern of informal control in Chinese urban neighborhoods. Old neighborhoods, i.e., neighborhoods that have longer histories, may have longer traditions of activism and more experiences of solving problems, and thus are more capable of gaining support beyond neighborhood boundaries than younger neighborhoods. Considering the persistent existence of self-governance organizations and neighborhood committees that can strengthen informal control in the neighborhoods from the onset of neighborhood establishment, the traditions and experiences can be passed down to new residents and enhance residents’ sense of neighborhood identity via these organizations in a short time.<sup>10</sup> Thus, age of neighborhoods may affect the neighborhoods’ capacity to secure resources, and, in turn, solve the problems in China’s urban neighborhoods. Aggregated survey measures of respondents’ length of residence may not accurately capture the age of neighborhoods. Although some researchers have recognized the different manifestations of key concepts, e.g., collective efficacy, in the Chinese setting (see Messner et al. 2017), the cultural influences on measurement is clearly a critically important consideration.

## Comparative Criminology, Theory Development, and Directions for Future Research

When considering promising paths for future research on social disorganization processes and crime in China, it is useful to situate the research with reference to overarching goals of comparative criminology. In his seminal essay, Bennett (1980) proposed two approaches that guide comparative criminological research: the “evaluative” approach and the “generative” approach. The evaluative approach seeks to determine the scope conditions of theories and their generalizability across differing socio-cultural contexts. The overarching goal of the “generative” approach, in contrast, is to use research findings about processes in highly different socio-cultural contexts to generate more general explanations that can account for scope conditions—essentially to transform theory. These dual objectives can be, and often are, pursued in tandem. Transporting theory across socio-cultural boundaries is likely to stimulate the introduction of new concepts, which has the potential to facilitate the construction of more general, more universal theories.

The inconsistent findings in the literature pertaining to traditional hypotheses of social disorganization theory and generally reported results in the West raise questions about the feasibility of simply transporting the theoretical framework from the West to China. It is clear that researchers need to expand the conceptual toolkit to understand crime within non-Western contexts (Messner 2015). Indeed, as noted above, some researchers have taken pioneering efforts to formulate and incorporate new concepts that are faithful to the social realities in Chinese society, e.g., semi-public control and distinct forms of market-based control (Jiang et al. 2013; Messner et al. 2017; Zhang et al. 2007; Zhang et al. 2017). We consider below

<sup>10</sup> A study in Beijing has shown that neighborhood age has a significant positive relationship with the ability of homeowner associations to solve developer-related issues (Wang 2014).

some directions for future research that might enrich “evaluative” comparative research and further stimulate “generative” comparative research.

### Neighborhood Boundaries

Even though research on social disorganization has predominantly adopted the strategy of defining neighborhoods based on Census geography in the West, researchers have become more aware of the distinct influences of ecological units at different levels (e.g., Grannis 1998; Hipp and Boessen 2013). The key concepts in the various social disorganization perspectives, e.g., social ties, collective efficacy, are emergent properties generated from residents’ daily activities in a particular geographic locale (Ren and Kwan 2009). Some dependent variables, e.g., physical disorder, can be reliably measured at lower levels of aggregation, whereas others cannot, e.g., social disorder (Raudenbush and Sampson 1999). Thus, the conceptualization of neighborhoods should match the social reality experienced by residents.

Although the unit of analysis issue has attracted much serious attention in the West, it has not received as much in China. This is unfortunate because settlement patterns in China have become increasingly complex. The housing reform has led to a rise of gated residential spaces because real estate developers have been preoccupied with selling the ideal type of life style resulting from residential segregation, and the governments can tailor the provision of social services to different populations (Tomba 2014). “Boundaries determine membership: someone must be inside and someone outside. Boundaries also delineate space to facilitate the activities and purposes of political, economic, and social life” (Blakely and Snyder 1997:1).

Residents in the residential compound (*xiaoqu*) hire property management companies to clean and guard the public space within the area; they watch over the spaces inside the gate, and establish self-governance associations that only consist of homeowners living in the residential compound. Thus, the micro-ecology of the residential compound may bear directly on patterns of residents’ daily interaction. However, the community (*shequ*), composed of several residential compounds but governed by one neighborhood committee, is the basic ecological unit on which the Chinese government builds the infrastructural power at the grass-root level (Heberer and Göbel 2011). Residents in the same *shequ* have access to the same institutional resources, even though they live in different *xiaoqu*. The neighborhood committee is the organization that all residents can reach out to if they have any issues about the *shequ*; local public security agency also assigns police officers to each *shequ*. The institutional processes, compared to residents’ daily interaction, operate at a larger scale.

The peculiar features of residential segregation and neighborhood governance require researchers not only to define the neighborhood boundaries carefully but also to consider the analysis at multiple scales. Different crime processes could operate simultaneously at different spatial scales. Western research has documented that many neighborhood factors operate on the micro-scale, while others seem to have a much broader impact (Boessen and Hipp 2015). Extant studies in China have identified the ecological patterns of crime at the street level and several land-use factors relevant to the patterns (Liu and Zhu 2016; Xiong 2016). Thus, it is imperative to examine the scales at which various social control processes can be best measured.

## Temporal Dynamics

As recognized by Chicago School scholars, the ecological pattern of crime-related phenomena is attributed to “larger economic and social processes characterizing the history and growth of the city and the local communities which comprise it” (Shaw and Mckay 1969:14). Western scholars have developed dynamic models and initiated longitudinal research on social disorganization (e.g., Bellair 2000; Sampson et al. 2002; Kubrin and Weitzer 2003; Steenbeek and Hipp 2011; Hipp and Steenbeek 2016; Hipp and Wickes 2017). Research in China only provides a snapshot of social disorganization and neighborhood crime-related phenomena in a single, fixed time point. The difficulties of capturing social processes or change through cross-sectional research have left many questions unanswered. For example, do Chinese neighborhoods exhibit persistent inequality over time? How have the effects of residents’ interaction on informal control changed? Are there reciprocal effects between public control and crime? What are the effects of new actors, e.g., property management companies, homeowner associations, neighborhood workstations, on neighborhood social control, and how do they affect the role of neighborhood committees and public security agencies? What have transitional zones experienced during rapid social change? It would be extremely valuable for future researchers to conduct longitudinal research in the same city to observe the changes in a systematic way, or initiate cohort studies on rural migrants or residents in “urban villages” to examine how the cultural conflicts emerge, how the social change attenuated traditional culture, and whether there is an oppositional culture in the transitional zone.<sup>11</sup>

## Interpenetration of Levels of Social Structures

The recent Western research on neighborhood effects incorporates social interactional processes at the micro-level, the extra-local level, and the larger social order. It aims to elaborate, for example, how the social isolation of neighborhoods and patterns of higher-order segregation are produced and maintained by “homophily” manifested in everyday spatial mobility and crosscutting neighborhood networks, and how neighborhoods mediate and are mediated by the effects from the top and bottom (Sampson 2012, 2019). Attending to the interpenetration of levels of social structures is particularly important in the Chinese context but also particularly challenging.

The Chinese state has become increasingly interested in introducing and deploying market instruments in urban development following the economic and political reforms after 1980s, thereby maximizing land revenue (Hsing 2010) and reducing fiscal spending on urban development and renewal. The Chinese state, nevertheless, is still more proactive towards the agenda of urban development compared to Western countries. It plays an influential role in shaping urban affairs (Ren 2013; Wu 2010), while adjusting the ways of intervention to the rule of games that have changed under new societal circumstances. The distinction of urban space within the cities is “the result not of deregulation but of planning and the overhaul of governance strategies”

<sup>11</sup> Western research on immigration has found that the receptivity of the receiving location plays an important role in the adaptation of newcomers (Ramey 2013). Similar processes might also operate for rural migrants in China, underscoring our earlier point about the importance of expanding the geographic coverage of research.

(Tomba 2014:32). Housing, as a mechanism for social and spatial stratification, is also to some extent a product of inter-generational transfer of the politically privileged social class to their off-springs, and the traces of benefits from resourceful work units and household registration system (Huang and Li 2014; Li and Yi 2007; Huang and Yi 2010, 2011; Wu et al. 2006).

The practice of urban governance in China has been termed a form of “state entrepreneurialism” by urban scholars that combines planning centrality and market institutions (Wu 2018). To overcome political economic constraints caused by the higher social order of urban governance, individuals exert agency and create their own space, thereby creating informalities in Chinese urban development (Ren 2018; Wu 2018). The urban village is an example of informal settlement developed by individual agency (Ren 2018; Wu 2018). In urban villages, the disparity of culture between local residents and migrants hinder the assimilation of the latter into urban life, affect neighborhood social control, and make them breeding grounds of crime (Cui and Shi 2017; Mao and Jin 2014; Liu 2010; Xiong 2016). In this manner, the social isolation and higher-order segregation in Chinese cities are more than the result of everyday residential mobility and crosscutting neighborhood networks, but rather the result of the repetitive negotiations between state and market and the exercise of individual agencies under such negotiations.

The interpenetration of levels of social structure is thus likely to take on different forms in China than in the West. Nevertheless, clarifying this interpenetration, and more specifically explicating the interconnections among state, market, and society, is an important step in fostering a better understanding of neighborhood processes. Such an understanding can then guide the further development of new concepts, hypotheses, and empirical measures to promote “generative” research in China in the future.

## Conclusion

Compared to the long history of research on social disorganization in Western countries, researchers in China started decades behind. A great deal of progress has nevertheless been achieved in a relatively short period. Advancing from relying on small numbers of personal interviews and individual field observations to applying sophisticated scientific methods at a large-scale and becoming more aware of implications of the Chinese context for applying the theory, researchers have made great strides in uncharted areas. The available research has demonstrated that a fundamental insight of the social disorganization perspective can be readily transported to China: crime-related phenomena are socially structured for territorial units in China as they are in the West. This can serve as a solid foundation for future research on social disorganization processes in Chinese cities.

Most importantly, what prior researchers have done makes our assessment and synthesis in this paper possible, and it provides a propitious opportunity to reflect on where we are, what we have done, and what we should do in the future. The accumulating knowledge of social disorganization and neighborhood crime in China generated from ongoing research will surely lay the groundwork for more advanced theoretical and empirical work on social disorganization in the future, thereby contributing greatly to the field of comparative criminology.



### Appendix 1

**Table 3** Overview of extant research

Study	Location	Sampling units/research fields	Method(s)	Research questions
Situ and Liu (1996)	Guangzhou	Not Specified	Qualitative: field research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Describe the situation of social disorganization neighborhoods were experiencing under the economic reform</li> <li>■ Examine the roles that neighborhoods played in fighting against crime</li> </ul>
Lu and Miethe (2001)	Shanghai	Neighborhood (N = 2) in 2 districts	Quantitative: survey (probability sampling)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Examine the important change of neighborhood structure and its implications on neighborhood integration and social control</li> <li>■ Study the relationship between neighborhood integration and effectiveness of social control in a changing urban context</li> </ul>
Zhang et al. (2007)	Tianjin	Neighborhood (N = 50) in 6 districts	Same as above	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Analyze the effect of three sets of determinants, household variables, neighborhood structural factors, and neighborhood social control processes, on the risk of household burglary</li> <li>■ Attempt to gain a better understanding of the social factors underlying burglary in Chinese cities by importing and adapting the integrated, multilevel framework that has proven to be highly useful in Western research</li> </ul>
Zhong and Broadhurst (2007); Zhong (2009)	Shenzhen	Community (observation N = 5; survey N = 2)	Mixed methods: field research; survey (non-probability)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Describe the community crime prevention program with Chinese characteristics</li> <li>■ Examine whether social capital contributes to the success of residents' positive attitude towards the community crime prevention program</li> </ul>
Liu (2010)	Shenzhen	Village (N = 1)	Qualitative: field research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Examine the causes of high criminal rates among rural migrants</li> </ul>
Jiang et al. (2010)	Guangzhou	Neighborhood(N = 30) in 6 districts	Quantitative: survey (probability sampling)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Explore factors correlated to informal control in Chinese urban neighborhoods</li> </ul>
Jiang et al. (2013)	Guangzhou	Neighborhood (N = 30) in 6 districts	Same as above	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Explore perceptions of property crime at the neighborhood level</li> <li>■ Explore correlates of perceptions of property crime at the neighborhood level</li> <li>■ Assess the applicability of collective efficacy theory in contemporary China</li> </ul>
Song and Liu (2013)	Changchun	Street (N = 45) in 5 districts and 4 development zones	Quantitative: existing statistics/documents and secondary analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Examine the spatial distribution of property crime</li> <li>■ Analyze the relationship between the spatial patterns of property crime and neighborhood characteristics</li> </ul>

Table 3 (continued)

Study	Location	Sampling units/research fields	Method(s)	Research questions
Mao and Jin (2014)	Wenzhou	Neighborhood ( $N = 4$ ) in 1 district	Quantitative: Survey (probability sampling)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Examine the effects of covariates derived from the social disorganization theory on victimization in rural migrant concentrated areas</li> </ul>
Liu et al. (2016)	Changchun	Street ( $N = 45$ ) in 5 districts and 4 development zones	Quantitative: Existing statistics/documents and secondary analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyze the relationship between the spatial patterns of violent crime and neighborhood characteristics</li> </ul>
Liu and Zhu (2016)	Wuhan	Neighborhood ( $N = 114$ ) in 1 district	Quantitative: existing statistics/documents and secondary analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Examine the spatial distribution of burglary risks</li> <li>Examine the effect of covariates on burglary risks at the neighborhood level</li> </ul>
Xiong (2016)	Guangzhou	Community ( $N = 3$ for observation and interview) District, street and township for the spatial analysis (10 districts, 119 streets, and 24 towns)	Mixed methods: field research; existing statistics/documents and secondary analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify the differences of urban crime distribution and social disorganization between the Chinese city and Western cities</li> <li>Discuss specific patterns of social disorganization, and the relationship between social disorganization and crime in different communities</li> </ul>
Wang et al. (2017)	Guangzhou	Street ( $N = 118$ )	Quantitative: existing statistics/documents and secondary analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Predict the spatial distribution of property and violent crime risk based on the estimation of factors derived from social disorganization theory</li> </ul>
Messner et al. (2017)	Tianjin	Neighborhood ( $N = 50$ ) in 6 districts	Quantitative: Survey (probability sampling)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess the impacts of crime control activities adopted by neighborhood committees on household property victimization</li> </ul>
Zhang et al. (2017)	Tianjin	Neighborhood ( $N = 50$ ) in 6 districts	Same as above	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Examine the contextual effects of different forms of neighborhood social control (i.e., collective efficacy, semi-public control, public control, and market-based control) on different types of perceived disorder (i.e., criminal activity, social disorder, physical disorder, and total disorder) across neighborhoods</li> </ul>
Cui and Shi (2017)	Beijing	Village ( $N = 5$ ) in 5 districts	Qualitative: field research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discover the mechanism of residents' interaction through sport games in "urban village"<sup>a</sup></li> <li>Identify the causes of high crime rates related to sports (e.g., sports gambling, sports pyramid selling, and illegal sports organization) in "urban village"</li> </ul>

<sup>a</sup> "Urban village" (*Chengzhongcun* in Chinese) indicates the areas where rural migrants are concentrated in cities

## Appendix 2

Table 4 Summary of main conclusions from qualitative and mixed-method research

Location	Study	Conclusions
Guangzhou	Situ and Liu (1996)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Social disorganization goes hand in hand with economic reform in the city</li> <li>(1) Modernized lifestyle in high-rise apartments results in the loss of traditional neighborhood culture.</li> <li>(2) Rural migration has caused high population turnover and instability in urban neighborhoods, which increased crime rates.</li> <li>(3) Members in neighborhood committees were less motivated to work for their neighborhoods due to the influence of getting-rich atmosphere during economic reform.</li> </ul> <p>The Municipal government's strategy to cope with the social disorganization under economic reform</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) The government mobilized public organs to enhance social control in neighborhoods.</li> <li>(2) Residents' participation is limited, and voluntarism has been replaced by materialistic rewards for participation in neighborhood affairs.</li> </ul>
	Xiong (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Spatial distribution of crime in the city</li> <li>(1) A layered-circle structure: crime rate decreases as the distance increases gradually from the core areas and central urban areas to the peripheral area.</li> <li>(2) The punctuated distribution of crime: crime is cluster in hot spots, e.g., commercial areas, old residential areas, train stations, bus stations.</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Communities characteristics related to social disorganization</li> <li>(1) Residents with household registration, or home ownership tend to have more positive perception of social order, and higher levels of cohesion than renters and rural migrants in disadvantaged neighborhoods.</li> <li>(2) The geographic location of neighborhoods differs among residents at different continuum of the social hierarchy. Migrants are concentrated in "urban village" in the periphery areas; better-off residents live in remote suburban neighborhoods under the management of property management companies, which might obviate the need of police.</li> <li>(3) Cultural conflicts exist between local residents and migrants. The latter is not assimilated to local culture. They aspire to monetary success and tend to favor money over morality.</li> </ul>
Shenzhen	Zhong and Broadhurst (2007); Zhong (2009)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The community-based crime prevention program initiated by the Municipal Government: a cooperation among the "special organs", e.g., criminal justice system, neighborhood committees, etc., and "the mass line", i.e., neighborhood residents.</li> <li>■ The ability of a neighborhood to get sufficient funding to adopt crime prevention program depends on its bridging social capital that connects the neighborhood to the local government, business corporations, and residents.</li> <li>■ There are higher crime rates, higher levels of perceived risk of victimization, and more presence of police in the socially disorganized neighborhood than the neighborhoods in good social order.</li> </ul>
	Liu (2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The patterns of offenses and characteristics of criminals in the "urban village":</li> <li>(1) Property crimes, especially burglaries, are the most common crimes.</li> <li>(2) The large proportions of criminals are young males from rural areas.</li> </ul>
Beijing	Cui and Shi (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Low income, high mobility, and heterogeneity of residents have restricted the interaction among residents and reduced their willingness to intervene in neighborhoods.</li> <li>■ Rural migrants learned how to commit crime through their networks with fellow villagers in the "urban village".</li> <li>■ The crowded space, shortage of police, and residents' routine activity make the "urban village" an incubator of crime.</li> <li>■ The traditional moral norms and cultural values have become weaker and lost control over residents during rapid urbanization in the "urban village".</li> <li>■ The lack of cultural control and public control from the state leads to pervasive gambling and high crime rates related to sports in the "urban village."</li> </ul>

## Appendix 3

**Table 5** Measurement of key concepts in quantitative research

Study	Poverty
Zhang et al. (2007); Zhang et al. (2017); Messner et al. (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Proportion of respondents who report to a household income (per person) below XX yuan</li> </ul>
Jiang et al. (2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Individual's perception of neighborhood economic condition</li> </ul>
Jiang et al. (2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Individual's perception of neighborhood economic condition AND unemployment rate</li> </ul>
Liu and Zhu (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ unemployment rate</li> </ul>
Song and Liu (2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <i>Concentrated disadvantage</i>: the average number of people per square meters of residential building space</li> </ul>
Liu et al. (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <i>Concentrated affluence</i>: the number of high-rise residential buildings (higher than 10 storeys) in each street</li> </ul>
Zhang et al. (2007); Zhang et al. (2017); Messner et al. (2017)	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Residential stability</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The mean number of years the respondents have lived at their current neighborhoods</li> </ul>
Jiang et al. (2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The length of months the respondents have lived at the current neighborhoods</li> </ul>
Jiang et al. (2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The percentage of residents who lived in the same house for 5 years and more</li> </ul>
Mao and Jim (2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The length of residence in the current neighborhoods</li> </ul>
Zhang et al. (2007); Zhang et al. (2017)	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Rural migrant concentration</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The proportion of respondents who report that there are temporary rural labors living in their neighborhood</li> </ul>
Song and Liu (2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <i>Substitute</i>: the proportion of permanent/registered urban residents in each street</li> </ul>
Lu and Miethe (2001)	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Neighborhood attachment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The frequency of residents' interactions with neighbors</li> </ul>
Jiang et al. (2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Individuals' preference to live in the neighborhood</li> </ul>
Jiang et al. (2010)	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Informal control</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Willingness to intervene in the following behaviors: (1) children skipping school and hanging out on a street corner; (2) children spray painting graffiti on a local building; (3) children showing disrespect to an adult in the neighborhood; (4) a fight breaking out in front of the respondent's house; (5) someone breaking into the respondent's house</li> </ul>
Zhang et al. (2007); Zhang et al. (2017)	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Collective efficacy: social cohesion + willingness to intervene</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ How strongly respondents agree with the questions: (1) the neighborhood is close-knit; (2) neighbors care much about the important matters you or your family have (has); (3) residents trust each other.</li> </ul>

Table 5 (continued)

Study	Poverty
Jiang et al. (2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ How strongly respondents agree with the questions: (1) residents are willing to help each other; (2) the neighborhood is close-knit; (3) people in the neighborhood can be trusted; (4) people in the neighborhood generally do not get along with each other.</li> </ul>
Messner et al. (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Getting along with neighbors, exchange of assistance, how close-knit the neighborhood is, shared concerns and levels of trust, how often they invited their neighbors to their home or were invited to their neighbor's home, how often they grocery shopped for their neighbors, how often they helped care for elderly neighbors or watched over their neighbors' children, how easy it was for respondents to pick out outsiders in the neighborhood</li> </ul>
Liu et al. (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Proxy: bachelor degree and plus</li> </ul>
Jiang et al. (2010); Jiang et al. (2013)	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Social ties</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Interaction (borrow things, hang out, talk, and ask for help) among residents</li> </ul>
Zhang et al. (2007)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ How active is your neighborhood mediation committee</li> </ul>
Jiang et al. (2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Is your neighborhood mediation committee is important in maintaining community order</li> </ul>
Messner et al. (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ How often respondents had known of, or had heard about any mediation, <i>bangjiao</i> and neighborhood watch activities by their neighborhood committee during the past year</li> </ul>
Zhang et al. (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Whether the respondents have known or have heard about moral or legal education, mediation, and neighborhood watch activities performed by their neighborhood committee; whether the neighborhood watch activities operate on a regular basis</li> </ul>
Zhang et al. (2007)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ How often do you see police officer in your neighborhood</li> </ul>
Zhang et al. (2017); Messner et al. (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Evaluation of police activities in neighborhood: frequency of visits from the local police officer, police officer's level of concern with safety/security of the neighborhood, the extent to which police respond in a timely and effective manner, and the competence of police</li> </ul>
Jiang et al. (2010, 2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <i>Satisfaction with police</i>: whether the respondent agree with the statements: (1) the police do a good job in responding to people in this neighborhood after they have been victims of crime; (2) the police are able to maintain order on the streets and sidewalks in my neighborhood; (3) the police are doing a good job in dealing with problems that really concern people in my neighborhood</li> </ul>
Liu and Zhu (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Total number of community policing and monitoring rooms per 10,000 people</li> </ul>

## References

- Abbott, A. (1997). Of time and space: The contemporary relevance of the Chicago School. *Social Forces*, 75(4), 114–1182.
- Bellair, P. E. (1997). Social interaction and community crime: Examining the importance of neighborhood networks. *Criminology*, 35, 677–705.
- Bellair, P. E. (2000). Informal surveillance and street crime: A complex relationship. *Criminology*, 38, 137–167.
- Bennett, R. (1980). Constructing cross-cultural theories in criminology. *Criminology*, 18, 252–268.
- Blakely, E. J., & Snyder, M. G. (1997). *Fortress America: Gated communities in the United States*. Washington DC: Brookings Institution.
- Boessen, A., & Hipp, J. R. (2015). Close-ups and the scale of ecology: Land use and the geography of social context and crime. *Criminology*, 53, 399–426.
- Browning, C. R., Feinberg, S. L., & Dietz, R. (2004). The paradox of social organization: Networks, collective efficacy, and violent crime in urban neighborhoods. *Social Forces*, 83, 503–534.
- Bursik, R. J. (1988). Social disorganization and theories of crime and delinquency: Problems and prospects. *Criminology*, 26, 519–551.
- Bursik, R. J. (1999). The informal control of crime through neighborhood networks. *Sociological Focus*, 32, 85–97.
- Bursik, R. J., & Grasmick, H. (1993). *Neighborhoods and crime: The dimensions of effective community control*. New York: Lexington Books.
- Cao, L.-q., & Heberton, B. (2018). Criminology in China: Taking stock (again). *The Criminologist*, 43(2), 1–9.
- Cui, X.-m., & Shi, X.-h. (2017). Social control and social anomie: Analyzed on the phenomenon of sports social disorganization in “Village in the City”. *Journal of Beijing Sport University*, 40(9), 16–22 in Chinese.
- Curran, D. J. (1998). Economic reform, the floating population, and crime: The transformation of social control in China. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, 14(3), 262–280.
- Grannis, R. (1998). The importance of trivial streets: Residents streets and residential segregation. *American Journal of Sociology*, 103(6), 1530–1564.
- Heberer, T., & Göbel, C. (2011). *The politics of community building in urban China*. New York: Routledge.
- Hipp, J. R., & Boessen, A. (2013). Egohoods as waves washing across the city: A new measure of “neighborhoods”. *Criminology*, 51, 287–327.
- Hipp, J. R., & Steenbeek, W. (2016). Types of crime and types of mechanisms: What are the consequences for neighborhoods over time? *Crime & Delinquency*, 62(9), 1203–1234.
- Hipp, J. R., & Wickes, R. (2017). Violence in urban neighborhoods: A longitudinal study of collective efficacy and violent crime. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 33(4), 783–808.
- Hsing, Y.-t. (2010). *The great urban transformation: Politics of land and property in China*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Huang, Y.-q., & Li, S.-m. (2014). *Housing inequality in Chinese cities*. New York: Routledge.
- Huang, Y., & Yi, C. (2010). Consumption and tenure choice of multiple homes in transitional urban China. *European Journal of Housing Policy*, 10, 105–131.
- Huang, Y., & Yi, C. (2011). Second home ownership in transitional urban China. *Housing Studies*, 26, 423–447.
- Jiang, S.-h., Wang, J., & Lambert, E. (2010). Correlates of informal social control in Guangzhou, China neighborhoods. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 38(4), 460–469.
- Jiang, S.-h., Land, K. C., & Wang, J. (2013). Social ties, collective efficacy and perceived neighborhood property crime in Guangzhou, China. *Asian Journal of Criminology*, 8(3), 207–223.
- Kornhauser, R. (1978). *Social sources of delinquency*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kubrin, C. E. (2009). Social disorganization theory: Then, now and in the future. In M. D. Krohn, A. J. Lizotte, & G. P. Hall (Eds.), *Handbook on crime and deviance* (pp. 225–236). New York: Springer.
- Kubrin, C. E., & Weitzer, R. (2003). New directions in social disorganization theory. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 40, 374–402.
- Li, S. M. (2005). Residential mobility and urban change in China: What have we learned so far. In L. J. C. Ma & F.-I. Wu (Eds.), *Restructuring the Chinese city: Changing society, economy and space* (pp. 157–171). New York: Routledge.
- Li, S. M., & Yi, Z. (2007). Financing home purchase in China, with special reference to Guangzhou. *Housing Studies*, 22, 409–425.
- Lin, S.-n., & Gaubatz, P. (2017). Socio-spatial segregation in China and migrants’ everyday life experiences: The case of Wenzhou. *Urban Geography*, 38(7), 1019–1038.

- Liu, Z.-g. (2010). Crime in urban village: An example in T village, Shenzhen. *Research on Crime*, 6, 64–71 in Chinese.
- Liu, J.-h., & Messner, S. F. (2001). Modernization and crime trend in China's reform era. In J.-h. Liu, L.-n. Zhang, & S. F. Messner (Eds.), *Crime and social control in a changing China* (pp. 3–22). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Liu, H.-q., & Zhu, X.-y. (2016). Exploring the influence of neighborhood characteristics on burglary risks: A Bayesian random effects modeling approach. *International Journal of Geo-Information*, 5(7), 102–115.
- Liu, D.-q., Song, W., & Xiu, C.-l. (2016). Spatial patterns of violent crimes and neighborhood characteristics in Changchun, China. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, 49(1), 53–72.
- Liu, J. H., Travers, M., & Chang, L. Y. C. (2017). *Comparative criminology in Asia*. Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.
- Lu, H., & Miethe, T. D. (2001). Community integration and the effectiveness of social control. In J.-h. Liu, L.-n. Zhang, & S. F. Messner (Eds.), *Crime and social control in a changing China* (pp. 106–121). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Mao, Z.-w., & Jin, C. (2014). Crime prevention in floating population concentrated area from the perspective of social disorganization theory: A sample from Li'ao, Wenzhou. *Juvenile Delinquency Prevention Research*, 3, 17–26 in Chinese.
- Messner, S. F. (2015). When west meets east: Generalizing theory and expanding the conceptual toolkit of criminology. *Asian Journal of Criminology*, 10, 117–129.
- Messner, S. F., & Zimmerman, G. M. (2012). Community-level influences on crime and offending. In B. C. Welsh & D. P. Farrington (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of crime prevention* (pp. 155–172). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Messner, S. F., Zhang, L.-n., Zhang, S. X., & Gruner, C. P. (2017). Neighborhood crime control in a changing China: Tiao-jie, Bang-jiao, and neighborhood watch. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 54(4), 544–577.
- Morenoff, J. D., Raudenbush, S. W., & Sampson, R. J. (2001). Neighborhood inequality, collective efficacy and the spatial dynamics of urban violence. *Criminology*, 39(3), 517–560.
- Park, R. E. (1929). Sociology. In W. Gee (Ed.), *Research in the social sciences* (pp. 3–49). New York: Macmillan Co.
- Park, R. E. (1985). Social change and social disorganization. In S. H. Traub & C. B. Little (Eds.), *Theories of Deviance* (pp. 47–50). Itasca: F.E. Peacock Publishers.
- Park, R. E., & Burgess, E. W. (1925). *The City* (1st ed.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Ramey, D. M. (2013). Immigrant revitalization and neighborhood violent crime in established and new destination cities. *Social Forces*, 92, 1–33.
- Raudenbush, S. W., & Sampson, R. J. (1999). Ecometrics: Toward a science of assessing ecological settings, with application to the systematic social observation of neighborhoods. *Sociological Methodology*, 29, 1–41.
- Ren, X.-f. (2013). *Urban China*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Ren, X.-f. (2018). From Chicago to China and India: Studying the city in the twenty-first century. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 44, 497–513.
- Ren, F., & Kwan, M.-P. (2009). The impact of the internet on human activity-travel patterns: Analysis of gender differences using multi-group structural equation models. *Journal of Transport Geography*, 17, 440–450.
- Sampson, R. J. (2006/2009). Collective efficacy theory: Lessons learned and directions for future inquiry. In F. T. Cullen, J. P. Wright, & K. R. Blevins (Eds.), *Taking stock: The status of criminological theory* (pp. 149–167). Transaction Publishers.
- Sampson, R. J. (2012). *Great American City*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- Sampson, R. J. (2019). Neighborhood effects and beyond: Explaining the paradoxes of inequality in the changing American Metropolis. *Urban Studies*, 56(1), 3–32.
- Sampson, R. J., & Groves, W. B. (1989). Community structure and crime: Testing social disorganization theory. *American Journal of Sociology*, 94, 774–802.
- Sampson, R. J., Raudenbush, S. W., & Earls, F. (1997). Neighborhoods and violent crime: A multilevel study of collective efficacy. *Science*, 277, 918–924.
- Sampson, R. J., Morenoff, J. D., & Rowley, T. G. (2002). Assessing “neighborhood effects”: Social processes and new directions in research. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 28(1), 443–478.
- Sampson, R. J., Morenoff, J. D., & Raudenbush, S. (2005). Social anatomy of racial and ethnic disparities in violence. *Journal of Information*, 95, 224–232.
- Shaw, C. R., & Mckay, H. (1942/1969/1972) *Juvenile delinquency and urban areas*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Shen, Y.-z., Messner, S. F., Liu, J.-h., & Sampson, R. J. (2018). What they don't know says a lot: Residents' knowledge of neighborhood crime in contemporary China. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10940-018-9401-1>.

- Situ, Y.-y., & Liu, W.-z. (1996). Restoring the neighborhood, fight against crime: A case study in Guangzhou City, People's Republic of China. *International Criminal Justice*, 6, 89–102.
- Song, W., & Liu, D.-q. (2013). Exploring spatial patterns of property crime risks in Changchun, China. *International Journal of Applied Geospatial Research*, 4(3), 80–100.
- Steenbeek, W., & Hipp, J. R. (2011). A longitudinal test of social disorganization theory: Feedback effects among cohesion, social control, and disorder. *Criminology*, 49, 833–871.
- Taylor, R. B. (2002). Fear of crime, social ties, and collective efficacy. *Justice Quarterly*, 19, 773–792.
- Tomba, L. (2014). *The government next door: Neighborhood politics in urban China*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Velez, M. B. (2001). The role of public social control in urban neighborhoods: A multilevel analysis of victimization risk. *Criminology*, 39, 837–862.
- Wang, Y.-p. (2004). *Urban poverty, housing and social change in China*. New York: Routledge.
- Wang, F. (2014). Determines of the effectiveness of Chinese homeowner associations in solving neighborhood issues. *Urban Affairs Review*, 50(3), 311–339.
- Wang, Y., Jin, L.-x., Zhang, H.-o., Wu, K.-m., Wang, C.-j., & Huang, G.-z. (2017). Pattern and model of residential criminal risk based on social space in Guangzhou, China. *Geographical Research*, 36(12), 2465–2478 (in Chinese).
- Warner, B. D., & Rountree, P. W. (1997). Local social ties in a community and crime model: Questioning the systemic nature of informal social control. *Social Problems*, 44, 520–536.
- Wei, S. (2008). A typological study of governance structure of China's urban community. *Journal of Nanjing University*, 4, 125–132 in Chinese.
- Wickes, R., & Hipp, J. R. (2018). The spatial and temporal dynamics of neighborhood informal social control and crime. *Social Forces*, 97, 277–307.
- Wu, F.-l. (2010). How neoliberal is China's reform? The origins of change during transition. *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 51, 619–631.
- Wu, F.-l. (2018). Planning centrality, market instruments: Governing Chinese urban transformation under state entrepreneurialism. *Urban Studies*, 55(7), 1383–1399.
- Wu, F.-l., Jiang, X., & Yeh, A. G. (2006). *Urban development in post-reform China: State, market, and space*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Xiong, H.-y. (2016). *Urban crime and social disorganization in China: A case study of three communities in Guangzhou*. Singapore: Springer.
- Yan, Z.-l., & Deng, W.-z. (2014). Challenges and paths innovation of urban community governance in the context of social construction. *The Journal of Shanghai Administrative Institute*, 15(4), 40–48 in Chinese.
- Zhang, L.-n., Messner, S. F., & Liu, J. (2007). A multilevel analysis of the risk of household burglary in the City of Tianjin, China. *British Journal of Criminology*, 47(6), 918–937.
- Zhang, L.-n., Messner, S. F., & Zhang, S. (2017). Neighborhood social control and perceptions of crime and disorder in contemporary urban China. *Criminology*, 55(3), 631–663.
- Zhong, L. Y. (2009). *Communities, crime and social capital in contemporary China*. Cullompton: Willan Publishing.
- Zhong, L. Y., & Broadburst, R. G. (2007). Building little state and civilized communities: Community crime prevention with Chinese characteristics. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 51(1), 52–67.