



Asian Criminology—Elaborating Its Concepts, Approach, Paradigm, and Future

Jianhong Liu¹

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Abstract

Criminologists have witnessed the significant growth of Asian Criminology since the establishment of the Asian Criminological Society. This paper reviews the development of Asian Criminology to answer key conceptual questions and clarify confusion and misunderstandings and their associated mistaken implications. The paper elaborates on the key concepts, mission, approach, and paradigm of Asian Criminology to further point out special opportunities provided by diverse contexts in Asia to enhance the discipline of criminology. It also discusses the approach for the future growth of criminology in Asia.

Keywords Asian Criminology · Asian paradigm · Asian approach · Asian criminological theory · Asian context · Crime and justice in Asia

Introduction

2009 was a year with special significance for Asian criminologists: it was the year when the Asian Criminological Society (ACS) was established and Asian criminologists built a home to work together. Since then, criminologists around the world interested in crime and justice in Asia have gathered together to exchange their insights and network every year in ACS's annual conferences. The first annual conference was held in Macau (2009); the second annual conference was held in Chennai (2010), followed by Taipei (2011), Seoul (2012), Mumbai (2013), Osaka (2014), Hong Kong (2015), Beijing (2016), Cairns (2017), Penang (2018), Cebu (2019), Kyoto (2020/2021), and Gujarat (2022).

To discuss the mission and the growth prospects that Asian Criminology will contribute to the general discipline of criminology, with its special strengths and approaches, I published a paper in the *Asian Journal of Criminology* entitled “Asian Criminology – Challenges, Opportunities, and Directions” as Editor-in-Chief of that journal (Liu, 2009). The paper reviewed the background of the proposed concept of Asian Criminology and

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✉ Jianhong Liu
jliu@um.edu.mo

¹ Faculty of Law, University of Macau, Avenida da Universidade, E32-3005 Taipa, Macau

discussed the main themes of Asian Criminology. The paper furthermore compared different features of Western and Asian contexts to argue certain special features that Asian contexts present. The paper discussed challenges to as well as great advantages and opportunities for enhancing the field of criminology. It also discussed Asian Criminology's future direction and path to growth.

Empirical data have shown a rapid increase in studies of crime and justice in Asia following the establishment of the Society (Belknap, 2016; Liu, 2022). International scholars have witnessed the growth of Asian Criminology over the past years. Leon Moosavi (2019, p. 257) stated that.

“Asian criminology has its roots in the founding of the *Asian Criminological Society* and the *Asian Journal of Criminology* in 2006 but was not proposed as a paradigm until 2009 when Jianhong Liu published ‘Asian Criminology—Challenges, Opportunities, and Directions’.”

Past President of the American Society of Criminology, Joanne Belknap, commented that “it is such a global loss for criminologists, practitioners, and others to miss this scholarship... Western (or Global North) criminology has a lot to learn from Asian criminology” (Belknap, 2016, p. 262). These evaluations suggest us it is time to review the primary aspect of Asian Criminology, the concept, and the paradigm, and summarize the path it has gone through over the past 13 years to ensure its continued success.

The 2009 paper suggested as the mission of Asian Criminology to bring attention to often ignored or missed knowledge about crime and justice in the Asian context. A primary theme was to stress diversity in cultures and other social processes that were not well addressed in conventional criminology. In the meantime, it especially stressed the importance of seeking general knowledge about diversity and developing a unified paradigm that would facilitate the growth of Asian Criminology.

This paper reviews and elaborates on these central themes of Asian Criminology in view of the rapid growth of Asian criminology over the past 13 years. The paper will highlight the historical mission and the opportunities associated with Asian Criminology; it further clarifies the concept of Asian Criminology and elaborates on its approach in view of some of the misunderstandings about the concept. It will review the Asian paradigm as its main strategy, address difficulties, and suggest solutions. It will also suggest future tasks and paths to accomplish the historic mission of Asian Criminology.

The Mission of Asian Criminology

Despite the enormous success of criminology, much still needs to be and can be done to further enhance the discipline. A number of critics have pointed out some major problems and limitations of the current criminological discipline.

One primary limitation of conventional criminology is that it gives insufficient attention to non-Western countries and contexts. Walklate has pointed out that “the global does therefore not present itself as a smooth, unified surface, a plane of immanence accessible through a zoom function, but rather as a dynamic multiplicity of surfaces and tectonic boundaries” (2016, p. 47). Consistently with other critics, she argues that the absences of global Southern/Non-western spheres in criminology “have three consequences: other voices and visions of social processes are excluded, non-metropolitan experiences are

erased and the gathering of data from the ‘periphery’ becomes framed and informed by Northern concepts and methods” (Connell, 2007, p. 380; Walklate, 2016, p. 48).

Messner, (2015) calls for the development of concepts more sensitive to non-Western societies. Braithwaite, (2015) points to areas in which the West could learn from Asian societies. Walklate points out a special advantage and mission for Asian Criminology within the discipline of criminology:

“Asian criminology, in being neither here nor there (Carrington, 2015), stands at the positive intersection of the north–south and east–west in terms of geography and culture. It is well placed to think differently, both conceptually and methodologically, about the criminological enterprise and the debates that such different thinking might generate.” (Walklate, 2016, p. 57).

Scholars have also criticized the criminological discipline in some other aspects. David Garland has commented that criminology is not considered useful for policy making, observing that “[e]mpirical research and criminological knowledge are downgraded” and are “failing to have much impact on the contemporary politics of crime and punishment” (Garland, 2021, pp. 258, 271).

These observations and criticisms are helpful in elaborating Asian Criminology’s mission as a new growth point for the criminological discipline. We shall elaborate on the mission of Asian Criminology for its role in enhancing criminology, taking advantage of special features of Asia to discover previously omitted or ignored knowledge of crime and justice in Asia, overcoming the limitations by contributing to the general understanding of crime and justice with an enlarged scope and insights from Asia, and making practical policy contributions to the control of crime and justice in Asia and internationally in general.

The Concept of Asian Criminology

In the 2009 paper, the most emphasized theme was the diversity feature of the Asian context. Much discussion centred around the keyword “context”. I would define the concept of Asian Criminology as *the study of crime and justice in the Asian context*. This definition will help to clarify some of the confusion in understanding aspects of Asian Criminology.

This definition implies the emphasis of Asian Criminology in bringing out from the Asian context content missed or ignored by conventional criminology. It stresses criminology can gain insights from special contextual features in Asia. The essential point in this definition stresses the focus is on context and in-depth content rather than geographic or various group boundaries. The main contribution of Asian Criminology is not knowing details of geographic or group boundaries but knowledge of the context of these. Such content from Asian contexts is typically not highly visible in other contexts such as Western ones and it helps to discover previously ignored or overlooked patterns or regularities, which are essential to the general understanding of crime and justice.

By the same logic, an Asian criminologist is someone who studies crime and justice in Asia. He or she does not need to be an Asian, or in any way be identified with or linked to Asia in any geographic sense.

An Asian context can be one particular place, a country, a group, or the whole of Asia. The approach is to achieve the objective of extending new insights and knowledge with their broader implications to reach a higher level of general understanding. I define this approach as a “context-focused approach” (Liu, 2021, 2022).

The approach stresses the importance of revealing ignored or missed information, different voices, and perspectives existing in some locations or among certain groups in Asia. Such perspectives have been previously ignored or missed due to various general or specific reasons and were not well presented for their particularity in the conventional criminological paradigm. Without such content, there will be no complete knowledge of crime and justice within criminology.

Much confusion about the concept of Asian Criminology arises when critics consider clear-cut boundaries or identification of a group as the analytical focus and pre-requirement to learn the content associated with the geographic place or group. For example, critics can reasonably ask how Asia is defined. Is Asian Criminology produced by Asians? How do we define “Asian”? By the same token, critics can ask what constitutes “Western” or “non-Western”. Based on this line of possible confusion with respect to the concept of Asian Criminology, critics can further question the possibility of “reverse discrimination” of non-Western over Western, or Asian groups could glorify themselves to the extent of creating a hierarchical distinction within Asian criminology that would deprecate the contributions of Western paradigms (Moosavi, 2019).

I must argue that these confusions are based on conceptualizations of groups such as Asia/Asian as the basis for discussing other matters. However, in my view, the boundaries of groups, be they geographic areas or people, are only convenient labels to be used to temporarily express some scholarly idea. These boundaries themselves are dynamic and may often change over time. Consideration of these boundaries can be used to reflect in relative ways on phenomena of underrepresentation of missed or ignored content and perspectives. Recognizing the underrepresentation of content is more important than the precise identification of temporary boundaries.

With the context-focused approach of Asian Criminology, the primary objective of its research is to gain insight from the study of a particular context or group for enhancing the general understanding of the discovered facts or their meaning for criminology.

Asian Paradigm

A primary theme in the 2009 paper was to build a unified paradigm of Asian Criminology. The paper argued that “[s]hared conceptual frameworks, research approaches, and institutionalization under a unified paradigm greatly promote the rapid growth of a science” (Liu, 2009, p. 7). It cites the history of science as evidence to argue that a successful discipline is typically supported by a paradigm as it rapidly grows (Kuhn, 1996; Liu, 2009).

I further defined the Asian criminological paradigm as “a framework that consists of a set of relatively unified concepts, approaches, and institutionalization 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, p. 63).

The concept of Asian Criminology and its approaches are corner stones for the framework of the Asian paradigm. They can provide guiding ideas for issues in research and for the growth of Asian criminology. As analysed before, a primary feature of the Asian context is diversity (Liu, 2009). I argue that diversity presents difficulties, but also advantages and opportunities. It is a function of a paradigm to help overcome difficulties. I stressed that “[t]he paradigm of Asian criminology should consider the diversity of Asia, particularly encouraging the in-depth study of particular Asian contexts, traditions, and theoretical

or practice models, as well as topics that are particularly Asian” (Liu, 2009, p. 8; 2018, p. 65). The context-focused approach suggests that our research programme can be most productive if it sets an objective of discovering facts and insights by focusing on studying the particular context, and further aims at extending those insights and knowledge to enhance general criminological knowledge.

The proposed approach stresses the importance of discovering missed or ignored content and aspects of crime and justice, and discovering ignored voices and perspectives from contexts in Asian societies. Asian countries often have their own effective ways of dealing with crimes (Liu, 2021, 2022). Many practices in Asian countries may not look “orthodox” to Westerners, or may even seem unacceptable from established Western perspectives. Focusing on context will help us to understand the content and meanings of crime and justice within relevant contexts, providing new insights. These insights can suggest ideas for reforms and alternative practices. A generalized understanding of crime and justice is not achievable without fully examining and considering diverse contexts. The paradigm of Asian Criminology directs criminologists to take advantage of the opportunities that diversity affords us, carefully study special models of crime and justice in different regions and cultures, and introduce unique models existing in Asian cultures to the world to enrich the understanding of human experience and our collective knowledge of criminology.

Developing theoretical understandings are central to a paradigm. The paradigm of Asian Criminology takes a three-stage path to develop theories. It considers the importance of linking Asian research to international literature and locating Asian experiences in the international literature to achieve a more general theoretical understanding of human knowledge. The first stage of theoretical work is to examine established theories, which most likely originated from the West, in relation to the diverse Asian contexts and conditions, to recognize their successes and failures, and in so doing assessing the strengths and limitations of the theories by taking advantage of the diverse Asian contexts. The second stage is to add theoretical elaborations to existing theories to modify them for Asian contexts. The third stage is the most contributive, which is to propose new theories based on evidence supplied from Asian contexts. New theories will enrich human knowledge and enhance criminology with a broader scope (Liu, 2009). Braithwaite commented:

“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.” (Braithwaite, 2015, p. 183).

Along this dimension of the paradigm of Asian Criminology, important progress has been made on the theoretical front (Zhong & Zhang, 2021). As I have pointed out before, the paradigm makes different assumptions about crime and justice in Asia:

“Justice is understood more broadly than the relationship between the individual and state. There are also victims who, in Western systems, do not have due process rights. In 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: 26).

Based on these assumptions, I have developed the Asian paradigm theory (2014; 2016) and further proposed the concept of relationism as a characteristic social feature, and a “relational theory” (2017). These theoretical efforts have been further developed into “relationism theory” (Liu, 2021). The efforts have been highly evaluated

((Braithwaite, 2015; Messner, 2015; Zhong & Zhang, 2021). Braithwaite pointed out that "... the hope is that they may be useful for constructing the kind of relational theory of crime control advocated by Liu, (2014) ..." (Braithwaite, 2015, p. 184).

A significant contribution of Asian Criminology is to offer opportunities for comparative studies between the West and Asia. Asia is an excellent context to compare with the West because of the large differences (Liu, 2009, p. 7). Karstedt pointed out that comparative studies "offer new insights, fresh theories and chances of innovative perspectives" (Karstedt, 2001, p. 285). Adler argued: "Globalization affords us the opportunity to do cross-cultural testing and development of criminological theory" (1996, p. 5). Asian contexts provide indispensable opportunities for developing modern criminology.

Institutionalization of the Asian Paradigm

Institutionalization of the Asian paradigm includes the establishment of an academic society and other academic networks, academic journals, and educational programmes, thus facilitating communication within the Asian criminological community and with other parts of the world (Liu, 2017, p. 75).

Institutionalization builds the infrastructure for the Asian paradigm. The establishment of the Asian Criminological Society provided a major platform; there had been limited collaboration between universities in different countries (Liu, 2017). The Asian Criminological Society offers opportunities to exchange ideas using English as a shared language (Liu, 2017). The annual conferences have been highly successful in facilitating the growth of academic networks and communications among scholars internationally. Within this context, criminologists in Asian countries have also established institutions to enhance Asian criminology. Many Asian countries have their country-wide society of criminology; some countries have established their country-wide associations with the support of ACS. For example, Sri Lanka established the Sri Lanka Society of Criminology in 2015, with Jeeva Niriella elected President of the society, while she has also been elected Vice President of the Asian Criminological Society in 2022. Many leaders of countrywide criminology societies also hold leadership positions within the Asian Criminological Society.

Important infrastructure is provided by high-impact academic journals. Before the establishment of the Asian Criminological Society and the *Asian Journal of Criminology*, most criminological research was published in local journals in different Asian languages (Liu, 2017). Over the years, the *Asian Journal of Criminology* has earned a growing prestige reflected in its increased international academic journal ranking. The journal was selected into the Social Sciences Citation Index in 2018. Recently, SCImago published the latest list of SJR (SCImago Journal Rank) in 2021.

The *Asian Journal of Criminology* was once again listed in Q1 in the subject of law, ranking 60th among 818 law journals in the world, rising to the top 10% of law journals. CiteScore™ is a journal evaluation system launched by Elsevier in 2016, which is used by many internationally renowned publishers, including Springer-Nature, Taylor&Francis, Elsevier, and Oxford University Press. According to its latest data, the *Asian Journal of Criminology* has risen from 126th in the law category in 2020 (722 in total) to 75th in the law category in 2021 (801 in total), in the CiteScore ranking, rising to the top 10% of law journals and reigning in Q1 in the subject of law.

The *Asian Journal of Criminology* has attracted the significant attention of criminologists to study crime and justice in Asia internationally; it plays an important role as part of the infrastructure of the Asian paradigm.

Another significant infrastructure improvement has been the establishment in 2018 of the “Springer Series on Asian Criminology and Criminal Justice Research”. The book series focuses on research findings concerning crime and justice in Asia and has published 10 books with 3 more forthcoming. Springer also has published the *Handbook of Asian Criminology* in 2014. Another book series on Asian crime and justice is *Palgrave Advances in Criminology and Criminal Justice in Asia* published by Palgrave from 2015, counting 20 books.

Criminological academic educational programmes are a major infrastructure within the discipline and they have known very significant growth in Asian countries. In East Asia, criminology and criminal justice programmes have been growing significantly in in China,¹ Japan,² South Korea,³ Hong Kong,⁴ Taiwan,⁵ and Macao.⁶ In Southeast Asia, many countries and regions offer criminology and criminal justice programmes, such as Malaysia,⁷ the Philippines,⁸ Thailand,⁹ and Indonesia.¹⁰ In South Asia, new programmes have been established in Afghanistan,¹¹ Bangladesh,¹² along with existing programmes in India,¹³ Pakistan,¹⁴ and Sri Lanka.¹⁵ In Western Asia, some universities in Israel,¹⁶ Lebanon,¹⁷ and Saudi Arabia¹⁸ have offered specialized criminology degree programmes. In addition, in Uzbekistan, Central Asia,¹⁹ the Department of Criminal Law and Criminology of the Tashkent State University of Law is actively conducting criminology-related research. This trend of growth has been continuing.

Future Directions

Studies of crime and justice in Asia can be traced back thousands of years ago in Asia. But the Asian Criminology paradigm was proposed with a specified meaning in 2009 (Moosavi, 2019). The new concept and paradigm function to unite the efforts and

¹ <http://www.ppsuc.edu.cn/xkzy/bks2/fzxzy.htm>

² <https://www.ryukoku.ac.jp/english2/research/crimrc.html>

³ http://gra.hannam.ac.kr/eng/sub3/menu1_27.php

⁴ <https://sociology.hku.hk/programmes/taught-postgraduate/criminology/>

⁵ <https://deptcrm.ccu.edu.tw/index.php?lang=cht>

⁶ <https://soc.fss.um.edu.mo/postgraduate-study/master-programme/>

⁷ <https://law.um.edu.my/master-of-criminal-justice>

⁸ <https://pccr.edu.ph/program/college-of-criminology/>

⁹ <http://thaicriminology.com/criminology-study.html>

¹⁰ <https://criminology.fisip.ui.ac.id/en/homepage/>

¹¹ <http://avicenna.edu.af/education/education-level/masters/criminal-law-and-criminology/>

¹² https://www.cps-mbstu.edu.bd/pages/content_details/about-2

¹³ <https://www.unom.ac.in/index.php?route=department/department/deptpage&deptid=22>

¹⁴ <http://www.uop.edu.pk/departments/?q=Department-of-Criminology>

¹⁵ <http://fhss.sjp.ac.lk/criminology/>

¹⁶ <https://criminology.biu.ac.il/en>

¹⁷ <https://www.usek.edu.lb/en/department-of-criminology/master-in-criminology-2?t=2>

¹⁸ <https://nauss.edu.sa/en-us/colleges-and-centers/crime-sciences-college/Pages/about-college.aspx>

¹⁹ <https://akadmvd.uz/en/menu/kafedra-kriminologii>

interests to enhance research and academic activities rapidly as indicated by statistics and findings of scholars (Belknap, 2016; Liu, 2022).

From the perspective of Asian Criminology, the diverse Asian context is a valuable resource for new insights, new voices, and new models of justice and crime control. The in-depth study of crime and justice in Asia can provide input that is not typically seen in conventional settings of the West. These contributions have wide general implications for the discipline of criminology. The concept of Asian Criminology and the proposed Asian paradigm contain rich implications for research and policy.

Despite the significant growth, however, criminology remains to be enhanced further across Asia (Liu, 2017). In many Asian countries, there are limited resources available, insufficient well-funded research programmes, and limited data sets on crime and criminal justice collected by government agencies and researchers. I have analysed the situation in China and proposed that one direction for a solution is to develop markets (Liu, 2021).

Asian criminologists need to deepen their understanding of the markets in different countries. Garland has commented that criminology has not had a large influence in policymaking and is “failing to have much impact on the contemporary politics of crime and punishment” (Garland, 2021, pp. 258, 271). Attention to market demand in Asian countries is a necessary response to these weaknesses. Crime control is a major public policy field and need of a society, implying a major market for criminology. Asian criminologists need a detailed and specific understanding of the specific situation in their countries. In countries where this demand is understood better, criminology has experienced widespread acceptance and has been incorporated into government positions and professional qualification systems to meet the demand. An example in Asia is the Philippines, where criminology is a major professional qualification requirement for almost all the government positions and occupations in the justice system and broader crime control-related jobs. We are planning our fifteenth Annual Conference to be held in Manila, the Philippines, in 2024; it would be a nice opportunity to visit various sites such as prisons and police stations in person to learn how our Philippine colleagues enhance criminology under the Asian paradigm.

On the supply side, criminologists must provide high-quality products, including academic knowledge, policy initiatives, and practical skills. This poses essential tasks for Asian Criminology research. We must continue to review our theoretical concepts, approaches, and paradigms, to closely follow changes in societies, such as the rapid growth in technology, update our tools such as adopting big data and AI technology, strengthen interdisciplinary cooperation, and borrow new insights and tools from natural sciences, social sciences, and legal studies, to produce high-quality products and services to take advantage of the innovations from other disciplines. Therefore, a review like the one conducted above will be helpful for us to know where we are from, where we are, and where we will be moving, to conceptually and practically meet our mission for Asian Criminology and the discipline of criminology in general.

Declarations

Ethical Approval This article does not contain any studies with human participants or animals performed by the author.

Conflict of Interest The author declares no competing interests.

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