Systematic Quantitative Literature Review on Criminological Theories in Asia

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Abstract

Empirical work on criminological theories in Asia has been increasing. However, few comprehensive and systematic reviews on the application of criminological theories in Asia have been conducted. Using a systematic quantitative literature review method on peer-reviewed English-language journal articles, we aim to provide an overview of the use of five major criminological theories in Asia: (1) strain; (2) social learning; (3) control; (4) routine activity; and (5) developmental and life-course. In particular, we address the following four questions: (1) how often are these theories tested in which region of Asia?; (2) what methodology is used to test these theories?; (3) to what extent are these theories supported in the Asian context?; and (4) what cultural uniqueness in the Asian context is taken into account in testing these theories, and what role and effect do they play in analysis and outcome? Findings indicate that the relationship between these theories and the Asian regions is skewed; many studies do not employ rigorous methodologies; these theories are either fully or partially supported in the Asian context; and only a few studies have analyzed the cultural uniqueness of the Asian context, and no effect of cultural uniqueness of the Asian context was found. Research implications for developing criminology in Asia are discussed.

Keywords

Criminology in Asia; criminological theory; comparative criminology; systematic quantitative literature review

Introduction

Over the last couple of decades, Asia has become an important area of criminological research due to its economic and political influence in the context of globalization. In what Belknap (2016) called a “powerful” article, Liu (2009) emphasized the need to develop criminology in Asia. He articulated this because while most of the recent major criminological theories have been developed in the US (Liu 2007), “cultures and societies within Asia differ considerably” (Liu 2009, p. 4). The development of criminology in Asia is thus important for considering the comparative criminology perspective. This is particularly the case in criminological theories because, as Liu (2016) argues the need of an Asian paradigm, (causes of) criminal behaviors might be different between the US and Asia.

The development of criminology in Asia is evident in the growing amount of empirical literature on criminological theories. While most extant empirical studies on these theories still originate from the US and other Western countries (Carrington 2017; Jiang and Lambert 2012), the number of originating in Asia has been increasing (Antonaccio and Botchkovar 2016; Belknap 2016; Heberton and Jou 2013). Yet, few comprehensive and systematic reviews on the application of criminological theories in Asia have been conducted. Due to the differences *between* Asia and the US (and other Western countries) and *within* Asia (Liu 2009, 2016), it is important to understand how the existing criminological theories are used in Asia. In this paper, we aim to provide an overall picture of criminological theories in Asia by using the method of systematic quantitative literature review (SQLR) (Pickering and Byrne 2013; Pickering et al. 2015). As will be discussed later, we specifically focus on the following five criminological theories: (1) strain; (2) social learning (SL); (3) control; (4) routine activity (RA); and (5) developmental and life-course (DLC).

We address the following four questions. First, how often are these theories tested in the various regions of Asia? Our intention is to identify whether there is any variation in the

amounts of literature and numbers of theories tested in each region of Asia. If we are to develop criminology in Asia, we first need to know the overall picture. Second, what methodology (e.g., research design, data collection method, sampling strategy, sample size, etc.) is used? We aim to offer an overview of the methodology used in the extant literature. This will help to provide implications for future research designs in Asia.

Third, to what extent are these theories supported in the Asian context? While theories are invented to be “universal” beyond cultures and societies, some scholars caution against simply applying existing criminological theories in the Asian context (Jiang and Lambert 2012; Joo 2015; Zhang 2008) because the differences between Asia and the US (and other Western countries) might affect criminal and antisocial behaviors among Asian people (Braithwaite 2014; Zhang et al. 2008). Since Antonaccio and Botchkovar (2016) and Belknap (2016) have already conducted a narrative review on how criminological theories are tested in non-Western contexts including Asia, we are more interested in “numerically” (see the discussion on Methodology) understanding the extent to which the theories are supported, and if not, the reasons for failures.

The fourth and final question is about the “cultural uniqueness” of the Asian context – which can make Asia different from the West – in using criminological theories in Asia. In relation to cross-cultural criminology, Karstedt (2001, p. 289-290; also see Karstedt 2012) proposes that two analytical strategies exist to examine cultural differences: (1) dimensional-extensive strategy, in which “cultures can be compared with regard to specific dimensions that are common to all” (e.g., individualism/collectivism); and (2) singular-trait-intensive strategy, in which “differences between cultures are shaped by a specific characteristics or singular cultural trait, that pervades the total cultural pattern; it is present in one type of culture, but absent in others” (e.g., Latin-American “Machismo”). Since we are interested in the cultural uniqueness of the Asian context, our focus is on studies that adopt the latter

strategy: that is, those exploring cultural traits that exist solely in Asia. So, the question is: what type of singular cultural traits that are specific to the Asian context has been taken into account and what role and effect do they play in analysis and outcome? Since which singular cultural trait in Asia should be considered and how we should take it into account remain relatively unknown (c.f., Travers 2017), examining the above question will help future theoretical development in criminology in Asia.

Methodology

Systematic Quantitative Literature Review

The idea of a systematic quantitative literature review (SQLR) is recently put forward by Catherine Pickering (Pickering and Byrne 2013; Pickering et al. 2015). The basic philosophy and procedure of SQLR is almost the same as the “traditional” systematic review (Pickering and Byrne 2013). Yet, SQLR differs in what types of research are included. While the traditional systematic review generally focuses on quantitative methods, SQLR can even include qualitative studies. This is because the ultimate goal of SQLR is not to provide “evidence-based” practices by using an effect size with sophisticated statistical techniques; rather, it aims to offer “knowledge about ‘what we know’ as well as ‘what we don’t know’ by identifying research trends and gaps” (Pickering et al. 2015, p. 1761). In other words, the focus of SQLR is not on the outcomes of extant studies, such as the statistical power, but on their *contents*, such as what methodology is used or whether outcomes are positive/neutral/negative. It aims to offer numerical understanding on these aspects.

Since our purpose in this paper is to provide an overall picture of the abovementioned questions in relation to applying criminological theories in Asia, we consider SQLR the most appropriate methodology. The number of papers that employ this method is increasing in various disciplines (see <https://www.griffith.edu.au/environment-planning->

architecture/griffith-school-environment/research/systematic-quantitative-literature-review).

However, to our knowledge, this type of literature is scarce in criminology, particularly in the Asian context (c.f., Belknap, 2016; Heberton and Jou 2013; Liu et al. 2017). By examining the overview of the use of five major criminological theories in Asia with SQLR, we aim to identify geographical, methodological, theoretical and conceptual gaps in the current literature on criminology in Asia in order to contribute to its development. The following outlines the eligibility criteria for our SQLR.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Tittle (2016, p. 1) argued that the definition of theory in criminology can vary among scholars, “depending on their philosophies about the nature of criminology, what it is attempting to accomplish, and how they think criminology ought to be done.” In this paper, we focused on *theories for causes of crime and deviance*. We did so because until the recent extensive focus on desistance (i.e., how and why people stop offending), understanding reasons why people commit a crime can arguably be regarded as a priority in criminology (Graham and McNeill 2017) and such theories may be suitable to identify the differences between Asia and the US (and other Western countries).

When it comes to criminological theories for causes of crime and deviance, variations still exist, for example, from micro- to macro-theories (Baumer and Arnio 2016). To determine our focus, we employed the following strategy: we decided to focus on theories that are covered in all three recently published handbooks of criminological theory as a main theme or topic of a chapter (i.e., the theory has been discussed throughout the chapter rather than merely as a section in the chapter) (Cullen and Wilcox 2013; McLaughlin and Newburn 2010; Piquero 2016). This left the following five criminological theories: (1) strain, (2) social learning (SL), (3) control, (4) routine activity (RA), and (5) developmental and life-course (DLC).

With regard to the definition of Asia, we followed the list of Asian countries offered by the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) (2016). According to the UNSD, there are total 51(52)¹ countries in five regions (see Table 1).

Table 1 List of Asian countries

Region	Country
Central (n = 5)	Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan
Eastern (n = 7 (8))	China, Hong Kong (Special Administrative Region), Macao (Special Administrative Region), Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Japan, Mongolia, Republic of Korea, (Taiwan)
Southern (n = 9)	Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka
South-Eastern (n = 11)	Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Viet Nam
Western (n = 18)	Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Cyprus, Georgia, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, State of Palestine, Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Yemen

We adopted the following criteria to select studies. First, we have targeted *peer-reviewed journal articles*. Wilson (2009) warns that solely focusing on peer-reviewed journal articles in systematic methods is problematic because “grey” literature – unpublished works and reports by research institutions or government agencies – can be as significant as those of peer-reviewed journal articles. However, since there are relatively fewer governmental and independent research institutions that publish original studies in Asia (Mei and Wang 2007; Yokoyama 2013), focusing on peer-reviewed journal articles would be less likely to raise a problem in the Asian context. Second, we focused on *original empirical* research. For the empirical research, as discussed above, we included all types of research including not only quantitative but also qualitative and mixed-method studies. Third, we limited our search to *English-written* literature. Although we had a privilege of being capable of searching in three

¹ While Taiwan is not listed as an Asian country in the UNSD list, we decided to include it because numerous empirical studies have been conducted independently in Taiwan (Hebenton and Jou 2013).

languages due to the authors' backgrounds (i.e., Japanese, Chinese, and Bengali), we decided to rely solely on English-written languages in order to be equitable to other languages in Asia. While there is a language barrier in publishing research articles in English for criminologists in Asia whose first language is not English, the number of journal articles written by criminologists in Asia has been increasing (Hebenton and Jou 2013; Liu et al. 2013). In addition, because criminology as a discipline and knowledge is derived mainly from English-speaking countries, the "common language" for criminologists is arguably English. Hence, publishing research articles in English is important for criminologists in Asia because it will help to disseminate knowledge on how Asia can be different from the US and other Western countries in terms of crime and control (Liu 2009). Finally, we excluded cross-sectional studies that were conducted in more than two countries unless they are all Asian countries. We made this decision because our focus is on regions in Asia, not other regions or countries.

Search Strategies

Conducting SQLR requires a thorough database search. In this regard, Wilson (2009, p. 433) argued that for the result of systematic methods to be comprehensive, more than one database is required because "no single bibliographic database provides adequate coverage to be relied on as the sole source for identifying studies in crime and justice." To make a comprehensive literature list for the SQLR, we therefore used the following three databases: Sociological Abstracts, Criminal Justice Abstracts, and PsycINFO. We chose these databases because they cover different disciplines relevant to criminology.

The literature search was conducted between May and July 2016. The aforementioned databases were searched with keywords using the following combination: (keyword(s) for criminological theory) AND (keyword(s) for country) AND (crim*² OR delinquen* OR

² "*" indicates a wildcard. Note that the wildcard in the Criminal Justice Abstracts is "?".

offen*). Table 2 shows the keywords for the five criminological theories we focused on. With respect to the keyword(s) for Asian countries, we used a wildcard to include both a country itself and its citizens (e.g., “Japan*” for Japan as a country and Japanese people).

Table 2 Keywords for criminological theories

Theory	Keywords
Strain	general strain theory OR strain
SL	social learning OR differential association
Control	control OR social control OR social bond OR self-control OR power-control
RA	routine activit* OR lifestyle
DLC	life-course OR risk factor OR criminal career OR age-crime curve OR developmental pathway

Figure 1 describes the screening process of our SQLR. To screen the search outcomes, we employed the following two steps. First, after obtaining the search results with the abovementioned keywords, we checked the title and abstract to identify whether the journal articles matched our eligibility criteria. At this stage, duplicated articles were excluded. When uncertain, those articles were retained for the next step. Second, we read the whole article to check whether the journal articles screened were consistent with our criteria. After all, we identified 118 journal articles.

Figure 1 Screening process

Results

Based on the journal articles identified as per our eligibility criteria (n = 118), this section describes the outcome of our SQLR search. Each section corresponds with the four research questions respectively: (1) how often these theories are tested in which region of Asia?; (2) what methodology is used?; (3) to what extent are these theories supported in the Asian context?; and (4) what cultural uniqueness of the Asian context has been taken into account and what role and effect do they play in analysis and outcome?

Relationship between Theories and Asian Regions

In relation to the number of articles in each Asian region, the majority of them originated from Eastern Asia (67.5%, n = 83), significantly from South Korea (n = 27), China (n = 20), and Hong Kong (n = 17). The region that produced the second most number of articles is Western Asia (22.0%, n = 27). But, most of the articles in this region originated from two specific countries, Israel (n = 18) and Turkey (n = 7). The number of other regions in Asia that produced relevant articles is significantly small: South Eastern Asia (8.9%, n = 11), Southern Asia (1.6%, n = 2). We could not find any articles in Central Asia.

When closely looking at each theory in conjunction with each region in Asia, the results show another skewed trend (Figure 2). Among the five criminological theories, control is the most tested (41.1%, n = 62), while the majority of articles still come from Eastern Asia (n = 49). This is followed by strain (21.2%, n = 32), DLC (17.9%, n = 27), SL (14.6%, n = 22) and RA (5.3%, n = 8). Yet, no articles were found for strain in Southern Asia, for RA in Southern and South Eastern Asia, and for DLC in Southern Asia.

Figure 2 Number of articles by theories and Asian regions (N = 118)³

Methodological Choices

Table 3 summarizes the methodology adopted in the articles identified by our SQLR search. In Asia, the five criminological theories tend to have been tested with a particular research approach and design. Most articles relied on a quantitative approach (91.5%, n = 108) and cross-sectional approach (71.9%, n = 97). The similar trend is evident in the data collection method. The most common data collection method is survey (81.1%, n = 99). Other data collection methods were infrequently used: interview (8.2%, n = 10), secondary data (9.8%, n = 12), and observation (0.8%, n = 1). In relation to the sampling method, around less than half of the articles adopted a probability sampling method (46.3%, n = 56). Yet, in a certain number of articles (27.3%, n = 33), it is not clear which sampling method was employed, although most are assumed to have been non-probability. Similarly, the sample size also varied. Less than half of the articles had more than 1,000 respondents (39.8%, n = 47), while just fewer than a quarter of articles had more than 500 respondents (22.9%, n = 27) and more than 100 respondents (23.7%, n = 28). As for type of offenders, the majority of studies focused on juvenile offenders (64.8%, n = 81), and relatively few articles

³ Since no article was found in the literature search, Central Asia is not included.

dealt with female offenders (9.6%, n = 12). In relation to type of offence, near three-fifth of the articles (61.0%, n = 72) targeted crime in general and the second largest number of studies (10.2%, n = 12) focused on substance use or drug-related crime.

Table 3 Summary of methodology used in identified journal articles (N = 118)

Category ^a	Frequency (%)
Research approach^b	
Quantitative	91.5 (n = 108)
Qualitative	5.9 (n = 7)
Mixed-method	2.5 (n = 3)
Research design^c	
Experiment	0.7 (n = 1)
Cross-sectional	71.9 (n = 97)
Longitudinal	16.3 (n = 22)
Case study	0.0 (n = 0)
Comparative	11.1 (n = 15)
Data collection method	
Survey ^d	81.1 (n = 99)
Interview ^e	8.2 (n = 10)
Observation	0.8 (n = 1)
Secondary data ^f	9.8 (n = 12)
Sampling method	
Probability	46.3 (n = 56)
Non-probability	26.4 (n = 32)
Unknown or Not Applicable	27.3 (n = 33)
Sample size	
1000 ≤ n	39.8 (n = 47)
500 ≤ n < 1000	22.9 (n = 27)
100 ≤ n < 500	23.7 (n = 28)
50 ≤ n < 100	6.8 (n = 8)
n < 50	3.4 (n = 4)
Unknown or Not Applicable ^g	3.4 (n = 4)
Type of offender	
Adult	21.6 (n = 27)
Juvenile	64.8 (n = 81)
Both adult and juvenile	4.0 (n = 5)
Female	9.6 (n = 12)
Type of offence	
Not specific	61.0 (n = 72)
Theft	1.7 (n = 2)
Robbery	0.8 (n = 1)
Burglary	0.8 (n = 1)
Physical assault	3.4 (n = 4)
Homicide	2.5 (n = 3)
Domestic ^h or intimate partner violence	5.9 (n = 7)
Sexual assault	2.5 (n = 3)
Cybercrime	4.2 (n = 5)

Bullying	4.2 (n = 5)
Substance use or drug-related	10.2 (n = 12)
Fraud	0.8 (n = 1)
Corporate crime	0.8 (n = 1)
Antisocial behavior or deviance	0.8 (n = 1)

^a Because of the rounding error, the sum of frequency (%) is not 100 in some categories.

^b We adopted Cresswell's (2014) classification on research approach.

^c We adopted Bryman's (2016) classification on research design.

^d "Survey" includes written questionnaires and structured interviews.

^e "Interview" means qualitative (semi-structured and unstructured) interviews.

^f "Secondary data" includes official statistics (n = 9).

^g "Unknown" or "Not applicable" include articles that employed secondary data.

^h This includes child abuse.

Extent of Theory Support in the Asian Context

Since our aim for this question is to examine the extent to which theories we focused on are supported in the Asian context, we decided to limit our investigation to "relatively rigorous" studies among those we have identified. Drawing on the foregoing result, we assessed the rigorousness of the studies based on: (1) whether the study adopted a quantitative approach;⁴ (2) whether the study employed a probability sampling method; and (3) whether the study had more than 1000 sample size. This left 28 journal articles.

To determine the extent of which the theories are supported, we read the whole article, particularly focusing on the sections of Abstract, Discussion and Conclusion. Subsequently, we classified studies into three categories: fully supported, partially supported, or not supported. The following describes how we classified studies into these three categories. If studies found a "complete" relationship between the theories and the targeted deviant behaviors, they were classified as "fully supported." If research found only a partial relationship between theories and deviant behavior (e.g., some domains or factors of the theories failed to explain the relationship), these were classified as "partially supported." If studies indicate no relationship between the theories and deviant behaviors, they were classified as "not supported."

⁴ This includes studies that employed mixed methods.

Table 4 summarizes 28 journal articles in terms of theory, country, offence type, and extent of theory support (if “partially supported” or “not supported,” excerpts for the reasons are provided). In case of studies testing two theories, both results are presented.⁵ The result showed that these studies were conducted in countries where more research on criminological theories originated (see the previous section), such as South Korea (n = 12) or Hong Kong (n = 6). The majority of them focused on delinquency in general (n = 20). In terms of the extent of theory support, the number of “partially supported” (n = 17) slightly outweighed that of “fully supported” (n = 15). None of the studies were classified as “not supported.” When closely looking at each theory, all studies in SL (n = 3) and RA (n = 1) were classified as “fully supported.” Although the total number of studies was smaller than that of other theories (n = 2), the numbers of research categorized as “fully supported” and “partially supported” were equal in DLC (n = 1, respectively). Only among studies on Strain (n = 9) and Control (n = 17), the numbers of “partially supported” (n = 7 and 9 respectively) outweighed those of “fully supported” (n = 2 and 8 respectively). As for the reasons for “partially supported,” although most of them were that some domains or factors merely failed to explain the relationship between the theories and deviant behaviors (n = 10), others are concentrated on gender differences (n = 7).

⁵ For this reason, the number of the journal articles and the total sum of “fully supported,” “partially supported” and “not supported” are not consistent.

Table 4 Summary of journal articles for the extent of theory support in the Asian context (N = 28)

Article	Theory	Country	Offence type	Extent of theory support
Lin (2012)	Strain	Taiwan	Delinquency in general	Fully supported
Cheung and Cheung (2010)	Strain, Control	Hong Kong	Delinquency in general	Fully supported for Strain Partially supported for Control because of “a partial explanation for the gender gap in delinquency by elaborating the gender disparity in strain moderation of self-control” (p. 339)
Lin and Yi (2016)	Strain	Taiwan	Delinquency in general	Partially supported because “complex relationships between strain, negative emotions, non-emotive concepts, and delinquency are also found” (p. 515)
Gao et al. (2016)	Strain	China	Delinquency in general	Partially supported because “the extended model was found to more accurately reflect the mechanism of leading adolescent maltreatment to delinquency, and the original GST model only received partial support due to the failed mediating effects of state negative emotions” (p. 52)
Jang and Song (2015)	Strain	South Korea	Delinquency in general	Partially supported because of “little evidence that combining variables conducive to criminal coping is likely to help detect their conditioning effects than using the variables individually” (p. 419)
Yun et al (2014)	Strain	South Korea	Delinquency in general	Partially supported because “some culture-specific aspects, which means that gendered GST pathways to delinquency have some general applicability, but specific gendered pathways from strain through negative emotionality and conditioning factors toward deviance depend not only on specific combination of types of strains, negative emotions, conditioning factors, and deviance but also on specific types of cultural settings” (p. 286)
Moon et al. (2012)	Strain	South Korea	School bullying	Partially supported because of “limited support for the interaction effects between strains and conditioning factors on school bullying” (p. 827)
Cheung et al. (2007)	Strain	Hong Kong, China	Delinquency in general	Partially supported because “while parental support is notably effective for reducing adolescent delinquency in Hong Kong, it is not so in Guangzhou, where it is positively related to delinquency among adolescents whose mothers are not working” (p. 637)
Özbay and Özcan (2006)	Strain	Turkey	Delinquency in general	Partially supported because “various strain and class measures do not appear to be associated consistently with delinquency and gender, except for blocked opportunity for females” (p. 21)
Kim et al. (2013)	SL	South Korea	Delinquency in general	Fully supported
Kim et al. (2010)	SL, Control	South Korea	Substance use	Fully supported for both SL and Control
Lee et al. (2016)	SL, Control	South Korea	Sexting behavior	Fully supported for SL Partially supported for Control because “social control was negatively related to only

				the second type of sexting behavior, and self-control was not related to both types of behaviors” (p. 242)
Sacarellos et al. (2016)	Control	Saudi Arabia	Delinquency in general	Fully supported
Chan and Wong (2015)	Control	Hong Kong	School bullying	Fully supported
Jo (2015)	Control	South Korea	Delinquency in general	Fully supported
Cheung (2014)	Control	Hong Kong	Substance use, delinquency in general	Fully supported
Lu et al. (2013)	Control	China	Youth risky behavior	Fully supported
Moon et al. (2010)	Control	South Korea	Computer crime	Fully supported
Tanioka and Glaser (1991)	Control, RA	Japan	Delinquency in general	Fully supported for both Control and RA
Jo and Zhang (2014)	Control	South Korea	Delinquency in general	Partially supported because “for females, only the relationship between parenting and self-control was significant, but other associations, such as parenting-delinquency, and self-control-delinquency, were not statistically significant.” (p. 1355)
Ünal and Çukur (2011)	Control	Turkey	Delinquency in general	Partially supported because “Although the relationships of attachment to teacher and inductive discipline techniques to delinquency resulted as expected, the relationships were not statistically significant” (p. 566)
Yun and Walsh (2011)	Control	South Korea	Delinquency in general	Partially supported because “our correlational analysis that partially taps within-individual stability of self-control showed that self-control was not as stable as Gottfredson and Hirschi would have expected” (p. 455)
Jo and Bouffard (2014)	Control	South Korea	Delinquency in general	Partially supported because of “partial support for Gottfredson and Hirschi’s position that one general theory can be applied to explain both male and female crimes” (p. 363)
Moon et al. (2013)	Control	South Korea	Computer crime	Partially supported because “boys are more likely than girls to be involved in computer crime, but the results indicate that low self-control and opportunity factors are not effective in mediating the impact of gender” (p. 474)
Chui and Chan (2012b)	Control	Hong Kong	Delinquency in general	Partially supported because “involvement in organizational activities in general was found to have negative relationship with male and female delinquency” (p. 383)
Cheung and Cheung (2008)	Control	Hong Kong	Delinquency in general	Partially supported because “self-control fails to predict delinquency when social variables [measuring a number of other competing theoretical domains] are controlled for among Chinese adolescents” (p. 412)
Yi et al (2011)	DLC	Cambodia	Substance use	Fully supported
Lee and Bukowski (2012)	DLC	South Korea	Delinquency in general	Partially supported because “some risk factors have common effects on both domains and both genders, whereas others have unique effects despite their concurrent association across domain and gender” (p. 725)

Cultural Uniqueness of the Asian Context

To identify which journal articles has taken account the singular cultural trait that is unique to Asia in their analytical models, we focused on qualitative studies ($n = 111$).⁶ Further, we adopted the following procedure: (1) we read the introduction and literature review sections of each article to check if it refers to the uniqueness of the Asian context; and (2) if mentioned any, we then read the methodology section to check whether the singular cultural trait in the Asian context that is referred to in the introduction or the literature review section is incorporated into the analytical model.

While a certain number of articles referred to the uniqueness in the Asian context in relation to criminal and deviant behavior in their introduction or discussion sections and some articles have taken account for multi-dimensional concepts of culture, the number of the articles that actually incorporated singular cultural traits that are specific to Asia in their analytical models is small. Of 111 quantitative research identified, we found that only four journal articles did so. In addition, these singular cultural traits in the Asian context are limited to religious or ethical systems: Buddhism ($n = 2$), Confucianism ($n = 2$), and Daoism ($n = 1$).

Table 5 summarizes journal articles that incorporated the singular cultural trait in the Asian context into their analytical models for which theory, country, offence type, measurement, role in the analytical model, and the result. As an independent variable of Control, Confucianism was measured by Ornatowski's (1996) scale and analyzed for delinquency in general in Hong Kong. Similarly, as independent variables of Control, Confucianism and Daoism were measured by Dien's (1983) scale and analyzed for child maltreatment in Vietnam. Neither research showed effect of Confucianism and Daoism on the targeted deviant behaviors. As one of socio-demographic characteristics, Buddhism was

⁶ Consistent with the previous section, this includes studies with mixed methods.

incorporated as a control variable of SL and Control for family and intimate partner violence in the Thai context. This is because Buddhism, which has “non-violent nature” (Kerley et al. 2010, p. 346) and “encourages tolerance and individual initiative” (Kerley et al. 2008, p. 526), could affect family and intimate partner violence in Thailand. Consequently, its effect was not analyzed in these studies.

Table 5 Summary of journal articles that have taken account for uniqueness of the Asian context

Article	Theory	Country	Offence type	Singular cultural trait	Measurement	Role in the analytical model	Results on the effects of the uniqueness of the Asian context
Emery et al. (2014)	Control	Vietnam	Child maltreatment	Confucianism	(1) "a high public regard for education and widespread use of meritocratic entrance exams" (2) "an emphasis mutual obligations between superior and inferior" (3) "an overall stress on 'social harmony' as opposed to individualism, i.e. the individual 'fitting' himself into groups based on performing the proper role and groups doing the same vis a vis society" (Ornatowski 1996, p. 574)	Independent variable	No effect: "Because the Confucian beliefs variable did not have a significant relationship with either abuse or neglect in any of the models run, it is dropped from further analyses" (p. 1241)
Ngai and Cheung (2005)	Control	Hong Kong	Delinquency in general	Confucianism, Daoism	(1) "Endorsement of Confucian ethics: How much do you agree with various Confucian values (Dien 1983)?" (5 items) (p. 452) (2) "Endorsement of Daoist ethics: How much do you agree with various Daoist values (Dien 1983)?" (5 items) (p. 452)	Independent variable	No effect: "Moral belief, or disapproval of offenses, also promotes social control. Although endorsement of Confucian and Daoist ethics shows no significant impact on the likelihood of crime or delinquency, they demonstrate correlations with delinquent likelihood in the expected direction. They are also integral components of social control, which is the strongest factor preventing the marginal youths delinquency" (p. 461)
Kerley et al. (2010)	SL	Thailand	Family violence	Buddhism	"dummy coded with other faith traditions as the reference" (p.341)	Control variable	Not applicable
Kerley et al. (2008)	Control	Thailand	Intimate partner violence	Buddhism	"dummy coded with other faith transitions as the reference" (p. 515)	Control variable	Not applicable

Discussion

While the number of criminological literature on Asia is growing, fewer studies are involved in comprehensive and systematic reviews on the application of criminological theories in Asia. Using the SQLR method, we have offered an overall picture of the five major criminological theories in Asia: (1) strain, (2) SL, (3) control, (4) RA, and (5) DLC. Since our eligibility criteria is English-written peer-reviewed journal articles on these five theories, our finding might have missed some literature. For example, although social disorganization theory has been tested in Japan (Takagi and Kawachi 2014) and China (Jiang et al. 2013), our result does not include these literature because this theory is not in our eligibility criteria. Also, our result does not include journal articles written in non-English languages, book chapters or dissertations. Despite these limitations, however, we have identified 118 journal articles that have examined these five theories in Asia. Based on the findings in response to our four research questions – (1) relationship between theories and Asian regions; (2) methodological choices; (3) extent of theory support in the Asian context; and (4) cultural uniqueness of the Asian context – in this section we offer a future direction in developing criminology in Asia.

The most obvious trend in the relationship between the theories and the Asian regions is skewed. The existing knowledge on criminological theories in the Asian context is significantly biased towards Eastern Asia and Control. This remains a challenge if scholars intend to develop “indigenous” criminology in Asia because Asia consists of diverse cultures, religions, politics, and economies (Konishi 2013; Liu 2009). For instance, it would be hard to say that even if both are located in Asia, Japan and Bangladesh would be culturally, religiously, politically, and economically similar. To grasp the effect of diversity within Asia, more empirical studies need to be undertaken in the Southern, South Eastern and Central Asian regions, especially in relation to RA and DLC theories.

In relation to methodology, there is much room for improvement. First, more longitudinal studies with a comparison group are needed. Lack of longitudinal studies and a comparison group makes the causal mechanism less certain for these criminological theories in the Asian context (Antonaccio and Botchkovar 2016; Zhang 2008). Such a gap can be an obstacle to developing criminology in Asia, given the potential differences in criminal behavior and control between Asia and the US and other Western countries. Second, quality and availability of official data need to be improved. Compared to Western countries, the availability of official data on crime is relatively limited (Lee and Laidler 2013; Liu 2007; Zhang et al. 2008). Not only is the validity of official data questioned (Broadhurst and Liu 2004), but authorities are somewhat reluctant to provide crime-related data in some Asian countries (Zhang et al. 2007). This makes it difficult for criminologists in Asia to be competitive, while scholars in the West enjoy the luxury of availability of official data. Third, random sampling should be adapted in more studies. Lack of probability sampling strategy questions the quality of data (Zhang 2008). Given this, and the aforementioned methodological problems, more methodologically rigorous studies are needed.

Consistent with other studies (e.g. Marshall and Enzmann 2012), examination on the extent of theory support in the Asian context revealed that the selected theories are fully or at least partially supported in the Asian context. This may lead to the argument that existing major criminological theories, particularly SL and RA, are applicable beyond cultures and geography. Yet, it is important to remind the need for further investigation because some studies failed to fully support the theories. Especially, more research need to be conducted to examine differences between female and male offenders in the Asian context because some of the studies identified were classified as “partially supported” due to gender differences. This need can be further justified given the limited number of studies that focus on female offenders in the Asian context.

To develop criminology in Asia, it is crucial to “develop a basic understanding of the features of Asian cultures and societies, and of how these key features are related to crime and crime control practices” (Liu 2009, p. 4). This may be of particular importance because, as the above discussion suggests, some of the criminological theories are not fully supported in the Asian context. However, our results show that few articles attempted to consider the uniqueness of the Asian context. In other words, criminologists in Asia tend to test existing major criminological theories in Asian countries without modifications (Hebenton and Jou 2005; Lee and Laidler 2013). This may be partly due to the fact what singular cultural trait in Asia should be considered and how we should take it into account remain relatively unknown (c.f., Travers 2017). We need to investigate what mechanism and factors specific to Asia influence criminal and antisocial behaviors in order to develop criminology in Asia.

Yet, only pursuing such a singular-trait intensive strategy (Karstedt 2001) may not be enough to develop criminology in Asia. This is because our results also showed that those studies that incorporated singular cultural traits that are specific to the Asian context found no effect of these singular cultural traits. Given the limited number of such studies we have identified, it may just mean that singular cultural traits that are specific to the Asian context have yet to be sufficiently considered: for example, the effects of some potential singular cultural traits, such as Hinduism, are not examined. Or other contexts or conditions within Asia may yield different results. However, no effect of singular cultural trait in the Asian context may also mean that we should also employ the dimensional-extensive strategy (Karstedt 2001) in order to develop criminology in Asia. This is somewhat in line with the argument that modifications of existing criminological theories are needed to fit into the Asian context (Agnew 2015; Messner 2014, 2015; Miyazawa 1997) due to multi-dimensional cultural differences, such as collectivism (Liang and Lu 2006).

To offer a complete picture of a future direction for the dimensional-extensive strategy for the Asian context is beyond the scope of this paper. In this regard, however, Liu (2016, 2017b) has recently proposed a potential approach: Asian Paradigm. According to it, Asia could differ from the “West” in three cultural values – (1) attachment, (2) honor, and (3) harmony⁷ – and each of these values might affect the (criminal) behaviors in Asian societies. At this point, it is not much clear how these cultural values can fit into the research context, but at least they can be a good starting point to advance the dimensional-extensive strategy for criminology in Asia. Without moving forward somehow, in relation to the three stages of the development of criminological theories in Asia – (1) transportation (i.e., testing existing theories), (2) transformation (i.e., modifying existing theories so as to fit to Asian contexts), and (3) establishment of “new” theories (Liu 2017a) – we continue to remain between the first and second stage, and will not be able to further develop criminology for Asia.

Conclusion

Although some studies, such as Heberton and Jou (2013), have conducted a similar study, their analyses are limited to a specific Asian region, such as East Asia. Our paper is the first to show the overall trend of published English-written peer-reviewed journal articles across the *entire* Asian region. This is the central contribution of our paper for the sake of the development of criminology in Asia. Our results showed geographical, methodological, theoretical and conceptual gaps in the knowledge in the current empirical studies on criminological theories in Asia. Our findings encourage criminologists in Asia whose regions are underrepresented in the extant (English-written) literature, as well as give insights to those who are planning to conduct empirical studies in Asian regions.

⁷ Although the definition of harmony is not clear, Liu (2016, p. 215) considers it important in the Asian context where a high value is placed upon “group/relationship harmony, conflict avoidance, self-sacrifice, and compromise when personal interests are harmed or personal conflict arises.”

Criminology as a discipline in Asia has just started to develop. For instance, it is relatively recent that criminology as a major or criminology departments at the university level have become established in Asian countries (Hossain and Shahidullah 2008; Lee and Laidler 2013). While our results partly demonstrate the development of criminology in Asia, they also highlight a number of challenges. Without addressing these discrepancies in the extant literature, criminology in Asia remains at the nascent stage (Liu 2009; Liu et al. 2013). Particularly, criminologists in Asia should try to ask this question: With significant differences in cultures, regions, politics and economy within Asia, how do we construct/develop criminology in our own region?

Compliance with Ethical Standards

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This article does not contain any studies with human participants or animals performed by any of the authors.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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