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**Challenges and Prospects for Comparative Criminology  
in the Globalization Era**

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# Challenges and Prospects for Comparative Criminology in the Globalization Era

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## Introduction

The globalization beginning the 1990s has influenced upon the field of comparative criminology and criminal justice. It has created economic growth and well-being with an opening of the borders to trade and travel and the advances of communication technology such as the Internet, worldwide e-mail, and mobile phone. At the same time, however, it has had the by-product of the escalating threat associated with the new forms of crime that transcend national borders. Confronting the transnational crime has challenged the paradigm of traditional comparative criminology. Thus, this paper examines how the growth of globalization has had a significant impact on comparative criminological studies. In doing so, this paper will focus on the theoretical and methodological development of comparative criminology and the availability of cross-national crime data during the past two decades. Finally, the prospects of a new comparative criminology will be discussed.

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**What is Comparative Criminology? : Conceptual Distinction  
between Comparative Criminology and International/Trans-  
national Criminology**

The term comparative criminology is often used interchangeably with international/transnational criminology or global criminology these days. However, these terms are not interchangeable and in fact, have slightly different meanings.

Adler, Mueller and Laufer (2007: 384) give us very clear definition of comparative criminology. "Simply put, it is the cross-cultural or cross-national study of crime and crime control applying the comparative method in the science of criminology." Beirne and Nelken (1997 : *xiii*) define comparative criminology as "the systematic and theoretically informed comparison of crime in two or more cultures." In this sense, comparative criminology is synonymous with cross-cultural and cross-national criminology. The key point here is that "comparative" refers to method. Any criminology that compares will fit the category of comparative research and it requires comparison across cultures or nations. When conceived of as a method, comparative criminology is a broad body of knowledge that can encompass a wide variety of types of enquiry.

In contrast, international and transnational refer to "objects of study." International/transnational criminology focus on international/transnational crimes and a cooperative international response. Indeed, transnational crime has emerged as a leading issue of the 1990s. Since then, the term transnational crime is often referred to as international crime and vice versa. Although there may be some overlap with some of the crimes in the two categories, such as international drug trafficking or terrorism, they are technically not the same.

Transnational crimes always involve at least two countries whereas some international crimes can occur only within the boundaries of a country, as with genocide or apartheid. Again, The terms transnational crime will be used to describe the illegal activities that occur across international boundaries (Dammer and Fairchild, 2006: 6).

To take an example, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998) defines international crimes as “the gravest crimes that threaten the peace, security and well-being of the world and are of concern to the international community.” This covers three categories of “core crimes”: genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. According to Murphy (1999), “international crime” is an act that is defined as criminal under international law (Natarajan, 2005: *xvi*). In essence, these crimes can be tried by countries that recognize them or they can be tried by international criminal courts.

Transnational crimes, on the other hand, are criminal acts that span national borders thus, violating the laws of more than one country. Fourth United Nations Surveys of Crime Trends and Operation of Criminal Justice Systems (UNCJS) (1995) defines transnational crime as “offenses whose inception, proportion and/or indirect effects involve more than one country.” These crimes include illicit trafficking in arms, drugs, children, women, immigrants, body organs, cultural artifact, nuclear materials and automobiles, terrorism, corruption and money laundering, computer crimes or cyber crimes and so on (Adler et al., 2007: 395-402; Dammer and Fairchild, 2006: 6). While it is conceivable that all these activities could be committed within a single jurisdiction and/or by individual perpetrators, it is the hallmark of all that they are typically perpetrated by means of transnational activities and by the international organized crime

groups.

In my view, the distinction of comparative criminology and international/transnational criminology is important because, when criminologists inaccurately interchange the terms comparative and international/transnational, they lose the distinctive meaning of “comparative analysis” or “comparative method.”

Given these terminology, traditional comparative criminology has focused on the following basic questions:

- (1) Why do some societies have lower crime rates?
- (2) What are the differences and similarities in crime definition and control across cultures and nations?
- (3) How do theoretical models relating to crime translate across cultures?

### **What are the Impacts of Globalization?**

Now, as traditional comparative criminology is confronted by the globalization beginning the 1990s, it has been changing in several ways and directions of inquiry. I would like to present some discussions about the possible changes and future directions of comparative criminological research in the globalization era.

In doing so, at first, let me look at the impacts of globalization briefly. Globalization generally refers to the growing interconnect- edness of states and societies and it has created economic growth and well-being with an opening of the borders to trade and travel and the advances of information and communication technology such as the Internet, e-mail, and mobile phone. The process of globalization has increased the mobility of people, goods, information and ideas across borders on a global scale. Because of this kind of globalization, it

is said that the world has become much smaller. To use the term by Adler et al.(2007: 385), the world has become a “global village.”

While the progress in socio-economic globalization is making people's everyday life more comfortable and enriching it, globalization has had as much impact on crime as on many other aspects of social life. In other words, it has had the side-effect of the escalating threat associated with the new forms of crime that transcend national borders. This is said to be “globalization of crime” (Findlay, 1999; Shelley, 2005; UNODC, 2010) or the emergence of transnational crime (Williams, 1999).

Perhaps, Europe is feeling the effects of globalization even more intensely than the rest of the world. The complete collapse of the Soviet Union and Communist states in central and eastern Europe and the virtual abolition of frontiers within Europe have brought crime problems until now inexperienced in Europe. Consequently, national criminology had to become transnational/international criminology. Criminology has in fact been globalized.

### **Expanding the Scope of Comparative Criminological Research**

In this context, globalization should become a focal point for comparative criminology. From this perspective, key objects are phenomena created or enhanced by globalization, such as transnational/international crimes.

Confronting the transnational/international crimes has challenged the paradigm of traditional comparative criminology. The benefits of globalization are unevenly distributed. Some regions are reaping its benefits whereas others are excluded. For some people globalization is a promise of cosmopolitan life experiences and business

opportunity. To other, it is a force set to destroy their way of life. Accordingly, the differential impact of globalization on regions, societies, and individuals is a key area of comparative research.

Therefore, the scope of comparative criminology is wider than the search for the causes of crime. It extends beyond cross-national testing and development of criminological theory, the study of transnational crime and transnational crime control, the problems of exporting models of crime control to other countries, and the issues related to the international cooperation, and the availability of international data.

In terms of applying today's global perspective to comparative criminology, I leave you with five challenges and prospects for comparative criminology.

### **The Need of Transnational Crime and Crime Control**

Perhaps the most recent and popular addition to the domain of comparative criminology is transnational crime. As the world becomes a smaller place through the expansion of globalization, crime and criminal justice become increasingly transnational. The problems of transnational crime point to the need for a coordinated or transnational criminal justice response. The establishment of effective crime prevention strategy to prevent transnational crime from occurring is heavily dependent on countries working together to develop the way to reduce demand for the illicit goods and services that are the bread and butter of organized criminal groups, and to work with each other in combating the international criminal organization.

Here, the benefits of comparative criminology extended beyond the merely provincial and become more fully universal.

### **Advancing Comparative Analysis**

Comparative studies in criminology and criminal justice is to compare crime rates and justice systems in different nations or cultures. It is quite valuable work and typically involves scholars familiar with practice and procedures in many different nations. The central focus of such studies is not any one place but a variety of different places. Students of comparative criminology are supposed to be cosmopolitan and masters of multiple systems. For this reason, comparative research requires special preparatory work to attain the goal of comparative criminology (Adler et al, 2007: 388-390). This work includes studying foreign law, understanding foreign criminal justice systems, learning about a foreign culture, collecting international data. Therefore, the possibility for the comparative research is dependent upon the existence of social scientists who are highly trained in social science methodology and have an intimate knowledge of their respective criminal justice systems. Given that there will be more and more researchers who are so trained, the increased globalization will surely increase the possibility of more capable scholars coming together. Then, it is expected that an existing international body like International Society for Criminology could advance the study of comparative criminology by ensuring regular meetings of scholars and researchers interested in the subject.

For example, as for the Japanese scholars, they are very willing to do comparative works to investigate the Anglo-American systems and European countries like Germany and France under the Civil Law systems. This kind of work is obviously significant to learn from the experience of others, provide new insight and understand-



ing of our own systems of justice, accordingly improve that system. A technique used in one country to combat crime might be successfully adapted for use in another country.

To take an example, the Japanese police system called Koban (police box) would be among them. Because policing in Japan is considered to be very effective and efficient, it has been studied and written about in many countries (Bayley, 1991; Ganapathy, 2005:161; Leishman, 2007). Some researchers and practitioners argue that the koban system's community-wide deployment of police would be effective in the United States (Dammer and Fairchild, 2006: 9; Reichel, 2002: 5, 340-342). In addition, the koban system may have important implications for the trends toward community policing in America and other countries.

To give another example, restorative justice such as mediation and dispute resolution has a long and distinguished tradition at the tribal and village levels in Oceania and other less developed countries. These traditional aspects of different cultures transfer to modern developed countries and may operate successfully in a new setting (Pakes, 2010: 80-83; Reichel, 2002: 239-240)

### **Data Explosion**

Another significant development in the field of comparative criminology is that the incredible explosion of crime and criminal justice information in the international area. In recent years, an enormous amount of information concerning the crime and justice situation in many countries has become readily available. Most major countries of the world now host Web sites that provide a range of statistics and criminal justice information. There are also many international bodies that provide crime and justice statistics on the

Internet. Many site also make available lists of new publications concerning crime and justice in their respective countries. Thus, it is possible not only to obtain more information than ever before, but also to obtain it more quickly, often without regard to crossing national borders. The transparency and availability of such information have created a climate in which the promises of comparative criminological research may be realistically pursued.

So far, there are three main sources of official crime data at the cross-national level. First, for those researchers interested in a specific country or for comparative analyses of a small set of countries, the best approach is to gather information directly from the nations themselves by means of Internet.

Second, comparative researchers can take advantage of the most well known source of information on cross-national data, that is the United Nations crime surveys. The UN crime surveys (United Nations Surveys of Crime Trends, Operation of Criminal Justice Systems and Crime Prevention Strategies: UN-CTS) gather information on crime and criminal justice systems in the member countries of the United Nations, with the goal of improving the dissemination of this information to a global audience of researchers and administrators. The UN-CTS started in 1977 and are conducted under the auspices of the United Nations Centre for International Crime Prevention, Office of Drug Control and Crime Prevention in Vienna. There have been thus far eleven surveys and the twelfth planned for the years 2009-2010 is underway (see [http://unodc.org/unodc/en/crime\\_survey\\_eleventh.html](http://unodc.org/unodc/en/crime_survey_eleventh.html)).

The United Nations has attempted to validate data and analyzes each past survey and questionnaire in order to make the next survey better. Given the inherently dark figure or underreporting

of crime problem, the definitional problem of crime among nations, and differences in collection and recording practices, however, UN-CTS data suffer from the same validity and reliability problems as any other official crime statistics. While the UN survey, as such, acknowledges that it is not intended to measure the exact amount of crime existing in the world (Newman, 1999: 3), comparative criminological researchers should be cautioned against comparing statistical data of individual reporting countries.

In this context, it should be noted that the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) International Crime Statistics, which has been published since 1950 for about 100 nations bi-annually and one of the primary sources of official police data at an international level, is not accessible to any researchers, but only authorized Police personnel since 2003. The main reason for that is the quality of statistics is insufficient to ensure the requirements of accuracy and reliability. INTERPOL states that “the information given is in no way intended for use as a basis for comparisons between different countries.”(Neapolitan, 2005: 248). I’m afraid the unavailability of INTERPOL data surely prevents researchers from doing cross-national comparisons and analysis, even if there have been many limitations with the international crime data.

Consequently, to obtain a more accurate picture of the crime situation in various countries, researchers have devised two additional statistical instruments, that is, the International Crime Victim Survey (ICVS) and the International Self-Report Delinquency (ISRD) (Dammer and Fairchild, 2006: 26-28; Newman, 1999: 15-17). ICVS conducted by United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) from 1989 on a periodic basis provide victimization data using a standard questionnaire in all participating

countries. There have thus far been five sweeps of the ICVS, 1989, 1992, 1996, 2000, and 2005 (van Dijk et al., 2008). ICVS is now the most extensive standardized survey of victims in the world.

ISR D is another primary sources of international crime data and is considered as an alternative to INTERPOL data and ICVS victim data. ISR D study has been conducted twice. The first ISR D study (1991-1992) compared juvenile rates of crime in thirteen countries, using standardized and comparable methods in questionnaires, sample selection, and data coding. The second ISR D study (2005-2007) was repeated with a larger number of countries. A third and larger ISR D study is planned for 2011-2012 (He and Marshall, 2011: 478).

Whether ICVS or ISR D, these unofficial international data is as well flawed in the validity and reliability problems and still limited to a small set of countries under investigation. These limitations of international data have not allowed for valid cross-national comparison or analysis. Therefore, it is necessary to make efforts to improve the data's usefulness and comparability (Dammer and Fairchild, 2006: 32-34).

### **Establishment of a System for International Cooperation**

For today's criminologists, again, transnational crime is serious concerns that beg for a cooperative international response. There have been several international efforts to coordinate the fight against transnational crime so far.

For instance, INTERPOL has been working to enlarge its information network in order to facilitate the effective and quick exchange of information among member countries and regions (Reichel, 2002: 178-181). INTERPOL, working with national law enforcement of-

ficials, would take the lead in the investigation of globalization-related crimes.

Security organizations of G8 countries (Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia and the USA) discuss international cooperation issues. Cross-border security issues like international terrorism and transnational crime have been in the forefront of G8 Summit Meetings in recent years. G8 recognized the importance of supporting international cooperation in order to effectively fight against international/transnational crime.

To take the Japanese situation an example, it is necessary to strengthen international cooperation with the countries of East Asia, including China and the Republic of Korea. Because the international organized crime groups from China and Korea cause the majority of cases of crimes involving foreigners, due to the deep economic relationship and close proximity of these countries to Japan.

With this regard, it is expected that comparative criminologists take an active part in the project to assess such international efforts and provide the information on coordinated criminal justice response.

### **Extending Theories beyond Cultural and National Boundaries**

Finally, globalization affords us the opportunity to do cross-cultural testing and development of criminological theory. The challenge for comparative criminologists is to develop theories with increased specificity while managing to construct them in such a way that they can be applied across more than one culture or nation (Howard et al., 2000: 189). It should be noted that many good theories in criminology pass through a phase in which they are criticized as temporally or spatially provincial (Adler, 1996). For example, if

American criminological theories developed to explain crime rates in the United States are applicable to other cultures and/or nations like Japan and Switzerland with low crime rates, such cross-national theory testing would be helpful to improve the universal validity of American theories. This is the replication problem, which is the important point of any scientific inquiries. Comparative criminological research with the replication design clearly should serve the elaboration and specification of the theory. Consequently, comparative work in criminology offers great potential for increasing the explanatory power of our theories.

Unfortunately, however, there has been little systematic and quantitative comparative research to test criminological theories with cross-national data so far. The testing of theories also depends essentially on the ability of the researcher to specify theoretical concepts and translate them into variables that can be measured from valid and reliable cross-national data. Doing this in the cross-national setting is indeed a challenge.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, too many issues confronting comparative criminology in the globalization era make me feel dizzy. I know my limitations in dealing with such challenging tasks alone. I believe comparative criminology with international/transnational perspective is the kind of research field where a researcher should team up with his/her partners sharing the same research concerns and approaches. Hopefully, this paper would become a small step to advance this kind of the comparative criminological research for the future.

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