

Crime in Japan – a Lesson for Criminological Theory? The Cultural Dimension in Crime – What Can the Japanese Experience Tell Us?

Dag Leonardsen
Lillehammer University College, Norway

If the post-war years are divided into three periods (1945-52, 1952-90, and 1990-2003), crime in Japan seems to have varied inversely with crime in Western countries. Throughout the whole period Japan has undergone **structural** changes largely similar to those that have taken place in the Western countries (modernisation and urbanisation). However, Japan has not undergone the same **cultural** transformations. This provides an interesting point of departure for a debate on the role of structural vs cultural explanations in criminology. Does the case of Japan show that culture has a stronger role to play? The author discusses the relevance of economic and social structures in understanding of crime as against the relevance of cultural structures. This paper concludes that Japanese culture has strongly contributed to the low crime rates in Japan between 1952-90. However, these cultural values were unable to prevent the crime wave in 1945-52 and (perhaps) in 1990-2003. The crime increase in the final period is probably more related to economic and social changes than to a change in the moral climate.

Introduction

For a Western criminologist travelling to Japan one particular observation soon becomes apparent: Japanese politeness, carefulness and defensiveness in interpersonal relations. As part of this picture, one rapidly experiences the extensive 'apology culture'. At the check-in counter at the airport one will be met with 'please excuse us for keeping you waiting', when there is nobody queuing in front of you. For a long time people have for a long time used surgical masks – not primarily to protect themselves from infection, but to prevent *others* from being infected. On rainy days you will not see people taking dripping umbrellas into shops. Instead, they protect the floors by putting on a cover placed at the entrance. Even down and outs (rapidly increasing in number) who sleep in tube stations or in parks will wrap their covers and sleeping bags and underlay neatly together in a small bundle as the morning breaks.

Examples such as these are innumerable. Accordingly, some observers have characterised Japan as a 'wrapping culture' (Hendry, 1993, 1999, Ben-Ari et al., 1990), while others have used the label 'Nanny State' (McGregor, 1996) or the 'Kindergarten State' (Kerr, 2001). Undoubtedly, Japan is both a courteous and caring (some would say bothering) nation. People are extremely conscious that they are under the scrutiny of an ever-watchful public eye. Body language (procedures for greetings and farewells etc) gives a clear impression of an other-directed awareness. This has been incorporated into their language. The so-called 'keigo', polite language, is loaded with expressions concerning correct behaviour in everyday communication.

Criminologically, it is not difficult to see how these characteristics of Japanese culture might give some important clues as to understanding Japan as a low-crime nation (Leonardsen,

2004). While Japan has undergone most of the *structural* changes found in Western¹ countries (connected with modernisation and urbanisation), this country has not undergone the same *cultural* transformation. This gives us a very challenging and interesting starting point for a more general criminological debate. Does Japan prove wrong all the criminological theories focusing on structural explanations (‘*anybody* can commit murder depending on the structural surroundings’)? Is Japan a country that illuminates the importance of ‘cultural’, rather than ‘structural’, to explanations of crime?

Another observation that makes Japan an interesting case for criminologists, is the manner in which crime during these three phases has varied inversely compared with Western countries.² In Japan almost all types of registered crime *increased* immediately after the end of World War II. In most Western countries, however, crime *decreased* in that period. Yet from the early 50s the trend was reversed - in both places! Except for some types of crimes for profit, the crime statistics in Japan show a steady decline until the early 90s. In Western countries, on the other hand, crime rocketed in the same period. During the 90s the situation seems to have changed once again – in both places! Over the last 10-15 years the Japanese have become more worried about crime (Fenwick, 2004), and the most recent figures (White Paper on Crime, 2002, 2003, 2004) indicate that the crime situation is deteriorating. By contrast, in the West (especially the US) the 90s seem to have brought a downward turn. The general picture appears to be – for the third time since 1945 – crime figures in the West has gone in the opposite direction compared with Japan.

The common denominator in criminological studies of Japan has been the focus on the paradox that crime in Japan for most of the years after the Second World War decreased or stabilised while the modernisation and urbanisation process developed continuously. How could it be that ‘all’ modernised societies had to pay the price of increasing crime, apart from Japan? In answering this question there has been broad agreement amongst criminologists that the *cultural* dimension provides the best explanation of Japanese uniqueness. However, surprisingly this conclusion has had little influence on Western debates concerning crime preventive strategies in this part of the world.³ Also, it has had surprisingly little consequence for action theory within the social sciences. Is it not the case - Japan tells us - that structural determinants have been largely exaggerated in Western countries, and does it not tell us that value based action (‘morality’) has correspondingly been underestimated? Is Japan evidence that the warning against ‘the oversocialised conception of man’ (Wrong, 1961) or against man as a ‘cultural dope’ (Garfinkel, 1967) has suffered an ethnocentrist bias? If these questions are discussed not only for the period when crime in Japan decreased, but also in the two periods (after the War) when it apparently *increased*, we obtain a broader empirical base from which to reflect on cultural and structural influences on crime. Why has crime development in Japan been the inverse of the West?

My intention in this paper is to use Japan as a case to foreground a more general criminological debate. By looking into the three different periods since 1945 I shall examine the relevance of cultural vs. structural explanations of crime.

Perspectives

Is crime an *action* or should it rather be understood as *behaviour*? The difference between these two concepts is more than semantic. As a general principle one can argue that outer ‘forces’ determine human behaviour or that an inner, moral will is the engine behind human

actions. In the first case we operate within a natural science paradigm and argue, as Durkheim did, that mechanical forces operating behind the back of each individual *cause* crime. The individual does not choose to commit the deviant act but nevertheless this occurs because blind determinants inexorably take control. This is what we call a 'mechanistic' perspective since one talks about 'mechanisms' that operate in a 'mechanistic' way. From this perspective it should be possible to develop nomotetic interconnections between, not only natural phenomena, but between social phenomena. In this context it follows as a logical consequence that people should not be punished for criminal behaviour since the individual is not an autonomous, reflecting entity. Concerning criminological research in general one can illustrate this (positivistic) way of thinking by saying that rapid urbanisation will (*ceteris paribus*) necessarily lead to more crime, or that increased availability of alcohol will increase consumption and thereby alcohol related problems (e.g. crime). In this perspective humans are like animals, they do not act; they behave (cf. *behaviourism*).

However, from Weber to Giddens there has been much criticism of this view of human behaviour. People are not victims of inescapable conveyors, and they are not objects reflecting given structures. Human beings are intentional, value rational, carriers of meaning who express conscious and deliberate choices as they *act*.⁴ Behind every act there is an intention that reflects some basic values, and the individual has, in principle, a free will to decide what to do. Instead of regarding the human being as determined by surrounding conditions, the individual is regarded as an agent carrying forward a set of values that, even though they are culture specific, in the deepest sense 'belong' to the individual. Accordingly, people should be held responsible for their actions.

I support scholars who have tried to bring 'acting people' back into the social sciences. Animals *behave* in a non-reflexive and conditioned way, while humans *act* (expressing a will and a set of values). I find it important to be attentive to the perspective of human agency and role performance⁵, especially if our analysis relates to some kind of a micro level.

Nevertheless, in this paper I will consciously disregard the Weberian approach to human action. My perspective in this paper is mainly macro sociological and it is *causal*. From such a perspective it is possible to make an analytical distinction between 'structural determinants' and 'cultural determinants' of human behaviour, while nevertheless regarding them both as given facts. Thus, even though 'culture' is interpreted, adapted or edited by each individual, in my present analysis this process is interpreted in a causal perspective.

Regarding *structural* determinants I distinguish between the *economic* and *social* dimension. Economic determinants refer to such phenomena as unemployment, poverty and economic inequality. Meanwhile, social determinants refer to sociological dimensions that influence an individual's sense of belonging, predictability and well-being. With respect to the last mentioned, primary groups will be the source of social bonds that gives a deep sense of roots for each citizen. From a criminological perspective one can argue that modern societies with little unemployment, poverty, and economic inequality, that also offer each individual a real sense of belonging to some kind of stable and surveyable community will be low crime societies (Leonardsen, 2002, Hirschi, 1969).

By *cultural* determinants I mean normative structures or the total values within one culture. Analytically, these can be split into two spheres. One is related to the macro level where culture is regarded as a given aggregate that encapsulates individuals from cradle to grave. In this perspective culture is about the systems of meanings that surround each individual and

which, in a more or less tacit way, provide each individual with some basic and standard navigating principles. The other aspect of culture is related to those values (at the micro level) that are internalised by each individual via the socialisation process. Culture in the first instance is linked to what we might call regulative ideas that are deeply embedded in one group of people, and should be regarded as taken-for-granted (Ito, 1988). However, this 'outer' normative regulation is insufficient to adapt and integrate people into a specific culture unless it is internalised in the personality of each individual (as 'conscience'). While culture in the first meaning is a relatively static phenomenon at the macro level, culture in the second meaning is more dynamic and to a larger extent linked to agency. Culture is something 'moulded' by individuals, both as sender and receiver, and the transmission of the cultural heritage takes place as a conscious process. Instead of culture being pre-packed and a standard cocoon that encapsulates everybody in the same way, culture in the second meaning is more open to individual variation. Nevertheless, this process of cultural mediation will, in my analysis, be looked upon as a standard script that is unequivocally and uniformly handed over to each generation. However, I still prefer to make a distinction between the micro (socialisation) and the macro ('culture heritage') level since there can be varying degrees of accordance between those levels in different cultures. As we shall see, in Japan, the *social* codex of harmony is mirrored in a *personal* codex of reserve and defensiveness, and this continuity between the social and the personal is of great importance for societal integration.

From a criminological perspective one can argue that a society that conveys values and stresses awareness of other people, will most probably be a low crime society. Or to take the perspective in reverse and focus on the individual level: inner-directed individuals, with little self-control who live in compliant cultures, will more easily engage in criminal acts than self-controlled and other-directed individuals living in stricter cultures (Leonardsen, 2004).

In this article I plan to use Japan as an empirical case to 'test' the relevance of these two main perspectives to explain crime. What can be said about the role played by economic and social structures to explain crime, and what can be said about the role played by culturally specific values? In most studies regarding the uniqueness of Japanese crime rates, scholars have used culture as a kind of 'omnibus designation', that includes general values as well as group structure and different aspects of homogeneity (ethnicity, class, history etc.). Alternatively, in some cases (see Roberts and LaFree, 2001) culture has been operationalised in a simplistic way. This has resulted in a rejection of culture as the main source for understanding crime in Japan. I contend that it is important to 'upgrade' normative structures in our understanding of crime. How people are economically and structurally situated is definitely of great importance. However, it seems to me that a Western rationalistic culture has too long distanced itself from perspectives that involve different aspects of morality⁶. Western societies have avoided an important debate on individual freedom that even Adam Smith (1976) took seriously. The appearance and popularity of the communitarian movement in the US is perhaps indicative of the loss of 'moral dialogue' in this country.⁷

Three phases of crime development in Japan

1945-52: Economic and social chaos – the limit of Japanese culture as an integrative force?

There was a rise in almost all kinds of crimes during the 30s (when there was economic depression and political instability). Then a *decrease* during the wartime period 1937-45

(many young adult males had been sent off to the war front overseas). However, crime in Japan 'was rampant and the social order eroded' (Shikita and Tsuchiya, 1990: ii) in the years after the end of World War II. According to the statistics almost all types of crime (except murder, gambling and kidnapping) increased rapidly, mainly until 1952-54 (but for assaults the peak was not reached until 1958). Theft, extortion, robbery, assault, bodily injury, rape; all these crimes washed like a wave into the Japanese society in these years.

This makes it tempting to conclude that the first post-war period falsifies the relevance of cultural explanations of crime in Japan. If culture is to be understood as a time-old history that is deposited in a multiplicity of social remnants (my first definition of culture), then culture will not be changed over-night. Neither will it be essentially changed during a short post-war period. Even though cultures are adaptable and do undergo changes, it is hard to argue that Japanese culture (as an aggregate of institutionalised values) changed dramatically during these years. Nonetheless, one has to add that the post-war years were characterised by an obvious short-term moral chaos. In this period 'the sense of values collapsed, moral sense was "shaken"' (Shikita and Tsuchiya, 1990: 44), and it seems that the *operational* navigating principles for acceptable behaviour changed for a period of time. This, of course, did not turn everybody into a scoundrel, but social control as expressed through a consistent and actively enforced value system, seemed to disintegrate. This was further reinforced by the fact that the formal gatekeeper of public morality – the police – was in disarray⁸ and governmental structures were in dissolution. Add to this the fact that amphetamines were ubiquitous in Japan right after the war,⁹ and it becomes obvious that the social situation at that time was highly unstable. The streets were filled with vagrants and people's lives were wretched due to the war. Japanese society was atomised and fostered a general situation where each citizen had to mind his/her own business. Put succinctly, life was 'Hobbesian' and 'moral tightness' (Durkheim, 1952) was weak. Japan was in a situation of moral *laissez-faire* and the ideology of survival of the fittest dominated. However, this is not the same as saying that there was a fundamental change in the basic value structure of Japanese society.

If we move our perspective to the second meaning of culture (as values transmitted in the socialisation process) it is hard to maintain that the *general* situation in Japan changed dramatically during these years. However, for quite a few people everyday life was dramatically changed, and structural conditions surrounding many youth were traumatic. In 1948, it was estimated that there were some 124.000 orphans in Japan, and many were living on the streets (EAMM, 1996). Many were sent to host families, whilst some were accommodated in institutions or different types of child protection facilities.¹⁰ Obviously, conditions for raising children were dramatically changed for a number of people in these years, and one would surmise that this might have affected the early socialisation of children.¹¹ However, an eventual negative effect of deteriorating conditions for raising children would hardly have its main manifestation until 10- 15 years later. The social unrest appeared to have a crime triggering effect in Japan during these years, but the situation must be analysed in relation to what I have designated as structural determinants (i. e. economic and social relations). First, however, I shall comment on the role of social network giving people a sense of bonding.

World War II claimed three million Japanese people (Kodansha Encyclopedia of Japan). This meant that a huge number of families were suddenly thrown into instability and unpredictability. Even though Japanese family structure at this time was characterised by extended families, Japanese social structure collapsed in many ways after the humiliating defeat. While this nation is usually presented as the typical example of a 'tight culture'

(Triandis, 1994) where norms are clear and reliably imposed, some basic prerequisites for this type of socialisation were absent for some years after 1945. For *all* Japanese families (not only those directly effected by the war) these years were characterised by extreme uncertainty and disorganised social networks. Normally, predictability and social belonging represent important qualities for an integrated society, yet Japan had little to offer along these lines for a considerable number of people.

From sociology it is known that a society of stable primary groups is a basic prerequisite for creating the informal social control which compensates for a lack of inner control. In the turbulent post-war years the group had essentially weakened its control over the individual in Japan. People were no longer prisoner of what Rousseau called 'the gaze of the Other'.

Turning next to *economic* determinants, more than most war-ridden countries, Japan's economy was in a state of total devastation in 1945. The country was completely cut off from raw materials, which, due to Japan's lack of natural resources, caused a serious setback. In addition, all manufacturing facilities had been damaged or totally destroyed during the War. At the same time the population increased as many people returned from the War. Valid statistical data on unemployment, poverty or economic inequalities are not available for this period, but there is no doubt that the net effect of these realities meant that many people were unable to support themselves economically. Consequently, crimes for survival became rampant. Even though every category of crime increased, it was crimes against property that showed the most rapid increase. According to Shikita and Tsuchiya (1990: 32) 'theft offences consisted mostly of factory and store burglaries with the aim of stealing production goods or foodstuff'. The crimes centring on food and manufactured goods are typical of a poverty-stricken life. But robberies also increased, from less than 1.500 cases before the war to a peak of almost 11.000 cases in 1950! There is little doubt that crimes for profit at this time were primarily generated from a perspective of survival.¹²

Does this crime increase in Japan during the first post-War years tell us that, given certain material conditions, moral attitudes will not operate as a sufficient breakwater? The answer is yes, - and no, depending on what we mean by morality. As for ideology Japan was no less a Confucian and group-oriented society in 1945 than it was in 1930 or in 1960. At the level of 'deep structure' Japan did not change. Neither did values transmitted in the socialisation process change in any significant way. However, at the 'operational' level the everyday navigating principles changed for those in the population who were economically and/or socially set free.

During the early post-war period Japan demonstrated the truth in Bertolt Brecht's famous expression: *Erst dass Essen, dann die Moral* (First the essential eating, then morality). Many lacked the bare necessities. When crime appears as the last resort to survival it will obviously be the final outcome, no matter the extent of internal (morality) or external (formal or informal) control. But Brecht's formulation should perhaps be elaborated one step further: *Erst das Essen, nächst die zuhörigkeit, dann die Moral!* In addition to the necessary victuals, the individual needs a basic belonging in order to feel like a member of a community. Many people started their new life after the War without such a sense of belonging. Under such circumstances morality is an insufficient guide for decent action. The situation in Japan at that time could be compared to life in distressed communities in today's US. As Hagan (1994: 92) has put it, 'in conventional circumstances, the presence in a community of intact families and informal social networks and formal institutions are all sources of social capital that can be converted into cultural capital to improve the life chances

of youth as they become adults. However, in distressed communities this process is jeopardised'. Japan was obviously just such a distressed society immediately after the War. Consequently, it was economic and social marginalisation, not a general change of cultural values that explains the crime wave in Japan during that period.

1952-90: Economic growth and social harmony – the proof of Japanese culture as an integrating force?

Criminologists are in broad agreement that the exceptional decline/stability in crime 1952-90 in Japan is more than a statistical illusion. Japan definitely deserves its place in the group of 'nations not obsessed with crime' (Adler, 1983). If we stick to offences known to the police, the overall crime rate showed a small but significant fall until the early 80s. Felonious crimes reached a post-war high in 1950 (16.225), then dropped below the 10.000 mark in 1973 and stood at some 6.000 in 1989. Among these crimes homicide peaked in 1954 and has considerably decreased until today; robbery has constantly fallen in the period 1948-1989; rape reached a top in 1964, but then fell until 1989. Violent offences peaked in 1959 and then fell until 1991. Larcenies represent the only exception to this general picture. The number of larcenies remained relatively constant until around 1970, increasing steadily thereafter (where the number of larcenies account for 88% of the total number of known Penal Code offences).

How has Japan, undergoing the same structural changes that produced rampant crime in Western countries, succeeded in attaining a record like this? Why has structural modernisation not led to the same negative effects in Japan, as in the West? I will answer this question in relation to my two analytical dimensions (cultural and structural determinants).

Could the little crime in Japan during the relevant period primarily mirror an *economic* climate that hindered different types of marginalisation? Is it possible to argue that Japan was in this regard significantly different from some crime-ridden countries in the West? At a general level it is hard to argue in favour of a Japanese economic uniqueness in the period until the early 70s. Steady economic growth, little unemployment and a Pareto-optimal distribution of wealth were characteristics in both the West (though there are essential internal differences between these countries) and Japan. However, the oil crisis at the beginning of the 1970s struck Western countries much harder than Japan. While unemployment in Japan was stable at 2 – 3% until 1995, many Western countries experienced extensive unemployment in these years and remained at a significantly higher level for the rest of the century. In addition, an essential part of industrial life in Japan was based on life-long employment contracts.¹³ This made labour market relations more stable and predictable than in most Western countries.

The differences between Japan and the West concerning the employment situation might of course have some criminological relevance for the situation in the 1980s and 1990s, but hardly in the period before that. Criminologists are in disagreement as to the crime effect of unemployment (Watts, 1996). Yet to the extent that unemployment is a precursor to crime, we cannot disregard that this type of economic variable is relevant when it comes to explaining some of the difference in crime patterns in Japan and the West since 1970. Before that, however, it is hard to argue that the labour market is a relevant variable explaining the unique decline of crime in Japan. Unemployment figures were constant in Japan and they did not greatly diverge from some typical Western countries.

What about economic inequality? Could little crime in Japan mirror an economic egalitarian society? In this regard it is obviously hopeless to operate with Western countries in toto. As we know the US has essentially larger economic differences between top and bottom than the Scandinavian societies. To the extent that one can rely on statistical figures Japan should be included in the category of relatively egalitarian societies (Leonardsen, 2004). The gap between the highest and the lowest income groups has until recently been remarkably small. However, there is no reason to regard Japan as more egalitarian than the Scandinavian countries and *these are countries with increasing crime* since the middle of the 1960s. In addition, the total income security for each citizen in the Scandinavian countries is probably essentially higher than in Japan because of a better-developed welfare state system. As far as income security and income inequality is concerned, this means that crime should have been higher in Japan than in Scandinavia, if these criteria were significant in themselves.

I share the argument that – *ceteris paribus* - crime is correlated with unemployment and economic inequality (for a further discussion, see Leonardsen, 2004). However, as the Scandinavian countries illustrate so well, economic growth, little unemployment/economic inequality, and even a fully developed welfare state does not galvanise against crime. The unique decrease in Japanese crime in this period has to be accounted for in another way.

If we move from the economic to the *social* dimension of the structural determinants, it is far easier to identify crime preventive characteristics unique to Japan. To simplify a very complex topic, I am talking about Japan as a collectivistic, group-oriented society.

Sociological and criminological theories give rich support to the importance of *belonging* and social *bonding* for establishing social integration. Durkheim (1952:209) expressed this fundamental insight in this way: 'The more weakened the groups to which the individual belongs, the less he depends on them, the more he consequently depends only on himself and recognises no other rules of conduct than what are founded on his private interest'. In Hirschi's (1969) well known book *Causes of Delinquency* this perspective is elaborated in terms of *attachment, commitment, belief* and *involvement*.

In Japan individual needs are put in brackets while the well functioning of the group is given paramount attention. According to Stevens (1997: 101), 'the Japanese believe that the self is embedded in social relations, and that the human being can only exist in the web of social networks'. Consequently, group membership is the most important basis for individual identity. The individual achieves her/his social status and respect only through the status of the group to which (s)he belongs. In the collectivistic and group-oriented Japanese culture one pays a very high price for standing outside social networks. This, of course, has important implications for the exercise of social control.

One important aspect of Japanese group society is the phenomenon called *iemoto*. This is a type of secondary group existing between the family and the extended group like the tribe or the community. The core structure of the *iemoto* is the master - disciple relationship marked by mutual dependency. This dependency is 'soft'. The relation between the master and the disciple is defined in a kind of pseudo-kinship terms. 'From this point of view each *iemoto* is a giant kinship establishment, with the characteristic closeness and inclusiveness of interpersonal links, but without kinship limitations on its size' (Hsu, 1975: 152). This means that whatever turbulent processes the individual experiences (cf. geographic and social mobility), on most occasions the individual will be linked to supportive, caring and controlling personal relations: 'the all-inclusive, interlinking mutual dependence among

members of any two levels in a large hierarchical organization has the effect of extending the feeling of intimacy beyond those situated in the closest proximity' (op. cit.: 152). The effect of this *iemoto* system is that Japanese citizens, throughout an enormous modernisation process, have been embedded in insulating and conservative social relations. Basic principles for human relations have been exceptionally unaffected by economic and technological changes. The manner in which (almost all!) Japanese people have been linked to a social network of significant others has very likely contributed to the unique crime pattern in Japan during this period.¹⁴

Of course, it is only in an analytical perspective that social structure can be disconnected from normative culture. People communicate within given social arrangements (groups), and the *value foundation* of this communication should not be overlooked. What characterises Japanese society concerning this normative culture, and how does it affect the propensity to commit crime?

The special Japanese group *structure* is matched by a corresponding group *ideology*. The concept of *kaisha* means group consciousness and this group consciousness is all-important for Japanese citizens (Nakane, 1970). This means that the individual in Japan is very rarely left alone, out of view, or out of social control of a collective unit. It goes without saying that in such a society the fear of shaming your fellow group members will operate as a very efficient moderator of eventual deviant actions.

If one arranges the value foundation of Japanese society hierarchically, the value of *harmony within the group* is at the top. A general philosophy of group consciousness is operationalised in everyday life in the form of an elaborated social etiquette. Personal relations play a very important function in society, and people have to avoid being eccentric. In every aspect of Japanese culture (language, social etiquette, organising principles etc.) the ideology of the group is present. Japanese culture (in the meaning of 'the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one category of people from those of another' (Hofstede and Bond, 1988: 6) is in many ways a given fact confronting citizens. Without participating in the debate about *how* homogenous is Japanese culture compared to most Western countries, Japanese culture in the post-war period has appeared as monolithic and 'non-negotiable' for its citizens.

Moving from this aggregate level of culture to culture as the values transmitted via the socialisation process, Japanese people advocate a Buddhist and Confucian ideology. Starting with the family, continuing through nursery, primary and secondary school, and via the work place, the same message is confirmed: stick to your group, behave in a cordial and friendly way, adopt a waiting attitude, do not rush forward, and let individual rights have second priority to collective needs. This idea of being very sensitive to people around you is deeply rooted in Confucian thought.

This way of socialising people creates a type of dependence and a social discipline that is highly relevant from a criminological perspective. Disregarding a normative assessment of the *value content* of this culture (a lot of critical remarks could be made!), the point can be made that Japanese 'moral philosophy' constitutes the foundation) of a *defensive culture*. Komiya (1999: 385) confirms this perspective in his own analysis of low crime rates in Japan: 'the Japanese have succeeded in internalising the forces restraining people from committing crime; they are cautious, patient and punctual. They are not adventuresome, risk-taking, short-sighted, self-centred, and responsive to tangible stimuli in the immediate environment'. The

everyday life in the inner circle (called the *uchi* world) is so entrenched with watching eyes that the individual soon internalises this control into severe self-control. By installing a watching eye in the child, Japanese society is less dependent on formal control. As many observers have commented, the Japanese people are in fact policing themselves - a perspective that resonates very well with Hirschi's (1969) general control theory of crime.

In conclusion, Japan is an interesting case for criminologists because it challenges a structuralist perspective on human action in general and on crime in particular. I support the logical argument that economic structures to a large extent form the basic premises for social structures. However, Japan sends Western social science an important reminder about creating social order via the guidance of social norms. While in the West economic growth and rapid structural changes have led to social turbulence and increasing crime, this has not been the case in Japan. While criminologists are used to regarding crime as an inseparable concomitant to modernisation (structure determining action), this supposed nomotetic relation has been proven wrong in Japan¹⁵. Accordingly, 'cultural ingredients' do seem to make a difference. Values, be it as cultural aggregate or as regulating ideas transmitted through the socialisation process, appear to have a strong independent role to play.

1990 – 2003: Economic stagnation and new pessimism – the final falsification of Japanese culture as crime preventive?

After a very long period of exceptionally low crime, more and more worried voices have been heard in Japan over the last 10 years (Fenwick, 2004). These new signals concerning a broader social disturbance have escalated during the last 3- 4 years. What is the substance of these worries?

Japan has enjoyed the reputation of the safest country in the world for a long time and crime was never an issue on the political agenda until very recently. However, since the 1990, the persistent slump seems to have shaken the Japanese public's confidence in both economic security and public safety (Hamai, Ministry of Justice, 2001).

The National Police Agency says that a remarkable increase in the number of juveniles taken into custody by police for using amphetamines has been observed since the second half of last year (Asahi News Service, September 9, 1996).

Violent crime up in Japan. Trend arouses deep concern in a country known for being safe (The Detroit News, February 13, 2000).

Youth crime reflects breakdown of society (Daily Yomiuri, February 20, 2001).

A chain of brutal attacks by junior high school students (Foreign Press Center, Japan, January 30, 2003).

According to a survey, there are over 105,000 students who have not gone to school for more than 30 days even though they are enrolled in a program in elementary schools and junior high schools. This means one in sixty students in junior high school (Japan Insight, 2003)

Breakdown of order in classrooms or *gakkyuu houkai* (Japan Insight, 2003).

What worries all Japanese, especially Japanese parents and teachers, is that there has been a remarkable increase in the number of cases of teens with no previous criminal record now being involved for the first time (Japan Insight, 2003).

These quotes constitute only a small sample of reports from the latest years, signalling that something new is happening in a society we have considered to be peaceful and socially integrated. Strong characterisations like 'moral crisis' (Kosai, 1997) and 'escalation of cruelty' (Seto, 2003) give the impression of dramatic changes, not only concerning the crime situation but also in a much broader cultural perspective. According to McCormack (1996: 3)

Japanese society entered the 90s with a 'feeling of uncertainty about the future that had been unknown through the long post-war decades'

At first glance statistical data seems to confirm these anxieties¹⁶. In the White Paper on crime in 2002 the Ministry of Justice states that 'the recent circumstances of crimes in Japan are deteriorating', and that 'people seem to feel there is a deterioration of public security and their fear about public security seems to be increasing' (p. 1). In addition to a quantitative change the Ministry reports a qualitative change as well. More crimes are committed by teenagers with no previous record 'going berserk'. There is a trend towards a new era of 'crimes of the moment'. Robberies are often executed in a daring manner. There has been an increase in what is called 'bizarre homicides'; and (since 1996) crime seems to be on the rise not only in the biggest metropolitan areas, but all over Japan.

A closer look at the public figures (penal code offences known to the police) shows that

- larcenies (gradually increasing since 1970) jumped dramatically upwards after 1996, and
- nine types of offences that the Ministry defines as 'violent' (robbery, bodily injury, assault, intimidation, extortion, rape, indecent assault, breaking and entering, and destruction of objects) have increased rapidly since 1996.

The Ministry underlines that the increase in the number of general penal code offences since 1996 is due to the increase in the referred types of crimes. Prior to 1996 (and after 1974) the rate of increase of the nine mentioned types of violent offences was generally lower than the rate of penal code offences (excluding larcenies), while this was reversed after 1996. In 2000 the rate of increase in the nine violent offences was 52.6%. In 2001 it was 40.0%.

Interestingly, the acquaintance rate, both for homicides and violent crime in general, is both high (85 –90% for homicides) and increasing, thus indicating 'motivation' (by close relationship) rather than 'blind' violence. Also, it seems that the number of older people (50+) cleared for robbery and bodily injury has increased, 'which indicates drastic changes in the environment that surrounds elderly people' (op. cit.: 28). However, a media dramatisation concerning a new wave of homicides is not supported by the statistics. Sensational reports about 'spectacular' homicides committed by teenagers should not be confused with a dramatic rise in the absolute numbers.¹⁷

If the referred changes in crime figures are reliable, how could this be interpreted? The Ministry of Justice is worried about the fact that 'the environment surrounding adults has deteriorated markedly, as seen in weakened family bonds, accumulated daily stress, the unstable economic situation, and anxieties related to unemployment' (op. cit.: 75). If we link this explanation to what I have stated above, it seems that the authorities focus on a change in economic and social structures. However, *cultural* determinants are also included in their analysis: 'The recent increase in offences seems to have been caused due to the fact that traditional crime deterrents in Japan have become ineffective, including education at home and school becoming inadequate' (op.cit.: 76). Even if the arguments at this point are very limited, it seems that the Ministry indicates that the socialisation of new generations is deteriorating. This perspective is echoed by the Ministry of Education. In the aftermath of one gruesome event in Kobe¹⁸ the Ministry requested that the Central Council for Education (an advisory body) undertake an urgent inquiry on appropriate ways to provide 'moral education starting at infancy' (Seto, 2003). In their interim report (released in 1998) they observed that:

the moral deterioration of adult society as a whole is increasingly apparent, with priorities being assigned to material values, such as a desire for money and possessions, social trends placing an overwhelming emphasis on convenience and utility, and the climate of opinion asserting the pre-eminence of personal interests over those of society at large (op. cit.: 12).

No matter the validity of public figures it is obvious that both the media as well as public authorities believe that fundamental structural and cultural changes have gradually taken place since the burst of the 'bubble economy' in the early 90s. According to the mentioned report what was needed now, was not a minor or limited social engineering approach but a re-examination of the situation 'from the ground up'.

This brings my main analytical topic back into focus, namely the relationship between structural and cultural approaches as explanations for crime. No doubt, Japan has experienced a serious *economic* recession during the last 15 years with the consequence of rapidly increasing unemployment rates (2.1% in 1991, gradually increasing to 5.4% in 2002). Also, one might argue that some aspects of the *social* structure have changed in the same period. Divorces have increased (the divorce rate was 1.27 in 1990 and steadily climbed to 2.27 in 2001). The family structure has changed. The participation of females in the labour force has increased and so has the number of one-child-families (the reproduction rate is only 1,4). According to Jolivet (1993) more and more women find motherhood tedious, mainly because of isolation and loneliness. 'Family stress' is a popular term for the new situation. Furthermore, the system of lifetime employment (mainly related to the bigger companies) has gradually been weakened, thus creating more uncertainty. Japanese companies have been forced to pay increasing attention to minimising loss and maximising profit, and 'gorika' (or rationalisation) techniques have been introduced in a more aggressive way.¹⁹ In other words, when it comes to economic and social structural change, Japan has become somewhat more 'westernised' in the last fifteen years. This might lead us to argue that criminologist should hold on to the 'structural' explanation of crime, at least as long as we operate at a macro or sociological level (i.e. as long as we are talking about the 'causes' of crime). Crime in Japan seems to have increased in respond to changes in the economic and social structure.

However, as already stated, the public authorities, the media, as well as many observers of Japanese society have proclaimed the view that Japan has changed not only structurally, but also culturally. It is argued that Japan, once a society where individual needs and aspirations were secondary to collective interests, has moved in the direction of a more Western life style. This cultural change has contributed to a reorientation that many argue has affected navigating principles concerning crime. One very clear-spoken representative of such a position is Nobuyuki (2000: 57) who argues that Japan is experiencing a kind of moral disruption, strongly influenced by Western values:

Upscale morality (as I ironically call it) emanates from the West. Charity, equality, peace, the volunteer spirit, and so forth – in truth, these lofty concepts are mere abstractions to the Japanese; there is no way we can live up to most of them. Popular morality, meanwhile, is based on familiar tradition. Honouring parents, respecting seniors, dealing sincerely with others, and so on – these are realistic and can be put into practice here and now.

Nobuyuki argues on behalf of traditional Japanese values, or what he calls 'down-to-earth popular morality'. He maintains that these values have become increasingly forgotten, they are no longer taught at home or in schools. As for values, there has been a shift from absolute standpoints to relativity. Today it is hard to identify primary, universal, and absolute values in

Japanese society. Nobuyuki argues that by defining such values as feudalistic and old-fashioned children have lost respect for authorities and have no understanding of filial piety and the continuity of life. Freedom to choose seems to be the most important motivating value, most clearly expressed in the use of new electronic devices (TV, mobile telephones, personal computers etc). What is needed is a return to classical Confucian values which for Nobuyuki means: 'guide them by edicts, keep them in line with punishments, and the common people will stay out of trouble but will have no shame' (op. cit.: 57). It might seem to be an increasing worry among influential groups that the traditional Japanese value structure is changing in a negative way. When the Central Council for Education announces a need for a re-examination of the situation, this is indicative of a renewed interest in popular morality.

Let me make two critical remarks at this point concerning the assertion of moral decay. First (concerning methodology), we have to ask if the increase in crime is mainly a reflex to moral decline in society, or is it the other way around? We seem to be lost in the classic dilemma, which came first, the chicken or the egg? In times when social integration seems to deteriorate it is important to watch out for the pitfalls of tautology. Often one can register that people who argue that morality is wanting are using crime as proof of this decay.²⁰ But in that case one cannot in the next turn argue that crime is increasing *because* morality has weakened. This is a form of argumentation where one obviously risks biting one's own tail.

My second remark is a genuine doubt about the proclaimed moral decay. *Is* Japanese morality really in full retreat? Anybody giving an unequivocal answer to that question will certainly have a problem finding empirical evidence. So we will have to scale down our ambitions. Some common sense observations will have to do.

It is not difficult to find indications of cultural change that can be regarded as indications of moral deterioration. However, this is not the same as arguing that those cultural elements that a criminologist might argue are 'crime preventive' have changed. If we are to reject the cultural thesis as an explanation for the low crime rate in Japan the important questions are a) has the way people are socialised today changed significantly since the 80s, and b) has Japanese culture as a given mentality structure changed essentially in the same period. I am not sure if this is the case.

Through my own conversations with Japanese scholars it was repeatedly underlined that the liberalisation concerning the socialisation of children in the school system happened in the 70s, not in the 90s. The ideology of individual freedom was probably more evident 30 years ago than today. If popular morality, as Nobuyuki called it, were ever undermined it would have been in the 70s rather than the 90s. In other words, the warning against a moral decay and a creeping undermining of traditional Japanese values might seem to be more ideological than based on empirical realities. Moreover, the idea of a moral decay seems to have been deduced directly from the crime figures themselves rather than being based on a critical analysis of cultural change. Like all modern societies Japan is of course changing, in both structural and cultural ways. To be sure, one can argue (as Berger, (1991) does) that in the time of globalisation a 'social transformation' is taking place in Japan. Individualism is in some ways on the increase. However, neither if we look at culture as an aggregate of values nor if we look at the content of the socialisation process do we have any convincing documentation of basic changes. Japanese culture as described in the preceding paragraph is probably no less a Confucian and collectivistic culture today than it was 30 years ago, and

those aspects of Japanese culture that can be said to be crime preventive are probably as present in Japanese society today as they were 30 years ago.²¹

Miyanaga (1991) confirms that the modernisation of Japan is not the story of a linear development away from traditional to modern values. It was back in the late 60s and up till the end of the 80s that the concept of 'New Men' (i.e. emancipated) took hold. Originally this term had no negative connotation, but this changed as adult society registered what they called a weakening of group society. As the new generation appeared to be less group oriented than the older generation this triggered a reaction. Gradually the individualistic trend among the youth collapsed. In addition, Miyanaga points out that from the end of the 80s the Japanese government tried to re-instate and re-confirm the importance of group identity, e.g. by campaigning for traditional family values.

Foljanty-Jost and Metzler (2003: 42) have analysed the asserted decline in conformity among Japanese youth since the mid-90s and looked into how Japanese schools have responded to this situation. Making a distinction between structural, general and specific control they conclude that

Japanese junior high schools refrain from a laissez-faire attitude towards student behavior. Instead they provide clear rules on how students are expected to behave, all day long and five days a week. Social interaction in clubs, student committees, and class activities is organized to prevent anonymity and promote social integration. The bulk of school control measures are designed as preemptive, well in advance of the occurrence of any delinquent behavior. Control measures are based on a clear-cut set of rules which are constantly and forcefully presented to students, but never blindly imposed on them.

To be sure, the ideology that is transmitted in Japanese schools today is hardly in accordance with what Nobuyuki would describe as traditional Confucianism, but it is definitely not a laissez-faire ideology either. Rather, one might get the impression that public authorities, to take an example, are running a kind of moral campaign that is 'surprisingly unrelated to the actual degree of occurrence of problem behavior' (op. cit.: 43). Since Japanese society is based on principles of harmony and consensus the reactions to a new situation of social unrest easily turns into something like a moral panic. When new incidents of 'conspicuous' crimes appear the reactions are equally strong.

By this I am not saying that Japanese culture is unaffected by changes in economic and social surroundings, and I am not saying that cultural values remain unchanged. Of course, general processes of globalisation and economic destabilisation affect mentality structures in Japan, as anywhere, and it is unthinkable that traditional Japanese values will remain untouched by structural changes in economy and social patterns. However, Japan is a society based on principles of harmony and consensus, and it is a society that for a very long time has been able to take conformity as a matter of course. Small deviations from this might easily trigger strong reactions. Miyanaga (1991, cf. Fenwick, 2004) expresses this by saying that small changes in the rules of interaction among the youth have created a lot of fear among adults. Thus, when you have strong confidence in ritual interaction minor changes will appear rather dramatic.

To conclude, I am not convinced that a changing crime pattern mirrors a change in basic cultural values. If this is the case, then we would have to conclude that *structural* changes (more than cultural) provide the best explanation of the new crime situation in Japan. When Japan in general is described as a collectivistic culture we must keep in mind that this is not a description of some superfluous characteristics of Japanese society. Every fibre of Japanese

society is entrenched by values such as: other-directedness, harmony within the group, compassion, tenderness, softness, gentleness, warmth, carefulness, understanding and non-intrusiveness. These are values that are deeply embedded in Japanese language, in official ideology, and in the socialisation of children in nursery, primary and secondary schools and the family. If anything has changed concerning official ideology it is rather in the direction of a *firmer* underlining of submission to collective obligations. Most people in Japan will still regard individualism as a serious deviation that should be condemned. However, it is an open question as to what extent and in which areas it will be possible to maintain the collective and submissive values as globalisation further expands. I agree with Berger, who argues (1991) that Japanese culture probably will remain unique even if it moves in a more Western direction. It is a question of degrees of change and in which field. But my guess is that Japan in the future will continue to be a nation of low crime (i. e. 'traditional', predatory, public order crime, cf. footnote 15).

Culture – still a significant determinant concerning crime?

What can this presentation teach us concerning the status of 'culture' in criminology? Does increasing crime in Japan (1945 - 52 and 1990 – 2003) show us that culture is of little relevance in explaining low crime rates in Japan? I think such a conclusion is premature.

The challenge in answering my fundamental question is twofold. 1) The uncertainty connected with the empirical reality. In this article I have not had the chance to go into much detail for any of the periods concerning crime in relation to gender, age, regions, etc., and I have definitely not been able to relate each of these dimensions to different types of crime. There is always a danger when analysing trends at a macro level that one gives general explanations that do not always match empirical realities. If a closer look at the data was to reveal that the crime increase in Japan is due to transgressions committed by youths of school age, the causal effect of rising unemployment would change from being a *direct* cause (the unemployed are the ones that commit the criminal action) to becoming an *indirect* cause (unemployment means destabilised families which again might trigger youth crime). 2) At a nominal level we can operate with analytical categories that at first glance seem distinct and clear-cut, e.g. structural and cultural determinants. However, when these dimensions are operationalised the picture can easily become more confused and blurred. Explaining crime necessitates a dynamic and interactive perspective. Crime is the end result of a long process. Our concepts, however, offer nothing but static terms. This makes consistent and well informed debate difficult.

I don't believe that discussing co-variations between wide concepts like 'crime' and 'economy' will advance debate. It is easy to document that crime, in different time periods and at different places, has increased – *and decreased* – both during periods of prosperity and depression. Depending on a whole lot of other circumstances it may 'take a good back to carry good times' but the opposite may also be true. Japan and the West (during our second time period) represent ideal types that confirm the validity of both perspectives. Economic growth in Japan was accompanied by decreasing crime, while the opposite was the case in the West. Consequently, little insight is gained by operating with general co-variations at this level of abstraction. Should the same argument be applied when we discuss the link between crime and culture? Is it the case that some types of cultures or some types of value structures will be a better 'guarantee' against crime than others, independent of other relevant variables? Can we argue that some cultural values – *independent* of economic climate – will prevent

crime to a larger extent than other cultural values? Or, to pose this question in more precise terms; is collectivistic Japanese culture – *ceteris paribus* – significantly more crime preventive than an individualistic Western culture?²² If the answer is yes, how could one argue in defence of such a point of view? Since my own answer is – tentatively – in the positive, let me elaborate upon the argument presented in the paper.

At first glance, the Japanese case indicates that cultural values do not nullify the effect of structural determinants. Crime seems to increase in Japan when structural conditions change in a significantly negative way. Such a conclusion is not only empirically valid; it is also in accordance with a more heuristic interpretation. Take for example the statement from Brecht referred to above; it entails an obvious truth with respect to crime. If we put people in a kind of ‘nothing more to lose’ situation, we should not be surprised if they will appeal to a higher moral consideration, namely the principle of ‘first things first’. Where there is nothing more to collect, even the Emperor has lost his rights! As we know, in states of emergencies, even the law is suspended. But this logic does not apply only to situations of absolute poverty. Even in situations of *relative* poverty (i.e. huge income differences) one can expect more crime than in situations of economic equality. Braithwaite (1991: 40) has argued convincingly for such a position:

It may be theoretically fruitful to move away from a positivist conception of need to needs socially constructed as wants that can be satisfied (contrasted with greed – socially constructed as insatiable wants). When needs are satisfied, further power and wealth enables crime motivated by greed. New types of criminal opportunities and new paths to immunity from accountability are constituted by concentrations of wealth and power. Inequality thus worsens both crimes of poverty motivated by **need** for goods for use and crimes of wealth motivated by **greed** enabled by goods for **exchange**. Furthermore, much crime, particularly violent crime, is motivated by the humiliation of the offender and the offender’s perceived right to humiliate the victim. Inegalitarian societies, it is argued, are more structurally humiliating.

Logically speaking, most people will agree that – *ceteris paribus* – infringements will vary positively with incentives to commit such infringements. These incentives might be defined either positively (wants) or negatively (losses). However, I want to argue that the threshold for committing crime, given the same economic situation, is essentially higher in Japan than in most Western countries. This threshold is partly due to a social control implicit in Japan as a group society (i.e. the social structure). But – and this is the argument concerning culture – it is also due to the value foundation of Japanese society. Socialisation in Japan induces in people a defensiveness that makes crime a less probable option. Japanese culture as a given aggregate of values, wraps every citizen into the same, homogenous system of norms and guidelines. Japanese culture is, to a much larger extent than is the case in most Western countries, a common and standardised cocoon that few people challenge and that implants the same message of defensiveness.

As I discussed above crime is not only *behaviour* that is *caused* by external determinants. It is also a *volitional act* carried out by conscious individuals, and such an act will automatically be coded as a confrontation with the community. Crime represents a challenge to the social contract formally constituted by Law. Crime is a sign by the offender that (s)he does not belong or feel obligated to the established community. In short, to commit crime it takes an ‘entrepreneurial’ disposition and, at the same time, an ability to neutralise the fear of condemnation from significant others surrounding the individual.

The motive for performing the criminal act can be enfeebled by control mechanisms. In principal, these control mechanisms can be of two types: 1) ‘Internal’/internalised control in

the form of values that constitute an individual conscience. 2) 'External'/imposed control. This type of control can either be in the form of a) a structural pressure (more or less subtle) from significant others that, in interaction with the individual self, impose a feeling of shame on the agent (here: the criminal), or in the form of b) vertical surveillance based on strict regimentation and repressive rules. The internal control is synonymous with Freud's super-ego that forbids the expression of antisocial impulses. The external control from significant others refers to informal social control or the control we exercise upon each other in the course of everyday interaction. The external control from 'vertical surveillance' is the control exercised by people in position of power or through locally based groups.

The low crime rate in Japan is to a certain extent to do with mutual surveillance. As Sugimoto (1997) points out Japanese society could be described by the characteristic 'friendly authoritarianism'. The systematic extension of systems of regimentation and visual control in Japan, especially in schools, contributes to surveillance systems that deter deviant actions. The low crime rate is also very likely linked to unique social structures in Japan; in particular the special group-based philosophy upon which Japanese society is built. However, my focus in this paper has been upon *cultural* determinants and their relation to *cultural* values. The question in this connection is if morality (defined as values transmitted in the socialisation process as well as the total cultural 'wrapping' in which every member of a culture is enveloped) is a relevant and significant dimension when it comes to understanding the unique character of Japanese crime pattern? My answer is 'yes'.

As we have seen the stress on harmony within the group that characterises Japanese culture is not sufficient to hinder tendencies of social dissolution, no matter the surrounding conditions. However, social science in Western countries, for a long time marked by a positivist, causal approach to social phenomenon, seems to have reserved the world of values, attitudes, and morality for politicians and philosophers. The case of Japan reminds us that societies that in many respects have the same *structural* characteristics can have widely different cultural codes, and that *this difference is significant in explaining variations in human action (i. e. crime)*. Let me illustrate this argument with two empirical examples.

Alcohol politics. It might seem that the Western 'availability thesis' concerning alcohol is challenged by Japan, at least if we limit ourselves to the situation among the youth (Leonardsen, 2006). According to well-documented research, low prices, long opening hours, and extensive commercial advertising will lead to high consumption. This is not necessarily true in Japan. Prices are low, alcohol can be bought at any time of the day or night (even from vending machines!), and television as well as newspapers show commercials for beer, wine and liquor. Nevertheless, alcohol abuse among younger people seems to be a minor problem. Easy availability is *not* tantamount to high consumption. *Norms* related to drinking, and *norms* related to respect for elderly people have probably a significant and independent role to play in regulating the way young people deal with alcohol.

Japanese citizens living abroad. Even when disconnected from their native environment and from the cultural hegemony of Japanese society, they conform to the law, adopting a law-abiding way of behaving. When a sample of these people were asked to answer the question 'Why is it that Japanese Americans rarely if ever violate the law', the respondents systematically referred to 'the moral values instilled in us by our parents' to the fact that 'our immigrant parents instilled in us children respect for authority', and to the fact that 'we were brought up, taught to be honest, respect our elders, work hard and do what's right' (referred in Thornton and Endo, 1992: 23).

Even though these two examples do not prove much in themselves, they function as thought-provoking illustrations of the strength of norms in this culture.

Crime can be defined as an outsiders' strike against society. Criminality is about 'acting out'; and it is about eliminating filters of control (inside and outside the individual). This being so, it should be more apparent why we should (a priori) *expect* that Japan is a low crime nation. Being a very *defensive* culture it is the basic code for addressing other people that is the interesting dimension in this connection. The programming of the new generations represents an important contribution to crime prevention, especially in times of prosperity and multiple temptations.

To what extent Japanese collectivistic values represent a value foundation that Western cultures can and should adopt, is, of course, quite another discussion. As argued in Leonardsen (2004), repressive characteristics of Japanese society are obvious to a Western eye. 'Their reliance upon order and hierarchy and our faith in freedom and equality are poles apart and it is hard for us to give hierarchy its just due as a possible social mechanism' (Leonardsen, 2002). Nevertheless, such an observation should not exclude Japan as an interesting source for cross-cultural learning. Communitarianism comes in many brands (Hughes, 1996) and a 'friendly authoritarianism' (as Sugimoto, 1997, labels Japanese ideology) should not be regarded as the only possible form of collectivism and other-directedness. In the present Western debate on *'The Great Disruption'* (Fukuyama, 2000) I regard Japan to be a valuable source of information for criminological debate.

Notes

¹ I use the concept 'the West/Western countries' as an ideal type (i.e. something that does not exist in reality, but which is constructed to purify some characteristics that help us simplify a complex reality). Of course, these countries in many ways do not represent a monolithic unity. The distinction between three types of welfare states (the liberal, residual one, the conservative, corporative one, and the social democratic, distributive one, Titmuss, 1974, Esping-Andersen, 1990) is precisely an expression of this fact. The Nordic, social democratic model should until the 1970s clearly be described as a strongly interventionist state that, like Japan, in many ways defined political and social integrative preconditions for economic development. Before the liberalisation of international free market trade gained momentum in the 1970s, one could really say that these countries followed (in a broad sense) a preventive and social integrative policy. In this regard, the Nordic countries represented, like Japan, an interesting case for studying how solidaristic values could 'compete' in a capitalist market economy. However, during the last thirty years it has become more and more meaningful to operate with 'the West' as one unifying concept even though there still are huge internal variations.

² There is of course a lot to be said about the interpretation of crime statistics. In this paper I stick to the public figures without much further comment. For critical remarks, see Leonardsen (2004). My presentation of crime development in Japan and the West is very rough and approximate, but my concern in this paper is theoretical and not methodological.

³ Braithwaite (1989, 1993) represents an important exception.

⁴ Geertz' (1975: 5) classical formulation should be remembered: '...man is an animal suspended in webs of significance *he himself has spun*' (italics added).

⁵ Wrong (1961: 192) makes the relevance of this distinction between macro and micro level concerning culture clear when saying: '*On the one hand socialization means the "transmission of the culture", the particular culture of the society an individual enters at birth; on the other hand the term is used to mean the "process of becoming human", of acquiring uniquely human attributes from interaction with others. All men are socialized in the second sense, but this does not mean that they have been completely moulded by the particular norms and values of their culture*'.

⁶ Some might argue that 'values' or 'morality' is a non-scientific topic that is beyond rational reasoning. Without having a chance to go into that discussion I do disagree with such a perspective on facts vs values, is vs should be, etc. By this I am not saying that science can develop one (and only one) true answer to normative dilemmas. However, I do not accept that (social) scientists who avoid discussing such topics thereby avoid involving themselves in normative questions.

⁷ I immediately rush to distance myself from the variant of communitarianism that Hughes (1996) designates as 'moral authoritarianism'. 'Radical egalitarianism' is another variant of communitarianism that I myself feel more comfortable with. However, the importance of what Marx called 'economic base' should not make us exclude an independent discussion on the 'superstructure' (where cultural values represent one important ingredient).

⁸ The police in Japan are not only the custodian of the *legal* order. To a much larger extent than we are used to in the West, the police is also fulfilling tasks related to public morality.

⁹ The Japanese army used amphetamines extensively during wartime, and there were plenty of leftovers in the Japanese society after the capitulation.

¹⁰ It was this very difficult situation for children in the post-war period that triggered the enactment of a special 'Child Welfare Law' in 1947.

¹¹ Sugimoto (1997: 65) argues that those of the post-war generation experienced a very turbulent period during these years, and (very American children in their primary- and secondary school years witnessed a breakdown of their value system.

¹² It should be added that crimes concerning Special Law Offences are *not* included in my above presentation. However, there was a sharp rise in the number of violators of economic control regulations as well.

¹³ These life-long contracts were primarily in the big companies.

¹⁴ As for the suppressing and patriarchal aspects of this social network, see Leonardsen 2004.

¹⁵ I have to add one important precaution at this point: when I talk about Japan as a low-crime nation I explicitly exclude crime within the private sphere, white-collar crime, traffic violence and organised crime. Available research makes Japan's uniqueness dubious in those regards. For a further discussion, see Leonardsen, 2004).

¹⁶ For a discussion of methodological fallacies related to the reading of Japanese crime figures, see Leonardsen (forthcoming).

¹⁷ How serious *are* the changes in the Japanese crime picture during the 90s? Even though the statistics seem unequivocal Japanese scholars (personal interviews) do not all jump to the conclusion that things have gotten so much worse. Some of the changes may be connected to routines for reporting; others may have to do with tactical (read: budget) interests. Furthermore, even though I cannot develop my argument further, we should be aware that crime among youth, that explains most of the increase in this middle period, is not rising dramatically. Foljanty-Jost and Metzler (2003) conclude in their study of juvenile delinquency that there was a discrepancy

between the public perception of a crisis among Japanese youth and relatively low levels of delinquent students. Cases of violence among junior high school students are (today) for example among the lowest of all the OECD countries. These general findings were supported by their case studies at the school micro level. The researchers found 'an unrelated high problem awareness combined with a high density of structural, general, and local control' (op. cit.: 40). Fenwick (2004) presents the same perspective, referring to an 'acute moral panic' surrounding youth crime. I think there is a real danger in making too simplistic inferences from a general debate on a moral collapse in society, a number of spectacular and front-paged crime stories, and a conclusion that crime in general is skyrocketing.

In other words, critical remarks could be made that may *modify* the general conclusion about a dramatic increase in crime in Japan. However, it is hard to see how the rather abrupt changes in so many different types of crimes (but not all!) should have happened without mirroring an empirical reality. Even though one could argue that these days there are classical indications of a 'moral panic' in Japan, the broad public debate on breakdown of order, together with the referred statistical figures do indicate (but do not prove) that Japan is a bit less unique today than some 15 years ago. But still we have to keep in mind that Japan, no matter the exact figures, in a comparative perspectives also today a very peaceful country. Even though we might have less reason than before to celebrate Japan as a very exceptional country when it comes to crime, it should still be included in the group of low crime nations.

¹⁸ A third-year junior high student murdered and 11-year old sixth-grader, decapitated the body, and deposited the severed head at the front gate of his own school with a note stuffed inside the mouth signed with a pseudonym.

¹⁹ This change has happened fairly recently. As late as 1996 McGregor (1996: 256) wrote that, 'no major Japanese company has bitten the bullet and sacked large numbers of workers'. The Japanese word for being fired is *kubi kiri* which means to be chopped off at the neck, and this is not an acceptable way of doing business. However, there has been much debate about the imminent demise of the lifetime employment system, and things have changed quite a bit since 1996.

²⁰ Miyanaga (1991) argues f. ex. that increasing crime rates in Japan is interpreted by many as the expression of 'the American sickness'; a sickness that in the end will destroy Japanese culture.

²¹ If we adapt a theory of 'cultural lag' (the value foundation in the socialisation process will harvest its fruits 15 years later), one might of course argue that eventual behavioural problems today are mirroring attitudinal changes in earlier years. But if this should be the case, then it is precisely the cultural explanation that is significant in explaining the crime increase. Also, if the increased emphasise on 'moral education starting at infancy' (cf. above) is implemented in a consistent way one could perhaps expect an even stronger stress on traditional Japanese cultural values in the coming years.

²² Once again I have to stress the huge cultural variety within Western culture.

References

- Adler, Freda (1983) *Nations not Obsessed with Crime*. Colorado: Rothman & co.
Asahi News Service, September 9, 1996.
Balvig, Flemming and Britta Kyvsgaard (1986) *Kriminalitet og Ungdom (Crime and Youth)*. København: Borgen.
Ben-Ari, Eyal et al. (1990) *Unwrapping Japan*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
Berger, Peter L. (1991) *Foreword*. In Miyanaga: *The Creative Edge: Emerging Individualism in Japan*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.
Braithwaite, John (1989) *Crime, Shame and Reintegration*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Braithwaite, John (1991) 'Poverty, Power, White-Collar Crime and the Paradoxes of Criminological Theory', *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology* 24: 41-58.
Braithwaite, John (1993) 'Shame and Modernity', *The British Journal of Criminology* 33 (1): 1-18.
Clifford, William (1976) *Crime Control in Japan*. Lexington Books.
Dahrendorf, Ralf (1985) *Law and Order*. London: Stevens & Sons.
Daily Yomiuri, February 20, 2001.
Durkheim, Emile (1952) *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
EAMM (1996) *The Japanese Experience in Social Security*. East Asian Ministerial Meeting on Caring Societies. December 5.
Esping-Andersen, Gösta (1990) *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
Fenwick, Mark (2004) 'Youth Crime and Control in Contemporary Japan'. In Colin Sumner (ed.) *The Blackwell companion to Criminology*. Blackwell Publishing.

- Foljanty-Jost Gesine and Manuel Metzler (2003) 'Juvenile Delinquency in Japan: A Self-Preventing Prophecy', *Social Science Japan*, 25: 39-43, February.
Foreign Press Centre, Japan, January 30, 2003.
- Fukuyama, Francis (2000) *The Great Disruption. Human Nature and the Reconstitution of Social Order*. London: Profile Books.
- Garfinkel, Harold (1967) *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.
- Geertz, Clifford (1975) 'Common Sense as a Cultural System', in Clifford Geertz: *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*. NY: Basic Books.
- Hagan, John (1994) 'Crime, Inequality and Efficiency', in Andrew Glyn and David Miliband: *Paying for Inequality*. Rivers Oram Press.
- Hendry, Joy (1993) *Wrapping Culture: Politeness, Presentation and Power in Japan and other Societies*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Hendry, Joy (1999) *An Anthropologist in Japan*. Routledge.
- Hirschi, Travis (1969) *Causes of Delinquency*. California: University of California Press.
- Hofstede, Geert and Michael H. Bond (1988) 'The Confucius Connection – from Cultural Roots to Economic Growth', *American Management Association*, 4: 5-21.
- Hsu, Francis L. K. (1975) *Iemoto: The Heart of Japan*. Halsted Press.
- Hughes, Gordon (1996) 'Communitarianism and law and order', *Critical Social Policy*, 16 (4): 17-41.
- Ito, Masayuki (1998) 'The Status of the Individual in Japanese Religions: Implications for Japan's Collectivistic Social Values'. *Social Compass*, 45 (4): 619-633.
- Japan Insight (2003) <http://jin.jcic.or.jp/insight>.
- Kerr, Alex (2001) *Dogs and Demons. The Fall of Modern Japan*. Penguin Books.
- Kodansha Encyclopedia of Japan. <http://www.ency-japan.com/>
- Komiya, Nobuo (1999) 'A Cultural Study of the Low Crime Rate in Japan', *The British Journal of Criminology* 39 (3): 369-390.
- Kosai, Enjo (1997) 'Moral crisis', *Japan Echo* 24 (2).
- Leonardsen Dag (2002) 'The Impossible Case of Japan', *The Australian Journal of Criminology* 35 (2): 203-229.
- Leonardsen, Dag (2004) *Japan as a Low-Crime Nation*. Palgrave MacMillan.
- Leonardsen, Dag (2006) 'Drinking Among Japanese Youth: A Paradox for Theories of Alcohol Availability?' *Nordisk alkohol og narkotikatidsskrift*, English supplement. 23.
- Leonarden, Dag (forthcoming) 'Crime in Japan: Paradise Lost?'
- McCormack, Gavan (1996) *The Emptiness of Japanese Affluence*. M E Sharpe.
- McGregor, Richard (1996) *Japan swings*. St. Leonards: Allen & Unwin.
- Mead, George H. (1934) *Mind, Self and Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Miyayama, Kuniko (1991) *The Creative Edge: Emerging Individualism in Japan*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers
- Mouzelis, Niclas (1995) *Sociological Theory: What Went Wrong?* London:Routledge
- Nakane, Chie (1970) *Japanese Society*. University of California Press.
- Research and Training Institute. Ministry of Justice (2002). *White Paper on Crime*.
- Nobuyuki, Kaji (2000) 'Call for a Return to Popular Morality'. *Japan Echo*, June.
- Roberts, Aki and Gary LaFree (2001) 'The Role of Declining Economic Stress in Explaining Japan's Remarkable Postwar Crime Decreases, 1951 to 1997', *Japanese Journal of Sociological Criminology*, 26: 11-33.
- Sano, Keiji (1995) 'Japanese Mentality and Behaviour - Based on Indigenous Japanese Culture'. *Acta Neurochirurgica* 132: 192-195.
- Seto, Jun'ichi (2003) 'Juvenile crime. The current situation'. *Foreign Press Center*. Japan.
- Shikita, Minoru and Shinichi Tsuchia (1990) *Crime and Criminal Policy in Japan*. Springer-Verlag.
- Singer, Kurt (1973) *Mirror, Sword and Jewel. A Study of Japanese Characteristics*. London: Croom Helm.
- Smith, Adam (1976) *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Stevens, Carolyn S. (1997) *On the Margins of Japanese Society. Volunteers and the Welfare of the Urban Underclass*. Routledge.
- Sugimoto, Yoshio (1997) *An Introduction to Japanese Society*. Cambridge University Press.
- The Detroit News, February 13, 2000.
- Titmuss, Richard H. (1974) *Social Policy. An Introduction*. Allen & Unwin.
- Triandis, Harry C. (1994) *Culture and Social Behavior*. McGraw-Hill.
- Ueda, N. (2000) 'The Collapse of Human Relationships and the 'Middle Perspective''. *Monthly Review*, March.
- Watts, Rob (1996) 'Unemployment, the Underclass and Crime in Australia: A Critique', *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, 29 (1): 1-19.
- White Paper on Crime (2002) Research and Training Institute. Ministry of Justice. Japan.
- White Paper on Crime (2003) Research and Training Institute . Ministry of Justice. Japan.

White Paper on Crime (2004) Research and Training Institute. Ministry of Justice. Japan.
Wrong, Dennis (1961) 'The Oversocialized Conception of Man in Modern Sociology', *American Sociological Review*, 26: 183-192.
Wrong, Dennis (1994) *The Problem of Order*. The Free Press.
Aam, Eli (1981) *Japansk Barnehage. (Japanese Kindergarten)*. Universitetsforlaget.

Dag Leonardsen is Professor of Sociology at Lillehammer University College. He has written about social welfare, regional and social policy, and criminology. For some years he has been working on a research project on 'Crime in Japan', and his most recent book is *Japan as a Low-Crime Nation* (2004).

Address for correspondence: Professor Dag Leonardsen, Faculty of Health and Social Studies, Lillehammer University College, 2626 Lillehammer.

E-mail: Dag.Leonardsen@hil.no