

In a special issue on Asian criminology for *Theoretical Criminology* a few years ago, we reflected on the “meaning” and “doing” of criminology in the region and, in particular, the changing landscape of knowledge production of and for Hong Kong. The development of the discipline in Asia has been heavily constrained. First, one of the major issues facing academics in Asia is the arduous task of institutional recognition of criminology as a legitimate scholarly enterprise, as universities often adopt a rigid view of the “disciplines”, with criminology being understood as a subject matter within law or social work rather than a discipline in its own right:

From this standpoint, the nature of criminology is culturally understood as one concerning crime and criminal justice, and as a technical matter for training practitioners of the legal and welfare professions (Lee and Laidler, 2014, p. 144).

Second, governmental support for research has long been favoured as a way to understand the aetiology of crime and the machinations of the criminal justice system. But unlike the global North, where administrative criminology has provided the knowledge foundation to move beyond “functional research” with varying degrees of success, cultural, political and institutional constraints have hampered this shift in many Asian locales. For example, Hong Kong’s administrative criminology had a decidedly limited character, shaped and regulated, at least initially through the colonial governmental structure of internal research units and government year-end reports, and later becoming an institutional legacy. This cultural twist has been a key factor in shaping the history of indigenous criminology and its empirical project of “causes and control” in Hong Kong.

Whilst acknowledging the colonial legacy of state-produced knowledge and the historical dominance of theories imported from the global North, especially the USA, in existing ethnocentric knowledge structures, we were cautiously optimistic about the development of a variety of criminologies in Hong Kong, particularly those informed by a critical perspective:

While we are fully cognizant British and USA criminology have very much set the stage for teaching and research in locales like Hong Kong, and the constraints within which research operates, we believe that the tide is turning in Asia as new scholars, both locally and northern trained, have become sensitive to the issues of the core and the periphery, and with new methodologies and new agendas, are beginning to shift the course of knowledge production (Lee and Laidler, 2013, p. 150).

The papers in this special issue attest to the flourishing of a locally grounded criminology which is sensitive to global transformations and the ongoing challenges involved in producing a critical voice on issues of crime, social (dis)order and control in Hong Kong. In 1986, the first ever Master of Social Sciences in Criminology programme in Hong Kong was set up by the Department of Sociology at the University of Hong Kong (HKU). The department has a long tradition of studying deviance and social problems, such as corruption, within a broader historical and social context (Lethbridge, 1985). The programme extended that tradition and epitomized a new way of teaching and doing criminology that is sociologically informed and attuned to locally relevant

empirical issues and conceptual tools at a time when the local criminology society was dominated by practitioners, for example, in psychiatry. Within the first decade of the programme, teaching staff attempted to make a first step towards knowledge building and to address key policy concerns and going beyond the confines of a narrow vision of criminology geared towards a social welfare or epidemiological orientation (Lowe and McLaughlin, 1993; Travers and Vagg, 1991; Vagg, 1991, 1998). Criminologists based in other institutions were also producing research explicitly grounded in social theories and making important contributions to the local criminological agenda at the time (Cheung and Cheung, 2000; Gray, 1991, 1996; Lo, 1993).

Over time, the criminological enterprise in the department has been extended to cover a wide range of social concerns, crime and control debates in Hong Kong, mainland China and East Asia which link what C Wright Mills (1959) famously termed “private troubles” and “public issues” in his book *The Sociological Imagination* – from the history of criminal justice (Jones and Vagg, 2007); drug use and culture (Joe Laidler, 2005, 2009); youth justice (Adorjan and Chui, 2013) and youth studies (Fraser, in an ESRC-funded study of youth leisure in Hong Kong and Glasgow); victimization survey (Broadhurst *et al.*, 2010); crime and punishment (Bakken, 2005; Xu, 2009); gender, migration and imprisonment (Joe Laidler *et al.*, 2007; Lee, 2007; Lee and Laidler, 2014); policing and oral histories (Ho and Chu, 2012; Joe Laidler and Lee, 2015; Martin, 2013; Martin and Chan, 2014); fear of crime (Lee and Adorjan, *Forthcoming*) to military corruption (Wang, *Forthcoming*), gendered politics of human trafficking in Southeast Asia (Ham and Dewar, 2014) and the recent protests under the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong (Fraser, 2015). To paraphrase Fraser (2015, p. 10) in his passionate piece on the “task” and “promise” of “Umbrella sociology”, we might think of a form of sociologically informed criminology that is “both protective yet engaged, unifying yet mobile, civic yet creative”.

This special issue documents the efforts of taking up such a task and some of the results of generating a criminological imagination in Hong Kong that C Wright Mills might approve of. The first set of three papers traces the development of criminology at the HKU, the constraints and the efforts to overcome them, the ways that local criminologists and students have negotiated with administrative criminology as they went about their teaching and research and the process in which the educators are in turn “educated” by the local context and a critical awareness of the meaning and the doing of criminology in a post-colonial setting. Clearly, the shifting patterns of power resultant of post-coloniality and globalization have not been lost on them.

The opening paper by McLaughlin, one of the founding members of the Master of Social Sciences in Criminology programme, charts the vision and the trials and tribulations of setting up the programme in 1986, the first taught postgraduate programme in the department and “the first criminology postgraduate degree to be offered by any university in South East Asia”. The programme built on “the popular sociology of deviance courses [...] treaded carefully in terms of approach, being taught within a social problems perspective with a nod to conflict theory”. There were inherent problems in all postgraduate criminology programmes:

Choices had to be made, either run a multi-disciplinary professional criminal justice administration degree or an academic sociology of deviance degree. The HKU programme was of course trying to do both.

The HKU programme's ambition to be professionally relevant and academically rigorous meant the department had to grapple with a number of issues and dilemmas in terms of student recruitment, course syllabus, assessment, managing student expectations and, ultimately, the programme's purpose and identity. Many of these issues, dilemmas and controversies would subsequently be played out in sociology and social policy departments in the UK from the late 1990s, as criminology established itself as an increasingly popular degree subject. Nevertheless, McLaughlin argues that "for all the practical complications a distinctive criminological tradition was forged in the early years that has had a lasting influence", especially in terms of its ambition to nurture an "empirical revitalization and enlargement of a Hong Kong research agenda" through student dissertations.

This theme is picked up in "Thirty Years of Criminology at HKU: Themes and Trends in Crime and Its Control". Laidler and Lee reflect on the development of criminological research over the past three decades as articulated in the dissertations from the Master of Social Sciences (Criminology) programme. Between 1988 and 2015, over 200 dissertations have been written, documenting some aspects of crime and social control in Hong Kong or the region and, as they argue, representing an important part of the criminological enterprise in the region. Through these dissertations, we can see what were regarded as major crimes and criminal justice issues of public or governmental concern at particular points of time in Hong Kong's history. In addition to this, these research projects drew from particular theoretical currents, typically a reflection of teaching staff's orientation but also of the shifts in the discipline itself in the North ([Lee and Laidler, 2013](#)). The theoretical backdrop, we know, shapes the selection of any research topic and the kinds of questions and data sources used in scholarly projects. By looking at this repository of knowledge, Laidler and Lee take stock of how criminology started, how it has progressed and point to some of the new possibilities.

Notwithstanding the progress in the criminological enterprise that has been made in the past three decades, some of the constraints identified by McLaughlin still remain valid today. In "Criminology in a controlled climate: Reflections on learning and teaching in Hong Kong", Fraser discusses some of the ways in which he sought to engage in public criminology in an environment where "research access to criminal justice institutions is regulated, and comparatively few civil society groups work specifically on criminal justice issues". The approach to teaching and learning he adopted includes problematizing concepts, ideas and theories developed within the context of the USA and Europe, contributing to the critical pedagogy of the programme which has sought "to cultivate critical, independent scholarship among criminal justice practitioners in Hong Kong", especially through doing empirically grounded research. Ultimately, he is optimistic about the ongoing project of developing new forms of "home-grown" knowledge about crime and justice in Hong Kong.

The second set of papers from graduates from the 2003-2005 cohort on the programme is the result of ongoing efforts at decentering an ethnocentric criminology and producing a home-grown criminology that is engaged, civic yet creative. Students have retained a keen interest in crime and deviance and social control; at the same time, they have moved away from the tethers that see criminology as merely serving the state or as a subsidiary to social welfare policy concerns. Taken together, these papers are informed by urban narrative and spurred on by cultural experiences in the everyday setting. They have tackled street-level subcultures, multiple forms of victimization by

migrant workers, and cross-border crime in a changing order of time and place; their work feeds on kindred developments in sociology and cultural studies while enriching them, in turn, with critical insights into the social divisions and inequalities of globalization.

In the first empirical paper, Chan *et al.* have chosen to research into graffiti-writing in Hong Kong. Graffiti are an underdeveloped research topic in Hong Kong, which is absent not only in the mainstream discourse, but also in the mainstream arts. Chan *et al.* argued how the legal system shapes and marginalizes the development of graffiti and how graffiti writers compromise with the commercial sector for various purposes. Through visually documenting graffiti in eight local sites, such as Mong Kok, Tsim Sha Tsui and Mid-Levels, interviewing graffiti writers and conducting participant observations through attending graffiti class, Chan *et al.* have challenged the conventional understanding of graffiti as deviance in Hong Kong. They have given a voice to graffiti writers to reveal how this hidden group of people perceives the notion of graffiti within their own subcultural discourse and, at the same time, how the public responds to those graffiti-writings.

In the second empirical paper, Chan *et al.* examined the forms and experiences of victimization of female migrant workers, in particular foreign domestic helpers (FDHs) in Hong Kong, the effects of victimization on FDHs and their coping strategies. The main findings based on semi-structured interviews with FDHs uncovered a continuum of violence ranging from relatively mundane abuses on an everyday basis to acute events at the time of termination. Some respondents also experienced secondary victimization from police and/or pending criminal justice proceedings after termination. Victimization exerted significant adverse physical and psychological effects on FDHs in our study. Nevertheless, contrary to common assumptions about FDHs as passive victims, the paper suggests that some FDHs experienced a degree of empowerment as they found ways to cope with their difficulties by individualized and social strategies depending on the degree of victimization and the resources available.

In the final empirical paper, Cheung *et al.* examined the recent phenomenon of parallel trading across the Hong Kong-mainland Chinese border and the social issues associated with its activities. One important issue is the nature of parallel trading activities. Adopting “*ant-moving-home*” (“*螞蟻搬家*” or “*maangai bungaa*”) as a mode of grey market operation, different types of parallel goods (including everyday items such as baby milk powder and chocolates) are carried in small amounts by employed couriers or “*disguised*” visitors who cross the border. So who are the traders, and what are their motivations? And how do the peculiar legal parameters of parallel trading as a cross-border activity involving two different sets of laws and legal systems actually impact on the control efforts? Through a series of field observations of the organization of parallel trading in North District and semi-structured interviews with traders and frontline officers with experience and knowledge of the grey market operations, the researchers were able to provide critical insights into the nature of the social disturbances and public disorder arising from parallel trading activities; the current strategies adopted by law enforcement agencies to control parallel trading and the resulting public disorder; and the challenges that law enforcement agencies face in policing the area. Ultimately, the paper argues that the problem of cross-border parallel trading has to be understood within a broader socio-political context in relation to social anxieties, identity conflict, contrast between the expanding economy of China and

saturated one of Hong Kong, relaxed immigration control of Mainland visitors and food safety and product quality problems in China.

In 1986, one of the newspaper headlines on the launch of the programme noted that “HKU brings crime into classroom”. Thirty years on, staff and students are taking up the challenge of fulfilling the promise of a sociologically informed criminology by going out into the social world; reflecting on our everyday experiences, working lives and organizations and the connections between “private troubles” and “public issues”; and asking questions about the public role of criminology and professional responsibilities of criminologists. Clearly, there are many ways to “do” criminology and to make sense of the relationship between knowledge, power and action. This special issue represents not only a celebration of the coming of age of the Master of Social Sciences in Criminology programme, but also a recognition of the challenges that lie ahead for staff and students alike as we continue to build a criminological enterprise that truly places “our ‘local’ conceptualizations of crime, deviance, victimization, and control in the context of dramatic local and global transformations”.

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