

Crime in Japan: Paradise Lost?

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Abstract

Japan has become known as a country with exceptionally low crime rate. Criminologists have often focused on *cultural characteristics* to explain this uniqueness. With the burst of the bubble economy in 1990 the situation may have changed: 15 years of economic stagnation is mirrored in climbing numbers of registered crime. In this article the author has two aims: At the

descriptive level, the intention is to map as completely as existing data permit the actual crime situation during the last 15 years. At the analytical level the aim is to discuss the relevance of cultural versus economic variables to explain crime development in Japan. The author concludes that the crime situation in Japan actually has deteriorated for some years now, and that the

changing economic climate is the main explanation behind this development. 'Culture' may have inoculated against crime during economic expansion, but it has not the same effect during economic slump.

KEY WORDS: Crime, Culture, Economic change, Japan, New trends

A few years after the end of Second World War optimism returned in the so-called modern world. This optimism related to political, economic, cultural, and, not the least, social questions. With economic growth one took for granted that social problems, such as crime, would vanish. From the end of the 1960s this hopeful vision proved wrong. Economic growth came in tandem with increased crime—everywhere but in Japan.

Quite a few scholars have discussed Japanese uniqueness regarding crime (for an overview, see Leonardsen 2004). Especially important for criminological theory was Braithwaite's (1989) proclamation of Japan as a society of reintegrative shaming. According to Braithwaite's Durkheimian perspective it was the group- and shame-based social control in Japan that explained the low crime rates in this country. However, since the early 1990s international criminological debates on Japan have been relatively scarce. My intention in this

article is to bring up to date recent (i.e. the last 15 years) developments in Japan regarding the crime situation. I will approach my topic from this analytical perspective:

Leonardsen (2002; 2004) discusses *cultural* (i.e. value foundations) and *socio-structural* (i.e. social organizational) explanations of the paradoxical Japanese case. Focusing on characteristics like belonging to a *defensive, collectivistic shame culture* provides in these analyses many clues to understanding the low level of predatory crime in this country. Cultural values transmitted in the process of socialization (dependency, defensiveness, other-directedness, etc.) together with principles of social organization (group-based society) are the main explanatory factors in this study.

In analyzing the importance of these socio-cultural dimensions, Leonardsen makes one important reservation: Japan is different from the main Western countries, not only regarding

culture. From the mid-1970s (when registered crime in Western countries exploded) Japan succeeded in having full employment, which was contrary to most Western countries. It *could* be that this *economic* difference represented a significant variable in explaining the Japanese uniqueness.

In 1990 Japan faced what has been called 'the burst of the bubble economy'. The last decennium of the 20th century represented a continuous economic setback with a strong impact on most sectors of Japanese society. For the first time since the 1930s unemployment became a lasting threat, steadily increasing to 5.4% in 2002. The unemployment rate for people aged 15–29 surpassed 10% in 1998.

This unfortunate situation for Japan gives criminologists the fortunate opportunity of examining the strength of economic stability (i.e. full employment) as an explanation for low crime rates in Japan. Cultural values and social structures appeared to be strong enough to resist the eruptive effects of modernization, urbanization and rapid technological changes during the period 1950–1990. Are the same values and the same social structures that vaccinated against the social dangers of rapid economic growth strong enough to withstand the effects of an economic backlash?¹ Has

¹Concepts like cultural values, social structures (on one side) and economic dimensions (on the other) are analytical and therefore abstract concepts. In social analysis they can easily become static. In the 'real world' these dimensions are interwoven, they interact spontaneously over time, and there is a dialectical relationship between them. Consequently, it is difficult to extract the independent effect of 'economy' versus 'culture'. However, this should not prevent us from taking advantage of 'practical experiments', as represented by Japan in the 1990s.

Japanese 'culture' the same inoculating effect in bad as in good days?

My intention in this article is both descriptive and analytical: to present main aspects of the crime picture in Japan since the early 1990s and to then make some tentative interpretations of what has happened. The main source of information will be registered data on crime as published in the annual White Papers on Crime. As in the literature referred to above, I exclude from my analysis organized crime, white-collar crime, crime in the private sphere, and traffic-related violence. With respect to such crimes, Japan is hardly deserving of the label 'Low-Crime Nation'². However, the question remains: does Japan still deserve its unique reputation regarding 'traditional', predatory, public order crime? How safe from crime is Japan after the onset of the recession?

Moral Panic?

Since the mid-1990s, public discourse on crime in Japan has changed dramatically. After having been celebrated for decades as perhaps *the* safest modern country in the world, this reputation gradually faded:

People here are scared. Crime—once unthinkable in Japan—is on the rise (Lazarus 1999).

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

The National Police Agency says that a remarkable increase in the number of juveniles taken into

²As for further elaboration on these matters, as well as further methodological discussions I refer to chapter 2 in Leonardsen (2004).

custody by police for using amphetamines has been observed since the second half of last year (Asahi News Service, September 9, 1996).

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).

Japan's old-style police force is failing to curb a rise in violent crime (The Economist, February 21, 2000).

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 cases that teens with no previous criminal record are now involved for the first time (Japan Insight, 2003).

Along with their jobs and pensions, Japanese now fear for their safety (The Economist, October 23, 2003).

These quotes are only a small sample of reports from recent years, signaling that something new is happening in a society renowned for its peacefulness and high level of social integration. Strong characterizations like 'collapse of human relationships' (Ueda 2000) and 'escalation in cruelty' (Seto 1999: 7) have given the impression of dramatic changes, not only concerning the crime situation, but also in a much broader cultural sense. According to McCormack (1996: 3) Japanese society entered the 1990s with a 'feeling of uncertainty about the future that had been unknown through the long postwar decades'. This uncertainty may have changed Japan's former status

as a nation 'not obsessed with crime' (Adler 1983).

The primary sources for the new, dramatic announcements are the National Police Agency and the Ministry of Justice. White Papers from the latter on Crime (WP) have been unequivocal in their message:

The recent circumstances of crimes in Japan are deteriorating. The number of reported penal code offenses has been renewing postwar highs since 1996 and the number of persons cleared is also increasing, whereas a far greater number of offenses are reported and the clearance rate continues to decrease. More specifically, serious and heinous crimes that are frightening people in the society, such as the indiscriminate killing/assault in the premises of an elementary school and the killing of all the members of a family, happen one after another. Furthermore, the number of drug offenses still remains at a high level and other various offenses that threaten the peaceful life of Japanese people show no sign of decline (WP 2002: 273).

As an expression of the seriousness of the situation the Research and Training Institute of the Ministry of Justice wrote a special report in 2001 entitled 'Increasing Offenses and Offenders' that focused on larceny, traffic and drug offenses by foreign nationals. The 2002 White Paper presented another special report on a total of nine types of violent crime (robbery, bodily injury, assault, intimidation, extortion, rape, indecent assault, breaking and entering, and destruction of objects), all of which showed a significant increase. In the

2003 White Paper (the latest that is published), the special report focused on homicide and robbery. The general alarm regarding the crime situation is sharpened even further:

Security measures have come to the fore as a major concern in the society. This indicates that people have come to feel a real sense of crisis in the increase of crimes and the worsening of offenses so that a sense of security has been replaced with that of anxiety. ... Now the key issues for Japan are to prevent crimes, reduce the number of offenses, and make and maintain a safe society (WP 2003: preface).

Criminologists are well aware that crime and crime statistics are social constructions. Rising figures should not be taken at face value before they are exposed to critical examination. For example, one should not exclude the possibility that a low-crime nation like Japan is extremely sensitive to minor changes, and that few but spectacular crimes might end up as top news in the media, breeding a self-reinforcing wave of reports that soon mistake media reality for societal reality. Furthermore, an increase in registered crime might mirror a change on the control side as much as a change among the controlled. This is a well rehearsed topic in modern criminology (Cohen 1980; Mathiesen 1986; Young 1999; Garland 2001) and should definitely be kept in mind when interpreting the Japanese case. As Herbert (1992: 115) correctly observes, 'in themselves crime figures are neither right nor wrong from a sociological standpoint, nor are they correct or useless, but are just part of social realities and serve as a significant element in crime policy'. I will return to

this topic after a presentation of the official statistics.

Before we enter this complicated field of 'fact and fiction' there is little doubt that, in the public discourse, Japan has finally lost its status as a 'Heaven for a Cop' (Bayley 1991). From my own reading of four national newspapers (English version of *Asahi News*, *Japan Times*, *Mainichi Daily News* and *Japan Today*) along with popular journals (like *Japan Echo*) and different internet links (*Japan Insight*, *Japan Government*), there are clear indications of something like a 'moral panic' in Japan today and the anxiety or the psychological fear of being a victim of crime has been increasing among the people of Japan (Akane 2002: 1). At least from Thomas' theorem ('if man defines situations as real, they are real in their consequences') the crime situation in Japan has changed during the last ten years. Figures from the International Crime Victimization Survey (ICVS) 2000 are telling in this regard: next to Poland and Portugal, people in Japan (and Belgium) were those who felt most unsafe at home (Kesteren et al. 2000). It is also noteworthy (cf. Braithwaite 1989) that people in Japan today (according to the ICVS) appear to harbor strongly revengeful attitudes.

Crime Statistics: Yes, Japan Has Lost Its Virtue!

The annual White Papers on Crime are voluminous documents (400–500 pages) containing detailed information on crimes, offenders, comparisons with other countries, treatment of offenders, data on victims and even different special surveys. The amount of information is so extensive that one can easily lose sight of the main patterns. Let me try to

penetrate into the data with the following overview, covering the long period from 1946 to 2002 (Fig 1).

We can commence our analysis with the figures included in the 'general penal code offense'. These figures exclude the so-called 'professional negligence in traffic accidents' (the hatched figure) and the crime rate is calculated per 100,000 capita of population. Since 1996, the total number of reported cases has reached a new postwar high in consecutive years until 2002. The aggregate

official figures as presented above are unequivocal: the crime situation in Japan has deteriorated towards the end of the 20th century.

While registered crime has increased, the *clearance rate* has been on the decline from 1987, and in 2002 amounts to 20.8%. According to the Ministry of Justice this negative trend is primarily explained by the steep increase in reported cases.

The *female rate* has gradually increased in most of the years since

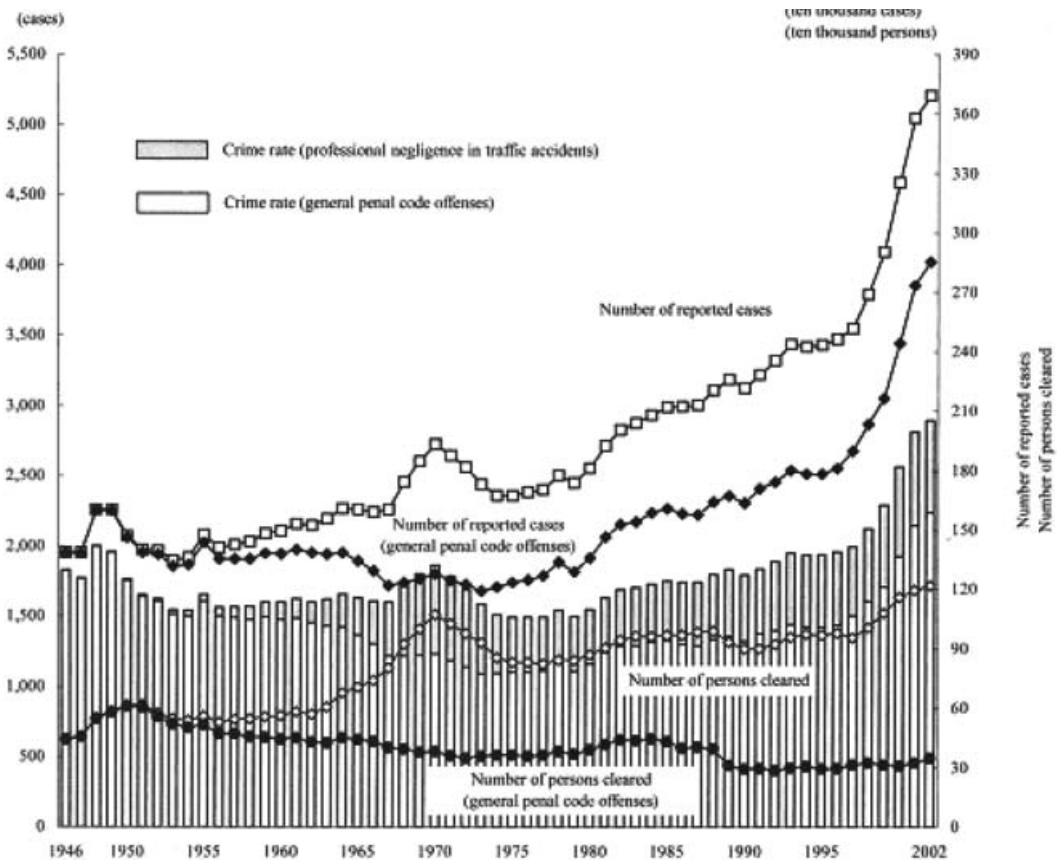


Figure 1. Trends in the number of reported cases, number of persons cleared, and crime rate for penal code offenses, 1946–2002

Note: 1. Until 1955, offenses committed by persons under 14 years of age are included.

2. General penal code offenses until 1965 refers to 'penal code offenses excluding professional negligence' rather than 'penal code offenses excluding professional negligence in traffic accidents'.

Source: White Paper on Crime, 2003, p. 4.

1946, but is actually not much higher in 2002 (21.5%) than it was at the end of the 1980s. In other words, the increase in registered crime during the period of economic decline is first of all a male project. If the economic setbacks since the 1990s have had a negative impact on the crime situation in Japan, then it is the male part of the population who has tackled this crisis the worst.

Aggregate figures like these can of course hide very different trends of development between different types of crimes, such that they obscure rather than clarify. We need to delve into the details.

Like in other countries, *larceny* accounts for the lion's share of reported crimes (64.4% of the cases reported, 71.5% of the persons cleared in 2002). The trend in registered cases has been gradually upward, well before the economic backlash in Japan. However, from 1998 until 2001 the curve became much steeper (average annual increase of almost 170,000 cases) and then slowed slightly in the last year (only 1.6% increase). Larceny includes offenses like vehicle theft (very rapid increase 1996–2001) and theft from vehicles (these two offenses account for more than 50% of larceny cases), theft from houses (upward turn from 1997, after having decreased for many years), theft from vending machines, shoplifting, snatching and pickpocketing. Even if snatching amounts to only 2.2% (2002) of the reported cases of larceny it is interesting to note that these cases have increased sharply, especially since 1991 (five times up in 2002). As the Ministry observes, snatching is an easier and more violent modus operandi than pickpocketing, which requires specific skills. While

pickpocketing accounted for more than the double of cases of snatching in 1990, the situation was reversed during the 5 years from 1995 (53,000 reported cases of snatching versus less than 25,000 cases of pickpocketing).

If we look at the most serious type of crime, *homicide*, the situation does not appear very alarming³. While in the period from 1954 to 1991 the total number of reported cases showed a continuous decline, there have been only marginal fluctuations in the 1990s. In absolute numbers, it should be noted that it is persons in their 50s and 60s who are responsible for this increase. This is first of all due to demographic changes since there has been a rapid increase in the population of elderly people. However, comparing Japan to Western countries like the US, France and Britain, it appears that Japan has a disproportionately high share of 'older people' (i.e. 50+) as murderers (Kageyama 2000). Since 1989 the number and percentage of perpetrators who are employed has remained constant, whereas those by unemployed persons has been rising slightly. The acquaintance rate between suspected perpetrator and victim has remained at a high level of about 85% throughout the 1990s.

Turning to the *victims* of homicide it appears that the rate of minor victims has been on a declining trend since 1976 (26.6%) ending at 11.2% in 2002. The development in the 1990s has not distinguished itself in any particular way in this regard. Most male victims were in their 50s, followed by those in their 40s, 60s, 30s, 20s, and under 20.

³For a further specification of what is included in the term 'homicide' in Japan, see Finch 2001.

Today it seems that female victims in their 60s account for a disturbingly high proportion of total numbers (30.5%).

In Japan, as in many Western countries, there has been a debate on *foreign nationals*' share of the total crimes committed (4.6 million foreigners out a total population of 127 million people in 2002).⁴ Without going into this debate,⁵ the figures regarding homicide do not disclose any alarming tendencies in this regard. Correcting for some minor fluctuations during the 1990s the total numbers of homicides committed by this group is approximately the same in 2002 as in the early 1990s—in spite of the increased total number of foreigners living in Japan.

With only minor fluctuations in the total number of homicides in the 1990s one could argue that Japan still deserves the label 'low-crime nation' in this regard. While the homicide rates in France, Germany, the UK and the US in 2001 were 3.9, 3.2, 3.4 and 5.6 reported cases per 100,000 capita of population, respectively, the rate in Japan was not more than 1.1 (approximately one-fifth of these homicides were committed by organized crime groups). (All figures from WP 2003: 108.)

When the Ministry of Justice announces that 'people seem to feel that there is a deterioration of public security and their fear about public security in Japan seems to be increasing' (WP 2002: 273), this has to do with other heinous crimes than homicide. The White Paper

entitled *Present Situation and Trend of Offenses of Violent Nature* (White Paper, 2002) presents the background for this anxiety. After a detailed analysis of nine types of violent offenses, the Ministry concludes that 'under the present circumstances where people are feeling "insecure" instead of "safe" about public peace, appropriate measures against the rapid deterioration of the crime situation have never been desired so strongly as they are today' (WP 2002: 481). Let us look at the empirical basis for this statement.

First of all, the registered development regarding *robberies* seems to have sent shock waves through Japanese society. Fig 2 compares robberies to the development of homicide, larceny and general penal code offenses in total. Even though robberies accounted for only 0.24% of all reported cases in 2002 (0.05% for homicides) the influence of these offenses upon people's feeling of insecurity has been immense, which, of course, has been further amplified by frequent media coverage of these cases.

Except for the chaotic period immediately after the war the number of reported cases of robbery declined gradually, showing a flat or slightly decreasing trend from 1975 to 1988. However, from 1995 to 2002 the numbers increased three-fold, and the same trend has been seen in the number of cleared cases and the number of persons cleared. Since the number of persons cleared is relatively higher than the number of cleared cases this indicates that robbery cases involve quite a number of accomplice cases (i.e. involving more than two persons). The clearance rate, which used to be about

⁴In 1990 a revised 'Immigration Law' came into force, aiming to control the entry and departure of refugees.

⁵For a critical discussion of blaming foreigners for increasing crime, see W. Herbert's article (1992) *Conjuring Up a Crime Wave: The 'Rapid Growth in the Crime Rate among Foreign Migrant Workers in Japan' Critically Examined*.

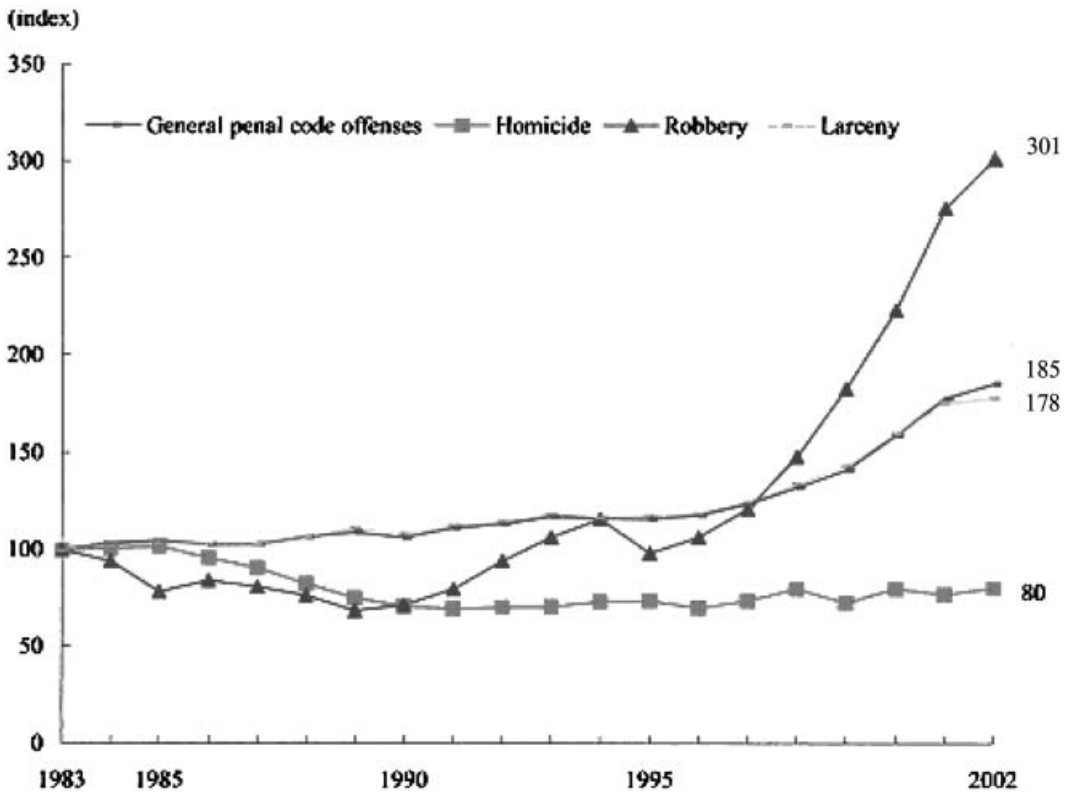


Figure 2. Trends in the number (index number) of reported cases of general penal code offenses, homicide, robbery, and larceny (1983–2002)

Note: Index number regarding the number of reported cases in 1983 as 100.

Source: White Paper on Crime, 2003, p. 286.

80% until 1998, fell below 50% in 2001, and this, according to the Ministry, is due to the drastic increase in the number of reported cases. When the numbers of robbery are broken down into ‘robbery resulting in death’, ‘robbery resulting in bodily injury’, and ‘rape on the occasion of robbery’, it appears that all of these offenses, and especially the second one, are remarkably up since 1995–96 (two- and three-fold). Robberies targeting all-night supermarkets have made a considerable upward jump since 1998. If one differentiates between invasive and noninvasive robberies it appears that both categories have risen sharply (invasive robberies increased 3.7-fold

from 1995 to 2002 while noninvasive robberies increased 2.4-fold from 1997 to 2002).

The referred changes are mirrored in the rate of victims injured, where the numbers for victims severely injured increased 3.5-fold from 1995 to 2002. The Ministry reports that people who are closely related to the suspected perpetrators seem to be targeted and victimized more frequently during recent years. They add that,

the number of offenders who commit robbery even targeting their friends or associates has been increasing constantly. Furthermore, in robbery cases

involving acquaintances, the perpetrators inherently tend to commit the offense in a more malicious manner, such as causing harm to victims' lives or bodies out of fear that their commitment of the crime would be revealed (WP 2002: 297).

A special section in the 2002 White Paper carries the headline *Increasing Damage to Females, Minors, and Elderly People*. While most robbery perpetrators are males (93%–96%) it is commented as an especially disturbing trend that male robbery offenders more frequently attack physically weak people, such as females, minors and elderly people.

The Ministry has analyzed changes in *occurrences* of heinous offenses (homicide and robbery) throughout the different regions. There are significant gaps among prefectures, with the national average rate coming to 224.7 per 100,000 capita of population, the highest rate to 445.1, and the lowest to 46.3. A special comment is made on what is described as the 'doughnut phenomenon', i.e. a tendency where the crime rate is relatively lower in the center of the largest cities than in the so-called dormitory towns surrounding them. The explanation given for this development is that conventional communities in these dormitory towns are changing, and 'as more residents go to work or school in urban areas and become less oriented toward or less conscious of their own communities, robbery is committed more frequently targeting such vacancies in communities' (WP, 2003: 357). More specifically, the Ministry put forwards these factors as lying behind the asserted increase in street robberies in these areas:

- the expansion and increase of entertainment districts as well as convenience stores and other all-night stores to suburban cities around the Tokyo metropolitan area;
- the increase in people who come from work or school to suburban cities during the nighttime;
- the increase in persons, and in particular juveniles, out of employment due to job losses.

In the special analysis (WP 2002) of nine types of violent offenses (robbery, bodily injury, assault, intimidation, extortion, rape, indecent assault, breaking and entering, and destruction of objects) the deteriorating crime situation is further confirmed. Even though these offenses account for only 7.4% of the total number of reported penal code offenses, these are the crimes that create the most fear and anxiety among people. Fig 3 shows the trend in the number of reported cases of the referred types of offenses, and compares this with 1) the total number of offenses excluding larceny, 2) the number of offenses excluding larceny and the nine types of violent offenses.

This overview shows that the number of reported cases of general penal code offenses, excluding larceny and the nine types of violent offenses, fluctuated between 100,000 and 150,000 for the whole period, and it has been flat since 1996. This means that the increase in offenses excluding larceny since 1996 is due to the increase in the nine types of violent offenses. The Ministry divides these offenses into three groups from the perspective of the time of increase/decrease.

- Group 1: Types of offenses (reported cases), which showed a repeated trend of gradual increase and decrease for a long

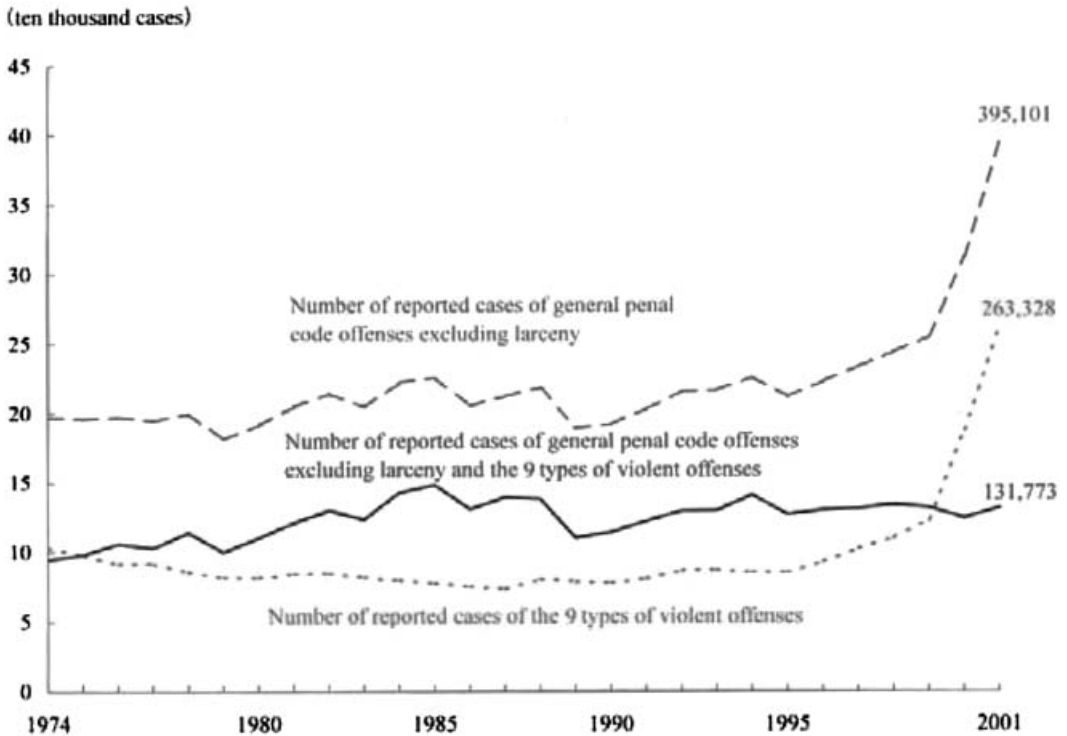


Figure 3. Trends in the number of reported cases of nine types of violent offenses (1974–2001)

Note: 'Nine types of violent offenses' include robbery, injury, assault, intimidation, extortion, rape, indecent assault, breaking and entering, and destruction of objects.

Source: White Paper on Crime, 2002, p. 276.

period of time and then started to rise sharply during the period from 1996 to 1998. These offenses include robbery, extortion, and breaking and entering; i.e. offenses with the purpose of taking property.

- Group 2: Types of offenses (reported cases) which increased from around 1996 after showing a downward trend for a long time, and subsequently have increased rapidly since 2000. These offenses include bodily injury, assault, intimidation, and rape; i.e. offenses of a violent nature that are committed by causing direct damage to the body of the victim.
- Group 3: Types of offenses (reported cases) which have been on the rise since 1987, and which experienced an even steeper increase in 1999/2000. These offenses include indecent assault and destruction of objects.

If we keep to the figures referred to in the three most recent White Papers on Crime, the 'statistical reality' corresponds to the 'media reality'. This is not very surprising, since the media base their reports on data from the National Police Agency and/or the Ministry of Justice. Based on the public figures presented above we make the preliminary conclusion that Japan has lost some of its uniqueness as a low-crime nation. According to the Ministry of Justice traditional crime deterrents do not function adequately any more and, consequently, it is necessary to establish new measures against crimes.

I have only briefly commented on the crime situation among *young* people. A

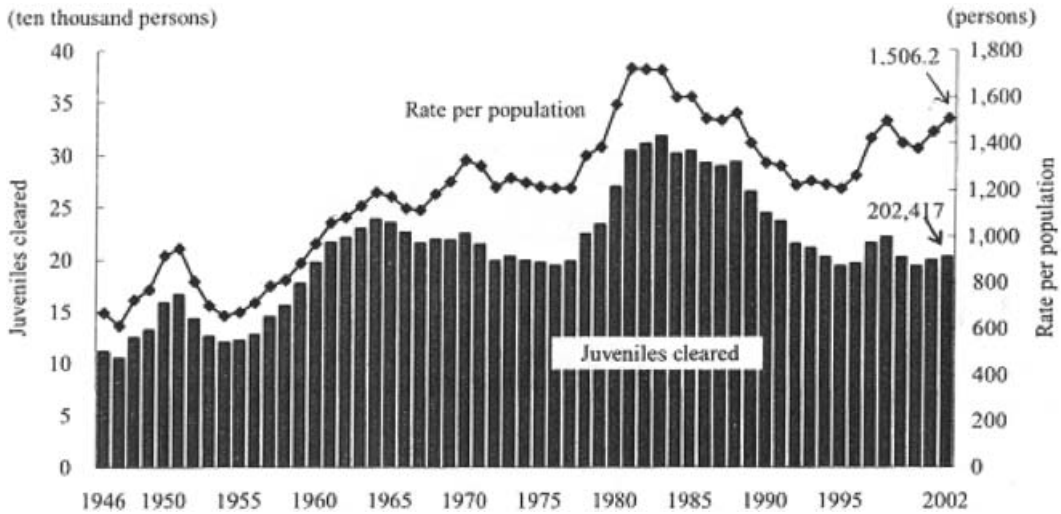


Figure 4. Trends in the number of juveniles cleared for penal code offenses and rate per population (1946–2002)

Note: 1. Including juvenile offenders under 14.

2. The number and the rate since 1970 exclude those for professional negligence in traffic accidents by juvenile offenders under 14.

Source: White Paper on Crime, 2003, p. 216.

great deal of media attention has addressed the development of juvenile crime and there is obviously a deep concern in Japan regarding a ‘moral deterioration’, especially among the youth. Mass media as well as public authorities since the mid-1990s have shown much concern not only about increasing juvenile crime, but also about suicides, violence in schools, dropouts from high school, bullying, drugs, paid dating among school girls, etc. The Central Council of Education released an interim report on ‘moral education’ in 1998 with recommendations regarding ‘reexamining the situation from the ground up’, ‘reexamining the role of the family’, making use of the power of the community’, and ‘reexamining schools in terms of their role as venues for moral education’ (Seto 1999: 12). In the 2002 White Paper on Crime the Ministry of Justice explicitly announces that

‘education both at home and at schools does not fulfill its function well’ (WP 2002: preface). How worrying is the situation among the youth? I will limit my concerns by looking at crime.

The overall trend (1946–2002) in number of juveniles cleared for penal code offenses and rate per population is shown in Fig 4 (60% of these are larceny).⁶

In short, there have been big fluctuations during different periods of time. From the middle of the 1990s we can register a new upward trend (rate per population, i.e. the number of juveniles

⁶The Ministry of Justice does not operate with ‘reported cases’ regarding youth, only ‘cleared cases’. This might be due to the fact that juvenile delinquency is the general term for three types of juveniles, white paper, 2003:21. Since the third category (‘status offenses’) would have been included in the figures for reported cases, this would have biased the figures. However, please note that Fig 4 includes juvenile offenders under 14 (i.e. punishable offense without criminal liability due to age).

cleared for penal code offenses per 1,000 juveniles in each age group). Due to the falling birth rate and an increase in the number of adults, the juvenile rate (cleared cases) has fallen from 68% in 1990 to 44% in 2002. The female rate among juveniles has fluctuated during the 1990s between 18% (1993) and 26% (1998), ending at 24% in 2002. Regarding trends in juvenile special law offenses (i.e. mainly drugs and traffic offenses) there has been a continued downward trend (referred persons) since the middle of the 1980s.

If we look at the absolute numbers of *homicides* committed by people aged 14–20 years we find that there has been a relatively stable development during the 1990s. Due to the decreasing population of juveniles in this age group the *rate* (i.e. controlling for number of persons per 100,000 in this age group) has increased slightly during the 1990s (up 0.2 points from 1995 to 2002). This is far from what one would have expected from the public debate, where much attention has been paid to a series of brutal homicides by junior high school students.⁷ Of course, one can discuss, as many do, if these homicides have been committed in more cruel and aggressive ways than before. However, if we limit our analysis to the absolute and relative numbers of homicides committed by juveniles in the 1990s, one can really talk about ‘deviancy amplification’ and a ‘signification spiral’ leading to a media-led moral panic (Hamai et al. 2003: 5).

The trend regarding *robberies* is more worrying. As shown in Fig 5, the

increase of cleared persons aged 14–19 is especially steep. During the period 1995 to 2002 the rate per population has increased by 10.6 points.

Juveniles commit an increasing number of robberies on the street and during late night. While the rate of invasive robbery to noninvasive robbery is 4 to 6, or 5 to 5 among adult offenders, the rate is 1 to 9 among juvenile offenders. Among people aged 14–19 years the accomplice rate has increased from 52.0% in 1987 to 71.2% in 2002. The motives among juvenile offenders for committing robberies have mainly been the same during the 1990s, namely to obtain entertainment expenses/extra spending money (while an increasing number of adult offenders commit robberies because of poverty). The number of unemployed juveniles who have committed robbery has increased rapidly after remaining flat from 1973 to 1995. Between 1995 and 2002 the number of unemployed juveniles cleared increased 2.5-fold.

In Japan, juvenile delinquency includes three types of conduct, and juvenile delinquents subjected to family court hearings include three types of juveniles:

- offenders aged 14–19 (the minimum age for criminal liability is 14);
- offenders under 14 (punishable offense without criminal liability);
- ‘status offenders’ (acts that are deemed likely to result in future offenses due to disobedience towards the lawful supervision of guardians, staying away from home without justifiable reason, contact with persons with criminal or immoral tendencies or frequentation of places of disrepute, and a tendency towards acts that are detrimental to the morality of themselves or others).

⁷For more details, see Seto 1999; Akane 2002; <http://www.fpcj.jp>

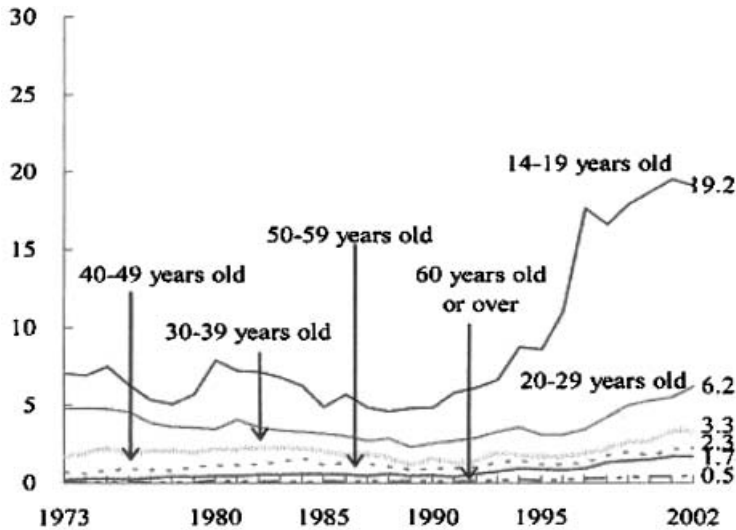


Figure 5. Trends in the rate of persons cleared for robberies per population (rate per population) by age group

Note: 1. 'Rate of persons cleared per population' refers to the rate of persons cleared per 100,000 persons in each age group.

2. Data based on the age at the time of the offense.

3. Both the number of persons aged 60 or over and the number of persons aged 65 or over are indicated in data for 1986 and thereafter.

Source: White Paper on Crime, 2003, p. 308.

Since many have been worried about the moral development of Japanese youth it is worth taking a closer look at Fig 6, which shows the development (1969–2002) in the number of juveniles disposed by family courts for status offenses ('moral crimes') and the female rate.

To the extent that these statistics give a valid report of the situation among young people, there seems to be little reason for worrying about the moral deterioration among Japanese youth (but note the relatively high female rate). However, status offenses are certainly extremely sensitive to policy changes in police work so conclusions should be drawn very carefully on this point. Furthermore, one should warn against simplistic conclusions regarding this

complex question. As the Ministry of Justice comments in their special survey on heinous crimes, one cannot exclude that within more or less organized groups, crimes have become more brutalized in recent years.⁸

Other Indications of a Change in Crime

There are three other indications regarding a negative change in the crime situation in Japan: the sales of *security*

⁸The Ministry of Justice concludes their special survey regarding young offenders in this way: 'Viewing these 8 offenses [homicides and robberies], we can see the same characteristics as in "bullying" problems, including that assault was initiated for trivial reasons, that multiple offenders relentlessly assaulted a person in a weaker position, that criminal acts were committed for entertainment and with the intention of increasing the victim's suffering, and that the offenders sometimes participated in the offense from the motivation that they did not want to be regarded as a "chicken" or a coward' (p. 408).

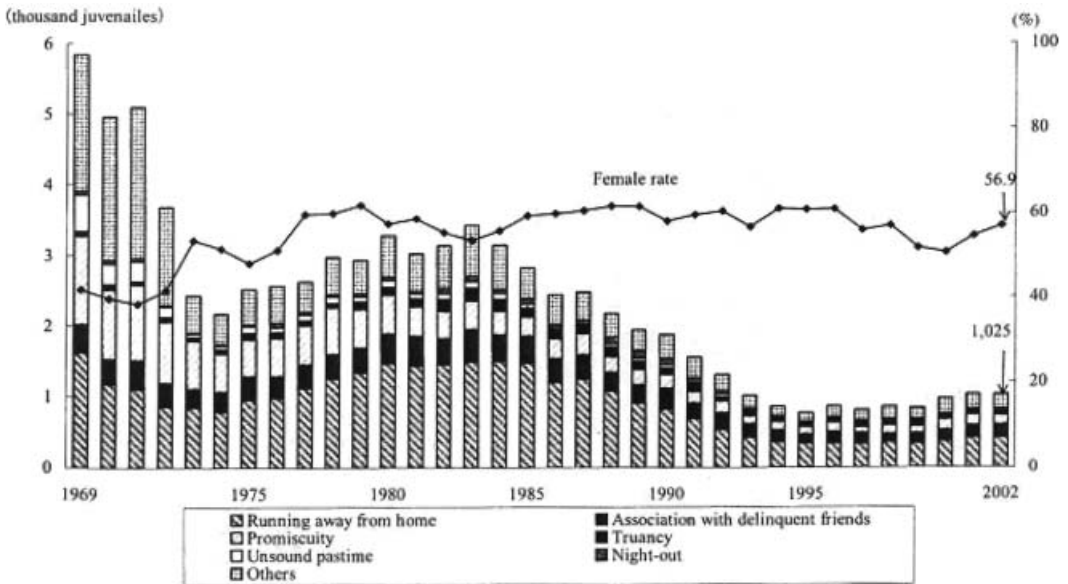


Figure 6. Trends in the number of juveniles finally disposed by family courts for status offenses and the female rate (1969–2002)

Note: Excluding dismissal without hearing and dismissal after hearing due to *non-est inventus*, etc.
Source: White Paper on Crime, 2003, p. 223.

items, the forming of *neighborhood watch groups*, and *opinion surveys*. The subsequent information will mainly be based on mass media coverage of these items.

Sales of security items

The Japan Times (March 9, 2001) reports that 'increasing numbers of people are flocking to the home security sections of their local hardware and do-it-yourself stores on weekends amid reports of a growing crime wave in Japan'. One shop dealing with security items reported a hundred phone calls a day from people worried whether their doors were safe enough. Another company said it produced five times as many keys and locks in January 2001 compared to the same period a year earlier, and they had orders on a waiting list of 2–3 months. The Economist

(October 23, 2003) writes about how a frightening increase in crime has led many people to look to technology for help⁹. One example, which has become very popular, is a small computer chip that allows parents to track their children with satellite technology. Another example is Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, which is planning to begin test-marketing a robot that will put any watchdog

⁹The Asahi Shimbun (January 15, 2005) reports about the developer of a housing project (860 family homes for about 3,500 people) who was horrified because people were afraid of crime. Without effective countermeasures huge investments would probably swirl down the drain. Between September 2002 and January 2004, 17 of the 130 completed and occupied homes were broken into. Of course, word got out to prospective buyers and sales slowed to a crawl. The solution was to install crime prevention systems: a high-speed fiber-optic network that allows monitoring camera images on a password-protected community website, an intruder alarm for each house, and, finally, security guards, working three shifts, patrolling the complex 24 hours a day. Thanks to the new security measures, sales have rebounded, the report says.

to shame. Instead of barking it will phone or e-mail its master if anyone comes prowling while nobody is at home. According to Daily Yomiuri (February 18, 2003) taxi companies in Kobe try to prevent crime by installing the '110 taxi' label in the cars, indicating that the drivers are prepared to aid crime victims and report crimes to the police.

Forming of neighborhood watch groups

During the last years there seems to have been an increase in the number of crime prevention groups. Since the mid-1990s the National Police Agency has advocated greater local community involvement to prevent crime. In the conclusion of the White Paper 2003, there was an explicit recognition that the police cannot solve the crime problem alone. Consequently, a further enhancement and development of the public-private cooperation in crime prevention was to be welcomed. There are no official statistics available regarding the expansion of this activity, but Japanese newspapers are constantly reporting on this topic.¹⁰ The Daily Yomiuri (August 06, 2005) informs that neighborhood watch groups increased 2.6 times in one year from 2003 to 2004, totaling 8,097 associations, while individual membership in such groups totaled 521,749 persons in 2004, 2.9 times more than the previous year. In Tokyo alone, the number of neighborhood watch groups increased by 30 during two months in 2004. Most of these groups operate during late hours, but quite a few of them give protection to children

traveling to and from school. The National Police Agency has designated 100 locations as model areas for regional safety stations, providing crime-fighting equipment, such as stab-resistant vests, flashlights, as well as paying part of the premiums for on-duty insurance carried by 42% of the volunteers. To an increasing extent these security groups operate like pseudo-cops (in Tokyo one has even engaged young sumo wrestlers, see The Japan Times 6 January 2004). In the Ibaraki Prefecture the neighborhood watch group has at their disposal vehicles that look like police cars with flashing exterior lights and bullhorns bolted to the roofs. Each member carries a badge, which is the spitting image of the ones used by the police. In one Tokyo neighborhood the Meidaimae Peace Makers have built a Peace Makers Box (like an ordinary police box), which is manned to offer help to those who need it (The Japan Times 23 October 2003). According to The Japan Times (29 May 2004) 1,290 local governments (more than 40% of the total number of municipalities in Japan) had adopted 'living safety ordinances' since the mid-1990s.

Opinion surveys

No more than 27% of Japanese people answer (2002) that 'a high level of public peace' is one of the features in which Japanese people today can take pride. In a survey on 'Values Shared Among People' (2002) the percentage of people who recognize an increase in crimes has increased from 62% in 1996 to 80% in 2001. In a survey among police officers the respondents were asked, 'Do you feel that crimes have increased from ten years ago?'—and 94% answered either

¹⁰See for example The Japan Times 29 May 2004, 6 January 2004, 23 October 2003, 29 July 2003, 9 March 2001; The Daily Yomiuri 6 August 2005; Asahi Shimbun 15 January 2005.

'I strongly feel so' (59%) or 'I feel so' (35%) (2003 White Paper on Crime).

Of course, these three illustrations (sales of security items, the neighborhood watch groups, and opinion surveys) probably reflect a media-triggered fear, as much as they do a real increase in crime. As I will return to, there are strong arguments in support of a 'constructivist' perspective on the asserted crime increase in Japan today (i.e. changes on the control side and changes regarding media coverage). However, one perspective does not exclude the other—both may be (and probably are) correct. It is as misconceiving to read crime figures at face value as it is to 'explain away' every registered change as a social construction. Ideas about 'final realities' regarding crime have to be replaced by humble but qualified calculations of probability.

Methodological Deliberations: What Has 'Really' Happened to the Crime Situation in Japan?

The public opinion and the mass media presentation seem to be unequivocal: the crime situation in Japan has deteriorated during the last ten years. How do they know? Except from personal experiences these conclusions are drawn from the account presented by the National Police Agency and the Ministry of Justice. How valid is the information from these actors? Crime is a story about an iceberg (probably some 80%–85% of all crime goes unreported, Dahrendorf 1985: 16).¹¹ Could it be that changes in the

routines for reporting and recording of crime have changed so that more of the iceberg has become visible?

According to Hamai et al. (2003: 1) a series of police scandals in the late 1990s changed the way the mass media reported policing issues, and 'this in turn resulted in a sudden increase in the number of crimes recorded and a sudden decrease in the clear-up rates'. Consequently, these authors find that the asserted increase in crime in the 1990s is more apparent than real.

The police scandals were especially related to two murder cases where the police were accused of inaction. Press coverage was immense and the National Police Agency was forced to issue a new instruction safeguarding that more effort would be made to prevent crimes before they were committed. Hamai et al. (2003: 8) then go on:

One key outcome was to ensure that all reported incidents were now recorded without police discretion, either at the 'crime desk' or at the 'consultation desk'. Indeed, the consultation desks were opened up more widely and this is where more 'trivial' incidents would most likely to be reported. This change marked severe restrictions on *kaiketsu* [informal resolution] for a whole raft of previously underrecorded offenses, an, in effect, an end to 'cuffing' at the police station. The impact of such changes on recorded crime was profound. Firstly, the number of 'incidents' recorded at the consultation desks increased dramatically.

This is an important observation that definitely is of relevance to our discussion. Massive critique of the police represents a

¹¹The 1993 Australia-wide Crime and Safety Survey produced the following figures: 94% of robbery victims, 32% of both assault and attempted break and enter victims, but only 25% of sexual assault victims, reported the incidents to the police (referred to in Anleu 1999: 133).

challenge to their legitimacy, which in turn most likely will increase the pressure to prove their efficiency and their trustworthiness. Hamai et al. show that the number of incidents reported to and recorded by the police was stable between 1992 and 1999, but then rocketed. This development is in accordance with police efforts to improve on solving cases brought to the police, and it is in accordance with their encouragement to bring incidents to the police.

However, as shown in Fig 3, the increase in the nine types of violent offenses started three years *before* the police scandals, even though figures really escalated from 1999. The number of reported cases of larceny has been on a steady but slow increase for a longer period of time, but the curve became steeper in 1996, and this trend was even further reinforced in 1999. Robberies and extortion show an intensified upward trend since 1995, rape since 1996. Without going into details for different types of offenses, figures presented in the 2003 White Paper on Crime do not give full support to the ‘police scandal hypothesis’. However, for some offenses it is true that a negative trend further escalated in 1999, and this lends some credibility to the conclusion drawn by Hamai et al. As I see it, the police scandals in 1999 and 2000 had an aggravating effect on a crime trend that was already deteriorating.

The International Crime Victimization Survey (ICVS) is not of much help for our analysis since important data are not available for Japan during the relevant period. The only valid conclusion one can draw from these data (i.e. the 2000 Survey) is that Japan still seems

to defend its position as at least a *relatively* low-crime society. It is only regarding ‘bicycle theft’ that Japan is in the lead among the so-called industrialized countries (surpassed by the Netherlands and Sweden).

Theoretical Reflections: Explaining the Changing Crime Situation in Japan

When analyzing Japan as a low-crime nation between 1950 and 1990 I concur with those scholars who first of all emphasize the *cultural* dimension (for detailed references, see Leonardsen 2004). Moreover, much classical, Western sociological theory would have to be revised if a collectivistic, tradition-oriented, other-directed, hierarchical, defensive and shame-based culture like the Japanese did not pave the way for low crime. In Japan individuals are strongly bonded to social institutions, which leads to effective social control. Also, they are socialized in a way that invites a conformist and consensus-oriented way of behaving. In sum, *cultural values* (simplified to Confucianism) and *social structures* (simplified to group society) go a long way towards explaining why Japan has deserved the label of a ‘low-crime nation’ (traditional, predateive crimes only).

Japan’s strong economy has probably contributed to some extent to this development. But as Leonardsen (2003) argues, the economic soundness is hardly the main explanatory dimension in this discussion. The *extraordinary* low crime rates in Japan 1950–1990 cannot be explained with reference to more favorable unemployment or inequality figures than in many Western countries. To be sure, Roberts and LaFree (2001: 14) have argued that

'culture' cannot explain declining crime in this period, since it is 'likely that the traditional aspects of Japanese culture that are widely believed to support strong informal social control have probably weakened during the past half century'. By reducing 'culture' to three indicators (divorce, female labor force participation and urbanization) their conclusion might be sensible, but this is hardly an adequate basis for reducing the relevance of 'culture' *in toto*. In Western countries crime has increased with economic prosperity—in Japan it has not. The dangers of anomic situations embedded in rapid economic growth in open capitalistic societies have become manifest in individualistic Western countries, but not in the more collectivistic Japan. 'Culture' is the main dimension to analyze in order to understand this situation. The interesting follow-up question is if Japanese culture also inoculates against crime in periods of economic depression.

In this essay, I have argued that the asserted increase in crime 1990–2005 is *real*, even though the police scandals I have referred to have probably contributed to the escalation since 1999. Japanese culture is apparently *not* a sufficient shock absorber when an economic slump occurs.¹² If my argument is to remain watertight we should ask: what could explain the negative crime trend in this period? Referring to

¹²In addition, in a complete analysis of this topic one should also include a discussion on how economic recession affects the general 'psychological health' among people. As Kageyama (2000: 3) argues, 'in Japan, social problems and economic recession have manifested itself less in murder than suicide'. It may be that the economic problems in Japan in the 1990s are more clearly expressed as general psychological problems than as crimes; a topic I cannot elaborate on here.

Leonardsen (2004) we have three possible answers:

- Crime has changed because there has been a change in cultural values ('moral').
- Crime has changed because there has been a change in social structures (group society).
- Crime has changed because there has been a change in the economy (downward economic trend).

Of course, 'cultural values', 'social structure' and 'economy' are all analytical dimensions, and this classification can easily invite a simplified either-or way of thinking. Before I proceed, let me underline that—in real life—these dimensions are closely interlinked. A change in one dimension will certainly have an impact on the others. However, for analytical reasons it is appropriate to operate with this type of simplification.

Let us begin with the first two bullet points. Japanese society can sociologically be described (at least until 1990) in five dimensions (Leonardsen 2002; 2004):

- Japan is a society with values that have a high degree of continuity, consistency and homogeneity, over time and across society.
- Japan is a social-conservative and group-based society.
- Japan is an other-directed and contextual society.
- Japan is a hierarchical and patriarchal society.
- Japan possesses a defensive shame culture.

Each of these dimensions conveys characteristics that are relevant to understanding the low crime rate in Japan. The decisive issue is if some of these distinctive traits have changed during the last 15 years, and, if so, in a direction that provokes crime. Space will only permit a few short comments on this.

We do not have empirical evidence to allow any firm conclusions. Popular

opinions as well as viewpoints expressed by public authorities indicate that there has been a noticeable change during the 1990s, both regarding cultural values and social structure. In the aftermath of one gruesome crime in Kobe¹³ the Ministry of Education requested that the Central Council of Education (an advisory body) should undertake an urgent inquiry into appropriate ways of providing 'moral education starting at infancy' (Seto 1999: 12). In their interim report (released in 1998) it is 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 preeminence of personal interests over those of society at large.

As already noted, the Ministry of Justice shares these anxieties. The official view obviously maintains that social ethics have deteriorated and that a traditional sense of solidarity in society is lacking. Kaji (2000: 57) is another exponent of the same viewpoint. He speaks explicitly about a 'moral disruption' in Japan today, and how it is connected with the influence of Western values:

Upscale morality (as I ironically call it) emanates from the West. Charity, equality, 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. Honoring parents, respecting seniors, dealing sincerely with others, and so on—these are realistic and can be put into practice here and now.

Kaji argues on behalf of traditional Japanese values, or what he calls 'down-to-earth popular morality'. He claims that these values have increasingly been forgotten; they are not taught at home and not in the schools. There has been a shift from absolute values to relative values. Thus, it is hard to identify primary, universal, and absolute values in contemporary Japanese society. By defining these absolute values as feudalistic and old-fashioned, kids have lost respect for authorities and have no understanding of filial piety and the continuity of life. What is needed is a return to classical Confucian values, which for Kaji (2000: 57) means to 'guide them [i.e. the population] by edicts, keep them in line with punishment, and the common people will stay out of trouble but will have no shame'. In short, these perspectives on crime are not very different from what scholars like Murray (1990; 1994), Wilson (1985; 1993) and Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) have put forward to explain increasing crime in the West: the causes of crime are to be found in a general moral decline, the decline of the family and the central competence of socialization.

In addition to this 'call for return to popular morality', which is the title of Kaji's article, some aspects of the social structure are said to have changed as well. The divorce rate has increased

¹³A third-year junior high student murdered an 11-year-old boy, decapitated his body and later on sent a statement acknowledging his crime to a local newspaper. His message was that he wanted to take his revenge on 'compulsory education, which produced me as a transparent existence, and the society that created it' (referred in Seto 1999: 2).

from 1.27 per thousand people in 1990 to 2.15 in 2004. The family structure has changed. Female participation in the labor market 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 the isolation and loneliness. 'Family stress' is a term that has become a popular descriptor of the new situation. Furthermore, the system with lifetime employment (mainly related to the bigger companies) has gradually been weakened, thus creating more uncertainty for social life in general. Roberts and LaFree (2001: 13) argue that 'much evidence suggests that traditional ties to the family and community in Japan, and the informal social controls that presumably flow from them, are becoming noticeably weaker, as the Japanese people respond to rapid social change'.

It is not sensational to argue that Japan—a modern capitalistic market society in a globalized world—is changing, both regarding cultural values and regarding social structure. However, these general observations have to be placed in their right context. Even though the family institution has changed in Japan, this is a story of a very gradual change during a long period of time. If there were a direct causal link between divorces and crime, then we would have expected only a slight increase since 1988. Besides, a short glimpse at the divorce and crime statistics in different countries indicates that this type of monocausal thinking easily becomes more speculative than scientific. More research is needed, but I have seen no documentation that

Japanese social structure has changed in a way and in fields that could be linked directly to increasing crime.

Returning to the assertion about a significant moral decay in Japan, I have two critical remarks. First, we have to ask if the crime increase is mainly a reflection of a moral decline, or if it is instead the other way around. We seem to be lost in the classic dilemma about the egg and the chicken: what came first? In times when social integration seems to deteriorate, it is important to watch out for tautological explanations. One will often register that people who argue that morality is wanting, use crime as the proof of this decay.¹⁴ But in that case, one cannot at the next turn argue that crime is on the increase *because* morality is weakened. The logic goes like this: there is a moral decay in society, and this we can say because crime is increasing. Crime is up and this proves that morality is deteriorating. Obviously, one ends up biting one's own tail.

Secondly, we have to ask if morality really *is* in full retreat in Japan? Certainly, it is not difficult to find indications of cultural change that by many might be defined as moral deterioration (cf. above). However, this is not the same as arguing that those cultural elements that a criminologist might consider 'crime preventive' have changed. If we are to reject the cultural thesis in explaining little crime in Japan the important question is if (1) the way people

¹⁴Some 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 versus values. 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 debates of a normative character.

are socialized today is significantly different from the 1980s, and 2) if Japanese culture as a given mental structure has essentially changed in the same period. I cannot see that this is the case.

Through my own interviews with Japanese social scientists it has repeatedly been underlined that liberalization concerning the socialization of kids in the school system, happened in the 1970s, not in the 1990s. The ideology of individual freedom was probably much stronger 30 years ago than today. If popular morality (as Kaji called it) ever was undermined it would be in the 1970s more than in the 1990s. 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. Also, the idea of a moral decay seems to be deduced directly from the crime figures themselves rather than being based on a critical analysis of cultural change. Like all modern societies Japan is changing. However, neither if we look at culture as an aggregate of values, nor if we look at the content of the socialization 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 (as defined earlier) that have been said to be crime preventive are probably as present in Japanese society today as they were 30 years ago.¹⁵

Miyanaga (1991) confirms that the modernization of Japan is not the story about a linear development away from traditional to modern values. It was back in the late 1960s and up till the end

of the 1980s that the concept of 'New Men' (i.e. emancipated) was spread. 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 1980s the Japanese government has tried to reinstate and reconfirm the importance of group identity, e.g. by campaigning for traditional family values.

Foljanty-Jost and Metzler (2003: 42) analyze the asserted decline in conformity among Japanese youth since the mid-1990s and look into how Japanese schools have responded to this situation. Making a distinction between structural, general and specific control they conclude:

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,

¹⁵If we adapt a theory of 'cultural lag' (the value foundation in the socialization process will harvest its fruits 15 years later), one might of course argue that behavioral problems today mirror attitudinal changes in earlier years. But if this is the case, then it is exactly the cultural explanation that is significant in explaining the increase in crime. Also, if the increased emphasis 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.

well in advance of the occurrence of any delinquent behavior. Control measures are based on a clear-cut set of rules which is constantly and forcefully presented to students, but never blindly imposed on them.

According to these authors one gets the impression that public authorities are running a kind of moral campaign that is 'surprisingly unrelated to the actual degree of occurrence of problem behavior' (Foljanty-Jost and Metzler 2003: 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.

Okano and Tsuchiya (1999) document in their analysis of *Education in Contemporary Japan* that educational reforms undertaken since the early 1990s had a strong focus on *restoring* morality and Japanese culture and identity. Even though Japan has gradually created more diversity in schools (Shimahara 1998), reforms implemented in April 1992 (called the New Course of Study) aimed (among other things) at promoting 'moral education across the curriculum' (Okano and Tsuchiya, 1999: 216). This reform program covered kindergarten, primary, middle and high schools. Furthermore, the reforms that were implemented in the 1990s (and further developed in 2002) aimed to give Japanese school children more flexibility and less pressure in their lives (Tsuneyoshi 2004). If traditional cultural values have crumbled during the last two decades, and if juveniles have been influenced in an invidious way, this, at least, is hardly a result of a weakening of moral standards and increased pressure

in school. If anything, it is the opposite that seems to be the case.

Ben-Ari (2005: 251) seems to consider such a conclusion valid even for the kindergartens. In his analyses of the Japanese preschool system he shows how Japanese teaching and caretaking in the 1990s stressed the education of 'whole persons'. Preschool education aims to provide children with values and attitudes that are in accordance with the group ideology, and this involves a constant accent on morality. Through a very centralized and bureaucratic control the Government has developed a preschool system that is much more uniform than we are used to in Western countries. Even though guidelines from the Ministry now underline the importance of expressing personal thoughts and feelings, leading to a life in the service of the group is still a dominant concern, along with conformity to the superior value of 'harmony'.

As already argued, 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 consensus, and it is a society that for a very long time has been able to take conformity as a matter of course. Small aberrations from this might easily trigger strong reactions. Miyanaga (1991) expresses this by saying that small changes in the rules of interaction among the youth have created a lot of fear among adults. When you have a strong confidence in ritual interaction, minor changes will appear rather dramatic.

It remains to discuss the likely effect of the economic slump on crime. Japan-style capitalism (also designated Confucian capitalism) has been described as a special type of 'victimless

capitalism' (McGregor 1996). A steady and even economic growth combined with familial type of relations in the labor market has given people a basic security and a confidence that the future would be like today, with an extra economic gain. However, in 1990 'Adam Smith snuck in the back door of the Japanese economy' (McGregor 1996: 36) resulting in a long period of stagnation. Yuasa (2004: 1) reports that

... massive job cuts, often carried out through early retirement programs in the name of restructuring, have long become widely accepted management tactics in Japan, especially among large companies. The average number of employed workers in 2002 dropped by a sharp 820,000 from the previous year to 63.3 million. Myriad small and midsize companies have gone bust during the prolonged economic malaise. The jobless ranks have swelled to 3.5 million.

The relevance of economic stagnation to the crime situation is a recurring subject in the White Papers on Crime the last few years. In the preface of the 2002 White Paper the Ministry outlines a more than ten-year-long recession characterized by the fall of big enterprises, the collapse of financial institutions, intensified business restructuring and rises in the unemployment rate. Nobody would have imagined that this could happen during the period of rapid economic growth and 'the recent crime situation of Japan seems to be closely related to these social and economic factors' (WP 2002: preface).

According to the same Ministry, the increase in indoor robberies, mainly

committed by adults, is directly related to deteriorating economic conditions:

As for motives for committing robbery among adult offenders, cases committed with the motive of obtaining entertainment expenses have been increasing whereas those committed due to poverty or for debt repayment have also been increasing sharply, because of the increase in unemployed people due to recessions as well as the increase in persons in financial failure due to unplanned borrowing of money from consumer finance (WP 2003: 275).

The relevance of economic stagnation to the increase in robberies is set off also regarding organized crime groups, visiting foreigners and juveniles. Difficulties in finding jobs and financial troubles have hit visiting foreign nationals hard. In a special survey the Ministry of Justice examined seven financial background factors related to serious homicide/robbery cases. As for robbery, they found that the majority of the defendants were unemployed persons and that those who had changed jobs three times or more accounted for 79% of the cases. The conclusion from this special survey is that 'job loss had an influence on the commitment of the offense in a considerable number of robbery cases' (WP 2003: 424), and that 'a considerable number of defendants, whose amount of debts was relatively small, went as far as to commit robbery'. One could hypothesize that what we see here is the negative side of a shame culture; i.e. that shame on some occasions actually also might *trigger* crime.

Even young people seem to be influenced by economic setbacks:

Another problem is that a number of juveniles do not go to school or fail to adapt themselves to school and not a few of them leave or drop out of school. Due to high unemployment rate among juveniles because of recessions, difficulties in finding jobs not only among high school dropouts but also among junior high school/high school graduates, and the decline in motivation for working among juveniles, the number of unemployed juveniles has been increasing. Juveniles tend to worry about what their friends think of them while lacking a sense of belonging to society or sympathy for the weak, and show tendency of justifying violence or irresponsible or apathetic attitude toward society. Such changes in the attitudes of juveniles should not be disregarded.

These results imply the existence of a mechanism in which juveniles, who have left families or schools and found no place in society, suffer desolation of mind, and while hanging around late at night, they commit robbery for the purpose of obtaining money or articles quickly, without any sense of guilt but merely under the influence of friends, and finally damage victims by their violent acts (WP 2003: 475).

If we finally move the perspective from the perpetrator to the *victim*, statistics tell that from 1993 to 2002 the actual number of robbery victims has increased 2.6-fold among employed persons but 4.1-fold among unemployed.

The quotations in the preceding paragraphs should be regarded more as testimonies than as scientific 'proofs'.

In general, criminology will always have to accept the status as 'unfinished business' and contested realities. Even though the Japanese Research and Training Institute at the Ministry of Justice has a broad empirical basis for their commentaries, and even though the White Papers include articles that offer special surveys on motives, background factors, concepts of *modus operandi*, victim analysis, etc., the present status of knowledge does not permit any firm conclusions. However, the overall picture that has been outlined in this article indicate that during the last ten years:

- there has been a significant increase in 'traditional' crimes in Japan
- crimes for gain (mainly larceny) as well as crimes inflicting pain (physical and mental) (mainly robbery and rape) have been on the rise. Invasive as well as noninvasive registered thefts have increased sharply during the last 7–8 years
- massive critique of the police in the late 1990s has probably contributed to an increase in the *reporting* of crimes, which (once again!) warns against reading figures at face value
- economic decline, accumulated daily stress, and anxieties related to unemployment have most probably been the main impetus behind the changed crime situation.

In sum, this means that Japan is gradually losing its status as a low-crime nation, even though Japan still has a lead on most Western countries. Also, this might indicate that 'Japanese culture' primarily operates as an inclusive social system in times of optimism and economic progress. When recession and pessimism occurs there might be another story to be told. Finally, present reactions to the new crime situation in Japan might indicate that the country is moving in direction of more retributive attitudes.

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