International crime statistics in japanese society criminology essay

International crime statistics indicate that the crime rates for most offences are significantly lower in Japan compared to those among Western European nations.

To what extent could the relatively low Japanese crime rate be explained in terms of the social organisation of Japanese society?

When looking at comparative criminology, Japan is a good example. This is because the majority of the criminal justice system in Japan is borrowed from other countries and then adapted to fit in well with Japan's cultural traditions. They look at the fundamentals of social institutions from other countries and adapt them to fit in with their heritage. By comparing and looking at the systems in other countries it can help to establish an appropriate and useful way of carrying out their justice systems.

The increase in the economy in Japan in the 1980's and 90's drew interest from business people around the world. Also, along with this there was interest with justice officials on the success with Japan on responding to the crime problem. However, the accomplishments must be seen in light with its cultural heritage. Japan's criminal justice system is interesting as they have successfully provided an effective response into the crime problem and have also adopted the guidelines and methods of the criminal justice systems in other countries to fit in with their own. I will be looking at informal social methods of control as this contributes greatly in keeping the crime rate low in Japan.

The following statistics show crime rates in Japan compared with other western European countries:

The Sixth United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems between 1995 and 1997 showed that in 1995 the total crimes recorded in Japan stood at 1, 421 per 100, 000 population compared with 8, 168 in Germany and 4, 331 in Switzerland (UNCJIN, 19th January 2001).

Finch (2001) found, using statistics from the Heisei 0nen no Hanzai, that in 1994 the Japanese homicide rate stood at 1. 0 (per 100, 000 population) while France stood at 4. 7 and the UK at 2. 7.

The 2005 survey showed that Japan had a corruption rating of 6. 9 compared with 8. 6 in the UK (Transparency International, 2005).

It is thought that the decline of crime has been linked with the decline in the increase of population due to post-war industrialization and the continuing urbanisation and the fact that there were fewer younger children. In spite of this, there has been an increase in crime since industrialization and urbanisation in western countries. This then shows that it does not explain that post war industrialization and urbanisation is the reason for the decline in crime in Japan. Japan has changed in a similar way to western countries in this sense but the difference is that Japan has not undergone the same cultural transformations.

Although Japan is not a rich country it has become an industrial giant since World War 2. It is the only non-western country that has become industrialised and they export a number of products.

The Japanese saw how expanding and becoming more industrialised would have a positive impact on their economy. They have been successful because of their competitive spirit. This style is rooted in the traditional cohesiveness of society marked by a sense of conformity and uniformity. This can then explain why a lot more attention is focused on the group rather than the individual. (Reischauer 1977) explains that the reliance upon the group is illustrated in a number of ways. For example, a person is valued more as a member of the team rather than for contributing individually. So the Japanese are very competitive but not creative. Also, parental authority and family ties are stronger in Japan than in western societies however this is beginning to change.

There are a lot of qualities that we consider that may have an impact on Japan's successful criminal justice system and the impact that Japans cultural values may have on society's response and their criminal act. They are the most homogenous of people in the world as they have common history, language and race. Ninety nine per cent of its population is Japanese. By being a homogenous society it can help explain the low crime rate as they all share the common norms and have similar values.

By the residents agreeing on what signifies being Japanese, social control becomes a lot easier as they have the same values and beliefs. However, this does not mean that homogeneity itself can explain the low crime rates as there are other examples worldwide where people all agree on the same norms and values yet there are still people that are not conforming to them.

Due to the lack of Christian heritage, individuals that are in Japan aren't guilt ridden when they do something wrong as their culture doesn't believe in them sinning. However, having a sense of belonging has a huge impact on an individual in Japan. Deviant behaviour is considered a rejection of the social norms to which individuals are expected to conform to as they are part of the country's tradition. As a result, if an individual does something wrong they would feel shame because they have violated the norms in society.

Informal social control plays a huge part in Japanese society. In Japan this is applied to families, traditional religion, schools and work place. This method of informal social control is likely to be an important factor.

The way of the groups and family in Japanese society is that there is collective responsibility and that everyone sticks together. Although there is individualism it is different in a way that identity in Japan comes from the group that they belong to. Individualism in Japan comes from the individual's ability to produce, continue and guard relationships.

There's part of collectivism whereby everyone is attached, for instance school, family, employer. This tie between the groups then creates a sense of obligation towards each of them. This is good as it can provide emotional support however it can also bring a lot of shame when a member of the group misbehaves. Parents are an example of this as they are seen to be responsible and apologetic of the behaviour of a fully grown child.

Self control is something which is learnt earlier on for the Japanese. Developing self control is the most important stage of socialization in Japan. This differs from western countries where educating a sense of self is more

important. In Japan the main ways of socialization are families, schools and companies.

The Family play a significant role in how their children behave. Individuals act within the limits of their family and community roles and are easily humiliated when deviating from them. There is a strong obligation to humour their family, community and their nation.

The Japanese learn that the group is an important part of their wellbeing. Family is an important aspect and is opposite to how most individuals handle things in other countries. Bayley (1991) states that, " American mothers chase their children around the block to get them to come home; Japanese mothers are chased by their children so as not to be left behind." This shows that Japanese children respect their mothers and actively seek out their attention. Individuals act within the limits of their family and community roles and are easily humiliated when deviating from them.

Japanese children are under strict discipline at home. Most importantly they are taught to adhere to parental authority and so they are driven by parental expectations. For this reason they are allowed to depend on their parents. Japanese children have always had a lot of body contact with their parents, being carried on their mothers back, taking baths with parents and sleeping with them till around the age of four or five. This differs from western society where children are taught to sleep in their own beds in their own rooms at an early age. Japanese children are therefore treated as ' big babies' instead of small adults. Because of this Japanese children are very dependent on their parents. Bayley (1991) is clear to point this out when describing how in

western countries parents control badly behaved children by keeping them '

grounded' in the home whereas in Japan parents threaten children by saying

they will be locked out of the home. From this children learn their

punishment by being excluded from the ' uchi world.'

In schools pupils are around a lot of school regulations. Those who disobey

these regulations are not only criticized by their teachers but also by their

peers. Through the ' hidden curriculum' Japanese pupils develop social

control. Schools completely encourage informal social control. Pupils even

fear asking teachers questions as they might be seen as revolting against

the teacher. Also, Japanese pupils learn to not control selfish behaviour. They

are taught this through small group activities such as cleaning. Pupils are

also taught solidarity with the group and a shared responsibility for poor

performance in the group. From this, Japanese pupils then learn that it is

more appreciated to be part of a group rather than being alone as this is how

it is in the ' uchi world.'

The Japanese companies are described as ' Gemeinschaft Capitalism'

(Mawby 1990.) This is because all the local communities don't have an

impact on individuals in contemporary Japan but companies have replaced

this instead. Companies provide a lot of benefits and a sense of belonging to

a big family as well as a sense of pride. So the companies then offer '

ontological security'. This then means that the worker then must follow the

strong informal control by their company and if they do not do so then they

will be psychologically excluded from their colleagues and the company

which will mean losing the ontological security.

The appreciation for hierarchal arrangements among people is another element of Japanese culture. Empey (1982) noted the importance of Americans distrust in the 1960s of their social institutions. However, the Japanese do not share this experience. Archambeault and Fenwick (1988) state that, group consciousness combines with a sense of order to force cooperative relationships between most segments of the Japanese community and their justice agencies. The respect of one's positions leads to citizens to honour and trust the justice system employees. Police courts and correction officials are seen as guardians of the society's morals as well as enforcers of the law. Because of the people's faith in the agent of the system and the belief that decisions will be made according to what best serves society.

The Japanese response to criminal offenders may differ to the response of other countries. Western countries seek rehabilitation by encouraging the offender to become independent and responsible whereas the Japanese system looks at encouraging the offender to integrate voluntarily into the structured social order. The Japanese see the community as the best place for getting the voluntary integration. Prison is not seen as a useful way of achieving rehabilitation and this explains why there is such a low incarceration rate in Japan.

Japans way of policing is effective as they have a working relationship between the citizens and their services.

Those from western countries may be troubled by some of the ways that the relationship between them works. For example, there is a residential survey

that is conducted twice a year by Koban officers. Policing in western countries wouldn't do this as it would mean sharing personal and neighbourhood information with police officers. Also, Parker (1984) writes how Koban officers that are on patrol will enter homes that are unlocked and leave calling cards warning occupants about their poor crime prevention habits. This is because police behaviour in Japan reflects a moral norm just as much as a legal one.

Jury trial is a failure in Japan. As Shibahra says " Japanese people prefer to be tried by a judge rather than by their neighbour". This is because the decisions of the jury may not be binding as the judge can disagree with it. The judge can then put the case before different jury's and so this is why in most cases defence councils go before the judge.

Another reason for the effectiveness of Japans criminal justice system is because Japanese citizens tend to admit to misbehaviour.

Another way that looks at explaining the effectiveness of policing is how the police respond to civilians with encouragement and support. As Bayley (1991) put it, the Japanese police and their citizens believe that each have " to work through the other in order to make society a civil place to live." This support requires the police to place importance on non-enforcement activities and to work together with people not just the ones that are breaking the law. This then results in service orientation which helps to explain the effectiveness in policing.

Bayley (1991) also compares the policing in America with Japan. " An American policeman is like a fireman he responds when he must. A Japanese

policeman is more like a postman; he has a daily round of low key activities that relate him to the lives of the people among whom he works"

Japan is unique because of its low incarceration rate. This is surprising as it has the same objectives as most other countries, rehabilitation and retribution. Although they have similar aims, Japan is different in how they meet that aim. The majority of western countries try to solve rehabilitation by encouraging individualism whereas Japan looks at social responsibility.

Although the success of the economy in Japan was an achievement they also had another by having a falling crime rate. The western countries believed that because of industrialisation and urbanization that this was the cause of the rising crime rate. Since the World War 2 the crime rate has continued to increase whereas in Japan they have experienced a falling crime rate in the same time.

Japan has two different types of norm. One deals with members of the group where an individual belongs and the other deals with non members of the group where the individual belongs. The first consists of ' giri' (Japanese traditional duty) but the later appears to be more like western concepts of ' rights'. This combination is Japanese perception of social environment which can be represented as two concentric circles. The inner circle called uchi (home) and the outer circle called yoso (elsewhere).

When the police catch criminals 99 percent of the time offenders that come before a judge are convicted and 99 percent of those that are convicted are sent to prison. The statistics can be misleading as informal controls are used at each stage regardless of the formal terminology. Although this does seem

impressive around half of the 99 per cent convicted have their prison sentence suspended and a lot of the time the offenders aren't even placed in supervision.

Japanese houses are small and are built on narrow streets close to each other. This makes operating social control systems and recognising deviant behaviour easier as everyone in the community is known and it becomes hard to hide.

Today you would see patrol cars being used as a modern way of policing but Japan doesn't agree with this method. Instead they believe in the deployment system of Koban. One fifth of patrol officers work in patrol cars whereas the remaining four fifths operate from Koban. The Japanese citizens favour the Koban and where there is a lot of congestion in cities it means that the Koban officers on foot or bicycle would be able to beat patrol cars to scenes where police response is needed. The services that are provided by the Koban and their officers reflect community policing.

One of the major strengths with policing in Japan is the police box system. These boxes are staffed by an officer who lives in the resource with his family and becomes a part of the community. The residents have to be registered with the local stations. Officers frequently do home visits and even provide general assistance.

In order to answer the question on how the low crime rate can be explained in terms of the social organisation in Japan we have found that a lot of contributions are the cause of this. Japan has successfully taken laws from different counties and has adapted it to fit in with their own society. Also we

have learnt that informal social control plays a huge part in Japanese society and can be the answer to why there is such a low crime rate in Japan. In Japan, individuals tend to feel more at home within a group be it at home with a family or with their peers in school or at work. They fear expulsion from these groups if they were to deviate from the norms and so are less likely to commit a crime.

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