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## The Juvenile Delinquency Problem in Japan: Application of a Role Relationship Model\*

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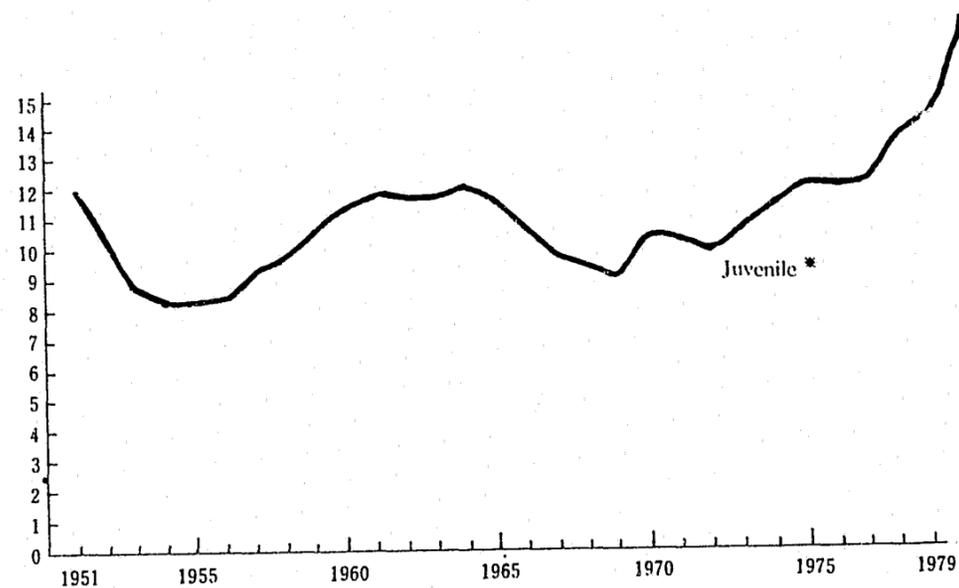
\* 200 The purpose of this paper is to seek a better understanding of the social conditions within Japan which may be related to the increasing rates of juvenile delinquency. This trend is in sharp contrast to their overall crime patterns. In fact, as reported by Ames (1981:1), Japan has the lowest crime rate in the industrialized world, and its crime totals have declined since 1955. Within this article, we discuss youth crime trends, explain the applicability of a role relationship model, discuss the breakdown in informal social control/social relationship areas, and suggest implications for Western societies. (publisher abstract) 300

LOOKING AT OFFICIAL STATISTICS FROM JAPAN, we see an overall crime rate that has dramatically declined during the past twenty-five years.<sup>1</sup> In fact, as reported by Ames (1976:496), this Oriental society is the only industrialized, non-communist nation in the world where conventional crime rates are decreasing. However, this nation does have real concerns in the areas of youth crime, organized crime, and activities by youthful radical extremists.<sup>2</sup> Because Japan has structural features similar to many Western societies, it is interesting and helpful for scholars and practitioners of criminology and criminal justice to understand rates and causes of youth crime in this Asian nation. The role relationship model proposed by Friday and Hage (1976) is insightful in explaining increasing delinquency patterns. Specifically, an analysis of the problem of juvenile crime will be made by reviewing certain social conditions in modern Japan.<sup>3</sup>

### Japanese Delinquency Trends

While arrest rates for adults have shown a continuous decline since approximately 1955, the rates for juveniles have fluctuated but increased significantly in recent years (Figure 1).<sup>4</sup>

Looking at this trend, we see that they have had three arrest volume peaks, the first in 1951 (126,505 juveniles), the second in 1964 (151,083 juveniles) and the most recent in 1980 (210,000 juveniles). In addition, since 1979, the arrest rate for juveniles has continued to increase, while the adult rate has declined slightly. One of the most important patterns is the significant escalation in the "population rate" (i.e., the number of juvenile offenders per 1,000 juveniles in the general population) for the juvenile offender group (Ministry of Justice,



\* Rate per 1,000 population 14-19 years of age.  
Juvenile at the time of commission of offense.

Japan (1981). In 1971, 12.0 juveniles for every 1,000 in the population were arrested for committing a crime. The comparative adult statistic was 8.2. In 1980, there was 17.9 juveniles compared with 2.8 adults. In this latter period, the juvenile arrest rate was approximately six (6) times that of the adult group (National Police Agency, 1981:2). Of all arrests for serious offenses in 1979, 38.9% were juveniles between the ages of 14 and 19 (National Police Agency 1980:28). The comparative 1980 statistic was 42.5% (National Police Agency, 1981:2).

Below we have listed a number of trends in juvenile delinquency which have been reported (see, e.g., Martin and Conger, 1980; National Police Agency, 1980:28; Ames, 1981:77-93; The Ministry of Justice, Japan, 1980):

- The median age for involvement in serious crime has been decreasing.
- There has been an increase in the number of heinous crimes (i.e., homicide, robbery, rape, and arson).
- There has been an increase in the number of drug abuse cases, especially glue sniffing, paint thinner inhaling, and the use of stimulants.
- There has been an increase in crime for enjoyment purposes only.
- There has been a marked increase of property and violent crimes by members of "Bosozoku" groups.
- There has been an increase in sexual criminal acts.
- There has been an increase in the rate of female involvement in crime.

After reviewing these trends, one is left with the perplexing problem of explaining why Japan can have an overall crime pattern that has declined significantly through time while concurrently having a juvenile delinquency

rate that is rapidly increasing (see, e.g., Yokoyama, 1981). This author believes that part of the answer lies in structural features of Japanese society and the changing role relationships of youth. To understand this phenomenon, we shall first discuss informal social control within Japan and suggest that youth crime is related directly to breakdowns within traditional informal social control mechanisms.

### Reasons

#### *Informal Social Controls*

In order to understand behavior at the individual, group, or national level in Japan, one must consider the high level of mutual dependence and social integration. Basically, the threat of exclusion from a significant social group is the real basis for conformity (Reischauer, 1980:127-137). A person's sense of well-being and his/her evaluation of self are very dependent upon his/her level of integration within the larger group contexts, i.e., family, peers, work, school, neighborhood, and nation (Bayley, 1976:155). Thus "group consciousness" is a concept which dominates Japanese society. Within this context, we start to see a strong deviance control mechanism, i.e., a collective consciousness which stresses that a person should not bring shame on his family, friends, work associates, or nation. Because of these social bonds, an individual avoids types of social conduct, including crime, that would increase the likelihood of losing prestige (i.e., "face") in the eyes of significant others. Concerning the crucial importance of loss of "face" and its relationship to crime control, the Citizens Crime Commission (1975:13) observed:

Fear of "loss of face" contributes measurably to the low crime rate in Japan. By committing a crime, a Japanese not only loses face for himself or herself but also for a senior, whether parent or employer. An action which brings loss of face inevitably results in expulsion from the social structure of which the individual is so essentially a part.

Indeed, where crime exists in this Asian nation, it is often of a sub-cultural nature and involves such activities as juvenile delinquency and political extremism (Conklin, 1981:239). What we basically see is that conformity is more a function of the threat of exclusion from social groupings rather than the formalized punishment that might be meted out by the criminal justice system. Christiansen (1976) suggests that while Japan has become rapidly urbanized/industrialized, with continued increase in population density, it has *not* shown the development of an urbanism characterized by impersonality and anonymity. This, he believes, is one of the major reasons for lower crime totals in Japan. Looking at this same unusual type of urbanism in Japan, Clifford (1976:164-65) concludes:

Urban concentration has obviously decreased the family role and reduced the older power and authority of parents. However, it has by no means atomized or anonymized the individual who has readily placed himself within other social contexts transferring his family obligations and loyalties to his neighborhood,

party, firm, or organization. It is not just the verticalism of relationships but the persistence of verticalism that is important. Herein, it seems, lies the clue to the difference in social behavior with conformity being as prized fundamentally today as it was in the earlier periods, and with feudal obligations in the form of social expectations being as exigent and exacting in a modern context as they were in the older villages. The Japanese are still far less individualistic than they are group-oriented and, therefore, far more amenable to the pressures to avoid the kinds of individual deviance that would make it easier to commit crime.

What the above suggests is that social structure conditions and processes are major determinants of not only normative human social conduct but also of crime causation control. These findings are very consistent with the explanations that are presented by the social control theorists (see, e.g., Hirschi, 1969; Hindelang, 1973; Friday, 1980). This author believes that there are a number of structural conditions within this Asian society which have lessened the effect of informal social controls on youth and thereby increased the probability of their committing illegal acts.

#### *Structural Conditions and Integration of Youth*

Recent increases in youth crime in Japan are not some "Oriental" mystery but can be explained, at least partially, by structural features of this society and the changing social integration patterns of youth. In line with the *role relationship model* proposed by Friday and Hage (1976), it can be argued that delinquency is related to conditions within modern Japan which have produced isolation from a number of social relationships that traditionally have fostered commitments by juveniles to the dominant normative system. The following quote by Friday and Halsey (1977:142) should elucidate this model:

The primary question, then, is what factors or conditions increase both the probability of involvement in criminal acts by youth and set the conditions under which most youth cease such activity. The underlying factor in both instances appears to be the degree of integration (involvement, commitment, attachment) by youth to the society as a whole and to conforming norms. Integration is fostered by interaction in groups that transmit conforming or deviant norms and that reinforce one behavioral set or another.

The major social relationship areas that foster adolescent conformity/integration are work, school, and family/community. An analysis of these factors reveals some interesting results.

*Work.* One type of social relationship that can facilitate meaningful bonds between a person and the larger society is work. Durkheim (1933:401) observed:

The individual becomes cognizant of his dependence upon society; from it comes the forces which keep him in check and restrain him. In short, since the division of labor becomes the chief source of social solidarity, it becomes at the same time the foundation of the moral order.

Thus, work, or more specifically, work relationships, play an important role in the normative integration and socialization process. Meaningful economic ties

seem to foster adherence to the status quo and thereby should decrease significantly the likelihood of conventional crime involvements. (See, e.g., Moscisker, 1969; Kiefer, 1970; Friday and Hage, 1976).

Since the mid 1960's, Japan has moved rapidly forward in the area of complex technology and has increased industrial productivity over 130% (*Time*, 1981:57). Parallel with this economic growth has come an expanding need for a highly skilled labor force and a declining demand for unskilled/semiskilled workers. What this economic change has meant for the unskilled (adults and juveniles), who do not, or will not, qualify for meaningful jobs, is a movement toward economic isolation (Fujiwara, 1978:125). Further, concomitant with this has been a decline in the age distribution for crime (Ministry of Justice, Japan, 1980:44-57). In sum, the current delinquency problem in highly competitive Japan may be due, in part, to the growing number of adolescents who believe that their future potential in the economic marketplace is not very good. Basically, structural conditions within Japan have led to increased economic isolation (either real or perceived) among youth; and this may explain some of the variation in serious crime involvement.

*School.* Educational institutions can affect both positively and negatively. Poor school performance, e.g., low achievement, can be a very alienating experience which can be associated with increased rates of truancy, school dropout, and delinquency (Hirschi, 1969; Schaefer et al., 1972; Reckless and Dinitz, 1972; Frease, 1973; Jensen, 1976; Jensen and Rojek, 1980). Further, the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice (1967) reports that there are many features of an educational system that can be related to increased school failure and resultant delinquency, e.g., belief in the limited potential of disadvantaged students, irrelevant instruction, inappropriate teaching methods, and various tracking methods. Presently, Japan is facing a number of social problems that seem to be related, at least in part, to programmatic characteristics within their educational system. Schools are highly competitive and only a small number of students can hope to attain acceptance into elite high schools and colleges. The *right* training can set the stage for successful adult participation in the capitalistic world and help to secure a desirable lifestyle. Through the 1970's, this Oriental society has become a postindustrialized giant with a growing need for a highly educated, technologically sophisticated labor force (*Time*, 1981:57-63). Even with decreased population growth among the youth age group, there is still high density competition within schools, and this has increased alienation among a growing number of young people, especially those who lack either the innate ability or socially approved motivations (see, e.g., Fujiwara, 1978:126). What enhances the problem is the fact that this society has a shrinking number of unskilled and semiskilled jobs that can absorb the marginalized youth group. In concert with the above, there has been a significant upswing in the dropout rate for both junior high and senior high students. Moreover, as Haraguchi (1972:63) reports, dropouts commit significantly more acts of juvenile delin-

quency, and these seem to be related to an underlying alienation from the larger society. The source for some of this disenchantment comes from conditions within their educational system. For example, students complain about the extremely strict regime, their 270 day school year coupled with the need to attend evening prep classes, few offerings for backward students, the lack of training for non-college students, the elite tracking system, and the small number of responsible careers that are open to persons who have middle or high school degrees only.<sup>5</sup> In this regard, Professor T. Takeuchi of Tokyo University (Chapman, 1981:23) writes:

The schools just concentrate on exams—it is the only factor they consider. But, those who are not going on to college must live in that environment, so it is natural that they would have inferiority complexes. Around the age of 10, a Japanese student knows from his grade reports whether he has a chance of getting on the college-bound track. At the junior high level, the poorer student is faced with three years of classwork that is directed to college exams and is totally irrelevant to his life.

*Family/Community.* The association between family interaction/integration and crime/juvenile delinquency has received a great deal of study by such criminologists as Reiss, 1951; Glueck and Glueck, 1950; Nye, 1958; Hirschi, 1969; and Hindelang, 1973. One of the major outcomes from this research is summarized by Friday (1980:104):

In general, the family may have a positive impact in insulating individuals from criminal patterns, providing it retains its ability to control rewards and effectively maintain positive attachments within the family unit.

This finding is again consistent with social control theorists (see, e.g., Hirschi, 1969; Matza, 1964; Empey and Lubeck, 1971) and their position that social conditions that decrease integration into conventional institutions of society increase the likelihood of individual and gang delinquency.

Historically, the Japanese family has been a highly revered institution that has played a major role in defining prescriptions and proscriptions for action. The threat of exclusion from the family and/or community has been one of the cornerstones for conformity within this society. Primarily, an individual avoids types of behavior, including crime, that would increase his/her likelihood of losing prestige in the eyes of the larger group. In conjunction with work and community ties, strong family attachments have traditionally provided adolescents with high levels of group consciousness, thereby reducing the probability of crime and delinquency (Conklin, 1981:488).

In regard to a growing number of youths, the above statements best relate to Japan before the 1970's. Recently, with rapidly increasing modernization and shifts to high industrial production, we see a number of changes that have led to a decline in the social integrating influences of the family and the larger community context.<sup>6</sup> In fact, there are signs that the traditional concepts of

community and attachments to family are undergoing rapid alteration. As Ames (1981:66) suggests:

Urbanization has led to a decline in the extended family, and ties in the nuclear family are less binding than in the past. Thus, if both parents are working, the grandparents are less likely to be home watching the house (*rusuban*) than in the past. Changes are also occurring in the traditional notions of neighborliness. The current phrase *mai homu shugi* ("my home-ism") connotes a passionate desire among many modern Japanese for their own homes and, more significantly, an increasing longing for a meaningful life free from the pressures of traditional neighborhood and other groups. Accompanying this phenomenon is a growing concern for the individual and his rights.

Further, there also have been demographic shifts which may have affected the integrating ability of the family and community. During the past decade, there has been an increase in the rural to urban migration of young people. Adolescents move to urbanized centers to find jobs or places in colleges or universities (Clifford, 1976:114). Usually, these migrants face problems in living (e.g., low levels of formalized training, poor language skills, an inadequate monetary base, and low level family support). In this regard, Haraguchi (1971) reports that rates of delinquency are correlated directly with the urban migration of juveniles who because of their relocation do not live with their families where care and assistance are present.

With the breakdown in attachments to work, school, family, and community, juveniles may not be in a reduced state of isolation. In fact, they may be more involved with another important social relationship area, i.e., peers. Other juveniles are an important source of socialization/integration. One possible problem with these attachments is that relationships with other adolescents, if they are isolated from other role relationships, can increase patterns of delinquency (see, e.g., Hindelang, 1973). As Friday and Hage (1976:365) write:

When adolescents have meaningful kin, educational, work, and community relationships, they are more likely to become socialized to the dominant norms of society. Integration is facilitated by interaction across all role patterns. An absence of these role relationships means a greater probability of "differential association" with youth or, in Sutherland's term, greater priority being given to deviant patterns. In other words, the youth group becomes the only meaningful relationship.

Thus, with breakdowns in various other role relationships (family, work, school, and community), there seems to be a high probability that adolescents, especially those who might be classified as having low level integration with these other social areas, can be influenced and integrated into a number of youth oriented peer groups. Two groups which have increased their associations with both middle school and high school students are the *bosozoku* (speed gangs) and student radicals.<sup>7</sup> The former group is becoming a real concern to Japanese authorities. The *bosozoku* consist of a large number of school drop-

outs who commit an overproportionate number of illegal acts, are related to increased school violence and are linked to a number of organized crime families (National Police Agency, 1981:4-10).

### Summary/Conclusions

The purpose of this paper is to seek a better understanding of the social conditions within Japan which may be related to increasing rates of delinquency. This trend is in *sharp* contrast to their overall crime pattern (see, e.g., Fenwick, 1981). Employing a role relationship model, the author proposes that youth crime can be understood and explained, at least in part, by looking at structural features that have hindered the development of integrated role patterns. With rapid economic development and modernization, we seem to have a nation in which a number of social relationship areas (i.e., family, school, community, and work) have reduced capacities for integrating youth. On the other hand, we see increasing attachments to peers, which according to the explanatory model employed in this paper enhances the probability of delinquency.

Future research should concentrate on the complex relationships between structural conditions imposed by the larger society and the integrating mechanisms within that society. Since Japan has crime totals which have been declining but juvenile delinquency rates which have been increasing rapidly, it seems an ideal place to carry out research in order to test many of our traditional criminological theories and planning strategies. Indeed, this author believes that Japan's experience with crime and juvenile delinquency can provide valuable information for Western societies in the search for answers to crime.

### NOTES

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<sup>1</sup>This rate includes non-traffic penal code offenses only. Also, we are referring to conventional crime patterns, and thus rates of white collar crime are omitted.

<sup>2</sup>While there is a distinction between the terms youth crime and juvenile delinquency, they will be used synonymously in this paper.

<sup>3</sup>For an overview of criminal/juvenile law, criminal justice development/organization and juvenile delinquency/justice in Japan, see Ogawa (1976:586-656).

<sup>4</sup>In order to clarify the term "juvenile delinquency" in Japan, we have included the following from the Ministry of Justice, Japan (1980:52):

Under the Juvenile Law of Japan, persons under twenty years of age are classified as juveniles and are subject to special procedures designed for their protection, education and treatment. Juvenile delinquents under the Juvenile Law fall into three categories:

A. Juvenile offenders, persons aged fourteen through nineteen who commit offenses under the Penal Code or special legislation.

B. Child offenders, persons younger than fourteen and thus not amenable to criminal

penalties under the Penal Law, who commit acts which, if done by adults, would constitute criminal offenses.

C. Predelinquent juveniles, persons younger than twenty years of age who, on the basis of criteria contained in the Juvenile Law, are thought likely on the basis of their character and circumstances to commit future offenses.

<sup>5</sup>Information provided by Japanese host families, Professors at Tokyo University, Staff Members of the Family Court of Tokyo and Japanese host schools.

<sup>6</sup>For a discussion of delinquency control programs in the community in Japan, see Yokoyama (1981:169-178).

<sup>7</sup>It is estimated that a very high proportion (81%) of speed gang members are juveniles (National Police Agency, 1981:5). Also, the bosozoku are referred to as speed gangs or reckless driving tribes. For a detailed description of speed gangs and student radical groups, see, e.g., Ames (1981:84-93).

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