

Crime and Crime Control

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HEE-JONG JOO

CRIME AND CRIME CONTROL

ABSTRACT. This article provides an overall picture of crime and crime control in Korea over the past 30 years. By using official crime data, we examined general trends and characteristics of crime, crime rates, and crime control practices in each stage of the criminal justice system in Korea during that period. The relative seriousness of crime problems in Korea is also examined from a comparative perspective by engaging in a cross-national comparison. The findings of this research indicate that the overall crime problem in Korea is not as serious as that in Japan and in the United States. Recent data, however, show an alarming increase in the crime rates in Korea during the past several years. These results are interpreted within a social context, and we can determine that economic, political, and socio-cultural factors have played and continue to play a crucial role in crime and crime control practices. Recent phenomena, such as the financial crisis that hit Korea in the late 1990s, and the current political stalemate in Korea, seem to have contributed to the disturbing increase in crime and crime rates.

INTRODUCTION

Crime is no longer viewed as only one problem to a given society. Rather it is an integral part of understanding a nation's socio-cultural, political, and economic situation. Korea is no exception. Until the mid-twentieth century, Korea's crime rate was lower than those in other Asian countries as well as most Western nations. Having been an agrarian society, a majority of the Korean population were farmers and primary relationships tended to be strong. Korea's crime rate back then was lower than in a society characterized by secondary relationships. In addition, Koreans have long been under the influence of Confucian moral codes that emphasize conforming to authority and the natural order and avoiding friction with others (Chang and Janeksela, 1996: p. 416). As Korean society has become increasingly industrialized and urbanized, however, crime rates have been rising.



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Sometimes various social problems stem from 'uncoordinated and unsystematic' social changes, particularly among those who are unable to adapt to ever-changing new environments. Rapid social change always tends to produce social disorganization, which includes crime. Although every society experiences various degrees of social change and consequent increases in crime and crime rates, rates of change differ from one society to another. If this is indeed the case, then it is possible to understand a society by examining changes in crime and crime rates where they are used as an index for measuring societal changes and their characteristics.

Accordingly, this paper will attempt an overview of the trends and characteristics of crime and crime control in Korea, and in doing so will provide a general understanding of crime in Korean society. To begin with, we will present an overall picture of crime in Korea by examining the trends and patterns of crime over the past three decades. We will then explore crime problems in Korea from a comparative perspective by conducting cross-national comparisons of crime problems in two other countries. By examining the crime data, we can get a better picture of how safe it is to live in Korea. This will be followed by an overview of crime control practices of the criminal justice system in Korea. This article will conclude with a discussion of the case of Korea as it experiences rapid change. We will also look at how these changes influence crime and crime control practices.

DATE AND METHOD

The present analysis will cover crime, the crime rate, and four subsequent rates in each successive stage of the criminal justice system in Korea. They include: the arrest rate by the police; the prosecution rate by the public prosecutor's office; the conviction rate by the courts; and, the incarceration rate by the Department of Corrections. This analytical framework was employed in a previous study on crime and social control in Korea (Yoon, 1998: pp. 55–65). Our relying on this framework will make it possible to examine crime and crime control practices in a single frame of reference.

The data on crime, arrests, and prosecutions, upon which we rely, come in large part from the Analytical Report on Crime, published

by the Supreme Public Prosecutors' Office. Annual publication of a White Paper on Crime, published by the Legal Research & Training Institute, was used in part to calculate the crime rates and arrest rates. The data on convictions and incarcerations came from the Judiciary Yearbook, which is published annually by the Administrative Office of Courts.

The Analytical Report on Crime is the most comprehensive compilation of statistical data on crime, police activity, and the dispositions of public prosecutors in Korea. Although official crime statistics are not entirely accurate, they are the most reliable sources available and do provide an indication of crime trends. The report divides crime into two broad categories: offenses that violate the Criminal Code and offenses that violate many special Laws (Yoon, 1998: pp. 83–86).

According to the Criminal Code, offenses are classified into seven sub-categories: violent crimes, property crimes, forgeries, crimes by government officials, crimes against public morals, crimes of negligence, and others. Of these, violent and property crimes consist of approximately four-fifths of all Criminal Code Offenses. The violent crime category is composed of criminal homicide, robbery, arson, rape, assault, aggravated assault, intimidation, kidnapping, and illegal confinement. Property crimes consist of larceny-theft, stolen property, fraud, embezzlement, breach of trust, and destruction of property.

Violations of Special Laws include various laws regulating all aspect of society. In 1999 there were approximately 200 Special Laws. The Act concerning Punishment for Violent Offenses; the Special Act on Disposition of Traffic Accidents; and the Road Traffic Act are typical examples of these laws. These three comprise approximately 80 percent of all violations of the Special Laws in 1999.

Official crime data of the United States and Japan were used for cross-national comparisons of crime rates. Included in the official data is the Uniform Crime Report (UCR) issued by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the White Paper on Crime issued by the Japanese Department of Justice.

TRENDS IN CRIMES

General Trends in Crimes

This section presents an overall picture of crime trends in Korea. Korean society has experienced rapid industrialization and urbanization as well as a notable increase in population (about 45%) over the past 30 years. As a consequence, both the total number of crimes and the crime rate have increased.

The total number of crimes occurring in Korea has increased 5.2 times over the past three decades, from 333537 in 1970 to 1732522 in 1999. The crime rate, which is defined as the total number of crimes that take place per 100000 people, has also increased 3.6 times over the same period, from 1035 in 1970 to 3697 in 1999. If we narrow our focus to just the last decade, the total number of crimes that occurred in Korea increased 1.5 times, between 1990 and 1999. The crime rate also increased 1.4 times over the same period. The total number of crimes remained stable from 1970–1975. After that it steadily increased to 810416 in 1985; to 1171380 in 1990; and then, steeply, to 1765887 in 1998 (Legal Research & Training Institute, 2000: p. 28).

The total number of arrest increased 5.7 times as well, from 289,637 in 1970 to 1,651,896 in 1999. The proportion of total arrests to the number of incidences of crime, which is known as the clearance rate,¹ hovered around 87 percent during the 1970s and 1980s. It has hovered around 90 percent since 1991. In 1993, it reached 95.7 percent, the highest rate ever.

In order to properly understand and interpret these changes and trends in crime over time, we need to take a multidimensional view. This view encompasses the interrelationships between the crime itself and the various social forces and responses to crime. Although crime control activities are practiced mainly by criminal justice agencies, they also constitute social phenomena closely associated with other social forces outside criminal justice agencies (Welch, 1996; Yoon, 1998: p. 55). This should be kept in mind when trying to understand crime patterns and trends in Korea.

Korean society has experienced a myriad of political climates and instability over the past three decades. This is not to say, however, that in focusing on the social determinants of crime and crime

TABLE I
Total Number of Incidences of Crime and Arrests (1970–1999)

| Year | Category | | | | | |
|------|-------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|--------------------|------------|---------------------------------------|
| | Number of incidences of crime | Number of arrests | Number of arrestees | Clearance rate (%) | Crime Rate | Total population (unit: 1,000 people) |
| 1970 | 333537 | 289637 | 415504 | 86.8 | 1035 | 32241 |
| 1971 | 351574 | 293279 | 395467 | 83.4 | 1069 | 32883 |
| 1972 | 369839 | 330890 | 442274 | 89.5 | 1104 | 33505 |
| 1973 | 323363 | 298157 | 398431 | 92.2 | 948 | 34103 |
| 1974 | 337535 | 292839 | 400266 | 86.8 | 978 | 34692 |
| 1975 | 387207 | 335944 | 462908 | 86.8 | 1097 | 35281 |
| 1976 | 504630 | 450059 | 609177 | 89.2 | 1408 | 35849 |
| 1977 | 506545 | 448168 | 600197 | 88.5 | 1391 | 36412 |
| 1978 | 513165 | 438265 | 589008 | 85.4 | 1388 | 36969 |
| 1979 | 555793 | 491567 | 651998 | 88.4 | 1481 | 37534 |
| 1980 | 595277 | 475353 | 697629 | 79.9 | 1561 | 38124 |
| 1981 | 625934 | 549532 | 734981 | 87.8 | 1616 | 38723 |
| 1982 | 658371 | 575029 | 784564 | 87.8 | 1674 | 39326 |
| 1983 | 786553 | 656204 | 859097 | 83.4 | 1971 | 39910 |
| 1984 | 803792 | 693387 | 888105 | 86.3 | 1989 | 40406 |
| 1985 | 810416 | 693270 | 885765 | 85.5 | 1986 | 40806 |
| 1986 | 809660 | 704874 | 902895 | 87.0 | 1966 | 41184 |
| 1987 | 946390 | 825601 | 1054407 | 87.2 | 2276 | 41575 |
| 1988 | 968965 | 856517 | 1114468 | 88.4 | 2308 | 41975 |
| 1989 | 1073997 | 949308 | 1179156 | 88.4 | 2534 | 42380 |
| 1990 | 1171380 | 1047760 | 1326775 | 89.4 | 2737 | 42793 |
| 1991 | 1230118 | 1130262 | 1418168 | 91.9 | 2843 | 43268 |
| 1992 | 1241102 | 1135146 | 1451942 | 91.5 | 2842 | 43663 |
| 1993 | 1356914 | 1298637 | 1656113 | 95.7 | 3080 | 44056 |
| 1994 | 1373407 | 1246582 | 1582428 | 90.8 | 3090 | 44453 |
| 1995 | 1399085 | 1269375 | 1599930 | 90.7 | 3119 | 44850 |
| 1996 | 1494846 | 1358982 | 1681321 | 90.9 | 3304 | 45248 |
| 1997 | 1588613 | 1452097 | 1802720 | 91.4 | 3454 | 45991 |
| 1998 | 1765887 | 1632678 | 2010814 | 92.5 | 3803 | 46430 |
| 1999 | 1732522 | 1651896 | 2081797 | 95.3 | 3697 | 46858 |

¹Source: Adapted from the Analytical Report on Crime, published by the Supreme public Prosecutor's Office, various years.

²Clearance rate means the proportion of crimes that result in arrest.

³Crime rate means the number of incidences of crime per 100000 people.

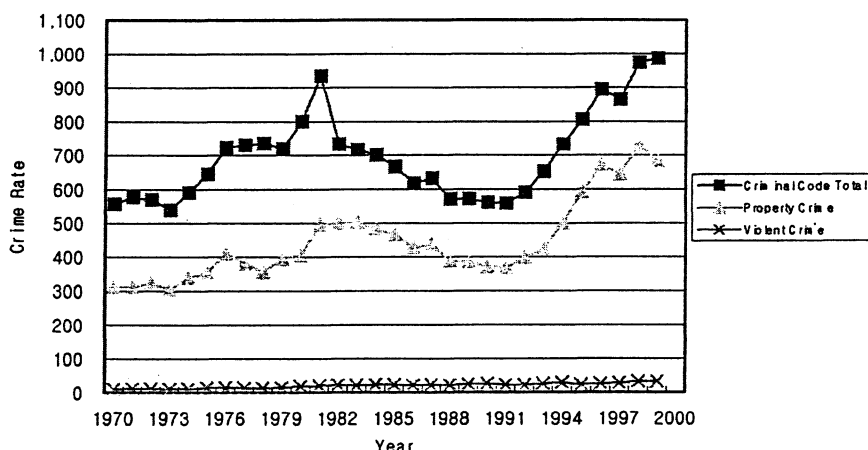


Figure 1. Crime rates of criminal code offenses.

control one ought to ignore the relationship between crime and crime control. Keeping all of this in mind, we will try to explain the changing nature and trends in crime as we analyze the subject matter in more detail.

Trends in Criminal Code Offenses and Their Characteristics

The term Criminal Code Offense (CCO) is a broad category of crimes. Violent and property crimes consist of approximately four fifths of all CCOs.² As Figure 1 shows, the total number of CCOs increased 257 percent, from 179608 in 1970 to 462253 in 1999. The crime rate of CCOs also increased 1.77 times over the same period, from 558 in 1970 to 986 in 1999. Between 1990 and 1999, the total number of CCOs increased 192 percent. With the exception of 1990 and 1997, CCOs have increased every year.

It is interesting to note that increases in crime rates, as well as in the total number of CCOs, show three different patterns over the past three decades: a notable increase in the 1970s; a slow down during the 1980s; and, another steep increase since 1990. Along with the notable increase in crime during the 1970s, we need to understand it in a social context. Korean society experienced rapid structural changes brought on by industrialization and modernization over the same period. Major institutions like the family, schools, government, churches, and others were undergoing rapid transform-

ations. As an increasing number of Koreans moved to urban areas, the society became increasingly heterogeneous.

Social changes always tend to produce social disorganization, some of which is crime. In Korea, the rapid growth in the urban population; the increase in the stress and strains of urban life; the higher standard of living; and, the changes in the existing value systems, were some of the factors contributing to the rapid increase in the crime rate during the 1970s (Chang and Janeksela, 1996: pp. 415–416).

While property crimes normally show a rapid rise with increased industrialization in most countries, it was violent crimes, rather than property crimes, that increased in Korea during the 1970s. Economic growth and an increase in employment opportunities, brought on by industrialization and modernization in the cities, seemed to contribute to a moderate increase in property crimes during that time.

With regard to the decline in crime and arrest rates during the 1980s, it is interesting to note that it took place after former president Doo-Whan Chun's authoritarian and repressive regime (1980–1987) came to power as a result of a military coup. Militaristic authoritarian governments, faced with a crisis of legitimacy, tend to use coercion and force against those who resist. As some have convincingly argued, the security of authoritarian regimes is heavily dependent on maintaining social stability and social order. Of necessity, such a regime strengthens its social control functions in order to keep the social order intact (Barberet, 1994; Chang and Iacovetta, 1996; Deng et al., 1994). Crime control is a form of social control and all disruptive behaviors are likely to be subjected to punitive state control.

Right after Chun seized political power (1980–1981), his government launched a massive program to crack down on hooligans, thieves, and violent offenders. Thousands of people, for example, who committed crimes of violence, including fraud, smuggling, drug trafficking and illegal drug use, were sent to boot camp as part of a "Social Purification Movement." The decline in the crime rate during the 1980s appears to be closely related to this existing repressive and coercive social atmosphere, in which the threat of

severe punishment was used to deter crime (Koo, 1993; Lee, 1990; Park, 1996; Yoon, 1998).

The crime and arrest rates, however, rose again in the 1990s. Faced with nationwide demonstrations for democratic reforms at the end of 1980s, Tae-Woo Roh, the successor of the Chun regime, made a public declaration that he would fully accept public demands for a democratic government. He chose to abandon repressive and coercive ways of social control, and he removed the existing restrictions on the basic rights of freedom of the press, publication, assembly and association (Bedeski, 1993; Paik, 1994).

In the early 1990s, Korea took steps toward participatory democracy even though a lot of unstable political and social conditions continued to exist. In this regard, the sharp increase in the number of crimes and arrests that took place might be partly explained by the government's "war on crime" in the early 1990s when the Roh regime faced turbulent sociopolitical upheavals. For example, the police arrested over 1.9 million suspects in 1991. This is strong evidence indicating that there might be a relationship between political situations and crime control practices. The massive number of arrests might easily account for the dramatic increases in crime as well as the arrest rate for crimes of violence and crimes against property during that era.

As shown in Figure 2, property crime rates, by crime type, increased sharply during the 1990s. Fraud in particular increased steadily in that decade, and the incidence of larceny-theft rose sharply after 1995. As Korean society increasingly put greater emphasis on material success as a means of determining personal worth, there was a correspondingly higher rate of property crime. As Korea enjoyed enormous economic growth, and the overall size of the Korean economy rapidly expanded during the 1990s, the number of available targets for property offenses increased as well.

There had been a steady increase in the violent crime rate as well. In the case of robbery, there was a steady increase in the incidence of this crime between the 1970s and the 1980s. It has been fluctuating since 1990, showing a big increase from 2.9 (per 100000 people) in 1970 to 10.1 in 1999 (see Figure 3). There was also an increase in the incidence of rape during the 1970s. It declined slowly during the 1980s, and peaked in 1993 at 16.0 (per 100000), and then hovered

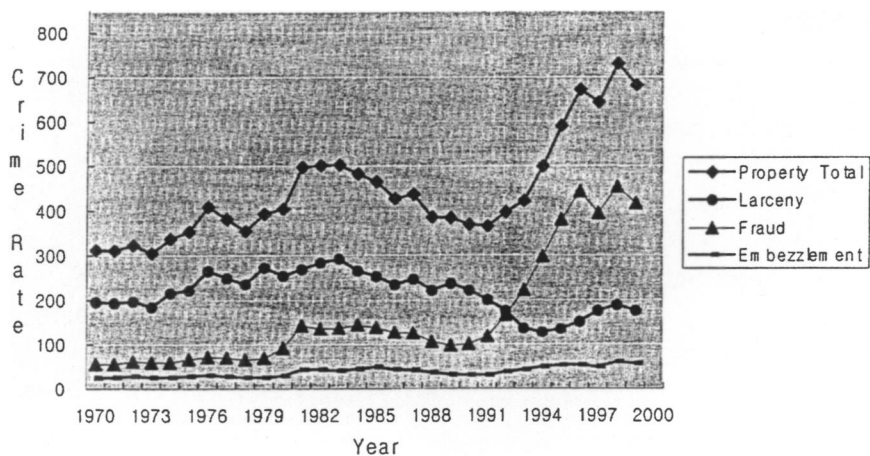


Figure 2. Crime rate: property crime within CCOs.

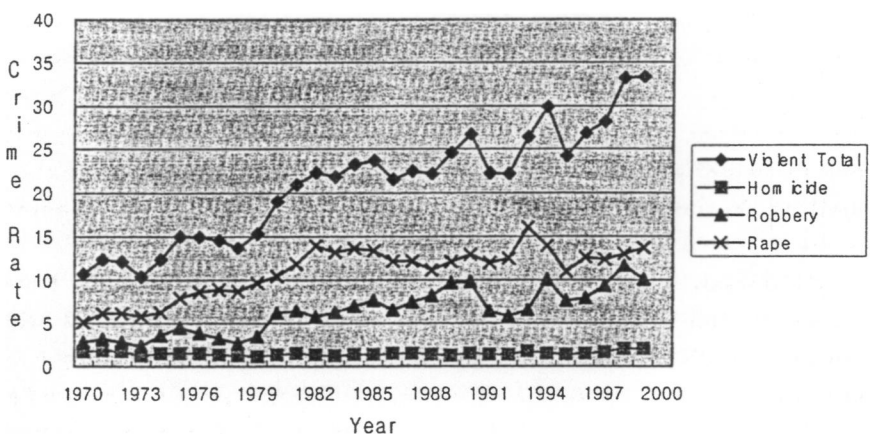


Figure 3. Crime rate: violent crime within CCOs.

at around 11.0 to 13.9 (per 100000) during the 1990s. There has, however, been little change in the crime rate for criminal homicide over the past three decades.

Trends in Violations of Special Laws and Their Characteristics

Violations of Special Laws (VSL) include such laws as an “Act concerning Punishment for Violent Offenses” (APVO); a “Special Act on Disposition of Traffic Accidents” (SADTA); and a “Road Traffic Act (RTA).” They are considered the big three, and they

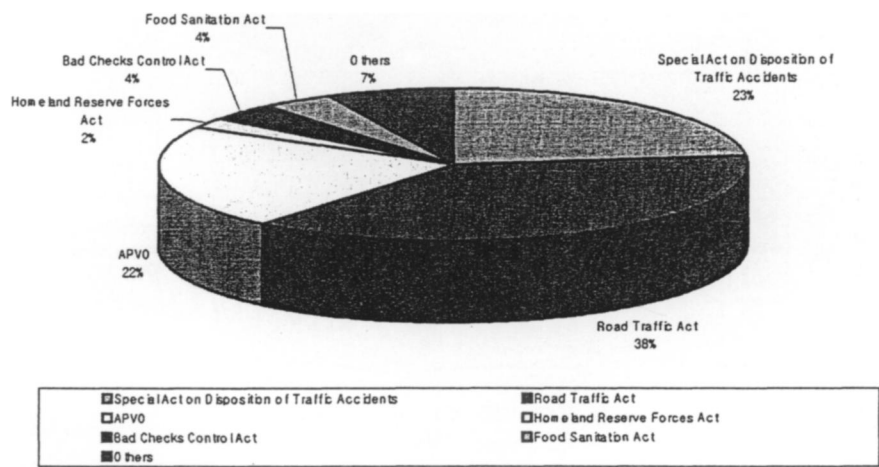


Figure 4. Composition of offenses violating special laws, by categories of crimes (1999).

¹Source: White Paper on Crime, 2000. Legal Research & Training Institute.

²Total number of APVO (Act concerning Punishment of Violent Offences): 1028335.

comprise approximately 80 percent of all violations of Special Laws in 1999, as shown in Figure 4.

In terms of the number of incidences of crime, offenders who violated Special Laws were more numerous than those who violated Criminal Code offenses (CCOs). For example, while the total number of incidence of CCOs was 462253, the total number of violations of the Special Law was 1270269 in 1999. Except for 1992, 1994, 1995 and 1999, the number of incidences of APVO rose steadily from 1990 through 1999. The total number of violations of the Special Laws in 1999 (931235 cases) far outstripped the number in 1999, which soared to 1270269 cases, an increase of 36.4 percent (Legal Research & Training Institute, 2000: pp. 36–39).

One of the main reasons for the sustained trend in the increase in the number of major criminal offenses may be attributed to a continued increase in the number of violations of special legislation such as the ‘Special Act on the Disposition of Traffic Accidents.’ The other reason may be due to revisions and improvements of the criminal justice system, laws and regulations. The improved regulations represent an attempt to exert more efficient control over Korea’s increasingly complex society. This social phenomenon is

manifested in the rapid expansion of the scope of activities engaged in by the public, together with the various ways in which these activities are pursued as Korean society progresses.

If we narrow our focus to the APVO, which we will examine as a separate category of violent crime, the total number of incidences of crime increased 1.5 times, from 150013 in 1990, to 230434 in 1999. The crime rate also increased 1.4 times, from 351 to 492, over the same period.

COMPARISON WITH OTHER MAJOR COUNTRIES

Comparison of Overall Crime Rates

An overall comparison of crime rates with the United States and Japan, with respect to the number of major crimes³ that occurred per 100000 people during the 1990s, reveals that figures for both Korea and Japan are substantially lower than those of the United States (see Table II). While the crime rate in the U.S. has declined since 1990, the crime rate in Korea has risen rapidly over the same period. When it comes to comparing the crime rate between Japan and Korea, Korea had a much lower one until 1992. Korea began to surpass Japan in 1993, when Roh's government was in the middle of waging a war against crime. The accuracy of the figures below, however, cannot be attested to, given the differences between the countries in terms of the provisions of the crimes that were subject to statistical analysis, as well as of the statistical methodology employed by each country.

Comparison of Crime Rates of Criminal Code Offenses

Relying on the official crime statistics of the U.S., Japan, and Korea, we will examine overall trends in Criminal Code Offenses over the past three decades. We will then focus on the trends in five major types of Criminal Code Crimes that receive the most attention from criminal justice agencies. The five crime categories to be covered here include criminal homicide, forcible rape, robbery, aggravated assault, and larceny-theft.

TABLE II
Crime Rate Comparison with Major Countries

| Year | Country | | |
|------|---------|-------|-------|
| | U.S.A. | Japan | Korea |
| 1990 | 5820 | 1324 | 910 |
| 1991 | 5898 | 1377 | 896 |
| 1992 | 5660 | 1400 | 911 |
| 1993 | 5483 | 1566 | 1918 |
| 1994 | 5374 | 1540 | 1959 |
| 1995 | 5269 | 1420 | 2015 |
| 1996 | 5079 | 1440 | 2028 |
| 1997 | 4930 | 1506 | 2033 |
| 1998 | 4616 | 1608 | 2330 |

¹The statistics of each country are based on the following sources.
U.S.A.: Crime in the United States, Federal Bureau of Investigation, various years.
Japan: The White Paper on Crime, Research and Training Institute, Ministry of Justice, various years.
Korea: The White Paper on Crime, Legal Research and Training Institute, Ministry of Justice, various years.
²Crime rate: Number of crimes per 100000 people.

Trends in the Overall Crime Rate in Criminal Code Offenses

Compared to the U.S. and Japan, the overall crime rate in Korea has been relatively low during the past three decades. The overall crime rate of Criminal Code Offenses in 1999, for example, numbered only 987, compared to 2292 in Japan, and 4276 in the U.S. However, the ratio of increase in the crime rate of Criminal Code Offenses is higher in Korea than in the other two countries (see Figure 5). For instance, the incidence of crimes per 100000 people in Korea increased by 75 percent, from 557 in 1970 to 987 in 1999. The percentage of increase was 32 percent in Japan, and 25 percent in the U.S., over the same period.

The crime rate in Korea has fluctuated over the past three decades. It showed a steep increase in the 1970s, then declined

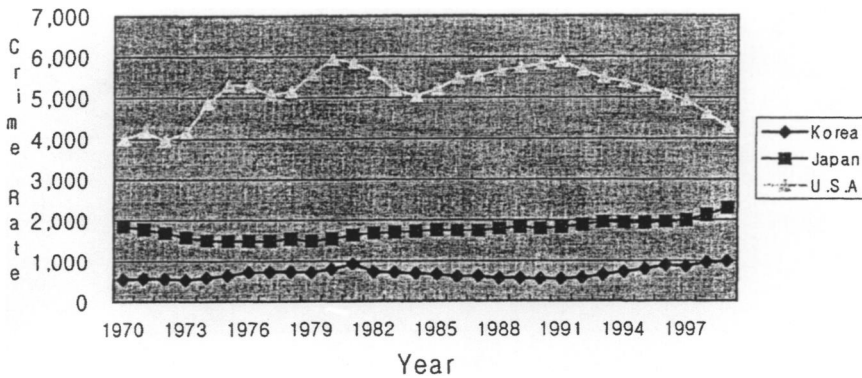


Figure 5. Trends in crime rates among the U.S.A., Japan and Korea: total criminal code offenses.

during the 1980s, and rose again in the 1990s. As mentioned previously, rapid industrialization and urbanization during the 1970s precipitated a social environment that gave rise to criminal behavior. On the other hand, the authoritarian rule of the Chun regime in the 1980s put a strong emphasis on social order and control, which seems to have deterred people from committing crime. In the 1990s, as the Korean economy expanded, the crime rate and property crimes in particular, rose sharply.

In Japan, the crime rate registered minor increases up until the 1980s. As was the case in Korea, however, it is noteworthy that increases in the crime rate were larger during the 1990s. The crime rate in the U.S. has been fluctuating over the past 30 years. Crime increased during the 1970s, but then began decreasing during the mid-1980s and most of the 1990s. This remarkable decrease in the crime rate during the 1990s in the U.S. is notable in that the crime rates in Japan and Korea were increasing during the same period.

Trends in Major Criminal Code Offenses of Three Countries

In line with the crime rates of the U.S., it is interesting to note that crimes of violence, such as criminal homicide, forcible rape, and burglary as well as crimes against property have all decreased since the early 1990s (FBI, 1999). These decreases can be attributed to a number of factors. They include the economic boom which occasioned the fall in unemployment; the demographic shift of

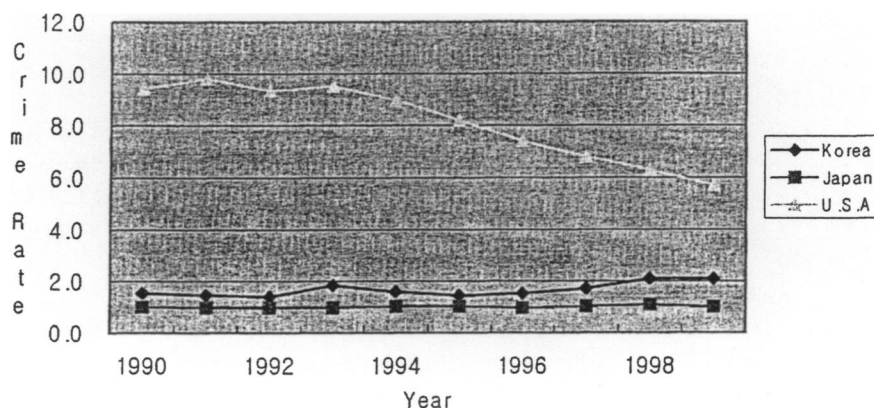


Figure 6. Trends in crime rates among the U.S.A., Japan and Korea: criminal homicide.

baby boomers from the crime-prone age to middle-age; the success of community-policing strategies; and various crime prevention programs (Coleman and Cressey, 2000; Dunham and Alpert, 1993).

When it comes to comparing property crimes between Korea and Japan, the crime rate of larceny/theft in Japan is noticeably higher than that of Korea. The economic recession in the 1990s in Japan seems to have caused reductions in the number of jobs and income; this perhaps led to an increase in property crimes (Shikita and Tsuchiya, 1992; Thornton and Endo, 1992). On the other hand, the rates of crimes of violence, such as robbery, rape, and criminal homicide, in Japan is much lower than that in Korea. The high crime rate of violent crimes in Korea has a strong impact on society in that violent offenses are seen as more threatening to public safety and intensity fear of crime among the public. These trends are clearly evident in Figures 6 through 9.

CRIME CONTROL PRACTICES IN KOREA

This section identifies overall trends in crime control in Korea. With Yoon's (1998: pp. 55–65) pioneer study⁴ serving as background, we will examine changes in criminal justice practices over the past three decades. We will rely on up-to-date data and some revisions in the four classifications of crime date: total, violent,

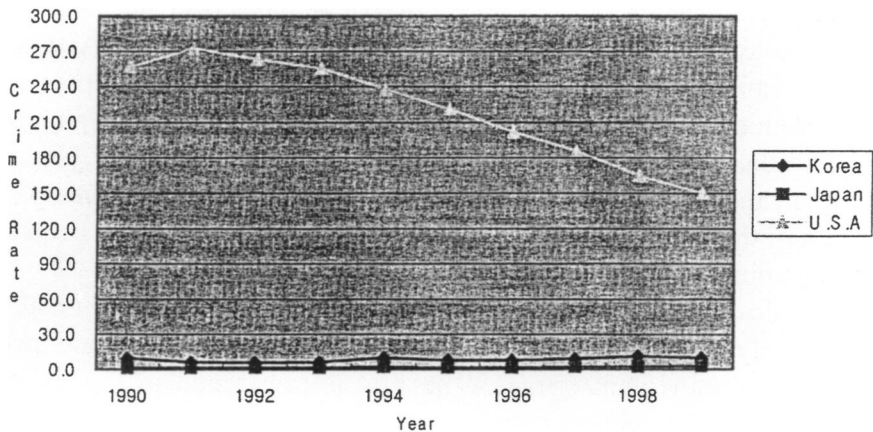


Figure 7. Trends in crime rates among the U.S.A., Japan and Korea: robbery.

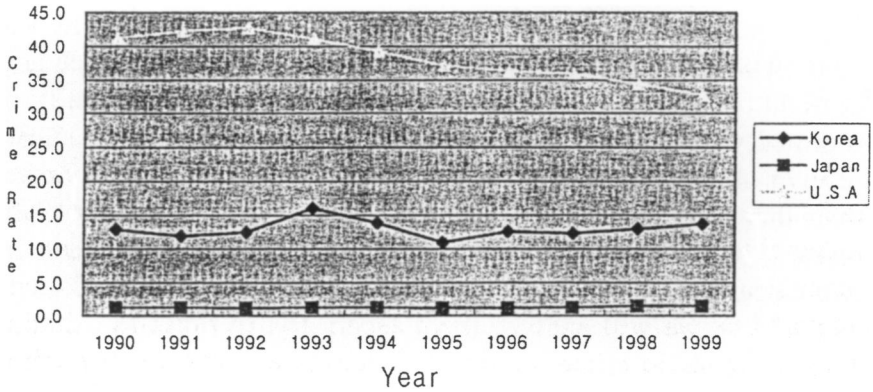


Figure 8. Trends in crime rates among the U.S.A., Japan and Korea: rape.

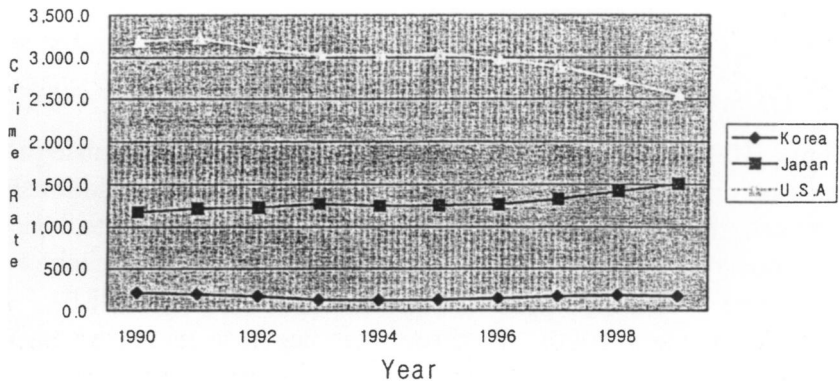


Figure 9. Trends in crime rates among the U.S.A., Japan and Korea: larceny/ theft.

property, and a specific category crime of violence (a crime violating the “Act concerning Punishment of Violent Offenses” or APVO). The criminal justice system consists of several subsystems that are independent of each other as well as interdependent (Rather and McMullan, 1987). Given the complexity of the criminal justice system and the influence of internal and external factors on the operation of the entire system, crime and crime control practices need to be examined in a social context.

To do this, we need to examine violent and property crimes separately as well as together. In such an analysis, there are two categories of violent crimes. The first is prescribed in the Criminal Code. The second consists of violations of the APVO. This latter act regulates a wide range of violent offenses and identifies certain types of offenses and certain conditions that deserve greater punishment. The purpose of the act is to punish people who commit collective or habitual violent offenses or commit such acts at night. Offenders who commit these crimes either habitually or repeatedly, collectively with more than two people, or after sunset receive, at maximum, a punishment one-and-a-half time harsher than that prescribed in the Criminal Code. Since Yoon’s (1998) research revealed that there are considerable differences between the two categories of violent crimes prescribed in the Criminal Code and APVO, we will analyze them separately. In order to examine general trends in crime control practices, we will trace the crime rate and four subsequent rates in each stage of the criminal justice system in Korea over the past three decades.

Total Crime and Crime Control

Figure 10 identifies changes in the crime rate and four subsequent rates of crime control of all crime.⁵ There is a close relationship between the crime rate, arrest rate and prosecution rate.⁶ Each rate moved upward with some fluctuation in the 1970s, reached its respective peak in 1981, and then decreased between 1981–1990. Then in the early 1990s, the three rates began to increase sharply. There were steep increases in the crime rate, arrest and prosecution rate after 1991. However, the ratio of increase in the arrest rate was higher than that of the other two.

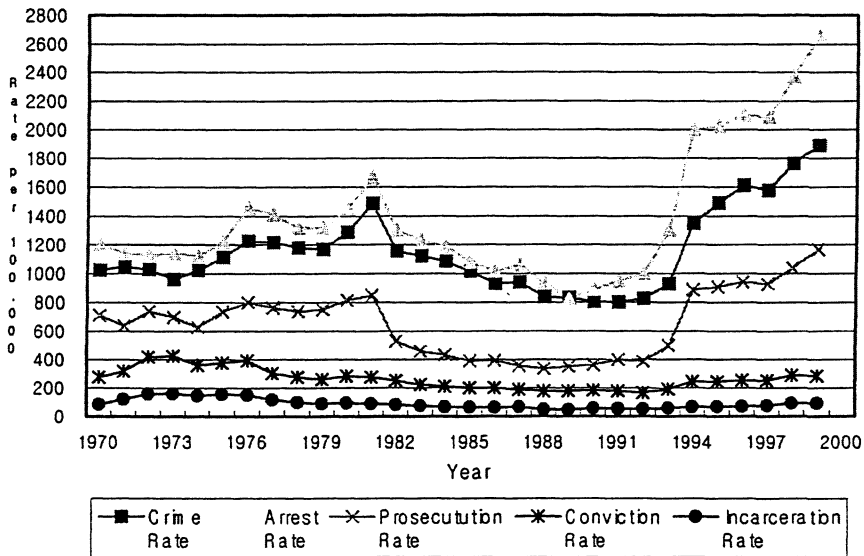


Figure 10. Total crime and crime control.

The crime rate, arrest rate, and prosecution rate in 1990 were 806, 889 and 362 respectively. They increased to 928, 1305, and 499 respectively in 1993, and then to 1890, 2656, 1165, respectively, in 1999. This sharp increase in the crime rate, arrest rate and prosecution rate between 1990 and 1993 might be partly explained by the “war on crime” campaign by Roh’s government in the early 1990s. The subsequent increase during the remainder of the 1990s also seems to be related to the “get tough on crime” policy that occurred at that time (Yoon, 1998: p. 56).

Both the conviction rate and the incarceration rate showed the highest increase in 1972 and 1973. They declined until the early 1990s and then posted an increase. It is interesting to note that the two rates declined even when the crime rate, arrest rate, and prosecution rate had been increasing with some fluctuation between 1973 and 1981. These two measures of court practices reveal relatively few changes over time except in the early 1970s.

Property Crime and Crime Control

As shown in Figure 11, the crime rate and the arrest rate are almost parallel for property crimes. The two rates fluctuated up until

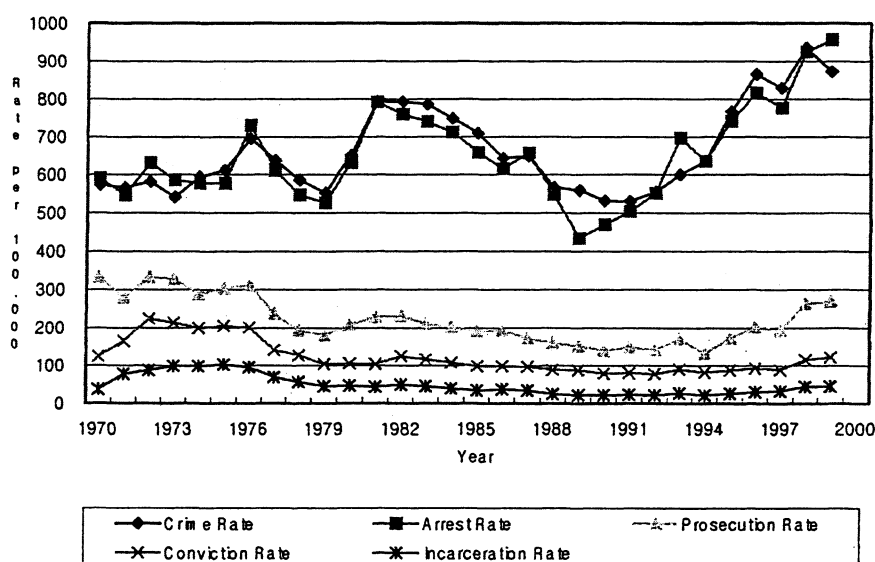


Figure 11. Property crime and crime control.

the middle of 1976 when a sharp increase took place. They then declined up until 1979, when afterwards both rates recorded their second peak in 1981. Fraud in particular was known to be responsible for this rapid increase in the property crime rate in the early 1980s. This was the time when unprecedented political changes were occurring after Chung-Hee Park's 18 years of authoritarian rule, and when Korean society suffered from transitional turmoil and instabilities (Kim and Cha, 1994).

During most of the 1980s, however, both the crime rate and arrest rate declined. Beginning in 1991, the property crime rate began to rise sharply and continued to increase during the rest of the 1990s. This increase in property crimes might help explain the increase in the total number of criminal code crimes given in Figure 10.

The prosecution, conviction and incarceration rates of property crimes showed an overall decline until 1992. Since then, all of the three rates have risen again. As we indicated in the previous study (Yoon, 1998: p. 60), there seems to be a relatively minor correlation between the conviction rate and the property crime rate and between the incarceration rate and the property crime rate.

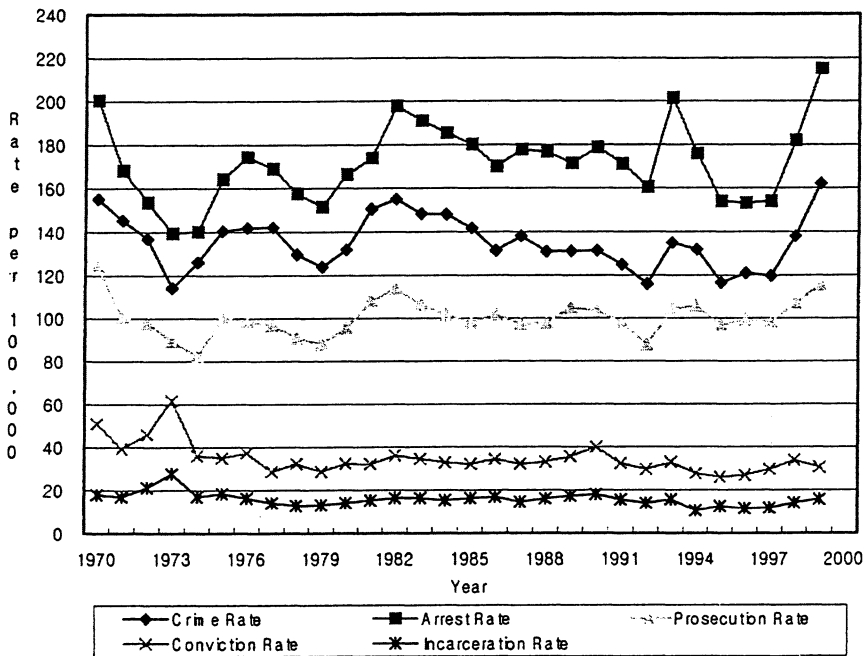


Figure 12. Violent crime and crime control.

Violent Crime and Crime Control

Crimes of violence, the crime rate, arrest rate and the prosecution rate are almost identical in pattern (see Figure 12). The three rates started off very high in the early 1970s, and then dropped sharply. They then fluctuated and increased drastically in the early 1980s. During the 1990s they increased rapidly. The patterns of the conviction rate and incarceration rate were also parallel. Both rates were very high in 1974, and then turned stable. Both rates rose again between 1987 and 1990. Thereafter, they declined until 1995, and then rose again. Unlike property crimes, the violent crime rate appears to be highly correlated with the arrest rate, prosecution rate and conviction rate.

These fluctuations can be attributed to the volatile economic, political, and socio-cultural conditions that have existed during the past 30 years. The financial crisis of the late 1990s, and all the turmoil in society that it caused apparently had a particularly major impact on the rate of violent crime.

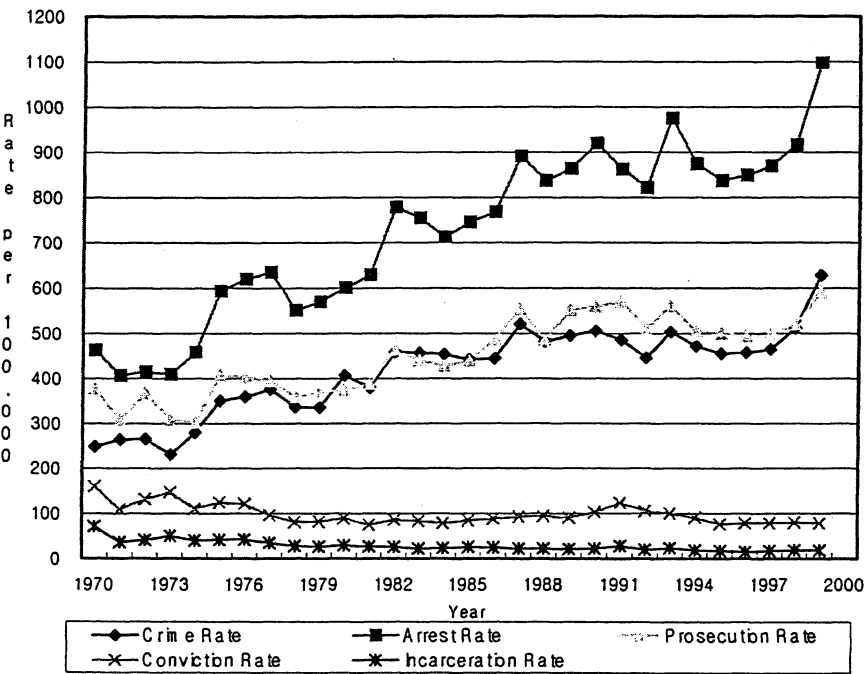


Figure 13. APVO crime and crime control.

APVO Crime and Crime Control

Figure 13 depicts trends in the crime rate and the four subsequent rates of crime control for the special category of violent crime, which are violations of the APVO. As mentioned earlier, this special law was enacted to control the prevalence of violence by handing out harsher punishment than that provided for in the Criminal Code. These offenses constitute a large proportion of all crime. For example, there were 230434 incidences of APVO in 1999, and this accounted for 13.3 percent of all crime (1732522) of that year. Compared to the incidences of Criminal Code violations, this amount was as much as fifty percent of the total number of Criminal Code offenses (462253) in 1999 (Legal Research & Training Institute, 2000).

Figure 13 shows a notable characteristic for the APVO. As was noted in Yoon's (1998) previous study, the APVO rates of crime, arrest and prosecution are quite different from the violent crimes under the Criminal Code. While the three (crime, arrest and prosec-

ution) rates of violent crime prescribed in the Criminal Code (see Figure 12) fluctuated most of the time and showed relatively minor increases, the three rates of APVO increased sharply most of the time.

The conviction rate and the incarceration rate, however, did not show parallel trends with these three rates. As was the case with the conviction and incarceration rate for violent crimes under the Criminal Code, these two rates did not show much change in their patterns, and were almost identical with crimes of violence under the Criminal Code. Although the APVO crime rate and subsequent arrest and prosecution rates have also risen during the past three decades, both rates of conviction and incarceration for APVO crimes have declined. As mentioned earlier, one of the major reasons for a continued increase in the APVO crime rate may be attributed to the improved laws and regulations, which exert more efficient control over various violent offenses in an increasingly complex society.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Trends in crime and the crime rate in Korea over the past three decades can be summarized as follows. The incidence of crimes fluctuated during that time. One exception to this trend was the APVO crime rate, which displayed a general pattern of increase. However, it is especially noteworthy that the overall crime rate rose during the 1990s. This increase appears to be attributable to the increase in the crime rate of both property crime and APVO crime in the 1990s. A cross-national comparison reveals that overall rates of crime in both Korea and Japan were substantially lower than that in the U.S. While rates of crime of the U.S. have declined or leveled off since 1990, the crime rate in Korea rose rapidly over the same period.

The crime rate in Korea was much lower than in Japan until 1992; thereafter, Korea began to surpass Japan. This indicates that social disorganization in Korean society took place much faster than in Japan. In addition, it indicates that the safety of the Korean society in terms of crime is not so good as it used to be. In fact, it became worse than that of Japan after the middle of the 1990s in that crime rates of violent offenses became higher than those in Japan.

Compared to the U.S. and Japan, the overall crime rate of Criminal Code Offenses (CCO) in Korea has been relatively low over the past three decades. However, the ratio of increase in the crime rate of CCO is higher in Korea than in the other two countries. It is also noteworthy that the crime rates of violent crimes, as well as of property crimes, have all decreased in the U.S. since the early 1990s.

For the past 30 years, there has been a close relationship between the crime rate, arrest rate and prosecution rate. Steep increases in the three rates were found after 1991. However, the ratio of increase in the arrest rate was higher than that of the other two. The sharp increase in the crime rate, arrest rate and prosecution rate between 1990 and 1993 is attributable to the “war on crime” or the “get tough on crime” policies during the 1990s in Korea. The increase in property and APVO crimes might explain most of the increase in the total number of crimes during the 1990s.

When it comes to the conviction rate and the incarceration rate, both rates have declined even while the rates of crime, arrest, and prosecution have been increasing. These two features of court proceeding have revealed relatively few changes over time. There seems to be a relatively minor correlation between the crime rate and conviction rate, and between the crime rate and incarceration rate for property crimes. Although the APVO crime rate and subsequent arrest and prosecution rates rose during the period we studied, both rates of conviction and incarceration for APVO crimes declined. This might explain the relatively low levels of change in the rates of conviction and incarceration.

According to this study, the overall crime problem in Korea is not as serious as that in Japan and the U.S. However, recent data indicate an alarming increase in the crime rate. From the data analyzed, we can determine that economic political, and societal factors have played a crucial role in the occurrence of crime and crime control practices in Korea. Recent phenomena, like the financial crisis and the current political stalemate in Korea, seem to have contributed to this recent disturbing increase in crime. If these factors can be stabilized, then we may anticipate the improvement of the crime situation in Korea.

NOTES

¹ Clearance rate refers to the number of arrestees over the number of incidences of crimes multiplied by 100. The number of crimes refers to those crimes that took place in the relevant year, and the number of arrestees includes the arrests of suspects that had occurred in the year immediately preceding the year of computation.

² As stated in the Data and method section, violent offenses include criminal homicide, robbery, rape, arson, assault, aggravated assault, intimidation and kidnapping. Included among property crimes are larceny-theft, stolen property, fraud, embezzlement, breach of trust, and destruction of property.

³ Crime categories that are subjected to this statistical analysis in each country are as follows:

U.S.A.: Crime Index Offense (homicide, rape, robbery, bodily injury, illegal entering, car theft, larceny. Arson was added in 1979, but was not included in the number of crimes that occurred).

Japan: Penal Code offenses include violations of the Law for the Punishment of Violent Crimes, Explosives Control Law, Law Relating to Duel and Law Concerning the Prevention and Punishment of Burglary, Robbery, Larceny, etc. Excluded from Penal Code offenses is professional or gross negligence causing death or bodily injury by traffic accident.

Korea: The violations of the Laws concerning Punishment of Violent Crimes are included. However, the violations of the Special Acts on Disposition of Traffic Accidents and the Road Traffic Act are excluded.

⁴ Yoon's (1998) study made a unique contribution to the issues of crime and social control in that it attempted to incorporate crime and various crime control practices in a single frame of analysis for the first time in criminological studies in Korea. She examined trends and patterns of crime and crime control practices from 1964 through 1993. This analysis is, in part, an attempt to update and extend Yoon's study from 1970 through 1999.

⁵ In this analysis, total crime means total criminal code crime.

⁶ In most cases, the arrest rate is higher than the crime rate because a crime can have more than one offender and the arrest rate measures the number of arrestees.

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