



# The Relationism Theory of Criminal Justice—A Paradigm Shift

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## Abstract

There are two significant difficulties in building a general criminal justice theory. First, different from criminology theories, criminal justice produces multiple outcomes at different levels. Second, the scopes of existing theories largely originate from Western contexts and data, few including cross-cultural variation. This paper outlines a unified theory to explain multiple criminal justice outcomes at the system, institutional, and individual levels across cultures under a paradigm shift from the current “monotonic paradigm” to a more general “comparison paradigm.” The new paradigm logically contains the existing paradigm while broadening research questions and scope of criminal justice studies. It constructs a new set of concepts and propositions, presenting an effort toward a general causal criminal justice theory.

**Keywords** Criminal justice theory · Theory building · Cross-cultural variation · Theoretical paradigm · Modeling criminal justice outcomes

## Introduction

Originating in the 1950s, academic criminal justice has made great achievements and has developed into an independent discipline primarily in the United States and Europe. However, to date, a major deficiency of the discipline is the lack of a well-recognized general criminal justice theory, as concluded by some prominent criminal justice scholars (Bernard & Engel, 2001; Clear, 2001; Crank, 2002; Cullen, 1995; Duffee, 1980; Hagan, 1989; Kraska, 2006; Kraska & Brent, 2004; Macdonald, 2008; Maguire & Duffee, 2015; Marenin & Worrall, 1998; Sullivan, 1994; Zalman, 1981). Criminal justice teaching programs in Western countries by default assume that the content of “criminal justice theory” is about crime and crime rates, which essentially is the subject of criminology theory (Bernard & Engel, 2001; Cullen, 1995; Hagan, 1989; Henderson & Boostrom, 1989; Macdonald, 2008; Maguire & Duffee, 2015). The majority of “Introduction to Criminal Justice” textbooks dedicate nearly all their discussion to theories of criminal behavior. Most Western criminal justice scholars believe that “theory” is about

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criminal behavior, while criminal justice research is about concrete and specific practical matters (Henderson & Boostrom, 1989; Macdonald, 2008; Maguire & Duffee, 2015)

This paper resumes the largely abandoned project of building a general theory of criminal justice. It begins with pointing out two fundamental difficulties. Without recognizing or overcoming these two difficulties, it would be hard to see a theory that is truly general. First, criminal justice is a complex system and process, producing multiple types of outcomes at the systemic, institutional, and individual levels. Different from criminology theories, whose outcome/dependent variables mainly concern criminal behaviors or crime rates, the dependent variables of a general criminal justice theory are by necessity the various kinds of outcomes of criminal justice processes or behaviors at multiple different levels. However, most existing criminal justice theories have focused on only explaining some particular criminal justice outcomes, or some specific aspect of criminal justice processes, at a particular level or institution of criminal justice, and little attention has been devoted to developing general theories that uniformly explain multiple outcomes across multiple levels of criminal justice.

The second substantial difficulty in building a general criminal justice theory concerns cross-culture variations. Comparative criminal justice research has provided ample evidence of vast variations in criminal justice across different cultural contexts and across different countries. However, almost all influential criminal justice theories have been developed based on data from Western contexts, especially the US and Europe, and consequently, they have a very limited theoretical scope and are often inapplicable to non-Western countries or cultural contexts (e.g., Liu, 2014b, 2016, 2017a, 2017b, 2021a; Liu & Miyazawa, 2018; Liu et al., 2017; Thilagaraj & Liu, 2017). Western-originated theories tend to assume implicitly their generalizability for non-Western contexts, while little effort has been made to systematically incorporate cultural variation into them. Without innovatively addressing cultural variation, a theory cannot be truly generalized in scope across different cultural contexts.

Given these formidable difficulties, efforts in building a highly general theory have largely been given up. A currently widely shared viewpoint among criminal justice scholars is that criminal justice theories should be devoted to specific, practical topics related to a specific justice organization or justice behavior, while the role of large-scope general theory should be delegated to criminology theories. A general criminal justice theory encompassing a very large scope and applicable across multiple outcomes and across various cultures is not deemed possible, practical, or useful. Many prominent criminal justice theorists doubt the value of seeking a general theory for criminal justice, criticizing those “grand” theories for being too remote from criminal justice practices, too abstract, or lacking in practical guidance for specific studies or day-to-day criminal justice operations (Duffee et al., 2015). For example, Howard and Freilich (2007) caution against grand theories. Black’s social legal theory (Black, 1976) is often cited as an example of an unpractical grand theory (Duffee et al., 2015). Duffee et al. (2015) commented that “it may be very premature or even misleading and dangerous to search for a theory that ‘explains all criminal justice responses at all times’” (p. 452). It was argued that “this was a false hope. Indeed, there often appear to be very different explanations for individual-level phenomena and those occurring at higher levels” (Duffee et al., 2015, p. 452).

These criticisms of “grand theory” also highlight a third substantial difficulty for building a general theory of criminal justice: how can highly general and highly abstract theories having a cross-national scope also be applicable to day-to-day criminal justice research and practice in particular local contexts?

The present paper argues that despite these formidable difficulties, the advancement of natural and social sciences has historically demonstrated that high-level general theory has unique value; the level of maturity of a discipline is characteristically reflected in its degree of achievements in general causal theories. General causal theories provide information and perform many functions that specific theories cannot perform for the discipline; they reveal patterns and discover critical knowledge that specific theories do not discover. Dismissing the value of a general causal theory is a mistake. The continued effort of developing a general theory of criminal justice is essential for the growth of the criminal justice discipline. The present paper proposes a paradigm shift and, under the new paradigm, outlines a general theory that aims at uniformly explaining multiple outcomes of criminal justice across great cultural variations with a reasonable level of parsimony and testability.

## The Current State of Criminal Justice Theories

Despite the hesitations towards or dismissal of building a general criminal justice theory, theorists have delivered many achievements in producing specific theories primarily based on Western data. Theoretical work has also made important progress based on data from non-western countries. This section briefly reviews the literature of criminal justice theory developments and their relations with and limitations to developing a general theory.

Research traditions based on Western data have produced many specific explanations for specific aspects or outcomes with a particular justice agency such as the police, courts, and corrections. (see Clear, 2001; Crank, 2002; Cullen, 1995; Duffee, 1980; Hagan, 1989;; Kraska & Brent, 2004; Macdonald, 2008; Maguire & Duffee, 2015; Marenin & Worrall, 1998; Sullivan, 1994; Zalman, 1981). Some of them focus on patterns of daily operations; some focus on explaining special cases and emphasize “applied” sides of criminal justice research. The limited effort of seeking generalization is most prominently reflected in a widely adopted framework that organizes the specific criminal justice theories into the three categories of police, courts, and correction. An excellent example is that of Maguire and Duffee et al. (2015). Police studies have been a major area within this threefold division (e.g., Reisig and Kane (2014)). One prominent example is Sherman’s police behavior theory (1980). A recent influential theory is Tyler’s police legitimacy theory (Tyler, 1990); its primary theme is that the style of policing is a major influence on citizens’ trust in and obedience to the police. Various specific aspects of correction have also received a large amount of research attention, producing many theoretical understandings with strong practical policy implications. For example, the work of Eric Lambert and his collaborators significantly contributed to our understanding on correction staff behavior and its consequences. The specific theories generally take a traditional approach, focusing on explaining one dependent variable or outcome within one level or one institution of criminal justice. They do not intend to be general over multiple outcomes and across cultures.

Within this tradition of explaining a single outcome or a single type of similar outcomes at a particular level of justice, researchers have also adopted theories from other disciplines that are not originally straightforwardly criminal justice theories. Two prominent studies have provided explanations for discrepancies between officially expected behavior and behavior in reality (Cressey, 1959; Feeley, 1973; Lipsky, 1980; Protas, 1978; Skolnick, 1966). Feeley (1973) adopted organization theory to explain the behavior of criminal justice officials in terms of “rational goal” versus “functional systems” models. The theories highlighted the importance of comparison in understanding behaviors of criminal justice

officials. Comparisons are also found in lines of research that ask why punitive versus lenient policies might be enacted in criminal justice. Packer (1968) used the due process versus crime control model to point out two conflicting orientations in day-to-day criminal justice practices. Packer's approach also recognized comparison as essential in understanding day-to-day practices. Generally, the Western research tradition has formulated important questions that guided many familiar lines of study.

However, the approach commonly shared by criminal justice theorists does not consider seeking generalizability beyond specific areas, agencies, or topics across different institutions or levels of the justice outcomes. Those who do appreciate building general theory take an approach to first accumulate over a long time a number of specific theories or explanations within a specific area, such as police, court, and corrections, so as to eventually accrue enough to enable possibility for a general theory (Bernard & Engel, 2001; Duffee et al., 2015, p. 452).

Following this route of developing higher levels of generalization, two most important contributions have been provided by Bernard and Engel (2001) and Kraska (2006). Bernard and Engel (2001) point out:

“After 50 years, a great deal of research has accumulated along with an increasing number of relatively specific theories to interpret that research. Despite some movement to generalize the theories, little progress has been made in formulating criminal justice theory *per se*.” (Bernard & Engel, 2001, p. 1)

They proposed a conceptual framework for categorizing and generalizing criminal justice theories. They used dependent variables to classify research topics and then used independent variables under the respective dependent variables to classify explanations. They laid out a framework cutting across components of the criminal justice system and move toward formulating a general theory (Bernard & Engel, 2001).

Another important contribution was from Peter B. Kraska (Kraska, 2006; Kraska & Brent, 2004). He criticized the “atheoretical” nature of criminal justice research and pointed out, “Studying criminal justice is tacitly, and sometimes explicitly, relegated to the narrow role of evaluative and descriptive scholarship” (Kraska, 2006, p. 174). He proposed that to move toward more general theories, it is important to categorize the existing work into theoretical orientations. “A theoretical orientation is simply an interpretive construct: a logically coherent set of organizing concepts, causal preferences, value-clusters, and assumptions that work to orient our interpretations and understanding of criminal justice phenomena” (Kraska, 2006, p. 175). He classified specific criminal justice theories and literature into eight theoretical orientations targeting criminal justice phenomena—rational-legalism, system, crime control versus due process, politics, the social construction of reality, growth complex, oppression, and late-modernity—and proposed a scheme to explain those eight orientations (Kraska, 2006; Kraska & Brent, 2004).

Kraska's framework provides categorization largely based on these different philosophical orientations. While this is valuable in increasing understanding of the meaning underlying specific theories, it does not readily provide any testable hypothesis. The framework does not suggest how it should be applied to explain multiple specific outcomes of criminal justice.

These efforts to generalize are commendable but have not led to a general theory. Nor do they address the two considerable difficulties of generalizing over multiple levels of justice

outcomes and variation across different cultural contexts. Results of these efforts are mainly different summarization and classification schemes. There is no indication that these efforts can further develop into solutions to the two primary challenges from multiple outcomes and cross-cultural variation. It appears that any similar efforts likely would not lead to a general theory cutting across multiple levels of analyses or incorporating multiple dependent outcomes, but probably only lead to different summarization and classification schemes based on Western data. In fact, in the more than one and a half decades since these two frameworks were proposed, there has been no further published attempt to produce a general causal theory in the field of criminal justice. No attempts have been made that show new promises to produce theories that provide unified general explanation across different levels of criminal justice outcomes and cross-cultural variation. The lack of promising progress essentially reflects the limitation of existing paradigms in criminal justice theory and research.

Literature in nonwestern contexts has rarely been reviewed in the Western criminal justice theory building literature. However, some of the progress is relevant and suggests important insights. Particularly comparative justice studies tend to reveal larger scope and more awareness of variation across different countries. They have provided ample evidence that cultural variation implies discrete contrasts concerning aspects of justice particularly between western and nonwestern societies. Some comparative studies also show innovative lines of thinking in terms of causes and processes that lead to certain outcomes of justice.

Recent literature review has pointed out that Asian criminologists have started to develop new theories (Zhong & Zhang, 2021). These include “Theory of relational justice” (Liu, 2014a), “Asian paradigm theory” (Liu, 2014b; 2016), “Relational theory” (Liu, 2017b), and “Relationism theory” (Liu, 2021b). Braithwaite commented that “the hope is that they may be useful for constructing the kind of relational theory of crime control advocated by Liu (2014b)” (Braithwaite, 2015, p. 184). He has commented: “It is the right time in the development of criminology in Asia to move away from an international division of scholarly labor whereby influential theories are developed in the west, while Asia’s role is to apply or test those theories in Asian contexts or adapt them to Asian realities. It is time for a new era of the criminological theory that was given birth in Asia by Asian scholars” (Braithwaite, 2015, p. 183). Research has demonstrated sharp differences or contrasts between West and East in patterns of crime and justice, in cultures and behavior patterns, in concepts of justice, and responses to crimes. As a result, it can be argued that cross-cultural differences imply variation in objectives of justice and justice processes. The non-Western literature suggests new understandings of causal processes in, and different approaches in achieving explanations for, justice outcomes.

In sum, it appears from the literature that so far criminal justice theory building, particularly in the West, has not solved, or even addressed, the two considerable challenges for building a truly general theory of criminal justice capable of explaining the multiple levels and multiple outcomes of justice and accommodating cross-cultural variation. The current literature suggests that seeking generalization across multiple justice outcomes and accommodating cross-cultural variation cannot be achieved within the dominant Western paradigm with traditional approaches towards theory building. The Western literature shows that existing efforts at best achieve a different summarization and categorization scheme. A paradigm shift is necessary to encompass both insights from the West and non-West to make progress in seeking higher levels of generalization in criminal justice theory building.

## Paradigm Shift: From a “Monotonic Paradigm” to “Comparison Paradigm”

Western-based theory and research generally focus on a single or single type of justice outcome as its dependent variable, modeling it using a set of supposedly mutually separate causal processes, or as a set of items associated with the justice outcome or dependent variable. The cultural scope tends to be within a Western context. This prevalent approach reflects the central feature of the existing paradigm in the criminal justice discipline. It is termed here as a “monotonic paradigm.” The literature review above has shown this approach promises little to overcome the two major difficulties faced by efforts of building a general theory.

To take the challenge of achieving a generalized theory across multiple levels of justice outcomes, and applicable to varied cultural contexts, a strategy is to consider causes that are more fundamental and contain far-reaching implications, thus producing a wider range of processes covering a wider range of justice outcomes. The causes need to reflect a broader perspective encompassing a broader range of justice outcomes. Conventional approaches applying a limited range of causes that answer a narrow range of questions cannot serve the purpose. A new cross-disciplinary search for candidates of fundamental or far-reaching causes and processes will be necessary. Moreover, the strategy of seeking far-reaching causes and implications will enlarge the range of questions to a broader research area that conventional criminal justice research does not typically fully covers. In overcoming formidable difficulties and limitations of a single discipline, there is an increasing trend in academia that scholars adopt an interdisciplinary strategy to succeed. This paper advocates just such a strategy for building a theory in the criminal justice discipline.

With such a momentous perspective change, reconceptualizing key concepts and developing new concepts will be necessary. Literature about personality in psychology and interdisciplinary studies of culture have accumulated a wealth of evidence and insights that suggest far-reaching motivational forces for behavior and various justice outcomes; they should be the candidates for thinking about causality. The wide implications of cultural variation of concepts can suggest significant influence on justice behavior and multiple justice outcomes. For far-reaching explanatory power, we should go beyond the current Western focus and also consider Eastern wisdom that may suggest new forms of integrated causal processes that can bring greater explanatory power to a broader range of different types of justice outcomes. These considerations suggest a significant shift with respect to conceptual systems, key questions, causal processes, approaches, and new theoretical structures away from current conventions, thus suggesting a paradigm shift. The new paradigm will raise so far unfamiliar research questions broad in scope that address multiple and broader types of justice outcomes.

To take the challenge of cultural variation for building a general theory, it is necessary to examine comparative literature to identify nature and primary characteristics of these variations. Studies across West and East have indicated that cultural variation across a wide scope of observations often shows a “discrete” nature; they are often not continuous but show sharp contrast. Considered within an international scope, the discrete variation is particularly acute between West and East, for example. These contrasts include fundamental differences in concepts of justice, personalities, cultures, behavior patterns, and justice responses to crimes at various levels (Liu, 2014a, 2016, 2017b, 2019, 2021b, 2022). As a result, the contrasts should be described using underlying causal processes and are a key aspect of reality that is largely overlooked and not theorized in current criminal justice

theory building. A truly general theory must build this essential aspect of reality into its theoretical structure to cover the wide international and cross-cultural scope. Therefore, a highly general theory must by nature be comparative in structure to possess the capacity of capturing the empirical reality of international variations. Conventional modes of theory development and forms of theories in Western literature have not put the comparative nature of reality into the central design of the relevant theories.

The two challenges appear to be too “grand” to be resolved within the current approaches in criminal justice research and theory building. We are in a position classically analyzed by Kuhn (1996) where a leap forward to break out of the conventional paradigm is called for. A new paradigm will bring fresh thinking, fresh approaches, fresh new puzzles and research questions, and fresh perspectives to tackle the challenges of building a general theory of criminal justice. A new paradigm that overcomes the limitations of the existing paradigm is necessary to allow moving forward with the ambition to build a highly general theory that captures the reality of cross-cultural variation, has a cross-national scope, explains multiple justice outcomes at different levels, and has potentials to organize criminal justice research and to derive testable sub-theories and explanations for many specific criminal justice outcomes and topics.

Under the new paradigm, justice phenomena will not be just seen as a number of independent single causes influencing or being associated with one particular justice outcome. In contrast, the justice phenomena are better viewed as sets of contrasted paired causes and processes. The construction of paired concepts more accurately reflects the discrete variation of justice phenomena across a broad cultural scope with higher levels of generalizability. Within the new paradigm, the theoretical building blocks are paired concepts and paired propositions for paired causal processes. Paired causes lead to paired consequences or paired justice outcomes. The paired structure of the new paradigm is significantly different from the currently dominant paradigm developed primarily from Western historical contexts and data. We could term this new paradigm a “comparison paradigm” of criminal justice.

The conventional paradigm does not see contrast or comparison as a central concern; however, when reexamining reality from the perspective of the new “comparison paradigm,” the comparative aspect of reality, less acute in western contexts, becomes visible. For example, several scholars have proposed ideas with respect to comparison (Cressey, 1959; Feeley, 1973; Lipsky, 1980; Packer, 1968; Prottas, 1978; Skolnick, 1966). Packer (1968) conceives the due process versus crime control model as two conflicting orientations in day-to-day criminal justice practices. A major part of criminal justice research in the Western context is evaluative research that compares actual practices with official expectations (Cressey, 1959; Feeley, 1973; Lipsky, 1980; Prottas, 1978; Skolnick, 1966). Feeley (1973) explains the behavior of criminal justice officials in terms of “rational goal” versus “functional systems” models. Lipsky (1980) attributes US street-level bureaucrats’ patterns of practice that deviate from official expectation as a response to the conditions of their working environment. These publications reveal the existence of comparative aspects of justice reality even within only the Western context; nevertheless, the comparative nature of reality has not taken a central position in the theory-building efforts that are based on data collected in the Western context.

The existing Western paradigm and the new “comparison paradigm” differ concerning their primary approach to research. The prevalent traditional Western approach to research is centered around examining effects of various independent causes or associations on essentially single dependent variables or justice outcomes. While multiple causes are examined, nevertheless, each of them is essentially regarded as having a separate single

effect, only influencing one justice outcome in an additive sense. This approach typically uses limited-ranged causes not suitable for multiple justice outcomes. This approach is termed a “monotonic cause” paradigm here, to refer to single justice outcome and single causal characteristics.

In contrast, the new comparison paradigm points to a new comparison-based modeling approach. It examines paired causes concerning their effects on multiple dependent variables or justice outcomes. Each concept or causal process contrasts with or complements the corresponding one in the paired analysis. The effects of any pair would be modeled together and reflect a comparison or contrast of the concepts and processes in pairs. Comparison-based modeling is the central, essential approach to model justice outcomes within the new comparison paradigm.

The new paradigm has the capacity to capture cultural variation, such as East versus West. However, it encompasses the existing “monotonic paradigm” and will logically reduce to the monotonic paradigm when we focus on Western or Eastern context only. For example, when the paired comparative model is applied to only Western context and data, the Eastern aspect would be less prevalent and have less or even no effect (and vice versa). The Eastern counterpart of the pair becomes a supplemental process. Thus, conceptually, in that case, the new comparison paradigm will be reduced to one that is similar to the conventional Western paradigm in the Western context, including only the effects of concepts representing the West.

With its broad scope and comparative structure, the new comparison paradigm will enlarge existing set of questions with questions not previously raised in the narrower Western paradigm. The new paradigm will enhance the range of research questions, reveal more general and “unfamiliar” realities and patterns, and so contribute to the growth of criminal justice research.

In the following section, this paper will outline a new theory of criminal justice within the new “comparison paradigm” to raise new interests, new questions, and new debates to reverse the sparsity of scholarly attention towards building a general criminal justice theory over the past decades.

## **Relationism Theory of Criminal Justice**

This section outlines a theoretical framework called “relationism theory of criminal justice.” The aim is to provide a unified consistent causal explanation across systemic levels, justice organizations, and individuals to achieve high levels of generalizability and reasonable levels of parsimony and testability.

Guided by the new paradigm, the theory takes the strategy of adopting far-reaching causes that have wide implications for various multiple justice outcomes; the theory is constructed with a comparative structure generalizable to both Western and Eastern cultures and also captures the comparative feature in many criminal justice studies and practices. The theory is expressed in a multilevel structure that makes hypothesis testing pertinent in many specific research situations and practices. With these strategies, the theory overcomes the limitations of past “grand theories,” which tended to only suggest general orientations but lacked the capacity to specify testable models concerning concrete policy and outcomes. For example, Black’s theory (1976) has received criticisms for difficulties in testability and applicability. The relationism theory of criminal justice is highly general but aims to overcome the limitations of other grand theories.



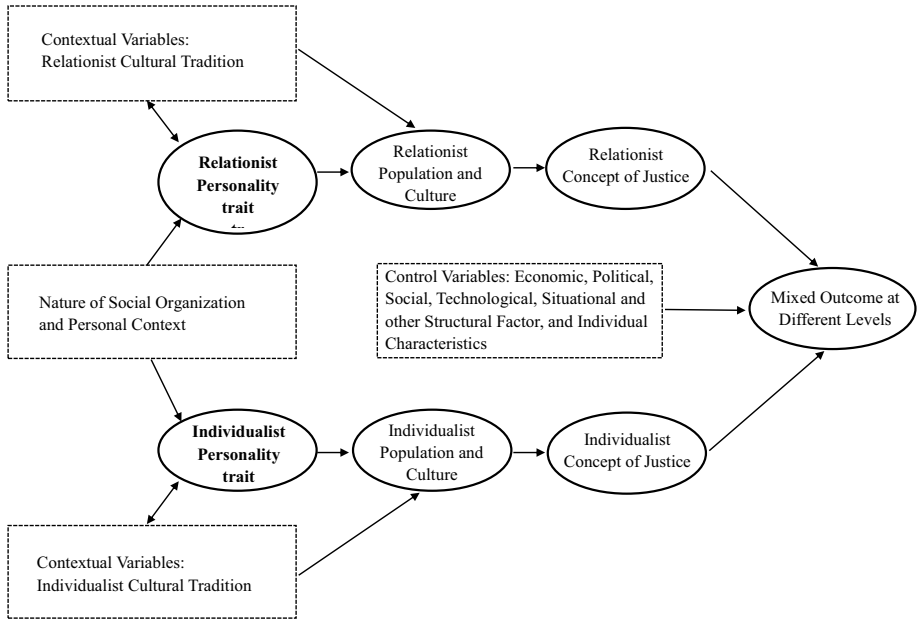


Fig. 1 Schematic diagram of relationism theory

The literature involving far-reaching causes such as personality, culture, and justice is vast; the present section focuses only on presenting the definitions of the concepts and outlining the proposed propositions, while having to omit deliberation about the details of reconceptualization, justification for the propositions, and extensively citing literature related to the concepts and arguments of the theory.

The central theme of the theoretical framework is that a range of “justice outcomes” are explained by a pair of explanatory variables: “relationist concept of justice” and “individualist concept of justice.” (Concepts are all defined and explained in the following section.) These concepts are further explained and predicted by “relationist culture” and “individualist culture,” which are held by “relationist populations” and “individualist populations.” Further, these populations are defined as aggregates of “relationist personality traits” and “individualist personality traits.” The section below will define each of the concepts and briefly present the propositions involved.

The theory is summarized in Fig. 1. For easy reference, all the definitions of concepts are listed together in the Appendix Table 1. The three-level structure of the theoretical framework and all variables at different levels are integrated into one diagram, with the possible control variables and mediating processes at different levels included in dashed-lined boxes. When modeling a particular justice outcome at a particular level, specific control variables or mediating processes become concrete depending on the specific research question.

The proposed causal processes presented in Fig. 1 represent a theoretical idea. It readily applies to the typical quantitative tradition of criminal justice research. However, it applies as well to linear, non-linear as well as unstructured data. It does not limit itself to quantitative data and analyses.

Following the flow of the causal diagram, the concepts are organized into three groups reflecting the three stages of the whole causal process. The first group is “actors and their cultures,” which includes three pairs of new concepts: “relationist personality” and “individualist personality,” “relationist culture” and “individualist culture,” and “relationist population” and “individualist population.”

The second group is the pair “relationist concept of justice” and “individualist concept of justice,” which directly explain the dependent variables/justice outcomes. The concepts of justice are the central explanatory theoretical variables that explain specific justice outcomes/dependent variables in a specific study.

The third group is “justice outcomes.” These justice outcomes exist in empirical reality and are mixed in nature, with both relationist and individualist components. Each of these justice outcomes includes a large number of specific criminal justice-dependent variables that belong to specific research topics at different levels. (All concepts are summarized in Appendix for easy reference.)

## Actors and Their Cultures

### Relationism and Individualism

Relationism and individualism are basic concepts of the theory. They are defined as personality traits of an actor. A relationist personality trait exhibits an intrinsic need and a strong desire for relations with others, putting high importance on emotionally warm and harmonious relationships with family, friends, and community. An individualist personality trait exhibits needs and desires for independence, self-centeredness, self-interest, and a tendency toward remoteness from others.

These personality traits are formed through the interactions and reinforcements between an inheritable predisposition to relationism and relationist or individualist culture, particularly during early childhood development and socialization. Ample research on personality traits has demonstrated the importance of biopsychosocial predispositions and socialization in forming personality (Matsumoto & Juang, 2004; Triandis & Suh, 2002).

Setting personality traits as the exogenous variables broadens the range of fundamental concepts explaining human actions, enhances potentials to explain wider ranges of justice outcomes and to arrive at a more general theory, and addresses questions that go beyond the conventional narrower focus of criminal justice research.

Personality is a central concept in psychology; the literature involving it is vast. Despite numerous definitions, it can be generally understood as mental organization of a human being (Skinner, 1945; Warren & Carmichael, 1930, p. 333), or an individual’s pattern of psychological processes arising from motives, feelings, thoughts, and other major areas of psychological function (Mayer, 2005),

The relationism theory considers both relationist and individualist personality traits as ideal types. A real actor has a mixture of relationist and individualist personality traits. Every person naturally acquires a basic amount of individualism that is rooted in the evolution of the human species. Individualism has been a basic assumption for individual actors in most modern thought systems. The definition in this theory captures the essence of the meaning but redefines the concept for theoretical purposes of relationism theory of criminal justice.

## Relationist and Individualist Populations

A relationist population is defined here in this theory as an aggregation of relationist personality actors. Likewise, an individualist population is defined as an aggregation of individualist personality actors. Relationist populations have demands and preferences different from those of individualistic populations, reflected by their respective cultures. These demands and preferences motivate cultural thoughts, actions, and justice outcomes to meet these demands and preferences.

## Relationist and Individualist Cultures

### Relationist Culture

The culture of relationist actors consists of their values, norms, and thought patterns. The central value is relations, a preference that stresses the importance of maintaining relations. More specific values include preferences for order, morality, attachment, honor, and harmony. These values establish a moral order for a relationist population. Order is upheld to maintain peaceful relations in the population; morality consists of the norms and standards for right and wrong; norms are mostly not formal, but permeate the population and facilitate maintaining relationships. Attachment is a motivating force in the culture. Honor has high priority, placed on respect and reputation in relations; honor can often be preferable to materialistic gains. Pursuit of harmony or conflict avoidance is a value maintaining relations. Relationist culture also contains a holistic thought pattern, which is the tendency to perceive objects in groups and stressing that the essence of the matter lies more in the whole than in the parts. Relationist culture values nurture and reinforces relationist personality traits. Relationist culture reflects the continuity of relationist cultural tradition. The concept of culture is consistent with the conventional literature but redefined for the theory of relationism.

### Individualist Culture

Individualist culture values independence, personal interests, personal materialistic achievements, competition, individual freedom, personal rights, and an analytical thinking pattern. This culture tradition was expressed most forcefully in the writings of classical philosophers such as Hobbes (1651), Locke (2008), and Rousseau (1950, 1992). Individualist culture nurtures individualist personality traits through interacting with individualist personalities and reinforcing them.

Almost all social science disciplines have studies or theories that touch upon the concept of culture. The classic conceptual contrast is individualistic versus collectivistic culture. Philosophers, anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists, economists, and psychologists have made many contributions to understanding the individualism-collectivism constructs.

Individualism is a classic concept. A large amount of literature exists in multiple literatures and disciplines on individualism, for example, in sociology (e.g., Durkheim, 1964; Lukes, 2006; Parsons, 1949a; Riesman et al., 1961; Rousseau, 1950), psychology (Burge, 1986; Hofstede, 1980; Schwartz, 1994; Triandis, 1988; Waterman, 1984), philosophy (Beck, 2002; Bell, 1979; Durkheim, 1898/1973; Infantino, 2014), law and economics

(Ahdieh, 2011; Ellickson, 1998), anthropology (Kluckhohn, 1956; Mead, 1967; Redfield, 1956), religious studies (Siedentop, 2014), demography (Kohn, 1969; Triandis, 2009), and ecology (Berry, 1976; Gaines Jr et al., 1997; Gleason, 1926).

Collectivism has also been debated extensively in various disciplines, for example, philosophy (Hofstede, 1991, p. 165; Kymlicka, 1989; Taylor, 1985; Triandis et al., 1990), sociology (Etzioni, 1988; Ho & Chiu, 1994; Parsons, 1949b; Riesman et al., 1961), psychology (Billings, 1989; Hofstede, 1980; Hui, 1984; Jackson et al., 2006; Marin & Triandis, 1985; Triandis, 1988), history studies (Perkin, 1977; Ward, 1955), and anthropology (Gross & Raynor, 1985; Hsu, 1983; Hui, 1984; Hui, 1988; Mead, 1967; Redfield, 1956). Importantly, Gudykunst and San Antonio (1993) pointed out that the concept of “collectivism” (zentaishugi) has connotations suggesting dictatorial political systems.

This paper proposes a new concept of “relationism culture,” which is based on relationist personality traits. The central emphasis of relationist culture is “relations” between individuals, who are motivated by their personality traits to seek emotionally warm and harmonious relationships with family, friends, and community. Relationism differs from collectivism and is a more elemental concept. The difference is recognized by the Asian classic philosophers Confucius (551–479 BC) and Mencius (372–289 BC). Their doctrines view the world from a perspective on interpersonal relations (ren lun, human relations) that includes five primary interpersonal relationships, namely, ruler and subject, father and son, husband and wife, brother and brother, and friend and friend relations<sup>1</sup>. Relations are seen as a basis for collectivism, but relationist culture does not have the same meaning as collectivism. Collectivism does not necessarily reflect the same patterns and properties that relationist culture reflects. Collectivism also has an implication of totalitarianism, which would misrepresent the effect the idea of relationist culture intends to reflect.

## Concepts of Justice

The concept of justice is a classical topic involved in a vast number of literatures across many disciplines. The discussion of the concept of justice goes back to Plato. (2006); in the Republic, he treats justice as an overarching virtue of both individuals and societies, so that almost every issue he (or we) would regard as ethical comes in under the notion of justice (Plato., 2006). In the dogmatic traditions in law, a typical assumption is a believe that there is a universal ideal of justice, despite the circumstance that each scholar approaches various aspects of the concept of justice somewhat differently (e.g., Plato., 2006; Rawls, 1971; Sandel, 1982). However, scholars have recently also proposed that the concept of justice varies with cultures and contexts (Ake, 1975; Berman, 1987; Chen et al., 1998; He et al., 2004; Hui et al., 1991; Laub et al., 2011; Leung & Iwawaki, 1988; Leung & Morris, 2001; Liu, 2011; Murphy-Berman et al., 1984; Nagel, 2017; Sama & Papamarcos, 2000; Sandel, 1998, p. 3).

The relationism theory of criminal justice considers that different concepts of justice are formed for different actors within different cultural contexts. Concepts and definitions of justice vary for different populations and cultures. Taking a new approach, the relationism

<sup>1</sup> See the *Analects* of Confucius (*Lun Yu* “论语”) written by Confucius’ followers recording his sayings and acts, retrieved from <https://lunyu.5000yan.com/>. We acknowledge that this list of interpersonal relationships by Confucius is considered sexist under current thinking. The following relationships are missing: mother-daughter; mother-son; brother-sister; sister-sister.

theory analyzes and defines a pair of contrasting ideal types: relationist concepts of justice versus individualist concepts of justice. On average, a more individualist concept of justice is observed in Western cultures, and a more relationist concept of justice is observed in Eastern or Asian cultures. The different concepts of justice reflect the respective demands of populations composed of relationist and individualist personality traits. In the theory, the relationist concept of justice and individualist concept of justice are ideal types that separately influence various justice outcomes. In observable reality, the concept of justice is a mixture of relationist and individualist concepts of justice within any actor and across actors. Each relationist or individualist concept of justice is influenced by relationist and individualist cultures, respectively.

The paired concepts of justice reveal the underlying paired causal processes and are key to understanding and explaining justice outcomes. Each concept of justice is manifested in a range of justice issues and conditions constituting dimensions of the concept of justice. These dimensions together explain specific justice outcomes at the system, institutional, and individual levels for given research questions. The definition for each concept will give the for a given outcome, some dimensions of the concept of justice are more closely relevant and direct, and suggest more observable measurements and hypotheses.

### **Relationist Concept of Justice**

The relationist concept of justice reflects a cultural focus on relations. Justice is to realize relationist cultural values, and the concept of justice is relation-centered. Justice should achieve a holistic goal of lasting harmonious relations with peace and order, following the morality of the relationist population (XXXX, 2014a).

A central value in the relationist concept of justice is truth. The concept considers that justice must be based on truth, which is knowable. Pursuit of truth with a holistic consideration of various pieces of information to reach truth should not be restricted by formality and overly strict procedures.

The relationist concept of justice identifies with conditions or manifestations like resuming harmonious relations, preferring informal processes, and seeking substantive understanding of all facts above importance of procedures. It stresses the educational functions of punishment, demonstrates an emphasis on rehabilitation of offenders, and values overall positive justice outcomes such as low recidivism rather than processes (Liu, 2016). A primary proposition of the relationism theory of justice is that a relationist concept of justice leads to relationist elements of justice outcomes.

### **Individualist Concept of Justice**

The individualist concept of justice reflects a cultural focus on individuals, more specifically, on the rights of suspects and offenders. This concept of justice emphasizes protecting offenders' rights throughout the justice process over other considerations. Only when rights are fully protected is the determination of guilt and punishment considered deserved and accurate. The individualist concept of justice is reflected most forcefully in Western due process laws, particularly the U.S. Bill of Rights and related rights for suspects and offenders, such as the evidence rule and the rule against double jeopardy. There is a strong emphasis on strictly following formal procedures in truth finding, implying a philosophical inclination towards agnosticism with respect to truth and facts; thus, formality in

procedures is a source of legitimacy (Liu, 2017b). Similarly, in the British system, procedural justice is viewed as central by A. V. Dicey and others (Marshall, 1977).

Individualist justice is sourced from cultural ideas best expressed in classic Western jurisprudential writings (Durkheim, 2005; Kant, 1956), particularly the classical philosophers such as Hobbes (1651), Locke (2008), and Rousseau (1950, 1992), as well as the modern work of John Rawls (1971). A primary proposition of the relationism theory of justice is that an individualist concept of justice is the source of individualist components of justice outcomes.

There are two other essential dimensions in the concept of justice: concepts of crime and concepts of the victim.

## Concepts of Crime

### The Relationist Concept of Crime

Crime is generally defined as acts that violate criminal law. Going beyond this simple definition, the relationist concept of crime stresses the harm crime brings to relationships. While crime directly harms victims, it also does long-term harm to relationships and collectives.

The members of relationist populations tend to conform to authorities and government. They tend to consider that a collective, such as clan, community, authority, or government, is responsible and should exercise power for maintaining and managing order, morality, and relations in the population and dealing with crimes. The legitimacy of a collective or government comes from its responsibility to oversee the welfare of the relationist population, not sourced from individuals. The moral order of a collective or government does not derive from individuals. Punishment of crime stresses the long-term objective of resuming order and relations, thus stressing educating and rehabilitating offenders and strengthening the moral of collectives.

### Individualist Concept of Crime

The individualist concept of crime is defined as actions by individuals that violate state criminal law, which is supposed to reflect the interests of individuals contracted with the government. In Western thought, individuals are the logical starting point; they give up some of their rights through “social contracts” (Locke, 2008; Rousseau, 1950) for the greater good. Therefore, the state’s power comes from individuals and the concept of crime is an individualist concept.

## Concepts of Victim

### Relationist Concept of Victim

Conventionally, a victim is defined as a person who has suffered physical or emotional harm, property damage, or economic loss because of a crime. The relationist concept of victim goes beyond the standard concept of a victim to stress the relations damaged by the crime. The concept of the victim involves the others in those relations, such as families and communities, but the focus is on the damaged relations among the members.

A large literature of victimology and victims' rights movements addresses the lack of attention to victims in the conventional Western justice systems. The essential focus is on the rights of the victims and compensation to the victims. The relationist concept of victim moves this attention from the victims and their rights to the relations harmed by a crime and restoration of these relations in achieving justice (Liu, 2012, 2017b). Consistent with the ideas of restorative justice, the relationist concept of justice stresses the restoration from harm done to the victim and the objective of the resumption of the relations but furthermore stresses restoration of relations as the central dimension to achieve justice (Liu, 2017b).

### **Individualist Concept of the Victim**

In the offender-centered individualist concept of justice, the primary parties involved are the state and the suspect/offender. The victim is defined conventionally as a person who has suffered physical or emotional harm, property damage, or economic loss because of a crime. Compared with offenders, there is no due process of rights protection for victims. When there is a role for the victims in criminal justice processes, they are largely marginalized and not central.

Relationist versus individualistic concepts of crime and victims more specifically highlight the differences as a dimension of the concept of justice.

### **Justice Outcomes**

The term justice outcomes refers to specific results produced by criminal justice processes in response to crime at different levels. It also includes dependent variables that are associated with other independent variables or factors. Criminal justice research studies various aspects and phenomena related to criminal justice. However, relationism theory in this paper limits its focus to a narrower set of justice results: the response to crimes at different levels and not all criminal justice-related phenomena. Justice outcomes are the concrete variations for modeling and explanation, reflecting specific research questions to be answered.

As stated before, different from existing specific criminal justice theories, the relationism theory is to explain a range of multiple justice outcomes at various levels, thus achieving generalizability across such outcomes. A primary feature of the justice outcomes in relationism theory is its multi-level structure, which promotes multilevel explanations of a dependent variable at one level to be explained by explanatory variables across levels.

Another main feature of the justice outcomes in relationism theory is the theory's highly enlarged scope across multidisciplinary boundaries to study broader justice-related topics for populations beyond typical criminal justice institutions, such as the general population of citizens, to answer broader justice-related questions with a broader interdisciplinary view.

The central characteristic of justice outcomes is that they are a mixture with a relationist and individualist component separately produced by the respective processes. A combination of relationist and individualist processes together produces the mixed outcome.

## Modeling Outcomes

Since a real justice outcome is a mixture of relationist and individualist components, the guiding approach to model a justice outcome is to recognize that relationist components of a justice outcome are actions or realizations of a relationist concept of justice. Similarly, the individualist components of a justice outcome are actions or realization of an individualist concept of justice indicated by its various dimensions.

In contrast with the conventional monotonic paradigm and modeling approach, relationism theory within the comparison paradigm considers that the monotonic paradigm and its modeling approach is only a special case of the comparison paradigm, it misses the comparative mechanism in causal process for mixed justice results, only reflecting a simplified monotonic average effect of independent variables.

The new modeling approach hypothesizes both the effects of relationist and individualist concepts of justice on outcomes, shedding new light on the nature of justice outcomes at any level in an empirical examination of them. Only when one component in the paired process is insignificant or can be ignored, the comparison paradigm reduces to a conventional monotonic model. The often-seen situation is when the data come from a highly individualistic context (such as some US context), the relationist component is insignificant and can be omitted, and the comparative modeling will be reduced to monotonic conventional modeling. In sum, the relationism theory adds to the existing conventional monotonic models a new paired causal influence to highlight the comparative insights, beyond known various factors that influence the justice outcomes.

At the criminal justice system level, justice outcomes are laws and policies, as well as system characteristics or properties. At the institutional level, they are policies and regulations, programs, and actions carrying out the programs. At the individual level, they are actions by justice professionals or attitudes toward justice and related phenomena by citizens.

## System-Level Outcome Examples

To analyze a legal system, for example, the overall nature of the system and its laws, we can recognize that some laws are more a reflection of the relationist values and focuses, while others are more a reflection of individualist demands of the general population. For example, due process laws can be understood as containing mostly individualist components and thus be hypothesized largely as a justice outcome of the individualist concept of justice. Victims' rights laws could be understood as containing mostly relationist components and thus be hypothesized largely as a justice outcome produced by the relationist concept of justice.

To analyze a particular law, relationism theory points out that a justice outcome is generally a mixed result of relationist and individualist components. When the nature or weight of relationism versus individualism is not clear-cut, face validity for either does not hold, and an explorative analysis using both relationist and individualist concepts of justice as predictors would reveal the relative weight of elements and structure. The respective effects estimated would suggest a useful understanding of the law in terms of the nature and sources of relationism and individualism.

Under a large cross-cultural or international scope, relationism theory shows special strength and provides ample potential to be applied. Current comparative law and justice



literature tends to focus only on revealing and describing the differences of justice systems and laws, organizations, and practices across cultures. The contribution of relationism theory is to provide a new perspective to explain these differences in terms of relationism versus individualism. Studies in Asian Criminology have provided many analyses to show relationist components of justice systems and laws in the Eastern context as compared with justice systems in the Western context (Liu, 2009, 2014b, 2016, 2017b, 2021b, 2022).

### **Institutional-Level Justice Outcome Examples**

Institutional-level justice outcomes include behaviors, policies, and other properties of justice institutions, such as police, courts, and corrections. Applications of the relationism theory would be to add measures that reflect relationist and individualist components to existing research in understanding the nature of institutional behavior.

A general approach is to add paired hypotheses to an existing model. Relationist components of an important independent variable and individualist components of that independent variable may be identified to produce their separate effects on a mixed justice outcome of organizations, policies, or behaviors; the comparative weight of effects from relationist versus individualist components will be discovered to shed light on the understanding of the comparative reality of the process, which most earlier research has overlooked.

For example, police culture has been analyzed within the dominant monotonic paradigm as a singular variable. Research encounters difficulty in deciding a clear-cut nature of culture. The relationism theory within the comparison paradigm entails analyzing police culture into relationist versus individualist components to suggest paired hypotheses for their separate effect on a mixed justice outcome of police policy and behavior. The larger effect size of relationist versus individualist components will help to discover the general nature of police policy and behavior.

In specific applications of the relationism theory to effects of police culture, specific topics or justice outcomes will suggest more directly relevant components of relationist versus individualist police culture. For example, suppose we would analyze the police clearance rate for domestic violence against women. The police chief or department with a culture of sympathy to women victims would allocate more resources and attention to domestic violence cases. This culture of sympathy for women can be recognized as a relationist component of police culture. The greater influences of the relationism and its effects would predict a higher clearance rate for the cases of domestic violence against women.

Within an international or cross-cultural scope, relationist components will on average be more visible in Eastern countries than Western countries. Many differences in justice phenomena could be due to the level of relationist versus individualist differences.

### **Individual-Level Outcome Examples**

Individual-level outcomes are attitudes and behaviors of criminal justice professionals and citizens; populations include police officers, judges, correction officers, lawyers, social workers, and citizens. Relationism theory's wider scope expands the conventional justice study focus to include interdisciplinary topics. Using personality traits and culture as predictors would result in assessing behavioral or attitudinal dependent variables that conventional criminal justice discussions do not consider central. For example, at individual level, attitudes of citizens toward justice policy would be meaningful for understanding the nature of the justice system and its tendencies in the establishment of laws and regulations.

A study has modeled a justice outcome variable “attitudes toward supporting adopting defective evidence,” for example. It was hypothesized that holders of the individualist concept of justice will tend to disapprove of using defective evidence, due to their higher emphasis on suspects’ rights; while holders of the relationist concept of justice are more likely to allow the use of defective evidence if dismissing the evidence would lead to an offender being freed from criminal punishment, regardless of what the law says (Cui & Jianhong., 2022)

The study analyzed a large survey data from a major city in China. It found that all three indicators of the relationist concept of justice showed positive and statistically significant effects on the dependent variable; all indicators of the individualist concept of justice in the full model showed negative and statistically significant effects on dependent variables, confirming the hypothesis of the theory (Cui & Jianhong., 2022).

## Summary of the Theory

The relationism theory of criminal justice outlined above attempts to build a framework for a highly general theory that overcomes the two substantial difficulties. The theory is constructed to be general across multiple levels of justice outcomes produced by criminal justice processes at system level, institutional level, and individual level. The theory aims to be general within a broad scope of cross-cultural variations. With a set of new concepts and propositions, the theory is built within a new paradigm termed “comparison paradigm.” The theory overcomes the limitation of the conventional “monotonic paradigm” to achieve the objective of high generalizability. The theory explores a uniform explanation that is parsimonious and testable. The new paradigm brings into criminal justice research many new research questions and the potential to derive subtheories that answer more specific questions for specific topics.

Given the space limit, this paper excludes extensive articulations and elaborations of the propositions and further derivation of subtheories and subtopics. It is hoped that the theory provides a new ground to reverse the sparsity of effort for general theory building within the discipline of criminal justice.

## Conclusions and Discussions

The importance of a general theory for a mature discipline has been well established by philosophers of sciences and social sciences (Kuhn, 1996; Seidman, 1992; Wagner, 1992). General theories reveal patterns and knowledge that specific theories with a narrower scope do not reveal. General theories serve to order existing scientific knowledge, guide further research, and control biases that may evolve in specialized research. However, developing a general theory of criminal justice encounters fundamental difficulties. While many specific theories have been developed in criminal justice literature, efforts to develop a general theory have been very sparse, and there has been no published effort of building a general theory over the past one and a half decades.

This paper highlights two crucial difficulties for building a highly general theory of criminal justice: generalizability across multiple justice outcomes and across vast cultural variations among various populations. Within the current “monotonic paradigm,” there appears to be no promise to resolve these difficulties. The history of natural and social sciences suggests that a new paradigm is called for when scientific growth faces immense obstacles. The conventional paradigm cannot address the existing challenges within its stage of “normal science” (Kuhn, 1996). The criminal justice discipline must recognize and address issues within reality that the existing paradigm does not see as centrally important. A new paradigm needs to be constructed to replace the conventional way of perceiving and modeling, with new concepts and new propositions, to bring about significant growth of the discipline. This paper outlines the new paradigm of the “relationism theory of criminal justice” to create, in Kuhn’s words, a new trajectory of puzzle solving.

The new “comparison paradigm” logically contains the current “monotonic paradigm” as a special case. In our “ideal type” discourse, the concepts are constructed in pairs to analytically reflect the mixture in reality of relationism and individualism. Within an ideal type of individualist context, presumably most resembling the US context, we can logically assume that the relationist aspect of the context plays a lesser role or fades away from researchers’ view. The paired concept system constructed in the “comparison paradigm” would be reduced to a singular “monotonic paradigm,” which is usually assumed by the current prevalent research approach in the US and Western contexts generally. When it is justifiable to ignore the relationist side of reality, the adoption of a monotonic paradigm is justified and it has no logical conflict with the “comparison paradigm.”

However, the new “comparison paradigm” is a more general framework, with a special strength to suggest a broader range of questions and a new modeling approach that a conventional monotonic paradigm does not include. The new paradigm overcomes the difficulties that conventional paradigms cannot resolve. The new paradigm can propose new explanations that apply across different levels/institutions and across cultural variations and populations, as represented in the relationism theory of criminal justice.

The new comparison paradigm provides a perspective to see the comparative reality that was previously not highly visible or not central in criminal justice studies. It highlights the comparison aspects of the social reality of crime and justice. Conventional “monotonic paradigms” overlook meaningful comparison between the relationist and individualist sides of reality even within single Western or Eastern context, since even within such contexts, the reality is mixed fundamentally, as several existing Western theories have suggested.

Despite many strengths of the new paradigm and theory, all theories and new endeavors have limitations. The theory’s applicability is limited to the justice phenomena belonging to “response to crimes.” The relationism theory does not aim at explaining all justice phenomena, or all aspects of justice-related questions.

The limitations also include incomplete content in many ways as presented in the outline here. Given the space limit, a fuller articulation on concepts, propositions, and related extensive literature has to be presented elsewhere. The future tasks call for further consolidating the paradigm and the theory and further elaborating concepts and propositions, deriving subtheories, and applying the theory to a broad range of situations and specific topics. It is the hope that the outline of the relationism theory of criminal justice will serve to revive the interest in theory building, to broaden criminal justice questions, and to welcome a new growth of the theoretical work and research in the criminal justice discipline.

## Appendix

**Table 1** Summary of concepts

Concept	Definition
Actors and their cultures	
Relationist personality trait	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A relationist personality trait exhibits needs and desires for relations with others, putting high importance on emotionally warm and harmonious relationships with family, friends, and community</li> </ul>
Individualist personality trait	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An individualist personality trait exhibits needs and desires for independence, self-centeredness, self-interest, and a tendency toward remoteness from others</li> </ul>
Relationist culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The culture of relationist actors consists of their relationist values, norms, and thought patterns. The central value is the importance of maintaining relations. More specific values include preferences for order, morality, attachment, honor, and harmony</li> <li>• Relationist culture also contains a holistic thought pattern, which is the tendency to perceive objects in groups and stress that the essence of matter lies more in the whole than in the parts</li> </ul>
Individualist culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The culture of individualist culture consists of their individualist values, norms, and thought patterns. Central values are independence, personal interests, personal materialistic achievements, competition, individual freedom, personal rights, and an analytical thinking pattern</li> </ul>
Relationist population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A relationist population is defined here in this theory as an aggregation of relationist personality actors</li> </ul>
Individualist population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An individualist population is defined here in this theory as an aggregation of individualist personality actors</li> </ul>
Concept of justice	
Relationist concept of justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The relationist concept of justice reflects a cultural focus on relations. Justice is to realize relationist cultural values, and the concept of justice is relation-centered. Justice should achieve holistic goals of lasting harmonious relations with peace and order, following the morality of the relationist population</li> <li>• A central value in the relationist concept of justice is truth</li> <li>• The relationist concept of justice identifies with conditions or manifestations like resuming harmonious relations, preferring informal processes, and seeking substantive understanding of all facts above importance of procedures</li> </ul>
Individualist concept of justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The individualist concept of justice reflects a cultural focus on individuals, more specifically, on the rights of suspects and offenders. This concept of justice emphasizes protecting offenders' rights throughout the justice process over other considerations. Only when rights are fully protected is the determination of guilt and punishment considered deserved and accurate</li> </ul>
Relationist concept of crime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The relationist concept of crime stresses the harm crime brings to relationships. While crime directly harms victims, it also does long-term harm to relationships and collectives</li> </ul>
Individualist concept of crime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The individualist concept of crime is defined as actions by individuals that violate state criminal law, which is supposed to reflect the interests of individuals contracted with the government</li> </ul>

**Table 1** (continued)

Concept	Definition
Relationist concept of victim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The relationist concept of victim goes beyond the standard concept of a victim to stress the relations damaged by the crime. The concept of the victim involves others in those relations, such as families and communities, but the focus is on the damaged relations among the members</li> </ul>
Individualist concept of the victim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The victim is defined conventionally as a person who has suffered physical or emotional harm, property damage, or economic loss because of a crime</li> </ul>
Justice outcomes	
System-level outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To analyze a legal system, for example, the overall nature of the system and its laws, we can recognize that some laws are more a reflection of relationist values and focuses, while others are more a reflection of individualist demands of the general population</li> <li>• To analyze a particular law, relationism theory points out that a justice outcome is generally a mixed result of relationist and individualist components</li> </ul>
Institutional-level outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institutional-level justice outcomes include behaviors, policies, and other properties of justice institutions, such as police, courts, and corrections</li> </ul>
Individual-level outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual-level outcomes are attitudes and behaviors of criminal justice professionals and citizens; populations including police officers, judges, correction officers, lawyers, social workers, and citizens</li> </ul>

## Declarations

**Competing Interests** The authors declare no competing interests.

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