

Crime Rate Control in the Face of Declining Economic Growth -- From the Perspective of Theory of Western Classical Criminology

Runbing Wu

School of Law, Guangdong University of Finance & Economics, Guangzhou, China.

2024205528@qq.com

Abstract. China's economy has been under attack with declining economic growth as the post-COVID-19 ushered in. In addition, there is a complicated relationship between economic growth and the crime rate. We analyze the specific impact of the decline of economic growth in the future on the crime rate from three perspectives of western classical criminology theories: social stratification and mobility theory, social anomie theory, and control theory. We also discuss measures to control the crime rate in the face of the decline of economic growth, mainly including improving the quality of economic development, refining the social security system, and developing education. We wish to supply some references for crime rate control in China.

Keywords: Decline of economic growth; Crime rate control; Criminology theory.

1. The Decline of Economic Growth from the Perspective of the Western Classical Criminology Theory

1.1 Theory of Social Stratification and Mobility

1.1.1 Background

Social stratification means the differentiation of a given population into hierarchically superposed classes. It is manifested in the existence of upper and lower social layers. [1]Simply put, social stratification is dividing an individual's social status into classes in accordance with a certain standard. Since the 1990s, China has slowed down the growth of social stratification and began to present a tendency of class solidification. In recent years, the social classes have been obvious and the promotion of suffocation has come to light. There are many factors attributed to the solidification of social solidification, such as family values, household registration system, education, interest groups, and so on.[2] In this paper, we focus on the impact of the decline in economic growth on social solidification and enabling mobility.

1.1.2 Social Solidification and Weakening Mobility

There are two main factors of class mobility. First, economic growth. It is of help to increase middle and senior positions so that lower-level personnel have more opportunities to move to higher-level positions. Second, self-upgrade. It means that under the premise of an unchanged position/hierarchy structure, low-level personnel actively strive to promote to the middle and senior level, thus he/she achieve self-upgrade. [3]Under the background of the declining economic growth in the future, it is almost impossible to achieve the class leap through the first way, while the second way of up jumping one's class through efforts will become more and more difficult due to the inequality of educational resources. Once the economic growth drops, the impact of the gap between the rich and the poor on social instability will be constantly highlighted. The existing high wealth gap will also lead to the inequality of educational resources in urban and rural areas. The original "knowledge changes fate" is likely to become "losing at the starting line from the beginning", which will exacerbate the social solidification.

The social solidification and the weakening of mobility will damage social equality and induce social conflicts. Individuals in society are pursuing equality of rights and opportunities. However, social solidification will break the equality of resource distribution, which causes inequality in society.

The final result of class solidification must be the Matthew effect of "the stronger the strong, the weaker the weak". This antagonistic situation will considerably intensify social contradictions, damage social harmony, and even induce social conflicts.[4]

1.2 The Declining Economic Growth from the Perspective of the Social Anomie Theory

1.2.1 Social Anomie Theory

Durkheim is an outstanding sociologist in France. He is the first to put forward the social anomie theory based on social facts coupled with the profound analysis of crime by sociological methods. When society changes rapidly, the crime rate and suicide rate will increase dramatically. The reason is that individuals would inappropriately satisfy their growing desires, that is, committing crimes or committing suicide[5] because individual desires are no longer restricted by social norms and social supervision.

After Durkheim, Merton also proposes the social anomie theory from the perspective of functionalism. He believes that the reason for the social anomie lies in the inconsistency between the goal and the means to achieve it, and crime is the product of social system imbalance.[6] Where an individual could not achieve his goal by presumed means stress and strain, on which his deviant behavior would appear.

1.2.2 Decline in Economic Growth and Social Anomie

Durkheim proposed that people have infinite desires and they will not be satisfied by gaining them but will be stimulated to have more needs which generate new desires.[7] Therefore, self-restraint alone could not maintain social stability. Only when the individual desires are refrained by the intervention of social supervision mechanisms such as moral consciousness, religion, public opinion, and so on can society function normally. Under the normal social order, the social supervision mechanism keeps a good running state, personal desires are effectively restrained, and there are vague boundaries of desires. However, when an external factor breaks the normal state, for example, during the economic growth decline studied in this paper, the social norms will change, the standard of right and wrong in society will become blurred, and the role of social supervision will be greatly weakened.

On the one hand, when the economic growth decreases, people cannot realize their existing expectations and needs which will lead to extensive egoism. Alternatively, the expanding individual desires will not be realized through the original means. Before the outbreak of COVID-19, China's GDP growth was 6.1% in 2019, which shows a promising economy accompanied by great expectations for the future. In 2020, affected by COVID-19, the GDP growth was only 2.3%, and the reasonable expectation was not realized. As COVID-19 had a deleterious effect on a large number of enterprises and individuals such as shut down and bankruptcy and unemployment. There was a huge gap between the ideal and reality, and there was a disconnection between the goal and the realization of the goal.

In recent years, due to the impact of COVID-19, the development of major industries has been sluggish, and many self-employed enterprises have been facing practical problems such as increased production costs and reduced consumer customers. When the order of the social market economy is chaotic and the original values of money are broken, enterprises often make anomie behaviors to maintain their survival and gain profits. For example, reducing the production cost by producing counterfeit and shoddy commodities, arbitrarily changing the production date to defraud consumers, illegally adding toxic raw materials to increase the shelf life of food, etc., all kinds of illegal and criminal acts emerge in endlessly.[8]

1.3 Control Theory

1.3.1 Background

Social control was first put forward by E. A. Ross, one of the founders of American sociology whose representatives are Walter C. Reckless, Albert Reiss, Travis Hirschi, and others. Different from the conventional theory, the control theory focuses on "Why don't we do it (commit crimes)". Hirschi

pointed out in his book *Causes of Delinquency*: “we are all animals, and thus all naturally capable of committing criminal acts.” The control theorists believe that people do not do it because there are various external and internal restraining forces that hinder their deviant behaviors, while people do it because there are various external and internal driving forces behind deviant behaviors. Ultimately, whether individuals commit crimes or not depends mainly on which forces are more powerful.[9] Control theory classified the factors that control individuals from deviant behavior into self-control and social control. It mainly depends on self-discipline, high recognition of society, and good morality to enhance self-control.[10]

According to Arthur Billy, the reasons for weakening individual self-control mainly include genetic and acquired physical defects, mental illness, etc., while strengthening social control mainly refers to using various means such as morality, religion and law to restrain and adjust individual behaviors and maintain social order.[11] The factors that weaken social control mainly include: economic downturn, population mobility, changes in customs and habits, control of public opinion, flawed education, family and neighborhood conflicts, etc.[12]

1.3.2 Decline in Economic Growth and Weakening Control

The decline in economic growth will lead to various social problems and the weakening of external control and internal control. From the perspective of external control, during the decline of economic growth, the social economy will encounter the following typical vicious circle pattern. Manufacturers' excessive expectation of market demand will prompt them to continuously expand production, resulting in industrial overproduction and inflation. However, consumers' insufficient purchasing power will lead to continuous overstock, resulting in an increasing stock and a shrinking industry. Consequently, enterprises will start to lay off a large number of employees, which means a decreasing social employment rate and a rising unemployed population, adding more pressure on social security departments. And as residents' purchasing power decrease because of currency devaluation, commodity production will shrink further and the layoffs will be intensified. Without external intervention, this social problem will keep on repeating itself.

From the foregoing, we know that under the control theory, if the deviant driving force is greater than the restraining force, the individual will choose to commit a crime. When the social problems mentioned above occur, people's dissatisfaction with the society will continue to accumulate, their sense of identity with the original laws and morals will be greatly weakened, and they will gradually break away from the control of the original social order. When the quantitative change reaches a certain level, the qualitative change occurs, the existing control force can no longer resist the external pressure and internal desire, the social regulation and control system fails, individual deviant behaviors appear in large numbers, and the crime rate keeps rising.

In addition, there are two main factors that affect internal control. One is congenital inheritance, the other is acquired physical defects, mental illness, etc. The innate factors have little relation with social economy, so they are not discussed in this essay. However, the frequent occurrence of the above-mentioned social problems will lead to the high incidence of individual mental illness, and negative emotions such as nervousness, anxiety and fear will hang over each individual, thus reducing their internal control.

2. Specific Crime Rate Control Measures at the Stage of Economic Growth Decline

2.1 Crime Rate Control Measures from the Perspective of Social Stratification and Mobility Theory

2.1.1 Unblock the Channels for the Masses to Express their Interest Demand and Ease the Solidification of Social Strata

From the perspective of social stratification and mobility theory, the key to controlling crime rate lies in reducing social conflicts and smoothing the channel for the upward development of the lower

strata. Class solidification is the product of social development to a certain stage, and it is an inevitable social phenomenon, impossible to be eliminated completely. The author believes that class solidification can be gradually alleviated by constructing a smooth channel for group interest demand and an effective mechanism for resolving conflicts.[13] At the stage of declining economic growth, all kinds of people's livelihood issues are constantly emerging, and the voice of dissatisfaction among the masses is gradually increasing. Without an effective feedback and solution mechanism, a divergence between interest groups may occur, resulting in more intense social conflicts and deviant behaviors that are illegal and criminal. Therefore, in order to control the crime rate and maintain social stability, the government should pay more attention to people's situation and opinions, open channels for people to appeal for their interests, build a more effective mechanism for resolving conflicts, adjusting interest distribution, and solve the difficulties of people's livelihood practically.

2.1.2 Solidly Promote Common Prosperity and Emphasize Fair Social Distribution

The widening gap between the rich and the poor will further aggravate class solidification, especially in the post-epidemic era, when a large number of small enterprises and self-employed people go bankrupt due to the difficulty of capital turnover, and large enterprises gradually occupy a monopoly position in a certain industry. At this time, the gap between the rich and the poor is more obvious, and social conflicts are constantly intensifying. In the period of declining economic growth in the future, the gap between the rich and the poor will become more prominent. Without timely intervention, the "core-type" social structure will gradually take shape. And it is impossible for market economy to spontaneously adjust distribution problems properly

To fundamentally solve the wealth gap, we mainly rely on government policy support. Therefore, we should continue to take economic construction as the center, vigorously develop the economy, improve social productivity, promote common prosperity, consolidate the existing achievements in poverty alleviation, set up different anti-poverty measures for different groups of people, and use economic means to alleviate class solidification.[14]

While making the cake bigger and better, we should give full consideration to efficiency and fairness in sharing the cake. We should strive to increase the proportion of residents' income in national income distribution, increase the proportion of labor income in the initial distribution, establish a sound tax regulation system, and emphasize social distribution fairness. In the second distribution, resources should be preferentially distributed to the vulnerable groups, infrastructure construction should be vigorously developed, a complete social security system should be established, the basic life of individuals should be guaranteed, and people's happiness in society should be enhanced.[15]

2.1.3 Improve Education and Promote the Fair Distribution of Educational Resources

As mentioned earlier, there are two main factors that affect class mobility, one is the objective increase of middle and senior positions, and the other is the subjective personal effort. During economic growth decline, one is unlikely to elevate his social class relying on the first factor, so the second factor will become a main approach. Promoting the fair and reasonable distribution of educational resources can not only balance class interests and reduce class conflicts, but also reduce deviant behaviors by improving the quality of the whole people. According to the research of sociologists, the longer people receive education in adolescence, the higher their social status in adulthood, and education is closely related to the labor market.[16] In recent years, with the decline of economic growth and the class solidification, the distribution of educational resources has also gradually become unbalanced, which is mainly manifested in the fact that urban teenagers enjoy more educational resources, have a high level of education, while rural teenagers enjoy less educational resources and have a low level of education. And the social phenomenon that it is difficult for children from a poor family to become rich is common. In addition, the education level of teenagers is also linked to the crime rate, in an inverse relationship. This requires the government not only to continue to strengthen the implementation of the nine-year compulsory education policy and improve the basic education level, but also to fully balance the educational resources between urban and rural area, so

as to create as equal a class jump condition as possible for teenagers in the whole society. Only by generally improving teenage education can the juvenile crime rate be reduced.

2.2 Crime Rate Control Measures from the Perspective of Social Anomie Theory

2.2.1 Re-establish Correct Personal Evaluation Standards

Today, with the prevalence of socialist market economy, utilitarianism and other values may have stimulated the individual's material desires and boosted economy growth, but they have also distorted people's view towards wealth. Many individuals have abandoned the traditional values of "a gentleman loves money but takes it wisely", instead regarded money as the ultimate goal of life. The amount of wealth becomes the only criteria to evaluate people's social status. The wealthier one gets, the higher his social status. This utilitarian thought will urge individuals to unlimited desires and eventually lead to anomie.[17] Judging from actual cases, all kinds of anomie existing in the society such as fraud, theft, smuggling, corruption, robbery, and murder, are mostly related to people's unreasonable pursuit of money. Money cannot be unduly worshipped as the criteria for everything or even to undermine morality. Individual desire for wealth cannot expand indefinitely. In a period of declining economic growth, a more reasonable and proper criterion is needed to guide individual development.

2.2.2 Strengthen Social Security and Provide Ways for Individuals to Realize Reasonable Expectations

After investigation, Durkheim found that the suicide rate will be greatly increased in the period of sudden social change. He attributed the occurrence of such "suicides in turbulence" to the loss of individual confidence in life.[18] Under the original social order, individuals have balanced between their desires and the means of satisfaction. Individuals have reasonable expectations from the society, and it also provide reasonable ways for individuals to realize these expectations. However, the sudden change in society has broken the existing rules, people no longer have the confidence to stabilize their current way of living. In our opinion, this theory can also be applied to explain the increase of crime rate during the period of lowered economic growth. After the economic growth rate drops, there will be an unbalanced state between the desire and the means for satisfaction, which directly leads to the individual's disappointment in life, and therefore the individual will fall into infinite anxiety and pain. In the period of lax social supervision, committing crime has become a quick way of emotional outlet and desire rebalance. On the one hand, an improved social security system can absorb the social cost of economic growth, weaken the social turmoil caused by cyclical economic fluctuations, improve the reproduction conditions of the labor force and the quality of human resources, and thus promote the coordinated development of economy and society; On the other hand, it can also enhance individual confidence in future life, and reduce crimes committed under turbulence of life.

2.2.3 Government Taking the Leading Role in Ideology and Culture

The theory of social anomie holds that the reason for the significant increase in the crime rate lies in the weakening of social supervision. In the period of declining economic growth, public opinions are diverse, social morality is weakened, and the original social norms are broken. These are all manifestations of weakening social supervision. We believe that the crime rate can be controlled from the source, and anomie can be reduced by strengthening social supervision. In the period of declining economic growth, the government should tackle difficulties in two fronts with determination, striving to strengthen social and cultural construction, solving all kinds of erroneous ideological issues in the process of economic development in time, grasping the correct ideology, and vigorously developing socialist core values.[19] Focusing on China's specific situation, the government should carrying forward Chinese traditional culture, guide individuals to build correct common socialist ideals with Chinese characteristics and world view, outlook on life and values, vigorously advocate positive value orientation, taking the leading role in ideology and culture, strengthen social supervision, guide the social transformation and reduce individual anomie.[20]

2.3 Crime rate control measures from the perspective of control theory

2.3.1 Build a Law-based Society and Speed up the Process of Popularizing the Law

According to theory of control, establishing an effective social system with public confidence of religion, morality, and law, can enhance social control, thus reduce individual deviant behavior. Focusing on the specific situation of our country, in the period of declining economic growth, we should improve the legal system, speed up the process of popularizing law, strengthen social control and build a law-based country. First of all, the rule of law can effectively control selfish desire and curb corruption. The phenomenon of accepting taking bribes in society will damage the confidence and loyalty of individuals to the society and the country, thus reducing social control.[21] Secondly, we should vigorously promote the popularization of law knowledge and reduce the number of people who are legally illiterate. The significance of the popularization is not only for national literacy but more importantly, to help legal illiterates to build a new way of life, develop law compliance of all the people, and reduce deviant behaviors. Especially in a period of declining economic growth, individual control is weakened due to frequent social problems. While promoting elementary education, the state should also actively popularize the law knowledge among teenagers to enhance their internal control and make them aware of the high costs and consequences of crime.[22]

2.3.2 Strengthen Family Rducation and Promote the Building of Family Tradition

In the period of declining economic growth, some workers will suffer from economic impact. Undoubtedly, when the backbone of a family is faced with problems such as remuneration reduction or unemployment, the living standard of the whole family will be greatly reduced, and children's education and daily life will also be affected. A nation's hopes are pinned on its youth, and strong youth will make China strong. Especially in a period of declining economic growth, it is more important to cultivate young talents for society.

In addition, Hirsch pointed out that in attachment relationships, the attachment of teenagers to their parents is the most important, which affects teenagers' internalization of social rules and codes of conduct. [23] Attachment refers to an individual's emotional connection with other individuals or groups. When an individual becomes attached to other individuals or groups, he or she will consider the feelings of the attached before engaging in certain activity. Generally speaking, this emotional connection is an important factor to restrain individual crime. When an individual wants to commit a crime, this emotion will be transformed into internal containment, and the individual will consider the influence of his behavior on the attachment relationship, thus preventing him from committing criminal activities. [24] Therefore, the function of family education must be brought into play, and parents should guide teenagers to the correct development and reduce deviant behaviors. On the one hand, in modern families, parents should pay attention to cultivating and guiding their children to correct morality and legal awareness, enhance their sense of social identity and responsibility, and enhance the external control carried out on children. On the other hand, parents should also guide their children to form healthy social values, let them grow up healthily, hence strengthen their internal control.

3. Conclusion

Given the continuous impact of COVID-19 in China, the decline of the economic growth will persist for a long time. This paper analyzed the impact on crime rate of economy growth decline in the future, and also put forward measures to control crime rate under such situation based on theories such as social stratification and mobility, social anomie theory, control theory. We must pay attention to improving the quality of economic growth, improving various systems, reducing and eliminating the problems such as excessive income disparities, high unemployment rate, high poverty rate, unbalanced regional economic development, disordered population flow, etc. during economic development so as to prevent and reduce crime. Specific measures to the purpose include speeding up economic construction, reducing the income disparity, and improving the social security system.

At the same time, we should also pay attention to the changes in social control during economic change.

References

- [1] Malcolm Waters, *Modern Sociological Theory* [M]. Huaxia Publishing House 2000: 343.
- [2] Zhang Chuanzhou, *On the Trend of Class Solidification in Chinese Society and its Governance* [J]. NORTHWEST MINZU UNIVERSITY (Philosophy and Social Science) 2019(1):185-186.
- [3] Yangliu, *A Challenge Should Be Actively Responded: Social Class Solidification* [J]. *Theoretical Exploration* 2012(5):50.
- [4] Zhang Chuanzhou, *On the Trend of Class Solidification in Chinese Society and its Governance* [J]. NORTHWEST MINZU UNIVERSITY (Philosophy and Social Science) 2019(1):186.
- [5] Han Xiaolian, Wang Guangjiao, *Social Anomie Theory—Brief Analysis on Durkheim and Merton's Criminology Ideology* [J]. *Legal and Economy* 2008(1):129.
- [6] Han Xiaolian, Wang Guangjiao, *Social Anomie Theory—Brief Analysis on Durkheim and Merton's Criminology Ideology* [J]. *Legal and Economy* 2008(1):130.
- [7] Han Xiaolian, Wang Guangjiao, *Social Anomie Theory—Brief Analysis on Durkheim and Merton's Criminology Ideology* [J]. *Legal and Economy* 2008(1):129.
- [8] Zhu Xiongjun, *A Perspective of Attribution Analysis on Social Pathology in China: Social Anomie* [J]. *Issues on Juvenile Crimes and Delinquency* 2012(2):15.
- [9] Tian Hecheng, *A Research on Relations Between Economic Development and Crime* [D]. Northwest A&F University 2009:20-21.
- [10] Tian Hecheng, *A Research on Relations Between Economic Development and Crime* [D]. Northwest A&F University 2009:21.
- [11] Xu Weihua, *Law and Social Control- - an Interpretation on Pound's Social Control Theory* [J], *Legal System and Society* 2008(04):87-88.
- [12] Wu Zongxian, *Western Criminology* [J], Law Press China 2006:291.
- [13] Deng Chao, *An Analysis on the Solidification of Social Class in China* [J], Master Dissertation of South China University of Technology 2011:34-35.
- [14] Deng Chao, *An Analysis on the Solidification of Social Class in China* [M], Master Dissertation of South China University of Technology 2011:39.
- [15] Zhang Jing, *A Study on Six Relations Affecting the Rising Crime Rate in China* [J], *Journal of People's Public Security University of China (Social Science Edition)* 2011(05):8.
- [16] Qian Minghui, *Does Education Really Contribute to upward Social Mobility: An Analysis of the relationship between Education and Social stratification* [J], *Social Science Front* 2004(04):198.
- [17] Zhu Xiongjun, *A Perspective of Attribution Analysis on Social Pathology in China: Social Anomie* [J]. *Issues on Juvenile Crimes and Delinquency* 2012(2): 15.
- [18] Yang Jing, *Crime Governance -- Classic theory of Criminology and Research on Crime in China* [J], Xiamen University Press 2013:41.
- [19] Chen Youfang, *Study on the Relationship between Economic Development and Crime Growth* [J], *Journals of Chinese People's Public Security University* 1997(01): 75.
- [20] Xia Yuzhen, *On the Rules' Confusing and Conditioning in Chinese Society in the period of Social Transformation* [J], *Journal of Central China Normal University (Humanities and Social Sciences)* 2002(05): 29.
- [21] Hao Yaowu, *On Rosco Pound's Social Control Through Law and Its Spirit* [J], *JOURNAL OF DALIAN UNIVERSITY* 2001(01):28.
- [22] Ling Bin, *Dissemination of General Knowledge of Law, Ignorance of Law and Rule of Law* [J], *Law and Social Development* 2004(02):136.
- [23] Zhang Du, *Research on Hirschi's Social Control Theory* [D], Xiangtan University 2013:29.
- [24] Yang Jing, *Crime Governance -- Classic theory of Criminology and Research on Crime in China* [J], Xiamen University Press 2013:31.