

## DOCTORAL THESIS

### Parental control and child attribution: the case of Chinese adolescents

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Parental Control and Child Attribution:  
The Case of Chinese Adolescents

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Doctor of Philosophy

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## Abstract

This thesis proposes a cognitive-moderating model of parental control. The cognitive factors in this model are children's intent attributions for parental control. This model was motivated by the social-information-processing (SIP) model that these intent attributions can either magnify or attenuate the impacts, whether positive or negative, of parental psychological and behavioral control on child outcomes. Two general types of intent attributions have been identified; namely, attributions to parent-centered interests and attributions to child-centered interests. In three studies, a scale measuring the four parent intent attributions; namely, parental control for parents' benefits, parental control for parents' power assertion, parental control for children's benefits, parental control for parents' unconditional love, was developed. The first two belong to the type of parent-centered interests, and last two to the type of child-centered interests. The scale has good psychometric properties, including indicators of reliability and validity. In the subsequent study of model-testing, the two attributions to parent-centered interests were combined, and the two attributions to child-centered interests were combined. In a large-scale survey of 1973 school children (senior primary and junior secondary) in Guangdong, mainland China, predictions based on the SIP model were supported on the dependent variables of psychological and behavioral adjustments, which include children's use of constructive cognitive strategies, and prosocial and delinquent behaviors. For the dependent variables of competence, autonomy, and relatedness, which self-determination theory singles out as primary psychological needs, the predictions based on the SIP model were not supported. Interestingly, findings on this latter group of dependent variables are indeed opposite to the direction predicted by the SIP model. To account for these unexpected findings, I propose a readiness hypothesis. My

readiness hypothesis argues those who hold attribution to child-centered interests are more ready to accept any parental control even though the control may have detrimental impacts on their competency, and sense of autonomy and relatedness. Those who attribute parental control to parent-centered interests are more likely to resist parental control. The impacts of parental control on these three psychological needs are therefore avoided. There are two major theoretical implications. First, the impacts of parental control on the primary psychological needs highlighted by self-determination theory are not malleable. Second, the roles that intent attributions play are not uniform.

Keywords: Parental control, Psychological control, Behavioral control, Intent attribution, Social-information-processing model

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