

The University of Hong Kong  
Department of Psychology

*Departmental Seminar*

**Chinese Parenting Paradox: A Cross-Cultural Comparison of  
Maternal Controlling Behaviors**

Date: August 27, 2012 (Monday)  
Time: 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon  
Venue: Room 813, 8/F Building C, Centennial Campus, HKU  
Speaker: Ms. Kitty Ka Yee Tsang  
MPhil Candidate  
Department of Psychology  
The University of Hong Kong

Past research has indicated that controlling parenting practices may impede children's learning motivation, while autonomy-supportive practices may facilitate learning outcomes (Grolnick, Ryan, & Deci, 1991). However, these findings may not be applicable to all cultures. Chinese mothers appear to be controlling (Chao & Tseng, 2002) but Chinese children outperform their Western counterparts in international comparisons (PISA, 2009).

The present study attempted to address this paradox. 120 Hong Kong Chinese 5<sup>th</sup> graders and 120 American 5<sup>th</sup> graders were asked to complete a questionnaire that included measures of children's feelings towards low vs. high levels of maternal controlling behaviors, mother-child relatedness, children's internalization and learning motivation. The results showed that the same maternal controlling behaviors elicited different feelings in children with different cultural backgrounds (Chinese vs. American) and different levels of mother-child relatedness (Low vs. High). More specifically, Chinese children perceived the high level of maternal controlling behaviors as less manipulative than American children and in turn reported more motivated in learning. Regardless of culture, children who reported high relatedness with mothers perceived the behaviors as less manipulative than those reported low relatedness. In addition, internalization was found to mediate the relation between mother-child relatedness and children's learning motivation in both cultures.

The findings reveal cultural differences in children's feelings towards the same maternal controlling behaviors. Chinese mothers' behaviors that are manipulative in the eyes' of the Westerner may not be perceived as such by the Chinese. Children's perceptions, mother-child relatedness and the universal psychological mechanism internalization are important to understand Chinese Parenting Paradox.