

# Does living at boarding preschools in China effect security of attachment?

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## Introduction

- Boarding schools for children two years of age and older are popular in China among affluent parents (Brassard & Chen, 2005).
- The roots of this phenomenon go to Chinese history and culture. Communist States encouraged parents to leave their children in the care of specialists by promulgating the view that these individuals could care for children as well or better than their parents could (Lis, 2000).
- “Elite schools” claim to provide a much higher quality academic and interpersonal environment than parents who work extremely long hours and have little time to interact with their children. In 2012, the number of private schools in China increased to 181,251, of which 124,638 were kindergartens with total enrollment of 18.5 millions of children. Most of those schools are boarding schools.
- Attachment research suggests that institutional rearing at such a young age is highly likely, if not certain, to result in highly insecure attachment styles, reflecting the perceived dangerousness of a setting where there is no one person who can be counted upon for protection (Crittenden, 2000).
- All studies on attachment conducted in China confirm both the universality hypothesis (by successfully classifying all children into one of the attachment categories), and the normativity hypothesis (by showing that the majority of children are securely attached) (Van IJZendoorn & Sagi-Schwartz, 2008).
- Sagi & Van Ijzendoorn in their study in Israel (1994) compared attachment in kibbutzim between children sleeping with their parents every night and children having communal sleeping arrangement. More than half of the infants in communal sleeping arrangements developed insecure attachment relationships with their mothers, and only a fifth of home-based infants were found to be insecure.

## Hypothesis

There will be more children insecurely attached to their mothers within those living in boarding preschools and going home once a week than within the children from the same preschools going home every day.

## Participants

10 preschools will participate in the study. In total, 60 children will be recruited (at least two children from each class: one who goes home every day and one who stays at school during the week and goes home only for a weekend). The age range of participants will be from 40 to 70 months.

## Measures

### Independent variables

Sleeping at home  
vs  
Staying at the  
kindergarten

### Control variables

Maternal  
sensitivity,  
Demographics

### Dependent variable

Security of  
attachment

### *Attachment measure*

The attachment-Q-sort, applicable for one-to-five-year olds (AQS; DeMulder et al., 2000; van IJzendoorn et al., 2004; Waters, 1995).

### *Sensitivity measure*

Maternal behavior Q-sort manual (Pederson & Moran 1995).

### *Family demographics*

Self-formulated family environment questionnaire

## Contribution of the study

- This study is important in further demonstrating the usefulness of attachment theory in understanding child development in different cultural context.
- This study is also important for informing Chinese parents about the consequences of living in boarding preschools.