Bonding to Bamboo: A Social Control Explanation of Chinese Crime

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Abstract
The primary purpose of this study was to ascertain whether an expanded version of Hirschi’s social bond, which included several peer related measures, could serve as a partial explanation of general, property, and violent crime, among Chinese university students. Utilizing data randomly collected from two major Chinese institutions, in two geographically disparate regions of Mainland China, we included traditional measures of parental and school attachment, school commitment, and belief. However, in an attempt to begin discussion regarding the impact of different types of peer variables in an international setting, we also included conventional peer attachment, delinquent peer attachment, number of religious peers, and peer commitment. We also included a number of demographic and behavioral controls which included age, gender, residential location, smoking, sexual activity, and alcohol consumption. Results indicated that parental and school attachment predicted a lower likelihood of involvement in general crime, while delinquent peer attachment predicted higher levels.

Keywords: Social Bond, Social Control, China, Crime, Delinquency.

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Introduction

This paper serves a number of important functions. First, while social bond theory has been tested frequently, most of the research focuses on data collected in the United States and to a lesser extent, Europe (Yun, Kim, & Kwon, 2016). As a result, far less attention has been focused on whether the theory can explain crime in other cultures. Underscoring this contention is the fact that Hirschi (2004) himself has stated that the social bond and self-control are synonymous. Since Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) asserted that self-control could explain all crime, across all geographic boundaries, it remains to be seen whether or not the two perspectives are the same. This is especially true since scholarship has not yet resolved the debate about whether self-control and the bond are in fact, the same thing, capable of explaining the same types of behavior (Brown & Jennings, 2014; Cretacci, 2009a; Cretacci, 2009b; Piquero & Bouffard, 2007). While we concede that scholars are investigating the applicability of the theory cross-culturally, we would also argue that much work remains to be done.

To specifically address this matter, we utilize data collected from respondents in the People’s Republic of China (Mainland) for the dual purposes of addressing the lack of international research on the ability of the social bond to explain crime and to address the lack of attention paid to the functioning of peers within the bond. We also argue that this study is important because China remains a location where research on social bond and self-control theories is still uncommon (Chan & Chu, 2013; Chan & Wong, 2015; Cretacci, Ding, & Rivera, 2010; Cretacci, Rivera, & Ding, 2009; Li et al., 2013) and where empirical research in general has not yet reached the level of prominence that it has in the West. As a result, even limited supportive findings can serve as a springboard for future research and discussion and shed light on the functioning of the bond in China.

A fair amount of research has provided insight concerning the functioning of the parenting, school, and commitment arenas of the bond in international studies (Cheung, Liu, & Lee, 2005) but less attention has been paid to the impact of peer measures and what types of peer measures could be tested within the framework of the bond. The current study makes an additional important contribution to the international social bond literature by not only specifying several aspects of the bond but by also including several peer attachment and activity measures that other studies do not. These particular additions to the bond will allow for additional insight into Hirschi’s (1969) contention that various ties to peers, regardless of whether they are involved in delinquency, will result in lower levels of crime. In sum, we propose that based on data collected on Mainland China, an expanded social bond including various types of peer measures will be a significant predictor of general, property, and violent crime.

Literature Review

In 1969, Travis Hirschi published his seminal *Causes of Delinquency* and with that, provided a model of control theory that borrowed heavily from such luminaries as Emile Durkheim (1915; 1951), Ivan F. Nye (1958), and Walter Reckless (1961). Essentially, Hirschi (1969) posited that people were similarly motivated to engage in delinquency and that what prevented them from doing so was their cumulative relationships and activities related to other conventional people and institutions. So, the caveat is that as long as the adolescent is close to non-delinquent others and societal organizations, he or she is less likely to engage in delinquency and crime. The manifestation of these relationships took the form of a general social bond, which was comprised of four different but related arenas
that precluded the adolescent from engaging in various forms of destructive and criminal behavior. Essentially, Hirschi argued that individual attachment to others, desire for goals (commitment), participation in activities that were related to those goals (involvement) and acceptance of societal rules (belief), would constrain delinquency.

In addition, Hirschi (1969) further stated that these important conventional ties to other people and institutions were also reflected in the actual aspirations, beliefs, and behavior of adolescents. By way of illustration, young people that are emotionally close to their parents, teachers, and friends are more likely to desire conventional educational attainment, a rewarding vocation, and material wealth (Han, Kim, & Lee, 2016; Hwang & Akers, 2007). Moreover, those same individuals would also pursue those goals by studying hard in school, working hard to find employment related to their future goals, and planning accomplishments related to future material success. All the while, these same people would harbor conventional attitudes towards society, for the most part believing that “the rules of life” were fair and should be followed (Yu & Gamble, 2010).

The commitment arena of the bond addresses the desire of the individual to pursue law abiding goals (Özbay & Özcan, 2008) and with it, a perceived stake in conformity. In other words, aspiring to conventional goals constrained delinquency because the individual did not want to disrupt the eventual attainment of a “good life” (Özbay & Özcan, 2006; Wadsworth, 2000). Relatedly, Hirschi (1969) argued that performing well in school and desiring a good occupation were indicative of a healthy commitment to conformity. However, Hirschi also recognized that some adolescents focus on adulthood before they should. Put another way, some adolescents pursue “adult status” before completing school. Such pursuits included engaging in sexual activity and dating, smoking, and consuming alcohol. Hirschi felt that pursuing such activities too soon would potentially negate the impact of conventional commitment. Involvement, the next element of the bond, is somewhat related to commitment.

However, Hirschi did also say that a delinquent could be heavily involved in conventional life. In fact, he noted that delinquents might only be so engaged for short periods of time each year and otherwise be engaged in perfectly conventional activity. So, in effect, it was the type of structured activity that an adolescent was involved in that served as a constraint on behavior (Alston, Harley, & Lenhoff, 1995). Essentially, Hirschi argued that in order for involvement to serve its purpose, the activities engaged in by the adolescent had to be related to the aspired to goals. In other words, if adolescents desire to work in noble occupations, then they need to be taking part in activities that will help them attain those goals. So, for Hirschi, involvement centered upon completing homework, studying, and engaging in activities that prepared an individual for work-related success. The third element of the bond is belief.

Conventional belief essentially states that the more adolescents feel that the rules of society are fair, the less likely they are to break the law (Entner-Wright et al., 1999). However, what is also interesting is that Hirschi (1969) asserts that individuals that have definitions favorable to law violation also lack intimate relationships or in the language of the theory, low levels of conventional attachment. Put another way, the delinquent is not close to his parents, does not like school, is unconcerned about the opinions of his teachers, and does not feel that rules are fair or that obeying the law is important. As a result, an adolescent in this position is more likely to engage in crime. The final arena that the bond operates in is that of attachment.
Specifically, social bond theory asserts that adolescents are affectionately tied to other important people in their lives and those people are most likely to be their parents, teachers, and peers (Chuang et al., 2009). While Hirschi asserted that each of the attachments was important, he argued that parents were the most influential. In fact, Hirschi also said that in order for parental attachment to be effective, the parent had to have a “psychological presence” with the adolescent. That is, the closer that an adolescent was to his or her parents, the more likely that individual would think about how their behavior would impact their parents’ feelings for them. Additionally, adolescents that had warm feelings for their teachers and others that worked in the educational environment (Han, Kim, & Ma, 2015) would develop a respect for their views and would therefore, refrain from delinquency. The final attachment was to peers and warm feelings for them would serve as insulation from crime (Chriss, 2007). However, Hirschi also made an unusual statement regarding the influence of peers on potential delinquency and that serves as a major point of departure for this study.

More exactly, Hirschi argued that while adolescents would certainly have intimate relationships with their peers, he stated that the behavior of the friend, the recipient of the affectionate feelings, was irrelevant. In other words, for purposes of peer attachment, Hirschi argued that the warm feelings that an adolescent had for a peer could be for a conventional or delinquent friend. Hirschi was saying that the strong, conventional feelings, even for a delinquent friend, would be enough to constrain the behavior of the adolescent expressing those feelings. In other words, the conventional friend would not be impacted by the delinquent friend’s behavior and would not be susceptible to learning deviance from the delinquent peer.

While scholarship has focused on the influence of deviant peers within the context of differential association or social learning theory (Cooper et al., 2009), very little international research has been conducted on how different peer ties operate within the context of the social bond. The most common peer variable is one that measures feelings for the respondent’s friends (Chan & Wong, 2015). Moreover, since these other perspectives argue that crime is learned among “intimate personal groups”, it makes sense to also argue that “peer commitment” or activities engaged in with peers, could be important within the arenas of the bond. This is underscored by the assertion by Hirschi that commitment to goals and involvement in activities are important arenas of functioning for the bond. Unfortunately, very little international scholarship exists that takes these matters into consideration, especially with regard to peer activities and different types of peers. Moreover, given that China is such a large country, with a great deal of influence in modern society, it is surprising that more research has not utilized Chinese data to bridge these important gaps. With these things in mind, we now turn to providing an overview of the international tests of social bond theory and the impact that peers specifically has had within those tests.

While interest in social bond theory remains robust (Intravia, Jones, & Piquero, 2012; Ngo & Davis, 2014; Popovici et al., 2014; Schaefer et al., 2015), it is still the case that most of the research on the perspective as well as Gottfredson and Hirschi’s self-control theory, is based on North American or European data (Özbay & Özcanc, 2006; Yun, Kim, & Kwon, 2016). Underscoring this point is that only a small number of studies have been conducted in the Asian context (Yun et al., 2016, p. 1190). Having said that, much of the research that has been conducted in the international setting, reports a variety of findings
(Chan & Wong, 2015; Chan & Chui, 2013; Nidjam-Jones et al., 2015; Selfhout, Branje, & Meeus, 2008). Important contributions have addressed the impact of the bond on problem internet use (Li et al., 2013), networking relationships among offenders (Smångs, 2010), academic dishonesty (Kobayashi & Fukushima, 2012), assault (Wong, 2005), adolescent runaway behavior (Cheung, Liu, & Lee, 2005) and truancy (Veenstra et al., 2010).

While it may seem that international investigations neglect to explain some of the more traditional types of crime, the literature has addressed these matters as well. More precisely, international tests of the perspective have included those that address public disturbance and assault (Özbay & Öcsan, 2006; Polakowski, 1994), criminal convictions (Entner-Wright et al., 2001), serious crime (Entner-Wright et al., 1999) and alcohol and tobacco use (Hwang & Akers, 1999). What is lacking in this area are tests that focus specifically on the impact and functioning of various types of peer variables within the context of the bond. However, irrespective of what type of crime is under study, what is clear in terms of the examination of the peer construct is that a number of international studies do include some measure of peer attachment, although the impact of such measures is by no means consistent.

For example, utilizing measures of respect of friends’ opinions and wanting to be like their friends, Chui and Chan (2012) uncovered very little impact of peer attachment, save for late adolescent females, on theft. In subsequent studies on school bullying in Hong Kong, both Chan and Chui (2013) and Chan and Wong (2015) found no effect for peer attachment on school bullying. Interestingly, Wade and Brannigan (1998) reported that not only did peer attachment not reduce delinquency but it actually reinforced risky choices, especially when family attachment was weak. Additionally, some scholars have also discovered that the findings surrounding peer variables supported more the concepts of differential association theory regarding delinquency than they did for social control. More specifically, they found that strong peer attachment fostered both adolescent deviance and acted as a primogenitor to delinquency in their friends (Selfhout et al., 2007; Smångs, 2010; Wong, 2005).

Disappointing findings, such as minimal support or those that are more indicative of other perspectives, for this indicator have also been reported for relatively minor offenses, such as academic cheating (Kobayashi & Fukushima, 2012), truancy (Nakhaie, Silverman, & LaGrange, 2000; Veenstra et al., 2010) and adolescent runaway behavior (Cheung, Liu, & Lee, 2005). Further, problem internet use (PIU), which is not a crime or even delinquent, has also been the focus of investigation, with peer attachment results only minimally and indirectly, supportive of the social bond (Li et al., 2013). However, in one of the bright spots in the literature, Nidjam-Jones et al. (2014), in an examination of adult, mental health patients, found that peer and friend attachments were vital to reintegration into normal patterns of life outside the hospital.

Given the inconsistent nature of these results, peer commitment is an area for potential exploration. It is also surprising that studies have not included some type of peer activity measures. Typically, international research testing the bond tends to focus on a simple measure of peer attachment by itself and out of context. Since Hirschi claimed that it was the attachment to the peer that was important and not the type of peer, it would be important to test whether or not delinquent peer attachment (Costello, 2000; Drapela, 2005; Durkin et al., 2009; Feldmeyer & Cui, 2015) was important in explaining behavior.
in addition to the traditional affectional peer indicator. Moreover, Hirschi also neglected to add some form of religious tie to the bond. Interestingly, consensus has now been reached that religious salience is an important constraint on behavior. So, in terms of the peer context, a study presenting a measure of religious friends (Adamczyk, 2009; Hoffman, 2014) might also shed some light on whether or not this important peer type was relevant to constraining delinquency and crime.

Given these shortcomings, this study makes important contributions to the literature. First, it is an international test and as such, it allows investigators to comment on the utility of social control theory to explain behavior in foreign samples. This is especially important since Hirschi now argues that the social bond is actually synonymous with self-control. Therefore, if self-control can explain all crime in all locations, it makes sense to argue for international tests of the perspective. Second, tests of the theory utilizing Chinese data are scarce and given China’s size and influence, we believe that conducting research using Chinese data furthers the understanding of this important culture. Third, since most studies testing social bond theory do not provide indicators of important peer constructs, we argue that this study serves to more clearly explain the impact of peers within the context of the social bond.

Methodology

Data Collection and Sample

In terms of the survey, one of the authors developed and oversaw changes and corrections to the instrument as it was translated into Chinese and back into English to ensure the most plausible version of the terms and concepts for the respondents. Once the survey was finalized, one of the authors asked a group of roughly 20–30 Chinese students at each of the host universities to provide feedback. The questions, clarifications, modifications, and deletions that were provided to one of the host contacts by the “pre-test” groups of students were forwarded to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) author. Further revision and development occurred and final approval was obtained both from the host university contacts and the U.S. institutional IRB.

Following the IRB approval, the IRB author and Chinese institutional contacts collaborated further to ensure that the survey was posted to a university site that students could easily access via any type of electronic device (laptop, desktop, phone, i-Pad etc.). This particular methodology not only allowed for the students to anonymously access the survey and respond to it electronically but it also facilitated the creation of a portable data file that one of the U.S. authors could access. This process resulted in the collection of roughly 700 cases, approximately 580 cases from University A and 120 responses from University B.

Each of the two universities is located in a large Chinese city in different parts of the country. In addition, each institution also has a law school which offers law degrees from the Baccalaureate to the Doctoral level. Both institutions also offer traditional majors, including the hard and social sciences, engineering, education and liberal arts. Finally, both institutions have about 30,000 students each, with more than one campus to accommodate those enrollees. The academic calendar in the Far East differs from that which is common in the West. The major “break” for Chinese students is Chinese New Year, which falls somewhere between mid-January to mid-February, depending on the Lunar Calendar. The break runs the equivalent of one month, so it can last until mid-February or mid-March.
The demographic characteristics of the sample do not necessarily mirror what one might expect to find in a Western university. For example, approximately 80% of the respondents indicated that they were enrolled as students at University A, while about 20% offered that they were students at University B. In addition, roughly 67% of the sample is female and 33% male. The age range that appears within the sample is approximately 17-28, with a few as high as 39. However, this range may account for the fact that both institutions offer the Ph.D degree. Interestingly, about 50% of the sample hails from urban residential areas but given the size of China and its population, that is not surprising. Additionally, roughly 15% of the sample identifies with the suburban areas of China, with the remainder (approximately 35%), referring to themselves as rural residents. In terms of income, about 25% of the sample comes from a family that earns 20,000 yuan or less per year but about 50% of the sample comes from a family background that reports more than 95,000 yuan during the same time period.

Due in part to the fact that there was a limited time to collect data, the sample is essentially a convenience sample of native, Chinese university students from two mainland Chinese institutions. Students were presented with an opportunity in their classes by their Chinese professors and by the visiting scholar from the U.S., to complete the survey. The students were made aware of the fact that they could complete a survey at their leisure on whatever device they chose to utilize, in whatever environment they chose to complete it in. Potential respondents were also informed of their ability to not finish a survey once they started or to not participate at all, without penalty or benefit. An informed consent form was also provided for the students to read as a part of the questionnaire.

Since the research question under study was whether or not the social bond would constrain various forms of deviant behavior, controlling for various peer measures, we developed the questionnaire with a desire to construct measures of parental, peer and school attachments and commitments. In keeping with Hirschi’s original model, we also included a measure a belief. However, as an additional variant from earlier models and unlike most tests of Hirschi’s theory, we employ conventional and delinquent peer attachment and number of religious friends. We do so here in an acknowledgement of subsequent research following Hirschi’s construction of the original model that clearly indicates that both delinquent and conventional peer attachments influence criminality (Barnes et al., 2007). We also include several demographic and behavioral controls which include: gender, age, residential location of the respondents and whether or not the respondents have ever consumed alcohol, smoked cigarettes, or engaged in sex. The various measures and their coding follows below:

**Dependent Variables**

Three separate indices of criminality were included in this study: general, property, and violent crime. The traditional bond items, the peer measures, and the controls, were all regressed on each of the dependent variables separately. This particular method resulted in three distinct and unique equations. All of the items utilized to construct the dependent measures began with, “In the past year…” and were coded, “0” = “never”, “1” = “1 or 2 times”, “2” = “3 or 4 times”, “3” = “5 or more times”. The final dependent variable measures were simple summed indices and the alphas are included for each.

The items used to construct “general crime” (α = .93), were: “How often did you paint on someone else’s or public property without permission?” , “How often did you
deliberately damage property that didn’t belong to you?” , “How often did you take something from a store without paying for it?” , “How often did you get into a serious physical fight?” , “How often did you hurt someone enough to need bandages or medical care?” , “How often did you drive a car without its owner’s permission?” , “How often did you steal something worth more than 1,000 Yuan?” , “How often did you go into a house or building to steal something?” , “How often did you use or threaten to use a weapon to get something?” , “How often did you steal something worth less than 1,000 Yuan?” and “How often were you loud, rowdy, or unruly in a public place?

Both the property and violent crime indices were subscales of the general crime measure. The items used for “property crime” (α = .89), were: “How often did you paint on someone else’s or public property without permission?” , “How often did you deliberately damage property that didn’t belong to you?” , “How often did you take something from a store without paying for it?” , “How often did you steal something worth more than 1,000 Yuan?” , “How often did you steal something worth less than 1,000 Yuan?” , “How often did you drive a car without its owner’s permission?” and “How often did you go into a house or building to steal something?” Finally, the items used to construct the “violent crime” (α = .86) index, were: “How often did you get into a serious physical fight?” , “How often did you hurt someone enough to need bandages or medical care?” and “How often did you use or threaten to use a weapon to get something?”

Independent Variables

There are essentially four types of attachment created for this study (parental, school, peer, and delinquent peer), but since the research question deals directly with the impacts of peer variables within the context of the bond, those variables (peer and delinquent peer attachment) will be presented separately. Both parental and school attachment indicators are reflections of the feelings that the respondents have towards their parents, their university, and their professors. Once again, these measures were combined into summed indices and their alphas are included. The items utilized for the “parental attachment” (α = .85) index are: “Most of the time, your parents are warm and loving to you?” , “You are satisfied with the way your parents and you communicate with each other?” and “Overall, you are satisfied with your relationship with your parents?” These items are coded: “1” = “strongly disagree”, “2” = “disagree”, “3” = “neither agree not disagree”, “4” = “agree”, “5” = “strongly agree”. “How much do you think your parents care about you?” and “How close do you feel to your parents?” are coded: “1” = “not at all”, “2” = “very little”, “3” = “somewhat”, “4” = “quite a bit”, “5” = “very much”. The “school attachment” (α = .79), items include: “I feel like I am part of this school?” , “You are happy at this school?” , “I feel close to people at school?” , “Teachers at your school treat students fairly?” and “How much do you feel that your teachers care about you?” These items are also coded: “1” = strongly disagree, “2” = disagree, “3” = neither agree not disagree, “4” = agree, “5” = strongly agree.

We include school commitment and although peer commitment is not something that Hirschi discussed, it certainly fits within the context of the bond. In addition, plenty of scholarship indicates that activities with one’s peers can also lead to learning both delinquent and non-delinquent behavior. School commitment (α = .77), is measured by
summing the following three items into an index: “What grade did you most recently receive in a Math class?” “What grade did you most recently receive in a Science class?” and “What grade did you most recently receive in a History class?” The items are each coded: “1” = “Did not take it”, “2” = “F [below 60]”, “3” = “D [60-69]”, “4” = “C [70 – 79]”, “5” = “B [80-89]”, “6” = “A [90 – 100]”.

Seven summed items comprise peer commitment (α = .72) and each references the 30 days prior to when the respondent is being asked the question. The items are: “Have you gone shopping with one of your friends?” “Have you played a sport with one of your friends?” “Have you talked about life with one of your friends?” “Have you gone to a movie with one of your friends?” “Have you discussed a problem with one of your friends?” “Have you talked about grades with one of your friends?” and “Have you worked on a school project with one of your friends?” Each of the items is coded: “0” = “0”, “1” = “1 time”, “2” = “2 times”, “3” = “3 times”, “4” = “4 times”, “5” = “5 or more times”. Specifically, we include conventional peer attachment, the number of religious friends, and delinquent peer attachment. We include the number of religious friends because it is an additional measure of attachment that could be influential but is left out of normal tests of the perspective. More specifically, if crime is partially learned and religious people engage in lower amounts of criminality, then people with religious friends should also be engaging in lower amounts of criminality. Finally, there is a significant body of literature pointing to the fact that delinquent peers have a profound influence on criminality (Benda, 1999). We include delinquent peers here to also test for that possibility within the context of the bond, in the Chinese setting.

Conventional “peer attachment” is simply a single item that asks, “How much do you feel that your friends care about you?” and it is coded: “1” = “not at all”, “2” = “very little”, “3” = “somewhat”, “4” = “quite a bit”, “5” = “very much”. Similarly, the number of religious friends that a respondent has is exactly that, a single item that asks how many religious friends the respondent has and it is coded: “0” = “0 friends”, “1” = “1 friend”, “2” = “2 friends”, “3” = “3 friends”, “4” = “4 friends”, “5” = “5+ friends”. “Delinquent peer attachment” (α = .70) is an index of two summed items that asks how many of the respondent’s three best friends smoke cigarettes or drink alcohol. Both of the items utilized are coded: “0” = “0”, “1” = “1”, “2” = “2”, “3” = “3”.

In keeping with the original formulation of the bond, the questionnaire included one item that asked to what extent respondents agreed or disagreed with the following statement, “You feel that the rules you have to follow in life are fair.” The item was coded: “1” = “strongly disagree”, “2” = “disagree”, “3” = “neither agree not disagree”, “4” = “agree”, “5” = “strongly agree”. We also included a few standard demographic controls. “Age” was a single item that asked, “How old are you?” and respondents were allowed to enter a number corresponding to their age. “Gender” was a single item that asked participants, “What is your gender?” and allowed for a response of “1” = “female” or “2” = “male”. Respondents were also asked, “What type of residential area are you originally from?” with the following coding: “1” = “rural”, “2” = “suburban”, “3” = “urban”. Several behavioral controls were also included in this study. More specifically, respondents were asked whether or not they had ever had sex, smoked cigarettes, or consumed alcohol. Each item was a standard dichotomous variable and coded: “1” = “no” and “2” = “yes”.

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Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the constructs in the model while Table 2 provides their impact in explaining the measures of crime. Due to the dichotomous nature of the crime variables, we estimated three logistic regression models using the bond variables and the controls to predict the odds of engaging in general, property, and violent crime. The exp (b) is an odds ratio that is included for all outcome variables and it indicates that when the independent variable increases by 1, its influence on the dependent variable will vary by the factor of the exp (b). Results at or close to 1 demonstrate that the variable has little or no effect.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

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<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Max</th>
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<td>Gender (2=Female)</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>697</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1.91</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>697</td>
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<tr>
<td>Residential Area</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>697</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>697</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>697</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever Had Sex (2=Yes)</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drink Alcohol (2=Yes)</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>697</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smoke Cigarettes (2=Yes)</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>692</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the first model, predicting general crime, the only bond variables that were statistically significant were parental (.939), school (.932), and delinquent peer attachment (1.146). Specifically, stronger parental and school attachment, were each associated with lower odds of engaging in crime, while stronger attachment to delinquent peers was associated with greater odds of engaging in crime. The model explained about 11% of the variance in general crime.
Table 2. Odds Ratios from Multivariate Logistic Regression Models Predicting General, Property, and Violent Crime

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Model 1: General Crime</th>
<th>Model 2: Property Crime</th>
<th>Model 3: Violent Crime</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parental Attachment</td>
<td>.939**</td>
<td>.952</td>
<td>.878**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Attachment</td>
<td>.932*</td>
<td>.915**</td>
<td>.858*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Attachment</td>
<td>1.038</td>
<td>1.011</td>
<td>.532**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delinquent Peer Attachment</td>
<td>1.146**</td>
<td>1.104</td>
<td>1.471***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number Religious Friends</td>
<td>1.081</td>
<td>1.117*</td>
<td>1.123</td>
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<tr>
<td>School Commitment</td>
<td>1.009</td>
<td>1.023</td>
<td>.980</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peer Commitment</td>
<td>1.010</td>
<td>1.004</td>
<td>1.103***</td>
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<td>General Belief</td>
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<td>.942</td>
<td>1.356</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>1.090</td>
<td>.949</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<td>.909</td>
<td>.964</td>
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<tr>
<td>Residential Area</td>
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<td>.506</td>
<td>1.332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>.955</td>
<td>1.006</td>
<td>.506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>.869</td>
<td>.956</td>
<td>1.332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever Had Sex</td>
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<td>1.214</td>
<td>1.250</td>
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<tr>
<td>Drink Alcohol</td>
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<td>1.511</td>
<td>.699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smoke Cigarettes</td>
<td>1.645</td>
<td>1.134</td>
<td>3.684**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N: 692
Model Chi-Square: 56.312***
Nagelkerke R-Square: .107

* p< .05  ** p< .01  *** p< .001

In the second model, predicting property crime, two bond variables were statistically significant. Specifically, stronger school attachment (.915) was associated with lower odds of engaging in property crime, while having a greater number of religious friends (1.117) was associated with greater odds of engaging in property crime. The model explained about 10% of the variance in property crime.

In the final model, predicting violent crime, five bond variables were statistically significant: attachment to parents (.878), school (.858), and peers (.532); peer commitment (1.103); and attachment to delinquent peers (1.471). Stronger parental, school, and peer attachment were each associated with lower odds of engaging in violence, while stronger peer commitment and attachment to delinquent peers was associated with greater odds of engaging in violence. In terms of control variables, smoking cigarettes (3.684) was also associated with greater odds of engaging in violence. In addition, this model had the highest Nagelkerke R-Square (.38), indicating the bond variables and controls do best at explaining violent crime compared to general or property crime.
Discussion and Conclusion

Generally, there is some evidence that the social bond is potentially useful in explaining crime and delinquency in China. The findings suggest that strong, positive ties on the part of university students for the educational institution and for their teachers could prevent future involvement in various forms of deviance. As a result, programs emphasizing the cohesiveness of the university environment and relationships with professors could be helpful. Such programs might involve student activities designed to foster relationships with other students across campus. Students might also be encouraged to seek out their favorite professors and develop long-lasting, professional relationships with them. Further, initiatives that seek to strengthen relationships between parents and their children may also serve to prevent problematic behavior. Programs stressing the Chinese cultural ties that parents and children have throughout life and the responsibilities that Chinese society places on those relationships, may be of some use in preventing criminality. These results are unsurprising and in keeping with much of the literature regarding the impacts of the social bond. In fact, results for both the school and parental variables were expected and hypothesized by Durkheim.

Interestingly, one area of further possible intervention is with friendship ties. While no significant result was obtained for general or property crime, significance was reached for violence. These results suggest that peers have little influence over certain types of non-violent and property offending with their counterparts but that they may have an impact on violence. So, even though significance was only found for violent crime, some utility can also come from programs that foster positive, law abiding relationships with the people that Chinese university students surround themselves with. It may be that strong, conventional friendship ties create a “barrier” of some sort to violence.

Conversely, peer commitment attained significance for violent crime and delinquent peer attachment reached significance for both violent and general crime. These findings indicate that a potential element of learning may exist for these types of offenses among Chinese university students. Finally, the number of religious friends attained significance but in an unexpected way, for property crime. It may be that since religiosity is still to some extent discouraged in China and in some places still openly repressed, that religious people think of themselves as “offenders” or “criminals” because they run afoul of some societal designation for religious activity. As a result, religious university students in China involved in delinquency may not really be an indicator that religious people in the traditional way of understanding the relationship between religiosity and destructive behavior, are more likely to be delinquent. Further research will need to shed further light on each of these findings.

While these results portray an important contribution to the international literature testing social bond theory, several limitations of this study hamper its overall impact. First, this study utilizes a cross-sectional design. Thus, results should not be interpreted as representing true causation. Second, the sample is small at 700 cases, and the data came from only two universities in two different Chinese cities. Therefore, generalizability of these results is also limited and interpretation of these results should be made with caution. In addition, since the study relied strictly upon self-reported data, social desirability in the responses and under-reporting could have also both been problematic. Future research should address these matters to the extent possible to more clearly report the impact of the social bond on crime in the international context.
References


