

College Students and New Elderly: Two-way Empowerment in Modern Filial Piety Education

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Abstract: In the context of the rapid development of modern society, college students, as the younger generation, no longer merely show traditional respect and care when interacting with the new elderly. The new elderly possess abundant resources in life experience and wisdom, which complement the vitality and innovative characteristics of college students. Through communication and interaction with the new elderly, college students can draw valuable life experience and wisdom from them, helping themselves better adapt to social changes and face challenges. At the same time, college students can provide the new elderly with technical support and professional knowledge, facilitating the elderly's integration with the times. This bidirectional empowerment relationship is not only conducive to inheriting and promoting traditional filial piety culture but also promotes communication and understanding between different age groups, building a more harmonious and inclusive social atmosphere. Therefore, the interactive relationship between college students and the new elderly is not only an evolution of the concept of filial piety but also a new model of intergenerational communication and joint growth, injecting new vitality and momentum into the development of society.

Keywords: College students; New elderly; Filial piety education

Online publication: February 12, 2025

1. Introduction

In the context of the rapid development of today's society and the accelerated process of aging, the interactive relationship between college students and the new elderly has become an important issue worthy of attention. College students, as a group full of vitality, possessing modern knowledge and innovative thinking, and the new elderly, with rich life experience and traditional wisdom, their two-way empowerment bring new opportunities and challenges to modern filial piety education. Fully utilizing the advantages of both sides and constructing an effective filial piety education model is not only related to the inheritance and promotion of traditional culture but also has far-reaching significance for building a harmonious and inclusive social atmosphere and promoting

sustainable social development.

2. The current situation of college students and the new elderly in modern filial piety

In the context of Chinese modernization, the concepts of filial piety among the old, middle-aged, and young generations show similarities and differences. In traditional concepts, filial piety is an important part of Chinese civilization, and respecting the elderly and loving the young is a traditional virtue. However, with the development of modernization, the values and lifestyles of the younger generation have changed, and their understanding of the concept of filial piety has also changed. College students, as representatives of the new generation, pay more attention to personal development and self-realization and have a new interpretation of traditional filial piety.

Table 1. Similarities and differences between traditional Chinese filial piety culture and modern Chinese filial piety culture

	Traditional Chinese filial piety culture	Modern Chinese filial piety culture
Definition	Filial piety is a traditional virtue, that emphasizes respect, care, and support for parents	Filial piety still values respect and obedience to parents, but in modern society, more attention is paid to equality and respect for individual values
Status of parents	Emphasizes the status of parents, and children should wholeheartedly obey their parents' arrangements and guidance	The status of parents is still important, but children pay more attention to equal interaction and joint decision-making with parents
Ways of filial piety	Emphasizes obedience and taking care of parents' daily lives and needs	Children tend to respect their parents' wishes and autonomy more and care about their physical and mental health and quality of life
Social influence	Demonstrates family values and maintains social stability	Demonstrates family values and maintains social stability
Traditional customs	Attaches great importance to ancestor worship and respecting the elderly, emphasizing family order	Focuses on accompanying parents and paying attention to their quality of life and needs.
Advocacy actions	Filial piety is emphasized as a personal and social responsibility, requiring children to repay their parents' nurturing kindness	Filial piety is regarded as an emotional expression and caring action, emphasizing children's care and respect for parents.
Modern challenges	Filial piety may be impacted by the pressure of modern social competition and personal pursuits	Filial piety needs to adapt to the changes in modern values and family relationships to balance personal needs and filial piety toward parents

3. The common ground of college students and the new elderly in modern filial piety

College students and the new elderly are the key to the conflict and integration of filial piety concepts. Through integrating higher education and filial piety education, communication and understanding between different generations can be promoted, guiding the young to better inherit and develop the spirit of filial piety. While receiving modern education, college students can also learn traditional wisdom and values from the elderly, achieving the integration of tradition and modernity. Modern filial piety is not limited to children's obedience to their parents but emphasizes respect, care, and support for all the elderly. It is conducive to forming an elderly-friendly social environment through educational guidance and cultivation.

3.1. A new perspective on filial piety education: The new elderly and college students share common characteristics

With the rise of individualism in the current era, individualism has gradually emerged in Chinese society with the progress of modernization. This has led the new generation to pay more attention to personal rights and self-realization, which may have an impact on traditional filial piety concepts. The filial piety concepts of both the new elderly and college students place more emphasis on equality, autonomy, and respect for individual choices.

Adapting to modern family structures and lifestyles, the family structure in China has changed, including the increase in nuclear families and single-parent families, as well as the increase in the number of elderly people living alone with the development of urbanization and the economy. These changes have an impact on traditional filial piety concepts and behaviors. The filial piety concepts of the new elderly and college students pay more attention to diverse ways and different channels of caring for the elderly, such as accepting “visiting parents regularly” and not relying solely on children for old-age care, which is different from traditional filial piety concepts such as “parents should not be far away when they are alive.”

3.2. The new role of filial piety education: The impact of pairing the new elderly with college students

(1) Affecting the cultivation and intergenerational transmission of modern filial piety emotions

The relationship with parents will be transferred to the filial piety requirements of the new elderly towards their children. For example, if there are many parent-child conflicts in one’s generation, one may pay less attention to the spiritual needs of parents at that time. When one grows old and needs support, one will avoid this in the relationship with children, thus evolving “filial piety” from an authoritative social obligation into sincere emotional feedback from children to parents, strengthening the elderly care in modern filial piety values. Filial piety is not based on parental authority but on the recognition of the emotional bond between parents and children, which helps to eliminate the phenomenon of indifferent filial piety to some extent in terms of morality.

(2) Leading to the diversification of reciprocal filial piety expressions

The new elderly have diverse expressions of reciprocal filial piety based on spontaneous parent-child emotions. The traditional responsibility of the elderly for raising grandchildren is becoming less obvious among the new elderly. The value concept of “living for oneself” is prominent in the new elderly’s perception of intergenerational responsibilities. Respecting and helping children are more reflected in economic assistance and intellectual support rather than devoting personal manpower to family affairs such as helping children take care of children. The expectation of “filial piety” feedback from children is more based on the transmission of family affection and mutual assistance relationships, which will help strengthen the emotional bond among family members and form a harmonious and stable family environment.

4. The value implication of two-way empowerment in modern filial piety education between college students and the new elderly

4.1. Promoting individuality and expanding the education model for respecting and caring for the elderly

Zhai (2019) ^[1] claimed that filial piety is the result of education and weighing of interests, rather than being maintained solely by emotions. Zhu (2019) [2] believes that modern “filial piety” is both a public norm and a

personal virtue. Li (2022) ^[3] discovered the value of innovative inheritance of the traditional Chinese culture of respecting and caring for the elderly based on field research. Yang *et al.* (2024) ^[4] hold that the transformation from traditional filial piety to modern respect and care for the elderly is an adaptation to the times. Through the interaction and cooperation between college students and the new elderly, combined modern knowledge with traditional wisdom can explore a new education model for respecting and caring for the elderly, reconstruct modern filial ethics, explore the development of dual filial piety during the social transformation period, focus on the discussion of the interpersonal relationships of the elderly themselves, develop new elderly care models such as traveling and residing for elderly care, affirm the positive and active mindset of this group of new elderly, meet the diverse educational needs of the elderly, and promote the diversified and personalized development of education for respecting and caring for the elderly.

4.2. Intergenerational integration to promote intergenerational communication and understanding

The concept of “new elderly” was first proposed by the Japanese doctor Hisakazu Hironaka. He initiated the establishment of the Tokyo New Elderly Association in 2000 and launched the New Elderly Movement, considering the “new elderly” to be those over 75 years old who can take care of themselves and continue to work ^[5]. Italian sociologists and relevant institutions believe that the “new elderly” are those aged 60–76 with a rich later life, a young psychological age, and a pursuit of comfortable consumption. The concept of elderly care is a common concern for all countries, and the global concept of elderly care is gradually shifting to emphasizing social responsibility and public services to ensure the well-being and dignity of the elderly. The age definition of “old” in China varies at different times. In ancient China, people were generally considered elderly at the age of fifty, while in modern China, the elderly refers to citizens over 60 years old. The new elderly group in China is mainly composed of those born in the 1960s, and this group is now retiring on a large scale. As the generation that grew up during the reform and opening up, they have an economic foundation, ample retirement time, a broad vision, and rich life experiences. Xu (2022) ^[6] analyzed the group characteristics and intergenerational responsibility cognition of urban new elderly. This group has relatively advanced concepts of respecting and caring for the elderly and possesses an awareness of active aging. Factors such as their physical condition, social participation, interpersonal relationships, and application of technology can all positively enhance the quality of life for the elderly and drive more groups in China to have advanced concepts of respecting and caring for the elderly. The interaction between college students and the new elderly promotes communication and understanding between different generations, breaks the traditional intergenerational barriers, promotes the harmony and integration of an aging society, cultivates the social responsibility and service awareness of college students, and promotes the application and promotion of volunteer services in the field of education.

4.3. Stimulating interest and improving the quality of learning and life for the elderly

The age and substantive constituent elements of the new elderly in foreign countries have commonalities with those in China. Both believe that age is not the fundamental sign, where the key lies in physical health and a young mindset. However, foreign countries emphasize that being able to continue working can be regarded as a new elderly. Different cultures have different understandings and expectations regarding the role and status of the elderly. Cross-cultural comparative studies can help us better understand the needs and values of the elderly in different cultural backgrounds. Due to the influence of factors such as politics, economy, and history, the West has formed family intergenerational relationships different from those in Eastern countries. Children and

parents are independent and equal individuals, and there is no clear regulation that children must support their parents. Elderly care mainly relies on the government and social forces. Therefore, although Western countries do not vigorously advocate the culture of filial piety, based on a systematic family ethics theory, Young *et al.* (2020) believe that filial piety is a spiritual trait and eternal culture that transcends time and space limitations and differences in different cultural concepts and ideas ^[7]. Some scholars believe that education is the foundation in the process of South Korea promoting the return of traditional ethics such as “filial piety” [8]. The differences in the research on filial piety culture between China and Japan are mainly manifested in the different attitudes towards the body and the different perceptions of the concepts of “loyalty and filial piety.” To a certain extent, this has triggered our examination of the new elderly and young college students in China, providing a global perspective for solving the problem of elderly care in the Chinese style. It can provide a more interesting and dynamic learning environment for the elderly, stimulate their enthusiasm and interest in learning, improve the quality of life of the elderly, provide new ideas and models for the development of education for respecting and caring for the elderly and volunteer service undertakings, and promote the further development and growth of these two fields through the interaction and cooperation between college students and the new elderly.

4.4. Main body linkage to cultivate the social responsibility of college students

In contemporary society, cultivating the social responsibility of college students through education for respecting and caring for the elderly is of great significance. Long *et al.* (2018) ^[9] pointed out that filial piety education helps shape the sound personality and correct values of college students, and social responsibility is an important part of it. Zhang *et al.* (2015) ^[10] emphasized that inheriting and promoting the culture of filial piety can enhance the sense of responsibility of college students towards their families and society. Li (2014) ^[11] found that college students who have received systematic filial piety education are more willing to actively participate in social public welfare activities and show a stronger sense of social responsibility. Zhang (2023) ^[12] proposed that the inheritance education of filial piety culture can guide college students to care about others and society and cultivate their spirit of social responsibility. Zhao *et al.* (2022) ^[13] believe that the conscious cultivation of filial piety helps college students unify personal responsibility and social responsibility. Chen *et al.* (2018) [14] also mentioned that effective ways of filial piety education can stimulate the social responsibility of college students and make them actively engage in social services and construction. Through education for respecting and caring for the elderly, college students can deeply understand the connection between family responsibility and social responsibility, thereby effectively cultivating their sense of social responsibility.

5. The optimization path of new elderly and college students empowering modern filial piety education

5.1. Defining the role and responsibility in the concept of filial piety and building a balanced modern filial piety interaction mechanism

- (1) The state should establish and improve the filial piety mechanism and be the promoter of active aging
It should clarify the important guiding role of the state and government in aging governance, create an elderly-friendly social environment, and accumulate the strength of the elderly through “elderly supporting the elderly.”
- (2) Society should integrate the diverse forces of filial piety and be the direct supervisor of the responsibility for old-age care

It should analyze the social welfare responsibilities of social groups and enterprises in the modern context, expand the main providers of old-age care in modern society, and give play to the filial piety forces of multiple subjects in modern society.

- (3) The family should consolidate the foundation of filial piety responsibility and be the main front for solving the problems of aging.

It should encourage the important role of the family in active aging. It should explore the family service model for the elderly in the Chinese context and play the role of the silver economy in family consumption in modern society.

- (4) Citizens should strengthen their awareness of filial piety actions and be the direct implementers of active aging

They should encourage individual mutual assistance to establish a new cultural system in an aging society and call for mutual assistance in old-age care among citizens to solve the problems of a rapidly aging society from point to surface.

- (5) The pattern should break through the dilemma of filial piety and build a new type of filial virtue education

It should break through the dilemma of curbing aging by increasing the fertility rate, focus on the new elderly group to find solutions for old-age care, and promote active aging based on the traditional filial piety atmosphere and family ethical environment.

5.2. Exploring new countermeasures for cultivating filial piety behaviors and forming a modern aging governance system

- (1) Encourage reciprocal old-age care and clarify the division of old-age care responsibilities

It is important to build an elderly-friendly society, highlight the active role of the traditional Chinese family network bond in modern old-age care responsibilities, drive the linkage of individual citizens, family members, and society, and shift from the individual one-way path of managing the family and the country with filial piety to the joint responsibility and co-governance of old-age care in an integrated family and country.

- (2) Explore new standards of filial piety and build an aging cultural system

The normative and guiding role of filial piety policies can be strengthened, breaking through the dilemma of inconsistent filial piety cognition and behavior, building a new filial piety system adapted to an aging society, integrating the Chinese filial piety culture into the process of Chinese modernization, and creating an implementation environment for the national strategy of active aging.

Funding

Humanities and Social Sciences Research of the Ministry of Education of China Project, “Research on the Filial Piety Concepts and Behaviors of New Elderly from the Perspective of Active Aging” (Project No.: 23YJAZH120)

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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