

# *The Influence of Chinese Parenting on Adolescent Pro-social Behavior*

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**Abstract:** Since teenagers tend to behave treasonably in their adolescence, researchers are more likely to focus on their problem behaviors, which neglect their pro-social behavior. However, instead of solving and dealing with the problems they currently faced, it is much more significant to promote the development of pro-social behavior positive in their adolescence. This article reviews previous literature and organizes the influence of pro-social behavior on adolescents through parenting in various scales and concludes mediation and moderation. The main arguments of this paper are: 1) divided parenting into parenting style and parenting behavior and defined pro-social behavior; 2) compared different influences on pro-social behavior by scales of parenting behavior and parenting style in different dimensions; 3) discussed the mediation and moderation between parenting and pro-social behavior. This article finds that positive parenting can greatly benefit adolescents' pro-social behavior, and also inspires researchers to focus more on factors, such as gender differences, single parents, and the system of the whole family, which can influence the development of pro-social behavior by parenting differently.

**Keywords:** parenting, teenager, pro-social behavior

## 1. Introduction

Since the 1930s, hundreds of psychologists have paid attention to parenting style from the perspective of the parent-child relationship [1-3]. Pro-social behavior is one of the hottest topics, which always is regarded as a kind of behavior that individuals formed spontaneously and benefits others and even the whole society, and also can improve the harmonious coexistence of individuals and society [4]. Therefore, the period of adolescents is the essential stage to cultivate pro-social behavior. The family environment, in which parenting is a significant factor, can make a great contribution to the growth of teenagers. Teenagers' perceived parenting style may have an impact on their personality [5]. Parents' traits and demeanor will subtly affect their children's capacity to adapt to society, understand social standards, and recognize the world. The definition of parenting and pro-social behavior, the influence of pro-social behavior on adolescents through parenting on various scales, and the lack of research are all three aspects that this article will discuss in order to effectively promote the research on parenting's influence on teenagers' social behavior. Also, some recommendations are made at the

conclusion of the article to support studies on the link between parenting and pro-social conduct in teenagers.

## **2. Definition of Parenting and Pro-social Behavior**

### **2.1. Definition and Classification of Parenting**

Parenting is a concept that is comparatively complicated and difficult to define. In Western countries, parenting is named differently, including parenting style, parental style, and parenting. Parenting can be defined as particular goal-directed and non-goal-directed responses or behaviors that parents interact with and make their children socialize [6]. These diverse behaviors combine to generate a specific atmosphere or style that surrounds the parent-child relationship [6]. This article classifies parenting as “parenting style” and “parenting behavior.” Parenting is a complete structure consisting of multiple elements and dimensions. The parent style will not be assigned to a specified type during the interaction between parents and their kids. Instead, it is combined with multiple types. As one is comparatively outstanding, it will be categorized as a certain type.

Scholars both domestically and outside tried to categorize parenting style as early as the previous century. The concept of parenting style was originally put forth by Diana Blumberg Baumind in 1967 [7]. After conducting considerable research which was based on two dimensions: emotional attitudes and the requirement and control that parents put on their kids, she separated parenting style into three categories: authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive. Based on the research of Baumind, Eleanor Maccoby and John Martin extended the categories into four parts: authoritative, permissive, authoritarian, and neglectful. In the 1980s, through evaluating young adults’ memories of their parents’ parenting behaviors, Swiss academic Perris and his colleagues created the EMBU (Egna Minne av barndoms Uppfostran), which classified parenting style into rejection, emotional warmth, excessive protection, and subject-favoring. Later, Yue and her fellows revised the Chinese version of EMBU, dividing the father’s parenting style into six types: care, punishment, excessive interference, favoring subject, rejection, and overprotection. Additionally, she separated the mother’s parenting style into 5 categories: care, excessive interference and overprotection, rejection, and favoring subject. Although there exists a huge gap between domestic and outside cultures, parenting style has the characteristics of cross-ethnic consistency [8]. This is research that is suitable for the Chinese environment. However, in response to the inadequacies of the Chinese EMBU scale, Chinese psychologist Jiang and others simplified the scale and created a brief EMBU scale on parenting style. Owing to the impact of the domestic population policy in China, most contemporary families have only one child, therefore, the preference subject was deleted, and the parenting style was grouped into three dimensions: rejection, emotional warmth, and overprotection. There were just a few questions, and the reliability was satisfying. In China, researches on parenting style and prosocial behavior frequently employs the EMBU scale. This article prefers the classification of s-EMBU whose division is clear and easy to understand and also widely used in China, it will be illustrated in detail.

### **2.2. Definition of Pro-social Behavior**

At the beginning of the 1970s, American scholar Wispe first proposes the word-pro-social behavior in the Positive Form Examination of Social Behavior, which defines pro-social behavior as beneficial and friendly behavior to society and others, such as self-sacrifice, donation, and assistance. These behaviors have versatile forms and contexts, but the basic goal, benefiting others and society, is the same. With the increasing attention to pro-social behavior, different interests and perspectives of scholars, the definition of pro-social behavior becomes larger and has various focuses. Kou Yu and Zhang Qingpeng define pro-social behavior as “a friendly and positive behavior when individuals interact with others, which characteristic is to benefit others and the whole group and prove the

harmonious relationship with both sides. In essence, this behavior is a reflection of one's relationships with others and the community, which has a positive impact on people's ability to adapt for survival and the advancement of civilization." [9]. Wang Yanhui proposes that pro-social behavior is a beneficial manner and tendency for others like help, cooperation, sharing, and comfort, which is a significant aspect of individual socializing development. Pro-social behavior has an essential influence on adolescents' academic scores, personal networks, and physical and mental health [10]. Xiao Fengqiu maintains that pro-social behavior means beneficial behavior including assistance, sharing, comfort, donation, and cooperation. Pro-social behavior can not only promote individuals to adapt the society quickly, but maintain the whole society's existence and development, which has an important evolutionary significance and practical significance [11]. In conclusion, pro-social behavior is emphasized by scholars as beneficial behaviors to others and the whole society.

There are various classifications of pro-social behavior. This article mainly adopts the idea of American psychologist Gustavo Carlo who concludes previous scholars' theories and results. He proposes pro-social behavior as a social-ecological developmental model. This paradigm incorporates pro-social behavior's ecological, personal, and social influences. Family and social context, cognitive and affective factors, and situational aspects that are immediately relevant to the individual are included in these three domains of influence. Individuals may exhibit various pro-social behaviors depending on how these three factors influence them. Carlo, therefore, divides pro-social behavior into five types: altruism, compliant, emotional, anonymous and dire, and public pro-social behavior [12]. This definition and model are closely related to parenting and widely used by Chinese scholars. Additionally, altruism, public, and anonymous pro-social behavior are the major factors that influenced by parenting.

### **3. The Influence of Parenting on Adolescent Pro-social Behavior**

#### **3.1. Classified by Parenting Style Scale**

##### **3.1.1. EMBU Scale**

The s-EMBU scale divides parenting style into three dimensions: rejection, warmth, and overprotection. Warmth parents will pay close attention to kids' mental health and timely response to their needs. According to a wealth of evidence, which supports Baumrind's theory, youths who are raised in loving, considerate families are more likely to exhibit highly pro-social conduct. [13-14]. On the other hand, there are also differences in the influence of pro-social behavior on adolescents between emotionally warm fathers and mothers. Children's altruistic conduct can be largely shaped by a mother's emotional warmth, while a father can influence a child's altruism indirectly through mediation [15].

Overprotection and rejection are two negative ways of parenting styles, however, the influence on pro-social behavior differs. Overprotection means that parents deliver excessive protection to their children in order to protect them away from damage, such as spoiling. In that case, it will deprive teenagers of self-reliance and problem-solving abilities, which can give rise to the loss of capability of dealing with stresses and difficulties in their adulthood. And rejection means that children are neglected, and punished severely, without receiving supportive care by their parents [16]. But most researchers find that the overprotection caused by parents has an insignificant influence on teenagers' pro-social behavior, while rejection negatively affects pro-social behavior [13,1]. The probable reason might be that overprotection or spoiling is a much more common phenomenon and the core of what is the deep love that parents give to children. Although it may perform in an inappropriate way, its positive elements can counteract its negative sides; therefore, it can have minor effects on pro-social behavior [15]. Besides, the effects on pro-social behavior led by paternal and maternal

parenting styles also differ. Jiang's experiment, which included more than 4,000 middle and high school students as participants, discovered that while protective mothers have no impact on prosocial behavior in adolescents, protective fathers can positively predict it [13]. The research illustrates nothing about it. This article believes that traditionally in China, mothers are acting as figures who perform warmly and protectively but fathers generally show less care to their kids. The positive impact of protective fathers outweighs its negative impact, so it can promote the formation and development of adolescents' prosocial behavior.

The Chinese version of the EMBU scale used by Yue aims to discuss the dimensions of Chinese parenting styles and increase the suitability for Chinese circumstances, which divides paternal and maternal parenting style into different aspects and is widely used by Chinese psychologists [8]. In the experiment of pupils in sharing and assistant behavior, positive parenting style, such as emotional warmth and understanding, is found to promote altruism, while negative parenting styles like strictness and over-interference can reduce the conduct of sharing and assistance [1]. Similarly, Zhang Lu and Sang Qingsong note that the development of teenagers' psychological societies is correlated with how favorable the parenting style of the parents is and that this corresponds with teenagers' propensity for engaging in pro-social behavior. But practicing negative parenting styles including strict punishment and rejection will make offspring become indifferent to their surroundings, performing less pro-social behaviors [2]. Influenced by traditional social norms in China, the words uttered and the behaviors acted by mothers can have profound effects on girls. As for adolescents in senior high school, a negative maternal parenting style will force girls to reflect on their behaviors. And under the encouragement and introspection between mothers and daughters, the mothers' negative evaluation has a predictive effect on the girls [3]. Therefore, the type of parenting style and teenagers' prosocial conduct is connected to some degree, with different parenting styles having varied effects.

### 3.1.2. Questionnaire and Scale of Parenting Style

The categories of the two scales are great similarities, so this article put them in the same section to discuss them. Similar to the EMBU scale, warm parents still generate positive effects on all aspects of pro-social behavior. Also, trusting and encouraging, and authoritative parents can deliver a higher level of care and support, which can make children feel warm and protected so that they may rely on their parents and at the same time, enhance their pro-social behavior. Positive parenting styles like authoritarian, devoted, and neglectful parents had a negative predictive effect on prosocial conduct, according to a 525 middle and high school students' anonymous online poll made by Lin Shuangjia and Hu Shan in 2022. Similarly, Zhang Jing and Yuan Yue propose that warm and trusting, and encouraging parents can positively predict pro-social behavior while authoritarian and spoiling parenting styles will negatively predict it [17]. The teenagers will lose their capability of being independent and self-reliant due to exceeded parental control and unrestrained care, which will negatively impact their offspring's prosocial behavior.

### 3.1.3. Parental Bonding Instrument

Parental Bonding Instrument is first generated by Parker to measure parenting style, according to Attachment Theory. Later, Yang Hongjun revised the PBI (Parental Bonding Instrument) scale and separated it into three dimensions: care, encouraging autonomy, and control. The measure further categorizes parenting styles into four groups based on care and overprotection component scores: affectionate constraint, affectionless control, optimal parenting, and neglectful parenting. The maternal parenting style with encouraging autonomy and care can greatly improve the development of pro-social behavior in five dimensions including public, anonymity, and altruism. Authoritative

parents with high care and high protection are more likely to cultivate children with a high level of pro-social behavior, which is an ideal parenting style [18]. But teenagers raised by an authoritative mother can perform better than any other type of parent in empathy [19]. Compared to fathers, mothers can affect teenagers' pro-social behavior to a greater degree, which is probably because the mother spends more time on their kids. Moreover, mothers, as females, have a higher ability to express themselves, which makes children more easily feel the emotions and characteristics of their mothers.

### **3.2. The Classification of Parenting Behavior Scale**

The classification of the parenting behavior scale includes the CRPBI (Children's Report of Parent Behavior Inventory) scale. The CRPBI scale is first constructed by Schaefer, which aims to measure parental behavioral control. It contains three dimensions: acceptance-rejection, strict control-lax control, and psychological autonomy-psychological control. Carlo and his colleagues find that parental strict control negatively influences children's pro-social behavior, while parental warmth was more positive in predicting the development of pro-social behavior, compared to strict control [20]. Additional research demonstrates that parental acceptance factors positively influence early adolescent pro-social behavior creation and growth [21].

The PBI scale is revised and re-separated into four categories by Steven et al., for measuring parenting behavior, which includes care, indifference, overprotection, and autonomy. An experiment, taking Hong Kong adolescents as participants, finds that overprotection can give rise to a positive impact on their emotions and altruism. The major reason might be that parental protection gives them a sense of security. It also notes that autonomy is the key point of developing pro-social behavior instead of care [22].

## **4. Mediation and Moderation**

Parenting is a crucial environmental component that influences teenagers' socialization, which can be influenced by a number of circumstances. Empathy, moral disengagement, and teacher-student relationship will mediate and moderate the results to some degree. Lots of studies find that parenting, through the mediation of empathy, can influence teenagers' pro-social behavior. A stronger capability of empathy can be established by positive parenting, which can positively affect pro-social behavior. Similar to what has been mentioned above, sufficient understanding and warmth given to children promote them to perform pro-social behavior better than their peers [18]. Positive parenting practices have an indirect positive predictive influence on prosocial conduct, and they are completely mediated by conscientiousness [15]. This emphasizes the significance of positive parenting. Besides, adolescents' perspective-taking partially mediates the relation between maternal parenting and their early period of prosocial behavior. Moreover, maternal parenting and adolescent prosocial conduct are linked by perspective-taking and empathetic care. Maternal parenting not only directly influences teenagers' early pro-social behavior, but with the help of perspective-taking and empathetic care affects the behavior [22]. However, parenting like a "strict father and warm mother" stirs controversy among scholars. Fan Bin and Lu Ning maintain that with the effects of a proactive approach and maternal warmth, paternal control can significantly predict teenagers' altruism in a positive way. On the other hand, Hu Wenbin and his colleagues insist that, compared to the mother, emotional warmth and understanding led by the father through the mediation of empathetic care can further benefit adolescents' pro-social formation. When parents are interacting with their offspring, what should be paid high attention to is the degree of warmth and care. Affectionate parents have the risk of positively predicting teenagers' moral disengagement, which means fueling the incorrect cognitive ability and then can-do harm to their pro-social behavior [23].

When examining the moderating influence of personality type on parenting style and adolescent social adaptation, it is revealed that teenagers cultivated by a variety of parenting styles have significantly different levels of social adaptation and five personality variables in many dimensions. The influence of parenting style on teenage socialization may be mediated by personality type. The impact of companionship, support, and voluntary giving on positive adaptation and the impact of rule guidance, voluntary giving, and awareness on negative adaptation are examples of the predictive effect [24]. When Yu Peilin and his colleagues are studying parenting's influence on pro-social behavior and the mediation of whether they are single-child, they find that non-single-child, compared to single-child, are comparatively more influenced by paternal emotional warmth [25]. However, these studies are mainly targeting university students. As teenagers are important participants, it is a research gap that teenagers' studies in this area have been ignored.

## 5. Conclusions

Parenting has a significant influence on the formation and development of teenagers' pro-social behavior. Through mediation, such as empathy and moral disengagement, the degree of influencing adolescents' prosocial behavior can also be altered. Parenting is the cooperative result of both father and mother who complement each other. On the other hand, it is hard to reach the key points that which specific behaviors performed by parents will affect teenagers due to the vague borders between parenting style and parenting behavior. Additionally, this article finds that parents who give sufficient care and encouragement to their offspring will cultivate a child who has a higher tendency for high-level pro-social behaviors. However, research on pro-social behavior mainly selects young children as their participants, which may comparatively neglect the focus on teenagers and discussions over gender and age that mediate the behavior lack, and there are fewer studies focusing on the single parent's influence on teenagers. As for young adults, scholars tend to emphasize the delinquent conduct performed by adolescents, which furtherly narrows the field of research. A large number of research involve co-parenting, however, due to the gender difference, the fathers' and the mothers' influence on teenagers differs. As for the major families in China, grandparents' influence is also involved. Thus, the system of the whole family should also be paid high attention to its influence on pro-social behavior, instead of only co-parenting.

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