

# Giant Baby Syndrome in Chinese College Students

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**Abstract:** *The term “giant baby” became popular among Chinese people after Zhihong Wu’s book *The Country of ‘Giant Babies’: A Domestic Psychologist Examining the Chinese National Character* was published. An adult who fits this description is considered to be cognitively and psychologically immature. Researchers have discovered that this condition, known as “Giant Babies,” also affects the educational system, as some students’ psychological growth lags behind their physical development. This article outlined the behavioral traits of giant baby symptoms among Chinese college students, such as excessive reliance on others, egocentrism, and bigotry, and explained the underlying causes from the perspective of school education in an effort to pinpoint pertinent issues with Chinese education and provide recommendations for the development and education of more socially mature talents.*

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## Introduction

ERIKSON'S theory states that a person's personality develops throughout the course of their entire life in eight stages: infancy, toddlerhood, preschool, school, adolescence, early adulthood, middle age, and elder adulthood. Each stage builds on the ones that come before it and prepares the way for the periods of development that follow (Guo, 2010). The truth is that some adults' mental development does not correspond to their age. The fact that an adult who is physically an adult is nevertheless psychologically a baby is a notable phenomenon.

Zhihong Wu, one of the first Chinese researchers to pay attention to this phenomenon, addressed the subject of Chinese people's psychological development from a cultural viewpoint in his best-selling book *The Country of 'Giant Babies': A Domestic Psychologist Examining the Chinese National Character*. Initially, the word "giant baby" refers to a medical term. Giant babies are those who weigh more than 4,000 grams at birth. Giant babies are adults who retain baby features in terms of behavior, emotion, and mentality, according to Wu's (2016) book. These giant babies are self-centered, unable to predict the potential impact their words and actions may have on others; overly reliant on others, to the point where they sacrifice integrity for others or institutions; and manipulative in interpersonal and social relationships, unable to give or receive love due to undue manipulation.

The term "giant baby," coined by Wu, was subsequently used in Chinese educational research. Studies discovered that a serious problem among students is the enormous disconnect between people's psychological growth and their physical progress. Scholars have examined this phenomenon in the educational field over the last several years from a variety of perspectives. Chen et al. (2018) examined the underlying causes of the "giant baby" problem among Chinese college students and made the case that parenting practices must be changed, parent-child interactions must be improved, and the school system's practice of "emphasizing academic abilities over emotional skills" must be changed. Chen (2018) examined the giant-baby phenomenon in private colleges and universities and expounded on the four traits of "giant babies" in an effort to raise the attention of academics. In their research, Ni et al. (2020) showed the possible harm caused by college students' giant-baby attitudes from the social, familial, and individual viewpoints. Zhang (2021) investigated the reasons behind high school students' baby-like actions and proposed methods for moral instruction of senior secondary school students. Ting Zhang (2021) studied visual design pieces with the "giant baby" as the central theme, exhibited a variety of baby behaviors, and determined the reasons at the familial, educational, social, and cultural levels. This article focuses on studying the giant-baby symptoms in college students

and exploring the causes in the educational setting based on the review of prior “giant baby” studies.

## **Giant-Baby Symptoms among College Students**

### ***Abnormal Symbiotic Relationships***

The 20th-century psychiatrist Margaret Mahler, who created the idea of individuation and separation, held the view that a child experiences a typical symbiotic period throughout the first six months of life. During this time, the baby does not yet feel like an individual but rather that they are inseparable from their mother (Wu, 2016). The baby may exhibit various psychological traits typical of their age in addition to their symbiotic bond with their mother. After this time, symbiotic relationships and early-month psychological traits that reappear later in life are seen as aberrant.

The large family, collectivism, disrespect for privacy, rejection of going Dutch, unified thinking, and other manifestations of abnormal symbioses are not uncommon in real life. Overdependence on others and an inability to accept responsibility are the most prominent indicators of college students’ improper symbiotic connections with others. According to the Study of Giant-Baby Mentality in College Students, 59.47% of college students said the most common giant-baby indicators among their peers are a lack of self-regulation, excessive reliance on classmates at school, and excessive reliance on parents at home (Ni, 2020). Their childish tendencies are partly due to family codependency: they become accustomed to the family’s planning and interference in their lives, and they frequently allow parents and other family members to make decisions for them on a variety of issues ranging from basic needs to education, relationships, and career choices (Chen, 2018).

### ***Narcissism and Self-absorption***

In his book, Wu (2016, p. 171) argues that one of the main characteristics of a “giant baby” is narcissism, the belief that “I am the omnipotent god, and the world should run according to my will; otherwise, I will become a fierce and destructive devil, wishing to destroy the world or myself.”

Egocentrism is a prevalent trait among college students today. According to the family planning policy, the majority of college students born in the late 1990s or early 21st century are their parents’ only child, who is the apple of their eyes. The parents concentrate all of their affection and care on one child, attempting to meet all of his or her requirements. Once they fail to do so, the “giant baby” will use frustration and rage to force others to comply with his or her demands. Over time, it will enhance the child’s omnipotence mindset, causing him or her to become progressively egocentric.

Chen (2019) suggested that these man-child college students lacked communication with others, particularly their classmates, throughout their earlier stages of development because they were overprotected by their families. As a result, they become egocentric and have difficulties discerning the boundaries between themselves and the outside world, as well as forming connections with others on an equal level.

### ***Bigotry and Intolerance***

In Wu's book, bigotry is defined as the refusal to adjust one's strong, irrational beliefs or attitudes; an intolerant person is one who maintains extreme views of the world and is unwilling to accept and tolerate variations in opinions (Wu, 2016).

Being bigoted and intolerant can disconnect a person from reality and weaken their connection to the real world. Giant-baby college students have lived in a greenhouse-like home setting and have had limited social interactions, rendering them unable to distinguish between the real and imagined worlds. They lack a sense of social responsibility because they lack a proper understanding of the relationship between the prospects of people and societal progress (People's Daily, 2018). Unreasonably high educational expectations, excessive parental involvement, and unscientific school instruction all contribute to their defiant attitude and reinforce their intolerance. During the prevention and control of COVID-19, for instance, a female student made a scene in a quarantine camp because she could not survive without mineral water in bottles. Wilful adolescents like her have a difficult time integrating into society, let alone achieving self-actualization and contributing to the community.

### **Behavioral Characteristics of Giant-Baby College Students**

The majority of college students are between the ages of 18 and 22. In this stage, individuals with typical psychological development should have a strong sense of identity, be assertive in problem-solving, and be able to live independently. Many Chinese college students, however, have not attained this psychological level.

### ***Unable to Break Away from Maternal Influence***

In Chinese culture, the term "mommy's boy" describes a man who, as an adult, still has a close bond with his mother but finds it difficult to run his own social and financial affairs and form symbiotic connections with other

people (Chen, 2017). According to Zhou's (2016) portrayal of the "mommy's boy," his mother overprotected and engaged him excessively, which impeded his mental development. Psychologically, this group is in an unconscious condition of delayed individuation (Xin, 2017). Current research agrees that a high level of reliance on the mother is the scourge of "mommy's boys." They often exhibit less maturity and confidence than their classmates and, to varying degrees, suffer from avoidant personality disorder.

### ***Low Self-Efficacy***

Narcissistic and self-centered "giant babies" are extremely sensitive to any loss of control. Any unpredictable scenario might plunge them into despair and powerlessness (Wu, 2016). Giant-baby college students generally have low self-efficacy and are unable to convince themselves of their worth to those around them. At the same time, they have significant feelings of vulnerability and helplessness, and as a result, they tend to give up or rely on others whenever they face difficulties and failures. They are unable to accept responsibility for their own academic success and must rely on their classmates to finish assignments. They gradually lose the ability to make independent judgments and appropriately manage their college lives.

### ***Being Conformist and Unwilling to Take Risks***

Entrepreneurship, ingenuity, pressure resistance, and perseverance are traits that young people must possess to thrive academically and professionally in a society that is rapidly evolving. Numerous college students are afraid to question what is taught in textbooks and by lecturers because of their ingrained, reliant, docile mindsets. They are prepared to lead a life of conformity and do not value the spirit of entrepreneurship; instead, they look forward to stabling employment in the future.

## **Educational Causes of Baby Behavior in College Students**

The giant-baby phenomenon in colleges and universities has a number of causes, including outmoded traditional beliefs and improper family education. This paper focuses on investigating the fundamental causes of this problem from the perspective of academic instruction.

### ***Test-Oriented Education Stunts Student Psychological Development***

The Gaokao (China's national college entrance examination) system, which restricts the multifaceted operation of education and creates a number of social issues, relies solely on test scores as a selection criterion (Zhang, 2019). Gaokao is a crucial link between basic and higher education; as a selection method based on competitive tests with high stakes, it has a significant impact on basic education. Because higher education institutions "evaluate candidates only by their Gaokao results," it is inevitable that the test results become the dominant criterion for evaluating student development level, instructor effectiveness, and school management at the early education stage. This has led to the ludicrous occurrence in basic education, where teachers only cover material that is likely to be examined in exams and students only learn that. Until now, the Gaokao has been a written test, which may be a useful tool for determining students' academic standing but cannot be used to assess their social and emotional intelligence or psychological traits. At the same time, it has increased the focus on test scores in secondary schools, where only an intellectual education is valued and the development of morality, character, and appropriate behavior is ignored. This has been the backdrop for the college students' early development as giant babies.

### ***One-sided Pursuit of Theoretical Knowledge Deprives Students of Life Experience in the Process of Growth***

Life events serve as catalysts for individuals' mental development and the formation of self-consciousness. They internalize the meaning and worth of life experience by perceiving and digesting life events, establishing the groundwork for the reconstruction of experience in subsequent growth. The most crucial aspect of adolescent life is education. Education and life are inextricably linked for teenagers, as Dewey (2001) noted in *Democracy and Education* that life is education and education is the change of experience. Yet, the link between education and life is not adequately addressed in present school instruction. Because of the pressures of school competitiveness, acquiring theoretical knowledge takes precedence over practical experience in the lives of adolescents.

According to the survey results of Sun and Zhang (2018), the top five communication subjects (in order of priority) between Chinese students and their parents are academic issues (71.8%), school matters (69.6%), interests and hobbies (35.4%), friends (31.7%), and personal prospects (31.6%). School matters (58.4%), interests and hobbies (42.5%), friends (40.1%), academic issues (38.1%), and personal prospects (27.7%) are in that order among their American peers. The top five topics for their Japanese counterparts are school matters (76.7%), friends (52.3%), academic issues (42.3%), interests and hobbies (34.7%), and social issues (27.1%). School matters

(83.6%), academic issues (53.4%), friends (48.1%), interests and hobbies (44.0%), and social issues (26.4%) are the top five subjects in South Korea. It demonstrates that the five key child-parent communication subjects in China, the United States, Japan, and South Korea essentially overlap but are prioritized differently. Clearly, there is a tendency in Chinese education to emphasize academic achievement while ignoring life experiences in the real world. Human development and growth are attributed to the combined impacts of knowledge, practice, and experiences. Individual development can be distorted if just conceptual knowledge is taught without emotional experience or behavioral verification in practice. Education that lacks a balanced moral, intellectual, physical, artistic, and social education sets the stage for the birth of giant babies.

### ***“Nanny-Style Education” Hinders the Implementation of Competence-Oriented Training***

Some researchers characterized “nanny-style education” as an educational strategy in which teachers oversee everything for students and, in doing so, impair the possibility of unrestricted student development (Xin, 2008). Nanny-like educators provide college students with both explicit and intangible “nanny-style service”. Explicit “nanny-style service” refers to actions taken by professors and administrators to ease the college experience for students. For instance, some teachers purposefully create the test questions to be as easy and simple as possible in order to ensure that students pass the exam without difficulty. Other teachers may identify the essential concepts for pre-exam preparation or even reveal the test questions in advance. Some college supervisors who oversee students’ extracurricular activities must function as “nannies,” ready on the scene to handle emergencies. Supervisors must provide specialized lectures to instruct students on how to meticulously complete the application forms in order to aid them in applying for scholarships and grants. Each student may receive a template that needs to be filled out and followed. The term “intangible nanny-style service” describes instructional strategies like rote learning and cramming that do not call for critical thought.

This kind of “nanny-style education” goes against the foundational idea of competence-based education. Competency-oriented education is defined by its emphasis on maximizing students’ potential talents, cultivating their inventive consciousness, and equipping them to face the difficulties of a society that is always evolving (Li & Li, 2001). Young people’s development of critical skills is essential to their healthy development and the success of society. Nonetheless, “nanny-style education” methods have ham-

pered the spread of competence-oriented education, lowered children's chances of survival, and increased the number of giant-baby college students.

## Conclusion

The detrimental effects of social experience on the growth process of individuals have produced "giant babies." Without a doubt, adults who are dependent, self-centered, and intolerant disrupt the regular functioning of families and societies. There are numerous explanations underpinning the problem, but one prominent one is unscientific school instruction. Despite the fact that China's education has experienced rapid development and reached a substantial scale over the past several decades, the existence of "giant babies" reveals the shortcomings of Chinese education, reminding us that we should not only focus on the scale and speed of educational development but also on the quality of education. While examining the outcomes of education and identifying its flaws, it is necessary to investigate their causes and discover remedies in an effort to enhance the quality of education.

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