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The Growing Generation in A Changing Chinese Society: Youth Problems and Strategies*

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I. Introduction

In the last 40 years, the impact of the global trends on the Chinese inhabitants in Taiwan, together with the common effort of the government and its people, have worked together to this antiquated society drastically. The Chinese, have their specific philosophical pursuits of attempting to realized a hundred years but hitherto unrealized wishes of getting China rid of the longstanding dilemma of poverty, sickness and ignorance through the changing process of social and reconstruction; thereby, transforming the Chinese society into a safe, harmonious, happy and prosperous new society. Being awared of the facts that economic backwardness, educational and scientific underdevelopments are the root causes of poverty, sickness and ignorance, it is only natural that economic development and educational promotion have been set as their main endeavoring targets. Over the course of 40 years of effort, the region of Taiwan has today been developed into an economically prosperous and educational advance society, in which poverty and sickness had far disappeared. The expected harmonious and happy life however has not yet come into sight. This is especially true if we were to look at the youth growing amid the changing society. Although youths who are brought up by the bitter-experienced adult do enjoy the fruits of social development, they are not happy. In fact, it has been common to learn about the stories of youths escaping from home, playing truant, taking drugs, engaging in anti-social behavior and even to the extent of committing crimes. There is a Chinese saying, "One does not realize what one is enjoying." which may be quoted to describe the stuation of the present-day youths in Taiwan. However, the problem is how are we going to interpret the manifestations of youth

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problems? What educational measures should be taken to cope with the manifestations of youth problems? It is the objective of this paper in trying to answer the above-mentioned two problems. Before answering the problems, let me give a brief account of the facts of social change in Taiwan in the last 40 years.

II. The Manifest Facts of Social Change in Taiwan

The manifest facts of social change in Taiwan in the last 40 years can be observed from the three following indicators:

1. The Population Increase and the Changing Family Structure

In the early period of the coming of the National Government in 1494, the population of the region of Taiwan was a mere six million and above, at the end of 1988, it had increased to 19 million and above. The population density in 1964 was 169 persons square kilometer, it had increased to 546 persons square kilometer in 1987, showing an increase of 3.25-folds. And that the population is concentrating in the big cities, the population density in Taipei and Kaohsiung were 9,703 persons square kilometer and 8,742 persons square kilometer respectively (Directorate-General of Budgets, 1988). This shows that there has been a high rate of social mobility. The very high rate of social mobility has given rise to the disintegration of the traditional Chinese extended family of three-generation under a roof. According to the government statistics, the average family members of the Taiwanese household in 1946 was 6.5 members per household; that means most of them were three-generation under a roof. However, it reduced to 4.5 members per household in 1986, indicating that most of them were parent-child nuclear families. (Ministry of Interior, 1988). Understandably, the changing family structure has changed the growth environment in which the new generation is born into.

2. Economic prosperity and the Increase in National Income

In the process of the economic development in the Republic of China, the new economic policy taken around 1975 was a key critical factor. Slightly before 1975, that is in 1971, the average national per capita income was US\$ 438, and it increased to US\$ 1,122 in 1976. Then, the growth rate has been accelerating continuously. It is estimated that it will increase to US\$ 6,780 to the end of 1989, an increase of 15.7 folds (Directorate-General of Budget, 1987, 1989), which is an undisputed economic miracle in the history of world economic development. As rapid economic development has improved the material comforts of the people a great deal; so has its negative impact on youths who have never took part in the production process. For they have never, as their predecessors did, given the chance

to cultivate the traditional Chinese characteristics of perseverance through their life experiences; from childhood, they have picked up the habits of sponging on their parents, thus, fail to cultivate the traditional Chinese virtue of industrious and the philosophical choice of "bitterness before sweetness". It is clear that the two types of unhealthy characters claimed to be found in the new generation of the West by the American psychologist E. Fromm (1955), the receptive character, depending on others support and the exploiting character, taking things from others and manipulating others, have found its ways into the Chinese youth. These kinds of characters will no doubt have an impact on their sense of values and view of life. It is indeed paradoxical to observe that social affluence would do harm on the youth, here is the price for the many years of the pursuit of economic growth.

3. The Universalization of Education and the Lengthening of School Years

Another important indicator of social development in the region of Taiwan has been the universalization of education and the lengthening of school years. In 1950, there were 1,504 schools in Taiwan, with average 41.8 schools to per thousand square kilometer, in 1987 the number of schools had grown to 6,491 with 179.5 schools to per thousand square kilometer. In 1950, the ratio between the number of general population and the number of students was 139.64 students per thousand population. In 1987, the number of school-going population had grown to 258.64, showing that the growth rate of school-going population had surpassed that of the nonschool-going population, an indication of the advancement of education. Measured by the proportional number of students in different school grades; in 1950, the number of the first nine years primary school students and junior high school students accounted for 93.96% of the total number of students; college students accounted for a mere 0.63%. In 1987, the number of the first nine years primary school students and junior high school students accounted for 67.33% of the total number of students, and college students accounted for the remaining 8.77%. This is a prove of the lengthening of schools years and the upgrading of educational level. Currently, students in Taiwan enjoy a nine years compulsory education (6-12 years) and the students school enrollment rate had reached 99.87% (Ministry of Education 1988). It goes without saying that universal education and longer school years are the indicators of social progress; however, it has its negative impact on the youth owing to its rapid development. This points will be discussed in the following pages.

III. Youth Problems amid the Changing Society

According to the study of cultural anthropologist (Mead, 1955), it is generally agreed by the scholars that youth problems are sociocultural phenomena rather than biophysiological phenomena. In other words, youth problems are incidental phenomena of social change. The most concrete data to the study of juvenile delinquency are the statistical data published by the government. Of course, data disclosed by the government are no more than a small part of the youth problems, as if confined to the number of teenagers (12-18 years old) offenders punished by the law, it does not cover and cannot represent the whole range of youth problems. Nevertheless, an analytical study of the increased cases of offense the factors contribute to the committing of crimes by this small part of juvenile delinquency may throw light to the relationship between youth problems and social change.

As I have pointed out in the section on the economic development of Taiwan, the year after 1975 was a critical period. As national income increased drastically along with the rate of juvenile delinquency according to statistical data, in the whole year of 1976, the total number of teenage offenders was 4,791, which accounted for 4.53% of the total number of offenders of 10,578 of the same year. Up to 1981, national per capita income had increased six-fold to that of 1971, the number of teenage offenders had amounted to 11,951 accordingly, which accounted for 27.40% of the total number of offenders of 43,612 of the same year, a six-fold proportional rise in national income. The rate kept on rising until it slightly dropped off in 1988, which accounted for 22.85% of the total offenses (Ministry of Justice, 1980, 1987, National Police Administration, 1987, 1988).

Above is an analytical study of the percentage of juvenile delinquency accounted in the total number of offenders. The severity of juvenile delinquency in the last ten years can be seen also by analyzing the youth population of the same age group. In 1977, the number of teenager offenders (12-18 years old) compared to the same age group, accounted for 31 persons per ten thousand persons, and it was rising annually till 1988, it had risen to 79 persons per ten thousand persons, (Ministry of Justice, 1980, 1988) an increase of 2.54 folds.

In the past, people used to assume that poverty is the root of crimes. Such a hypothesis is based on two inferences: first, it assumed that the poor have no knowledge, thus unable to judge between what is right and wrong; second, as the poor have no means to make a living, they have to resort to illegal means. Such a hypothesis was possibly correct in

the Chinese society of 40 years back. However, it no longer holds true for the Chinese youth of the present day Chinese society. According to the statistical data disclosed by the authorities (Ministry of Justice, 1984, 1987), the economic situation of the teenager offenders' families have improved along with social change. In 1974, teenager offenders who came from the abject poverty family accounted for 11.01% of the total offenders of the same age group; 67.71% of them came from not-so-poor family, and 19.64% came from decent or middle and upper class families. The message of such and phenomenon means that poverty was the main cause of teenage offenders. However, viewing from the evolving situation of teenage offenders problem of the last ten years, the family background of the teenage offenders had changed drastically. To take the 1984 statistical data as an example, teenage offenders came from abject poverty and not-so-poor families had lowered to 4.47% and 24.36% respectively, however, those came from decent, middle and upper class families had increased to 70.91%. Such an atypical phenomenon of a greater part of the offenders came from affluence family go on up to now. Common sensibly, children from decent, middle and upper class families should be the group who have the educational edge over those from the poorer families; as they have no financial constraints, and are provided with better educational opportunities. But, why are they giving up the honest life and taking to the life of self-degeneration and crimes? Mencius says "Survive in crisis, die in comfort." This saying may well be quoted as an footnote to the above-mentioned phenomenon.

As mentioned above, statistical data on juvenile delinquency alone can only revealed the severity of youth problems; it can neither explain the whole view of youth problems, nor can it pinpoint the real causes. However, it does bring out a corner of the iceberg, and enables us to picture the degree of severity of the youth problems. According to the statistical data disclosed by the National Police Administration, the types of offenses committed by the teenager offenders basically fall into the following categories: (1) burglary, (2) bodily harm, (3) homicide, (4) intimidation, (5) robbery, (6) snatching, and (7) stolen property (Ministry of Interior, 1987). These types of youths are not so commonly found in ordinary schools and families. However, we are sure that there must be a lot of latent problem youths. It is our task to observe their maladjusted behavior as express in the school and family environment, before it develops to the level of committing crimes. In view of this, it is important to give them timely correction so as to prevent behavioral deterioration which may be resulted in rule-breaking. In 1983, the writer interviewed 140 junior high school counselors, asking them to classify the student cases which they

handled (Chang, 1983). They recounted over 400 cases. The writer classified these cases into nine types according to its attributions: (1) academic underachievement, (2) emotionally disturbed, (3) escape from responsibility, (4) self-rejection, (5) confusion of sex-role, (6) runaway from home, (7) somatization disorder, (8) drug abuse, and (9) antisocial aggression. Judging from the educational problems constituted by these nine types of students, there are all parts of the youth problems; however, as the results of their behavior do not necessarily violated the law, they are not classified into the category of juvenile delinquency. Nevertheless, viewing from the personality development and mental health of the youth, these types of students should be treated with equal important as the youth offenders.

IV. The Psychological and Educational Factors of the Youth problems

Why has social change give rise to this youth problems? There is no easy answers to this question. Sociologists, psychologists, educators, and criminologists hold their own views to the same problems. Basically, it is generally agreed that it is a socio-cultural product. To be more specific, it is an international product of the growth process of the youth and the environment in which they are brought into. It is therefore relevant to choose psychological and educational factors to discussed about from among the various causes contribute to the rise of youth problem.

1. The Developmental Crisis of the New Generation

To begin with we should bear in mind that the psychological-characteristic of the present-day youth are very much different from that of their predecessors. As the older generation of 40 years bears back have undergone hardship of life, mentally, they are precocious; however, physically, they reach the age of puberty late, owing to under-nourishment and the conservativeness of knowledge and concept and most them look precocious. On the contrary, owing to the facts of enough nourishment and the stimulation of exposing to greater and more open sex information, the present-day youth are physically mature earlier; however, the dislocation of education from life, hinders rather than helps the growth of their personality. Generally, the impression of the older generation on the present-day youth is that of physically grown up but mentally not. In fact, it has been proved by the developmental psychologists that the coming of initial menstruation of the females of the late hundred years has advanced from about 17 years old in the past to that of about 12 years old in the modern times. The phenomenon is same in the developed western countries (Bullough 1981, Dreyer, 1982) as in Taiwan (Chiu, Su, and Hwang, 1967). It is not necessary to give an account of the phenomenon and factors contri-

bute to the advanced physical maturity of the youth; however, further explanations on the delayed psychological maturity of the presentday youth and the effects of their different degrees of psychsomatic maturity to that of the older gecceration will be given.

In the past, the traditional Chinese extended family provided the growing new generation with various helps in the aspects of life, education and occupation. As it was an agricultural-oriented society, it was earthbound and most of the families, stayed together continuously, with overlapping generations. Such an multi-generation family provided the children with opportunities to partake into the production process; thus, enable the children to pick up the skills of making a living and cultivate the relevant life habits and social attitudes after their predecessor. As can be expected. under the condition of generation continuity, individual growth of the new generation were more inclined to identify themselves values; thus, preventing the rise of generation gap as they grew into adolescent period. On the contrary, the present-day youth are growing in an environment different from that of the past. This new environment is unfamiliar to them and they are lacking a clear and certain sense of direction in this emerping new environment. For the parents, instead of teaching the relevant skills of concept and attitude to the children; they design the education and future guidance of the children on the basis of their own experiences without taking intp consideration of the real needs of the the children with the result that the growth process of new generation is cut into two discontinuous parts. That is, the childhood period is placed under the care and arrangement of the parents. which demands no livelihood responsibility beside attending school. However, after entering the adolescent period, physical changes take place and create new needs, at the same time, they come into contact with the outside world as they extend their life space outside the family, thus giving rise to a critical psychological change. This critical psychological change is termed developmental crisis by American psychologist E. H. Erikson (1968, 1980). The term has three basic meanings:

- (1) Developmental crisis is a common psychological phenomenon found among the present-day youth; it is caused by the discontinuation of childhood and adolescent life experiences.
- (2) It arises out of the individuals' felt difficulties in establishing self-identity when losing a balanced psychophysical maturity; after getting rid of the constraints of the family in facing the future; they attempt to construct their ideals by identifying the six factors of past experienced, the real world, future course, ones own conditions, peronal ideals and the expectations of others. However,

most of the youth experience anxiety and pains in the process of realizing their dreams.

- (3) The evaluating state of developmental crisis may have two possible consequences: one is that of getting the timely counseling of parents, good teachers or good friends; thus, succeeding in getting over the difficulties and develop a mature personality; the other is affected by unhealthy social influences; thus aggravating the crisis and experience difficulties in personality formation.

It can be said that youth groups who are ill-adjusted and take to a life of crises is a result of failure in establishing self-identity. So far, the theory of Erikson has gained universal support and been proved, (Marcia, 1980), same result is achieved by the writer of this text. (Chang, 1982)

2. The Negative Effects of the School Education

In recent years, some contradictory phenomena are found in the education processes in both the developed and developing countries. The more investment being invested in education, the least effect it appears; the longer the period of compulsory education, the more number of problem youths appear. The general interpretation of these atypical manifestations are that, in designing the education for the new generation; government, society and family lay too much emphasis on end at the expense of means, which results in the mismatching of school education and the psychophysical developmental needs of the students. The inability of education in meeting the individual differences of the students not only hinders the healthy growth of the students, it rather kill the vitality of their individual natural development. J. Holt (1972), the American educator says lamentably, "School fail to promote the growth of children and substitute custodial function for the learning. The young are in school because they are not wanted anywhere else." Another critic of American education is E. Z. Friedenberg (1965), who disapproves of compulsory school attendance, believing that such compulsion strips victims of personal autonomy and civil rights.

The Chinese has long been attaching much important to education, as government has always been consistently taking up the development of education as its work, so do the family lay their hopes on the education of their children. The degree of important the Chinese lay on education can be seen from a Chinese saying, "Everything is inferior to education." The matter is, the focus of their emphases are on the educational opportunities and the after-education achievements. They are not so much concern about the proper educational process of the youth. It is lamentable to say that the defects of the school education and its unfavorable effects on the development of personality are more conspicuous in Taiwan than that of

what the American educators criticize on the U. S. school education. In Taiwan, students have to sit for the open examination in gaining admission into high schools and colleges, the school entrance examination held each summer is a highly competition one. On the whole, decent, middle and upper class families even go so far as preparing their children's high school and college entrance examination start from the pre-school kindergarten education. The consequence is that besides daytime school attendance, many families have tutorial courses for their children at nights, and during weekends and holidays. Therefore, start from pre-school education to high school, youths have to spend over ten years of their childhood and adolescent life in the monotonous activities of studying and doing the same type of textbooks and school work. As such, they are isolated from the society and dislocated from the real life. Although a small portion of students who are successful in their studies, do develop their abilities and cultivate an interest in the pursuit of knowledge; most of them only experience failure, pains and deprived of the pleasure of success in this long process of schooling. According to the government regulations, in the first nine years of compulsory education (6-15 years old), students should not be expelled from the school on account of rule-breaking, nor be not promoted to advance class on account of academic failure. Without doubt, it is a good intention policy of safeguarding the students' right to education; however, in practice, it work against the free development of the students. The ultimate result is that for most of those who have not a chance of getting into the university (only one tenth of the primary and junior high school students success in gaining into universities), they are marking their time under the conditions of being forced to study against their abilities and will, as they dislike study and yet forced to study, the longer the time of studying, the disgusted they grow. Understandably, the reason why advancement of education fails to eliminate the youth problems lies in the fact that the education carried out by the family and the schools is not directed to meet the needs of the educatees.

V. The Effective Strategies for Preventing Youth Problems

From the above analysis, we can arrive to three understanding of the youth problems.

- (1) Juvenile delinquency should not be equaled with youth problems; its an deteriorated result of the youth problems
- (2) Juvenile delinquency is a social problem; whereas, youth problems are educational problem.
- (3) Social and legal measures alone will not be effective in checking

juvenile delinquency; the proper and thorough measures should be improving the family and school environment in which the youth grow; along with the change of educational practices so as to enable the new generation to cultivate their will and efforts to self advancement in the process of personality development.

It is comprehensible that although the government do attach great important in checking juvenile delinquency in recent years, the results are not impressive (Executive Yuan, 1986). The correct approach should be: taking the educational approach of helping to direct the selfgrowth of the youth. In practice, the approach can be carried out in two aspects:

First, cultivate their proper social abilities, which include self-concept, interpersonal relationship, sex-role, rational attitude, observance of norms, value judgment and so forth. In the aspect of cultivation of social abilities the concept to developmental task developed by the psychologist is worthy of reference. As R. J. Havighurst (1972) writes that a developmental task is "a task which arises at or about a certain period in the life of the individual, successful achievement of which leads to his happiness and to success with later tasks, while failure leads to unhappiness in the individual's disapproval by the society, and difficulty with later tasks. Havighurst outlined eight major tasks of the adolescent period:

- (1) Accepting one's physique and using the body effectively.
- (2) Achieving new and more mutual relation with age mate of both sexes.
- (3) Achieving a masculine or feminine social role.
- (4) Achieving emotional independence from parents and other adults.
- (5) Preparing for an economic career.
- (6) Preparing for marriage and family life.
- (7) Desiring and achieving social responsible behavior.
- (8) Acquiring a set of values and an ethical system as a guide to behavior.

Judging from the nature of these eight types of abilities, there are applicable to the youth in American as well as in the Chinese society. It is predictable that youth problems will decrease gradually if the youth are successful in cultivating these social abilities.

Second, cultivate their proper interests in the pursuit of knowledge and skills of life. Currently, the family and school education in Taiwan attach its importance solely on the preparation of promotionism at the expense of practical knowledge. As such, those school learners fail in the promotion, having no skills of making a living with them after leaving the schools. Under such a situation, even though they would not resort to illegal means in making a living, they are unable to support themselves. Having

analyzed this much, the writer would hereby, like to propose to the parents and educational authorities to change the educational policy of the stage of primary education, revising and reediting the textbooks and curricula and changing the teaching methods thoroughly. The basic principles of the change is to make it to meet the development levels and individual differences of the school children. It is hoped that two levels of objectives will be attained after the changing of textbooks and teaching methods: (1) To enable all the students to equip themselves with the basic skills and knowledge as required by a modern citizen; and to build in them the basic foundation of making a living before entering society. (2) To enable the more brilliant students to learn more and deeper knowledge so as to build a foundation for later stage educational advancement. Of course, the first level subjective of the education should be given precedence. As the undermentioned, the writer would like to propose the following seven types of abilities as deemed proper to the youth. The idea is based on the concept of developmental tasks with reference to the social abilities as claimed by R. H. Havighurst in the preceding pages.

- (1) Reading ability: able to read newspapers, magazines, letters, documents and books in general.
- (2) Writing ability: able to make use of the written language in taking down ones experience, communicate with others or expressing oneself.
- (3) Computing ability: able to apply the basic maths in computation and an ability in using computing instruments.
- (4) Knowledge of hygiene: know about the preservation of health and the knowledge of treating oneself or others when falling sick.
- (5) Legal knowledge: knowing how to protect ones own rights and perform ones own duties.
- (6) Financial management: knowing how to keep ones budget and the handling of money.
- (7) Problems-solving ability: knowing how to get oneself round in a fit.

One way of cultivating the above-mentioned seven basic knowledge and abilities of the student is by taking the grade norm method; whereby, a standard passable by most students of the same class is set to enable most students to reach the standard without much difficulties. By doing so, the students will take an interest in learning, as one must be interested in learning in order to keep on learning, they will produce result, in their sustaining interest in learning. It is certain that youth problems will decrease gradually if most of the students are interested in learning, and schooling.

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