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# Introduction to Chinese Youth (with a Commentary)

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# Introduction to Chinese Youth

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Different countries and fields of study differ in determining the age group of youth. Based on the census result from the National Bureau of Statistics and the situation of Chinese youth, the age group of youth is defined as those from 15 to 29 years old. Therefore, Chinese youth described in this chapter refers to the age group of 15-29 living in the Chinese mainland, not including youth from Hong Kong, Macao Special Administrative Regions and Taiwan Province.

According to China's fifth census conducted in 2000, the youth population in the Chinese mainland is 315 million, accounting for 25.36% of the total population. Based on the sampling survey of 1 %0 of the total population carried out by the National Bureau of Statistics in past years, the proportion of youth from 15 to 29 to the total population is 26.29%, 25.73%, 25.50%, 24.59%, 23.68%, 23.59%, 23.30% and 22.76% in 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999,2001,2002 and 2003 respectively. The proportion of Chinese youth population to the total population is decreasing.

## Social Background of Chinese Youth Development

China today has already entered a new period of in-depth reform and opening-up with peaceful and more international exchange at the same time. Besides the founding of the People's Republic of China and the initial stages of reform and opening-up, the turn of the century and the first two decades in the 21st century will witness the most rapid change in the Chinese society and the most drastic adjustment of its structure. Contemporary Chinese youth inevitably bear the mark of this era.

### New Era of Building a Well-off Society

In accordance with the three-step development strategy initiated by Deng Xiaoping, the chief architect of China's reform and opening-up policy, by the end of the 20th century, China has successfully achieved the goal of quadrupling GDP and goals for the first and second steps of the modernization drive. The overall living standard of Chinese people has attained a comparatively well-off level. However, the well-off living stan-

dard achieved now is still a relatively low level, not all-round or evenly developed, just the starting point rather than an all-round well-off society in its real sense. Therefore, since the beginning of the new century, China has started building a well-off society in an all-round way, quickening the pace of social modernization and forming a harmonious society.

Stepping into the 21st century, many countries in the world view the first one or two decades as periods of great opportunity and strategic importance. As for China, a big country speeding up its all-round development and exerting great influence on international relations, this period has even more opportunities and greater strategic importance for China's development. It is a critical period for China's all-round construction of a well-off society at a higher level that will benefit over 1 billion people. It is a critical period to achieve the grand objective of quadrupling the GDP of 2000 based on structural optimization and efficiency improvement that was proposed in the Report of the 16th Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC). In 2003, China's GDP has reached over US$ 1.4 trillion and per capita GDP has historically exceeded US$ l,000 to US$ 1,090. China's economic development goal of 2020 is US$ 3,000 per capita GDP. China's development has entered a critical transitional stage in which per capita GDP will increase from US$ 1,000 to US$ 3,000. During this period, automobile, housing and tourism will become new hot spots of consumption and people's consumption value, demand and pattern are undergoing great changes. Furthermore, in this critical period, China is facing new tasks and challenges of rapid transition of industrial structure, drastic changes of social interest groups and constant demand for political system innovations.

*Decline of Work Unit System and Rapid Development of Private Sectors*

Before the reform and opening-up, China was a society of "work unit system" and people played the role of "unit members". With the socialist market economy taking the place of a planned economy, large numbers of new economic and social organizations came into being. With the reform of the social security system deepening, and much of the responsibility of the unit shifted to the society and the government, units' control and influence over their members is weakening since the social economic resources they possess, manage and distribute are decreasing. At the same time, with the in-depth development of economic restructuring and the formation of pluralistic economic patterns, the number of people engaged in private sectors has greatly increased. The surplus rural work force flood into cities, resulting in a large number of people seeking employment outside of unit systems. Since they are unable to be absorbed into existing unit systems, communities where they settle down have to shoulder social responsibilities of administration, service and education for them. It is the reality of declining unit systems and developing community organizations that gives youth more and more space for free migration and connects their own development closer to the state policy, i.e. the development of youth is increasingly under the direct influence of the state policy.

With the establishment and gradual improvement of a socialist market economy, China's private sector has greatly developed in the past 10 years. *The Development of Pri-*

*vate Enterprises in the People s Republic of China* published in March 2003 by the Asian Development Bank revealed that by 2002, the production value of private sectors had exceeded 2/3 of the China's GDP. From 1990 to 2003, the number of employees of self-employed and private-owned enterprises in China's towns and cities increased by 35.96 million, accounting for 46.5% of the total increase in employment in urban areas over the same period. By the end of June 2004, the number of private enterprises registered nationwide had reached 3.340 million, and the number of employees has reached 47.140 million, an increase of about 1.5%, 0.5 percentage points higher than that of the whole society. In 2004, the proportion of increased employment of private sectors to that of the whole society is on constant rise and private sectors remain the major channel of employment increase.

*Increasingly Obvious Social Strata and Frequent Social Migration*

Before China's reform and opening-up, social stratum was simple, fixed and unfair and social migration was slow and restricted because of social systems like identity requirement, the household registration system and unit system. Since 1979, social strata in China have shifted from those based primarily on identity strata to those based mainly on economic and occupational strata. The former identity system classifying people into urban residents, cadres, workers and rural residents is going to disintegrate. The control exerted by the strict administration system of personnel files and the household registration system is on the decline and posterior efforts have taken the place of inborn factors in determining social members' status in the social structure. The identity affiliation, work fixation and residence immobility is challenged by normal, efficient and expedite social migration mechanism that are being built up and perfected step by step. The results of a survey on national social migration status conducted by Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in 2002 showed that in terms of inter-generation flow, the overall rate of mobility increased from 41.4% before 1980 to 54% after 1980. The rate of upward mobility rose from 32.4% to 40.9% and the rate of non-mobility fell from 58.6% to 46%. In terms of intragenation occupational mobility, the overall rate of mobility was only 13.3% before 1979, while the rate of upward mobility or the rate of promotion increased to 18.2% between 1980 and 1989 and further to 30.5% between 1990 and 2000. According to another survey, before 1980s, Chinese workers changed their jobs once every 15 to 20 years; the time span shortened to 10 years in the 1980s and to 5 years in the 1990s.

With the gradual establishment of market economy, the law of fair competition exerts an increasingly greater influence upon the whole society. The dominant role played by posterior efforts in social advance increasingly rationalized social migration and the shift of distribution mechanism from egalitarianism or the so-called "daguofan" system (indiscriminate egalitarianism) to the contribution measurement all show that the whole social operation system attaches more and more importance to equal start and equal opportunities. As far as youth are concerned, it is more realistic and possible for them to participate in the competition and win higher social status under more equal and fair circumstances. A 2000 survey of youth all over the country by China Youth

and Children Research Center shows that 80.5% of youth believe that opportunities for success are increasing in recent years, while only less than 20% believe that opportunities remain the same or are fewer.

*Increased Education Investments from the Government and Families*

In recent years, the government has been increasing funding for education by a remarkable margin. From 1991 to 1995, China's financial expenditure on education totaled 480 billion yuan with an average annual increase around 20%. From 1996 to 2000, China's education expenditure added up to 1.4941 trillion yuan with an average annual increase of 15.4%. In the meantime, the proportion of financial expenditure on education in GDP is increasing year by year, from 2.59% in 1998 to 2.87% in 2000. In 2001, the total national education expenditure amounted to 463.766 billion yuan and national financial expenditure on education made up 3.19% of the GDP that year. In 2002, national education expenditure totaled 548 billion yuan and national financial expenditure on education reached 305.701 billion yuan, holding 3.41% of the GDP. In 2003, the national education expenditure amounted to 620.8 billion yuan, of which the national financial expenditure on education was 385.1 billion yuan, a rise of 10% over 2002. The education expenditure goal of the Chinese government is to raise the proportion of national financial expenditure on education in GDP to 4% in a relatively short time and to 5% by 2010. With great assistance and support from national finances, in 2003, China has 2,110 institutions of higher education and institutions of higher education for adults, 720 graduate schools and institutes and 68 internet universities.

With the development of education reform in China and the increase in income, Chinese households are increasingly enthusiastic about education investment; their investment awareness is growing and education consumption is heating up. After entering the 21st century, educational expenses in Chinese families are increasing by an annual rate of 29.3% on average. A survey carried out by the Economic Situation Monitoring Center under National Bureau of Statistics in 2001 revealed that education had become a significant part of household expenses and the primary item of household consumption for nearly half of those surveyed. Chinese families are now spending 10% of their total household expenses on investment in education, compared to the 7.1 % they spend on housing. Moreover, people tend to be more ready to invest in education than in housing. Education consumption has become a new hot spot for Chinese household investment.

*Information Society and Network Society Are Taking Shape*

The "digital era" is a new era constructed by the joint effort of information society and network society. Since 1990s, phone and mobile phone have enjoyed great development in China. By the end of June 2004, the number of subscribers to the telephone net-

work in China had reached 295 million. By August 2004, the number of mobile phone users in China had increased to 315.1 million. At the same time, China has speedily integrated itself into the historical trend of the rapid development of the internet. In June 1991, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences established the first special line connecting with the internet. In April 1994, China officially opened the first connection line with internet and set up China's highest domain name (CN) server, thus the internet officially landed China. In March 1995, there were only 400 computers with access to the internet and 3,000 internet users; in July 1995, the number of computers connected to the internet jumped to 6,000 and the population of internet users soared to 40,000. According to the first *Statistical Report on China's Development Status of Internet* issued by China Internet Network Information Center in October, 1997, there were 299,000 computers and 620,000 internet users in China. In December 1999, 3.5 million of computers were linked with Internet and internet users were 8.9 million. The two figures increased to about 8.92 million and 22.50 million in December 2000, 12.54 million and 33.70 million in December 2001, 20.83 million and 59.10 million in December 2002, 30.89 million and 79.50 million in December 2003, and 41.60 million and 94 million in December 2004, respectively. Thus China has become the second largest market of internet users, ranked only next to US.

## A New Stage of China's Opening-Up Policy

On December 11, 2001, China formally entered WTO as its 143rd member. This is the inevitable result of China's adjustment to economic globalization and the realistic need for China to open its market to the world. After China's entry into WTO, China participated in the global economy in a larger scope and at a higher level. By July 2002, China had established diplomatic relations with 164 countries in the world. By now, China has had scientific and technological cooperation with 135 countries and regions, established educational and cultural exchanges and cooperations with 154 countries and regions, signed 95 inter-governmental contracts for scientific and technological cooperation and joined 75 international academic organizations. From 1992 to present, China has actually got over US$ 3 billion of foreign investment and more than half of the 50 largest retailers in the world have entered China's market. China's opening-up to the outside world is changing from a limited scope and limited areas to multi-dimensional and multi-level, from a one-way opening-up to the outside world on China's side to a two-way opening-up between China and other WTO members, from a selective opening-up in the past to an all-round opening-up, from a policy-based opening-up to a law-based opening-up, from an import-oriented opening-up into an import- and export-oriented opening-up. China's opening-up has been developed into an all-round, multi-level and broad pattern.

**Major Characteristics of Chinese Youth**

Most of the contemporary Chinese youth were born in the 1970s and 1980s, so they are called "the seventies" and "the eighties". Due to differences in the social environment they live in, youth born in the two different decades demonstrate certain differences in terms of values, cultural life, behaviors and so on. However, in terms of major characteristics, the two are very similar to each other. The following eight characteristics are a summary.

*Salient Self-Value Orientation and Practical Behaviors*

Social characteristics like mobility and changeability guided by the market economic mechanism require youth to change themselves in order to adapt to social changes, greatly increasing their sense of self-direction and making the pursuit of individuality the basic characteristic of contemporary Chinese youth. Generally, contemporary youth seek satisfaction of self-needs, view the society as the objective environment where they can realize their goals and display their ability and attach more importance to self-development and realization of self-interest. The popularity of digital and cyber culture in the information age has highlighted these characteristics of contemporary youth. The 1996 national survey of youth by China Youth and Children Research Center reveals that 77.5% of the youth consider the realization of self-value as their life goal; meanwhile, 50.3% of the surveyed confess that the primary reason for their hard work is to realize their own value. Therefore, "self-realization" is the salient characteristic of the value orientation of contemporary youth.

The establishment of a market economy has brought about the awareness of material benefits and economic gains. The influence of pragmatism on youths' values and various kinds of desires kindled by the increasingly affluent material world cause behaviors of contemporary youth to turn from being ideal to being practical, from valuing spiritual fulfillment to valuing material gains and from being ideology-oriented to being practical. Many surveys of senior high school students and college students show that most of the surveyed believe that qualities they need to improve most at present are foreign language ability, specialized knowledge, range of knowledge, ability to socialize and ability to solve practical problems. They pay more attention to reforms directly related to their existence and development. Housing reform, medical care reform, retirement insurance system reform and price reform are always foci of attention of contemporary youth. A survey of youth all over the country conducted by China Youth and Children Research Center shows that life goals most valued by the majority of youth are "contribution to the construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics," "a happy and harmonious family" and "successful career". The fact that love for the country, family and career have become the major life goals of contemporary Chinese youth shows clearly their practical value orientation towards a powerful country, happy family and successful career.

*Strong Patriotism and Active Service for the Society*

Patriotism has been a proud tradition for the Chinese. In a time of exchange and conflict among multiple cultures with pluralistic values, Chinese youth still show strong patriotic feelings and actions to serve the country. A nationwide survey of over 10,000 senior high school students organized by the Ministry of Education in 2000 revealed that 24.4% of the surveyed regarded Zhou Enlai as the one they admire (or worship) most and ranked Premier Zhou first, which is the absolute largest percentage compared to those of other nominees. All of those who choose singing stars and movie stars added up to less than 20%. According to a national survey of college students carried out by China Youth and Children Research Center in January 2004, nearly 9/10 believed China would continue to pursue socialism with Chinese characteristics without many changes or relapses in its future development; 91.9% of the college students were ready to make contributions to anti-secession efforts and resistance against foreign aggression. Because of the patriotic education activities advocated by the government, Chinese youth generally demonstrate great enthusiasm for participation and have actual actions as well. The Nationwide Reading Program for Patriotism Education of Youth and Children, which began in 1993, had continued for 11 years by 2004 with altogether 390 million participants. Patriotic education sites across the whole country have become places where youth and children visit and study frequently. Take Beijing for example, the 88 patriotic education places in the city have received over 250 million visitors in the past 12 years.

In the 1990s, China witnessed rapid development of its public non-profitable organizations, with "Chinese Young Volunteers Campaign" as a representative that had the largest scale and the most profound influence. At the end of 1993, the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League of China decided to launch "China Young Volunteers Campaign". On December 19 in the same year, over 20,000 young railway workers took the lead in holding up the banner of "Youth Volunteers" and carrying out volunteer services to help passengers along the Beijing-Guangzhou Railway. Thereafter, the youth volunteer campaign spread rapidly all over the country. According to a national survey of 2,600 young people carried out by China Youth and Children Research Center in 2000,86.4% of them had participated in volunteer services. Among those who participated, 77.5% did so "on their own will". The vast majority support volunteer activities and demonstrate great willingness to serve the people. By 2004, more than 100 millions of young people had offered over 4.5 billion hours of volunteer service to the society in China. A grass-root organization network of youth volunteer services had established consisting of over 24,000 youth volunteers' service stations in communities and more than 100,000 volunteer service teams.

*Great Improvement in Youth Educational and Scientific Quality*

After over 20 years of development, China's education has made two major historic breakthroughs: one is the realization of the goal to eliminate illiteracy among the

young and the middle-aged with free compulsory educational programs; the other is the beginning of mass higher education. Thus, the average year of education for Chinese people has increased from 8.2 years in 1990 to 11 years in 2000. More importantly, Chinese youths benefit the most from this with their abilities greatly improved. The rate of nine-year free compulsory education in China increased from only 40% in the early 1990s to 92% at present. Illiteracy rate among the young and middle-aged dropped from 10.3% in the 1990s to about 4% at present. At the same time, senior high school education also made great progress. In 2003, there were altogether 31,800 senior high schools in China with an admission of 12.6788 million students, a total enrolment of 32.4340 million and the gross enrolment rate of 43.8%. The drastic development of higher education in China provides contemporary youth with more opportunities for access to higher education. In 1998, China's higher education institutions began to increase the admission continuously. In 2003, the total enrolment of students reached 19 million, ranked first in the world. The gross admission rate rose from 9.8% in 1998 to 17% in 2003. Till then, China's higher education had entered a stage when many more high school students can go to college. In 2004, the enrollment in China's higher education institutions exceeded 20 million for the first time with a gross admission rate of 19%.

With the constant improvement in education and the policy of "rejuvenating China through science and technology," the scientific and technological knowledge base of Chinese youth is increasing all the time. According to the international practice of scientific knowledge testing, 1.98% of the Chinese people had met the standard in 2003, rising 0.48 percentage from the 1.4% in 2001. Youth aged 18-29 were with the highest scientific level among all age groups and the general scientific knowledge level was 3.7%, 1 percentage higher than 2.7% in 2001. As far as four major aspects of scientific knowledge were concerned, the percentage of ordinary Chinese people knowing the relevant scientific terms reached 12.5%, while the percentage for the youth group aged from 18 to 29 was 20.1 %, ranking first among all age groups. The percentage of ordinary Chinese people knowing relevant scientific notions reached 30%, while that of youth aged 18-29 was 40.1 %, ranking first again in all age groups; the percentage of common Chinese people knowing relevant scientific methodologies reached 8%, while that of youth aged 18-29 was 16.3%, much higher than other age groups; the percentage of ordinary Chinese understanding the relation between science and society reached 46.7%, while that of youth aged 18-29 was only 44.4%, the lowest among all age groups.

*New Main Force of Employment with Constantly Rising Social Status*

The only child policy has helped China maintain a low birth rate in past over 20 years. With people born during the third baby boom reaching the working age, the percentage of work force population aged 15 to 64 in the whole population has been increasing and reached a historic peak of around 71 % in 2003. The increase in work force population is mainly caused by an ever-continuing process for the youth to be employed. It was reported that young people under 35 made up nearly half of the existing work

force in China. The annual increase of almost 10 million in the work force in cities and towns were mostly young people. Among 113.9 million rural workers working away from their hometowns in 2003, 47.3% were under 25. The increase in the proportion of young people in the whole work force population and the continuous improvement in youth's education has provided sufficient human resources guaranteed for China's development and enabled youth to play a more and more important role in economic development and social changes.

Contemporary Chinese youth have become the new main force of employment and are also the backbone of scientific and technological industries, high-tech enterprises, information network and e-commerce and other new economic domains, playing a more and more important part in economic development. The 2000 nationwide survey of big IT enterprises conducted by China Youth and Children Research Center revealed that young people under 35 made up 56.9% of leaders in those enterprises, 61.7% of middle managers, 56.0% of top-notch professionals (with secondary senior positions and higher) and 72.8% of research and development personnel who had made significant and outstanding contributions to those enterprises. At the end of 2003, Chinese Academy of Sciences had a permanent staff of 45,000, among whom 70% were under 45. Not only has the status of contemporary youth in economic development been improved, their economic income and political lives have also made remarkable progress. A survey of high-income urban families all over the country carried out by China's National Bureau of Statistics in August 2004 indicates that the income of young people from 25 to 35 is higher than any other age groups. As far as political status is concerned, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the State Council, through the 8th and 16th Documents issued by the General Office of the CPC Central Committee in 2004, stressed the strengthening of ideological and moral construction of minors and college students, fully recognized their great influence over the prospect of the Party and destiny of the nation. Meanwhile, contemporary Chinese youth have strong sense of political participation and each year hundreds of thousands of people are employed by government services. All of these show that the political status of contemporary youth is also on the increase.

*More Freedom in Love and Marriage and More Open about Sex*

The freedom and independence of love and marriage of contemporary Chinese youth is reflected, on the one hand, by more rights of freedom and independence endowed by the law and, on the other hand, by the fact that youth now enjoy more freedom and rights in love, marriage and divorce, while the influence from parents, families and other social factors is on the decrease. On October 1, 2003 China began to implement the new *Regulation on Marriage Registration* by which neither the government nor the work units should "interfere" with marriage any more, thus providing people more decision-making rights to marriage. One should be responsible for his or her own marriage and should enjoy the full freedom of marriage. After the 1990s, freedom in love and marriage and choice of one's own spouse were accepted by the majority of Chinese youth.

Freedom in marriage enabled the two parties not only to consider social and economic factors but also to pay more attention to other factors including the quality of marriage and stability of family. Results of the "National Survey on the Moral Situations of Marriage and Family" carried out by All-China Women's Federation in 2002 showed that in terms of spouse selection, residents from both urban and rural areas have broken the tradition of arranged marriage by parents and 68.2% of them could have the final say in their own marriage.

As the age of sexual maturity comes earlier and earlier and the age of first marriage is delayed again and again, the period between sexual maturity and marriage has been lengthening. Accompanied with social, economic and cultural influence, sex concepts and sexual behaviors of contemporary Chinese youth have undergone great changes. The percentage of those who are for premarital sex is going up and that of those who actually have had premarital sex is rising too. *National Report on China's Population and Development* released in September 2004 pointed out that over the past 10 years, the physiological and psychological sexual maturity of Chinese youth and children came earlier and earlier, their sex attitude was more open, sex morality became pluralistic and the average age of first sex went down. Results from a survey of over 10,000 senior high school students nationwide carried out by China Ministry of Education in 2000 revealed that they had a considerably open attitude towards sex with 15.5% of the senior high school students agree or quite agree to premarital sex, among which 22.7% were from urban areas and 9.0% from rural areas and 23% agree with dating in high school. In 2004, a survey of 15,000 college students on their sex health condition revealed that 10.6% of the male students and 5.6% of the female students had sex. Among them, male and female students from 24 to 26 who had sex account for 19.5% and 17.6% and the percentages for those above 27 were 56.6% and 42.9%, respectively. Besides, 45.5% of male students and 26.8% of female students believed that cohabitation before marriage was a more suitable social life style for family life.

*Rich Leisure Life and Main Body of Digitized Life*

The continuous increase of leisure time and rising quality of leisure life are important contents and marked signs of social advancement. With the rapid development of the China's economy and society, leisure time has increased and has become richer. Results of a 2004 survey on the cultural and spiritual life of the Chinese people in their leisure time suggested that contemporary Chinese people's average length of leisure time is 4 hours 46 minutes during workdays and 8 hours 9 minutes during weekends. Watching TV was the activity which occupied the largest part of their leisure time, averaging 2 hours 39 minutes every day. Contemporary Chinese youth make the best use of their leisure time to step out of their houses and broad social interactions. They acquire knowledge, build up their bodies, expand their interpersonal communications and increase their social knowledge and adaptability. They are also more active in selecting their leisure activities, making their leisure time of higher quality, richer and

more colorful. A 2000 survey conducted by China Youth and Children Research Center indicated that as to the favorite activity in their leisure time, 36.8% youth chose "to enrich oneself through reading and learning," 21.7% "to watch TV," 16.7% "to contact friends," 7.1% "to seek the opportunity to earn money," 6.5% "to have physical training and exercise," and 4.1 % chose "to play cards or chess".

Digitized life refers to the lifestyle of which the internet and mobile phone become an indispensable part. In China, most internet and mobile phone users are youth. Among the current 94 million internet users in China, those below 30 account for 69.4%. The average Chinese internet users spend 13.2 hours online and get online 4 days per week. On average, they have 1.5 e-mail accounts, receive 4.4 e-mails and send 3.6 every week. They frequently employ the following internet services: e-mail box, news reading, search engines, software uploading or downloading, website or webpage browsing, online chatting, online games, BBS forum and community and discussion groups. Mobile phone text message is youth's favorite digitized means of information transmission, thus greatly facilitating the development of "thumb economy" in China. According to statistics of a 2003 survey, for groups of text message users, 43% are between 18 and 25, followed by those between 26 to 35, accounting for 25.4% and then came those below 18, making up 19.5%, while those aged 36 or older only account for 13.3%. In 2000, the number of mobile phone text messages in China was not more than I billion, only I % of the world's total; while in 2001, the figure rose to 18.9 billion, accounting for 7% of that of the world. This number was more than quadrupled in 2002, reaching 90 billion and 20% of the world's sum total. In 2003, the number came to 200 billion, accounting for half of the number of the world. And in 2004, China sent 220 billion text messages. The amount of time internet users spend going online every week, the services they employ, the frequency of using those services and the mobile phones' profound impact on the communication pattern of youth clearly suggest that the internet and mobile phones are more and more penetrating into youth daily life and will pervade, in an all-round way, all the fields of youth life.

*Marriage Peak of First Generation Only-Children*

China initiated the only-child policy in 1974 and has officially implemented it since 1979. The first group of children born with an only-child certificate totaled 6.1 million. Now these children have reached marriage and child bearing age and are entering a period of marriage and baby-raising peak. By now, the population of the new generation born with an "only-child certificate" has exceeded 80 million and China is moving towards "the era of only children". In the next 10 years, the number of new families where "only-child parents" raise their own only children will surpass 10 million and there will emerge a so-called group of "only-child parents". The impact of this phenomenon on the process of social advancement is growing apparent. According to a 2004 survey, 45.7% of the "only-child parents" entrusted their parents to take care of their children, while that proportion for "non-only-child parents" was only 28.1 %. Of "only-child par-

ents" surveyed 51 % choose to live with grandparents under the same roof, while 42.5% of "non-only-child parents" choose to do so. Another survey in the same year indicated that nearly 50% of children were receiving "education of grandparents". The byproduct of only children's marriage and children bearing, will exert considerable influence on the next generation of only children.

Currently, the average household size in a Chinese family drops from 3.96 in 1990 to 3.44 in 2000. Smaller family leads to a simpler family relationship, a more equal parent-child relationship and an increasingly important position of children in the family. The 1997 year-end survey of youth in Beijing and Shanghai showed that, respectively, 50.5% and 46.8% of the youth thought that parents could respect their views or opinions; 67.3% youth believed that parents showed respect for their privacy while only 6.4% did not think so. According to another survey, the 2002 "National Survey of the Moral Situations of Marriage and Family" conducted by All-China Women's Federation, 90.6% of the surveyed from urban areas agreed to the approach of "equality and being reasonable" in bringing up children; 64.1 % urban parents advocated joint efforts from parents and children in solving problem in children's daily life and learning, while 37.7% parents insisted on taking the initiative in solving problems for children; and proportions of urban and rural children who help their parents with the housework were 65.9% and 85%, respectively. In sum, most parents have begun to, or are going to, solve problems through discussions with their children and the parent-child relationship shows a positive development trend. Under such a background where democratic concepts have taken root in the hearts of Chinese people, accompanied by changes in family relationship, the relationship between youth and their parents has been more harmonious and intimate. Equality and democracy have become key factors in contemporary family relationship.

*Youth Unemployment and Delinquency*

China has a big youth population and every year it has an increase of tens of millions of new workers. The youth employment problem is increasingly prominent. The period of 2001-2005 sees the fastest growth of China's working population, an increase of 13.6 million every year. While the working population is growing, currently 150 million rural surplus farmers need to be transferred and over 11 million unemployed and laid-off workers in the urban areas need to be reemployed. In recent years, China's registered unemployment rate in urban areas rose from 3.1 % (5.71 million) in 1998 to 4.2% (7.95 million) in 2004. Out of the registered unemployed, about 70% are under 35. Meanwhile, along with the wider access to higher education and the increasing difficulty of employment for college graduates, more and more college students are confronted with more pressure from employment. In 2002, the number of China's college graduates was 1.45 million nationwide, but only 70% of them found employment and some 430,000 failed to find a job after graduation. In 2003, college graduates totaled 2.12 million, but their employment rate was only 76%, with over 520,000 waiting for employment. In 2004, the number of college graduates reached 2.8 million and those unemployed also increased to 700,000. The

number of college graduates in 2005 will rise to 3.38 million and those without employment upon graduation will exceed 800,000. Also in 2004,24 million workers in urban areas needed employment, while, at most, only about 10 million new posts can be created every year, leaving the labor surplus against posts of about 14 million that year. It is just against this historical background where the imbalance between the total demand and supply of labor force is aggravating and the structural unemployment problem resulting from the disagreement of the quality of the labor force and the requirements of posts becomes more and more prominent.

Juvenile delinquency is another outstanding problem for social security. Statistics from the China Juvenile Delinquency Research Association suggested that, in recent years, the total of juvenile delinquency had come to occupy more than 70% of China's total criminal offences. In 2003, offenders under 25 made up 45% of the total number of criminals and 33% of the detainees who had disrupted social law and order. In the period of 1999-2003, the number of juvenile delinquents increased by 4.7% and the rate of criminal offences grew by 1.4 times. The percentage of minors sentenced for criminal offences rose from 6.36% in 1998 to 7.93% in 2003; the number of minor crime types also increased from 98 in 1998 to 120 in 2003 nationally, an increase of 22.45%. Current juvenile delinquencies, in addition to traditional types, also see such new offences as network fraud, computer network safety endangerment, participation in organized crimes of mafia-like criminal groups, forgery of various types of invoices and so on.

## Predictions of Chinese Youth Development

*Gender Imbalance and Heavier Burden in Care of Aged Parents*

Since the 1980s, the gender (boys to girls) ratio in the newborns has been always high. In 1981 it was 109/100, only slightly above the normal range (103-107/100); in 1989 it rose to 111/100; however, the fifth national census in 2000 showed that the gender ratio of those 0-4 reached 119/100. After 2000, the gender ratio of babies still remained high. In 2003, the average gender ratio of 0-4 year olds was 121.22/100, that of 5-9 year olds 119.66/100, that of 10-14 year olds 111.69/100 and that of 15–19 year olds 110.61/100. The emergence of such a phenomenon is closely related to the gender preference of the Chinese public and to the intensification of such a gender preference caused by the implementation of the only-child policy. Of course, the Chinese government has already fully realized serious social consequences of such phenomenon and has adopted forceful and effective measures to alleviate and solve such a problem with the view of pulling the gender ratio back to the normal. However, due to the unchangeable reality of the existing gender imbalance of those already born, in 10-20 years' time, as they reach marriage age, the population born in the period of rising gender ratio will inevitably be confronted with marriage difficulties.

At present, only children have begun to step into the society in an all-round way, taking up their social responsibility for the care of the aged and upbringing of the young. From the family perspective, contemporary youth have got an obviously heavier burden in caring for the aged. The per capita burden rises from the past 1/5-1/4 to the present 1/2 or even 1. Due to the quick growth of the Chinese aging population, the rate of the social caring for the aged also increases rapidly. China joined the world's aging countries ahead of time in October 1999, with those over 60 reaching 126 million, accounting for 10% of the country's population. By 2020, the percentage of China's senior population will rise to 11.8%, with a peak of 23%. In 1990, the rate of the caring for the aged was 13.7% for the Chinese working population; in 2000 it rose to 15.6%; in 2025, it is estimated to grow up to 29.46% and in 2050 to 48.49%. At the same time, due to the decreasing newborn population, the rate of raising children is decreasing all the time. At present, China is in a historical period when the burden of raising children for the Chinese population is the lightest. In the year of 2008, the rate of raising children for the working population will reach the historical low, i.e. 46.56%. However, the interval between the falling child raising rate and the rising rate for caring for the aged is very short, making the overall rate of child raising and caring for the aged stay at a comparatively low level only for a relatively short period, that is to say the 21st century will only see a rather short period of continuous falling at the rate and then it will be characterized by a sharp rise in the rate of caring for the aged, which will result in a speedy aggravation of the overall social burden of the caring for the aged. In 2025, the rate of caring for the aged for the working population will reach 59.5% and in 2050 it will come to 76.8%.

*Increased Opportunities to Receive Higher Education and Study Abroad*

Revitalizing China through science and education is China's basic strategy and a necessary path to building China into a powerful country with rich human resources. The *Outline for China's Sustainable Development Action at the Beginning of the 21st Century* released in 2004 proposed that by the year 2010, the gross admission rate for junior high schools would surpass 95% and that for senior high schools would reach 20% or so and the literacy rate of the young, and the middle-aged, would remain over 95%. In 2004, the diploma office of the State Council pointed out that the number of China's postgraduates at school would increase from the present 800,000 to 1.8 million in the next five years. And in January 2005, Chinese Ministry of Education released the admission plan for ordinary institutions of higher education for the year 2005: the admission of undergraduates in 2005 is 4.75 million, up 8% over the actual admission in 2004; the admission of graduates is 370,000, of which 316,000 were master and 54,000 doctoral students, up about 15% and 2% over 2004 respectively. Therefore, at the time of fierce international competition, China will emphasize on enhancing the quality of higher education while keeping a high expansion rate and Chinese youth will have more opportunities to receive higher education.

From 1978 to 2003, the number of Chinese students studying abroad totaled 700,200. In recent years, that number has grown rapidly and the number of self-funded students has also soared up. In 2000, the number of Chinese students studying abroad was 39,000, of whom 32,000 were self-funded; in 2001, 84,000 went to study abroad and 76,000 were self-funded; in 2002, the number increased to 125,000 with 117,000 being self-funded; and in 2003, the number of Chinese students studying abroad was 117,300 and 109,200 were self-funded students. With increasing enthusiasm of family investment on education, more parents would like to send their children to study abroad at their own expense. Such a strong desire to invest on education will keep going and the momentum of self-funded study abroad will also remain strong.

With the radical increase in the number of students studying abroad, the scale of those who return to China after completing their studies is also rapidly expanding. During the period of 1978-2003, the total number of returned Chinese students reached 172,800. And from 1996 to 2002, the average return rate of the personnel sent abroad was 95.88%. And in 2003, the number of returned Chinese students exceeded 20,000 for the first time and reached 20,100, a record high since 1978. In November 2004, a survey conducted by All-China Youth Federation on the status quo of the students studying abroad or already returned from 49 countries and regions worldwide indicated that, 87.7% of overseas Chinese students would like to return to China. Among them, 34.5% expressed that they would like to return upon the completion of their studies and 53.1 % said that they would like to return after having worked for a certain period of time and having accumulated some work experience. Among their reasons for return, the most important ones were the ample space for development and their adaptation to the Chinese cultural environment. Based on wishes and reasons for the return of overseas Chinese students, we may predict that, with the growing number of Chinese students going to study abroad, the number of returned students is also going to rise by a big margin in the future.

*More Social Mobility Due to the Weakening of Household Register System*

The household register system, an obstacle blocking people's mobility between urban and rural areas, has to be abolished. Now, many of China's provinces have sped up their reforms of the household register system. For instance, Hubei Province has ended its 46-year-long history to differentiate "agricultural" and "non-agricultural" residence and has established a unified residence registration system for urban and rural areas. Hunan Province has also set up a uniform residence registration system for urban and rural areas, under which all people will be registered as "residents". And Shandong Province has begun the implementation of a new policy of "household register," calling off various offices restricting the population flow to cities and towns such as "population control office" and trying to promote the population concentration to small cities and towns. Guiyang City has loosened the conditions for farmers to find employment or to settle down in cities and has adopted the prefecture-wide "project of trans-

fer and employment for rural labor force". The reform of household register system has gradually done away the fundamental social basis for the existence and functioning of identity control, and has been reducing the influence and restriction of household register system and identity in their impact on and limitation to the flow of social members gradually. Meanwhile, non-public economy is enjoying continuous development in China. Since private enterprises do not care about employees' residency registration, former employment or school files, or political identity, the identity and household register system is weakened to a great extent and the mobility of youth between different industries and professions is encouraged. The 2000 survey of Beijing Youth Research Association suggested that 25.6% of youth in Beijing had changed their jobs; 45% of people in Beijing and Shenzhen had changed their professions; and Chinese under 30 changed their jobs at least once every five years on average. The 2003 survey of the "Youth Development Report" in Shanghai showed that the mobility rate of young professionals for professional reasons reached 23.8% and the expected mobility rate for professional reasons reached 56.3%. Thus, in an age of household register reform and identity weakening, young laborers will enjoy faster, more frequent and more upward mobility thanks to their advantages of age, education, job market competitiveness and ease to move and work with others in industrial restructuring and production factor allocation.

*Youth Culture Makes Mainstream Culture Young*

During the 1990s, the pluralistic trend of China's youth culture began to take shape. Pluralism was found in the diversification of values, regions, groups and carriers of youth culture. Specifically, it is reflected by the "star worship" phenomenon, the "chat fever" phenomenon in the virtual world, the "South Korean trend" phenomenon in foreign culture and the "catchwords" phenomenon in social life. Not only this, the more important factor is that youth culture has undergone an evolution from inconspicuous to the center, from being a daily phenomenon to becoming the outlook on values and the nucleus of culture, from being a group sub-culture to being a social mainstream culture. After youth have mastered more scientific and technological expertise and held more social resources, the youth culture they have created will inevitably be and is also integrated into, adjusted to, or taking the place of some current mainstream culture, making mainstream culture rejuvenated. As far as the present is concerned, in the fields of digital life, recreational culture, enterprise culture and social concepts, youth culture is being integrated into, or is becoming an important part of, mainstream culture.

Cross-generational discrepancy is an objective social fact. With more generational layers, decreasing effect of cross-generational cultural inheritance, great socio-environmental and radical social changes, cross-generational differences will also be widening. At present, the average lifespan of the Chinese is apparently prolonged, with the average life expectancy of the Chinese population rising from 35 before 1949 to 71.4 in 2002. As more cross-generational layers appear, the cross-gen-

erational discrepancies are also becoming more obvious in various aspects. Currently, with radical socio-environmental changes, the rapid permeation of internet into learning, work and life of youth, the popularization of mobile phones, the fast development of a "thumb economy" and the speedy elevation of youth education, differences between generations regarding value formation, mainstream culture and lifestyles will be widened more and more. Meanwhile, during the transition from a society in which people only consume basic necessities to one in which people seek quality consumption, differences in consumer psychology, consumer behavior and consumption patterns have also been major manifestations of cross-generational discrepancies. In terms of consumer psychology, contemporary Chinese youth pay more attention to raising their quality of life and to satisfying their personal taste. The consumer psychology of excessive consumption collides head-on with traditional concepts of living a frugal life. Although cross-generational discrepancies are widening, different generations are living harmoniously together, with each being more rational and tolerant with the existence of differences. Thus, cross-generational conflicts will not worsen with the widening of cross-generational differences. Therefore, in certain sense, broadening of cross-generational discrepancies not only reflect to the extent the society is advanced, but also become an inner motive in the advancement of the society.

*Youth Employment Difficulty and High Youth Crime Rate*

Due to many social factors, such as Chinese social economic development process, big population base, age structure and migration, in the first 20 years of the 21st century, China is still confronted with comparatively high pressure from employment. Various predictions indicate that, in the next 20 years, China's proportion of work force will stay at a high level of 70% or so, and in 2020, its working population will amount to 940 million. From 2001 to 2005, China's working population increased 13.6 million annually on average and that aged 16 or older grows 5.50 million every year; and up to 2020, newly added youth to be employed will come to 100 million or so. During the same period of time, China needs not only to solve the problem of employment for the current unemployed and laid-off but also to create employment opportunities for 100 million or so newly added young labor force. Besides, more than 100 million surplus young laborers from rural areas need jobs. Given the huge income gap of employment between agricultural and non-agricultural sectors, the scale of the flow of young farmers to cities and of the transfer of farming work force to non-agricultural sectors will be further enlarged. Meanwhile, the employment elastic coefficient of China's GDP has been on the decline ever since the 1980s, with that of 0.322 during 1980-1989 dropping to 0.109 during 1990-1995, and at present it is lower than 0.1 %. Thus, the decreasing number of positions provided by the economy and the increasing number of people who need jobs form a prominent challenge. Complicated by such factors as rather serious structural unemployment among varied professions and vocations, unemployment in different regions and for people with different val-

ues, it is very hard to fundamentally alleviate the difficult employment and reemployment situation for youth in a short period of time.

A similarly prominent problem is the long-standing high rate of juvenile delinquency. At present, there are three fairly apparent trends concerning China's juvenile delinquency. Firstly, idle youth and children (not in school at school age or unemployed) become the main body of criminals. In 2003, a survey by the Central Committee of Communist Youth League of China found that among the surveyed 2,361 juvenile delinquents, 1,445 were idle youth and children, accounting for 61.2%. Because more urban youth dropped out of school, were unemployed and lost assistance and more rural youth whose parents go to cities to find jobs lost parental care, the population of idle youth and children is growing and thereby forms the main body of potential juvenile delinquents. Secondly, juvenile offences against property caused by a relative sense of deprivation or money worship increase. It was reported that among cases of juvenile delinquency, robbery and theft account for 71 % of the total. Due to the rapidly widening social gap, a part of youth and children are thrown out of the social development process, which leads to them resorting to illegal means in order to secure resources for sustenance and development. Since social gap is hard to narrow in a short period of time and the imperfect social security mechanism is also inadequate in solving the economic and social predicament of disadvantaged youth and children, it is inevitable that the rate of juvenile offences against property should stay high over a long period of time. Thirdly, juvenile delinquency connected with negative factors such as addition to the internet and drugs rises. The ratio of minor delinquency caused by internet use in total minor offences increased from 4.1% in 2000 to 25.1% in 2003. Besides, most drug users have criminal behaviors or criminal records. According to statistics, 80% of female drug users are engaged in prostitution while 80% of male users have committed other criminal acts. According to statistics at the end of 2003, there were some 756,000 registered youth and children drug users in China, holding 72% of the total 1.05 million. And the number of drug users is still rising, which means, to some extent, the growing number of juvenile delinquents. Due to the difficulty in eliminating or eradicating these social factors in a short period of time, and some factors may worsen to some extent, it is difficult to prevent and eliminate juvenile delinquency in the near future.

# Introduction to Chinese Youth:
# A Commentary

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In this chapter, the author gives a comprehensive overview of the social and cultural contexts in which mainland Chinese youth live and grow, describes the characteristics of contemporary Chinese youth and helps readers to understand what challenges they face in an era of social transformation. In order to understand Chinese youth's experiences during the social changes described by the author, it is helpful to discuss the social and cultural differences in defining youth between China and US, adolescent and youth development, social change and youth, factors moderating youth developmental process, as well as the effects of the social changes on youth's well-being and prevention and intervention for youth's maladjustment.

**Youth in Eyes of Chinese and Americans**

Chinese youth is defined as a Chinese person aged 15 to 29 in this chapter. As the author points out, youth definition varies across cultures and societies. Youth definition also varies in biology, law, or different domains of social sciences (e.g., psychology and sociology). For example, in the US, youth may suggest a phase of development particularly marked by puberty and its related psychosocial adjustment. In Canada, a person is eligible for public benefits for youth until the age of 24 (University of Ottawa Medicine School, 2005). In China, a young person under age of 14 is not held legally accountable for any illegal act and thus is not charged for the crime he/she committed (Suzhou Attorney Network, 2005). On the other end, 14 or older may mean accountability and "growing-up". In most western societies, youth is viewed neither as a child nor as an adult. Youth refers to a period of life between childhood and adulthood (Princeton University Cognitive Science Laboratory, no date) and all that entails - social obligation, role expectation, relationship development and social status/treatment. It is interesting to note subtle differences in defining youth in Chinese and American cultural and social contexts. American youth are often interchangeable with adolescents or teenagers, as compared with Chinese youth that include adolescents as well as young adults. Chinese youth, then, are expected to be more mature, assume more responsibilities for themselves and their families and develop clearer education

and career goals. Chinese youth are expected to make many decisions about their education, relationship and career development while trying to learn skills in making right decisions, developing dating and other meaningful relationships and establishing themselves financially. Despite the fact that youth in both countries go through a similar developmental path, American youth are allowed for immaturity or inexperience and emotional instability.

## Adolescent and Youth Development

Adolescence is a developmental period of life marked by uncertainty and turmoil in western cultures. Adolescents experience many changes in physical appearance, cognitive operations, social perspective taking, psychological and sexual identity formation and so forth. Through these changes, adolescents are able to think more critically and logically. They begin to reexamine values internalized when they were younger. Old values are either confirmed or rejected and many new values accepted.

The first apparent growth spurt for adolescents is physical development. Hormone changes result in an explosive change in body shape and proportions. With the maturity of their reproductive system, teens are more attracted by the other sex and more concerned about their physical appearances. Another growth spurt for adolescents is cognitive development. Their thinking appears to be more logical and steady (Siegler, 1978; Keating, 1980). They begin to think in abstract concepts such as justice (Flavell, 1985). But the justice in their mind is often justice in its absolute sense. It is accomplished with idealism and fantasy. Adolescent thinking is also marked by idealistic rebellion. They begin to think critically, comparing how things might be to what they are and what one says and what he/she does.

Adolescence is a period of identity exploration. They explore personal interest and values, and try on different roles. They question who they are and what they want in life (Erikson, 1968). During adolescence the growing sense of autonomy and independence prompts adolescents to exercise more control over their activities and to be more critical of their parents' values and beliefs. Recent research found Chinese parents appeared to be less authoritarian than the prevailing literature had described. Chinese adolescents experienced a passage of autonomy development similar to that of their American counterparts (Xia, Zhou, Xie, DeFrain, Combs and Meredith, 2004).

## Social Change and Adolescent/Youth Development

Like their American counterparts, Chinese youth's experiences are shaped by the social and cultural contexts. "Social change, which entails large-scale alterations in ideological, technological and economic systems within societies, has significant implications for adolescent development. For example, social change can affect the structure and dynamics of social contexts that adolescents experience on a daily basis such as family, school and youth groups. It can also alter social institutions and cultural belief sys-

tems that organize the adolescent period" (Crockett and Silbereisen, 2000). The author of this chapter has done an admirable job in highlighting China's rapid social changes over past two decades that affect the lives of Chinese youth in many facets identified by Crockett and Silbereisen.

The chapter gives a great example of the impact of social change on youth development from Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological framework. Economic reform has brought about an unprecedented growth of China's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and improvement of living standards. In addition to this, the shift from planned to socialist marketing economy is accompanied by the occurrence of new cultural values, education system and social conditions (*macrosystem*). During the transition, the pluralistic economic pattern makes mobility possible. The reform and opening-up policy creates many employment opportunities that require new knowledge and high technology. Redefining the relationship between the employer and the employee leads to the decline of the "work unit system," a social structure that allows the government control and influence people' lives through working place (*exosystem*). As the transformation continues, a new sense of community and neighborhood, new mate selection criteria and new marital and parent-child relationships are emerging (*microsystem*).

The author of this chapter summarizes eight major characteristics of contemporary Chinese youth who capitalize opportunities and take challenges posed by social changes. Compared with their parents and older siblings, the generation of "seventies" and "eighties" (those who were born in the 1970s and 1980s) are more individualistic and self-orientated, more liberal in premarital sex and more engaged in public services. They obtain more education, learn more knowledge and skills in computer science and high technology and use the internet more often. Some of them are troubled by unemployment and show signs of maladjustment such as drug use, involvement in gangs and other antisocial behaviors.

The ecological paradigm permits researchers to investigate not only youth individual characteristics and social contexts, but also interactions between them. The major strength of this theoretical approach is that youth experiencing opportunities and challenges are not examined as a sole individual or as part of a social system (i.e., family, peer, school, community). Rather, "It is assumed that the young person is constantly responding to, and adapting to, the different systems that he or she is exposed to" (Kaplan and Munoz, 1997, p. 63).

## Moderators of Impacts of Chinese Social Change

The impact of Chinese social change is not uniform. Education and economic opportunities do not reach every young person equally. To understand moderators of impacts of social change, we examine what variables make youth's experiences different. The author of the chapter points out that Chinese young people in urban areas benefit more from the economic reform than those in rural areas and males benefit more than females. During the social transformation, many urban families with in-

creased income are able to provide a good education for their children and enable them to compete for high-paid jobs after graduation. The economic reform has resulted in over 100 million surplus farmers. It has also widened the income gap between agricultural and non-agricultural employment. Young people in the rural areas leave their farms to seek employment in cities. Without an advanced degree, they, like migrant workers in America, often take jobs that are relatively low in pay but high in risk (e.g., construction workers, custodians and workers on production lines). Given new opportunities of working off the farm and increased income, they are disadvantaged in the economic reform.

Gender is another moderator of the social change impacts. Women have been more likely than men to suffer from reduced job security and health care benefits due to the increased discrimination in the job market (Parish and Busse, 2000; Sun, 1993).

## Family Variables as Moderators

Youth establish a sexual, political, moral and vocational identity through constant interactions with family, peer, school, community and the larger social systems (Berger, 2001). For contemporary Chinese youth, this task may become difficult and stressful when the new system creates endless identity possibilities and youth are caught between divergent cultural expectations. For example, the distancing effect of adolescent development on parent-adolescent relationship may become even more apparent in these Chinese youth's families. Parents may find themselves frustrated with their adolescent children whereas children feel their parents have too much control over them. Several family variables, such as parent-adolescent relationship and communication, are identified to protect youth from the stress associated with this developmental stage and help them adjust successfully to changes.

### *Parent-Adolescent Relationships*

Studies of parent-child relationships during the adolescent period repeatedly show that the transition into adolescence accompanies some levels of tension between parents and their children and disruption in the family (Collins and Russell, 1991; Fuligni, 1998; Paikoff and Brooks-Gunn, 1991). Parent-child conflict and emotional distancing are perceived predominantly as a function of development of the adolescent's autonomy. Adolescents redefine their roles in decision-making that used to be their parents' domain and seek an equalitarian parent-child relationship. The growing sense of autonomy and independence prompts adolescents to exercise more control over their activities and to be more critical of their parents' values and beliefs. Conflicts occur when parents are reluctant to accommodate the change and when there is not an agreement in role expectations between parents and children (Smetana, 1988). The level of conflict between parents and adolescents decreases after early or middle adolescence (Laursen and Collins,

1994). A reasonable degree of independence and supportive parent-child relationship are seen to be the healthiest to adolescent development (Grotevant and Cooper, 1985). Troubled relationships are reported more likely to occur between adjudicated adolescents and their parents (Smith and Kerpelman, 2002).

The fact that conflict is often seen as a synonym for adolescence does not suggest that conflict only has negative implications for adolescent growth (Collins and Laursen, 1992; Paikoff and Brooks-Gunn, 1991; Peterson, Wilson, Bush, and Zhao, 2002). Psychoanalytic theorists believe that conflict encourages individuation. Developmental psychologists assert that conflict redefines interpersonal roles. Social exchange theorists suggest that conflict provides a context for monitoring the relationship between rewards and costs. They all believe conflict is important in fostering development (Laursen and Koplas, 1995).

*Parent-Adolescent Communication and Interaction*

Good parent-adolescent relationships can hardly be sustained without an open and healthy communication between parents and adolescent children. Parent-adolescent communication plays an essential role in family functioning throughout adolescence (Collins, 1990; Gecas and Seff, 1990; Noller, 1994; Sroufe, 1991; Youniss and Smollar, 1985). Communication among family members is one of the most crucial facets of interpersonal relationships and the key to understanding the dynamics underlying family relations. Within the family system, family members constantly define and adjust their relationships through patterns of communication (Watzlawick, Beavin and Johnson, 1967). Families with a good communication style help the adolescent develop a clearer sense of self (Barnes and Olson, 1985). Effective communication at home helps clarify adolescents' role in the family and helps them develop the skill of empathy so that their personal identity effectively balances feelings of both individuality and connectedness (Grotevant and Cooper, 1985). Good communication improves adolescents' social skills that are positively correlated with self-esteem, well-being, coping and social support (Bijstra, Bosma and Jackson, 1994). Adequate communication between parents and adolescents (being able to freely express opinions and feelings) can effectively mediate stress adolescents experience. They will be less likely to feel lonely and suffocated in the external world when they know they are encouraged, supported and always have somebody to count on at home (Marta, 1997). Communication facilitates the process of family cohesion and adaptability development. Good communication between parents and adolescent children leads to closer family relationships and help them to be more loving and flexible in solving family problems (Barnes and Olson, 1985). Open communication with parents has a strong positive correlation with family satisfaction (Xia, et al., 2004).

*Chinese Parent-Adolescent Communication and Relationships*

In traditional Chinese culture, non-confrontational communication among people is valued in order to prevent them from losing face or dignity (Hong, 1989). Non-confrontational communication refers to expressing one's thoughts and feelings in an indirect and implicit manner, particularly when people disagree. This pattern of communication is evident among family members, not only to preserve an individual's dignity, but also to protect family harmony and family ties. Children are obligated to obey their parents, and take care of them when the parents get old (filial piety), as their parents are obligated to nurture and raise them while the children grow up.

Results from a recent study show good Chinese parent-adolescent communication was associated positively with cohesion and negatively with conflict. It also mediated the relationship between adolescent age and parent-adolescent conflict (Xia, et al., 2004). Chinese adolescents in Hong Kong wanted more independence in decision-making than the parents granted them. They perceived fathers as relatively less demanding, less concerned, more restrictive and harsher than mothers and adolescent girls perceived mothers as more demanding but less harsh (Shek, 1998; 1995). Other studies in Hong Kong showed that better relationships with parents were linked to higher self-concepts, better school performance, social skills and physical ability, while poorer relationships with parents were reported to relate to more misconduct and delinquency, as well as more psychological symptoms (Lau and Leung, 1992; Shek, 1997).

**Then What?**

Protective factors like positive parent-youth communication and relationships may buffer youth from maladjustment and therefore may work to reduce adolescent delinquency. Risk factors such as poverty, drug use and gang involvement may be difficult and take long time to change. However, programs may seek to increase protective factors to offset the risk. For example, poor communication skills and parent-adolescent/youth conflict are more amenable and can be addressed through programs that teach communication and problem solving skills. Although such youth services are provided by community and school programs, profit and nonprofit, throughout America, they are rarely seen in China.

Another approach to prevent juvenile delinquency is to address youth emotional problems. Research in the US indicates that emotionally-troubled youth are at much higher risk for committing suicide, using drugs and engaging in violence or other antisocial behaviors (Miczek, DeBold, Haney, Tidey, Vivian and Weets, 1994). However, I hypothesize that most cases of Chinese juvenile delinquency are not committed by youth with a diagnosable mental illness, but more often by youth with maladjustment and emotional disturbance. It may be that stigma associated with emotional and mental problems keep parents and youth from seeking help. Lack of knowledge of recognizing signs of emotional disturbance in professionals and the public may

also contribute to no effort of intervention. Early identification of emotionally troubled youth is critical in prevention and intervention. As mental and behavioral health issues grow, so does the necessity for health and social services to understand youth behaviors and to be equipped to respond to unique needs of Chinese youth in the era of rapid social change.

In summary, the author uses developmental and ecological framework to examine the effects of social change on the development and well-being of Chinese adolescents and young adults. Viewing the complexity of youth growth from this perspective, the author examines the developmental process and change in both the individual and the social context. The extensive statistical data and the author's insight make this chapter one of the most comprehensive contextual analysis of Chinese social change and youth's well-being in existing literature.

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