

# *The Chinese Press on the Condition of China's Families and Youth*

*Compiled by the Tripod Staff*

## **Family Patterns**

The United Nations has named 1994 as the "International Year of the Family" to call the attention of the world to the need to improve the quality of the family. What follows are a few facts gleaned from the Chinese press about China's families and youth.

According to the *China Daily*:

--Families change but tradition continues, and the changing nature of the family remains an important issue in the face of mounting global crises.

--Chinese families remain relatively stable compared with their counterparts in other countries.

--A stable family is instrumental to social stability.

--A traditional Chinese family is characterized by three generations living under the same roof and favouring male children.

--In cities the nuclear families with only one child dominate; in the rural areas most families have two to three children.

--The tradition of support for the elderly and close relationships between family members and a sense of strong family responsibility have not died out.

--Chinese parents are still unwilling to let their children select a spouse.

--Parents still meddle in their children's affairs.

--In the next century Dink (double income and no kids) families will increase in China. From 1978 through 1993 the number of Dink families hit 1 million. Most of these families are in large and medium size cities (*China Daily*, Jan. 26, 1994).

According to the China Academy of Social Sciences (CASS):

--There are more than 1 million Dink families in China.

--Most dinkies are well educated and live in large cities.

--Seventy-three percent of them are teachers, journalists and government employees.

--More than eighty per cent are college graduates.

Dinkies give the following reasons for not having children:

--A baby would be a great financial burden (60%).

--They worry about how their children might live (55%).

--Children would lower their living standards (47%).

Some, however, stated that children might give stability to a marriage and others feared that the next generation would be inferior if more intelligent couples had no children (*China Daily*, Jan. 28, 1994).

## Patterns among the Youth

### Young People Encouraged to Volunteer Services

#### *The New Young Volunteer Project*

Recently, China has developed youth volunteer projects that, hopefully, will help make young people more altruistic and caring. One such project is the New Young Volunteer Project which aims to persuade some 350 million young people to volunteer their services and thereby develop commitment, friendship, responsibility and a sense of duty.

Formerly, youth organizations tried to draw inspiration from Lei Feng, a folk hero of the early 60s, famous for his readiness to help others. These efforts failed to have much impact. The new project is setting more realistic goals to meet the country's rapidly changing situation.

The project is designed "to battle against the free-market view that everything comes at a cost" (*China Daily* March 29, 1994).

#### *CCYL Volunteer Project*

Another project, launched by the Chinese Communist Youth League (CCYL), aims to help care for 100 retired scientists and officials who have no children. The volunteers, mostly college students and young doctors, hope to provide routine medical examinations and consultations, as well as work on manuscripts and do housework (*China Daily* Feb. 28, 1994).

### ***Beijing University's Love Project***

The Love Society on the Beijing University campus, is an effort to bring care and love to others. Over the last few months the members of the Love Society have left their mark all over the campus. The Society's motto (which will be very familiar to American readers) is "*Let's do it now. Do not ask what others can do for you, ask what you can do for others; do not ask what China can do for you, ask what you can do for the country.*"

The group has organized visits to children's and old folks' homes and hospitals, have cleaned up the five campus cafeterias, tended the campus' gardens, rearranged the bicycle parking lots, helped at the local railway stations during the annual spring festival, etc.

The Love Society's reputation has now spread to many colleges and universities and, in the last few weeks, millions of students from universities in 15 large cities have offered their services to the public (*China Daily*, Feb. 8, 1994).

### **Changes in Young People's Expectations**

A survey recently conducted by Beijing University revealed substantial changes in young people's expectations in marriage partners:

- love, a caring personality and good education are replacing political and economic credentials in cities;
- a good character and common interests are crucial;
- health is important;
- young women want masculine and considerate men;
- the partner's profession or position is of much less importance and interest than character;

Changing criteria for marriage partners reveal a growing sense of independence and equality among Chinese youth.

It is generally agreed, however, that marriages based on love are still not the general norm in China. This is especially so in rural areas where young male farmers put economic conditions above all other considerations (*China Daily*, March 10, 1994).

### **New School Emphasizes Psychological Health**

Beijing has a new school to help young people develop psychologically. The 21st Century Psychology Education School

will have special counselors to help students with their problems. The school has invited 13 psychological experts in the capital to serve as consultants and instructors. All 753 students will take courses in mental health wherein they will be taught to deal with stress and handle problems with parents, teachers, schoolmates and friends from the opposite sex.

In 1989 Beijing set up a hotline for primary and middle school students and it has received an average of 10,000 calls yearly, 76% of which involve psychological problems. Most deal with relationships, school related stress, puberty questions and fear about the future. Experts maintain that the quickly changing society is creating more problems for children now than in the past. (*China Daily*, March 2, 1994).

### **Some Facts about Juvenile Delinquency in China**

--China's crime rate is among the lowest in the world with 0.6 persons per thousand committing a crime.

--Eighty per cent of delinquency cases involve teenagers.

--Juvenile delinquents, aged 14-18, are given mitigated punishment and cannot be put to death.

--The average age of youngsters who violated laws for the first time is now 14 years old compared to 16.7 before 1990.

--1989 showed a 31.79 % increase in juvenile crime over 1988.

Tian Sen, chairman of the China Contemporary Society Research Centre, speaking at a symposium on juvenile delinquency and moral education, pointed out the following developing trends in China's juvenile delinquency:

1) Lower age offenders: teenage thieves are not rare and occasionally, murderers and rapists are under 14 years of age. Factors responsible, according to the speaker, are the shift to a commodity economy, money worship, the negative influence of media on children, parents being too busy and neglecting to educate their children, the spoiling of children, the result of the one-child policy and the weakening of social authority and education.

2) An increase in female criminals: The rate of crime among women is increasing at a faster rate than that of men. Increased equality with men has brought more opportunities for

females to commit crimes. Besides prostitution, female financial crimes are on the rise.

3) Fleeing offenders: The present floating population makes it easier for offenders to commit crimes and "disappear".

4) Increase in gang offenders and gangs dominated by women are on the increase. Gang-related crimes are thefts, prostitution, swindling, kidnapping and selling of people. The education level among gang members is usually very low.

5) Use of brutal means to commit offenses, often learned from movies and crime stories.

6) Crime is concentrated in the urban areas.

7) Increase in transnational criminal cases.

The reasons for an increase in juvenile delinquency are complicated, but certain contributing factors are clear: reform and a better economy, the country's insufficiently developed legal system, the weakening of the country's moral strength, unfair social distribution and fewer opportunities for young people to obtain jobs.

The speaker concluded that to reduce the juvenile crime rate the moral education of the children in the family, school and society must be strengthened (*China Today*, Vol. 42 #11, Nov. 1993).

*China Now* attributes the rising crime rate to "the erosion of the national ethic" (*China Now*, No. 142).

The *Beijing Review* lists the causes of crime as:

--self independence and insubordination: Some young people do not want to be taught by others and are more likely to do what they are warned not to do.

--Bad influence: young people want to satisfy their desire for money, ease and comfort by whatever means. Pornographic culture is harmful to young minds and hearts.

--Lack of education: There are 10 million primary school graduates, 7 million junior middle school graduates and 5 million senior school students who cannot enter higher types of education each year. Many of these are influenced by bad elements in society.

--Among young offenders the largest number come from the following social conditions: broken homes, families with remarried parents, one-child families or are the youngest child in the family (*Beijing Review* Vol. 35 #2, Jan 13-19, 1992).