

From the Editor

Worried about its stability and the decline in its moral and family values, China laments publicly, “the disappearance of social norms, the demise of public morality and the disintegration of traditional values have brought us to this present moral crisis.” And yet, it would be difficult to find a country that has tried so hard through its many campaigns to curb “bureaucratic corruption” and “unhealthy tendencies.”

China has conducted campaigns against the six evils: prostitution, pornography, kidnapping of women and children, gambling, drug addiction and superstitious practices. It has tried to resurrect folk heroes like Lei Feng, a young soldier who, according to legend, made tremendous selfless contributions to those around him. Wang Junxi, the Iron Man hero, Jiao Yulu, the friend of the poor and countless others. They have tried to promote the ideology that “The Chinese Communists have their own understanding of the supreme purpose of a person’s life. For example, they do not believe people should devote inordinate amounts of time and energy to the mundane purpose of earning money. They believe instead that the best lives are lived by those who pursue the lofty goal of working hard in order to ensure the happiness of others.” The author of the article adds, “Is it still necessary for the Communist party to articulate values which emphasize the importance of devoting one’s life to serving the people?” (*Beijing Review*, Vol 38, No. 40, 1995).

The five-year plan for establishing a Spiritual Civilization, begun in 1990, stressed patriotism, self-abnegation and total dedication to the Chinese Communist Party. In 1992, the government warned against the dangers of creeping corruption and emphasized the need for “patriotism, collectivism and socialism.” In 1993, not knowing where to go with its plan, the Chinese government decided to blame its social ills on foreign influences. The government also redoubled its efforts, requiring youth to be saturated with moral education. Lectures on moral character became part of the daily curriculum at Beijing University. Suddenly, the “four olds”, the value of the past and especially the Confucian tradition, all supposedly obliterated with the Cultural Revolution, were revived. None of these

efforts, including heavy fines and punishments with long prison terms or even executions in the public squares, seem to deter the people from pursuing Deng's adage "to get rich is glorious". This has now become the overarching motivation. People held for so long in a straitjacket of government controls are not ashamed to admit publicly that for them, "the highest value in life is money."

The campaign has obviously failed to stirred hearts or win back the confidence of the people in the Party. To the outsider watching the process, it seems evident that the motivation of the government's effort is not so much due to the desire to see old customs and values revived as to ensure some modicum of stability and the survival of the Communist Party during this transformational period of economic development, modernization and opening to the outside world.

Building a Socialist Spiritual Civilization is the principle theme of this issue of *Tripod*. Sergio Ticozzi analyzes the extent of the moral crisis and the efforts made to address the problem and the results of these efforts.

Peter Barry traces the historical background of the government's efforts, as far back as 1981, to stave off devious behavior during the drive for modernization and the development of a "material civilization". Barry also addresses the role of religion in the socialist society, as well as its role in building up the "spiritual civilization".

Zhihua Yao, with his article, "In the Power of the Spirit" provides us with new insight into devising a spirituality especially suited and adapted to Asians in general and to the Chinese in particular. This spirituality is Spirit-centered, rather than Word-centered, free from the control of Eurocentrism and rationalism, yet thoroughly Christian, and based on a theology of hope

With this issue coming out at the beginning of the new Lunar New Year, the Year of the Rat, and the first in the twelve year series, the staff wishes all its readers Kung Hei Fat Choi! (BAM)
