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Revisiting China's Youth Policy

2011 was designated as the EU-China Year of Youth with a view to “further promoting and deepening partnership between Europe and China”, at the 12th EU-China Summit, held in Nanjing on 30 November 2009. A joint action plan for the Year of Youth was signed on 6 October 2010 by Commissioner Androulla Vassiliou and the Vice President of the All China Youth Federation. Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao attended the opening ceremony of the China-EU Year of Youth in Beijing on 23 February 2011, encouraging young people from China and the EU to build a brighter future for bilateral strategic partnerships.

One of the main objectives of the Year is to achieve extensive and positive impact and help ensure that cooperation between policy makers as well as between youth organizations is sustainable beyond 2011.

The publication of the results of our research in Forum21 shall contribute to broaden the knowledge of youth policy and policy dialogue as well as of other youth-related issues in China.

Youth Policy in the Changing Society

Over the past three decades since China officially implemented its open door and economic reform policies since early 1980s, it has transformed from a closed society to an opening up society and has brought drastic social change in various social strata. Economically, China has shifted from the highly centralized planned economy to a socialist market economy which has gained remarkable achievements in social constructions and quality of livelihood of citizens. However, in parallel with the success and opportunities of reforms, there came the challenges to young people who are in the disadvantaged position in society, have not fully matured their physical, intellectual, social and mental development, and “in a series of transitions from childhood to adulthood” (Cole, 1995:79) that requires adult guidance, social support, and privileged policies and rights to protect.

The contemporary challenges to young people in China can be comprehended in three aspects.

Firstly, the intrusion of western ideology such as democracy, liberalism, justice, capitalism, science and belief in diversity of social values confronts communism, socialism, collectivism, traditional Chinese values, socialist education, and socialization of communist ideology. There is confusion in the belief of political ideology and traditional social values. Secondly, the realistic and materialistic values contest the ideal, spiritual, and moral values. There is a tension in balancing the values of idealism and pragmatism. Thirdly, the wide-spread of Internet, popularity of various mass media and information explosion have accelerated the conflicting values of young people in choosing their social life and ways of living. There is a need to address the problems of internet-media-generated impact on young people and understand their changing lifestyles.

In this connection, policies and services that can help young people to face the challenges and grasp the opportunities for development, meet their needs and resolve problems, improve

their relationship with the ruling party and the government, and promote a harmonious and united society are supported and adopted by the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the government. Traditionally, the Chinese Communist Youth League (CYL) both at central and local levels which are under the auspices of CPC, and commissioned by the governments at different levels is assigned as the sole youth work organization to assist in formulating relevant policies and in managing youth affairs.

The CYL has to enhance its attractiveness among its 75 million members, in particular those young people aged between 14 and 28 years old, with the aims to uphold socialist education and guidance to the thinking of young people, increase capacity to serve youth needs, interests and protecting rights, explore effective ways to contact and mobilize members of various youth organizations to participate in positive social activities or political campaign, and organize training programs to enhance the leadership, knowledge and skills of youth workers in working with young people, especially members of the CYL.

In 1990s, the CYL Central Committee confirmed the direction and policy of its youth work by formulating two strategic development documents, namely, **“Our Strategic Development of Youth Work in the Process of Establishing the Socialist Market Economic System”** and **“Outline for the Trans-century Development of CYL’s Work”**. In line with the rapid urban development and the blooming of social organizations at grassroots level, a document entitled, *“The CYL Central Committee’s Opinions on Strengthening the Urban Community-based Organizations”*, was issued in 2000. Moreover, in 2008, the 16th National Congress of CYL further requested to speed up the development of urban CYL. Currently, there are more than 200 laws, rules and regulations, and official notifications relating to young people, e.g., education, employment, marriage, family, criminal offenses, cultural activities, etc. which direct various government departments to address youth affairs and protect

the rights and welfare of young people. Thus we find that there are youth policies in China despite the fact that they are existed in an uncoordinated way and implemented through a ruling party based or semi-official youth work organization (Ngai, 1998).

The key areas of current youth policy can be identified as follows:

① Ideology and directions of youth policy

Presently, China doesn’t have an explicitly written, unified national youth policy or official executive mechanism for carrying out and monitoring national or regional youth affairs. Youth policy is regarded as a component of the overall policy of the CPC which is ideologically oriented and politically dominated. It is always reflected in the state leaders’ speeches or written instructions pertaining to youth issues or youth work, stipulated in the laws, rules and regulations, incorporated in the specific youth-related policies issued by various government departments, and laid down in the CPC’s guiding ideology and action guidelines, aiming to promote the positive development, autonomy, civic responsibility, and social adaptability of young people (Ngai, Cheung and Li, 2001).

Since China follows the communist ideology and adopted the so-called “socialism with Chinese characteristics” as the guiding ethos of political development and economic reform and social education, the basic philosophy and overall direction of its youth policy obviously are to uphold the banner of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and strengthen ideological, patriotic and moral education, so that young people would believe in communism and become the CPC’s genuine supporters and “qualified citizens”.

In practice, though theoretically the communist ideology is viewed as the central guideline in formulating the direction of youth policy, the

ideological influence has gradually become less significant and more emphasis has been placed on the practical social situation and youth needs in recent times. Youth policy tends to focus on involving young people in making contributions to socialist economic, political, cultural and social construction so as to achieve a civilized and well-off society through developing their capability, creativity, civic responsibility, and hard working attitude.

② Youth policy: the role of Communist Youth League (CYL)

Youth policy in China is historically a part of the CPC's policy and is considered as support to the ruling of CPC. In order to implement the Party's policies on young people, the CYL has been set up and assigned as a quasi-official youth work organization under the CPC and supported by the government to lead and coordinate youth affairs. The CYL Charter (2008, revised) stipulates that the CYL fully exercise the function to connect the link and bridge between the Party and youth, and to actively assist the government to manage youth affairs, safeguard the national interests of the people, and represent and protect the specific interests of youth. The CYL helps young people develop their abilities and potentials, provides timely social services, promotes work ethics, encourages learning, and involves in activities to make contributions to socialist economic, political, cultural and social construction through various channels both at central, regional and local levels, aiming to achieve an advanced, prosperous and modern socialist society.

In practice, there are numerous functions which the CYL is expected to perform. As the CPC's assistant and reserve army, it has the political function to support and follow the political and ideological orientation of the Party and to educate young people with communism and socialism. As an assistant to the government in managing youth affairs, it has the administrative function to directing, leading, organizing, planning and evaluating youth related policies and services. As a mass organization for young people, it has

the social and cultural function to provide a wide variety of social, cultural, leisure and recreational services for young people (Lu 2003).

However, there are a number of outstanding issues that have affected the CYL in performing the aforesaid functions. For examples, lacking of formal administrative position and power in helping the government to manage youth affairs, insufficient legitimate authority to propose or monitor youth related policies for the protection of youth interests, inadequate channels for youth participation in the decision making on youth affairs, and adaptation to the service demand for multifarious youth problems due to advanced technological change and globalization, such as internet addict, mental health, drug and delinquency.

In other words, the current role and functions of the CYL as the sole recognized semi-official youth work organization in deciding youth policies and delivering youth services has faced challenge that demands for urgent reform and creates opportunities for innovative ideas, new development, and a shift towards a pragmatic and scientific approach to work with young people and deal with youth affairs (To, Ngai, Wu, Zhang and Yang, 2010).

③ Blossoming of self-organized youth organizations (SYOs) and youth policy

In 2008, there are more than 400,000 registered non-governmental organizations (NGOs), nonprofit making organizations (NPOs) or mass organizations in China in which a large percentage is self-organized youth organizations (SYOs). The number of SYOs and their scope of activities have gained great development in the past thirty years. The blossoming of the SYOs reflected their significant functions and services in meeting multifarious youth needs and engage young people in interacting with other people, participating in social affairs, and involving in charitable activities (Ai, 2010). They are regarded as the second home of young people,

a social venue for young people to participate in community affairs, and an organized group to voice out and protect the rights and welfare of vulnerable youth. They promote mutual help among young people with similar difficulties or problems, provide non-formal education for the children of migrant workers, offer financial assistance to needy students, improve teaching facilities, and provide technical supports, information and services for young people.

In view of the rising number and significance of SYOs, it seems to inform that future challenge of youth policy has to cater for the needs of SYOs and meet youth demands. It is opined that the effective management and coordination of SYOs will not only change the relationship between SYOs and CYL or the government which in turn will influence the provision of youth services, but also have effect on the development of political socialization and civil society in China (Li and Chen, 2009). Therefore, the seizure of the opportunity to coordinate and work with the SYOs might bring about social inclusion of different youth organizations and meet young people's diverse demand for self-fulfillment, search for self-identity, social identity, and a just, equal and humanistic society. Currently, there is no specific youth policy on SYOs. Thus it needs to fully recognize the positive contributions of SYOs and give particular concern with the development of SYOs by formulating relevant policy with explicit monitoring strategies, guidelines, rules, regulations, and procedures. The CYL has to strengthen its role and capabilities in managing the SYOs by providing necessary administrative, financial and tangible support to assist its positive growth and development (He and Ma, 2010).

④ Protection of youth rights and welfare

Before 1990s, China did not have a comprehensive law or policy to deal with legal rights or welfare pertinent to young people. The protection of youth rights and welfare is lagged behind the social development and economic prosperity. The government realizes the need to

use legal power to protect the interests and rights of young people. In 1991, the promulgation of "Juvenile Protection Law" (revised in 2006) laid down the legal policy covering a wide range of youth welfare including family, school, judicial protection and legal responsibilities. In 1999, the enactment of the "Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency" law further sets out the rights and interests protection, guiding principles and legal liability. Thereafter, 29 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities, and 318 cities had established Committee on Protection of Juvenile, and 26 provincial CYL Committees and all the municipal CYL Committees set up the Protection of Juvenile Office, with the aims to promote and enforce the laws and regulations governing the rights and welfare of young people.

In line with the continuous opening up of the country, the development of rights consciousness of young people, the demand for greater protection of youth welfare and the rights of young people are expected. The root of current youth problems such as the exploitation and violation of rights, the inadequacy of democratic political participation, and the ineffective rights and welfare protection must be given priority for public education, legislation and policy intervention as they may affect social instability and challenge the political leadership.

According to a report on Juvenile rights published by the China Children and Youth Research Center Task Force on Juvenile Rights (2009), there were problems in youth rights protection such as imperfect protection mechanism, incomplete legal system, inadequate social mechanism, insufficient protection and support for young people to realize their rights, especially the young migrant workers.

In order to ensure the provision of the rights and welfare of young people is effectively protected, youth policy has to improve the current practice: ① improving the operational mechanism by setting up steering or coordinating committees on youth affairs at different levels of the governments to handle issues relating to the protection of youth rights and welfare; ② organizing different kinds of

youth forums via diverse channels to understand the problems of protecting youth rights and welfare, and providing free of charge legal support to young people who have encountered violation of rights or involved in legal disputes; ③ enhancing the awareness of right and welfare protection among CYL cadres and its members through non-formal education, and to use the CYL publications and mass media to publicize important youth policies; and ④ establishing administrative offices in the governments at varied levels with designated staff to handle youth issues related to right and welfare protection which can facilitate the implementation youth policy and boost its effectiveness in practice.

Thus the issue of protecting youth rights and welfare in China is a critical problem which involves varied legislations, policies, and services. The development of a national or regional youth policy has to consider multifarious aspects of youth protection and the executive mechanism of implementation.

In fact, Ngai (1996) has pointed out the potential restraints of the development of youth policy and youth work might include: legal ideals versus social reality, legal flexibility versus legal rigidity, cultural paternalism versus democratic justice and legal ignorance versus legal consciousness. Thus, youth policy needs to address these controversial issues by promoting a sense of ruled by law, changing the views of party leaders, officials, and emphasizing the involvement of all walk of people and different parties in society to advocate legal protection and justice for young people, which will finally make contribution to the development of a Chinese society truly ruled by law.

⑤ Youth unemployment

In the early years of the Chinese Communist regime, the government played an active role in employment issues and assumed the responsibility of providing jobs for all young people. As a result, there was no unemployment problem, or the problem was insignificant since

every young person of a working age would be assigned with a job. In the wake of market-oriented economic reforms, technological changes, and an increasingly integrated global economy, youth unemployment has become an epochal challenge in China. The youth unemployment rate for working persons under aged 25 stood at 28.1 per cent in 2009, which is much higher than other age group (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2010). As millions of rural laborers flocked to cities to find jobs, and the need to find new jobs for tens of thousands of new university graduates, the problem of youth unemployment has become a vital issue of social concern. This, in turn, can determine the attitude of young people toward the Party and the government. It can also lead to a decline of young people's mental and physical health and create undesirable problems and may commit anti-social behaviors.

Since the economic recession due to global financial crisis has not fully recovered and the surplus of youth labor force is expected, the problem of youth unemployment will continue to exist in the coming years. Thus the youth employment policy must provide an effective solution to the demands of employment by providing a well-organized plan to enhance the employability of young people in the global competitive market, especially in the industrial, commercial and service sectors. It has to cover multifarious areas such as education on employment, vocational and technical training, on-the-job training, life career development guidance, and self-employed enterprise training (Cao, 2009). In other words, a far-sighted youth policy with solid education and training components may be able to assist young people to cope with employment problems which are brought about by the fast economic, social, global, and technological changes.

In tackling the youth unemployment challenges, current youth policies have located diverse measures:

➤ Implementing College Students' Employment Projects by organizing "Volunteer Service Project in the Western Region", "College Students

Internship Employment Action”, and “One Hundred Cities Thousand Enterprises into Campus”;

➤ Promoting youth employment activities and the spirit of enterprises by implementing International Youth Enterprise Program, and organizing various employment educational and entrepreneurial skills training programs; and

➤ Setting up special funds for supporting youth enterprises.

⑥ Youth development

Youth development refers to the process by which young people grow through various spheres of growth into autonomous adulthood with reasoning independent thinking, and mature personality. The growth of young people closely ties to the fulfillment of their needs which consists of a number of areas such as education, physical and mental health, social, cultural and recreational development, community and political participation, national identity or integration and development of global perspective, which demand the CYL and society to help and support them to achieve.

In order to satisfy the educational need of young people, since 1980s, numerous education laws have promulgated to protect youth's right to education and promote equal opportunity for education of young people: “Compulsory Education Law”, “Teachers Law”, “Education Law”, “Vocational Education Law”, “Higher Education Act”, etc (Xi, 2003). The CYL assumes its role to monitor the implementation of the youth education related laws and policies.

In promoting physical and mental health, youth mental health education and counseling activities were carried out to discourage drug abuse, alcoholism, smoking, and anti-social behavior, and promote personal hygiene, food nutrition and poverty alleviation. The CYL tries to create a positive environment for youth development through diverse moral and legal educational programs.

Within the social, cultural, and recreational aspects, the CYL urges the government to formulate policies to meet the social, cultural and recreational needs of youth by promoting social, recreational, leisure and sports activities, advocating the improvement of cultural venues and supporting the development of youth cultural organizations, youth centers and various hobby clubs so that they can become a link to contact youth and cultural organizations.

In social and community participation aspects, the CYL launches the Hope Project, Hand in Hand Project, and Helping the Poor and Needy Students Project, Youth Cultural Festival, Youth of China Series of Activities, Volunteer Service Project in the Western Region, Going to the Rural Areas, Hand in Hand Project, and Youth Environmental Protection Project.

In view of the speeding up of the integration of Hong Kong and Macao into mainland China and the rapid development of globalization, the CYL also encourages and supports exchange programs among youths in Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan by organizing the “Chinese Dragon Festival”, “Cross-Strait Youth Festival”, “Cross-Strait Youth Forum” and other exchange activities. Moreover, the CYL also tries to establish friendly relations with overseas youth work organizations and organizes international youth exchange program and overseas volunteer service program for young people.

In recent years, the CYL assumes the role to facilitate young people to realize these positive development by using varied youth policies and services, which comprise, for example, developing youth affairs (youth work), promoting education through monitoring the effective implementation of Compulsory Education Law, encouraging volunteering among youth, educating youth to love natural environment, promoting youth mental health, preventing juvenile delinquency, and organizing youth exchange program. In this connection, Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai Pudong New Area and other 13 cities in China were identified by a high level trans-departmental agreement as the first batch of pioneering areas

to implement the idea of youth affairs (youth work) to provide youth services through the joint efforts committed by the government and the CYL (Wang and Zhao, 2009). In other words, the CYL were granted with the official status, power and responsibility to deal with youth affairs in the above mentioned cities.

Challenges ahead

China's youth policy must find some effective ways to cater for the rising needs and problems of young people. The youth policy formulated should be able to deal with complex youth affairs, meet the need of young people and improve their quality, satisfy the expectations of society and the CPC, and make substantial contribution to the modernization of the country.

Thus the solution is not easy and there are many challenges ahead both for the CPC, the government and the CYL at all levels, which may include:

- Coming up with an explicit, comprehensive and written national youth policy with the support of specific laws and detailed operational definitions of youth rights, responsibilities and welfare, in meeting distinctive youth needs and in tackling unique youth problems;
- Changing or modifying the CYL's ambiguous status in between the Party and the government, political function and role in policy formulation, provision of services, and management of youth affairs;
- Recognizing the position and impact of the SYOs and exploring ways for achieving positive development and contributions;
- Developing varied services for youth development and encouraging youth participation in youth affairs;
- Boosting professional standards of youth work through professional accreditation and continuous on the job training; and
- Setting up a Department of Youth Affairs or Ministry for Youth in the governments both at national, provincial and metropolitan

city level, with the aim to interface among different government departments to plan, implement, monitor and evaluate youth policies and services.

Conclusion

Challenges and opportunities are opening up in China's youth policy as social context, youth needs, and youth problems in the country change due to its open door to the external world, rapid expansion of the market economy, drastic social change, relaxation of social control, speedy rising number of SYOs, significant youth unemployment, and emphasis on youth welfare and rights. As a result, a new generation of modern youth with a sense of liberal values and need for self-fulfillment has shed critical queries to the conventional politically and ideologically orientated youth policy and the contents of youth work or services. The provision of youth services has to foster a new wisdom of working approach with young people. Thus it is anticipated that the original concept of youth policy, youth work or services, operating systems, mechanisms and methods, and the substance of youth policy and youth services will be enriched, modified and developed towards youth-orientated direction. The CYL and its youth workers have to adopt a practical youth policy and youth work approach in order to perform their role and functions effectively and efficiently.

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La politique de jeunesse chinoise revisitée

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La Chine n'est pas dotée d'une politique nationale de jeunesse cohérente énoncée sous la forme d'un document, pas plus que d'un mécanisme exécutif officiel pour la gestion et le suivi des questions de jeunesse à l'échelon régional ou national. La politique relative à la jeunesse est appréhendée à la manière d'une composante de la politique d'ensemble de la Chine, qui est imprégnée de l'idéologie et dominée par la politique. Cette situation se reflète encore dans les allocutions des dirigeants ou les instructions écrites relatives aux questions de jeunesse ou au travail de jeunesse, telles qu'énoncées dans les lois, les règles et les règlements, intégrées dans les politiques spécifiques en relation avec la jeunesse promues par les divers services gouvernementaux et empreintes de l'idéologie qui guide le parti communiste chinois et ses lignes d'action.

L'objectif de cette politique est de promouvoir le développement positif, l'autonomie, la responsabilité civique et l'adaptabilité sociale des jeunes.

Dans la pratique ces derniers temps, bien que théoriquement perçue comme la colonne vertébrale de la politique de jeunesse, l'idéologie communiste a progressivement perdu de son importance au profit d'une priorité accordée à la situation sociale des jeunes et à leurs besoins. La politique de jeunesse vise à inciter les jeunes à apporter leur contribution à la construction socialiste – sur les plans économique, politique, culturel et social –, afin de parvenir à une société civilisée et aisée, basée sur les capacités, la créativité, la responsabilité et les attitudes positives des jeunes en faveur du travail.

Neue Überlegungen zur Jugendpolitik in China

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China verfügt nicht über eine explizit niedergelegte einheitliche Jugendpolitik oder einen offiziellen Regierungsmechanismus zur Umsetzung und Überwachung von nationalen oder regionalen jugendpolitischen Angelegenheiten. Jugendpolitik wird als eine Komponente der generellen Politik der Kommunistischen Partei Chinas (CPC) betrachtet, die ideologisch orientiert und von der Politik dominiert ist. Sie spiegelt sich immer in den Reden oder schriftlichen Weisungen der Staatsführer zu Jugendfragen oder Jugendarbeit wider, wird in den Gesetzen, Regeln und Vorschriften vorgeschrieben, in die speziellen jugendpolitischen Maßnahmen der diversen Regierungsstellen einbezogen und in den Leitlinien für Politik und Handeln der Kommunistischen Partei Chinas in dem Bestreben festgelegt, die positive Entwicklung, Eigenständigkeit, bürgerschaftliche Verantwortung und gesellschaftliche

Anpassungsfähigkeit von jungen Menschen zu fördern.

In der Praxis wird zwar die kommunistische Ideologie theoretisch als zentrale Leitlinie für die Gestaltung der jugendpolitischen Ausrichtung betrachtet, aber der ideologische Einfluss ist allmählich weniger signifikant geworden und in der jüngsten Vergangenheit wurde ein größeres Schwergewicht auf die praktische gesellschaftliche Lage und die Bedürfnisse der Jugend gelegt. Die Jugendpolitik konzentriert sich eher auf die Einbindung junger Menschen in Beiträge zum Aufbau der sozialistischen Wirtschaft, Politik, Kultur und Gesellschaft, um eine zivilisierte und wohlhabende Gesellschaft zu erreichen, indem man deren Fähigkeiten, Kreativität, bürgerschaftliche Verantwortung und auf harte Arbeit ausgerichtete Einstellung entwickelt.

Пересмотр молодежной политике Китая

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В Китае отсутствуют четко прописанная единая национальная молодежная политика или официальный механизм исполнительной власти по проведению и мониторингу национальных и региональных вопросов по делам молодежи. Молодежная политика рассматривается как компонент общей политики КПК, идеологически ориентированной и политически доминирующей. Молодежная политика всегда находит отражение в выступлениях государственных лидеров или письменных руководствах, относящихся к проблемам молодежи и молодежной работы, предусмотрена в законах, правилах и положениях, заложена в конкретных документах молодежной политики, изданных различными правительственными ведомствами, изложена в руководящей идеологии и практических рекомендациях Китайской коммунистической партии,

направленных на продвижение позитивного развития, автономии, гражданской ответственности и социальной адаптации молодых людей.

На практике, хотя теоретически коммунистическая идеология рассматривается как центральный ориентир в разработке направления молодежной политики, идеологическое влияние становится постепенно менее значительным и больший акцент переносится на реальную социальную ситуацию и текущие потребности молодежи. Молодежная политика направлена на вовлечение молодых людей в процесс социалистического, экономического, политического, культурного и социального строительства, нацеленный на достижение цивилизованного и зажиточного общества, через развитие способностей, творчества, гражданской ответственности и трудолюбия.