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An Informal Discussion on Internet Matters

Moral Construction for Children and Young People

The social problems triggered by Internet are legion. Computer games and such high-tech achievements of the Internet that used be regarded as "angels" are today frequently playing the role of "demons." As the times advance, Internet ethics have become a new challenge facing educational workers. Today, when our country is attaching great importance to building up youngsters' ideology and morals, youngsters' Internet ethics is a new issue that deserves constant exploration.

Overall Analysis of the State of Chinese Youngsters' Ethics in 2004

In May 2004, the Chinese Communist Party's Central Committee (CCPCC) held a national conference in Beijing on strengthening and improving the work of building up ideological and moral work among juveniles, and in

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October 2004, the CCPCC and State Council once more put forward a number of opinions concerning strengthening the building up of ideology and morals among college students. These, and the emergence of a series of documents and measures, fully demonstrate the high degree of attention our Party and state attach to building up the ideology and morals of children and young people. Our country today has 367 million youngsters at or under the age of eighteen, and these account for more than one fourth of China's total population. The state of these youngsters' outlook on life, value concepts, and world outlook will directly affect our country's future development. Judging from the overall tendency of ethical development among Chinese youngsters today, the broad masses of children and young people are presenting a salutary tendency in terms of moral issues and ideological understanding. It should be said that the mainstream of their ideological understanding is sound, their value orientation has been shown to be multielemental and pragmatic, and, overall, their ideological and moral orientations are positive and upward looking. For example, according to a relevant survey, most children and young people are actively patriotic, and they identify themselves with their motherland much more than in a similar survey conducted eight years ago. Children and young people all declare that they would not hesitate to sacrifice themselves for their motherland when the need arises and would willingly offer their efforts and compassion to others who find themselves in difficulty. They also express anger and discontent with the uncivilized phenomena that emerge in society. This indicates that the majority of them are imbued with patriotic fervor and with excellent ideological and moral understandings. However, we must soberly recognize that many hazy and even wrong ideological understandings also exist among our children and young people.

The Negative Influences of the Social Environment

Along with increasing openness of our country's social environment and rise of the Internet and other new media, some unhealthy social and cultural garbage and film and TV products are bringing serious harm to youngsters who are inexperienced with the ways of the world and who possess little ability to resist temptations. For example, unhealthy film and TV products, advertisements, books and publications, electronic games, and the violent, self-centered, lewd, and debauched way of life that fills the Internet (*wangluo*) powerfully stimulate curious and adolescent youngsters who have little ability to judge between right and wrong. For instance, a female middle school student only sixteen years old met an Internet lover who claimed to be twenty years old, and the two exchanged endearments and expressions of love, hitting it off very well. However, when they later met in real life, the girl found

that her "lover" was in fact a middle-aged woman more than forty years old. Such anonymous fraud over the Internet not only pollutes youngsters' moral perceptions but also has a grave negative effect on social mores. Also, negative ideological concepts in society, such as money worship, hedonism, and extreme individualism, are seriously contaminating youngsters' value concepts. I have been informed that the word "depressed" (*yumen*) is one of the most voguish expressions among today's elementary and secondary school students, and even among college students. Even if we disregard the "vogue expression" element and the conform-with-the-majority mentality, taking such a negative term as something fashionable and voguish reflects, from one aspect, the spiritual emptiness of today's youngsters and shows that lack of mental health is quite serious among children and young people. We witness everywhere in social life such things as beauty salons, dance halls, and cybercafes that show little evidence of management, the raucous ejaculations of bored adults playing mahjong and cards, the ubiquitous advertisements for venereal diseases and "psoriasis" (*niu pi xuan*), and so forth, all of which seriously corrupt the social atmosphere, poison people's minds, and corrupt youngsters' souls. Some adolescents and young people have formed negative outlooks on life, twisted value concepts, and inverted perceptions of honor and disgrace. Even some college students and postgraduate students who have had a higher education reject anything noble and take as their value concept the pursuit of social fashion and "satisfying oneself to the full and then dying." All of these things gravely affect young people's understanding of ideological and moral issues and their healthy growth.

Misunderstandings Regarding Schools and Family Education

On the surface, the primary job of schools would seem to be moral education, but manifested in action it mainly consists of intellectual education. Today, China's schools at all levels and of various categories exhibit to varying degrees a tendency toward placing importance on intellectual education, making light of moral education, and giving one-sided attention to the proportion of students entering schools of a higher grade. Moral courses and moral education activities are limited to superficial displays of obtaining relatively high academic grades and completing tasks assigned by the higher authorities. Hence, the way of education most favored by some schools is "conducting moral education on a grandiose scale, and grasping intellectual education in a down-to-earth manner," which results in some students lacking the ability to differentiate between the good and the bad, the true and the false, the beautiful and the ugly, and the honorable and the disgraceful, lacking immunity against negative influences in social life, and being very easily

led astray. Some teachers regard students with poor marks or who have committed breaches of the law or discipline as "student trash," so that some students lose any forward-going motivation and orientation from a very early age and develop serious inferiority complexes or feelings of mental pressure. Because these students, who are not lacking in energy, cannot make advances in their studies and are looked down upon by classmates and teachers, they either drop out of school or form gangs that constitute a disruptive force in society. Serious misunderstandings also exist in connection with family education. A topical study produced by the Tianjin Academy of Social Sciences maintains that the biggest mistake of family education is to overlook moral education. The study lists thirteen items, including regular studies, physical education, contact with schoolmates, teacher-student relations, spare-time hobbies, ideological qualities, food and clothing, spending money, mental state, holiday and vacation activities, and so forth, to survey the degree of attention to their children, or lack thereof, given by the parents of ordinary students and those of adolescent delinquents. The statistics showed that a great many problems in terms of ways of education were to be found even among the parents of ordinary students, the most common problem being that the parents entertained high expectations of their progeny, were seriously affected by the desire to see their children become "dragons and phoenixes," and paid little attention to all other aspects so long as their children were good at their studies. These have resulted in lacunae in the moral education given by families to children and young people.

Overall Insufficiency of Community Moral Education

The community is an important venue for moral education. Although the functional departments, social organizations, and warm-hearted individuals in some communities have done a great deal of work for the moral education of children and young people and have obtained substantial results, the lack of an integrated force for education often results in each unit doing its own work, each taking charge of its own turf, and barriers arising among different departments, leaving "dead corners" and "gaps" that receive little attention in the moral education of children and young people. Even if some ideological and moral education is conducted, people content themselves with inviting speakers to give a few lectures to adolescents and fulfilling the tasks and plans assigned by relevant higher-level departments. The speakers either deal merely with generalities and simply go through the motions, or they attach more attention to form than to effect. Another constraining factor is the obvious lack of venues for the activities of children and young people in many communities. Some moral education bases are not being opened in a normal

fashion, and the functions of some activity venues for youngsters have been altered. Community work personnel have little awareness of performing moral education, and systems for the conduct of moral education by communities in conjunction with schools and families have yet to be clearly established. Illegal cybercafes proliferate in some communities, exacerbating the emergence of grave Internet problems among children and young people.

Hidden Threats to the Moral Concepts of Children and Young People

In the wake of the market economy's constant advances and the constant improvements in people's livelihood, some children and young people go more and more for "the real goods"; parents pamper their children, spend money lavishly on their children, and even stop at nothing to satisfy their children's desires for consumption. This is manifested concretely as the following: Clothing consumption revolves around famous brand names, snacks-and-nibbles consumption is determined by advertisements, "interpersonal relations" consumption is modeled on that of adults, cosmetics consumption takes its cue from film stars, and so forth. In some economically developed regions, in particular, there is a multitude of items of consumption by students (and even kindergarten children). For example, those who make good grades in exams must receive treats, gatherings must be held for those who win places in competitions, celebrations must be held for those who enter the Youth League or the Communist Party or who become class officers, parties must be given for birthdays. Such things have become common phenomena these days. Graduation parties and thank-our-teachers banquets have become favorite social activities for many young students. Many children and young people see these as being "cool" and as manifestations of "quality" or "class" (*pinwei*). Some people have no idea that such inability to tell right from wrong in terms of moral concepts constitutes a serious hidden peril for the moral development of children and young people, that it undermines the will (*yizhi xiaochen*) of young people and causes them to hanker after creature comforts, and that it is very likely that they will go to extremes if their demands are unfulfilled.

Also, a relevant survey on cigarette smoking among 500,000 people nationwide shows an average 33.9 percent rate of smoking in the fifteen and above age group and that 61 percent of them are male and 7 percent females. There are currently more than 300 million smokers in China, and more than 80,000 children and young people join their ranks every day. The ratio of smokers among college students, senior high school students, and junior high school students has reached, respectively, 46 percent, 45 percent, and 34

percent, indicating a sharp rise in the rate of smoking among children and young people along with increased age and number of years in school. And the age at which they start smoking is getting lower; some youngsters begin to smoke when they are between ten and fourteen years of age. This leads to society's lowered opinion of young people, but the youngsters themselves maintain that this is a sign of maturity, a mark of adulthood. This disparity in understanding is gravely corroding the souls of children and young people.

Analysis of the Present State of the Internet Problem Among China's Children and Young People

Development of the Internet in China

During each period in the thousands of years of development of human civilization, there have been certain inventions or science-technology innovations that have guided the process and direction of sociohistorical development. Ever since the 1980s, the rapid advances of the Internet have eclipsed all other inventions and science-technology innovations of the same period. The Internet has caused today's society to enter the "information era" and the "E-era"; it has left its footprints in every corner of our life and is still changing our way of life at a startling rate. It is believable that the potentials of the Internet will find even greater scope in the future and may become one of people's chief means of existence.

The development of China's Internet may be traced back to the mid-1980s, during which a series of landmark events occurred. In 1987, CANET constructed the first Internet e-mail node in China, and Professor Qian Tianbai sent China's first e-mail to Karlsruhe University in the German Federal Republic. The contents of that e-mail were: "Crossing the Great Wall and going out to the world." On April 20, 1994, the China Science and Technology Net (CNNET) for the first time brought about full connection with the international Internet, to become China's first network linked up with the international Internet and marking China's emergence as a member of the world Internet family. In this sense, April 20, 2004, is the tenth anniversary of the setting up of China's Internet.

In the past ten years, there has been a tendency toward swift increases in the number of online computers, number of users, distribution of clients, distribution of information flow, and registration of domain names. In July 2004, the China Internet Information Center (CNNIC) issued its fourteenth "Statistical Report on the State of Development of China's Internet." By June 30, 2004, China had a total of 36.3 million online computers and 87 million online users. There were a total of 382,216 domain names, and approxi-

mately 626,600 World Wide Web sites (including Web sites under .cn, .com, .net, and .org). The total amount of international export bandwidths was 53,941 m., connected to such countries as the United States, Canada, Australia, Britain, Germany, France, Japan, and South Korea.

Analysis of Youngsters' Online Contents

Along with the popularization of computers and the Internet, more and more households and schools are beginning to attach importance to the important role played by computers and the Internet in education, and the opportunities for children and young people to come in contact with the Internet is increasing by leaps and bounds. Because children and young people are open-minded, active, and quick to accept new things, they have very quickly become the main force of China's netizens. Among the 87 million netizens in China, 36.8 percent of Internet users are between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four, and 17.3 percent are under eighteen years. These two groups together make up more than half of China's total netizen population.

In that case, what is the Internet bringing to children and young people?

Surveys show that the things that children and young people do most often are mainly the following:

1. Browsing Web pages. The main motive for going online with most children and young people is to find information they need by browsing Web pages and to obtain the latest news. This is also the first thing that most of China's netizens do after going online. Children and young people can find information they need on the Internet, whether it is news, information on computer hardware and software, or information on leisure entertainment or everyday services.

2. Receiving and sending e-mail. E-mail is the most efficient, nimble, mature, and welcomed tool of correspondence. Currently, a great many Web sites provide free mail boxes, and some even provide mail boxes with capacities as big as 1G. This provides a great many conveniences for children and young people applying for mail boxes and using these to receive and send out e-mail. Surveys show that China's Internet users receive on average 4.6 e-mails and send out on average 4.3 e-mails per week.

3. Chatting online. Chatting online is a way of interpersonal contact particular to the Internet. Due to the hidden nature and anonymity of online chatting, it has become one of the main ways of Internet communication among many netizens. Children and young people are in a special period of their physical and mental development and urgently require various forms of interpersonal exchange, and when schools and the family are unable to satisfy their need for such exchanges, Internet intercourse becomes their option

of choice. Recognizing this mentality among children and young people, many software companies put much effort into the development of chat tools. The monopoly of the Internet chat market a few years ago by such chat tools as ICQ and OICQ chat rooms has now been broken, and many new chat tools, such as *wang yi*, PO-PO, UC, and MSN messenger are quietly making their appearance.

4. Logging in on BBS forums, communities, and discussion groups. Most children and young people know how to log into BBS forums and communities. In these forms and communities, children and young people may obtain information by browsing other people's topics and may link up to express their own opinions. They may also launch topics and conduct discussions with other people and obtain the information they need. Shooting the bull and loud bombast are commonplace in these forums and communities, and the environment of equality, freedom, and unrestricted expression that children and young people so desire finds perfect manifestation here.

5. Learning online. Along with the popularization of the Internet, long-distance Internet education has become a reality. More and more children and young people are able to take senior middle school and university courses by means of long-distance Internet education without having to set foot outside their homes. Currently, China already has several tens of universities that have established long-distance education and provide the broad masses of students with conveniences for learning and acquiring an education.

6. Online games. Logging in on the Internet to play Web games is also one of the main contents of online activity by children and young people, and they have been called "Web gamers" (*wang you yi zu*). Along with the influx of foreign Web games into China and the constant development of the Chinese Web game manufacturing industry, the ranks of China's Web gamers is constantly expanding and is showing a tendency toward becoming younger. Web games that were frequented only by male college and middle school students a few years ago not only have female players today, but have even attracted a number of elementary school students.

Bill Gates once said: "The Internet is a gamble [*du zhu*]." There is a repeatedly proven and irrefutable truth in human history—technology is a two-edged sword. One may say that half of the Web is an "angel" and the other half is a "demon." As the Internet, by completely unprecedented means, presents people with a multicolored world, it also stretches its criminal talons toward inexperienced children and young people. A flood of pornographic Web sites, online crime, online gambling, and fraud is poisoning youngsters, the worst harm being caused by pornographic Web sites. As we congratulate ourselves on this technological discovery, its social consequences and its effects on children and young people are also ringing alarms for us.

Moral Issues Triggered Among Youngsters by Web Bars

In the wake of the constant development of China's socioeconomy, culture, and science and technology, Web information has become one of people's main sources of income: hence the emergence of "Web bars" (*wang ba*). In 1998, cybercafes first began to emerge in such big cities as Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, then spread toward medium and small cities, and in 2002 were popularized in rural townships. According to the fourteenth "Statistical Report on the Development of China's Internet," 22 percent of China's netizens choose to go online at Web bars, Net schools, and cybercafes, most of them children and young people. The majority of these youngsters claim that many Web bars can be found within 200 meters of their schools. The moral problems that this great number of Web bars engenders among youngsters are something to which the government and state should give its full attention.

The environment at Web bars is troubling. Web bars are narrow, dark, stuffy, and the air in them is foul. Fire-fighting installations in some Web bars are crude and present serious safety hazards. Web bars provide their habitués with a dissolute cultural atmosphere in which they can behave without any inhibitions. A substantial number of the netizens at Web bars are students, but undesirable young people from society also can be found. Some Web bars sell various kinds of cigarettes and cigars, wines, soft drinks, and snacks. Youngsters do as they please here, get in the bad habits of smoking and drinking, and frequently create disturbances. All these things have highly deleterious effects on youngsters' physical and mental health.

Of course, the Web opens up youngsters' perspectives, helps children and young people obtain a great deal of needed information, and provides swift and convenient services for their [social] exchanges and entertainment, but some children and young people who become enamored of these Net bars spend a great deal of time and money on them. Some youngsters display a shocking degree of dependence on the Net, often going online for a dozen hours or more at a stretch and eating, living, and sleeping at the Net bars. Even "doing battle" continuously for several days and nights is not uncommon. This has gravely affected studies. Many students who were once good in both character and scholarship have seen their grades plummet after they become enamored of Web bars. Their parents worry and their teachers are distressed, but neither can do anything about it. Faced with various temptations on the Net, these youngsters who have little ability to discriminate between moral rights and wrongs are frequently unable to make rational choices. Some youngsters take advantage of their parents' ignorance about the Net and, under the pretext of conducting online studies, ask them for money to

go online but then go to Net bars to engage in improper activities. Other students do not dare go home because of poor exam scores and spend several nights at Net bars, get to owe the Net bars large sums of money for going online, and ultimately run away from home. Still other youngsters who have no money to go online resort to theft, fraud, robbery, and other means that violate the criminal law to attain their objectives and thereafter even take to the path of crime.

The Net is a fictitious world in which no one knows what kind of person you are. The only marks of your identity are your account number (ID) and your alias. Netizens use "symbols" (*fuhao*) to replace their identities and conduct exchanges "in absentia," with the result that they can give vent online to the bad sides of their character—sides that are repressed in everyday life. Studies by experts indicate that long-term association with the Web is likely to produce spiritual apathy, moral indifference, the loss of feelings of reality, the loss of an effective ability to make moral judgments. Hence, traditional feelings of morality are subjected to enormous challenges in the Net world. The main contents of youngsters' online activities in Net bars is chatting, browsing Web pages, playing games, and even logging in on pornographic Web sites. Due to the hidden and anonymous nature of the Net, youngsters can talk about anything they wish during their chats, and this provides them with enormous scope for manifesting their talents. However, some youngsters go against moral standards and discuss reactionary and vulgar subjects. Some chat rooms furnish youngsters with space to talk about issues of sex, and the filthy language one hears there is extremely detrimental to children's and young people's ideology. The Net romance issue also constitutes a time bomb for youngsters' mentality. Some youngsters conduct Net romances, pretending to be persons of a different sex or the same sex. This not only affects their own gender orientation but also causes mental harm to the other party. Today's Net games are replete with violence and sex and provide children and young people with sensory stimulation and temptations, and youngsters sometimes vent their feelings by playing such games. Many youngsters frankly admit that many of their own actions are modeled on the behavior of personages designed in games. The regional nature of information and the global and supraregional nature of the transmission of Internet information inevitably give rise to moral conflicts in Net culture; that is, pornographic information and services that are permitted in certain other countries are transmitted to China. Because going online is subject to parental supervision in the household, not a few children and young people log onto pornographic Web sites at Net bars. One survey indicates that 46 percent of youngsters admit to visiting pornographic Web sites. Because traditional Chinese education for the most part avoids any mention of sexual issues, children and

young people are very much lacking in sexual education. Where youngsters in a state of adolescence are concerned, the mysteries and temptations of sex awaken their sexual urges. Children are highly imitative and temperamentally unstable, and pornographic Web sites exert a very strong influence on them.

Although one cannot say that the "Ma Jiajue incident" that shocked the entire nation is a universal phenomenon, his [Ma Jiajue's] growth history reflects the current mental state of China's children and young people. Judging from current surveys, most children and young people who have mental impediments suffer at the same time from the Web addiction syndrome. Some children and young people who are enamored of Web bars suffer to varying degrees from Web addiction syndrome accompanied by such mental problems as boredom, loneliness, the feeling that life makes no sense, and lack of self-awareness, all of which result in a decline in moral standards. Another concurrent problem is that of youngsters using viruses and hacker programs to infringe on other people's privacy, attack large Web sites, and even violate the law, causing irreparable consequences.

Hence, the government must enhance governance over Web bars, and parents and schools must increase education for youngsters. However, bringing Web bars under control merely alleviates the symptoms without curing the cause. The key to the issue is the contents of the Web. A true cure of the cause hinges on improving the online environment for children and young people and reducing it deleterious contents.

Psychological Considerations of Web Addiction

The Internet addiction disorder (IAD) is known, for short, as Web addiction or Web dementia (*wang chi*). It is a sort of dysfunction triggered by the Internet. The American Psychology Association (*Meiguo xinli xuehui*) has named it Pathological Internet Use, or PIA for short, and lists it as a sort of mental illness.

The main manifestations of IAD are that the patient manifests lack of control in Net operations and cannot stop as time goes on. Most patients indulge heavily in online free conversations (*ziyou shuo*) or online interactive games and thereafter begin to ignore the existence of real life or feel dissatisfied with real life. The patients' initial manifestations are mental dependence and yearning to go online, which subsequently develop into physical dependence manifested as depression, dizziness, unsteady hands, weakness, and poor appetite. In clinical terms, IAD consists of at least the five following types:

1. addiction to pornographic Web sites (including online pornographic music, pictures, and films);

2. addiction to online intercourse (including the conduct of online interpersonal exchanges via Web games and chat rooms);

3. compulsive online behavior (including compulsive participation in online gambling, online auctions, or online deals);

4. compulsive collection of information (including compulsive gathering of useless, inconsequential, or nonurgent information from the Web); and

5. addiction to computers (including uncontrollable playing of computer games for extended periods of time).

Some experts once predicted that in the twenty-first century, Internet addiction would be no less harmful than drug addiction. Facts have proven that this prediction was not an alarmist overstatement. Internet addiction has today become the number-one assassin of children's and young people's mental health.

The main online activities of Internet-addicted netizens are (a) online chatting and (b) playing Net games. There are a number of Internet-addicted netizens in every age group, and not just males; females also make up a certain percentage. Most Internet addicts are adolescent youngsters. According to a *Harbin Daily* report, a child who had always ranked among the top two in his class in examinations in elementary school up to the first year of junior middle school, began, in the second year of junior middle school, to become mired inextricably in Web games, and his marks went into a tailspin. His parents did everything within their power to pull him away from Net games, but five years passed without the child showing any restraint. He finally dropped out of school to go home only half a year before the college entrance exams. His father went to a newspaper office and tearfully recounted his feelings of helplessness over his five years of fruitless efforts to wrest his son away from Net games, and he uttered a last desperate call for help: "Who can help me win back my son?"

The chief and immediate cause for Internet addiction is aimlessness in the lives of children and young people and lack of friends with whom they can exchange views. Youngsters are in an important period in their physical and mental development. They are curious about unfamiliar matters in the outside world, and they urgently need to acquire new knowledge and to conduct exchanges and communication. Unfortunately, coordination between parents and schools in this respect leaves much to be desired. On the one hand, the education we give them at all stages in their lives is weighted toward inculcation of [book] knowledge; children are hardly able to acquire knowledge that interests them and are subjected to such a variety of heavy burdens that they can hardly breathe. Examination scores are often regarded as the most basic index for measuring a child, and some children who are unable to lighten the excessive pressures placed on them turn to the Internet for stimulation and

release. On the other hand, parents wearied by the hassle of everyday life seldom have any contact with their children, who become unsociable and eccentric and stretch out their hands to the Internet for solace.

According to Maslow's theory of needs hierarchy, people evince needs of both love and self-respect. Some youngsters whose interpersonal relationships in real life are filled with tension, who lack self-confidence, or who for some reason are ignored and alienated by others, find ways to resolve their problem on the Internet. Due to the anonymity and hidden nature of the Net, online chatting is devoid of the directness and face-to-face nature of interpersonal exchanges in real society. On the Net, people may cater to their interlocutor's mentality by changing their gender, age, identity, and manner of speaking. Thus youngsters who feel lonely and depressed in life can, in the course of chatting, become humorous, likeable persons who possess much learning and wisdom and excellent interpersonal relationships. They experience feelings of belonging and of being loved, something they do not experience in real life, and the self-respect they once lost is once again stimulated and established. These regained sensations cause youngsters to feel that roaming through the Net society is more real to them, more congenial and satisfying, and better able to manifest their values. And in the long run, they develop a dependence on the Internet and shun real life even more.

For a long time already, teachers and parents have been at a loss about what to do about youngsters going online to play Net games. Youngsters are quite rebellious, and attempts by teachers and parents to forcibly put an end to playing Net games only exacerbates the youngsters' urge to approach such games. Some Net games are replete with violence and sex and provide some youngsters with opportunities and venues for venting ugly desires that are repressed in everyday life. The pleasure evinced by the players and the ensuing feelings of emptiness and helplessness make it more likely for them to fall victim to Internet addiction. Most Net games provide the players with a choice of various postulated professions, positions, roles, and tasks. The players may choose their preferred image in line with their ideals and can obtain greater abilities and improve their image and position in other people's eyes by raising their status. The youngsters manifest, in these Net games, ideals that cannot be fulfilled or accepted in actual society. Most youngsters say that the postulated personages in Net games are exactly the kind of persons they want to be. A considerable number of adults are to be found among China's Net gamers. All the game players, whether they are youngsters or adults like these, have a need for self-fulfillment, and by means of long-term accumulation (*ji lei*) in the fictitious society of Net games, they satisfy their need for self-fulfillment, experience a certain sense of achievement, and become Net game parasites. Many adult players like their roles and vocations

in the Net games but ignore their positions and duties in real society. Their dissatisfaction with society and their shunning of their real vocations serve as the driving force of their addiction in the Net world. In fact, the fictitious macroenvironment of Net games conceals a great many anxious, agitated hearts (*zaodong de xin*) and is replete with feelings of dissatisfaction, helplessness, and anger. Net games—a superficially resplendent world that is devoid of any real content—provide a temporary cover for the serious mental problems of some of the players, whose timid and weak mentalities and desire to escape the harsh realities of society cause them to return again and again to the safe, ideal haven of Net games. When some of the players emerge from the games, they may even hallucinate to a certain degree and assume that real society is part of the society in Net games.

What Net games bring to the players is not just a negative influence. As the team spirit among youngsters in real life deteriorates, the team cooperation and mutual help required in Net games is beneficial for cultivating an awareness of cooperation among youngsters as well as allowing them to experience the warmth of the big family. Also, the tense interpersonal relationships and the petty intrigues in real life are attenuated in Net games, and players who go into these games to escape from society are able to experience an easy and carefree sort of "life."

Hence, the root cause of Internet addiction is to be found in the harshness and indifference of real society. We call for concern and love for children and young people and for the establishment of happy and relaxed interpersonal relationships and the spirit of team cooperation, so that youngsters may truly gain a sense of warmth in real society.

Problems and Considerations Concerning the Moral Construction of China's Children and Young People

The Main Reasons for the Problems in the Ideology and Morals of Children and Young People

1. Measures for social supervision and control are not up to par. Currently, the state's supervision and control over films, TV, newspapers, and publications are far from sufficient. Some production units, for the sake of profits, wantonly issue books, publications, videos, and recordings that lean toward violence and sex, severely eroding the thoughts and morals of youngsters who are inexperienced in affairs of the world and causing adolescents to become victims of a corrosive torrent of violence and pornography. Many game parlors, song and dance halls, and Net bars have become venues for putting unhealthy content and activities on display and for selling coarse and

vulgar books and publications. These places are very tempting to youngsters and become frequent haunts for them. They also play an important role in inducing criminal behavior among children and young people. Management by the relevant social institutions over youngsters who have not yet begun to study in senior middle schools is also unsatisfactory. A considerable number of junior middle school graduates drift into society. Many of them have no livelihood skills, their education is interrupted after they leave school, their mentality becomes unbalanced, and they are very likely to be tempted and led astray by bad people.

2. Poor adjustment of the school education system. The authoritarian effect (*zhihuibang de zuoyong*) of our country's education system and college examinations, and society's mistaken comprehension of the academic credentials issue, has made it impossible for schools and teachers to genuinely cast off the yoke of examinations-oriented education. Some students who lag behind in study performance and who feel that they have no hope of advancing to higher schools simply give up and write themselves off as hopeless. Some youngsters are pampered by their families, teachers, and society, possess weak perceptions of moral right and wrong, and have little ability to objectively assess the social environment and their own value, with the result that they deal poorly with interpersonal relationships in social life. They are excessively sensitive and their personalities are too weak, so that when they come up against failures and setbacks they become dispirited and lose heart. Vainglory and the desire for revenge may cause some students with unhealthy mentalities to take to the path of crime. The education on rule of law given in schools and society is inappropriate. For example, education on rule of law in our country consists mostly of exposés of the dark side of society, and there is little analysis or evaluation of its harmfulness. The educational measures are mostly abstract and formalistic, and few of them are directed at remedying the causes and at resolving the moral and mental problems of children and young people. The effects of education on rule of law are especially poor in some rural districts. Due to the lack of rule-of-law education directed at the realities in the rural areas, some rural children do not know how to use the law as a weapon to protect themselves when their legitimate rights and interests are violated. Some of them either suffer their humiliations in silence, or they resort to tooth-for-tooth revenge, resulting in an endless stream of violations of the law and of criminal behavior in society. The fact that schools do not conduct any positive education on adolescent health and sexual morals among youngsters is another important reason for sex crimes among youngsters and for the unchecked spread of Net bar pornographic information. The broad masses of youngsters are in a period of adolescence, but a great many schools intentionally or unintentionally avoid or

abstain from giving adolescence education to young students. Due to lack of sex education from proper channels, the youngsters are exposed to undesirable sex information, sex knowledge, and sex concepts from society. And the youngsters' curiosity, imitative propensity, and poor ability to differentiate between right and wrong cause many of them to fall into the morass of sex crime.

3. Inappropriate family education. Youngsters and children in most families in the cities are single children, and the education given them by their parents often goes to two extremes. Either the parents excessively pamper the children, only require that they complete their studies well, do not ask them to do any household chores, and go to all lengths to satisfy their demands, which in turn results in these youngsters and children becoming poorly adapted to society and excessively self-centered; or they are too stern, do not allow the children to make any mistakes, beat the children on the least provocation, and put severe mental pressures on the child, resulting in children harboring feelings of resentment against parents and family, running away from home, quarreling with their parents, and even killing them. Also, heavy mental pressures may also be caused to adolescents by disharmony in the family and constant quarreling and separations between the parents or by one or the other abandoning the family, resulting in the children being mentally depressed, unsociable, and eccentric. Some youngsters have no interest in studying and indiscriminately make friends in society—friends who lead them astray. Undesirable influences are also produced on children by some parents who have bad habits or low moral qualities and even commit crimes against the law, resulting in the children taking to the path of crime at a very early age. There are also parents who are busy working and making money and spend little time disciplining their children, with the result that the latter develop many undesirable habits.

Suggestions for Strengthening Ideological and Moral Construction in Children and Young People

Strengthening ideological and moral construction in children and young people is an important component of our country's long-term construction of citizens' morals and an important guarantee for the overall advance of our country's spiritual civilization construction. In view of the problems existing in the present state of children's and young people's ideology and morals, we maintain that the following measures should be adopted to further strengthen and improve ideological and moral construction in children and young people.

1. Take the family as the starting point and improve the parents' "house-

hold seedling cultivation" ability. The household is the smallest cell in society, and one must first give full scope to the foundation-laying role of family education if one is to do a good job of ideological and moral construction among adolescents. We propose giving full play to the role of such relevant departments as work committees, educational bureaus, and women's federations and social communities in spreading family education knowledge and successful family education experience, and thereby assist and guide parents in setting up correct concepts of family education, in mastering scientific methods of family education, and in improving their ability to conduct scientific family education. The relevant departments should actively engage in scientific research pinpointed at the most salient problems in family education in their regions to provide theoretical support and grounds for guiding family education work. Localities with the conditions for doing so may guide parents in giving correct family education by using such forms as parent/school meetings or parent interaction meetings. The parents' understanding of children's mental health should be improved by means of seminars and special publicity columns on mental health. Localities that have the conditions for doing so should set up and perfect mental health consultancy centers and do their best to dispel mental problems that emerge among parents or children in the growing process. Family education research society and family education guidance centers could be set up to improve the parents' ability to "raise seedlings at home." A female teacher in Harbin city in Heilongjiang province mentioned a case in which a student in her class was addicted to "legend-and-romance" games and spent all of his pocket money buying equipment for going online. After consulting the parents, the woman teacher invited a computer specialization university student to the boy's home to coach the latter on his lessons and at the same time teach him computer technology. The boy finally underwent a change—his study performance rapidly improved and he gradually developed a correct attitude toward computer games.

2. Using schools as the main line of action, genuinely place moral education in first place in school education and make it run through all links of education and teaching. Moral education is a systemic project. We propose that educational administrations at all levels change the traditional methods of assessing education and, by means of a correct way of evaluating education, guide the schools in adopting firm measures to reform course curricula, teaching materials, and teaching methods, and in taking the improvement of student moral attributes as the schools' foremost task. And, at the same time, enhance the moral construction of children and young people, strengthen their innovative spirit and practical abilities, and create a salubrious school education environment. We propose that efforts be made to explore new lines

of thinking and methods in terms of college entrance exams and enrollments, for example, using information about students' overall development during all stages of elementary and secondary school as important grounds for college enrollment, so as to prompt secondary and elementary schools not only to pay attention to their students' academic performance but to show ever greater concern for their overall development.

3. Use society as a breakthrough point and vigorously conduct a "cleanup of the social environment." The effectiveness of school and family education is, to a large extent, affected by the social environment, and for this reason the rectification (*zhengzhi*) and cleansing of the social environment should be made an important link in citizens' moral construction. We propose that all localities use their own resources and actively set up and utilize bases for education aimed at students' all-around development (*sushi jiaoyu*) in secondary and elementary schools and use bases for youngsters' patriotic and ideological/moral education to create a salubrious educational atmosphere for the broad masses of adolescents. The localities could also make use of learning through practice and carefully design and organize moral practice activities with fresh and lively contents, novel forms, and a high degree of attractiveness, pinpointed at the characteristics of youngsters of different levels, in order to encourage the latter to acquire inspiration and strength from outstanding personages both ancient and contemporary, both Chinese and foreign, and from moral role models and advanced moral persons, and even to observe bright sparks of morality in their schoolfellows, teachers, and companions. The relevant departments should adopt vigorous measures to strengthen controls over film and TV productions, Internet bars, and books and publications. For example, some localities employ "Internet nannies" to guide youngsters toward healthy online activities. The relevant work unit in other localities engage the "five veterans" (*wu lao*) to act as Internet supervisors. Still other localities engage secondary and primary school students to engage in activities called "create safe and trustworthy Internet bars" and "no involvement in venues of activities inappropriate for children and young people" and have thereby effectively strengthened the perception of self-discipline among adolescents. Departments of education, public security, and culture must regularly launch dedicated campaigns to recondition electronic game machines, overhaul Internet bars and venues that do business in audiovisual products and books, and rigorously investigate and ban venues that have unhealthy e-games containing pornography, gambling, violence, and feudal superstitions. While there should be strict division of work, all relevant departments in society should also do their best form a joint force for putting the environment in order and set up permanent mechanisms for creating a salutary social environment for the healthy growth of adolescents. In

mid-summer 2004, the residents of Shanghai's Luwan district used their own photo and video cameras to take pictures of many different sorts of bad customs and habits, under the title of "usher in an abundant world, do away with bad customs, everyone take pictures." The chief bad customs depicted among the more than 1,200 pictorial works were: jaywalking, men going about bare-chested outside the house in summer, women going out in their pajamas, and so forth. These pictures greatly shocked a great many residents and had a positive effect on cleansing the social environment. Also, governments at all levels should earnestly increase their investment of funds in such areas as constructing after-school activity centers for children and young people and moral education bases and put moral education for children and young people on a truly solid footing.