**Why Contemporary Chinese University Students Encounter Difficulties**

**in Encountering Romantic Relationships**

In the Psychological Health Status of College Students Report 2022 (2023), it was found that 25.40% of the participants had never engaged in a romantic relationship, while 41.93% reported currently being single. Within this single cohort, according to China’s college students’ sex and reproductive health survey report 2019-2020 (2020), the proportion of male and female students whose attitude towards entering a relationship ranges from “let it be” to “very reluctant” accounted for 55.45% and 73.91%, respectively. Situated in a liberating environment, students don’t engage in romantic relationships as eagerly as they anticipated during their secondary education years, an undeniably perplexing phenomenon. Herein are three reasons I have identified for this occurrence: the deficiency in students' capacity for affection, the adverse influence of consumerism on their value system, and the distortion in their self-perception brought about by Utilitarianism.

The first and most significant reason is that contemporary Chinese university students lack the capacity for love. As articulated in the famous quote by Fromm (2013), “Love is an art, it requires knowledge and effort.” “Most people see the problem of love primarily as that of being loved, rather than that of loving, of one’s capacity to love.” (p.7) Yet, the majority of contemporary Chinese university students lack answers to the question of how to love. This may be because they are immersed in an online environment from a young age, which makes them unfamiliar with real interpersonal interactions. Alternatively, it could be due to the high-pressure education system's prohibition on

puppy love, depriving them of the opportunity to practice the capability for love. Should an individual neglect the holistic development of their personality and the attainment of a creative disposition, any endeavor toward love is destined for failure. Absent the ability to love others with humility, courage, sincerity, and discipline, one is perpetually condemned to dissatisfaction in their romantic endeavors.

Second, due to the impacts of consumerism and meritocracy, the value systems of contemporary Chinese university students have been somewhat distorted. Consequently, under the guidance of this erroneous methodology, their misconceived notions and methods of courtship have become obstacles to entering into romantic relationships. To become what they perceive as worthy of love, they typically adopt several approaches. Firstly, striving for maximal success, attaining the highest possible academic achievements, earning as much money as possible, and ascending to the highest attainable positions, a pathway predominantly adopted by males. Secondly, enhancing their physical appearance through grooming, adorning themselves in luxurious attire, thereby augmenting their allure, a course of action particularly favored by females. According to Fromm (2013), in a culture dominated by commercialization and where material success is esteemed above all else, it is unsurprising that human romantic relationships and the regulation of the commodity and labor markets follow the same pattern (p.9). However, while this set of values may function effectively in society at large, it often meets with resistance within the university student body. Students are prone to perceive the aforementioned self-presentation behaviors as ostentatious, thereby silently keeping their distance. Indeed, consumerism and meritocracy are fundamentally far removed from the essence of love. This represents the core flaw of this methodological

approach.

The third reason relates to how an achievement society affects students at a metaphysical level. This is due to the internal discipline imposed by elitism on the contemporary Chinese college students' mindset. Consequently, students gradually lose confidence as they continually compare their current state with an idealized condition, experiencing a sense of disappointment. The present situation is characterized by the transition from a disciplinary society during high school to an achievement society in college, where individuals are no longer obedience-subjects but achievement-subjects. As concluded by Han (2015), “They are entrepreneurs of themselves” (p.8), and as students begin to act as Ehrenberg (2010) describes:

Depression began its ascent when the disciplinary model for behaviors, the rules of authority and observance of taboos that gave social classes as well as both sexes a specific destiny, broke against norms that invited us to undertake personal initiative by enjoining us to be ourselves……The depressed individual is unable to measure up; he is tired of having to become himself. (p.4)

Students thus become both the perpetrators and the victims of violence themselves. As victims, they are supposed to feel lethargy, resignation, and sorrow. However, when they are about to sympathize with themselves, they realize that they are also the perpetrators, thereby forbidding self-pity and compassion towards themselves. This vicious cycle is not only reflected in the contemporary Chinese college students’ attitudes toward love but also their approaches to grades, money, and leisure among other aspects of life. It is

precisely due to this habitual self-oppression that the excessively high expectations of college students towards love become the initial barrier to entering into romantic relationships, with the continuous pursuit of a perfect state subsequently becoming a significant source of their disenchantment and boredom with love.

The aforementioned are three reasons identified for the phenomenon of contemporary Chinese university students encountering difficulties in entering romantic relationships. Of course, love is a lifelong pursuit that requires continual adjustment of attitudes and enhancement of capabilities. Different individuals have various personalized considerations when facing the topic of romantic relationships. Among the foregoing rationales, consumerism and achievement society are modern products of social development, while the lack of ability in love is a perennial issue accompanying humanity throughout the ages. It is difficult to predict whether these three reasons will have a lasting impact on the university student population and even broader societal members as time progresses and society develops. Furthermore, whether the reluctance to enter romantic relationships will become an influential trend or even a new normality remains uncertain. However, as Berscheid (2006) pointed out, “the word love is one of the most popular words in the English language” (p.47). May university students and everyone else be empowered to embrace love in its many forms, and may their journey be filled with fulfillment and joy.

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