

# 16

## The Lapse of Morals in Modern Life

WHEN I TAUGHT FORM 5 ENGLISH in the early 1960s, one of the set books was the novel “Pride and Prejudice”.

On reaching the story of young Lydia running away from home to live with an older, evil-minded man, my students were shocked, and asked me why they had to read a book like that, because no Chinese girl would ever do that. Do you think that Chinese girls today would be shocked by Lydia’s conduct? Not as much as they were four decades ago, I think. At that time, Chinese children were usually brought up under strict Confucian principles. I always feared, in fact, that the influences of the west would damage Chinese cultural values here.

Why are the thoughts of Chinese young people so different today? I will mention a few points, and you may be able to think of others. First is the fact that time does change people’s values, and that is why there is usually a generation gap between parents and children. However, the impact on Chinese children here has been quicker, because of the clash between Chinese culture and deteriorating Western cultural values.

The main influences, I believe, have been western films, television, and now, the internet. When television first hit Hong Kong in the 1960s, I welcomed it, believing it could be used for educational purposes. I soon discovered that most films were full

of sex and violence, greatly exaggerating the worst of western culture, and misleading local children into believing that this was the modern way of life. Even drug-taking, which was quite common among elderly workers here to relieve them from work fatigue, began to be pushed on to young people to give them some excitement. Since then, many have died from overdoses.

Newspapers, magazines and comics soon jumped on the bandwagon by printing lurid pictures in order to sell more copies. Now the age of cover girls has been reduced to a frightening low. Young girls may feel flattered to have their pictures displayed, without realizing they are being used and degraded.

Of course, most young people do not succumb to these evil profiteers, but even if they buy their publications “just to have a look”, they are encouraging this pornographic trade. We can help to reduce this trade by refusing to buy such publications.

As we now try to clear up pollution in the atmosphere, let us also clear up the pollution from our culture.