

New Concepts, New Strategies to achieve New Results for a Changing World

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There is a clear consensus emerging in the international community that sustainability must be ensured in the quest for economic development. It means that economic growth must take due account of the need to protect the natural ecology and prevent the depletion of natural resources. However there is less attention on the probable impact of economic growth on the social environment – such as the distortion of social values, the alienation of human relationships, and the erosion of social capital. After almost half a century of technological advancement, especially with the extensive infiltration of the silicone chips, productivity has been hugely increased, resulting in surplus production as technology has easily displaced those human activities that only require lower level intellectual and physical capabilities. Along with globalization, dominance of the market economy and liberalization of trade, a culture of the economic jungle (where each for their own) results. The values of commodities and the flow of wealth are at the mercy of our pervasive information technology and marketing strategies. This has unfairly undermined the ability of the working class to negotiate, hence planting the seeds of future class conflicts when the rich easily gets richer and the poor, poorer.

It is a matter of survival. As the world economy radically transforms, every country in the world, capitalistic or socialistic alike, is pursuing similar financial strategies to encourage consumerism in order to maintain a certain level of economic growth, tax income and employment opportunities for the populace. This provided fertile grounds for the business sector to blind us with materialism, consumerism and glorify the cultures of vanity and indulgence. Many of our traditional festivals that celebrate faith and relationships such as Christmas, Easter, Valentine, Halloween, and Mothers Day have degenerated into just another occasion to consume.

Let's refocus on Hong Kong, this beloved and compact home of ours, which has also been challenged by the global economy, and whose production

base has significantly altered along with changes in the market. The production work force is having difficulties in keeping up with these macro changes that are further complicated by our own special political and social situations. An imbalance in the highly and lowly paid jobs results, aggravating the polarization between the rich and poor, and increasing the burden on the government-funded safety net. For the relatively materially well-off societies such as Hong Kong, the promotion of consumption is one legitimate way to redistribute wealth. But this can lead to erosion of our core values. Whilst traditional Chinese values have cherished simplicity, frugality, integrity and scholarship as the means to life enrichment, the glorification of materialism and consumerism has redefined success, taste and status as those who consume. What were once healthy values became distorted. The impact extends beyond igniting the material desires amongst the poor, leading to psychological imbalances that adversely affect the next generations. Some politicians and even social workers were convinced that relative material deprivation were the cause of loss of self-respect and confidence amongst young people, and some even promulgate the expectation that the legitimate function of government was to satisfy every material desires.

We are really lagging the world in such mindsets. If we take a moment to reflect, the rest of the world, especially those in post-modern and developed economies, many have come to the realization that money and material wealth cannot really enhance the quality of life. The renaissance of religions reflects this renewed search for spiritual fulfilment. The “market” is now wide open for more spiritual products and services, which the more enterprising are starting to develop. Just as the emergence of environmentally friendly products has been helpful towards protecting the natural ecology, the development of spiritual products should also aid the healthy development of our social milieu; and could facilitate the development of social capital.

In response, the CIIF has endorsed the following principles

(1) **People are equal** – our values and dignity are intrinsic to our human life and spirit. No one should be valued differently on the bases of their intelligence, appearance, wealth or health. We should not be ranked (as inferior or superior) because of our individual differences. We all have the right to live and the responsibility to develop. In the spirit that “we are all part of a big

family”, all civilized communities must take seriously their responsibility to provide a safety net that would safeguard these intrinsic rights and developmental opportunities for all. This, however, should not be the sole responsibility of government, but one to be shared by the families and wider community.

(2) **There is talent in each of us that could be put to good use** – our talents are multi-faceted and not confined to academic achievements or intellectual abilities alone. The aim of education must be focused on bringing out the potentials in all; and effective education often takes place outside of the classroom. The CIIF puts emphasis on identifying, developing and exercising the contributive potentials of each and all.

(3) **Blessed are those who give rather than receive** – is a wisdom that has been well articulated by many wiser people before.

- As Bajin (巴金) put it – the meaning of our life lies in our ability to give; and not in receiving, or in beseeching;
- Alan Cohen (艾倫柯漢) also believed that our true joy results from giving with love and compassion without counting costs and returns. Conflicts and tensions between people, districts and countries are almost inevitable as our societies are driven by market economy ideology. As we move towards greater polarization of wealth and poverty, those who have must share a bit more with those who have not. Governments have a definite role in wealth distribution. But a more harmonious, inclusive and peaceful society could only be built if all of us were willing to take up a bigger “third” sector role and the business sector assuming greater corporate social responsibilities.

(4) **The intangibles and invisible are the most enduring and valuable** – whilst material relief would serve, at most, to temporarily alleviate emergency needs. Hong Kong is essentially a relatively rich society, where material deprivation is generally uncommon, with a reasonably sound safety net in place. Hence, knowledge and expertise, experience and wisdom; social networks as well as opportunities are most needed by those caught in the cycles of poverty. As Carnegie has pointed out, attitudes and personality rather than intelligence, are the critical success factors in shaping our careers and future. Therefore the emphasis of empowerment is not on skill training, but on shaping personality, and activating motivation, enhancing positivity,

curiosity, perseverance, search for excellence, and integrity.

(5) **Material gains and sensory stimulations bring only transient gratification.** A higher and more enduring level of satisfaction would be founded on relationships within the family, between partners and amongst friends. Another level of fulfillment is when we found meaning in our lives, sense of achievement, contribution, being loved and respected.

To promote these CIIF values and beliefs, the CIIF has set the following strategies:

- (1) **Interactive learning through project implementation** – the social capital concepts being promoted by the CIIF are abstract that promulgation by lecturing through the written or electronic media would neither be appropriate nor effective. Real impact could only be achieved through doing – so that we could progress from knowing, understanding, realization, integration, articulation and coaching to action. Through the projects put forth by various community or service organizations, they start to mobilize and reshape social connections, vulnerable groups are engaged through the development of volunteer teams; mutual help networks with mutual trust are being built with compassion, care and support; and social participation were achieved through capacity building, and pathways built through bridging and linking social capital.
- (2) **We are careful in our assessment of projects** to ensure their alignment with the CIIF objectives, to exercise proper stewardship of public funds, to encourage innovation for new solutions rather than simply to supplement or expand existing services. We hope to mobilize the participation of the entire community to address their own concerns, not because this approach is more effective in providing prompt solutions and preventing future problems. It is because this approach is more conducive to strengthening the formation of social networks, building of communities and enhancement of social harmony. We treasure every proposal. We do not let go of any group that shows commitment to the fund objectives and demonstrates willingness to work with the CIIF to develop strategies. We encourage continuous innovation, enhancement, a search for excellence and adaptability in response to changing circumstances.
- (3) **We put a lot of emphasis on strategies to achieve “complementary”**

and interlocking matching that applies to relationships between people, organizations, sectors and social strata. The search for this complementarity sharpens our understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of oneself and those of others. The strongest are those interlocking relationships that involve both giving and accepting. The exchanges are most enduring when they involve non-material resources such as knowledge, expertise, experience, wisdom and social networks. We value the acts of compassion when one is most in need. We emphasize relationships that are lasting with the ability to respond at times of need.

- (4) **We search for the most despondent and helpless** within our community and re-ignite their hope with compassion; to rebuild their confidence by finding their potentials; and to re-energize their life journey, providing the channels for them to serve others. The crux is in returning to our first principle, in that we recognize and respect the intrinsic values of each person. We take time to understand their individual needs. We walk closely with them to rebuild mutual trust; and not to waver in our support until the person is firmly re-established.
- (5) **We expect each project to continuously develop** and learn from different sources in search of excellence without becoming complacent with any initial achievement. We must seek to continuously surpass one's own standard, not those of others. We do not need to give ourselves a "pass" mark, and we should definitely not assign ourselves a full mark.
- (6) **We look for practical results that are sustainable**, cumulative in impact, and "snowballing" in effect. We are not impressed by simple statistics, or one-off surge of energy that do not last. We firmly believe in the power of relationships and ideas that influence change.

Since the Fund was first launched over 3 years ago, we have approved over 90 projects, 70 of which have commenced implementation, involving over 150 paid staff, mobilizing over 15,000 volunteers, and involving over 900 collaborators. Together, they have been working hard to achieve various "little good deeds" without acclaim - building relationships, weaving networks, resolving problems, building capacities, motivating those most marginalised to re-engage with mainstream society, uplifting those who falter, and finding

opportunities for those without jobs or hope. As they give selflessly they will gain much happiness and wisdom along the way.

These are unmistakable social capital results. These little results are gathering like the precious underground spring water. They do not have the glory or impact of an ocean. But when cumulated to a certain level, they will be the life springs that nourish us all.