

My sadness

Contributed by Tian Miao

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Why only anger will bring change.

As soon as we set out last winter vacation, on the roads which lead me back to my remote, poor hometown, I realized there was still no change. Our car bumped along the narrow dirt road, and several times I thought we were going to overturn. When we finally finished this perilous journey, what came into my vision was the exact two-roomed bungalow that I could remember from 20 years ago: a dusted bulb which gave out dim light; two wooden single beds on the verge of falling down; and a small black-and-white television which displayed snowflakes more often than clear images. And this was the legacy that I would inherit someday in the future. Later my cousin came to have a word with my dad and told us his wife had diabetes. With all his money being spent caring for his wife, my cousin could not pay back the money he borrowed from my dad after being fined for having a second child. I felt sad. They had given birth to her despite not having enough money to raise her and her little brother. Having a second child is not allowed, according to the "single-child policy," which has been in effect in this country for nearly 30 years. But I can see why they insisted on having her: Having more babies means more fortune and luck. And given the unequal enjoyment by citizens of medical insurance, depending on whether you live in the city or the country, rural folks raise "enough" children to prevent themselves from living a lonely and unsecured old age. There is a main bus stop in front of our campus. Sometimes when a bus comes, "ladies and gentlemen" would swarm to the door, pushing each other with no regard for old and young, just to grab a seat or squeeze on before everyone else. I saw many elders encourage kids to jump the line to buy tickets and then push and then grab seats. If the kid is successful, he or she will get praised as if they had learned a skill that equips them to be the future masters of the nation. I felt sad. Everyone seemed egocentric, concentrating only on self-advantage. Some argue that we act like this because limited goods once forced people to push and jostle to grab them or else suffer hunger. But why should we still suffer from that psychology despite peace and prosperity today? What happened to honoring the elderly and taking care of children, keeping great order, and being altruistic? One day I came across a 1984 article, "Why don't we Chinese get angry?", by Lung Ying-tai and published in Taiwan's China Times. I was greatly enlightened: My sadness is actually anger in disguise. Lung criticized Taiwan during the 1980s, writing, "In a society ruled by law, people do have the right to get angry. If you are tortured (by the street traders), you should at first stand in front of them with arms akimbo and say to them angrily: 'Please YOU get lost!'; If they don't, send for the police. If you discover the street and the police work in collusion -- that is more serious. This fury should burn until they (the police) eliminate the evil trends and get disciplined. But you do nothing but close the doors and windows cowardly, shaking your head and shrugging your shoulders." To my disappointment, she is still right today. In my residential quarters, if a neighbor makes noise at midnight, people usually only complain with a few words and close the door and windows tight. We were taught not to criticize or stir up trouble in order to avoid unnecessary trouble. This seems to confirm an inherent flaw among Chinese: excessive self-protection. We only care about how to protect and maximize our own interests and try not to get involved with other people's affairs. Thus we withdraw, never complain or express dissatisfaction. We do not want to change the present condition, as long as we can live smoothly regardless of improved conditions. I grow sadder. As one of the "hopes of the nation," I, a college student, should be full of passion and dreams for an ideal future. But when faced with unpleasant scenes, I have no courage to announce my grievances but just remain "sad." I will change my attitude. I will air my anger. I will influence others to change if the shabby houses greet my eyes again. If the anger cannot bring about changes, I can only get sad. But I believe sadness will not come back any more.