

Post-totalitarian deconversion trauma

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1. Introduction

In many post-totalitarian societies, a considerable percentage of the population experienced anxiety and various types of inner psychological conflicts rather than feelings of liberation, emancipation, elation or relief. This phenomenon has been observed in several types of sociopolitical changes in the world. But because these psychological problems occurred in a 'freed' society where the psychological environment should be 'better' than before, they tended to be treated as individual adjustment problems.

However, the current problems in the psychological transition in the former East Germany, which was believed to have no or little psychological difficulties in deconversion from communism, have made us aware of the pervasiveness and tenacity of the trauma at a much deeper level than initially analyzed by psychologists and social scientists. For a while it was popular to interpret the trauma as a 'weaning syndrome' [6] – loss of the mother figure whose role had been played by the government – or 'maturation pain' inherent in the replacement of naïve hope with awareness of the complexity of the reality. It was expected that the weaning syndrome and maturation pain would dissolve with time.

On the other hand, evidences and analyses have been accumulating in China – mostly written by Chinese scholars in the Chinese language – that the systematic inculcation of guilt, internalized compulsive self-criticism and negation of self which occurred in the 1950s (readers who cannot read Chinese can get a glimpse in Robert J. Lifton's *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism*, [3]) had long-lasting traumatic effects which surfaced decades later during the various phases of political and social transformations which occurred in waves since the death of Mao in 1976.

Whereas in the Eastern and Central European countries under communism *psychological infantilization* (dependency on the mother figure which was played by the government) was perhaps a main characteristic, the trauma in China can be understood more adequately in terms of *guilt, self-accusation and loss of self* stemming from the 'brainwashing' of the 1950s. But both of these processes can be found in Europe and China. The *post-totalitarian deconversion trauma* (PTDT) in various parts of the world can be understood better if we analyze them in the light of these two processes. Considering that some societies such as North Korea and Argentina are undergoing or yet are to undergo post-totalitarian transitions, the time seems ripe to re-examine the assumptions and theories of PTDT.

2. Menticide

Robert J. Lifton [3] coined the word 'menticide' to designate the method of indoctrination used by Chinese communists in the 1950s. An illustrative example is as follows. Individuals were brought into indoctrination centers where the main activities consisted in group discussion meetings in which the participants competed in confessing real or imaginary sins. The more confessions one made, the more prestige she/he obtained, just as in the precommunist China, a person could become famous for being humble. The individual was supposed to have no self-interest, and to devote herself/himself to the wellbeing of 'people'. Any thought of self-interest was a sin and crime against people. Every detail of private life was discussed, and every hidden corner of the mind was scrutinized. If one could not think of a sin she/he had committed, she/he had to invent a fictitious sin. Confession meetings were held almost daily everywhere including schools and workplaces. Repeated confessions made the individual convinced of her/his sins to the point of obsession of guilt. One should feel guilt. If one did not feel guilt, she/he was guilty of not feeling guilt. This led to complete self-accusation,

self-hate and self-negation. Furthermore, in Bateson's terms [1], one became unable to tell the truth value of her/his statements and feelings in the process of convincing herself/himself of having committed a sin even when she/he actually did not. As will be seen later in this article, the effects of this trauma lasted several decades.

3. Were the Chinese predisposed?

Ide [2] posits that when the People's Republic of China (PRC) was created in 1949, most of the people in China, including intellectuals and political party members, were hopeful and optimistic about the future development of China towards a prosperous and democratic nation, and did not imagine that they would be forced to accept a totalitarian, hierarchical and ascetic social system. Then what went wrong? Ide [2] quotes from a report of an Institute of Sociology: "The basic principles of the society imposed at that time were to consider the ideal and the future more important than the reality. Exaggeration of spirituality, honor and duty, disdain for material desire and profit, emphasis on the goal of society, worship of authority, obedience, minimization of individuality and self-respect were the imposed principles which resulted in mediocrity, do-nothingism, inertia and conservatism."

Why did the Chinese population accept these principles? Ide gives several reasons: 1) the establishment of the PRC marked the end of the century-long period of successive merciless invasions of China by the British, French, Russian, Japanese, American, German, Austrian and Italian military forces; 2) most of the communist party members and military officers at the time of the establishment of the PRC were uncorrupted and devoted; 3) even though some of the communists' concepts such as social class opposition and one-dimensional human value were incongruent with the Chinese tradition, there were other Chinese communist concepts such as frugality and ascetism which agreed with the Chinese tradition; and 4) the farmers who received land from the government and the labourers in cities enjoyed tangible benefits, and this reinforced some traditional concepts such as worship of wise kings, loyalty, trust and obligation, and gave a support to the communist party. Some contradictions did exist. Two songs were regularly sung at all types of meetings. One of them said "There is no savior, god or king. We must build our happiness ourselves."

The other said "Chairman Mao is the savior of the people".

Tragic fate waited those who criticized the government. People shut their mouth and came to feel that the mere act of thinking was dangerous. Behavior and statements of every person were recorded, and any adverse item on the record jeopardized one's job, educational opportunities and housing allocation. Later in the 1960s, the system of 'person-to-person conversation' turned into thought control and spying activity.

4. Difficult process of recovery from PTDT

Ide continues her detailed analysis of various sociopolitical movements and philosophical trends up to the present, every part of which is relevant to PTDT. But for our purpose of comparing PTDT in several countries, let us limit our discussion to three of the items she analyzed. The first item concerns debates on 'the third alternative'. The second on the popularity of Sartre, Freud and Nietzsche among young people. The third contains criticisms of the old Chinese culture and tradition. These three trends were deeply philosophical in nature, as seldom found in other countries.

In 1980 an article appeared in a magazine for young people. It was written by a woman at the age of 23. During the Reform of 1969–1978, her various experiences (age 12–21), including being spied on, made her doubt the official teaching "the human being lives in order to make others happy" which she had believed. She formulated her own philosophy "One is motivated for her/his own sake. If the result becomes useful to others, then it is better." Until that time, the official doctrine taught that there were only two alternatives to choose from: unselfish devotion to the society, or egocentric exploitation of others. Life under the official ideology was becoming unbearable to most people. Her philosophy provided a third alternative, and it became very popular. During the two years following its publication, the editor of the magazine received 200,000 letters from readers, and several million persons participated in debates resulting from her philosophy. Even today, her philosophy appears as an item in most major opinion surveys.

The 'Sartre Boom' occurred from 1978 to 1983. The 'Freud Boom' occurred from 1983 to 1985, and the 'Nietzsche Boom' occurred in 1988. Let me insert a comment on Sartre, because his philosophy is often misunderstood even among western readers. Sartre in

his *L'Être et le Néant* [8] emphasized the individual's freedom and responsibility: the individual is totally responsible for his own act. There is no escape from this responsibility. A Nazi soldier who exterminated Jewish people was responsible for obeying Hitler's or Himmler's order. Even a lazy individual is responsible for his decision at each moment to continue to be lazy. An authentic human being (*pour-soi*) has a future goal which is different from the present situation, and the present negating the future. Those who are satisfied with the situation are inauthentic human beings (*en-soi*). They do not want to change anything, not because they are simply used to the situation, but because they cannot imagine things to be otherwise. Therefore the Sartre Boom reflected not only assertion of the individual, but also an attack on the passive doing-nothingist mentality. The Freud Boom reflected the need for search for inner motivation which had been repressed. The Nietzsche Boom reflected the awakening need to get away from the dependency on the authority.

Returning to Ide's analysis, the trend to criticize the Chinese tradition and culture occurred from the mid-1980s to 1989. This was a period when the defects of the political system became apparent. At the same time, intellectual exchange with foreign countries became freer. The political system, which partly incorporated the pre-communist Chinese traditions and culture, was criticized, and at the same time the Chinese culture was compared with foreign cultures.

These three phenomena were deeply philosophical. 'The Third Alternative' challenged not only the political ideology but also the Aristotelean logic as well as the zero-sum epistemology [5] and opened a way for a positive-sum epistemology [4]. The three booms took up European existentialism and psychoanalysis which themselves were a rebellion against Cartesian and Kantian philosophy. The criticisms on Chinese culture and traditions were also philosophical.

5. Comparison with other countries

Could menticide, with a similar intensity and thoroughness, have occurred in other countries? Did other countries have a similar type of predisposition? Did other countries undergo a deeply philosophical recovery process comparable to that in China? These are the questions to be investigated. The answers are not yet available. However, we can conceive of some answers, which may or may not turn out to be wrong.

Some concepts in Chinese culture made China vulnerable to totalitarianism: honor and duty, worship of authority, and ascetism. From this point of view, Prussia in Germany had perhaps a much stronger predisposition. Koreans and Japanese ranked also high. Russian peasants had a tradition of frugality, to the point of considering it immoral to eat in a restaurant. Prussia underwent nazism and communism. North Korea is still under communism. Japan was ruled by militarists during the Second World War. Russian peasants *resisted* communism [7]. How strong was or is the PTDT in these countries? There are also countries which did not have a predisposition similar to that of China, but underwent dictatorship, such as Italy under Mussolini, Argentina under Peron, and Cuba under Castro. Were there, is there, or will there be a PTDT in these countries? These are the questions to be studied.

Another question is whether deeply philosophical debates took place during the process of recovery from PTDT in other countries. Are there philosophical debates now in former East Germany? The West Germany of the 1950s was characterized by 'ohne-mich-ism' (individual withdrawal from politics) instead of criticisms of German culture. Japan took the practical route of imitating the North Americans without deep philosophical debate and consequently at the price of insufficient philosophical overhaul.

What can be done to cure the PTDT which still exists in many countries and which will exist in those countries which are now under totalitarianism? This is our ultimate and practical question.

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Bribing in historical context: the case of Japan

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Revised June 1995

In many cultures, forms of mutual gift exchange or service exchange, or upward vertical flow of symbolic or material items to obtain permissions or favor exist. Ample documentations or data have been given by historians and anthropologists. Bribing is not a mere economic transaction but is a part of social mutual obligation, hierarchical symbolism or functional lubrication. However, in the rapid social changes of today, the practice can become distorted or anachronistic. One of the reasons for Japan's foreign trade restrictions was to protect and hide anachronistic social patterns which included bribing. This article discusses *the way* the practice has *become* distorted and dysfunctional rather than the usual historical or sociological analysis of bribing.

1. Introduction

Public construction projects such as airports, highways and governmental office buildings are an example of business categories in which the bidding was almost closed to foreign firms. It was closed even to most of the Japanese firms, as the national and local governments practically decided which firm could enter into the bidding. The preselection was based on two practices. One was *amakudarism*, the other was *bribing*. Amakudarists are retired government officials who are employed by business firms or other organizations. They give "advices" to firms and organizations. As will be discussed later, their advices were actually a disguised form of unofficial requirements. One of the hidden reasons for the government's reluctance to open the bidding to foreign firms was the fact that foreign firms could not be manipulated by the use of amakudarists. As for bribing, it had more symbolic and less economic meaning than foreigners would expect. Some of the top bribe takers did not spend the money they received, but put much of it in hidden storage, for example, under the floor of their house for many years. In order to understand both amakudarism and bribing in Japan, we must first see

cultural differences in the concept, meaning, methods and behavior related to bribing.

2. Cultural differences

Let us begin with some concrete examples:

Mutual exchange. Bribing may be based on the concept of mutual social as well economic exchange. There are several versions of mutual exchange. For example, in Baghdad where I once worked, a traditional pattern was that several households lived around a courtyard. The lady in one household baked bread and distributed it to others. Another household made clothes and distributed them, and so forth. Economists may call it "barter". However, the social meaning was more important. When some "modern" urban planners re-housed the interacting households to widely scattered parts of the city, the households continued their daily exchange *by taxi*, aggravating the traffic congestion in the city. The social meaning of mutual exchange was more important than the costs of the taxi. Also in Baghdad, the rich and the poor lived mixed in each neighborhood. This was important and functional because the tradition required that the rich cooked and put on their dining table twice as much food as they could eat. After the meals the left-overs were distributed to the poor, and the poor in turn offered services such as garden cleaning to the rich. The same concept was used in restaurants. Each dish had a portion twice as large as one could eat, and the customer was expected to leave one-half of it uneaten instead of giving tips. This was the vertical mutual exchange system. Needless to say, the modern urban planning destroyed it.

In Arabic countries, mutual exchange did not lead to bribing, but in some other countries it did. For example, in pre-communist Poland, a sculptor who wanted his son to be admitted to a university would give one of his sculptures to a university professor. While the exchange among households or between the rich and the poor in Baghdad was a daily activity, this type of "mutual favor" in Poland took place occasionally but predictably and expectedly. In pre-communist

days, mutual favor had no corruptive meaning. But under the communist regime, communist-type bribing [1] became enmeshed with the traditional concept of favor, and now it is difficult to disentangle the two and to return to the pre-communist concept. In some countries mutual "service exchange" is practiced to avoid taxes. For example, in the USA, a dentist fixes a car mechanic's teeth, and the mechanic repairs the dentist's car. This transaction does not appear in income statements, and saves taxes. Another example of tax saving is exchange of prepaid tourist hotel reservations between hotels in several countries. In this case the money does not cross national boundaries. If taxes of foreign income are higher than taxes on domestic income, this method saves taxes. Such exchanges are made for economic purposes only, and do not involve social meaning as was the case in the examples from Baghdad and Poland.

Functional lubrication. In Indonesia and in Egypt, a small amount of unofficial fee is expected if one wants to expedite processing of documents [3]. It can be called "express fee". It has several characteristics: a) the amount is small; b) the amount is standardized; c) it does not stay in the hands of the official who receives it but is passed onto others involved in the processing of the documents; and d) the express service is available to anyone, with few exceptions. One exception in Indonesia was customs duties for international travellers. Usually, foreign tourists did not have to pay customs duties for their personal effects. But Chinese¹, both those living in foreign countries such as Hong Kong and Singapore, and those residing in Indonesia, had to pay \$50, or rather insert \$50 inside the passport when they handed their passport to the customs officials. For those \$50, however, they could bring in anything. In Egypt, the express fee may fluctuate daily but one can obtain "today's rate" from the secretary of the official. In any case it is customary to give a small present to the secretary at each visit to the official, and you can obtain the rate when you hand your present to the secretary.

Individual greed. In contrast, in some countries such as Mexico, bribing has the following characteristics: a) the amount depends on the individual official; and b) it is for the official's own personal use: the bribe is not re-distributed to others. In some situ-

ations Indonesian officials at high levels may take this type of bribe, but the majority of the bribes at lower levels in Indonesia are of the "express fee" type even though there are exceptions.

Bribing under communist systems. The communist systems depended on allocation of materials as well as budgets. The officials in charge of distribution and allocation yielded great power. The "entrepreneurs" in communist systems were those who were skilled in obtaining allocations, similar to "grantsmen" in North American academic systems. Grants do not have to produce profit, and they do not have to be repaid. If a deficit occurs, one asks for more grants. Chinese firms, and even many Russian firms of today, tend to regard foreign joint-venture partners as grant-giving agencies [5]: it is logical for them *not* to produce profit, *not* to repay, and to ask for additional funds.

Since material allocations usually arrived with much delay, the strategy of managers was to overstock anything and to trade the surplus with other factories. Besides, allocation of any sort required bribing [1]. One difference between communist entrepreneurs and North American grantsmen is that the latter do not trade material allocation with others, and do not usually use bribes. The latter's strategy is strict conformity to the dominant academic research methodology and theory, rather than allegiance to a political ideology.

3. Bribing in Japan

Since the feudal periods, bribing was extensively practiced in Japan. Historical records indicate incidents and riots against excessive bribing. For example, the incident of Chushingura (1702), a revenge by 47 retainers of a lord who, trying to protest against a greedy official, lost his life, exemplified excessive practice of bribing as well as the public's resentment against it. The Tokugawa Period in Japan, 260 years long, is known as one of the longest politically stable and internationally isolated periods in world history. Yet there were numerous riots due to a heavy burden on farmers caused by legal and illegal taxation connected with embezzlements by administrators [4].

In cross-cultural comparison, Japanese bribing has been mainly of two types: individual greed; and mutual exchange. It has been intrinsic to the social and political system in Japan. It was considered to be more or less "normal" and necessary. There is still a

¹More precisely, "overseas Chinese" to distinguish them from the "mainland Chinese".

great deal of it going on. For example, it is customary for pharmaceutical dealers to give expensive presents to hospital physicians who are in charge of selecting pharmaceutical products. The costs of bribing are reflected in high prices of pharmaceutical products, often as much as ten times those in the USA. Most of the medical costs are covered by insurance, but the individuals must pay a very high insurance premium which is usually deducted from salary and therefore remains invisible and intangible. The higher the pharmaceutical prices, the more the physicians gain from the insurance firms.

Since two decades, large-scale bribing incidents have begun to be exposed: the Lockheed case, involving a former prime minister Tanaka; cases involving insider-trading of stocks; cases on closed bidding of large public construction projects; etc. But they are tips of icebergs. A great deal more remains under the surface. Incidents surface only when they get into conflict with new social or legal changes. For example, the "Recruit" case surfaced when insider-trading became illegal.

In some aspects of life, bribing disappeared earlier. For example, in the 1930s rich people still gave presents to those who were influential in overriding the failing scores in school entrance examinations of their children. But this practice has almost completely disappeared, at least at the top level universities because the students' ability has become more important than their family background.

In some unexpected aspects of life, one can still find its vestiges. An example is the "gratitude payment" for rented apartments. Still a large percentage of apartment owners require the initial "gratitude payment" in addition to the rent and security deposit. Its amount can vary, but is usually an equivalent of one or two months rent. It is non-refundable. The concept dates back to the feudal period when land was owned by feudal lords. People needed permission to live, and had to pay for the permission. But the system survives today because of the extreme shortage of housing in the small overcrowded country. People have to put up with small, uncomfortable and sometimes dirty or very old expensive apartments. Fortunately, there are now nationally or municipally supported new housing developments, often called "new towns" which offer cleaner, but still very small, apartments without the gratitude payment. These apartments are very popular, and there are several times more applicants than vacancies, and drawing of lots is used to determine the winners,

4. The nature of bribing in Japan

It is difficult to understand the nature of bribing in Japan unless one realizes that it originated from a philosophy that individuals had no rights and had to obtain permission for everything. Once one becomes aware of this philosophy, the seemingly illogical, mysterious and "uneconomical" behavior of Japanese bribing becomes intelligible. This philosophy is closely related to *kindergarten mentality* and *overprotectionism*, and is aggravated by *appearance-giving formality*. Let us begin with some examples of these concepts before discussing how they underlie the nature of bribing in Japan.

Japanese tend to overorganize conferences. After the speakers' talks, the chairperson of a session tends to spend 20 or 30 minutes summarizing what the audience has heard from the speakers instead of allocating the precious time to questions from the audience. 'Discussion session' in Japan usually means discussion among panelists or speakers, with little chance of audience participation. Even the panelists may be constrained. They may have to speak in a predetermined order, not in spontaneous exchange. In public lectures, efforts are made to separate the audience from the speaker. The speaker is ushered in from the backstage, and ushered out immediately after the completion of his/her talk, and is made to disappear.

Last year I met a European colleague during a trip. He told me that he planned to be in Japan in October for a conference. I said that I would try to organize a colloquium by him at my university. He told me that he would be free on one of the days during his short stay in Japan. Upon my return to Tokyo I phoned to the office of his conference and asked which the free day of the conference was. A woman gave me the information, and I organized a colloquium. On the day of my colleague's arrival, I called the conference office to check whether the participants arrived on schedule. This time a man answered, and accused me for not having obtained his permission. I asked him why I would need a permission for my colleague's activities on his free day. The man said that his office was instrumental in issuing a document for his colleague's visa, and therefore his office was responsible for my colleague's whereabouts. He also added that it was international common sense that I should obtain his permission. I said that I had lived in many countries and had never heard of such a requirement, and that it was he who did not have international common sense. He said that if I did not

agree to his procedure, he would sue in a legal battle. In order not to waste any more time, I sent him a fax requesting his permission. Then he became happy and gave me his permission. I wondered why he was so authority-hungry. As a possible reason I thought the conference might have paid my colleague's travel expenses. Later my colleague told me that the conference did not pay for his travel, but showed their authority to "permit" him to attend the conference. In this incident, no bribe was required. But the implication was that one should feel grateful for the permission, and if this had happened a few decades ago, some gift-giving would have been expected. The philosophy was that no one has freedom nor right, and explicit or implicit permission is required for everything, and one should feel grateful for the permission. In the light of this philosophy, bribing becomes intelligible not as an economic transaction, but as an ethical act. That is to say, giving a gift for a permission is ethically required, and practically everything one does requires a permission because there is no *a priori* right. Therefore, bribing is ethically required. And even after giving the gift, one should feel grateful and obligated for the rest of one's life. If the bribing were an economic transaction, there would be no obligation after the transaction had been completed: one would feel neither grateful nor obligated.

In addition to the kindergarten mentality and over-protectionism, the practice of appearance-giving formality may make some types of bribing a matter of formality rather than of substance. Appearance-giving formality can be found almost everywhere. For example, if a research project is funded by the university where it is carried out, research papers and discussion papers are ritualistically distributed to all members of specific departments regardless of whether the recipients are interested in reading them. The costs of printing one paper run to about \$ 1,000. If seven members of a project write two papers each, the project must spend \$14,000 on the ritualistic distributions. The final report of the project may cost \$20,000 to print as a book. Each faculty member receives many of such papers every year and ends up with piles of unwanted papers. The total budget of such a project, as an example, may be \$60,000. You can imagine how little money is left for research. In a similar spirit, one receives useless gifts as rituals. For example, if you comment on a manuscript of a colleague, you may receive an expensive, large piece of art, which has no place to be displayed in the typical, small Japanese apartment like mine. The only use for such gifts is to

recycle them. Many of the so-called Japanese bribes are such ritualistic gifts with no practical use, and the recipients do not intend to use them. Sometimes the research itself may be ritualistic. I was once asked to participate in a government-funded research project. I asked how the results would be used. The project director told me not to mind: we simply had to produce a report regardless of the use. Actually, the report was ritualistically distributed and had no effect or impact. Still worse, some of the biggest think-tanks funded by business firms engaged in government contract research, in which the contract-giver specified the conclusion of the research, and the task of the think-tank was to produce arguments to support the conclusion. It was research in name only: in reality, it was more like a propaganda-making contract. And sometimes "research" or "training" may be a disguised bonus to provide an expense-paid trip or vacation. It was practiced by firms and public agencies, though less by universities. I once directed a research project. One project member made a "research trip" to Europe, drawing \$3,000 from the research funds. After the trip he never produced a report. I took up the matter with the administration, and was told that buying a book during the trip would justify the trip. In fact, the project member came back with some books. Ironically, in order to counteract the looseness, some illogical restriction may be instituted which turns out to be counterproductive. Since the government may expect the research trips to be vacations, it may impose time limits. A professor told me ten years ago that when he participated in a conference in the USA, he was not permitted to stay even one day longer to do research in libraries after the conference. Even today, a photocopy of the passport showing the dates of departure from and return to Japan is required, even though no such proof of dates is required to justify a research travel inside Japan. With such counterproductive restrictions, appearance-giving formality justifies gifts, monetary and non-monetary rewards, which are not only legalized but also ethically required. They do not become illegal until social changes necessitate them to be defined as illegal.

Finally another example of "amakudarism". Public agencies used to select and appoint their favorite construction firms, which of course gave gifts to agency officials. This system of non-competitive contract-awarding was supported by the practice of amakudarism. Amakudarists are retired high-ranking government officials employed by private firms as advisors. Actually their "advising" consists in imposing

the public agencies' unofficial specifications in a paraphrased way. I have had the opportunity to observe how they gave their advices. The usual phrasing was: "It will increase the probability of your receiving the contract if you do this in such and such a way..." The Japanese government has been quite reluctant to open the contract-bidding to foreign firms, not only because it would lose the bribe-giving firms, but also because it could not use the amakuradi method with foreign firms.

Even though some practices persist because of deep-rooted philosophies and traditions, Japanese people have proved to be capable of adaptation and change in many cases when necessities arise, because they are more pragmatic than theoretical or ideological. One example is the obsolescence of personal introduction. Until recently a canonical rule in Japanese business was one could not approach a firm without a personal introduction through an acquaintance. But today's faster pace of business has made this rule almost obsolete. Since ten years I have been experimenting with direct contact approach without personal introduction, and found out that it has become increasingly easier. Nowadays the direct approach is almost always successful. In one of my courses, I require my students to choose a business category and compare firms from several countries in that category, and

make direct contacts with them for interviews and site visits. At the beginning they may be rejected many times, but eventually they learn how to approach firms, and become able to obtain interviews with managers and to make site visits without personal introduction.

Judging from such a change, it is not impossible to reduce the practice of what is called "bribing". The key is the recognition of obsolescence of the philosophy of no rights, kindergarten mentality, overprotectionism and appearance-giving formality.

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