Analysis of the Phenomenon of "Apathy Towards Relatives" among Young People in Contemporary Society

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Abstract: "Apathy towards relatives" is a sociological term that refers to laziness, negligence, and disdain for interaction and socialization with relatives within two generations. As the saying goes, "One generation is considered close families, the second generation is considered distant relatives, while the third and fourth generation are equivalent to strangers." In this atomized society, apathy towards relatives brings about a possible social trust crisis. Therefore, in this paper, we will dive into the leading causes of this phenomenon and its impact on today's society and the relationship structure between distant relatives.

Keywords: Apathy towards relatives; Kinship; Social trust

1. Introduction

Kinship is a kind of social relationship that is built upon blood relations, which is the initial source of interpersonal relationships in a society, and also the source of the sense of trust between human beings. If we compare social relations to a big net, and human beings are the knots in it, then the first thing that ties up this knot is blood. "Apathy towards relatives" is a sociological term that refers to laziness, negligence, and disdain for interaction and socialization with relatives within two generations. Apathy towards relatives among young people may seem to be the result of egocentrism a tendency to socialize only when needed, and the fading importance of shared interests. However, a more nuanced understanding reveals that this phenomenon is influenced by deeper factors such as historical shifts, legislative changes, technological advancements, and broader societal influences. Meanwhile, in rural areas of China, the trend of apathy towards relatives within the second generation is particularly noticeable, with a higher prevalence of left-behind children and elderly individuals living alone. These observations highlight the complex dynamics of familial relationships and the diverse challenges faced within different cultural and socio-economic contexts. The progression of apathy towards relatives will lead to a trust crisis in society, which will cause many issues in the future. Therefore, in

this paper, the causes and impact of this phenomenon will be analyzed in the context of the development of contemporary society.

2. Analysis of the causes of the widespread phenomenon of "Slacking off on relatives"

2.1. Social development dimension

Hsiao Tung Fei's *From the Soil* [1] says that at the grassroots level, China is a rural society. At the beginning of the reform and opening-up period in 1978, among China's population of 960 million people, there were 790 million peasants (rural residents), accounting for 82% of the country's population. Of the more than 400 million people working in the field, 280 million were farmers (agricultural workers), accounting for 70% of the working population, making it an extremely typical agrarian, or rural society. In such a society, communication between people is basically face-to-face between acquaintances. Because of the uniformity of production methods and lifestyles, people in the same settlement group are mainly engaged in agricultural farming, and the social structure has been in a stable state for a long time, with no large-scale market exchange and industrialization innovation, and no large-scale and drastic movement of population; such a social pattern has lasted for thousands of years in China.

The native society became a society of "born herein, die herein" within the confines of the locality. The norm is to end up in the countryside as it is a familiar, stranger-free society.

This is an unavoidable problem encountered by the country in the process of industrialization. Under drastic population movement and social change, people's traditional kinship relationship has been destroyed, and "born herein, die herein" has become a thing of the past. Rural society has been deconstructed under the influence of industrialization. The urban "society of strangers" has gradually replaced the rural society and even becoming the mainstream of society [1].

2.2. Informatization: A profound transformation of the social fabric

In a traditional agricultural society, face-to-face conversation between people is the basic form of social communication. As Fei said: "Villagers whose lives are confined to the land are in contact with the characters they are born with, just like our parents and brothers, not because of the relationships we choose to have, but because of the environment in which they live without having to choose, or even before me." In such a relatively unchanging and stable social environment over a long period of time, people get along with each other through a natural familiarity resulting from frequent contact. Because of this familiarity, some things do not need to be said. People get to understand each other just by a nod of the head and a heartfelt smile. This way of communication makes it easier to read people's thoughts and actions.

Internet technology, born in the 1970s, has changed the forms of social organization and communication among human beings and even brought profound changes in social structure. The rapid development of information technology, especially the wide application of mobile Internet, has greatly boosted global economic development and brought about global social changes. Needless to say, China is also affected by it.

The emergence of mobile internet has significantly reduced the cost of online interactions, connecting a vast majority of people worldwide. This has greatly expanded social spaces and fundamentally changed social relations and communication methods. The Internet, which has made each of us an individual, has brought us all together in a continuous conversation [2]. In the era of the internet, people communicate with individuals far beyond their immediate neighborhoods, expanding their social circles to include thousands of strangers worldwide. Additionally, rapid advancements in postal and telecommunication technologies, as well as the

rise of artificial intelligence and other modern high-tech innovations, are rapidly changing the landscape of information technology.^{Top of Form}

Migrant workers who work in cities no longer need to leave their jobs and go back to their hometowns, they can connect with their families just through a simple phone call. With such a convenient means of communication, coupled with the fast-paced life of modern society, many people seldom return to their hometowns. They may only go home during Chinese New Year. Consequently, they become estranged from their relatives.

2.3. Policy orientation and substitution of secondary relationships

The development of apathy towards relatives in China can be partly attributed to the country's family planning policies implemented in recent decades [3]. The One Child Policy was introduced in 1980. Prior to its implementation, the prevalent birth control slogan during the 1970s suggested that "One child is insufficient, two children are ideal, and three children are excessive." Following the enforcement of the policy, many individuals from the post-90s generation became the sole child in their families, resulting in a decrease in the number of relatives.

For those born after the 1990s, their focus on relationships has shifted more towards their careers and communities. Instead of relying on family ties, they tend to prioritize friendships and connections formed through work and community involvement. For example, classmates they see every day at school often become important colleagues in their careers, while childhood friends from the neighborhood remain close to their community. As these non-family relationships become more significant, the absence of strong family bonds, which used to be central, becomes noticeable, and its place is filled by the importance of career and community connections.

2. Other causes behind the phenomenon of apathy towards relatives among specific groups (rural youth)

2.1. Excessive disparity between urban and rural wealth

After the reform and opening up of China, the country's economy has been developing rapidly, and people's living standards have been greatly improved. However, along with this rapid economic development, the problem of the urban/rural divide between the rich and the poor has become more and more serious and is constantly widening. The gap between the rich and the poor has affected millions of ordinary people, and economic problems will develop into social problems if they continue to evolve. Data from the National Bureau of Statistics of China show that the gap between the rich and the poor in urban and rural areas is even on the verge of widening [4].

Under this great wealth gap between urban and rural areas, a large number of young rural laborers are pouring into the cities in search of development opportunities. Data from the National Bureau of Statistics of China show that the rural labor force accounts for a large proportion of the working-age population [5]. Meanwhile, as the annual income of migrant workers continues to rise, the high salaries and opportunities attract more and more rural youths to leave their hometowns and go to the cities to work. With the long-term separation from their hometowns and relatives, the gradual thinning and alienation of family ties gradually become the norm.

2.2. Increasing number of children left behind

In rural areas, there is a common saying that "once the last generation leaves, the next generation becomes

strangers," which is becoming increasingly true in modern times. This sentiment reflects the reality faced by many left-behind children, who are those whose parents have migrated for work or when one parent is unable to provide supervision. Essentially, left-behind children experience a separation from their parents or one of their parents for a significant period of time, leading to feelings of estrangement and disconnection within the family unit.

These children, growing up in rural areas, have been confined to relatively underdeveloped educational environments for a long time. With the absence of parental care and companionship, they often experience confusion and yearn for affection and attention. As a result, they may develop a sense of detachment from family ties and even exhibit resistance towards familial relationships [6].

In left-behind families, grandparents often take on the role of primary caregivers for the children. However, elderly grandparents may have more rigid attitudes and may require care themselves, leaving them with limited energy and capacity to educate and manage the children. Additionally, many grandparents in these families grew up with the belief that rural children have limited opportunities and that education is not essential, leading them to prioritize early dropout for agricultural or work purposes. This clash in inherent beliefs between grandparents and children often leads to a lack of understanding between the generations. As a result, children may resist communication and become disengaged over time.

In such scenarios, a significant generation gap exists between grandparents and grandchildren, leading to communication challenges. Coupled with limited contact with their biological parents, these children often lack affection and emotional support, which is more common in rural areas. This dearth of affection can lead to feelings of detachment and even apathy towards relatives among left-behind children, exacerbating the sense of estrangement within familial relationships.

2.3. Inability of clans to adapt to the times

As economic conditions improved and the level of rural development rose, the relations of production changed, with small families replacing the large clan as the basic unit of production. Private ownership was further developed and ownership changed from the clan to the family. At the same time, with the gradual disappearance of the vernacular society, the mode of production changed, and the labor force was no longer confined to the land but was quite mobile. Thanks to the much higher level of production, people no longer needed to rely on the clan for survival.

3. The unfolding of the phenomenon of apathy towards relatives in today's society in a figurative sense

Apathy towards relatives is no longer a phenomenon of the near future but has become a social reality today.

In a study conducted by Hu and Han, findings revealed varying degrees of contact with relatives across different age groups among the 1,200 valid samples. Respondents under the age of 18 generally reported minimal contact with relatives. The majority of individuals between 18 and 30 years old, commonly referred to as the "post-90s" generation, reported occasional contact with relatives. Similarly, respondents aged between 30 and 40 also reported occasional contact with relatives, with over 55% having such interactions and only 30% having frequent contact. On the other hand, individuals aged 40 to 50 reported frequent contact with relatives, with 66.67% maintaining regular communication. Those aged over 50 also reported regular contact with relatives, with 50% indicating consistent interaction. These findings suggest a trend towards decreased contact with relatives among younger age groups, with more frequent communication occurring among older respondents.

4. Consequences of apathy towards relatives and the idea of re-establishing kinship relations

4.1. The phenomenon of apathy towards relatives culminating in social atomization

From a micro-perspective, the severance of the closest primitive blood ties cuts off one's innate social bonds, further exacerbating the possibility of the creation of an atomized society. In such a society, each individual will become an island, traditional clan ties will be disintegrated, and new social ideologies will evolve, joining forces with technology to bury the old vernacular ties. A person's social relations are greatly reduced, interaction with the outside world is minimized, and his or her position in society becomes more and more delicate and isolated.

From a social macro perspective, the atomized society has changed the way society used to function. The sense of social participation of different groups has diminished, and the social democratization of society is slowly fading away. The lack of a centralized, official organizational structure brings with it an inevitable lack of control. The trends, movements, and cultural direction of the whole society may become unpredictable and unchangeable.

4.2. Reconstruction of the kinship scenario

In order to get rid of the deep-rooted problems of an atomized society and re-establish essential kinship relationships, we need to start with adult attachment relationships.If everyone in society adopts a social attitude of "socializing only when necessary," society will lose its functional structure and become scattered.

Teenagers may find it difficult to recognize the importance of this innate bond of blood and to realize that a trusted relationship such as kinship is a necessity in life. As children of this generation become parents, they may begin to think differently and rethink their relationship with their blood relatives. When their own children speak ill of them and treat them with indifference, they will reflect on themselves and realize the importance of such a stable, long-term, close, and lasting socio-emotional bond. In the context discussed in this article, specifically focusing on rural youth, apathy towards their relatives could be attributed to childhood trauma. This trauma may stem from experiences such as being left behind or feeling insecure during their upbringing. Additionally, for girls who grew up in deeply traditional and superstitious environments where sons are prioritized over daughters, the resulting trauma could impact their trust in their parents and familial relationships. These early experiences can significantly influence their perceptions of familial bonds and may contribute to feelings of apathy or detachment towards relatives, akin to the impact of early childhood trauma on infants. For such young people to rebuild their emotional connection to their blood relatives, it is necessary to develop a stable and trusting relationship in subsequent social connections, giving them the possibility to rebuild their psychological and emotional connection in the first place. In this way, it is possible to provide traumatized youth with a sense of security, establish secure attachments that will benefit them throughout their lives, break down the barriers of apathy towards relatives, and re-establish the ties inherent in the bloodline.

5. Conclusion

If left unaddressed, the increasing prevalence of apathy towards relatives in society could lead to extreme atomization or even disintegration. To rebuild kinship relationships, this paper suggests considering it from a psychological perspective. As children grow into parents, they may develop a different perspective and recognize the importance of maintaining strong familial bonds. This shift in mindset could help repair the fractures caused by apathy towards relatives. Additionally, rural youth should be provided with opportunities to rebuild emotional connections, establish stable relationships within society, and foster a sense of security. Addressing the root causes of apathy towards relatives is crucial, as it is a societal ailment that cannot be

sustained. Therefore, efforts to tackle the social issues faced by today's youth are essential in resolving this problem.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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