

ON THE STATUS AND CAUSES OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF IN UNIVERSITY

**HAN YI, DAI YANJUN, ZHANG YUANHANG
DALIAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY (CHINA)**

Abstract

Education and religion are separated in China. The percentage of religious belief in university is less than 10% and Buddhism and Christian are the two major beliefs. The motivation of their belief is to look for inner comfort, so there are vague areas in their religious cognition. The main causes of religious belief among university students are personal requirement of emotional identity, unique culture of religion, influence of family members and impact of social transformation in China.

Key Words: University, students, religion, belief, education...

**Higher Education &
Research Society**

ON THE STATUS AND CAUSES OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF IN UNIVERSITY

-HAN YI, DAI YANJUN, ZHANG YUANHANG

I. The policy guidance to university students

In Chinese culture, religion means a founder and many followers worshipping him with certain sacrificial ceremony. In western culture, the word 'religion' is the combination of Latin words: 're' and 'legere' which mean 'again' and 'gathering' respectively. That is, a group of people gather together for one objective and then develop into a same belief.

The freedom of religious belief and the separation of politics and religion are the religious policy in China. It is also a basic policy of socialist country. The Education Law of China states that education and religion should be separated. Any organization or person is not allowed to use religion as an excuse to obstruct education system. The principle of separating education and religion includes 2 aspects: On one hand, any institute or other educational organization, any teacher or other educator in national education filed should respect the freedom of religious belief and should not violate citizens' basic right of free religious belief. They should not discriminate against any students who have religious belief, force any students to believe in any religion or force them not to believe in any religion. On the other hand, any religious organization or person should not illegally intervene in educational activities or management in any institute or any other educational organization in national education field. In 2005, the Ministry of Education issued a regulation named as 'The Provisions on the Administration of Students in Regular Institutions of Higher Education'. The 43rd provision in the regulation stipulates: "No organization or person is allowed to conduct any religious activities in school." Currently, ideological and political education is carried out in university to guide students, which includes Marxism-Leninism, Mao Tse-tung Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory and Three Represents Theory. Although the group of people who have religious belief is small under the guidance of these policies and principles, it is still worth investigation of the current status and the causes of religious belief among students in university.

II. The current status of religious belief in university

i. The percentage of students with religious belief is lower than the average percentage in China

Researches show that the percentage of people with religious belief is varied from 10% to 15% in mainland China. For example, in 1993 the social research center in Renmin University of China conducted an investigation about social changes and social consciousness and the data indicated that the percentage of people with religious belief was 11.51% in mainland China at that time. The comprehensive social investigation which was taken 20 years later by the research and data center in Renmin University of China showed that the percentage of people with religious belief was 13.45% in mainland China in 2012. The annual data of the comprehensive social investigation from 2003 indicated that the percentage of people who have religious belief in mainland China is fluctuated. There is no trend of stable increase.ⁱ

Regarding the percentage of students in university who have religious belief, "The Investigation of Beijing Youth's Religious Belief Status and Countermeasures" was conducted as a 'Nine Five' project by Beijing Education Committee in 1998 and it provided that about 13.4% of university students have religious belief in Beijing. "The Research of Deep Level Ideology among University Students", an important project led by Shanghai Education Committee in the year of 2000 showed that about 11.8% of university students have religious belief in Shanghai. The maximum estimation of Chinese university students with religious belief is around 20% and the minimum is around 3%-4%. But the above researches do not have clear and complete definition of the degree of their belief and most of them were by questionnaire simply asking students if they have religious belief. Some students said they have, but actually their answers to other relevant questions cannot support it. They do not take part in regular religious events, cannot often join religious study, are not familiar with the religious doctrine, or cannot guide or restrict their behaviors by the religious doctrine. This shows that most students are not very clear with religious belief. They said they have religious belief but actually it is just their own feeling or because of their strong interest instead of real religious belief.ⁱⁱ

Therefore, the comprehensive analysis of the religious belief among university students in China and the percentage of population with religious belief in mainland China provide that the percentage of university students with religious belief is lower than the percentage of all in mainland China and the real percentage among students is less than 10%.

ii. The main religious beliefs among university students are Buddhism and Christian

Several researches show that Buddhism and Christian are the top 2 religious beliefs among university students in China and they account about 80% of all. The investigation among

university students in Beijing conducted by Wang Weidong & Chen Yiru reveals that Buddhism is account 51.55% as the first belief, followed by generalized Christian accounting 28.57% including Catholicism, Protestant, Eastern Orthodoxy. Islamism is the third one accounting 14.91% and the believers are with minority nationality. The research among university students in Zhejiang by Wang Shihua & Chen Zhenliang indicates that 48.89% of student believers believe in Buddhism, 24.44% in Christian and 6.67% in Islamism.

iii. The motive of religious belief of university students is different from other believers

The motive of most student believers is for spiritual pursuit which is quite different from believers in society. Other believers try to get rid of real sufferings and misfortune in life but students focus more on the exploration of spiritual comfort, the suspicion of original faith, the confusion of reality. At the same time, students are not very clear about religion which is revealed by the following two aspects. The first one is that they are not clear about the religion policy in China. Some students are vague with the 'freedom of religion' policy and the relationship between attaching to the party and believing in religion. They consider religious belief as personal affairs and they can develop religious events in school without any interference. Some students even think that freedom of religion means they can still have religious belief after they join the party. A few students do not know that communist party members and communist youth league members can only believe in communism and cannot have any religious belief or join any religious activities. They do not know communism and religion are two different ideologies and they must choose either the political belief or any religious belief. The second one is that students do not clearly understand religion itself. Some students think they are religious believers but they lack the basic knowledge of the religious doctrine or the scientific recognition of the religious nature. They even do not know their objective or reasons why they believe in the religion.

III. The main causes of religious belief in university

i. Personal emotional recognition

The current education system for university student selection is easy to cause disjointing of school education, family education and social education. Students who have the only objective to be admitted by university will lose objective after they become a university student. Great pressures from study, communication and employment will cause fierce mental conflict. Then university students are eager to find certain mental comfort. Once they cannot gain emotional

recognition from mainstream organizations, they will gradually step into religious area. Many students find that there is sincere help, true care and tolerance in religious group. They can put down the inner burden, share their weakness and limitations, get the feeling of equality, safety and belongs and be satisfied with the love requirement.ⁱⁱⁱ

ii. Attraction of unique religious culture

In the process of creation and development of human civilization, religion and culture are intertwined. Religion is a special kind of culture and it is an important component of traditional culture. At the same time, it is like culture that provides human thinking and living method. The mysterious external form and the internal power of religion make it have pulling force which attracts people to contact, know and believe in it. There are 3 reasons why religion can attract university students: First, religion is full of culture and art; second, it is full of philosophy and ethics; third, it is full of popularity and fashion. Christmas is a typical religious festival which is fashionable in China to be celebrated by youths.

iii. Influence of family

Investigation shows that most university students have already believed in the religion before they come to university. The investigation of religious belief among Zhengjiang university students indicates that about 33.8% university student believers are influenced by their family. Those students have certain religious background in their family. They have been affected since they were still children and take part in social events with their family members and then believe in the religion. At the same time, nationality is another main cause for religious belief of minority nationality students.

iv. Impact of China's social transformation

Currently, China is still in the phase of social transformation and the intense changes bring social structure rebuilding. The fixed rule and the advocated idea of religion become the simplest method for some people to gain inner comfort and the reference of how to handle social affairs. With the increase of communication events between Chinese and foreign university students, some foreign teachers, foreign students do missionary work in parties. Teachers and students in China can be impacted by religious culture when they go abroad for study, practice or exchange. Although students are in school, they can be impacted by the social environment too. Some university students select to believe in religion for the above reasons.

Works Cited:

-
- ⁱ Wang Weidong and Chen Yiru. *Current Situation and Problem of Chinese College Students*. Lanzhou: Science Economy Society, 2013. Print.
 - ⁱⁱ Yang Kang. *Investigation and Analysis of Religious Recognition among University Students*. Beijing: China Higher Education, 2009. Print.
 - ⁱⁱⁱ Wang Zhifeng. *Investigation of Mental Causes and Methods of University Students' Religious Belief*. Nanning: Education Review, 2012. Print.



Higher Education &
Research Society