

The Cognition of Destructive Cults of College Students and Its Influential Factors

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Received: March 20, 2018

Accepted: April 19, 2018

Online Published: May 28, 2018

doi:10.5539/ass.v14n6p65

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5539/ass.v14n6p65>

This paper is phased research results of Beijing Social Science Fund research base project (No. 12ZXB001), the Beijing Social Science Fund research base project (No.14JDZHB008), and the social science plan project of Beijing Municipal Education Commission (No. SM201511417001).

Abstract

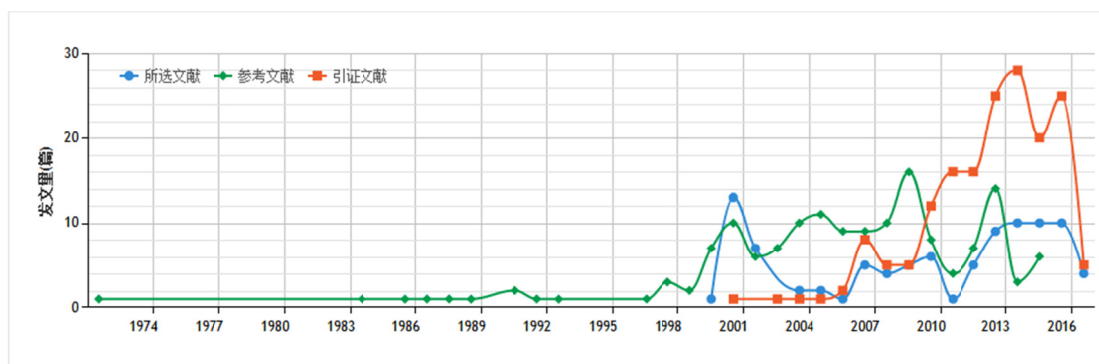
The cognition of destructive cults among students and its influential factors are explored in this paper by means of a survey of 500 college students. Objective: Our goal is to explore the cognition of destructive cult and its influential factors, especially the role of self-esteem and security. Methods: A total of 500 college adult students were enrolled and measured on a series of questionnaires. Results: 92.47% of college students think that mind control is the essence of the cult, 89.25% of college students think it is fabricated, 82.8% of college students choose amass wealth, 62.37% of college students regard it as a secret association. The cognition of the college students varies in different groups. The level of students' self-esteem and security have a certain correlation with their cognition of cults. Discussion: The development of college students' ability of self-knowledge, resilience and improvement of adaptability are helpful to upgrade their ability of identification and prevention.

Keywords: cognition, Destructive Cults, college students

1. Introduction

A religious cult represented by Falun Gong, with its doctrines and practices of anti-science, anti-human, anti-society and anti-government is always considered as a dangerous and threatening organization. It hinders human advancement and threatens social security, and more importantly impairs the growth of adolescents and youth. Given that college students are in a phase of forming a world view and an outlook on life and undergoing psychological development and maturity, it is effective to target those groups as a focus of whole cult prevention work.

1.1 College Students' Cognition of Cults



Related research on destructive cults in China started at the beginning of the century. There are in all 95 articles on China's CNKI with topics of "college students" and "religious cults" and an obvious gradual increase of

number of such papers can be observed these years in the chart above.

The research on college students' understanding of evil cults focuses on college students' religious views and safety education, recognition, dissemination, causes and education countermeasures. The existing research results show that "college students' mainstream are positive and healthy, family and school life of college students are harmonious, they are also with a scientific outlook on life and values, and a correct understanding of religion and cults. However, in the special period of social transformation and rapid development, the religious status of university students is still characterized by contradiction, irrationality, diversity and plasticity. Some college students are dissatisfied with the current situation of the society, some deny the role of morality in human development, and some feel lost in their future. And worse still, some are ignorant and superstitious and even agree with the idea of evil religion. Furthermore, faced with various social contradictions, employment pressure, shortage of money and troubles in inter-personal relationship, some college students tend to feel doubtful, confused, anxious, and discontent, and destructive cults are likely to take advantage of their religious crisis." (Zhou, 2010)

College students are "self-indulgent due to spiritual emptiness, ideal frustration, etc. Written in their "hymn", cult "preached" to "enrich" the spiritual life of college students, "comfort" their lonely hearts, created a so-called "spiritual home" for those lost souls, thus providing a breeding ground for all kinds of activities of evil cult of the soil." (Lu, 2015) They have a strong curiosity and a herd mentality, but lack social experience. Belief condition presents contradiction, irrationality, diversity and other characteristics. Problems like political belief confusion, ideal and faith blurring, value distortion, lack of credit, cooperation awareness and social reasonability, fearing hardship and poor psychological quality are not uncommon among college students. In addition, religion attracts contemporary college students owing to its rich culture, its own artistic charm, spiritual consolation function and its consistent moral code with social morality. As a result, the cult organizations have moved in and gradually shifted their goals and priorities, seeking to infiltrate the universities and reach out to contemporary college students who are easily absorbed as their members. (Xu, 2014)

The university students' faith still presents the characteristics of contradiction, irrationality, diversity and plasticity. Some college students lack confidence in the future of socialism and doubt the guiding culture of Marxism. Politically, we actively demand progress, identify with the party's reform and opening-up policy and achievements, and actively need more students to join the party organization. However, party membership motivation is diversified and the concept of party membership is declining. There are many people around university students who practice Falun Gong, although the number is small, we must take it seriously. Most students are affirmative about the government's opposition to cults, but there are still a few students who have a misconception of cults. (Song, 2007)

The above research findings indicate that the research on college students' cognition of destructive cults is still in the initial stage with more focus on concept and value education and less on empirical study. Therefore, a survey is conducted to probe into college students' cognition of destructive cults from the perspectives of their understanding of cult's essence and its ways of transmission.

2. Methods

A self-compiled questionnaire was used to investigate 324 students from freshman to senior year in Beijing area, and 12 students from grade 1 to 4 were interviewed.

3. Results

3.1 *The Status Quo of College Students' Cognition of Cults*

(1) Most college students think it is meaningful to understand the harm of cults.

80.65 percent of college students thought it was meaningful to learn about cults, and 9.68 percent of college students thought it was meaningless to learn about cults, and 9.68 percent of college students said they didn't think they knew anything about cults. It can be concluded that despite most students have been conscious of the harm of cults, a small number of students don't have any clue about that, which indicates that the threat of cults is underestimated by the public.

(2) The way in which the cult groups infiltrate the campus.

The cults infiltrate the campus in mainly four ways: in the name of student clubs, offering students interest or money along with affection, employing modern information technology, and distributing pamphlets or leaflets on campus. The survey reflects that most students don't have a comprehensive understanding of these means of infiltration, particularly only 68.82% chose the second way. We believe that college students should have the

initiative to understand the cults, and to understand the social causes and ways of infiltration from the theoretical perspective. Only with a thorough understanding of cults can students prevent themselves from going astray.

(3) The essential characteristics of the cult group.

As for students' understanding of the essential characteristics of worship group, 89.25% of college students chose "fabricated heterodox", 82.8% of college students choose "amassing wealth", 92.47% of college students choose "mind control", and "secret of association" was the choice for 62.37% of college students. With a good understanding of the nature of cults, one can distinguish them from other legitimate religions. But the findings of the survey show that most students fail to distinguish and show vigilance when confronting with worship groups, thus they are likely to be targeted by cults and absorbed as their followers. For example, some students believe Christianity and Taoism as destructive cults while they don't have any clue or have little knowledge about Falun Gong. Thus, it is urgent to help students distinguish legal religious groups and destructive cults through education work on them. And these findings are in agreement with those of surveys conducted by other universities in China. According to a survey of some colleges and universities in Guizhou province, "college students have a low awareness of cults, and most students don't have a comprehensive understanding of cults. 15% of the students think it is Qigong, 26% think it is superstition, 56% equal it to Falun Gong cult. They confessed that they knew Falun just via the news reports, and felt pity on victims and lucky for not joining Falun, but when it comes to a further understanding of Falun Gong, they admitted that they had little idea about it and its activities." (Chen, 2016) A study of college students in Quanzhou area of research shows that "64.57% of college students don't believe in any religions while 20.94% believe, 14.49% said they were not clear about their beliefs. 68.41% thought they could distinguish well between religion and cult, 83.07% are firmly sure that cults were not religious, 10.12% were unsure about that and 6.81% were confused with cult and religion. (Wu, 2015)

3.2 Influence Factors of College Students' Cognition of Cults

It is generally a complicated and long-term process full of confrontations to educate college students and raise their consciousness of the threat of cults. So a better understanding of the influencing factors of college students' cognition of cults would be helpful to propose effective education.

According to research the reason why a destructive cult attracts so many followers is that it destroys human nature from the angel of knowing that humans need soul consolation and care, steers people to irrational life goals by offering its irrational, evil theories and what's worse forces people to form irrational judgment. Due to the bewildering and changing social contradictions, people fail to understand or feel ease at some social phenomena, which easily leads to confusion, perplexity and doubt in their minds. And just because a cult generally concerns personal and social life and health, it is no surprise that with these so-called utilitarian theories they can easily absorb an increasing number of people with psychological demands. This was true for college students. Confronted with various pressures like study, work, health, relationships, a minority with utilitarian purposes would choose to join destructive cults.

(1) Insufficient channels of knowing religion and cults.

The freshmen at Business College, Beijing Union University said "the college students' understanding of a cult around us is too little, let alone its danger and characteristic, and keeping alert when confronted with it. I still remember when students got the questionnaire they exclaimed what is the cult group?" Such college students are not rare. At first we were interested in the subject, but now we are full of worry and responsibility. Understanding is the first step to change. From the survey results, we see that college students on the issues of religion and cult limited way, there are few channels for students to get knowledge of cults. The main one is through news reports which is unfortunately limited. The students' understanding of "falun gong" and "almighty god" is only on the surface level, and some students even have no idea about these cults. Students are conscious of cults' threat, but as for its concrete content, the mode of transmission and the difference of essence from that of religion their conception and understanding are very superficial.

(2) Lack of education in the critical period of college students' belief formation.

The university stage is the formation and perfection period of the college students' outlook on life, world outlook, the values, is a critical period in socialization process. However, college students in this period tend to have a lot of thoughts, unable to form mature and stable concepts. The ideal is perfect, and their demand is too high. Due to the limitations of objective conditions, the ideal and requirements cannot be realized immediately. There is a contradiction between subjective needs and objective reality. The physical growth of college students is mature, and they have stronger internal spiritual needs to realize their own values and aspirations. If the organization "takes advantage of" their needs, it is very easy to become the "spiritual fulcrum" of some college students. One

of the questions asked in our questionnaire is "do you believe in the existence of ghosts?" and "believe" "not" and "not sure" are the three options. Based on the statistical data, we found that there are some students choosing 'believe' and 'not sure', this part of the students are the cult's potential object of absorption, once the cult personnel give them wrong instructions, they are more likely to join it, and these followers could do harm to themselves and the personal property safety of others, even the harmonious development of society. However, most students still chose not to believe, indicating that this part still have a clear judgment of things and not easily to be influenced by the cult.

(3) The maturity degree of psychological development of college students is unbalanced.

The psychological development level of college students is the key factor that influences college students' cognition of cults. In the survey, we designed the question to get to know the students' ability of dealing with unfair treatment in the society, 52.69% of college students chose "to report to the relevant authorities", 31.18% chose "to submit to humiliation", 10.75% chose "to take revenge," 5.38% chose "to join some kind of spiritual organizations to ease pressure". It is obvious that some college students are not good at finding a proper way to relieve their own pressure, which gives the cult an opportunity to take advantage of it. "Some of the college students' intellectual development is not mature, being emotionally sensitive, fragile, eager to get others' recognition, but they lack the ability to analyze and rationally identify these social phenomena and a highly rational identification, so they are easily affected by some wrong thoughts and ideas, misled by cult and temptation."

4. Countermeasures and Suggestions for College Students' Cults Prevention

4.1 To Strengthen the Marxist Religious View of College Students by Multiple Channels

Whether education at colleges can achieve victory in the fight against destructive cults depends on how to develop college students' understanding of cults and help them form a right attitude towards cults. Only with a profound and comprehensive knowledge of cults can transmission among the youngsters be stopped and terminated. The course teaching is the main way for students to acquire knowledge, and ideological and political theory course is the main channel and main battle field of college students' ideological and political education. In the course of teaching, we should increase the content of the cognition of cults, so that the college students can have a clear understanding of the scientific atheism, the cult of theism; science, pseudoscience, religion, and cult. By combining history and reality, teachers should clearly present the dangers of cults, guiding students to set up correct world outlooks, values, and the outlook on life, to consciously resist the spread of cults, and be resolute about not joining them.

In addition, we can set up lectures on the prevention of cults, helping students know clearly the harm of cults and the difference between religion and cults. College students' misconception of religion is largely due to their ignorance of the essence of religion, believing it as mystery. So facilitating students' understanding of religion and helping them distinguish it from destructive cults are undoubtedly essential.

4.2 Enhance College Students' Ideal Belief Education

To make full use of the course teaching, the main educational channel of college students, and promote the educational work on students' faith construction, it is highly recommended to adopt social practice and peer counseling.

For example, Fudan University established "student anti-cult research institute" with 71 people as the first registered members. On the first topic seminar, six professors of Fudan University elaborated respectively on the necessity of anti-cult, the difference between the religion and cult, the status quo of international cult and struggle against evil cult. The students responded enthusiastically, saying that they have a further understanding of the essence of the cult, and have a more in-depth thinking about how to resist evil cult. Just as what they said, "falun gong" distracts minds, threatens the stability of society, disrupts the normal order of human production, work and life.

As the generation guided by the party and the people, faced with the knowledge economy era and the development opportunities and challenges in the world, college students take the responsibility of constructing the socialist power and realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation's history. Advocating science and exploring the truth are the main melody of contemporary college students. We should adhere to Marxism-Leninism and MAO Zedong thought, Deng Xiaoping theory have great confidence in the party's religious faith, uphold the party's principles and policies, fight against cults, and maintain the hard-won stability and unity of the political situation." (Cao, 2001)

We should make full use of the educational function of environment and create a positive campus atmosphere.

The environment influences students' behavior to a certain extent. For example, if a student who has relatively poor academic performance and is not resolute in constant study is surrounded by hard-working students, he or she will learn more efficiently and attentively. So is the fight against destructive cults, if every student has a clear understanding of its essence and threat, the chance will be slim for destructive cults to target and deceive them. In addition, more various activities like lectures, clubs should be encouraged on campus so that students can enhance their enthusiasm on study and interpersonal communication. By launching some campus activities with the topic of advocating science and opposing to superstition and cults can cultivate a civilized, healthy, and high-quality cultural and psychological atmosphere.

4.3 Pay Attention to College Students' Psychological Health Education

Psychological imbalance is the psychological condition for cults to go deep into college students. People with mental health are more likely to resist the temptation of cults than people with mental illness, and they are less likely to be confused. According to the current situation and characteristics of college students' mental health, the overall psychological quality of college students is low, and they are easy to be confused by the new things and even do harm to themselves and others.

Strengthening education for college students' mental health will help to improve college students' psychological ability to guard against evil cults. We must grasp the psychological characteristics of college students nowadays, to popularize mental health knowledge, teach them how to maintain their mental health, and some stress-relieving method, and improve the capacity of self-adjustment, because not in real time, to a certain extent of pressure comfort is also the important cause leading students to join cults. Secondly, college students' mental health assessment should be done on a regular basis to effectively and timely grasp the psychology of college students, providing effective references and evidence to the judging and counseling of college students' psychological difficulties. The assessment can help students adjust their mental imbalance and prevent themselves from other mental problems. In other words, the bud of mental problems can be killed in the "cradle" stage.

Psychological consultation institutions should be established and improved on campus, and timely psychological counseling for college students should be provided to help students get further understanding of their own psychological problems, and help them get rid of the psychological perplexity in time and maintain mental health.

College students are builders and reliable successors to the cause of socialist construction. Undertaking the historical mission of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, we need to strengthen marxist religion through the course teaching, conduct social practice and peer counseling-and carry out the evaluation and consultation of mental health education. With multi-channels, students' scientific spirit and critical spirit are cultivated, the correct world outlook, the outlook on life, values can be formed, and their ability to resist evil cult can be promoted.

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