

The Religious Thought of Humanistic Care Put Forward by Mao Zedong in the Anti-Japanese War Period and Its Implications for Present Days

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Abstract

During the Anti-Japanese War, the Chinese Communists represented by Mao Zedong implemented proactive policies in terms of safeguarding religious people's political, economic, and cultural rights, in order to mobilize and unite the majority of religious people to resist against Japan, as well as to develop a relatively complete religious thought of humanistic care. It not only earned the support of the majority of religious people towards the Communist Party of China, making them play an active part in fighting against the Japanese invaders and in the victory of anti-Japanese War, but is also of immense significance to the building of a harmonious society in China

Key words: Anti-Japanese War; Mao Zedong; Religious people; Humanistic care

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INTRODUCTION

Anti-Japanese War is a just war for the Chinese people to resist against the Japanese invaders and for China's national independence and liberation. In order to mobilize and unite the majority of religious people against Japan, Chinese Communists represented by Mao Zedong gradually developed a relatively comprehensive religious

thought of humanistic care, which served as an important part of the Chinese Communist Party's united front theory. Under the guidance of the thought, the Communist Party of China implemented proactive policies to protect religious people's political, economic and cultural rights. Hence it helped CPC to earn the support of the majority of religious people, making them play an active part in fighting against the Japanese invaders and thus making a great contribution to the victory of Anti-Japanese War. Besides, it is also of immense significance to the building of a harmonious society in China.

1. THE GIST OF THE RELIGIOUS THOUGHT OF HUMANISTIC CARES

Humanistic care is the concern for humans' living conditions, is the affirmation of humans' dignity and living conditions that are in line with the humanity, and is the pursuit of freedom and human liberation. During the Anti-Japanese War, considering the fact that China is a multinational country and has many religions and that the main religions such as Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, and Christianity have a lot of followers, Mao Zedong further developed the Marxism humanistic care so as to protect the human rights of the majority of religious people. In brief, Mao's humanistic care thought contains persistent pursuit of humans' dignity, freedom and rights.

1.1 Protecting Religious Lands and Safeguarding Religious People's Subsistence Right

As we all know, subsistence right is the most basic human right, and is the prerequisite to enjoy other human rights. It is universal. No matter what religion he or she believes in, as long as one is alive, he or she has the right to live. As is indicated in "The German Ideology" by Marx and Engels, "We should first establish the premise of all human existence, which is also the premise of all history, that is, people have to be able to live in order to 'make

history’.”¹ In practice, Mao Zedong correctly handled the relationship between universality and particularity of the subsistence right and the development right, took into account the needs of all classes and all walks of life, and attached importance to their right of subsistence.

During the Anti-Japanese War, Mao Zedong advocated the abolition of policies devised at the Soviet times in terms of confiscating religious lands and of giving out no lands to religious people. The Communist Party of China then made appropriate adjustments. On January, 1942, Mao Zedong chaired the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China where “The Decision on the Land Policy in the anti-Japanese Bases Approved by the Communist Party of China” stipulated: “Religious Lands (including the lands of Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Taoism and other sects) shall not be changed.”² Thus we can see Mao’s humanistic care of the change from confiscation of religious lands to temporarily religious lands “shall not be changed”. According to the “Land Rights Bill of Shangxi-Gansu-Ningxia Border Region (Draft)”, the lands of religions and temples, “if they have been confiscated, the land rights will be enjoyed by the land owners; if not, the land rights will still be in the hands of the original owners.”³ However, as revealed in the “Interim Regulations on the Land Use in the Shansi-Hopei-Shantung-Honan Border Region”, if the Catholic churches and Christian churches have legally acquired the ownership of their lands and have contracts to prove the ownership, then the lands should be owned by the churches.”; “the lands of foreign preachers, if are personally bought and donated, will be changed to be owned by the related churches”, which actually admits the land ownership of churches.⁴ The “Regulations on Using the Lands Owned by the Public, Communities, Households, Temples, and Schools in the Second Guerrilla Area in Shangxi Province” published in April 1941 also stated, “The lands of Lama Temples and Mosques, related to ethnic issues, shall be protected by the government.”⁵ The government thus began to protect the lands instead of confiscating the lands.

1.2 Helping Religious People Tackle Difficulties In Production and Life

In the Anti-Japanese War period, Mao Zedong showed concern about and helped churches and believers to

resolve difficulties. He focused on the implementation of various policies, gave affirmation to the living conditions of religious people, and their human dignity. So he showed more humanistic care. Mao Zedong also drafted “The Outline of the Ethnic Issues of Hui Nationality” and “The Outline of the Mongolian Ethnic Issues During the Anti-Japanese War”, which indicated, “we should help improve the lives of Hui and Mongolian people, thus develop the national economy”. (Li, 1986, p.456) Therefore, the Hui people who migrated to Shangxi-Gansu-Ningxia Border Region were distributed relief food, were arranged accommodation, and were allocated farmland or wasteland, as well as were given agricultural loans. Nevertheless, for the original Hui inhabitants who originally lived in Shangxi-Gansu-Ningxia Border Region and who were engaged in agriculture production, the government would give them lands, issue agricultural credits, and allocate seeds to them to help them resolve their difficulties in the production and life. For example, when Qingyang Sanshilipu church prepared to sell off its properties due to life difficulties, Ma Xi, a specialist in Longdong Region, discouraged the church to do so in person, and allocated some food and funds to help the church through the difficulties at the same time. Considering the fact that some churches shouldered heavy financial pressure, the government thus reduced their quantity of food to be turned over. The government even funded the destroyed Chengchuan Catholic Church to make renovation.

Since social assistance is at the lowest level of social security, is the most basic social security, and is the last defense to safeguard social stability (Zhou, 2003), Mao Zedong attached great importance to the welfare of vulnerable groups. “The Outline of the Ethnic Issues of Hui Nationality” pointed out, “special assistance should be given to the poor minority groups who cannot sustain themselves”. (Li, 1986, p.734) For the old nuns in Qiaoergou who had no relatives, governments in Border Regions mobilized the masses to help them find a grotto to settle down and also resolved the rent issue of churches. For the properties, houses and lands of churches, those that were personally occupied should be “truthfully reported to the government and be checked and returned” in accordance with the relevant regulations.

1.3 Giving Religious People Extensive Political Rights and Guaranteeing Their Rights of Participation and Development

During the Anti-Japanese War period, the Communist Party of China paid special attention to the protection of religious people’s political rights, which was rather different than before. In 1920s, in order to get rid of the influence of the Anglo-American colonial culture and to obtain the support of the vast masses, the Communist Party of China carried out a “non-Christian” movement. Then in Soviet times, the Communist Party of China

¹ *Collected works of Marx and Engels*. (1995, Volume III, p.31). Beijing: People’s Publishing House.

² *Anthology of the Communist Party of China’s documents*. (1986, Volume 12, p.342). Beijing: Central Party School Press.

³ *Selected historical Materials of Jinchaji Anti-Japanese Base*. (1983, First Volume, p.18). Shijiazhuang, China: Hebei People’s Publishing House.

⁴ *Selected historical Materials of Jinchaji Anti-Japanese Base*. (1983, First Volume, p.575). Shijiazhuang, China: Hebei People’s Publishing House.

⁵ *Anthology of the Communist Party of China’s documents*. (1986, Volume 12, p.18). Beijing: Central Party School Press.

implemented such religious policies as the confiscation of religious lands and of religious people's rights to vote and to be elected. Nevertheless, in the Anti-Japanese War period, the Communist Party of China attached great importance to and actively carried out the united front work for religious people. In January 1940, Mao Zedong profoundly expounded the complexity and diversity of religious beliefs in "On New Democracy", pointing out that although the Communist Party of China was not in favor of idealism and religious teachings, it "can establish a united anti-imperialist and anti-feudalism front with some idealists in political movements."⁶ In 1945, Mao Zedong solemnly and explicitly declared in the Seventh National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, "whether it is Christianity, Catholicism, Islam, Buddhism and other religions, as long as its believers abide by the laws of the Chinese people's government, it will be protected by the government." (Mao, 1991, p.1234)

To this end, in the Declarations and Documents of the Central Committee of CPC, and in the Programmes and Acts of CPC's Bases, the political rights enjoyed by religious people were explicitly stated. Equal political rights to vote and to be elected were given to them. Moreover, Christians, Catholic people, and Hui people were given special attention, and were arranged to work in the government bodies and public authorities at all levels. For example, Li Xiude, who was a pastor in the Qingyang Gospel Church in Shanxi province, was elected as the senator; Jia Keming, who was a Catholic, was elected as the township head of Qiaoergou in Yanan.⁷ In order to ensure that religious believers really enjoy equal political rights, "Election Ordinance for Councils at all Levels in Shanxi-Gansu-Ningxia Border Region" were released in April 1942, which provided, "The people who inhabit in the Border Region and who are aged over 18 shall enjoy the right to vote and the right to be elected regardless of class, party, occupation, sex, religion, nationality, property and cultural differences." When giving detailed explanation to this Ordinance, the government declared that the "religion" here refers to "Islam, Lamaism, Catholicism and so on"; besides, the Ordinance stated that "weak nations and religious people have the same right as the ordinary people. No restrictions shall be imposed on them."⁸ In addition, the Central Committee of CPC pointed out in "The Outline of the Ethnic Issues of Hui Nationality" and in "The Outline of the Mongolian Ethnic Issues During the Anti-Japanese War",

politically, Hui people and Mongolian people enjoy equal rights with the Han. Han chauvinism and narrow nationalism should be rejected; instead, open democracy should be advocated to protect Hui and Mongolian people's freedom of speech, freedom of publication, and freedom of assembly, etc. It is explicitly stated that Hui and Mongolian people can enjoy autonomy in their living places for the first time. (Li, 1986, p.456)

Later on, the minority groups in Shanxi-Gansu-Ningxia Border Region totaled about 0.1% of the whole population, while the proportion of minorities in the local councils and governments was up to 3.5% and 11%, respectively. Furthermore, Ma Shengxiao and Cai Dengfu in Xinzheng County were appointed as committee members through election. With the aim to speed up the training of minority cadres, the Central Committee specifically organized a training class for the Hui cadres in 1939. Later in April 1941, the Communist Party of China founded the Yan'an University for Nationalities which was aimed at training minority cadres, and which later recruited more than 300 Mongolians, Hui and other ethnic people. (Liu, 1997) At that time, the anti-Japanese organizations founded by the Chinese Communist Party fully attracted the participation of the religious people. For instance, "The Charters of People's anti-Japanese Self-Defense Forces" in the Shansi-Chahar-Hopei Border Region clearly stated: "As long as they are aged above 16 and under 55, people in the Border Region can join the Forces regardless of class, gender, race, or religious beliefs." (Mao, 1955) In this sense, religious people have been included in the People's Anti-Japanese Self-Defense Forces, thus the forces became an united-front organization.

1.4 Respecting the Diversity of Religious People's Cultural Thoughts

According to Mao Zedong, the cultures and thoughts in favor of anti-Japanese War are an important part of the new democratic culture. Therefore, he attached great importance to giving humanistic care to religious people in terms of their cultures and thoughts. Mao also implemented the policy of religious freedom, which provided that "religions are allowed to exist in China's Liberated Areas in accordance with the principles of religious freedom. Believers and non-believers have their freedom; they shall not be forced or discriminated." (Mao, 1991, p.1235) During this period, the Communist Party of China expanded the scope of religious freedom based on the experience gained during the Long March, and regarded it as the basic right and basic human right of all the people who were resisting against Japanese invaders. It not only determined the legal status of the policy, but also established a protection policy for places of worship and religious cultures, thus forming a relatively systematic policy of religious freedom. For example, under the guidance of Mao Zedong, the policy

⁶ *Selected works of Mao Zedong*. (1991, Volume II, p.707). Beijing: People's Publishing House.

⁷ *United front of Yan'an and China*. (2004, p.210). Beijing: Chinese Press.

⁸ *Selected historical materials of Jinchaji Anti-Japanese Base*. (1983, First Volume, p.296). Shijiazhuang, China: Hebei People's Publishing House.

of religious freedom was emphasized in the “The Outline of the Ethnic Issues of Hui Nationality” and in “The Outline of the Mongolian Ethnic Issues During the Anti-Japanese War” formulated by the Central Committee of CPC in 1940. The policy was also emphasized in the “Administrative Program” published by the Committee of Shansi-Chahar-Hopei Border Region. It was even stressed in the political report given by Mao in the Seventh National People’s Congress of the Communist Party Chinese. Besides, all these documents have stressed the need to respect the religious freedom and customs of the Hui, Mongolian and other ethnic minorities.⁹ Apart from what has been mentioned above, the governments in Border Regions established mosques in the places where there were a large number of Hui people. Eight mosques were gradually founded such as the construction of the mosque in Yan’an. On October 20, 1940, the “New China News” recorded a glorious event, “on October 7, Yan’an mosque is announced to have been accomplished which is engraved with three characters written by Mao Zedong in person, that is, “清真寺”. The inscription of the Imam Ma, the Yan’an Muslim leader, was also engraved on the opposite side. The Communist Party of China also helped Hui people establish and run Islamic primary schools based on the characteristics of places where Hui people live. The schools gave free education to students. In addition to the general cultural courses, the schools also added Arabic course, and history course of Hui people, etc. With regard to the adults who had deeper religious ideas, the Communist Party of China turned mosques into the places used to impart social education by mobilizing the enthusiasm of the mosque imams. In this sense, CPC carried out literacy work in line with the local conditions and circumstances.” (Kim & Wang, 2002)

2. CONTRIBUTION OF MAO’S RELIGIOUS THOUGHT TO THE VICTORY OF ANTI-JAPANESE WAR

In the Anti-Japanese War period, Mao Zedong proceeded from the reality of consolidating and developing the national Anti-Japanese united front, and put forward a series of humanistic care religious thoughts that were in line with China’s national conditions, thus theoretically enriching Marxist view of religion. It helped to mobilize the enthusiasm of the religious people to resist the Japanese invaders, eliminated religious people’s misgivings towards the Communist Party of China, strengthened the united front of the Communist Party of China and religious people, united religious believers and religious professionals to the hilt, and encouraged them to participate in the Anti-Japanese movement.

⁹ *United front of Yan’an and China*. (2004, p.212). Beijing: Chinese Press.

A. The majority of religious people prayed for the victory of the Anti-Japanese War and peace, offered donations of money and materials to the Eighth Route Army, and widely appealed for resisting against Japan. For instance, the Golden Pavilion Temple in Wutai Mountain in Shanxi province gave warm hospitality to the Eighth Route Army, actively subscribed the nation-saving public debt in the Anti-Japanese Base, donated food, clothing and money to the Army, and took the initiative to provide accommodations for the Anti-Japanese forces. Besides, they also used their religious knowledge to appeal for resisting against Japan. Ran Xiu, the abbot and master of the Buddhism Association in Wutai Mountain once said, “since lambs and crows will repay their mother for feeding, and the people coming to temple will burn incense for Lafayette, doesn’t we have kindness and humanity? Japanese invaders have set fire to the door of the Buddha, how can we sit back?” In addition, the religious people also rescued the wounded and refugees. For example, the Buddhists organized rescue teams, bury teams and stretcher teams to go to battlegrounds, to rescue anti-Japanese soldiers, to bury the bodies of the victims, and to establish refugee shelters. Catholic churches also founded Catholic National Salvation Organizations, participated in the Anti-Japanese movement, and rescued wounded soldiers.

B. The religious people took the initiative to wear military uniforms and to join in the anti-Japanese army lead by the Communist Party of China. For instance, Ma Benzhai, a famous soldier resisting against Japanese invaders, led an army composed of the Hui people. They later joined in the anti-Japanese army lead by the CPC. On the third political work conference of Hebei Military command in October 1940, they were highly rewarded with a silk banner that read “an invincible army”. Mao Zedong also spoke highly of their deeds, and gave them his inscription— “ever-victorious Hui army”. As for Ma Benzhai who risked his life in the forefront of the anti-Japanese struggle, he was hailed as “a hero following his mother’s deeds”. In the Daqing Mountain in Mongolia, the Eighth Route Army detachment established close ties and friendship with the upper levels of Mongolians and religious people, with the help of whom the Eighth Route Army gained communications with the interior lines of the enemy army and gained much support in all aspects. The religious people are also actively cooperated with the work of the Communist Party of China against Japan. They stood sentry, transmitted military information, and actively cooperated with the Eighth Route Army to send people to join in the local armed forces, thus resisting against “encirclement and suppression” as well as against the “mopping up” campaign carried by the Japanese invaders.

C. The religious people expanded the united front of the international anti-fascist war. Since Islam and Catholicism are international, the Communist Party of

China showed humanistic care to the religious people, earning CPC much international sympathy and help from the foreign friends. Besides, the complete policy of dealing with foreign missionaries also helped the Communist Party of China and the Shanxi-Gansu-Ningxia Border Region win the trust of foreign missionaries. Xu Leda, American Catholic missionary in Qingyang, praised the Communist Party of China for its “good government of the country” after he made a tour in Yan’an in October 1945. He revealed that “Today’s Yan’an has become an important place influencing the world politics,”¹⁰ and indicated that he would tell what he had seen to the friends abroad. To a large extent, the publicity of the personal experience of foreign missionaries in the Border Regions was conducive to breaking the blockade of the Chinese Nationalist Party to the liberated areas. The rumor that “the Communist Party of China will wipe out religions in China” has been proved wrong. All these have greatly improved the international reputation of the Communist Party of China.

3. IMPLICATIONS OF MAO’S RELIGIOUS THOUGHT OF HUMANISTIC CARE DURING THE ANTI-JAPANESE WAR PERIOD

Mao’s religious thought of humanistic care during the Anti-Japanese War period has important implications for building a harmonious society in China’s western minority nationality regions. The religious work carried out by the Communist Party of China is closely associated with the building of a harmonious socialist society, and the religious work itself is an integral part of the strategic task of building a socialist harmonist society under the shoulder of the Communist Party of China and of the Chinese government. Therefore, when building a harmonious society in today’s China, we should win the support of the majority of religious people. In particular, we should devise preferential policies in terms of politics, economy, life and culture in the western regions where Han people and minority groups are cohabiting with each other.

We should know that ethnic issues and religious issues are often mixed together in the current minority nationality regions in western China. To be more specific, first, the economic development gap is widening and we could witness psychological imbalances. Due to geographical disadvantages and historical reasons, the gap between China’s western region and the eastern coastal areas, between the ethnic minority areas and other areas is widening. Thus the unbalanced social

development has resulted in people’s psychological imbalances and discontent, which become an important factor influencing the national relationship and becomes a major factor for some religious people to incite the vast people and undermine social harmony. Hence we should uphold Mao Zedong’s religious thought of humanistic care, take into account the facts that ethnic and religious areas are relatively lagging behind due to historical, and natural factors, and give appropriate humanistic care to them in terms of politics, economy, culture and life. For example, we could devise more preferential policies in the university entrance examination, and in the master’s and doctoral entrance tests, letting the children of religious people have more access to higher education; in politics, we could attract more ethnic people into the state and local government agencies. Of course, the most fundamental things are to give benefits and privileges to the ethnic and religious regions to develop economy, to increase capital investment in the western ethnic and religious areas, and to step up efforts to alleviate poverty through development, and to take effective social assistance measures. Besides, we should take stability as the first priority, and actively guide religions to adapt to the socialist society. In addition, we should adhere to the theme of “working together for common prosperity and development”, and uphold the principle that “Han people are inseparable from the ethnic minorities, the ethnic minorities are inseparable from the Han people, and the ethnic minorities themselves are inseparable from each other” in our social development. We should inherit the fine traditions left over by the religious people and minority groups such as the love for country and religious, unity and progress, serving the society, and worshiping peace, actively guide them to adapt to the socialist society and to contribute to the building of a socialist harmonious society.

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¹⁰ *United front of Yan’an and China*. (2004, p.212). Beijing: Chinese Press.