

The Influence of the Religious Authority on Individuals in Taiwan

Zih-Rong Chen

Department of Psychology, Asia University
lempicka34.tw@gmail.com

Mein-Woei Suen

Department of Psychology, Asia University
The Gender Equality Education and Research Center,
Asia University The Asia University Hospital
blake@asia.edu.tw

Bo-Shen Chen

Department of Psychology, Asia University
kentericlin85@gmail.com

Fu-An Shieh

Department of Food and Beverage Management,
Jin-Wen University of Science & Technology
idontcare42@yahoo.com

Abstract: Both Christian and Chinese societies value obedience to authority. Among them, Christianity regards God, religious norms, and religious leaders as models to be followed by adherents. In Chinese society, parents are regarded as extensions of the authoritative relationship, which emphasizes hierarchical relationships. People in the upper levels are the authority in all kinds of relationships, and obedience to authority is one of the fundamental moral standards in Chinese societies. The purpose of this study is to understand the cultural contexts and psychological connotation of Christians' individual psychological mechanisms for religious authority and their obedience in Chinese society. The study uses purposive sampling to recruit one participant with a more religious attitude for interviews. Phenomenology is the research paradigm of this study to extract and to restore the participants' experiences in religion, to describe their life experience in order to understand their interpretation of religious authority. The results show that religious authority has a certain degree of influence on Christian daily life, the Bible is the only and supreme standard in Christianity, and it was passed on to believers by family and church leaders. Differences between authority and Christian values also create contradictions and doubts in Christians even to produce the guilt and pain of breaking commandments and teachings. Obeying God will have a significant impact on believers; it usually comes with positive effects. Christians believe that obeying God helps believers reduce risk and make the best choice which suits them. God sometimes asks someone to sacrifice himself to obey God's will, which usually brings pain, struggle, and guilt to believers. However, the ultimate result of obedience is often calm and spiritual growth.

Keywords: religious authority, authority, obedience, God image

Introduction

The study of authority and obedience

The obedience is defined as a phenomenon which the superior demands and commands, and the minor changes behavior. It is the general situation of social interaction and interpersonal relationships (Milgram, 1968). The requirement of this relationship inequality comes from the right of the owner to have an order, and the disobedient will be punished. The general authority, such as teachers, parents, superiors, and other authority, is the organizational norms and values shared by the group.

Obeying authority is related to the personality traits, and cultural background of the obedient, different cultures and backgrounds have different outcomes in obedience behavior (Milgram, 1963). Collectivism is more concerned with the interests of the group and the rights and obligations of individuals in the group. Therefore, people in collectivist culture tend to have a higher proportion of obedience than in individualistic culture. Chinese society belongs to a collective cultural society, where the interpersonal interaction focuses on

the upper and lower levels and role obligations, and it originates from the cultural context and social background. The elders, supervisors, and teachers are cited as people who need to obey to maintain social norms and ethical rules. So far, most Chinese still attach great importance to the relationship between the upper and lower classes. In contemporary times, society has derived various authoritative systems in different groups for the needs of human beings (Chien & Huang, 2015).

Religious authority and individual obedience

Religion is regarded as popular and unique culture in human life. Human beings can gain meaning and find a sense of belonging, guide bad behavior, establish moral standards and norms, and feel safe from religions. It consists of essential conditions such as shared beliefs, ethics, ceremonies, and ecclesiastical organizations. By obeying the commandments of the religious groups, the groups gain a sense of cohesion and support and provide the community with a strong sense of centripetal force and unity. Religious authority includes religious texts, religious leaders, and religious

understanding and values. Extending interpersonal relationships from religious norms will gain cohesion and centripetal force (Li, 1997; Ke, 2007). The essential factors of human belief in religion are also closely related to obedience.

Flugel (1945) explores the relationship between religious authority, self-concept, and obedience. Christians view religious leaders, god, and religious institutions as projections of God. It is internalized into the harmony of id, ego, and superego becomes the standard of right and wrong, good or evil in morality. When the id and the superego compete, this projection will coordinate between them to slow down the conflict between the id and the superego as the operation of the defense mechanism. For example, the clerk's ban or the biblical commandment is seen as a ban on God and a ban imposed by the external environment to achieve the effect of reducing conflict. Breaking precepts and religious taboos can lead to guilt or anxiety and cause obedience. Ostow (1958) proposed the concept of religious control in 1958, believing that religious control originated from the nature of human nature and had its evolutionary origin. Religious control plays the role of social supervision, endowing groups with survival value and social stability, which is necessary and universal in society. Through imitation, the influence of natural forces, communication, the need to meet the instinct to reach the impact of humans.

The intensity of an individual's perceptions of the religious authority is also due to the difference between denominations, originated from a different perception of authority, relationship, and attitudes (Argyle & Beilt - Hallahmi, 1975). Religious norms also influence Chinese values, such as marriage and family values. If the Christian is more devoted, the more thoroughly he implements the values.

The influence of God's image on obedience

God's image is a psychological concept. Grimes (2007) proposes the image of God as an individual's perception of God, the teaching of God's objectivity, and the emotional and empirical spiritual experience of including God (as cited in Chen et al., 2011). God's image is the crucial factor affecting the relationship, behavior, attitude, thought, and emotion of believers of God. These images of God contain images that need to obey God and the image of God's love and control. Studies have shown that God's image is projected by the emotions and cognitions of his external things, and is also closely related to the individual's interaction with others. Most people have their subjective opinions and ideas of God's image.

God's image not only affects one's perception but also extends into interaction with others. For example, in many Christian marriages, the image of God as the highest moral authority affects the dynamics of marriage. The goal of the marriage relationship is to obey God and serve God. It is believed that by doing so, the goal of marriage can be achieved, and the

marriage can be stabilized. Therefore, obedience to God is the highest value of marriage. And therefore, God is regarded as the maintenance of marriage who can strengthen the marriage relationship. Spouses experience God together in a way that obeys and accepts grace (Shichida et al., 2015).

In this study, religious authority is divided into authority centered on human beings and institutions and authority based on God's image. This study aims to study the events, causes, feelings, results, and reflections of individuals in religious groups. The interview was used to understand the reasons for their obedience to religious rules and follow-up actions. It also seeks to identify how God's thoughts affect their obedience to God. For example, if I don't listen to my parents, God will punish and discipline me; everything God does is right for me. Researchers looked forward to understanding the individual's thoughts, feelings, reactions, and follow-up actions in the face of religious culture through this research to help believers under the religious authority understand their situation.

According to the above research motives, the purpose of this study is: (1) To explore the incidents of religious norms or authorities experienced by Chinese Christians in obeying obedience; (2) Exploring the Chinese Christians' beliefs and obeying the relevant God images; (3) Exploring the thoughts, feelings and follow-up actions of Chinese Christians facing their values and religious norms and the image of God leading to obedience.

Research methods

This study uses phenomenology as a research paradigm that focuses on individual life experiences, gains commonality, and shares meaning.

1. Research tools

(1) Researchers: The research team consists of seven members. One of the principal investigators was a graduate student in a qualitative research program, and the other had a doctoral degree in counseling and was familiar with qualitative research. The rest were five undergraduates who had completed qualitative studies. Members of the research group meet once a week to discuss data collection and analysis.

(2) Interview outline: The interview outline was subtitled from religious authority down to religious norms, religious leadership, and god image, leading the interviewees to describe and think about personal obedience to religious groups to understand their experience of participating in religion.

(3) Francis scale of attitude toward Christianity: This study was designed to study Christians with a particular belief foundation. Therefore, the Francis scale of attitude toward Christianity was used to select subjects with high scores (over 78 points) for the interview.

2. Research object

This study uses purposive sampling. The conditions for the study participants are determined in

advance as follows: Francis Scale of Attitude Toward Christianity is higher than 78 points, and there are respondents who are submissive to religious leaders, religious books, and God's experience. His basic information is nickname Jian-Jian (male, 21), who is Baptist Church, Collaborative Council Pinghing Church Religious Society of friends participating.

3. Research Procedure

In this study, two-step procedures are conducted:

(1) Public inquiry: Through the researcher's initiative to ask potential research participants interested in the study, fill in the target group of the Francis Christian Attitude Scale in the Google form and make an initial telephone or interview contact, for potential research participants to be closer. One-step screening, follow-up formal interviews for those who may take the most information.

(2) Conduct interviews and record research data: The interviewed respondents in the follow-up study conduct several interviews, and the interview time is approximately 30 minutes to 2 hours.

4. Coding and Analysis

This study adopts the phenomenological data collation and analysis steps. First, in the stage of data collection, the researchers converted the spoken materials into verbatim transcripts through interviews, so as to restore the original materials and situations intact. After obtaining all the verbatim transcripts, the researchers immersed themselves in repeatedly reading the verbatim transcripts, so that the researcher can be familiar them self with the texts and immersed in them, master the key points and important themes of the interview texts, and know the gist of the texts. The researcher read the text with an open mind familiar with the overall impression of the text. The next step is to encode the meaning units, disassemble them according to the narrative content, compile the meaning units from the overall context of the text, and rewrite the original materials in the discipline language to organize and express them (for example the first meaning code in interviewee is called A-01). After that, the researchers find the theme, summarize the units, and adjust the categories of documents one by one. Based on the content of the whole story, several core focuses of the group are determined and contextualized. At this time, researchers began to construct structures to connect various topics in order to obtain a complete description of the situation structure (Lee & Lai, 2009).

Results

1. Religious leader

The impression of religious leaders

The impression of a religious leader varies from church to church, with conservative churches teaching and instructing more often and having a hierarchical relationship. These religious leaders are more likely to demand obedience. And more enlightened churches tend to establish an enlightened image of religious leaders. These religious leaders are also more receptive

to the ideas of others. Such religious leaders are more likely to allow Christians to discuss their views freely and are more likely to accept different ideas and opinions. Parents also act as religious leaders, passing on orders related to religion. Jian-Jian said parents would transfer religious norms and values through the family, but they would not accept the opinions of religious authorities completely. He could think independently.

For example, "That is, the pastor of the previous church would have emphasized this. The general shepherd is that he is very solemn... His purpose on stage is to teach, and then to give... Tell people what you're going to do." (A-32)

"Our own style is also more open, where you look at the Bible, and you talk about what you see, and you talk with mentors and classmates and... And then they gave me the impression that we were talking about how to do it, that you had your idea, I had my idea, and we put it out there, and we saw what we could do." (A-28)

"Because they're still human, and they probably know more than we do. But it may not be right. Does this make sense? Because they're still human, and they probably know more than we do. But it may not be right." (A-125).

2. Religious Classics

(1) *Bible is regarded as the word of God.*

"The Bible is the Word of God." (A-132)

(2) *Give positive values*

The authority gives the respondent positive values and gives them a feeling of love, self-acceptance, and renewal. For example, Jian-Jian found more self-worth from reading the Bible.

"That is to say; there is more value in my life, that is to say, I am given a new value... that is, every day can be a new state. ...the new state is because..... because the Bible has said that every day Christians are new people every day. ...it feels like you are alive." (A-6)

(3) *The conflict between self-understanding and biblical interpretation*

Self-awareness is different from the Bible. Christians have a sense of contradiction and struggle. "That's because I read Genesis over there, that's the one, wow. Every paragraph is so embarrassing. That is obvious. Leah and Rachel, just like sending a Pokémon, sending their own prostitutes to take turns to have children, is sick." (A-117) "Oh, Jesus said that the greatest commandment is to love others as yourself. This is also very important but also very contradictory. Jesus said that it is very contradictory to love others as oneself, but to oppose comrades." (A-26)

(4) *Religious norms*

Religious norms are considered part of the doctrine and commandment of Christians to be observed, but it is challenging to know that these norms are high standards of morality that are easy to come by. Norms are seen as human weaknesses and deficiencies that the average person needs to overcome. By observing and implementing norms, Christians demonstrate superior

ethical standards than the average person. It also serves as a Christian mission to learn the look of God and live a superb virtue to represent God in life and to please God.

"Christians have a mission and obligation to have the image of God... Learn to be a God to live like God in daily life. This will please God." (A-147)

i. Difficult to implement

The process of the implementation of religious norms that are difficult to comply with is afflicted. And such behavior violates instinct. For example, Jianjian believed that obeying religious norms in daily life would produce painful feelings. These norms require people to achieve perfection in character and need to eliminate their own weaknesses in human nature. Other religious norms that are easier to reach are less sensible.

"I think if you do it, it will be very torturous in the process..." (A-48)

"I feel that obeying, no matter which one is difficult. Because it is difficult for you to want it to be the best, it is difficult to do it." (A-46)

"Ten Commandments are actually a very difficult thing... Yes, because everyone has its weaknesses." (A-53)

ii. Compliance with norms

Jianjian described the process by which parents follow the commandments of the Gospel of Matthew. He believed that he must follow unnecessary commandments.

"It may be said that the difference between the past and the present is different. Just like this election, he is very optimistic about Han Kuo-yu. Then he said, he heard a voice saying that no other God could replace the Lord, and then he would confess. This everyday thing." (A-80)

"They (parents) will be especially kind to their neighbors from the past. Why are you so good to them, that is, they will not be so kind to you. What are they doing so well for them? Then they will say that they love your neighbor. It is a way for him to teach me and put it into practice. (A-123)"

3. God's image

Thoughts about God

Most of the views on God come from the verification of the Bible and daily life. These images are mostly love, compassion, and justice. God also has emotions such as joy and anger. These images and emotional interpretations will affect the interaction and relationship with God. Jian-Jian described that God knows from the Bible that God is merciful, merciful, righteous, and gives him a cruel and horrible image. In daily life, God is the role of his own parents, and he also loves himself by exercising his right to discipline. Jian-Jian described that God knows from the Bible that God is merciful, righteous but gave him a cruel and horrible image. In daily life, God is the role of his parents. God loved him and disciplined him.

"I think he is a merciful and a god of righteousness.

This should be that He will have love, but He will also have righteousness." (A-123)

"Love and cruelty. Usually, this feeling comes from the Bible or life." (A-103)

"John said that he saw that Jesus was terrified, white, and all white. White wool, white hair, even the clothes are all white; the sword is good in the mouth. I felt that Jesus is an angry God. ... I felt that Jesus really terrible." (A-114)

"I think there will be changes if I doubt Him. Then He loves me unconditionally, according to this logic, he loves me no matter what I do. (A-130)"

"(Get along with God)... It's like interacting with your parents. That relationship is a change as I do something bad." (A-131)

4. Obedience experience

Obedience to God usually has a positive effect. Christians believe that obedience to God can help believers reduce the risk and make the choice that suits them best. Obedience is often considered an unavoidable issue of life. If you want to obey the things that believers don't like, they usually bring a certain degree of pain and struggle to the believers. However, the results of obedience can help believers gain spiritual growth.

"He will give you an unexpected result; then I must face it, I must face it personally because this is a situational problem. After facing it, God will give me an unexpected result, and then the heart will be a very calm state." (A-91)

"(When the process of obedience encounters pain) I will say, God asks you to pity me, hurry to save me, and save me. I really can't hold it anymore." (A-89)

Discussions

1. Values conveyed by authority

Religious values are conveyed to the congregation of the church by the Bible, church books, church and religious authority (leaders, pastors, team leaders, etc.). Religious authority has an influence on Christians.

2. The influence of authority on Christian.

The message conveyed by religious authority is often related to a person's self-seeking or doctrine. These can be easily accepted when there is no difference with the values of believers. However, when there is a difference between the original values of the believers, Christians will feel contradictions and doubts. These contradictions will remain in the believers for a long time. It may also be distinguished from the original values of the believer and will be eliminated by the verification of the practice of daily life. It may also be distinguished from the original values of the believer and will be eliminated by the verification of the practice of daily life. Spiritual growth has been achieved in the process of individuals re-examining themselves and religion.

3. Collision with other values

The values conveyed by Christianity can easily collide with some social values and Chinese values.

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