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# Christian Faith Rush in Rural Areas and Social Work Intervention

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**Abstract** To make the public have rational knowledge of the Christian faith rush in rural areas and guide coordinated development of Christianity with the socialist society, we analyzed reasons and complex influence on rural social development from aspects of society and individual and attraction of Christianity by the Literature Analysis Method. In view of its negative effect, we put forward several countermeasures from the perspective of social work intervention, such as improving farmers' overall qualities, promoting effective implementation of social security system, and correcting believers' understanding of Christianity. Finally, we introduced situation of Christian faith in other countries and reference and directive significance to China.

**Key words** Rural areas, Christian faith rush, Social work intervention

## 1 Introduction

With implementation of the CPC's policy on freedom of religious belief and increasingly deepening of international cultural communication since the reform and opening-up, people's belief system has experienced enormous change. On the basis of original traditional Buddhism and Taoism, western Christian, Catholic and Muslim religions start to be introduced into rural areas, bringing about the situation of religious belief rush in rural areas, especially the Christian faith rush. According to statistics, by now, there are at least 30 million Christians in total in China. Different from the past situation, rural Christians take up 80% of the entire Christians in China<sup>[1]</sup>. To further understand social realities and problems reflected in rural Christian faith rush and guide coordinated development of religion and society, discussion on major reasons, current situations and influence will be of great realistic significance.

## 2 Characteristics of rural Christian faith rush

**2.1 Diversified faith subjects** In rural areas, the number of people who believe in Christianity rises rapidly. Believers of Christianity in rural areas are mainly the elderly and women. In recent years, there is a problem of CPC (Communist Party of China) member withdrawing from the CPC and turning to believe in religion. Some CPC members keep the status of CPC member in organization, but have started to believe in Christianity in idea.

**2.2 Diversified motives of faith** Different from westerners' faith in the Christianity, motives for rural villagers believing in the Christianity are various. Some want to bless and protect their family, some are for curing diseases or warding off calamities,

and some hope to have brisk business. These show that rural Christian faith is realistic and utilitarian, and reflect that China's social security and support network is not perfect.

### 2.3 Ambiguous understanding of Christian doctrines

Some scholars think that Christian belief is not the identification in spirit or explanation about meaning of life, but a kind of ambiguous concept. Here, it is believed that relatively backward economic development level of rural areas and low scientific and cultural quality of farmers determine that farmers' belief in the Christianity will only remain on the surface. What's worse, ambiguous understanding of Christian doctrines is likely to cause some superstitious activities and illegal religious organization to take advantage of its weak points.

**2.4 Homogeneous faith subjects** Motives of Christians are varied, but they still have many common characteristics. Most of them have experience of diseases, disasters, and setbacks; they are situated in weak position both physiologically and psychologically; they lack sense of safety and sense of belonging, so they want to seek psychological support from religion. These common characteristics make them form a homogeneous group. The religion brings believers with sense of status identification, sense of safety and sense of belonging, and becomes a safe port for believers avoiding living risks and obtaining spiritual ballast<sup>[2]</sup>.

## 3 Reasons for Christian faith rush in rural areas during the social transformation

Diversified and heterogeneous society leads to conflicts of social value and norm. The change of parts of social structures, fields of social life, as well as social systems, is not coordinated, leading to problem of anomie, and finally some farmers start to believe in the religion<sup>[3]</sup>. In view of the current situation of Christian faith rush in rural areas during the social transformation, we will discuss the reasons from following three factors.

### 3.1 Social factor

**3.1.1 Economic reason.** Economic system reform and productivity development during the social transformation promote economic transition, but also create huge tremendous impact on Chinese society. In the first place, the role of families becomes more and more important in production and living. It not only improves people's enthusiasm for production, but also weakens interpersonal relationship. People start to care about their own benefits, rather than collective interest. In the second place, under the condition of market economy, contemporary farmers often feel helpless and isolated, and have to seek comfort from the "God". Finally, unfair competition in economic and living fields leads to out of balance of their emotion<sup>[3]</sup>. In the course of transition from planned economy to market economy, criminal offences for abstaining profit for themselves are of common occurrence, which seriously impairs lawful rights and interests of consumers.

**3.1.2 Political reason.** With implementation of the household contract responsibility system, rural grass-roots organizations decentralize their economic power, which arouses farmers' enthusiasm for production and realizes development of rural productivity<sup>[4]</sup>. However, grass-roots work is still not perfect, such as divorce from the masses, villager selection becoming a mere formality, etc. The Christianity stresses the value of universal fraternity and tolerance, which brings farmers with sense of belonging, alleviates their feeling of loneliness, and provides psychological comfort and support for farmers.

**3.1.3 Cultural reason.** Currently, belief crisis becomes an outstanding socio-cultural phenomenon. Its impact on traditional ethics is huge, while the new ethics is not established. Therefore, chaos of ethics and psychological out-of-balance occur. In consequence, people require more belief support to balance out-of-balance spiritual structure<sup>[5]</sup>. In addition, due to shortage of cultural and recreational facilities in rural areas, farmers' spiritual demand fails to be satisfied.

**3.2 Personal reason** Apart from the above social factor, personal factor plays an important role in the choice of faith in Christianity. Here, we will analyze the Christian faith rush from the perspective of Rational Action Theory (also called Rational Choice Theory), which was put forward by Coleman. For most people, "rationality" means "sane", "in a thoughtful clear-headed manner", or knowing and doing what's healthy in the long term. Rational choice theory uses a specific and narrower definition of "rationality" simply to mean that an individual acts as if balancing costs against benefits to arrive at action that maximizes personal advantage<sup>[6]</sup>. In the survey, we found that the motive for most people believing in the Christianity is to bless their family and themselves, to have harmonious family relationship and brisk business, make themselves become tolerant and magnanimous, and make their living full of happiness. Most of the Christians want to seek inner sustenance and actual extrication through participating in religious activities<sup>[7]</sup>. Human beings are rational and will care about their interests when making a choice.

**3.3 Attraction of the Christianity** Marx believed that all re-

ligion, however, is nothing but the fantastic reflection in men's minds of those external forces which control their daily life, a reflection in which the terrestrial forces assume the form of supernatural forces. The ultimate and actual care of religion makes people seek comfort and support when something is beyond their ability<sup>[8]</sup>. Apart from the above social and personal factors, there is also the self-reason for Christian faith rush in rural areas.

**3.3.1** The Christianity has a complete theoretical system and much of its doctrine meets human nature and code of ethics<sup>[9]</sup>. The Christianity and its ethical thought contain much general love and supreme goodness<sup>[10]</sup>, which are consistent with psychological demand of people for justice, sincerity and friendliness.

**3.3.2** Attraction of Christianity church organizations to people. Christianity church organizations are varied in different regions. Apart from listening to clergies lecturing the Bible and singing hymns, believers also have to pray. People take a serious attitude to various religious rites.

## 4 Influence of Christian faith rush in rural areas during the social transformation

As subsystem of society and social structure of human belief, the religion will certainly reflect its significance and show its influence<sup>[11]</sup>. Objectively analyzing and assessing influence of Christian faith rush in rural areas and understanding its positive and negative functions are of great significance to taking appropriate measures.

### 4.1 Positive influence

**4.1.1** It is favorable for integration of rural society. In his book, *Globalized Religion and Contemporary China*, Zhuo Xiping stated that, at the value level, the religion provides its believers and mainstream society with unified world outlook, value dimension, faith concept and moral standard through its faith, doctrine, spirit and cultural tradition; at the action level, believers supervise their social actions and practical actions with social norms and moral standards<sup>[11]</sup>. Influenced by Christian doctrine, rural Christian believers will adhere to tolerant, kind-hearted and friend value, which is favorable for their getting well along with their family and villagers. Besides, Christian believers observe moral standards and legal norms through restraining their action, which is favorable for social stability in rural areas and achieving rural integration.

**4.1.2** Rural Christianity has excellent function of psychological regulation. Many religions let believers face the birth, old age, sickness and death, richness, poorness, calamity and happiness in "usual" mind or "supernatural" attitude. In addition, through praying to the God when faced with hardship and psychological perplexity, it reduces farmers' psychological burden and stress on the one hand, increases their hope and courage of living on the other hand.

**4.1.3** It also provides social services. Social service function of the religion is mainly shown in religious organizations soliciting contributions from society and believers. With the funds solicited, it is able to assist government in promoting development

of social service business, and effectively improve approval of the Christianity from those who do not believe in the Christianity.

## 4.2 Negative influence

**4.2.1** Religious belief is easy to lead to prevailing of feudalistic superstition and heresy. Most believers are farmers whose educational level is low and ability of distinguishing things is limited. Once utilized by lawless people, it is likely to develop into feudalistic superstition activities and heresies. What's worse, farmers believing in religion are utilitarian. Thus, once they fail to realize their expectation or purpose, their faith will shake, and may turn for help from other religious or superstitious activities.

**4.2.2** It is not favorable to construction of rural grass-roots political authority and course of democratization of politics. At present, organization of rural grass-roots political authority is weak and fails to solve farmers' problems timely and effectively in production and living, which is an important reason for farmers turning to religious belief for help. In turn, rural Christian faith rush will further weaken rural grass-roots political authority. When most farmers seek help and psychological support from the religion and obtain the sense of belonging and sense of safety from religious organizations, their enthusiasm for participation in political activities will be greatly dampened.

**4.2.3** It makes people satisfied with the existing state of affairs, which is not favorable for solution to realistic problems. Although some religious doctrines are advisable, most religions are negative somewhat. When faced with actual trouble, such as disease, setback or frustration, many believers will not seek medical advice or analyze reasons, but pray to the God and hope to tide over difficulty. As a result, their subjective initiative loses, which is neither favorable for improving individual conditions, favorable for rural development and improvement.

## 5 Several countermeasures from the perspective of social work intervention

As a thing imported from western world, the value of social work is the product of western social civilization. The Christian culture is an important mark of western culture, concentrated reflection of western value concept, and also important thought source of social value<sup>[10]</sup>. Implementation of social work practice is also originated from Christian believers helping poor people through voluntary service. We believe that it is necessary to introduce social work into rural areas and develop various social work, to solve various problems resulted from imperfect social security.

**5.1 Improving farmers' overall qualities** To alleviate plight of farmers and improve their living standard, it is required to popularize scientific and cultural knowledge among farmers, provide material and psychological support for them, and reduce their psychological stress and burden.

**5.2 Promoting effective implementation of social security system** From the perspective of social cultural construction, livelihood problem suffered by many farmers in the course of modernization is not resulted from their low quality, but from unfair distribution of social resources, farmers' failure to deal

with market risks, as well as failure in commercial operation of agriculture<sup>[13]</sup>. Therefore, social workers, as bridge between government and farmers, should play the role of contact person and contact and seek various resources for farmers.

**5.3 Improving farmers' awareness of political participation** Firstly, it is required to reconcile farmers' discontent with and distrust in grass-roots political authority. Social workers should report problems to leading cadres, to make them understand importance of farmers' democratic participation and danger of harming people's benefits. Secondly, it is required to report farmers' difficulties and demand to leading cadres, fight for rights and resources for farmers and change unreasonable social policies using social action mode<sup>[14]</sup>. Thirdly, rural social workers should offer great assistance with government in actively promoting villagers' autonomy, promoting villagers' participation in collective affairs and bringing into full play democratic rights of consultation and decision-making.

**5.4 Correcting believers' understanding of Christianity to prevent going to extremes** Through regularly lecturing on Christian development history, concept and value to believers, social workers can correct believers' understanding of Christianity, so as to prevent their excessive dependence on religion and finally harming their benefits due to utilitarian and superstitious nature of believing in the Christianity.

**5.5 Conducting various cultural and recreational activities to enrich farmers' spiritual and cultural life** On the basis of respecting farmers' freedom of believing in religion, social workers can establish cultural clubs in village committee and conduct various cultural and recreational activities to enrich farmers' amateur cultural life. Besides, it is possible to play movies in villages, to make people recall their beautiful memory, narrow interpersonal distance, and improve interpersonal relations.

## 6 Reference and directive significance of foreign Christian faith to Chinese part

Situations and organizational ways of Christian faith in western countries have reference and directive significance to Chinese government and social workers at all levels.

### 6.1 Universality of Christian faith in England can provide reference for China to correctly understand the Christianity

England is not the country with the highest proportion of people believing in the Christianity, but the importance of Christianity there is undeniable. British people have full freedom of believing in religions, and the proportion of people believing in religions is also relatively high. Statistics show that within two areas under jurisdiction of Anglican Church, 58% people accepted baptism of Anglican Church on their birth, and 19% people join in Anglican Church when they grow up<sup>[15]</sup>. Thus, the Christianity plays an indispensable role in people's daily life.

The Christianity is the religion with the largest number of believers. It has numerous believers in many countries, including China. Therefore, the Christian faith rush in rural areas is a normal social phenomenon, and it has specific social background for its appearance and development. Social workers

should guide government and common people to have a correct understanding of this situation, carry on its active role and dredge its negative influence, to realize harmonious relationship between rural Christianity and grass-roots political authority.

**6.2 Political participation of South Korean Christian organizations has inspiration to political participation awareness of rural Christian believers in China** At present, many countries implement separation of religion from politics. However, as a phenomenon not to be neglected, the religion still plays an important role in political life. Take South Korea as an example, since the 1950s, Korean Christian organizations gradually became a great force in Korean political circle. After it came to the 1980s, Korean Christian organizations started to go deeper into the society<sup>[16]</sup>. The freedom, equality and demand for human rights and social justice still influence opinion of society towards government.

In current situation of grass-roots cadres' corruption and divorce from the masses, rural social workers should organize believers to actively participate in political activities and report concerns of the masses, rather than merely seek support from the almighty God.

**6.3 Directive significance of "Faith-based organizations" in the United States to Christian faith in China** The United States is a typical large religious country. In the United States, Christianity is the largest religion and plays an important role in political, economic, cultural and social life. Religious culture has penetrated into various aspects of life. With development of secularization of religion, many religious organizations engaged in religious activities start to change to organizations that mainly provide charitable and public activities. People with common faith in religion form non-government organization, express their missions, conduct normal activities, and provide social services to respond to community demand<sup>[16]</sup>. Such faith-based organization plays a very significant role in protecting weak groups, improving social welfare level and promoting development of social work.

Due to particularity of Chinese rural historic culture and social economic situations, utilitarian characteristic of rural Christian believers, as well as many Christian believers being weak groups, it will be greatly difficult to let them spontaneously form organizations that provide social services. However, it is feasible to guide Christian development in rural areas on the basis of drawing on American experience. Many Christian believers trust and help each other, thus social workers can organize these believers, encourage them to help other farmers who do not believe in Christianity, so as to reach the purpose of help others and themselves, and to promote stability and development.

## 7 Conclusions

As a part of social system in rural areas, appearance of rural Christianity is closely related with social politics, economy and culture. It is a reflection of social problems and current sit-

uations in rural areas. In the course of its spread to China and Chinese rural areas, the Christianity shows deeper and deeper local color. We should treat this phenomenon in an objective, fair, scientific and rational attitude, and correctly assess its positive and negative influence. Besides, it is required to take proper measures to guide Christian faith rush in rural areas to adapt to the socialist society and to new socialist countryside. This is of great significance to maintaining social stability, promoting economic development, and enhancing spiritual and cultural construction, which are also what the social workers and government should do.

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