

Free essay on difference between chinese religion (buddhism) and superstition (fa...

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Introduction

There are several differences between religion and superstitious beliefs. The two entities are closely related and in ancient times superstitions were part of or subsets of religious beliefs. However, the passage of time has brought about the refinement of religion while it has diminished the place of superstitions in modern societies. The resultant labeling has made it possible to clearly distinguish between religion and superstition. The English dictionary defines religion as a strong belief in a supernatural power that controls human destiny while it defines superstition as an irrational belief arising from fear or ignorance. China is a country whose people are rooted in a strong culture characterized by numerous religions. A significant proportion of Chinese have carried on the practice of Buddhism from early 200AD into the 19th century while the emergence of the Falungong superstitious beliefs in 1992 raised serious controversy. Labeling of spiritual disciplines as religions or superstitions is useful to the people who live in the societies where those issues are found.

There are differences in the founding, age, establishment, popularity and diversity between religions and superstitions. Buddhism is a traditional Chinese religion that has been practiced in China for more than 2000 years (MacInnis, 11). China has the highest number of Buddhists in the world. The religion is the most dominant in the country. About 90% of China's 1.3 billion people are Buddhists. Though some people belong to one or more religions in China, at least one of these religions is almost always Buddhism and it is safe to put the figure of Chinese Buddhists at 1.1 billion (Poon, 11). The Chinese practice Mahayana Buddhism which includes various forms such

as Tibetan Buddhism (Lamaism), Zen Buddhism and Pure land Buddhism (Poon, 11). Mahayana Buddhists believe in the broader appeal of Buddha's teachings in comparison to the relatively abstract philosophical questions characteristic of Theravada Buddhism (practiced mostly in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia). In spite of China's shift to atheism in 1949 following the adoption of communism, Buddhism continued to gain popularity in the country (Poon, 12).

Falungong also known as the Falun Dafa is a superstition or spiritual discipline that was introduced in China in 1992 (falundafa. org). The superstition was founded and propagated by Li Hongzhi. Li Hongzhi now lives in the USA. Hongzhi founded this superstition amongst " Qigong Fever" of the late 80s and in the 90s. The Falungong entailed meditation and slow-moving Qigong (Life Energy Cultivation or the practice of aligning meditation, movement, breath, healing and awareness) (falundafa. org). The Falungong was banned in 1999 after being termed as an evil cult. Hongzhi had sought official state recognition of the spiritual discipline for all its existence. After the suppression of a demonstration of more than 15, 000 people in Beijing in 1999, Hongzhi was compelled to flee and stop propagating his superstitious beliefs among the Chinese.

As evidenced in the above scenario, superstitions are usually founded and dominated by individuals or a minority group unlike religions. Religions such as Buddhism are founded by individuals (Buddha in this case) but they are not dominated or run entirely by their founders. They are more accommodating and allow for exercise the freedoms of expression and worship to a greater degree as compared to superstitions (Poon, 24). As such

it is important to label spiritual disciplines as superstitions, cults or religions in order to inform people of key aspects to distinguish between ambiguous spiritual establishments.

Religion has a sound appeal to humanity and the alleviation of human suffering unlike superstitions. One of the reasons fronted for the popularity of Buddhism in China was its appeal and ability to address human suffering. At the time of its establishment in China, the people were dealing with massive disunity of states that were vying to control the country after the fall of the powerful Han Dynasty in 220 AD (Poon, 23). The Falungong on the other hand was founded at a time when there was a “ qigong boom” in China. It was kind of a separatist group that was radical in that it exempted members from paying membership fees and adherence to daily worship (Cheris, 674). This move was seen by many as a way to woo members to join the group with no real motive to alleviate human suffering.

Religions bring about socio-economic progress while superstitions are hardly involved in the advancement of such progress. The economic reforms that china witnessed in the 1980s were attributed to Buddhist teachings that urge for transparency, hardwork, respect for human rights, and organization among other aspects that lead to socio-economic prosperity. Superstitions on the other hand are rooted in unconventional practices, radical beliefs and seemingly irrational decisions that negate norms. The Falungong for instance focuses on the mind urging for its adherents to cultivate thoughts Xinxing intensely and increase gong (life energy). This superstition purports that the more one focuses on his/her thoughts, the more they acquire life energy. Xinxing or thoughts involve the transformation of Karma (a black form of

matter) and virtue (a white form of matter) (falundafa. org). Falungong also urges for discernment, forbearance and abandonment or forsaking of human attachments and desires. It urges its followers to endure the most trying of human ordeals. In light of these, authorities might want to discern the differences between religions and superstitions so that they know which to support and collaborate with in order to achieve social, economic and political prosperity of their regions.

The Falungong is not accommodative of liberal ideas and practices while Buddhism allows for a considerable degree of liberal ideas and practices. The Falungong's followers believe that a Falun (or "law wheel" -rotating, intelligent entity that is composed of high-energy matter) is cultivated and not an energy elixir. This is contrary to Buddhist beliefs that comprehend of an internal elixir or Dan. According to Cheris the Falungong therefore developed as a separatist group and due to its increasing popularity it attracted the interest of the communist party in late 1990s (670). When Falungong's founder Li was approached by the communist party leaders to for a political partnership he declined due to his beliefs. This was the precedence of a standoff between the Communist Chinese leadership and the Li's group. The group was suppressed and members forced to denounce their superstitious beliefs. The suppression of the group was ruthless and some members are said to have been burnt with hot metal rods by government soldiers in order to compel them to denounce the group (Cheris, 668). On the contrary, the Buddhists are said to have collaborated with the incoming communist government in the late 1980s and 1990s. The rise and strong economic establishment of China can be attributed to the Buddhist

teachings. The religion has unified the Chinese people and acted as a pillar of social and moral soundness of the Chinese people. In this case labeling helps people and especially young adults to distinguish between sound religions and other spiritual establishments and therefore guide their children to get into proper and sound moral guidance.

Conclusion

Religion and superstition seem closely related but there are glaring differences between them, taking Chinese Buddhism as a religion and Falungong as a superstition these labeling, are clearly brought out through differences between the two spiritual disciplines. Buddhism is a dominant religion in China with more than 1.1 billion adherents while Falungong has a relatively small number of adherents at the height of its survival. Unlike Buddhism which is liberal, and accommodative in terms of the leadership of the spiritual discipline, superstitions have a deep and unwavering reverence for their leaders. Religions have a deep appeal to alleviating human suffering unlike superstitions. Buddhism was instrumental in uniting the people of China after huge divisions arose between states following the fall of the Han Dynasty. The Falungong on the other hand was started as a separatist group and thus it seems to cause disunity among the Chinese people. Religions bring about socio-economic progress by collaborating or correcting the government. Such was the case when Buddhists supported the communist Chinese government in 1980s. The collaboration saw the country record massive socio-economic progress. Due to their strong and unusually unconventional and seemingly irrational teachings and practices,

superstitions such as Falungong cause divisions between their adherents and the authorities. The suppression of the Falungong in the late 1999 compelled its leader Li Hongzhi to flee. These differences among others enhance authoritative labeling of the Falungong as a superstition and Buddhism as a religion. The labeling is crucial to governments and the general public as it eliminates ambiguity between religious entities. It helps in the regulation and running of a country and the maintenance of law, order and constitutionalism characterized by respect for human rights and freedoms.

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