Research on the Reason of College Students Committing Suicide Based on the Impact of Chinese Culture

DU Xiangmin, SHAO Hongyun
School of Humanities and Social Science, Chang’an University P. R. China 710064
chdliu@126.com

Abstract: College students committing suicide is a very conspicuous problem in recent years, many scholars conducted research on the cause of this phenomenon. From the perspective of culture, this article analyzes the reasons behind the causes of the phenomenon of college students committing suicide and holds the viewpoint that in Chinese traditional culture and modern culture, some contents praised and esteemed by some people have essentially promoted the college students to commit suicide, so it is necessary to re-evaluate these cultural contents.

Key words: college students, commit suicide, China, culture roots

1 Introduction

In recent years, college students committing suicide constantly emerge, and the case presents the increasing tendency year after year. It is reported by Shanghai “Morning News” (Issuance on March 4, 2005) that only during the two years from 2004 to 2005, there are 35 college students committing suicide in the universities and colleges in Beijing area, and the vast majority took such an extremely shocking means of suicide----jumping from high-rise buildings. At the beginning of 2006, there was an appalling incident that four students committed suicide within 10 days of the new semester in South China Agricultural University (SCAU), this also attracted the widespread attention from the society, and further prove such incident has become a serious social problem, which has caused immeasurable loss to society and the family, and also created an adverse impact on the university students. The suicide phenomenon on University campus aroused the extensive concern of sociologists, psychologists and educators, and etc. What are the factors making these university students as young and beautiful as flowers become such indifference to life and look down on their own life? After one after another young life in bud fade away, we should reflect on this phenomenon so as to find out the fundamental causes triggering suicide, so that we can effectively intervene and control the occurrence of such incidents, this has become an important research topic in the field of the ideological and political education of college students.

The contemporary college students’ committing suicide has caused immeasurable losses to society and families, and also has become a very prominent problem in today’s society. Committing suicide ranks the first five causes of the death of Chinese people, suicide is the primary cause of death for the young adult at his prime within the age group from 15 years old to 34 years old. However, among the crowd committing suicide, the suicide rate of college students is much higher than other age groups, and also presents the rising trend, thus they have become the high-risk groups committing suicide. According to incomplete statistics, about 100 students commit suicide in China every year, the suicide rate in 2005 reached the highest point than ever before. In the two years from 2004 to 2005, the suicide rate among college students increased dramatically, there were as many as 35 people committed suicides only in major universities in Beijing in the two years, and the vast majority took such an extreme and shocking means ----jumping from high-rise buildings-----to finish their life. They chose such a suicide way that has a very low rate of saving once the implementation and may cause great impact on the people around and would have great psychological pressure on the students around. On August 29, 2008, failed in five courses in the final examination, under too high pressure before makeup-examination, a sophomore boy in Xiamen University of Technology hanged himself by using bed sheets on the railing of the bed in his dormitory. At the beginning of 2006, there was an appalling incident that four students committed suicide within 10 days of the new semester in South China Agricultural University (SCAU), this further
proves that such an incident of college students committing suicide has become a serious social problem, and the rapid spread of such an incident in the whole country has also further proved the great impact of suicide on the people around.

What is even more worrying is that among the college students group, in addition to the number of students who have already committed suicide and attempted suicide, there are also a lot of potential victims of suicide. On September 11, 2005, it was reported by SHANGHAI MORNING POST that Yangpu District Mental Health Center in Shanghai announced a set of data on “Shanghai Seminar on Suicide Prevention”, according to the survey on 3,000 fresh college students in Yangpu District in 2005, more than 25 percent of the respondents have had suicidal ideas, but fortunately, college students in Shanghai has lower desire of the suicide rate, many a questionnaire investigation on the students on campus suggests that 30% -50% of the students said that they once have had the idea of suicide just once or more.

2 The status quo analysis on the cause of university students committing suicide

At present, the suicide phenomenon of university students has caused a significant adverse impact on social and family, many experts and scholars have conducted research on the causes of such phenomena. Currently, the mainstream research results are mainly to conduct analysis on the reasons from the aspects of the psychological quality of college students. For example, the study of Cheng Lin-juan (2005) (Linjuan 2005), Duan Zhi-yan (2005) (Zhiyan 2005), etc., Ma Yan-ling (2004) (Yanling 2004), Fan Fu-min (2005) (Fumin 2005), Huang Dong Ming (2008) (Dongming 2008) are all elaborated from this perspective.

They maintain that the suicide of current college students have many reasons that can be mainly classified into the following six ones: first, poor psychological quality: This is directly related to the problems in China’s current education system. China’s long-term one-sided examination-oriented education makes schools lay too much emphasis on the academic performance of students, as the result, the educators devote the most energies on the basic teaching and scientific research while ignore training the psychological health of students. Complicated with the failure of family education, parents excessively doting their children, grow up like a flower in hothouse, this is also the reasons for their weak psychological endurance. Second, the learning pressure: in particular, such case is more popular for the students in name-brand universities since the honor itself of being matriculated by prestigious universities is a heavy mental stress. Parents and school are proud of these outstanding boys and girls, they were as a deemed as an example by lower-grade students, and thus they were surrounded by the honor halo, instead, the honor itself became a yoke, which also brings a lot of physical and invisible pressure on children. Third, the affection issues: this is a common phenomenon for college students to fall in love. for the students unduly devoted to the affection, in the event of losing his/her lover, he/she will experience the profound pain, and even get the idea of suicide triggered by resentment when they feel the unbearable blow to the spirit, female students are more prone in this case. Fourth, employment pressure: now the employment market is highly competitive, “two-way choice” mode has an improving requirements on the overall quality. In the face of the society with fierce competition, in the face of severe and unfair employment situation, many college students inevitably got a psychological panic. Fifth: economic pressure: China’s current system “go to school at their own expense” imposes a not small burden for the students from the family stricken by relatively backward domestic economy. On the other hand, the students from the less-developed regions, poverty-stricken families have the comparison psychology with the consumption patterns, consumer perceptions of students from affluent areas and rich families; this is also easy to cause poor students to be stricken by psychological imbalance and spirit stress. Sixth, interpersonal relation stress: at the beginning of college students entering university, due to the unfamiliar environment, the lack of understanding between each other, the introvert character, the students with strong sense of inferiority are more prone to get self-enclosed, pessimistic and world-weary, disorder of interpersonal relationship. For example: Zhong Li-ping(Liping 2008) (2008) maintains that college is the stage that is relatively concentrated with all kinds of pressures, so that it is easy to make college students fall into psychological crisis, and even commit suicide. Chen Wei-ze (2008) (Zewei 2008)believes that the three major pressures cause college students committing suicide to
occur repeatedly, first, the pressure caused by heavy expectations from family; second, tackling the interpersonal relationships have become a problem for the university students with the majority from one child family; and the third, emotional setbacks. The above research has made extensive and useful exploration on the causes of the phenomenon of college students committing suicide from the aspect of their own psychological quality; this has not only deepened our awareness of the issue but also provided an effective idea and method for the life and health education for university students. However, the authors of this paper considers that the current research on college students committing suicide is excessively focused on the causes analysis and research on individual aspects, but not searching the causes behind the causes from the social and cultural background level. In other words, the current researches failed to analyze the deeper-level root causes for the phenomenon, only finding out the causes behind the causes, that is, the root of the phenomenon can be conducive to fundamentally solving the problem. Documents research found that the research on the problem of college students committing suicide have already achieved some high-level findings, but this problem still falls lack of specialized research on the cultural factor---- the deep-seated causes with fundamental impact. In such a research context, from the perspective of cultural tradition forming and influencing college students forming a sense of committing suicide, this article explores the impact of the negative parts of Chinese traditional culture developed in thousands of years and the modern culture on the thought of people, trying to find out the deep-seated reasons for the phenomenon of college students committing suicide. The relationship between the phenomena of college students committing suicide, analysis on the reasons, and research on the cultural root causes is as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Sketch of relationship between the phenomena of college students committing suicide, analysis on the reasons, and research on the cultural root causes

3 Study on the root causes of the cultural impact on the psychology of college students committing suicide

When college student committing suicide still remains individual phenomenon, it is only the individual behavior that is related to the individual psychological endurance, but it is reported that currently, the
suicide rate among college students soared from 4/100000 to 10/100000, and college students committing suicides occur frequently, so such incidents are not just a personal problem at present, but has developed into a social problem. And when analyzing a single case of suicide, we find that the causes of suicides are complex and diverse, and the suicide can not be entirely attributed to personal endurance because sometimes their reasons for suicide are very simple. But the occasional reason that is seemingly ridiculous contains the inevitability of the suicide since the deep cultural factors potentially influenced the behavior of students. Therefore, it is urgent to explore the root causes of college students committing suicide from the perspective of cultural impact.

The people brought up in different cultural environment have different ways of thinking, different emotional intention, character traits, values, survival awareness, and etc. Culture has a significant impact on values-orientation, outlook on life, and outlook on the life value of the contemporary college students, and its influence is invisible and imperceptible. College students still remain in physical, psychological maturity period, which is a critical phase for developing world outlook, outlook on life. With better plasticity, they will have different behavior once accepting different culture.

3.1 The influence of Chinese traditional culture on college students' outlook on life

First, the influence of Chinese traditional outlook on life and values. One of the important traditional culture root cause for college students committing suicide is the traditional thinking of seeking position in official circles, making contribution to mother country and bring honor to family. College students has been accepting the influence of traditional culture from childhood and they are always inculcated with the traditional cultural values and conception such as “succeed in a government examination, bring honor to one’s ancestors” “A book holds a house of gold and girls as fair as jade”, “he who excels in study can follow an official career”, “Qualify yourself, organize your own family, father your kingdom and conquer the world”. In addition, China has undergone a special period of planned economy, at that time, university students are unusually lucky persons because they could be arranged with the specific work by government after graduation, so once entering the gate of university is equivalent to get a security for life long or get the iron rice bowl. But now, the rapid society reform has caused reforms in social culture, the cultural influence received by university students is entirely different from the real world they now personally feel, at this time, the instable state in the social culture due to social reforms shattered the sacred social ideal in the mind of college students. When stepping into the real society with rapid development and fierce competition, they feel that there is such large differences between the dream shaped by traditional culture that has been followed by them all and the real world and they can hardly adapt to, many students have pessimistic expectations about the future. They found that their future is so bleak, although they hold the lofty ideal to return home and serve the motherland, yet it is even difficult for one to find a suitable job in today's society with fierce and unjust competition, nothing to speak of creating brilliant future. So great difference between social reality and dreams makes many university students running into snags everywhere become pessimistic and world-weary and feel that life is meaningless or even lose confidence in the future, and consequently, they embarked on the suicide road without return to irresponsibly choose to give up their life.

Second, the impact of the traditional outlook on love. Another important traditional cultural root causes for college students committing suicide is the glorification in the loyalty of love in traditional culture. According to the survey result from Nanjing crisis intervention center, university students committing suicide as a result of emotional problems accounting for 44.2 percent among the investigated cases of college students committing suicide. College students are just in adolescence, with the increasing psychological and physical maturity, love becomes the problem that everyone must face on the university stage. And it is still the first love for majority of college students, who is willing to devote their true feelings, but suicide idea will occur to them once they fall lovelorn and feel the unbearable blow to the spirit. However, in Chinese tradition or traditional culture, some parts of traditional outlook on love eulogized wining the so-called true love at the cost of life, and this has encouraged the occurrence of suicide. Thus, the traditional outlook on love has an important incentive for college students committing suicide because it provided a wealth of feelings soil for college students committing suicide. “Life is truly precious; Love is even more” and “better to be a shard of jade than a
whole tile”, “not choose same year, month day born, but same year, month day die.” And other famous lines eternally sung for love. In addition, many of the most tragic and heartrending love story in the famous Chinese classical novels told about the heroine committing suicide for love, and the life and death love of the heroines move the people generation after generation. These have enormous and also imperceptible impact on college students’ outlook on love. Everyone wants to have a period of love moving the heaven and earth. And even from the modern perspective, we still hold a tolerant and sympathetic attitude to the suicide for love and even eulogize their behavior. For example, in one of Chinese Classical Novels “Dream of Red Mansions”, a lot of females ended their own life by committing suicide. For instance, You Sanjie, she came across Liu Xianglian in the theaing process five years ago and fell in love, after holding secret love for five years, she only to find her love is hopeless and fruitless, the girl took out her sword and killed herself in order to prove her innocence and her pure love. In “Forum for all Schools” of CCTV, the expert in “Dream of Red Mansions” Liu Xinwu evaluated You Sanjie that she is a spirited woman with affection and faith; she died in defense of her honor chastity or virginity. These traditional cultures have a deep ideological-level impact on the outlook on love of college students. When problems occur to their love, the long-term accumulation of their profound traditional culture in their heart will directly affect the ways and means handling their love problems. For example, the second case of four “jumping off a building” incidents happened in South China Agricultural University at the beginning of the new semester in 2006, a female post-graduate committed suicide because they fell in love with his boyfriend for as long as six years but she eventually can not be recognized and accepted by her boyfriend’s family. She is just a modern version of You Sanjie.

Third, the influence of the altruistic and patriotic suicide. In traditional Chinese culture, people gave the high moral evaluation on “altruistic” and “patriotic” suicide. Mencius said “Life is what I want; righteousness is also what I want. If I cannot have both, I would rather take the righteousness than life.” Wen Tianxiang also wrote “Life is dear, love is dearer. Both can be given up for freedom.” can both reflect the fact that traditional Chinese culture does not oppose suicide, but even encourage or promote the dedication of “altruistic-type, patriotic-type” suicide. In Chinese history, there emerged many great hero images from the Qu Yuan diving into Luogu Jiang River to Qiu Shaoyun, Dong Cunru, and Huang Jiguang in the liberation war, the heroes who had to sacrifice for the country and the people occupy lofty status in the eyes of people. Every student accepted these traditional patriotic educations from childhood; they advocate and admire these heroes who sacrificed their life to preserve their virtue complete, gave life for righteousness, presented inspiring awe by upholding justice, fearless before the critical moment of life and death. These play a positive role in promoting college students to commit suicide. When some college students face the so-called pressure and difficulties, they choose to commit suicide because, in their minds, they wrongly considered it as a heroic character to be fearless in the face of death, and they also defined suicide as a heroic behavior. For example: On February 12, 2005, 20-year-old college students Peng shouted: “Death is also a very happy thing” and then jumped off the Scientific Research Building in West campus district of China Agricultural University. In the point of view of Xiao Peng, his self-destruction may be a heroic image of inspiring awe by upholding justice, a heroic martyr.

3.2 The influence of modern negative culture on the outlook on life values of college students

With the deepening of China’s economic reform and expanding of opening-up to the outside world, China’s social and economic culture is just in a transition stage, money worship and hedonism culture have infiltrated into college campuses, these cultural atmosphere has very serious impact on university students. College students come from everywhere in the country, due to the different families background and family economic situation, some part of the students wear name-bra clothes, use high-grade goods, while another part of students can not afford to pay tuition, and have to tighten their belt as the result of insufficient living expenses. The trial implementation of students' dormitories rating system in some colleges and universities highlights the actual gap between rich and poor in the sensitive soul of college students, such a sharp contrast makes college students get serious psychological imbalance. Some students get psychological aberration so that they embarked on the path of crime in the
pursuit of extravagant life; and some of the students feel the psychological pressure unbearable or even commit suicide to escape.

In the current background with very strong commercial atmosphere, it is extremely rare to see the film works reflecting progressive, simple, struggling, and struggling, most films or plays reflect the life of dignitary or business elites relatively distant from the real life of students. Many film and television media more frequently reflect the extravagant and luxury life as nobility, the hero or heroine driving a luxury car, living in high-end hotels, owning their own successful careers and enjoying romantic love, presenting red lanterns and green wine—a scene of debauchery. However, college students are just the age group who are full of vision and imagination of society and future life, so they are vulnerable to the impact of film and television works. But, the reality is not like the hero in literature, as the result, college students are easy to get a sense of loss after draw comparison with the reality of life. The expensive tuition fees, the severe employment situation resulted from China education reform, complicated with the romantic love that can be maintained with spending money, and etc., the college students now can not find their own position nor find their own intimate friends, and consequently, they get depressed, pessimistic and other psychological imbalance, resulting in pessimistic and world-weary and other emotions, they may feel that this world has too many unfair, or even give up his life in serious condition.

In addition, college students are poisoned by the chivalrous culture, violence culture, fighting and killing, irresponsibly abandoning life and other plots in today's popular martial arts novel, and online games. These rampant unhealthy cultures lead to the ideological confusion, personality distortion and even other negative impact that Chinese college students follow with utmost efforts, and even result in neglecting their own life.

4 Conclusion

College students committing suicide phenomenon has aroused widespread concern in society, scholars conducted analyses from different angles on the social problems occurring in the field of education. From the perspective of cultural impact, this article analyzed the impact of Chinese traditional culture on the psychology of college students committing suicide. Research shows that: the impact of Chinese traditional culture is the ideological root-cause of the phenomenon of college students committing suicide; modern negative culture distorted the outlook on the life values of college students. It is some factors in the culture that solidifies the gene of college students underestimating their life, and thereby creates the ideological root–cause of college students committing suicide. In the process of vigorously carrying forward the traditional culture and traditional virtues developed for thousands of years in Chinese nation, we should simultaneously conduct re-understanding and re-evaluation. From the perspective of cherishing life, we should appropriately lightly depict or even denounce these cultures encouraging the suicide acts so as to reduce misleading students in suicidal behavior. So we should establish a positive and progressive campus culture featured by "self-strengthening self-reliance, love life” “Cherishing life, condemning the suicide” on the campus, only this way can fundamentally change the life awareness of college students and prevent college students from committing suicide.

References

