

Intercultural Communication and Religious Beliefs

-- A Case Study of the American Film “Innocence of Muslims”

Xiaochi ZHANG

School of Foreign Languages,
China West Normal University,
No.1 Shi Da Lu, Nanchong, 637009,
Sichuan, P. R. China.
E-mail: zhangxc66@126.com

Abstract

The world will be harmonious one, the people with different religious beliefs in the world should strengthen close intercultural communication. And the intercultural communication will avoid any different wrong recognition about religious beliefs and respect different religious beliefs from different countries and cultures. Otherwise, it will cause unstable, inharmonious and terrible disaster or incident in the world. Thus, the authors takes the American film “Innocence of Muslim” as a study case, briefly introduce the serious accident result of the film, deeply analyzes that religious beliefs have an important influence on cultural development and intercultural communication and are one of cultural components. A film is one of major bridges for intercultural communication. Any film should respect different religious beliefs. However, the American film “Innocence of Muslims” hurt the Islam people and caused some incredible accident for the peaceful world. Also, the American film

Keywords: intercultural communication, religious beliefs, American film,

1. INTRODUCTION

As the world has become globalized, the need for intercultural communication has also been increased to create a conducive, progressive and peaceful world (Akhtar, 2010). Under the influence of globalization, the intercultural communication and cooperation between countries become more and more frequent. And the intercultural communication across cultures in which values, beliefs, standards, knowledge, moral, laws, and behaviors shared by individuals and societies should be taken into fully consideration and plays an important role in the world communication; trade business and the development of cooperation and friendship between countries.

At the same time, people should know that religion, which conveys impressive cultural connotation, is not only a kind of particular belief, but also a kind of universal cultural phenomenon. And then they should recognize the influence of religious beliefs on different cultures, because it will contribute to intercultural communication and cooperation around the whole world. Moreover, the religious beliefs will strengthen mutual understanding and create harmonious world and harmonious human being.

Now, the author will take the incident caused by the American film “Innocence of Muslims” as a case, and further study that religious beliefs play an important role in intercultural communication and respect and tolerance for different religious beliefs will make our intercultural communication more deep and smooth, and our world more peaceful and harmonious.

2. A CASE

The film, *Innocence of Muslims*, was made by an Israeli-American who describes Islam as a “cancer” and depicts the Prophet Muhammad sleeping with women, the Wall Street journal reported (Al-Majbari, 2012). The film first sparked anti-American protests in Egypt and Libya, and soon spread to more than 20 countries across the Middle East and beyond. Christopher Stevens, the US ambassador to Libya, was killed along with three colleagues in an attack on the US consulate in Benghazi. The violent protests also forced 65 US embassies across the world to issue warnings to Americans to take precautions against violent attacks, and the Pentagon has sent Marines to protect embassies in Yemen and Sudan. Indeed, the range and violent intensity of the present anti-American wave is unprecedented (Hua, 2012).

With pretests against the film continuing from London to Lahore on Sunday, Western diplomatic missions were on edge. Germany followed the US lead and withdrew some staff from its embassy in Sudan, which was stormed on Friday. The protests peaked on Friday and abated over the weekend. About 350 people chanted slogans outside the US embassy in London on Sunday Sept. 15, 2012) A small group of protesters burned a US flag outside the embassy in the Turkish capital, and in Pakistan there were protests in a dozen cities (Agencies, 2012).

Therefore, the controversial caricature was played off of the US – produce amateurish film *The Innocence of Muslims*, which has already set off violence in seven countries that has killed at least 28 people, including the US ambassador to Libya (Agencies, 2012).

Since the 11th anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on Tuesday, the US-made anti-Islam film has been fanning the flames of a new wave of anti-US protests in Islamic countries around the world, even though countries criticized the film and leaders called for restraint (Zhou, 2012).

As a result, the American film *Innocence of Muslims* invited the Muslim World against the America and the West, and then the peaceful world caused the strong conflict and bloody clashes. The incident made the world unstable and hindered different people with different cultures and different religious beliefs from their intercultural communication. Hence, it’s necessary for us to analyze the role and influence of the religious beliefs in intercultural communication and discuss how to enhance intercultural communication competence for the people from different religious beliefs.

3. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Everyone knows that religious beliefs have many important impact and factors in cultures, even in intercultural communication. We should know some fundamental knowledge about religions and its origins, especial some things of Muslim, the relationship between religion and culture and religious beliefs in intercultural communication. And then we have to analyze religious beliefs’ important impact and factors in culture and intercultural communication, and further discuss how to respect different religious beliefs in

different cultures and to deeply strengthen understanding each other, and promote intercultural communication.

3.1. Religions and Muslim

Religion, human beings' relation to that which they regard as holy, sacred, spiritual, or divine. Religion is commonly regarded as consisting of a person's relation to God or to gods or spirits. Worship is probably the most basic element of religion, but moral conduct, right belief, and participation in religious institutions are generally also constituent elements and worshippers and as commanded by religious sages and scriptures. (Britannica, 2005)

Now, the world has three great religions including Buddhism, Islam and Christianity. The different religions have different origins and teachings. Also, the different religions have different group of religious believer. Here, the author only introduces something about Islam, so that we'll further study on the case.

Islam is the Muslim religion based on the teachings of Muhammad, which can also be spelt as Muhammed, Mohammad or Mohammed. This Muslim religion teaches that there is only one God. Allah is the name of God in Islam. As the founder of the Muslim religion, Muhammad is considered as His Prophet or the Prophet, who teaches religion and claims to be inspired by Allah. Among Muslims and among Arabs of all faiths, a Muslim, a Moslem, a Muhammadan or a Mohammedan is a believer of Islam and a follower of Muhammad. Islam can also be called Islamism, Muhammadanism, Muhammedanism, Mohammadanism or Mohammedanism. Some people refer to Islam when they are talking about all the countries where Islam is the main religion. As Muhammad was born in Mecca, a city in Saudi Arabia, it has become the holiest city and the spiritual center of Islam. All Muslims face towards Mecca when they say their daily prayers. Every year, hundreds of thousands of Muslims from various countries go to Mecca to pay their tributes to Muhammad, the founder of Islam. They are pilgrims who make their pilgrimage to Mecca. The sacred book of the Muslims is the Koran, which is written in Arabic, containing the Prophet Muhammad's revelations. They are signs or explanations from Muhammad about God's nature and purpose. (Wang, 2008)

3.2 Religious beliefs and intercultural communication

Religious belief is the belief in the reality of the mythological, supernatural, or spiritual aspects of a religion. Religious belief is distinct from religious practice or religious behaviors with some believers not practicing religion and some practitioners not believing religion. Religious beliefs, being derived from ideas that are exclusive to religion, often relate to the existence, characteristics and worship of a deity or deities, divine intervention in the universe and human life, or the deontological explanations for the values and practices centered on the teachings of a spiritual leader or group. In contrast to other belief systems, religious beliefs are usually codified. (Wittgenstein, 2007)

In some content, religious beliefs are such an influential factor in intercultural communication because they affect our conscious and unconscious minds, as well as the manner in which people communicate. The religious beliefs of different people originate as they grow up in their cultures. Different religious beliefs form different views of death in different cultures. Beliefs as one of the hidden aspects of culture, impact on the culture by influencing other elements inner the hidden aspects of culture, such as, aspirations, laws, and

symbol, religion itself is a symbol of culture. Each religion has its own characteristic, and these characteristics act as the symbols in various forms, such as, doctrines, churches, badges, figures, even speeches, and so on. Beyond this, these symbols of religions also reveal the cultural components of each group. (Luo, 2012)

3.3 Film and intercultural communication

Film is regarded as culture, and culture is in film. The relationship between film and culture is interactive. The global influence reflected through film in a country that has become one of the most powerful cultures in the world. To some extent, film is a bridge in intercultural communication because different people can admire actors' performance from different countries, enjoy different music, know other's life, understand the different social cultures and issues, or even travel around world and so on.

Thus, film is not only to reflect its own country's culture, but also to be a good way for the foreign people to know other culture. In this way, film will benefit the different people from different countries to understand respective different cultures and tolerant respective different cultures. It's no double that film plays an important role and mission in intercultural communication. However, the American Film "Innocence of Muslims" didn't play such a role in intercultural communication. The filmmakers have forgotten one important principle: film is an art, art doesn't change culture; art merely reflects culture. Films have the power to impact people." (Stone, 2012) Especially, the film should respect people with different religious beliefs and hurt Muslim people, so as to arouse the Muslim people against the West, even not to make the world harmonious and stable.

4. SUGGESTION

From the above analysis and discussion, we should have known that religious beliefs are a part of culture, every religion has its own cultural influence and everyone should respect the cultural diversity. The people with different cultures in the world only understand it and then they may conduct intercultural communication with other. It's incredible that every religious belief should be respected. Respect is just basic. It will build harmonious relationship among peoples with different cultures and religious beliefs. Therefore, the respect for different religious beliefs is vital to people when they talk with other, work with other, even live with other in the same world. Now, it's necessary for us to discuss how to respect different religious beliefs in intercultural communication.

4.1 Learn some basic knowledge about religious beliefs

Anthropologists Avruch and Black have noted that when faced by an interaction that we do not understand people tend to interpret the others involved as "abnormal", "weird", or "wrong" (Avruch and Black, 1993) No matter, what your beliefs or religious beliefs, it's important to learn other people and their religions and spirituality is a common tie across all of humanity, and we express that sense of wonder and awe in countless ways. Thus, people should learn some basic knowledge about different religious beliefs in the world, especially about different world major religions, their belief systems and values. In this way,

people with different communicative styles reflect deeper philosophies and world views which are the foundation of their culture.

And then people should know or understand that every religion advises its followers to be good because people are innately good. In general, people are supposed to live peacefully with others, showing generosity to those who are less fortunate. Lies, stealing, killing and sexual misconduct should be avoided. If a person properly followed his /her religion as taught originally, the world would be much more peaceful. It is ignorance which causes hatred between faiths and study of other faiths helps to understand and respect other religion. Hence, learning about different ways that people with different cultures and religious beliefs communicate with can enhance people's intercultural communication.

4.2 Maintain an attitude of respect

Look for similarities not differences. Set aside the notion that your religion is "right" and other religions are automatically "wrong" even if it is a tenement of your faith. This means suspending judgment and being diplomatic to show respect for people of other religions. Treat the people you encounter as you would want to be treated if someone of another faith was attending a service at your church. (Hou, 2012)

It is very important for people to keep this in mind when they are in a dialogue or when they are communicating with others with different religious beliefs. Especially, when they are dealing with any intercultural conflict, they should be mindful that people may differ in what they feel comfortable revealing, because the variation among different religions even religious interpretations in respective attitude toward different religions is also something to consider before they communicate with people from different religious beliefs.

4.3 Tolerate different religions

Tolerance is a very minimalist attitude whereas respect involves something more active and positive. Tolerance is a good cornerstone on which to build human relationships. When one views the slaughter and suffering caused by religious intolerance down all the history of Man and into modern times, one can see that intolerance is a very non-survival activity.

Religious tolerance does not mean one cannot express his own beliefs. It does mean that seeking to undermine or attack the religious faith and beliefs of another has always been a short road to trouble.

People with one religious belief should have tolerance awareness of other religions. Awareness of religious beliefs does not have to divide us from each other. It does not have to paralyze us either, for fear of not saying that "right thing". In fact, becoming more aware of religious beliefs' differences, as well as exploring their similarities, can help us communicate with each other more effectively. Recognizing where religious beliefs' different are in intercultural communication is the first step toward understanding and respecting each other.

In sum, people should be open to learning some things from different religious beliefs, have an active attitude toward different religious beliefs and then have tolerance for different religious beliefs. In this way, the people will really respect different religious beliefs in intercultural communication.

5. CONCLUSION

An increasing source of conflict in the world today is centered around religious believers' demands for respect. Muslims demand "respect" that would forbid criticism, satire, or mocking of their religion. Christians demand "respect" that would amount to something very similar. Nonbelievers are caught in a bind when it's not clear what "respect" is supposed to entail and how it is supposed to be achieved. If respect is so important to believers, they need to be clear about what they want. (Cline, 2012)

Therefore, religious beliefs are a part of culture, have an important influence on cultural development and intercultural communication. However, the American film "innocence of Muslims" did not respect and the Islam people and caused an incredible serious disaster for the peaceful world. Meanwhile, the American film also hinder the Muslim believer to communicate with other people with different religious beliefs. The filmmaker should respect the Islam people and their God. And it is vital for filmmaker or any people to remember that intercultural communication is not conducted in prejudice, stereotype and ethnocentrism, especially in respecting religious beliefs, rather it involves too many religious beliefs' differences or cultural differences that may leads to misunderstandings. Therefore, people should be aware of the differences, show understanding and respect to different religious beliefs and most importantly, build bridges across misunderstanding among different religious beliefs or different cultures.

REFERENCES

- Agencies in Paris. (2012). French cartoons fuel Muslim anger. China DAILY. Sept. 20.
- Akhtar, Nadeem. (2010). US's "War Against Terrorism" in Pakistan: Basic Intercultural communication Barriers and a Case Study of Tribat Belt. Intercultural Studies: New Frontiers. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 83p.
- Al-Majbari, Ibrahim. (2012). US ambassador Killed. China Daily. Sept. 13.
- Britannica. (2005). 15th Edition. Volume 9. 1016p. London: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc.
- Cline, Austin. (2012). Should We Respect Religion? Does Religion Deserve Respect? Retrieved from <http://athism.about.com/od/aboutreligion/p/RespectReligion.htm>. 2012-11-28
- How to Respect Other Religions. Retrieved from http://www.ehow.com/how_2073687_respect-other-religions.html. 2012-11-28
- Hua, Liming. (2012). US cannot read runes in Mideast. China Daily, Sept. 28.
- Luo, Wen. (2012). The Role of Religion in Intercultural Communication. Retrieved from <http://blog.163.com/slender193@126/blog/static/6981304200682021628612>. 2012-11-27
- Xu, Lisheng. (2012). Intercultural Communication in English. Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 5p,6p.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. (2007). Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief. California: University of California press. 53p.
- Stone, Tara. (2011). Film and Culture. Retrieved from <http://www.Asq.org/pub/sqp/past/vol4-issue4/biro.html>.
- Wang, Fengxin. (2008). English Culture. Beijing: Peking University Press, 296p. 273p.
- Zhou, WA. (2012). Washington needs to rethink policies: Experts. China Daily. Sept. 15-16.