

On Volunteer Spirit and Thought of “Universal Love” by Mo-tse

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Abstract

Voluntary service refers to the social public welfare in which human kinds take part in social activities, facilitate social progress and push forward human development of their own free will for no material or any spiritual rewards. Yet, volunteer spirit refers to a sort of altruistic and voluntary attitude or concept for public welfare but not for any reward. This sort of concept has something different in approach but equally satisfactory in results with the thought of “universal love” by Mo-tse. The thought of “universal love” by Mo-tse is a kind of thought that is altruistic, mutual love and mutual benefit, which comes down in one continuous line with the thought of “universal love” by Mo-tse. Of course, connotation of the volunteer spirit we are going to mention can no longer be contained by the thought of “universal love”. To a certain extent, these two have something in common.

Based on love for the entire human kind, Mo-tse advocated that the universal love could transfer people’s self-interest, that human kind expanded their love of themselves to love of others, extended their care of the land of the living to each class and hierarchy under obedience to the “will of the heaven”, and gradually re-established the social order that had gradually lost its order. He expected to change the atmosphere at that time in which people struggled with and invaded each other through promotion of the thought of “universal love”. Mo-tse invented the theory of “universal love”, and resorted to the target of “mutual love and mutual benefit” to convince the king at ancient times to play their role of “where the wind passes, the grass bends”, so as to direct people in making contributions and showing fraternal love and mutual benefit and reciprocity. Therefore, his concentrated attention and efforts were clearly known. Through our analysis of the thought of “universal love” and explanation of the volunteer spirit, we can find out the similarities and differences lying between the two, which helps us to better understand the connotation volunteer spirit and explore, therefrom, the ideological succession relationship of traditional Chinese moral culture implied.

Keywords: Volunteer spirit, Thought of universal love, Mo-tse

1. Volunteer spirit

In foreign countries, volunteer spirit is usually expounded as an altruism and charity spirit, which refers to a sort of social principle in which an individual or a team depends on their own free will and interest to pursue the goal of assisting others and improving the society but not for personal gains or rewards. For example, Peter Drucker said, “The essence and feature of a voluntary service organization mainly lies in that it can improve the life of human kind and enhance the life quality, which is invisible and is able to make human kind to obtain new knowledge and vacuous people to obtain repletion and freedom. Its spirit is benevolent, altruistic and considerate for the public welfare, so its action should be with combination of systematicalness, sustainability and perspectiveness. (Wu Guanzhi, 2003). Kofi Annan thought, “the core of volunteer spirit is the idea of service and utility and the belief to make the world become more encouraging. Considering this meaning, we can say that volunteer spirit is the ultimate reflection of the spirit of the United Nations.” By contrast, the domestic volunteer spirit is almost defined as a sort of attitude or concept that is altruistic and voluntary for the public welfare but not for any reward. There are usually the following common versions --- “behavior to take part in the public welfare with the ‘volunteer spirit’, and whatever specific means is taken, it is always a kind of behavior based on individual charity and philanthropy.” (Qin Hui, 1999) “Volunteer spirit is a kind of active attitude of individuals towards the value of life, society, human kind and outlook on life. (Zhang Jin, 2003) “Volunteer spirit is a sort of volunteer spirit in which one takes part in development of human kind to promote social progress and improve community work for no reward or income at all, an extremely important means by the public to take part in social life and the quintessence of the civil society and civil social organization.” (Ding Yuanzhu et al, 2001)

“Volunteer spirit is a sort of altruistic concept which has existed ever since the ancient times and which surpasses the cultural traditions of eastern and western world and differences of their religious backgrounds, and is a sort of universal value.” (An Guoqi, 2002)

According to the author, the internal feature of volunteer spirit is its being voluntary non-obligatory), not for reward or income (non-profiting) and its inalienable relation to take part in the society and civil society and culture. Volunteer spirit is the general term of the standards, principles and ideas with universal value that has been gradually formed by volunteers in the voluntary service social practice. This sort of standards, principles and ideas can be summarized in an abstract way as dedication, fraternal love, mutual assistance and progress, etc. It carries with itself the traditional virtue of China, ethic concepts under the socialist market economy and the common achievements of human civilization, and is the organic component of advanced culture of socialist with Chinese characteristics.

The connotation of the volunteer spirit is mainly its being voluntary, namely, asking for no reward and being altruistic. Simply speaking, volunteer spirit is a kind of spirit that one voluntarily participates in the social public welfare establishments for no reward to push forward social progress and promote the overall development of human kind. What volunteer spirit emphasizes is no distinction of race, color of skin, class and relationship and that any one should show care, assistance and support. In China, the volunteer spirit is concentratedly embodied as “dedication, fraternal love, mutual assistance and progress”. This not only inherits the traditional virtue of the Chinese people to be forward to help others and to support the poor and those impoverished, but also reflects the objective requirements of socialist ideological and ethical progress, so it is the soul and core of voluntary service and is the internal motive and spiritual support for voluntary activities to be held effectively in the long run. The volunteer spirit also reflects improvement of mutual relations between people, mutual harmony between human and the society and harmonious co-existence of human and the nature. Thus, it can be seen that, the essence of the volunteer spirit is the conscious attempt of human beings based on certain consciousness of the community, consciousness of care (altruistic spirit), consciousness of responsibility, consciousness of participation, consciousness of cooperation and spirit of dedication --- of course, also individual preferences (such as, freedom, voluntariness, pursuit of the significance and value of life). (Chen Xueming, 2006)

2. The thought of “universal love” by Mo-tse

Mo-tse is the distinguished thinker and community leader of China and founder of the Mohist School. His statements of the thought of “universal love” are contained in “Mo-tse --- Universal Love”. Mo-tse has a particular position in the hundred schools of thought. “Among the nine major schools of thought, only Confucius is qualified to contend against Mo-tse. And the other schools have no qualification to contend against him.” (Wang Zhong, 2000). However, ever since the Qin Dynasty and Han Dynasty, the Mohist School went gradually down to decline as a result of the rulers’ respecting only the Confucianism. Nevertheless, the thought of universal love by Mo-tse still has its thinking connotation and realistic significant that can’t be obliterated. Especially, the mutual love and mutual assistance it reflected has great enlightening significance to the volunteer spirit and the civil society as well as building a harmonious socialist society.

Universal love also means “mutual love and mutual benefit”, which is the “will of God”, and which also means one should love others and love the common people so as to achieve mutual love and mutual assistance, but not mutual complaint and harm. This is also the model of the Great Harmony society designed by Mo-tse according to the Yao and Shun (ancient sages in China) times. Thus, it can be seen that, universal love means that mutual love and mutual benefit exist between countries to a large extent and between people to a small extent. According to Mo-tse, the reason that the Ancient China lost its order was that mutual love didn't exist between different people. Thus, he put forward the political philosophy of “mutual love and mutual benefit”. Based on love to the entire human society, Mo-tse advocated that the theory of universal love should change the self-interest of people and expand from self-interest and self-love to love and benefit of others. Furthermore, under the “will of God”, he advocated expanding care for the realistic human society among each class and hierarchy and thus re-establishing the social order that had gradually be lost. From the above analysis, it can be found that, the thought of "universal love" by Mo-tse has the following three connotations. Firstly, universal love means "mutual love and mutual benefit", which means that we expect mutual benefits through this behavior. Based on the principle of "the law of holy king --- policy to govern the world", the lord of the country should follow those ancient lords that had exercised universal love to exercise the idea of governing the country so as to bring benefits to the world. Secondly, universal love means "one loves others just as one love oneself", and "one loves relatives of others just as one loves relatives of oneself". Here, there are two implications. On one hand, one starts out from love of oneself and regard oneself as the center. The same is true with one's parents, and then to others. However, from "Mo-tse", we can see that, there is closeness and distance in universal love. Expansion

from oneself to others, the relation of closeness and distance is the prerequisite for exercising universal love. On the other hand, it is explanation to the issue of unfilialness of "no father". When one loves others, one has been within the scope of what one loves, so there would never be the contradiction that one loves fathers of others, but not the father of oneself. Thirdly, universal love means "equality and mutual benefit" and "selflessness". Universal love has the meaning of equality, which means that, all should be loved regardless of the hierarchical relationship of subjects in the society. Just as love of the God to human being has no distinction of subjects and is given to all, which has been so ever since the old times, and which is the universal representation of universal love. Mo-tse resorted to the feature of selflessness of God to persuade human beings to imitate the love of God to love others so as to gain love of the world. Of course, if one exercises universal love, one will also be loved by others, which is the optimal choice for win-win. The thought of "universal love" by Mo-tse is the love of equality that exceeds the blood relationship, in which one loves others just as one loves oneself regardless of closeness and distance, social status and length of time, etc. While in reality, one starts from love of parents with the principle of "love of parents". In the eyes of Mo-tse, real love is "love of others and then love of parents" just as in "Mo-tse Xiaoqu".

Of course, the thought of "universal love" by Mo-tse has its limitations. In the first place, it is unlikely to guarantee that one loves others and similarly others can treat with oneself in the same way. In the second place, there is the problem of feasibility in its practical operation. Although this thought has had a long history, it has never been actually implemented in the society. In the third place, universal love mainly refers to love of people, but has not involved love of other living beings, so its subject is confined to people. In Confucianism, the subjects of care contain "love of oneself to love of the people and love of the people to love of objects" and "love of both people and objects", not only including people, but also objects, which the thought of universal love by Mo-tse lacks.

3. Comparison of volunteer spirit and the thought of "universal love" by Mo-tse

3.1 Similarities between the two

3.1.1 Equality and mutual love

Based on the concept of "returning a favor with a favor" and applying this equality and mutual benefit spirit of "returning a favor with a favor" into interpersonal relationship, Mo-tse wished that each person could bear in mind the mutual benefit principle of "mutual love and mutual benefit", make benign communications with each other in interaction of love and benefit and gain a win-win outcome. Volunteer spirit also pursues the target of "equality and fraternal love, mutual benefit and mutual assistance". Thus, the two can be said to have quite a lot of similarities. Universal love is a sort of equal love that is irrespective of high or low birth and volunteer spirit is also a sort of mutual love between individuals of equal status.

3.1.2 Selfless altruism

Universal love means that "one loves others just as one loves himself", "one loves relatives of others just as one loves his own relatives", and is "broad and selfless". The essence of the thought of universal love lies in its pursuit of "righteousness" and "kindness", whereas this sort of "righteousness" and "kindness" are selfless "righteousness" and altruistic "kindness". This is where the essential of the thought of Mo-tse lies, which constructs a harmonious society and country with equality, fraternal love, mutual benefit and reciprocity through the establishment of a sort of selfless and altruistic concept. Similarly, volunteer spirit is also portrayal of voluntary, altruistic and selfless giving. Thus, it can be discovered that the two have their similarities.

3.1.3 Asking for nothing in return

In his "Universal Love III", Mo-tse quoted the theory of "returning a favor with a favor" in "Great Elegance" to convince human being in the world. According to him, "I" firstly put into practice the standpoint of "giving a favor" in the universal love, and then "others" will also take the attitude of loving others and benefiting others to treat with "me" by "returning a favor". Of course, here when we look upon the behavior of "returning a favor with a favor", we can all find that it is I who is dominating in judging his own behavior and decides whether he himself will exercise universal love or the behavior of "returning a favor with a favor". However, as for others who have the capacity of thinking, they are unable to estimate in anticipation whether they will also exercise the "universal love" just as what they have in their mind, because human being is a kind of complicated animal, and its self-interest has no means to be measured in a specific way and predicated in an accurate way. How comes if "I" give a favor, but others are reluctant to return a favor as a result of their self-interest and unwillingness to mutual benefit and mutual love. It is difficult to have a certain standard how to treat with each other equally, how to start and how to be equal. Furthermore, all the above are high moral norms that are difficult to be achieved as

for humans. However, the attitude of asking for nothing in return embodied by the thought of universal love should be treated with care. This is also sufficiently embodied in volunteer spirit. Voluntary service does not ask for any material or spiritual return and is a kind of voluntary behavior, a sort of uni-direction giving. The essential significance of volunteer spirit lies in its uni-direction giving to achieve giving by everybody in the society, which, as a matter of fact, is to ultimately form a benign bi-direction state of mutual giving. Without doubt, this aspect of volunteer spirit is consistent with the thought of universal love.

3.1.4 The foundation of thought to set up a harmonious society and universal society

The concept of “universal love” by Mo-tse was established in the worldly reality that regards “will of the heaven” as the ultimate care, taking “universal love” as the footstone to re-establish the society and help settle down the heart of human being. However, its goal is to “flourish the benefits in the world and get rid of evils in the world”, longing for emergence of a brand-new and harmonious society in which “love is mutual and benefit is mutual”. This fully reflects the humanity care and cultural value of the thought of “universal love”. It can be said that, the thought of “universal love” by Mo-tse is a kind of preliminary trial to set up a harmonious society, and its final target is to realize a beautiful great harmonious society. Nowadays, we advocate volunteer spirit with the aim to lead the entire society to generate new fashions and perfect interpersonal relations through a sort of “dedication, fraternal love, mutual assistance and progress” to lay solid foundations for establishing a harmonious society and well-to-do society.

3.2 Differences between the two

3.2.1 Difference of the concept of justice and benefit

In ancient times, the concept of justice and benefit could be said to be the core content of all kinds of philosophical theories and a basic moral principle to conduct oneself in the society, which also involved the essential attitude of one towards the nation, society, others and himself. Under the principle that “the God seeks for justice yet the wickedness does not”, “justice” became the highest code of ethics in human life. Mo-tse firmly believed that, human kind ought to imitate the selfless moral spirit of God and to continue to make efforts, and he also believed that human kind had the capacity of exercising the universal love, which affirmed the value of humanity. However, in the contemporary world, our definition of volunteer spirit has surpassed constraints of this sort of “justice” and “benefit” and has broken away from the pattern that was set by the ancient traditional concept of justice and benefit, a kind of virtue of dedication and altruism, unity and fraternal love and mutual assistance as well as process and a kind of virtue which surpasses the concept of justice and benefit in its individual meaning. This can be said to benefit others and oneself and furthermore, reflection of collective spirit.

3.2.2 Difference of practical level

If the theory of universal love by Mo-tse can be carried out, then the effect of mutual benefit brought about by the universal love theory would be affirmed. According to Mo-tse, ancient lords had already realized universal love, while ancient tyrants had given it up. Then, whether universal love was exercised was affected, to a great extent, by “people”. Whether this means it was because the efficacy of the thought of universal love itself was infeasible or its practice was difficult that the thought of universal love had not gained unanimous recognition from the social public, which made the thought of universal love unable to be inherited and extended and further unable to be carried out universally. However, this is thought provoking. Considering the history, the thought of the universal love by Mo-tse still remains on the conceptual level, but has not been implemented specifically in the society. In addition to influences of merely respecting the Confucianism, the author believed that the thought of universal love itself contributed a lot. This sort of supra-hierarchy and supra-class absolute equality and absolute mutual benefit and reciprocity irrespective of subjects didn’t work in the society at that time, which also didn’t comply with interests of the ruling class at that time. Therefore, it was necessary that it hadn’t been carried out in the society. By contrast, the voluntary service today is a kind of activity based on dedication and altruism, mutual assistance and fraternal love, mutual benefit and reciprocity, which has a whole set of institutional norms and personnel guarantee and which is implemented in the society with definite orders and conditions. Thus, voluntary service can be pushed forward. So far, the voluntary service has already been implemented all over the world, which is the best proof.

3.2.3 Difference of nature

It is true that the thought of “universal love” allows for distinctions among different individuals and exhibits the virtue value of human moral progress, but it differs from the volunteer spirit in terms of the essence. “Universal love” is a kind of pure and plain thought of mutual love and mutual benefit, while volunteer spirit is a kind of progressive and harmonious idea and is established under certain economical conditions and civil society, which

complies with the target that human society expects for more unity, friendliness and harmony. According to the author of this paper, the essence of volunteer spirit lies in its consciousness of community, consciousness of responsibility and cooperation, altruistic spirit and dedication spirit, which belongs to a universal value.

4. Conclusions

The thought of “universal love” by Mo-tse was established in the worldly reality with the ultimate care of “will of God”, and constructed a universal world with “mutual love and mutual benefit”, with the “universal love” as the foundation to re-construct the society. Mo-tse firmly believed that human being had the capacity of exercising universal love. Throughout all his life, Mo-tse pushed forward the thought of universal love whether in terms of physical resource, financial resource or knowledge. According to him, human being had the ability to help the weak group and human being could realize a stable life and realize the philanthropy thought of universal peace and order through the method of “universal love”. His improvement on the functions of any tool that was concerned with people’s livelihood and his popularization of the aspect of humanistic care embodied his spirit of universal love, which was his contribution to the human kind, and, in the meanwhile, was actually the optimal standard to exercise the thought of universal love. Therefore, it can be said, this thought of universal love has its certain research value and practical significance. In addition, Mo-tse spared no effort and never retreated in his carrying out the thought of universal love. He himself was also exercising his own ideal. At the same time, the thought of universal love has great significance for us how to respect differences between different cultures and how to maintain harmonious relations through mutual love in the contemporary diversified society. This also manifests the virtue value of moral progress of human kind.

Volunteer spirit is the general term of the standards, principles and ideas with universal value that has been gradually formed by volunteers in the voluntary service social practice, which includes profound ethic quality and features and has realistic significance to build a harmonious socialist society. Volunteer spirit is able to facilitate realization of social fairness and justice, push forward building of the harmonious social atmosphere and promote coordinate, comprehensive and sustainable development of the society. Moreover, the volunteer spirit reflects perfect combination of traditional virtue and modern civilization. The volunteer spirit has inherited beneficial components in the traditional Chinese moral culture, including the thought of universal love. It encourages people to be active and kind and to lead a lofty and virtuous life. The essence of volunteer spirit is the organic integration of specific externalization of virtue’s ethic connotation and ethic tension of its practical level and is the organic integration of ethics and well-doing.

It can be found by comparison that, there are quite a lot of similarities and yet a lot of dissimilarities between the volunteer spirit and the thought of “universal love” by Mo-tse. Both the two are intersectant, such as, mutual assistance, mutual love and mutual benefit, and are not intersectant, such as, fundamental distinctions between the two in their essence. Nevertheless, in the process of our setting up a harmonious socialist society, and in the high wave of vigorous cultivating the civil society and civil spirit and advocating voluntary service and volunteer spirit in the whole society, we can discover heritage and abandoning of traditional Chinese ethic culture, which also includes the thought of “universal love” by Mo-tse. This is also where the value and significance of this research study lies.

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