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University Education of Religious Diversity and Problematic Issues

[*abstract]

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Abstract

Religious education in Japanese universities has two aspects of academic discipline: 1) dogmatic education of Christianity, Buddhism, and other religions just in missionary founded colleges and 2) science of religion and religious history in all universities. The latter should maintain value-neutrality and provide an objective point of view to religious phenomena and religious institutions, and at the same time academism should carefully deal with religious diversity and individual religions' claims which demonstrates religious freedom and religious tolerance. I will show such multiculturalism and religious pluralism oriented claims might have conflict with academic freedom and human security on cult controversy in university education and academic research.

In this presentation I will introduce my education practice at Hokkaido University. The first example is an undergraduate and international course called 'Religion and Society in Contemporary Japan: From a Sociological Perspective.' This course focuses on religious movements in contemporary Japan and discusses how Japanese mind-sets such as philosophy of life, social consciousness, and spirituality are related to social changes since the end of World War II. Students will also learn about some sociological theories to analyze religious phenomena.

The second example is a seminar for all freshmen enrolling in Hokkaido University that provides information about particular controversial religions such as the Aum (recently changed name to Aleph and Circle of Rainbow Light), the Unification Church (recently changed name to Family Federation for World Peace and Unification), JMS (Christian Gospel Mission), and other Buddhist new religions. This seminar aims to prevent their solicitation in and out of campuses. As a general manager of student counseling, I adopt student support that places emphasis on students' security and their religious freedom.

Finally I will add one controversial case in which religious research on academic basis was undermined by unexpected claiming. JMS filed an allegation to Hokkaido University claiming that my papers on JMS in 2006 and 2007 were fabricated. Surprisingly, Hokkaido University formally received this allegation so that I was inquired on preparatory investigation committee until I cleared all my suspicions. Unfortunately, in following month I was inquired once again by anonymous allegation. Hokkaido University stubbornly believed in outsiders' good-will accusation in order to conduct quality control of research, which as a result has favored harassment on me and spoiled our efforts on student counseling about cult prevention.