**上海外国语大学 2020 –2021学年第一学期**

**期末考试试卷**

课程名称 中国文化概要

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**Please write an essay about 500-800 words in English, explaining a cultural phenomenon in China. A comparative perspective is encouraged.**

Utilitarianism in Chinese Secular Beliefs

The Chinese have been considered a practical-minded people since ancient times. This tendency is also reflected in secular beliefs. For many reasons people may believe in legends about historical figures and write different kinds of tales about them even if they lived in different regions. One of the most commonly worshiped figures is Guan Yu.

The reasons for the emergence and development of Guan Yu's belief are complex, but due to its ability to be offered as a deity and worshiped for more than a thousand years, it is by no means a coincidence or chance. Through this belief, we will find “utilitarianism and motivation” the main reason and essence of the enduring cult of Guan Gong.

Legends about Guan Yu in his home town Yun Chen of Shanxi Province say that Guan Yu was the reincarnation of a dragon slaughtered by the emperor of heaven for bringing rain to the region without permission. People also believed in the epiphany of Guan Yu because Lv Meng, the Wu general who captured and executed Guan Yu soon died from disease, and Jing Zhou also suffered from a plague after it was taken by Wu state. Such coincidences make people respect Guan Yu and probably laid the foundation of making Guan Yu a god representing loyalty and military force combining his life experiences.

Utilitarianism is a major characteristic of Chinese folk beliefs. The rulers of successive generations starting from Song dynasty have shown their respect to Guan Yu. The purpose was naturally to use Guan Yu's influence on the people to consolidate their rule.

But on the other hand, Chinese culture is in its nature characterized by its emphasis on the reality of human life and human morality. For the common people, Guan Yu was the embodiment of the general public, Guan Yu was the symbol of loyalty and justice. His loyalty to Liu Bei and the courageous and warlike image of Guan Yu was in line with the feudal dynasty's need.

The role of Guan Yu was to educate the people. In terms of traditional Chinese Confucianism, people seemed to have been more willing to accept the image of Guan Yu as a god than a historical figure, because through deification of Guan Yu, the moral code of loyalty, filial piety, and benevolence was strengthened.

If we put aside the general ghost and god worship factors, this “god-making movement” was full of the practical needs of people. The beliefs of Guan Yu emphasized and "righteousness" in maintaining social order and the construction of an ethical system, which was obviously positive.

In short, utilitarianism made Chinese people believe in gods for some reasons. In Guan Yu’s case, the loyalty and justice pursued by ancient people. Many classical literatures also showed the pragmatism of Chinese people. For example, in *Journey to the West,* Sun Wukong and Tang Seng became one of the gods because they introduced Buddhist texts to Tang for releasing the souls from suffering.

All in all, in Chinese secular beliefs, those who have super-natural powers has to do something good for the people to worshiped as a god.