Reviewer's report

Title: Belief system, meaningfullness, psychopathology associate with suicidal behaviors among Chinese college students: a cross-sectional survey

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Reviewer: Daniel T Rasic

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This is a well done study examining relationships between political and religious beliefs with suicidal behaviors. A major strength of this study is that it is done in a population in China, where the religious and political climates are considerably different from the Western nations, where the bulk of research in this area has been conducted. The theoretical rationale for the study was sound, the methods generally appropriate, and important results that have implications on our understanding the interplay of these factors. I have some comments that I believe can strengthen this study and they are provided below:

Minor Essential Revisions:

The authors often use the term ‘suicide’ interchangeably with suicidal behaviors. The authors should revise the manuscript throughout so that suicidal behavior or equivalent is used when referring to suicidal ideation or attempt and ‘suicide’ to refer to death by suicide.

The writing is generally clear, but there is awkward wording throughout that needs some attention. Some examples are “…findings are in line with existing researches,” or “existing literatures.”

The authors need to make clear early on in the manuscript that Confucianism is not considered a religion. I think that some of the confusion for me was the sentence on page 4 “Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism had been greatly shaped Chinese society.” It is not clear to someone not very familiar with Eastern cultures, like myself, until much later in the manuscript that a distinction between religion and philosophy was being made.

The sentence at the bottom of page 4 needs revision: “modern china has been witnessing a declination and renaissance of Confucianism…”

“Declination” should be changed to “decline.” However, how can there be a decline and renaissance of Confucianism? Was there a decline and then later a resurgence? Please clarify in the text.

Page 5. Please provide references for conceptualizations of belief system and political belief.

Page 6. “psychopathology is found to be reversely…” ‘reversly’ should be ‘inversely’

The response rate of the survey is good. However, given the sensitive nature of the topic area and political climate, do the authors have any information on
reasons for 16% nonresponse? If so, please list them.

In developing political belief measures, how was individualism, capitalism, scepticism conceptualized by the raters? More detail, even brief example statements, would aid in understanding how political belief was measured.

How did “what are the most important elements that have been affecting you politically and culturally?” result in socialism, communism and Confucianism as the top responses? Was there more of a procedure followed than is described? If so, please provide more detail.

Page 14. “indicating that for individuals who have political belief, being religious could be a protective factor against suicide…” This sentence implies causation, which cannot be inferred from cross sectional data. In addition, suicide was not examined. Please revise.

What was the sample size in the SEM models? Was there much missing data? Please report this.

Page 15. Are there other reasons for differences in suicidal behavior measures between the current study and Dai? There is a twenty five percent difference in lifetime prevalence of suicidal ideation. Were different measures used? Please provide additional reasons for the differences.

Page 18. The interpretation of the findings in this section seems somewhat speculative with few references to back up interpretations. While the argumentation is logical, it needs to be supported by references.

Could there be a social desirability bias in responses? If suicide is undesirable in the mainstream political philosophy and those who reported political belief were also less likely to report suicidal behavior, could there be a reporting bias? Please comment.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interest.