

Religion and International Relations in the Age of Globalization

XU Yihua^①

(Center for American Studies, Fudan University)

Abstract: *The global resurgence of religion and the return of religion from the so-called “Westphalia Exile” to the central stage of international religions have significantly transformed the viewpoints of both media and academia toward the role of religion in international relations (IR), and the challenges posed by religion to the contemporary international relations are often described as entirely subversive. The author argues that as a second-tier factor in the foreign policies of most countries and international affairs, religion and religious movements could neither shake the dominant role of “norm-setting” sovereign states in the international system, nor serve as a basis to “rebuild” IR theory. The paper concludes with a discussion on the implications of religion’s growing influence in IR for China, the importance of religion to the construction of China’s international image, and the feasibility of religion being developed as a resource for China’s public as well as people-to-people diplomacy.*

Key Words: *The Global Resurgence of Religion; Religion and International Relations; Return from Exile; China’s Foreign Policy*

^① Dr. XU Yihua, Professor at the School of International Relations and Public Affairs & the Center for American Studies, Fudan University. This research is the midterm product of the Ministry of Education’s Philosophy and National Social Science Research Key Project “Religion and China’s National Security Studies” (06JZD0005) and National Philosophy and Social Science Innovation Center Project “Religion and American Foreign Policy since the end of the Cold War ” (05FCZD0015).

When an international relations scholar talked about the impact of the global resurgence of religion on the traditional religious studies and international relations theory since the second half of the 20th century, he commented: "We live in a world that is not supposed to exist." (Thomas, 2007: 21). Since the birth of international relations as an independent discipline in the West, religion, as an object of study, has long been neglected, marginalized and even "banished" in the Western international relations theory. This exclusion can be traced back to the origins of modern international relations. In the Westphalian system of international relations generated at the end of the war in Europe, which saw the birth of the nation-state, national sovereignty was "sanctified", and religion no longer had a place. Hence in the state-centered international relations theory reflecting such an international relations system, it is natural that religion is also insignificant. In recent decades, however, the global resurgence of religion and worldwide desecularizing trends, especially after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, changed people's views on religion and international issues to a large extent; thus, religion has returned from the so-called "Westphalia Exile" to the "central stage of international religions". Religion is not only considered to be "a continuation of politics by other means", but also has become a resource that all parties on the international stage compete for (Hallinan, 2007: November 9; Jelen & Wilcox, 2002: 1-3). In the eyes of some international relations scholars, the theoretical challenges posed by the global resurgence of religion to international relations theory are "comparable to that raised by the end of the Cold War or the emergence of globalization" (Hurd, 2007: 647).

This paper attempts to make a comprehensive analysis of the research status and pathways of the religious influence on international relations in the era of globalization. First, the challenges

and even subversion to the current international relations and traditional religious concepts caused by the “return of religion” in international relations will be expounded; second, the research path of religion and international relations will be presented and discussed; finally, there will be a brief analysis of the impact of the global resurgence of religion and the “return of religion” in international relations on China.

I. The “Return of Religion” within the International Relations Field

Scott M. Thomas, a scholar studying religion and international relations defined “the global resurgence of religion” phenomenon as follows: “The global resurgence of religion is the growing saliency and persuasiveness of religion, i.e., the increasing importance of religious beliefs, practices, and discourses in personal and public life, and the growing role of religious or religiously-related individuals, non-state groups, political parties, and communities, and organizations in domestic politics, and this is occurring in ways that have significant implications for international politics.”(Thomas, 2005: 26). Since the 1970s, especially since the end of the Cold War, the global resurgence of religion has been changing the look of the global religion layout and even international relations in multiple ways. Also, the resurgence has caused partly subversive or “semi-subversive” impact on the current structure of international relations as well as people’s traditional ideas of religion. We can approach the “semi-subversive” impact from the following five aspects.

(A) The global resurgence of religion has subverted the traditional theory of secularization in a way

For a long time, religion was considered to be receding with the

modernization and economic development. The actual situation, however, is the contrary. Religion is on the rise instead of falling under the impact of modernization and economic development. Large-scale religious resurgence occurred mainly in Christianity (especially the Pentecostals), Islam, as well as various folk religions, while the continuous growth and political awakening of the Christian and Muslim conservatives have been the two most notable phenomena in world religious scenes since the second half of the 20th century. The alarmists among Western scholars even claim that if the above religious growth trend continues, by 2020, 54.2% of the world's population will be Christians, 37.76% Muslims (Dark, 2000: 73). Even in "godless Europe", which is also called a typical example of "secularization" and the negative example of "sanctification", where "the Christian faith has collapsed", not only the "immigrant church" and new religions are growing, there have also been signs of resurgence of the traditional religions, such as Catholicism (Jenkins, 2005: 115-120). Thereupon, the "re-enchantment of the world", "transnational religions and the fading states", "religious nationalism against the secular state", "the new Cold War of religious conflicts instead of ideological conflicts" and other discourse spread like wildfire and began flooding world news reports and academic publications. These have almost completely replaced the dominant discourse 50 years ago such as "the end of Christendom", "God is dead" and "the advent of post-Christian era and even post-religion era" and become the new label of the era. Various "non-secular", "de-secularizing", "post-secular" and "sanctification" theories have been introduced, becoming the prevailing paradigm of the academic religious studies in all countries. The global resurgence of religion is the sociological basis of the religious influence on international relations, the religious instead of ideological mass political

mobilization and “foreign policy debate regarding diplomacy, national security, democracy promotion and development assistance”(Thomas, 2007: 21).

However, among a variety of academic and non-academic voices of the popular “globalization of God”, traditional secularization theory not only has not disappeared, but it has also come back by the various revisionist versions, such as the “neo-secularization”, “elite secularization”, “long-term secularization” and “secularization of the rich countries”. Along with a variety of non-secular theories, it is seeking support from countless opinion surveys and empirical researches (Xu, 2004: 6-11). For instance, sociologists of religion Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart pointed out in their widely cited book that the secular trend among global intellectual elite is in sharp contrast to the general pro-religion attitude of the commons. In addition to the few exceptions, the widening gap between the rich countries (“secular society”) and poor countries (“holy society”) is not only in economy, but also in religion and theology. The two scholars came up with the “existential security hypothesis” based on a large number of empirical studies in 76 countries the population of which accounted for nearly 80% of the world's population, and considered that people’s life experience between the poor, weak and insecure societies and the prosperous and secure societies is different, the former enhances and the latter reduces the importance of religious values (Norris & Inglehart, 2004; Thomas, 2007: 21-45; Bellin, 2008: 331-334). In fact, the distinction between the secular and the sacred is not absolute. Another group of sociologists of religion, N.J. Demerath III and Rhys H. Williams took a more eclectic stance, and regarded that there is a dialectical relationship between the two, which tends to be more interdependent, not mutually exclusive. Actually, one trend can be fully understood only in the backdrop of the other trend. The

two scholars criticized on the basis of a large number of empirical studies in Springfield in New England region in the United States, that the traditional secular mode puts too much emphasis on the antagonism between secularization and sanctification, while in fact, there are both secular and sacred trends on all four levels of individuals, institutions, communities and culture. However, overall the secularization trend is stronger than the sanctification trend; the so-called religious resurgence is merely a short-term reaction in the long-term secularization trend that the United States and Western societies are undergoing (Demerath, 1992; 225-301). In nature, is not the so-called sacred or secular mode also rendering the antagonism between the sacred and the secular? The article does not intend to intervene in the dispute about secularization theory, but only intends to illustrate the fact that the global resurgence of religion has not ended the dispute, and it only has a "semi-subversive" impact on the traditional secularization theory.

(B) The global resurgence of religion has subverted the Westphalian system of international relations to some extent

Modern international relations are based on the so-called Westphalian assumptions. To some extent, the global resurgence of religion has partly subverted the unspoken rules of international relations that religion does not interfere in international affairs. As a product of the end of the Thirty Years' War in 1648 in Europe, the Peace of Westphalia, as well as the Heritage Settlement (or Westphalian Settlement) which was established through nearly two centuries, have replaced the theocratic supremacy with sovereign supremacy, recognized and established the principle of the authority of the state in place of the transnational religious authority, and no longer treated religion as a source of legitimacy in foreign policy or international conflicts. The core of the modern international system,

whose foundations are based on the Peace of Westphalia, is to protect the principle of national sovereignty through the establishment of a set of international rules and regulations, and to deny the transnational ideology that challenges the national sovereignty in terms of people's political loyalty. Ironically, in the Peace of Westphalia, although the political and legal structures were constructed to privatize religion and to limit its role in international affairs, the treaty itself actually "nationalized it (religion) as the basis for organizing modern states" (Thomas, 2010: 97-98).

However, religion that played an important role in the formation of the concept of national sovereignty now has posed challenges to it. The global resurgence of religion is changing "the naked public square" in the system of international relations, and has constituted a threat to the current principles and rules of international relations. Also, it is generally believed that the challenges of transnational religions mainly appear in the form of non-Western religions or civilizations being against the Western beliefs and values which the international community is based on, or challenging the Western secular interpretation of the international system. Thereupon, the "new Cold War" sometimes is interpreted as the war of the religious Orient against the secular West. For the majority of the non-Western countries, it is actually not national sovereignty the transnational religions have weakened, but the secular nation-states or the "hegemony of totalitarian states" (Thomas, 2000: 14-18; Falk, 2003: 181-205; Haynes, 2001: 157). However, in human rights, especially regarding religious freedom, the edge of the "new Cold War" is targeted against the non-Western countries. Since the end of the Cold War, the "violation of human rights and religious freedom" is becoming the more "acceptable" reason for some Western countries to politically and militarily interfere in other countries. Since the

beginning of the 21st century, to advocate the “responsibility to protect” was prevalent in Western countries, some scholars have even said that “with the possible exception of the prevention of genocide after World War II, no idea has moved faster in the international normative arena than *The Responsibility to Protect (R2P)*” (Weiss, 2006: 741)^①. Various faith-based organizations naturally become an active advocate of such “international norms”. The Sudan campaign initiated by the American religious groups in the early 21st century was the full practice of the theory of the “responsibility to protect” of the international community to keep civilians of a sovereign state from mass atrocities on humanitarian principles, advocated mainly by the West. However, due to their unilateral action, self-interested “imperialist agenda” and the militarization of humanitarian intervention in Kosovo, Iraq and other places without UN authorization, the West is being questioned as an appropriate bearer of the “responsibility to protect” international norms, which has also made it the “last defense against the rules of an unequal world” for the developing countries to strengthen their sovereignty (Weiss, 2006: 748-749). As some scholars have pointed out, globalization and transnational actors, including religion and transnational processes, are very important in shaping the foreign policy of states. Nonetheless, the main point of academia remains that the nation-state as the “main unit for territory security and administration”, which is dominant in the international system, and continues to “set the basic rules and define the environment within in which transnationals must function” (Synder, 2011: 5). In the current international relations, the religious factor remains to be a secondary factor or a lesser factor in terms of diplomatic, bilateral or multilateral relations. Religion is far from a

^① “Responsibility to protect” was originally proposed by the Intervention and State Sovereignty International Commission (ICISS).

“hard currency” that can match the importance of political, military, and economic factors in the contemporary international relations.

(C) The transfer of the world’s religious population has in part subverted the traditional layout of the world religions

Globalization has brought a great transfer of the global population, of industries as well as of religions. All three have a very close connection with each other. According to Andrew F. Walls, the authoritative scholar of international missionary movement, the “the Great European Migration” in the world’s population has lasted for five centuries, which not only re-divided the territory of the pattern of world trade and international politics in a way favorable to Europeans, but also expanded the sphere of influence of Christianity globally. Starting from the second half of the 20th century, “the great reverse migration” which refers to the mass immigration of Asian, African and Latin American countries to Europe and the United States, also changed the flow of the world’s cultures and religions. While a growing number of non-Western forms and expressions have emerged in Western Christianity, at the same time, the traditional religions of these areas have also gradually become the religions of the Western countries (Walls, 2011: 69-70). The dominant Western religions (Christianity, Mormonism, etc.) going southward and the dominant Oriental religions (Islam, Buddhism, Baha’i Faith, Hinduism, Taoism, and a number of new religions, etc.) going northward have crossed each other, as well as rewritten and expanded the roster of the world religions; this has also become one of the most significant signs of the global resurgence of religion (Xu, 2010: 65).

Same as “the Great European Migration”, the so-called "great reverse migration" also has connotations concerning politics, economics, religion and international relations. The rise of Christian churches in developing countries, known as the “third church,” as

well as the new missionary movement they promoted have, to a greater extent, subverted the traditional image of the missionary movement and missionaries. Thus, the traditional center and periphery of Christianity have been trans-located and Christians worldwide have increasingly claimed the role of "victims" of the alleged religious persecution than "victimizers". This has largely promoted the "International Religious Freedom Movement," which originated in the Western countries, particularly in the United States. The global expansion and changing demographics of Islam and Christianity have made the relationship between the two religions, religious freedom and religious pluralism "increasingly important issues in international politics in the 21st century" (Thomas, 2007: 30). For instance, emigration and the existence of international Diaspora communities have transposed the religious and ethnic conflicts of the Orient to the Western world, making the "Islamophobia" a common phenomenon in European countries and greatly impacting the traditional religious and ethnic integration mode of the migrant recipient countries, such as Britain, France and Germany. However, it is still too early to claim either that the 20th century is the last century of Caucasian-led Christianity, or that Christianity and the West have uncoupled with Christianity turning into a "post-Western religion" or "multi-center religion", or even that a post-religious Western world has emerged. The center of gravity of the global Christian theology, institutions and economic resources are still in the "global North" (Wuthnow, 2009). The southward shift of the Christian population has not really shaken Western control of Christianity.

(D) The trend of the politicization of religion has subverted the traditional positioning of religion in international relations to some degree

Accompanied by the global resurgence of religion is the global

trend of the politicization of religion and the religionization of politics, which has, to a large extent, subverted the traditional image of religion for being silent, negative and depoliticized, which even made fundamentalism (strong religion) and extremism popular interpretations of religion's role in international relations. The worldwide politicization of religion has various faces, such as the universality of religious extremism and fundamentalism, the "political awakening" of the religious organizations and their large-scale involvement in politics, especially in the field of foreign policy, the faith-based non-governmental organizations that play an increasingly important role in the international political arena, the formation of global network of religions advocacy and the international religious human rights mechanism, as well as "the fourth wave of international terrorism" and the securitization of international religious issues triggered as a result. The religious thought like the Latin American liberation theology, political Islam, the Religious Right in the US, as well as the events closely related with or driven by religion such as the Iranian revolution, the Polish and Eastern European upheavals and the 9/11 attacks are the significant signs of religion being politicized and radicalized since the second half of the 20th century.

In recent years, religious NGOs have been very active. Through instruments of influence, including information politics, symbolic politics, leverage politics, responsibility politics and global movement networks, these NGOs mobilize public opinion, social elite and foreign policymakers in order to achieve their policy goals. Together with Western "small or middle powers" or "good Samaritan states" that respect the global social democratic values and policies, it is becoming an important factor in promoting global governance and provide public goods outside of the international system led by big powers

(Lami, 2011: 244-254)^①. As a new international actor, the religious NGOs represent some kind of “power transfer” in current international relations. Although religious NGOs do not have the traditional legitimacy resources enjoyed by the nation-states, they can resort to economic sanctions and other means of “humanitarian intervention” to achieve their goals (Jarvik, 2007: 217), and even through the so-called “humanitarian fundamentalist” approach of justifying the means by the end. However, these organizations have given full play to the religious positive function in international relations by breaking down the boundaries of region, race, color and culture, as well as promoting economic empowerment, social improvement, cognitive liberation, political democracy, freedom of belief, multinational rescue missions, international exchanges, global governance and world peace. Thus, various religious actors not only play a vital role on the current international arena, but also quietly contribute to numerous concrete areas of international governance. Religion’s peaceful, quietist and non-political nature has not been submerged by the so-called international “identity warfare” permeating the media.

(E) Internet religion has partly subverted the traditional model of international religious communication

If globalization is boosting the cross-border flow of religion, then the Internet will be the cause of another significant combination of the media and religion since the Protestant Reformation, which is even touted as the initiator of the Second Reformation. According to the words of the famous American United Methodist Church Pastor, Michael Slaughter, “Electronic media is to the ‘Reformation’ of the twenty-first century what Gutenberg’s press was to the Reformation of

^① Western “middle powers” or “good Samaritan states” refer to Norway, Switzerland, Denmark, the Netherlands, Canada and Asian countries.

the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries”(Thomas, N., 2005: 4). Internet religion (or “Cyber-based religion”, “computer religion”, “virtual religion”) has amplification effects on the spread of various religions, greatly increasing the number of people participating in religious activities, and turning into “God’s microphone”. The match between the “worldwide” feature of the internet and the “universality” of religion has given the internet religion an ever greater capacity to travel across borders, an increased direct missionary ability of religious organizations, as well as the enhancement of their social grassroots mobilization, influence on political agenda and ability to participate in global affairs. And it has also enabled any religious issue around the world to quickly become transparent, international and politicized. Internet religion, whether as a new missionary body or a new tool of traditional missionary organizations, has shown great potential in the contemporary missionary movement.

However, to refer to the internet religion with low-threshold, low-cost, real-time revolutionary features as the “Second Reformation” and say that it is on par with the Reformation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, is difficult to validate. First of all, nowadays cultures are extremely diverse, and the vast majority of countries have implemented the separation of church and state. Under these circumstances, religion and the church are no longer the social focal point or are just one of the centers. The religious criticism and revolution are no longer the premise of the social criticism and revolution, so the condition of social change generated by religious revolution has ceased to exist. Secondly, despite the creation and generation capabilities, as well as the negative congestion costs (i.e., online information will not decrease after it is obtained by someone, but will increase) of internet religion, there is no qualitative difference between the internet and other integrated use of new media and

electronic means of communication, such as the radio, television, telephone, etc. following the paper (print) media. In other words, the progressive development of media has diluted the impact of the internet religion. Lastly, the Reformation of 16th and 17th centuries involved the full range of changes in the religious tenets and system, politics, economics, ideology, culture and nation-states, while the influence of internet religion is currently limited mainly to the field of communication. Therefore, internet religion has merely caused changes in means of communication and socializing, rather than fundamental change of social culture including religion.

II. The Study Pathways of Religion and International Relations

For a long time, social science theories that rooted in the Western experience since the Enlightenment have treated religion as a dispensable epiphenomenon. The “Westphalian exile” of religion exists not only in the Western-dominated international relations system, but also in the Western social science theories. The current major theoretical schools of international relations research all ignore the role of religion and culture in international relations in varying degrees. In fact, in many non-Western countries and religious traditions, and even in some Western countries, modernization did not lead to the marginalization and privatization of religion. The massive global resurgence of religion not only has been described as “God’s revenge”, but also called the “revenge of the East” or “revolt against the West” (Thomas, 2005: 42). As the South African Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu said, “only the relentless secularism of so much of the media and in the social sciences, at least in Western countries, has hidden from view what those of us from Africa or other

parts of the developing world are privileged to know so well" (Thomas, 2005: x). The Boston University professor of sociology of religion Peter Berger critically pointed out that religious fundamentalism is not a stranger to history and reality; on the contrary, strangers are the ones who do not think so. Therefore, "the difficult-to-understand phenomenon is not Iranian mullahs but American university professors" (Johnson & Cox, 2003: 11-12).

Ironically, despite the prevalence of religion in American society, religious studies have a relatively marginal status in political science. Two scholars studying American politics and religions pointed out that "apart from economics and geography, it is hard to find a social science that has given less attention to religion than political science". They attribute the negligence of religion in American political science to the original premises of the political science discipline (under the impact of behaviorism, positivism, and modernization theory), the secular educational and social background of professional political scientists (i.e., most political scientists are either not interested in, or hostile to religion), the complexity of religious issues, especially the measurement of religion (such as the diversity of denominations) as well as the "event-driven" or "event-oriented" research cycles and agenda of political science (i.e., religion did not make headlines in the past, and often cannot achieve the research grants) (Wald & Wilcox, 2006: 523; 525-529). The dominant position of the secular world view in the university and the secularization of the American elite culture can be traced back to the European, especially German origin of the traditional disciplines, including political science. Some scholars see the "culture war" based on religious demarcation in the United States in recent decades as a "secondary and delayed response to that extraordinary migration of influential European intellectuals" to the

US in the 1930s^①.

The global resurgence of religion and the three religion-related events (the Iranian revolution in 1979, the dramatic changes in Eastern Europe in the early 1990s, and the 9/11 attacks on the United States) have shaken international relations theories. Neoliberal institutionalism theorist Robert Keohane admitted that, "the attacks of September 11 reveal that all mainstream theories of world politics are relentlessly secular with respect to motivation. They ignore the impact of religion, despite the fact that world-shaking political movements have so often been fueled by religious fervor." (Keohane, 2002: 29). Jonathan Fox studying religion and international relations, also noted that the 9/11 incident "helped the paradigm shift that breaks the taboo to openly connect religion and international relations, also opened up the gate to various aspects of the study of religious influence in international relations" (Fox, 2007: 48).

Nowadays, the Western academic research on religion and international relations has been quite different: relevant treatises or even series of treatises have been written on the subject. The data show that the number of writings on Islam and wars published after 9/11 has exceeded the sum of any previous period, and that the writings on religion and international affairs have increased from an average of one per year in the 1970s to the 1990s up to six per year. Since 2002, the average number of papers relevant to religion published in major international relations journals has surged from fifteen per year before 9/11 to sixty per year since those attacks (Hassner, 2011: 38-41). About the relevance of religion and international relations, the analyses of Western scholars, especially IR

^① Quoted from *Contemporary American Religion* (Religion in Contemporary America) lecture speech made by Professor John F. Wilson in April 2007 at the Center for American Studies of Fudan University, Chapter 4, pp. 46-47. The speech is to be published by the Shanghai People's Publishing House.

scholars vary but are virtually similar. It is generally believed that religion plays its role in the national foreign policy and international relations mainly through the religious views of the world, the source of legitimacy, institutions and leaders, group identity, soft power, transnational religious movements and issues (Xu, 2010: 45). The manifestations of the internationalization of religious issues are different, interactive and overlapping. Plus, religion often is not alone in playing its role. Nevertheless, used to be treated as a sub-class associated with secular phenomena including terrorism and civilization or a dependent variable, religion has reached a higher level in the study of international relations and become a relatively independent area of study.

However, religions and international relations are disciplines of low threshold, which a variety of disciplines can meddle in, so are the relevant researches. Scholars have different opinions on how to study religion and international relations, and have come up with various research paths and programs. Some scholars divide research of religion and international relations into two parts, the history and current status. One part is historical research that explores the religious roots of the concept of international relations as well as international relations, etc.; the other part is the research into the status quo, or mainly to explore the global resurgence of religion as well as the role of religion in the current international politics and international institutions (Kratochvil, 2009: 5-12).

The current academic research pathways are mainly still the path of the so-called "genealogy" or "archeology", namely the pathway of the above-mentioned "religious root", or "organizational path", the pathway to study various religious actors in international relations, and "positivism path", the pathway that base the study of religion and international relations on positivism and functionalism such as

rational choice theory. There are more or less defects of reductionism or "turning holy into secular" with all three pathways. In fact, between religion and international relations, there is a basic tension, for there is "no method of resolving the conflict between the transcendental and secular, on ontological or epistemological grounds" (Kubalkova, 2003: 89). The research methods of religion are generally grouped into three paths: humanities, theology and social science (or empirical). As a social science, it is easier for the scientific (or empirical) religious studies to be accepted in international relations, but it is more difficult for humanities and theological studies to be included. Therefore, the previous two turns of the international relations study, "political economy turn" and "sociology turn", as "similar items merger", were relatively easy. Although the "religion turn" of international relations has been proposed, they are "heterogeneous items", and thus the merger is more difficult. While promoting interdisciplinary research and breaking disciplinary boundaries of international relations, they also face the feasibility of non-empirical research of religion and international relations (Xu, 2010: July 8).

Some scholars have critically summarized other methodologies of the current study on religion and international relations. For instance, political scientist Ron E. Hassner proposed three kinds of routes of religion and international relations study: broad, deep, and thick. Researchers taking the "broad route" focus on the international relations arena without questioning religion itself. The analysis tends to highly prioritize religion to explain the role of religion as a part of secular life as its social, economic or political impact. The representatives and writings of this route are the originators of the "clash of civilizations" theory, Samuel Huntington and the "Culture and Religion in International Relations" series by Palgrave Macmillan. A more plain explanation is probably that this route only "sees the

woods of international relations without seeing the trees of religion". Researchers who take the "deep route" usually focus on a religious movement or a detailed study of a regional religion, but have no induction and overall conclusions in the field of international relations. The representative works of this route are a multi-volume study of the religious fundamentalism presided over by American scholars of religion study Martin Marty and Scott Appleby, as well as the famous research entitled *The Shia Resurgence*. Although these studies are authoritative religious studies, they fail to learn by analogy, to extract the universal theory and make a contribution to IR theory studies. What the scholar advocated an eclectic route, the so-called "thick route". Such a route combines the deep route of in-depth research into religion that focuses on the domestic and regional levels and the broad route with an emphasis on positivism, as well as international and universal orientation. Also, reflectivist and positivist approaches, religious epistemology and international relations epistemology should be fused on each intermediate level of the research process from national to regional onto international. Representatives of this route are the scholars studying religious terrorism, such as Mark Juergensmeyer, and those studying religious reform, such as Daniel Philpott. Although the term "thick" grew out of the term "deep description" from the famous anthropologist Clifford Geertz, the five letters in the alphabet have deeper meanings, representing respectively theology, hierarchy, iconography or symbol, ceremony and knowledge or belief. As such, it is stressed that the broad theories that explain the phenomenon of international relations need to be extracted from detailed focus on the religious case studies (Hassner, 2011: 43-51).

Although the thick route tries to balance the two studies of religion and international relations, it has not yet responded to the

question of how the theory of international relations should treat and deal with religion and the global resurgence of religion. A decade after scholars announced that religion has returned to international relations, religion still only has a relatively limited impact on the discipline of international relations. "The mainstream of international relations scholars still finds it difficult to include religious issues into their usual conceptual framework". And the three major paradigms (realism, liberalism and constructivism) in international relations not only have failed in "providing clear guidelines" for such integration, and in some cases also imply that "the status of religion may not have been admitted in its logic paradigm". Jack Snyder, an international relations scholar at Columbia University summarized the four research pathways or attitudes of international relations theorists towards religion: (1) to discuss the role of religion in national systems in the traditional paradigms, which can be called old school; (2) religion should replace the existing paradigm and become the main prism through which to observe international relations, which is called transformational school; (3) advocate to adjust the basic view of looking at the world for religion's sake, and at the same time to absorb the insights of the traditional paradigms, which can be called compromise or amending school; (4) to avoid paradigm problem and to study the more targeted assumptions with religion as either the independent variable or the dependent variable, namely the practical school (Snyder, 2011: 2-3; Bellin, 2008: 313-347). The difference between the transformational school and others is whether to "reconstruct the discipline" by religious factors (i.e., use religion as a non-positivist guide to redefine and transform the discipline of international relations, such as the establishment of international politics theology^① and other programs), or to "face up" to religion and

^① Here the term "theology" does not refer to a belief system ; it does not involve

incorporate it into international relations (i.e., make religion an important object of study, or make it mainstream in the study of international relations). The other three, especially the compromise or amending school, believe that although three theoretical paradigms of international relations seem to neglect or even abandon religion, in fact they have offered “the solid bedrock on which to build a framework for studying religion and international relations”, and religious studies are completely helpful to “constitute the core assumptions in each of the major disciplinary paradigms”, and can enrich IR scholars’ “paradigmatic insights” (Snyder, 2011: 6-7). The mainstream scholars of international relations appeared to mainly agree with the latter but not the former, and thus the global resurgence of religion is at best only partly “subversive” to the discipline of international relations.

The intervention of IR theory is no doubt an important factor in deepening the development of the study of religion and international relations and the “mainstreaming” of religion in the IR discipline. The author has pointed out that the study of religion and international relations or international issues has a narrow sense and a broad sense. In the narrow sense, religion and international relations study can only refer to the research of international religious issues based on international relations or political science. In the broad sense, religion and international relations study refers to the researches on international religious issues by other disciplines outside the discipline of international relations. In terms of issues, the aforementioned fields can also be divided into “main topics” and

the premise of religion or is based on religion, but rather refers to the study on the “ought-to-be” ignored by the positivist social science research methods. Vendulka Kubalkova, “Towards an International Political Theology,” pp.79-105; Terry Nardin, “Epilogue,” in Pavlos Hatzopoulos & Fabio Petito, eds., *Religion in International Relations: The Return from Exile*, pp. 277-278.

“common topics”^①. Such distinctions might be arbitrary, but they help us to understand the current situation and prospects of the religious and international studies. Overall, religion and international relations research in the narrow sense was carried out rather late. The situation has begun to change only since the end of the 20th century, especially since the 9/11 attacks. The religion and international relations research in the broad sense has been carried out earlier and is relatively more developed. This is mainly due to the contribution of the theology/philosophy, religion studies, sociology, history, diplomacy and other disciplines. In the West, the two types, i.e. the narrow and the broad sense of research can be said to be evenly divided. In fact, many treatises are the result of both types of research. As a discipline, it is impossible for international relations to take on everything in the field of research. However, the study of religion and international relations can only get the indispensable and even more powerful tools of analysis by being fully integrated into the international relations discipline (Xu, 2010: 48-49).

III. Impact of the Return of Religion in International Relations on China

With the global resurgence of religion since the 1970s, especially since the end of the Cold War, Chinese society has also entered a period of unprecedented development and transition. Regarding the economy, China has replaced Japan to become the second largest

^① “The main topics” refer to the religion and international relations research topics led by international relations, including religion and the contemporary international system, the international system, national/international security, diplomacy, geopolitics, etc.; “Common topics” refer to the religion and international relations research topics that other disciplines have fully dealt with or even dominated, such as religion and global governance, international organizations, globalization, international law, international conflict and dialogue.

economy in the world. Politically, China has become a successful example of the developing and new rising countries. Even sayings like the “Chinese experience” and “Beijing Consensus” have spread internationally. Culturally, there has been a large-scale “going-out” strategy of Chinese culture following the economic “going-out” strategy. The increasing number of Confucius Institutes all over the world is the clear example of such a strategy. Religiously, a variety of authoritative data indicate that China is not only a traditional, but also an emerging “religious country”. The growth of mainstream religions, the rise of new religions, and the revival of folk beliefs are intertwined (Jin & Qiu, 2008; 2009; 2010; 2011), becoming an integral part of the global resurgence of religion. The return of religion in international relations, the politicization trend of religion, as well as the changes in the pattern of religious developments have made religion an outstanding problem in China’s domestic and foreign affairs. Religion involves the spiritual needs and lifestyle of billions of people. It is related to the overall work of the party and the country in the political and social spheres, and also one of the five major relationships (that is, the political, ethnic, religious, and class relations and the relations between compatriots at home and abroad) that need to be fully grasped and correctly handled in the united front work of the Communist Party of China. Therefore, if “international relations cannot be understood without taking religion into account” (Fox & Sandler, 2004: 7), it would also have been impossible for us to understand the current Chinese society had we ignored religion.

The global resurgence of religion has exerted some impact on the religious ecology and the political and religious patterns in China. Firstly, for a long time the Chinese government had banned foreign church missionaries; missionaries no longer constituted the spiritual bond between China and foreign countries. However, since the reform

and opening-up, the Chinese and foreign religious exchanges have entered a "post-missionary era". Substantive religious exchanges are more diverse and complex than ever before, although the Western and Oriental Christian churches have receded into the background (Xu, 2011: 30-31). The transnational dissemination of religion has broken the relatively stable religious ecology before China's reform and opening-up, has formed a rather large impact on the religious layout of the country, and created tension in the current model of religion management. Secondly, because of the accessible dissemination of internet religion as well as its open, virtual, transnational and permeable properties, the laws and regulations that limit the current religious activities are flawed, which also poses a challenge to Chinese government's religious and internet management. Thirdly, since the end of the Cold War, religion has become increasingly significant in the foreign policy of the West, especially in the US. The "gospelized" US foreign policy has resulted in religion being a major problem in Sino-US relations. This has not only made China one of the "countries of particular concern" on "religious freedom", but has also resulted in the "internationalization" of the China's religion issues and generated great concern within the international community. Fourth, the international religious movement, as well as domestic and foreign religious extremist forces, has confronted China with a situation where "traditional security threats and non-traditional security threats are intertwined" (Hu, 2005: June 27) in the field of national security. With international political and religious forces adding fuel to the flames, the political and violent actions towards China from the religious extremism, ethnic separatism, and terrorism have shown a trend of continuous escalation, which has clearly constituted the most direct, sudden and violent threat to China's national security. Also, the diverse international religious human rights movement and religious

NGOs are usually non-violent, but their influence is larger or has broad popular support. What they also have is the capability to boost "color revolution", and therefore constitute a more recurring factor affecting China's social stability. In fact, in terms of China's national security, violent organizations often use the internet and other modern means of science and technology as well as the support of religious freedom advocacy groups to conduct their activities (Xu, 2010: 163-164).

As the carrier of the traditional culture, the spiritual bond of national unity, as well as a factor shaping the international image of China, the Chinese religion now enjoys an unprecedented space for development in the era of globalization. China is a country with religious diversity. The growth of China's national strength has created the conditions for the external projection of religious influence. The growth of various religions in China and the vast number of overseas believers of China's various religions and folk beliefs, have constituted an intangible line of defense of its national sovereignty and interests. When talking about the growth of the Chinese Christians, Andrew F. Walls reminded people not to forget that "Chinese Christianity is not confined to China; the Christian portion of the huge Chinese population across Asia and beyond is now substantial", constituting an important development of Christianity in the 20th century. He even believes that in terms of theological creativity, the sustained interaction of Christian thought with the ancient cultures of Asia could open an era to "parallel the encounter with Hellenistic culture in the second and third and fourth centuries." (Walls, 2011: 74-75).

Various Chinese traditional religions and faiths with a longer history as well as a larger number of believers have become the main way in which the ordinary people of other countries, especially

neighboring countries, understand and make contact with China, which is an important resource of the Chinese public and people-to-people diplomacy. Coexisting with the global "China economic circle" and "cultural China" and as their value and institutional basis, "religious China" or "believing China" is growing. Today, China is already the world's largest producer and exporter of the Bible, and one the world's largest producers and exporters of religious products, ranging from Buddhist holy objects and Indian icons to Christmas gifts, but these are merely the commercialization or materialization of religion, which do not have the theological and cultural added value. Religions in China are still in the stage of extensive and introverted development and do not have the full capacity to engage in international religious dialogue. However, the case will be greatly improved with Chinese religion increasingly going-out. Over time, the traditional philosophy and even the current practice of China's religions are bound to have an important impact on the world religious exchange and dialogue. The current religious development of China also challenges the international formula that "once a minority religious group in a given country reaches 10-20 percent of the population, it can sufficiently resist policies promoting religious harmony and can even sustain struggles for liberation"^①. In addition, this development will help China to realize the change of status from a provider of global religious commodities to a provider of institutional religious public goods.

At present, China's international participation is no longer limited

^① Scott M. Thomas, "A Globalized God: Religion's Growing Influence in International Politics," p.101. Another scholar of religious studies also claims that missions and religious immigration movement may cause the global political upheavals. For instance, in the 25 most populous countries in the world at present, serious opposition between Christianity and Islam appear in at least ten of them. These countries are likely to be "stages of serious religious conflicts". See Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 166-167.

to the political and economic spheres, but increasingly involved in the field of culture and religion as well. With the in-depth development of China's reform and opening up, in the post-Cold War period, China's national interests has changed its priority and become increasingly diversified. To safeguard the country's sovereignty and unity, to adhere to the so-called socialist system with Chinese characteristics, to promote the harmonious development of economics and society as well as to shape the international image of the country, have constituted the four elements of China's current national interests. The national interests are formed by a dual construction. When the internal survival and economic development are guaranteed, external constructive factors such as international position and image will naturally be added to the pursuit of the national interests. International image is an important source of the soft power of a country, and the religious image is a significant component of the international image. To deal with religious issues at home and abroad has therefore become an important part of the China's effort in establishing its image as a responsible country of the international community (Xu, 2008: April 3; Xu & Zhang, 2009: 113). Chinese scholar of religious studies Zhuo Xinping has pointed out that to understand and deal with the domestic religious issues we must consider their international significance and influence, and that the treatment of religious issues should be linked with China's "culture strategy", so as to bring into play the positive role of religion as an important component of China's "soft power" (Zhuo, 2008: 276-277). China's "going-out" strategy should be well-rounded and systematic. It is difficult to conceive sustainable economic strategy of going-out without the support of the traditional culture and equally difficult to envisage the traditional culture without religious and values background. Religion has always been an important part of the

cultural exchange between China and foreign countries. Public as well as people-to-people diplomacy has been the major way in which religions and religious groups get involved in China's foreign relations whether in the past or at present. However, this is ignored by all social circles and has become the short board or missing item in China's public diplomacy practice and theoretical research.

The Chinese and foreign religious exchanges in the "post-missionary era" greatly promoted China's religious studies and bridged the gap with the international academic community. The religious studies standards of Chinese universities and research institutions have gradually risen. Some colleges and universities have a number of the religious studies program and the courses worthy compared with the US private comprehensive university, and may even be greater. This, to some extent, means that in the era of global resurgence of religion, Chinese universities and research institutions have high forward-looking ability and adaptability. They not only have the capability to provide academic support and talent pool for China's foreign strategy in the field of religion, but they themselves have also become a platform of Chinese and foreign academic exchanges and authoritative sources of mutual recognition in the field. International relations and religious studies, one new discipline and one old, the two disciplines are relatively popular academic disciplines in China, but between the two disciplines there is little interaction, described as the "cars running on two different paths" (Xu, 2010: 47-48)^①. In recent years, many scholars, especially researchers of religious studies have actively participated in the discussion of religion and international relations, shifting the focus from "heaven" to "earth". Towards religious issues, international relations scholars'

^① About the current situation and problems of domestic religious studies and international relations.

attitude has changed from complete negligence to paying some attention, turning from the "secular" to "sacred". Not only is there a tendency between religious studies and international relations of learning from each other, but there are also trends of interaction between the wide and narrow senses of religion and international relations study, that is, between the broad and deep route of research. Owing to the impact of the global resurgence of religion, based on the needs for developing the interdisciplinary studies as well as the profound Chinese religious traditions, and also driven by China's foreign strategic interests, the study of religion and international relations might attract greater academic attention in the coming future.

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