

Understanding and Respect: On Establishing a Chinese Discourse System for Middle East Studies¹

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Abstract: *In the process of establishing a Chinese discourse system for Middle East studies, the following fundamental factors should be taken into consideration. The guideline should be the mainstream of Chinese humanistic philosophy. Unlike the commanding and thrusting discourse systems of the US and some European countries, the Chinese discourse system highlights equality in communication. It is likely to be more popular with the Islamic countries in the Middle East and therefore receive serious concern and should be cherished by the Chinese academicians of Middle East studies. We should pay attention to all the documents and materials from the research topic, attaching great importance to referencing documents and materials from abroad as well as the established terminology and translated terms of the Chinese Muslims, which are different from those in Protestant Christianity or Catholic Christianity. We should also follow the current spirit in the process of establishing a Chinese discourse system for Middle East studies. In the background of economic globalization, the themes of the times emphasize peace and development and the trend of democratization of international relations. In analyzing the contradiction between the US and the Islamic world, we should consider their interpretation of the present spirit and their disparities because it relates to their core values. The study of how to establish a discourse system for Middle East studies in China, a socialist country, is actually one part of the study of the essence of socialism with "Chinese characteristics."*

Key Words: *Chinese Discourse System for Middle East Studies; Chinese Humanistic Philosophy; Documents and Materials; Respect and Understanding; Spirit of the Times*

In December 2006, I attended a forum of Cross-religious dialogue and communication held by Christian and Islamic institutes in Shanghai. The topic of

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the forum was “Harmonious coexistence”. I have been studying the Middle East for many years, and I am quite aware of how much religion is involved in the Middle East issue. Yet, I simply have not been able to figure out how to establish a Chinese discourse system with the Chinese humanistic philosophy as the guideline. This forum of religious dialogue and communication gave me a deep impression, i.e. Chinese religious people and scholars are trying to establish an academic and practical exchange platform by combining the contemporary humanistic philosophy and core values of China on the basis of their study of religious history or religious experience. This forum inspired me the idea that when we are establishing our discourse system for Middle East studies, we should take the mainstream humanistic philosophy of China as the guideline, pay attention to the documents and materials from our research object and make sure that it complements fundamental factors such as “the spirit of the times”. In this article I am sketching my thoughts about the above points and I look forward to your criticism or remarks.

I. Chinese Humanistic Philosophy as the Guideline

The guiding humanistic philosophy in research affects the nature of the discourse system and, what is more important, the thinking methodology in the development of the subject. Humanistic philosophy means, in essence, the concepts, values and principles that function when we are thinking intelligently about a topic. At the turn of the new millennium, the United Nations passed the *United Nations Millennium Declaration* on September 8, 2000. The Declaration is divided into eight parts and there are totally 32 items. The very first section of the Declaration is about its identified “Values and Principles”³. Then it articulates the major common goals of the new millennium for humankind such as peace, security, disarmament, development, poverty eradication, the protection of our common environment, human rights, democracy and good governance. As these values and principles are suitable for every country in the world, they can undoubtedly guide all countries in making policies and should be taken as references for each country. No country should work against them. In regard to studying the Middle East, the value “tolerance” in the *Millennium Declaration* deserves our significant attention. “Human beings must respect one other, in all their diversity of belief, culture and language. Differences within and between societies should be neither feared nor repressed, but cherished as a precious asset of humanity. A culture of peace and dialogue among all civilizations should be actively promoted.” In my view, it places a prerequisite for all countries to study the Middle East issue, that is, respect

³ Shanghai Institute for International Studies, *2001 Survey of International Affairs* (Shanghai: Shanghai Education Publishing House, 2001), pp. 426-433.

and understanding. The *Declaration* has clearly elaborated the meaning of “respect”. “Understanding” is apparently the intellectual foundation of why national and cultural differences “should be neither feared nor repressed”.

Since humankind entered the 21st century, the Middle East has been a hot spot in the world and also a major concern of the US global strategy because of the 2001 9/11 attack. Since then, the Afghan Iraq War and the Israel-Lebanon wars have all been related to Islam. With the US as the only super power at that time and the dominant speaker among the western media, many Middle East countries were labeled “rascal” or “evil” countries. Islam was directly or indirectly tied to extremism, terrorism or even fascism. Islamic countries and people became what should be reformed in the *Greater Middle East Initiative* put forward by the US. We should note the following two phenomena:

One is the excuse that the American government gave to launch the Iraq War in 2003, “the regime of Saddam Hussein possesses weapons of mass destruction. Saddam Hussein had long-established ties with al Qaeda” has been proven to lack any proof. In the United States, the media support for the Iraq War has fallen sharply since 2003. Even the former Chairman of the Federal Reserve of the US Alan Greenspan also clearly pointed out in his memoir *The Age of Turbulence: Adventures in a New World*, “I am saddened that it is politically inconvenient to acknowledge what everyone knows: the Iraq war is largely about oil.”⁴ Therefore, the Iraq War was actually a turning point of the alteration of the once US promotion of the “anti-terrorism war” started by the George Walker Bush administration after the breakout of the 9/11 attacks or it became an excuse to cover its real purpose of achieving national interests and domination in international affairs. However, if we look back carefully, we have to ask why the US won almost all the support from the Republican and Democratic congressional leaders, the media and the general American public and why so many countries were willing to cooperate and provide the US with human and physical resources to fight this probably unjust and immoral war.

The second phenomenon is the fact that much of American media’s long-held belief that the Islamic Middle East is regarded by the American government as adversary regimes or non governmental organizations basically remains the same. Although a large number of new extreme conservatives have left the White House, it is highly unlikely to mean that the American government will completely abandon its “unilateral and bellicose” policy. If decision-makers declare that Iran, Hizballah or Hamas has broken through the bottom line of American interest or core values the media in the US and Europe will quite likely follow suit.

In fact, the deeper reason behind all of this has to be found in the Islamic-related negative Oriental discourse system that has evolved into an age-old

⁴ “Bush Surprised By Greenspan’s Criticism”, *Wenhui Daily*, September 19, 2007.

tradition in the US and Europe.

Edward Said, a well-known scholar of Orientalism, made an incisive remark in book, *Orientalism* first published in 1978 that the Islamic Orient that he cared about was, for the citizens of the west who are living in an electronic age, “becoming closer to real life, no longer a myth but a land broken because of the interests of the West and the United States in particular,” “one aspect of the electronic, post-modern world is that there has been a reinforcement of the stereotypes by which the Orient is viewed. Television, the films, and all the media’s resources have forced information into more and more standardized molds. So far as the Orient is concerned, standardization and cultural stereotyping have intensified the hold of the nineteenth-century academic and imaginative demonology of ‘the mysterious Orient’.” He also pointed out, “Three things have contributed to making even the simplest perception of the Arabs and Islam into a highly politicized, almost raucous matter: one, the history of popular anti-Arab and anti-Islamic prejudice in the West, which is immediately reflected in the history of Orientalism; two, the struggle between the Arabs and Israeli Zionism, and its effects upon American Jews as well as upon both the liberal culture and the population at large; three, the almost total absence of any cultural position making it possible either to identify with or dispassionately to discuss the Arabs or Islam.”⁵

To sum up, there seems to be such a prevailing view of how those policies about the Middle East were made: the West, especially the United States, on the one hand, driven by its pursuit of interests, concocted relevant policies, and on the other hand asked all of its media to stereotype the Arabs and Islam into more and more standardized molds of demonization and has encouraged the already existing anti-Arab and anti-Islamic prejudice so that policies are developed before the supportive or indifferent public has become sufficiently questioning them. The formation of such an environment of policy-making, according to Said, originated from the history of the study of the Orient in Europe and the United States. A closer look may lead us to the conclusion that they controlled, rebuilt and ruled the Orient through this power discourse system, which served as a means of expression, demonstration, communication and description. It appears always to place the interest of the West at the core, with a desire or purpose of controlling, maneuvering and even annexing these countries into the western model of democracy⁶. This discourse system is a custom or tradition as well as a vital part in the politics or academics even of today’s US. To be honest, it is hardly imaginable for the West, the United States in particular, to change this deep-rooted discourse system for it has been the most proficient and profitable tool to help them obtain interests around the world.

⁵ Edward .W. Said, *Orientalism*, Trans, Yugen Wang , (Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, 1999), pp.34-35.

⁶ *Ibid*, p.16, p.28.

With China, it is a different story. In ancient times, the Chinese and the people in the Middle East had close contact in both cultures and civilizations. The modern history of the two peoples are quite similar, both facing the common mission of development over the past half century. Exchanges and cooperation have led to a profound traditional friendship between the two peoples. Therefore, there must have been a mutual discourse system with its own characteristics.

Although the academic research of the development of Islam in the Middle East has not been fully implemented in China, the academic community has its own common sense on many issues. In the *China Islamic Encyclopedia* we note, "Philosophy and Social Science '7th five-year Plan' Key national Program", is a significant book which took over a hundred reputed scholars six years to compile. It says, "In late Ming dynasty and early Qing dynasty, the Chinese Islam came into being with its unique characteristics due to the development of Hui nationality society and the integration of Islamic culture and traditional Chinese culture."⁷ "The academic activity of interpreting the doctrines, dogma, history and culture of Islam while seeking reference to traditional Chinese ideology and culture began around late Ming dynasty and continued through Qing dynasty, the Republic of China. It had developed for about 300 years when the People's Republic of China was founded. Among the scholars who were "masters of four major religions (Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism and Islam)" and "interpreted religious doctrines by referring Confucianism," Daiyu Wang (about 1584-1670) and Zhi Liu (about 1655-1754) were two of the most outstanding ones. Wang "combined Islamic doctrines with traditional Chinese culture especially the Neo-Confucianism in Song Dynasty and Ming Dynasty." He elaborated the ontology, cosmology and epistemology of Islam and laid the theoretic foundation for establishing a framework of the Chinese Islamic philosophy and dogmatics. His theory was closely connected to the Chinese reality, which shows the interactive and complementary relationship between Islam and Chinese culture in the spread of Islam in China. His research of Chinese Islam was the first of its kind. "*The Real Record of the Last Prophet of Islam* by Zhi Liu is highly thought of as "the first biography written by the Chinese"⁸. I would like to point out: one, that the academic activities of studying Islam in China were also the Sinicization process of Islam; two, the study of Islam in China paid much attention to the integration of Islam and the mainstream Chinese cultural concepts from the beginning, seeking mutual complementation instead of disparities. Therefore, modern Chinese research discourse system featuring these traits is definitely different from the Orientalism discourse system that European colonists created in order to control and plunder the Islamic areas.

⁷ *China Islamic Encyclopedia* (Chengdu: Sichuan Lexicographical Publishing House, 1994), p.755, p.762.

⁸ *Ibid*, p.580, p.319.

Since the 20th century, apart from the translation of classic Islamic works, Chinese scholars also developed the historical, cultural and national fields so that the Chinese people would have a better understanding of Islamic culture. In the discourse system of these academic achievements, the tone has always been respect and mutual equality. After the foundation of New China, the diplomatic relations between China and Middle East countries developed rapidly and bilateral ties expanded into political, diplomatic, trade, energy, culture, sports and health fields. The number of published books, translations and theses on the Middle East has been consistently on the rise. The amount of academic achievements has shown an obvious increase since 1979. Besides pertinent magazines of the study of the Middle East such as *West Asia and Africa* and *Arab World Studies*, we can also find articles about the Middle East in comprehensive magazines like *Studies in World Religion*, *Journal of Hui Muslim Minority Studies*, *North West Ethno-national Studies* and *Social Sciences in Xinjiang*. China's five principles of peaceful coexistence in its foreign policy and its independent peaceful diplomacy policy, seen in the eyes of scholars of Middle East studies, voluntarily develop our unique research style of taking the Chinese humanistic philosophy and values as our guideline and insisting on supporting the principle of seeking common grounds while shelving differences so as to show respect to other countries and people. The discourse used here tries its best to be objective and accurate in the hope of increasing the Chinese people's understanding of other civilizations and reinforcing mutual friendship. This discourse with Chinese characteristics is not only seen in the intercourse between China and Islamic countries and diplomatic documents and media reports over the past half-century, but also often seen in the works of the literati⁹.

In recent years, China has set up a core value system which is in concert with the values and principles in the *United Nations Millennium Declaration* as well as China's practical situation of promoting the construction of modernization¹⁰. In *China's African Policy*, the very first item is "Sincerity, Friendship and Equality. China adheres to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, respects African countries' independent choice of the road of development and supports African countries' efforts to grow stronger through unity."¹¹ In *The Declaration of the Forum on Cooperation between China and Arab States*, which was passed in September 2004, it was also clearly stipulated that the two sides should "respect the culture and civilization individualities of all countries and safeguard the civilization variety of mankind; we call for dialogue and exchanges between different civilizations and

⁹ Tieying Ge, "The Arab Story—Arab Literature in China," Vol. 5, *Love of China* (Beijing: Capital Normal University Publishing House, 2007).

¹⁰ "Decisions by the Central Committee of the CPC on Some Major Issues in Building a Harmonious Socialist Society," *People's Daily*, October 19, 2006.

¹¹ *China's African Policy*, in Shanghai Institute for International Studies, *2007 Survey of International Affairs* (Shanghai: Shanghai Century Publishing Limited Company, Shanghai Lexicographical Publishing House, 2007), p.474.

an international environment of cooperation and harmony so as to promote peace and development of mankind.”¹² Exchanges and cooperation on the basis of mutual respect and better understanding are positive practices appreciated in both the Sino-African and Sino-Arab relations. The discourse system appearing in bilateral exchanges is in line with historical traditions and mutual values and current interests as well. Both sides should safeguard and hold on to this significant resource. In the beginning of the 21st century, hot-spot issues in the Middle East such as the nuclear issue of Iran, the rebuilding of Iraq, the peace talk between Palestine and Israel and the Darfur issue in Sudan are becoming more and more internationally interconnected. China has proved in its active participation that the Chinese discourse system featuring equality is more likely to be accepted by the Islamic countries in the Middle East than the frequent commanding and thrusting discourse system of Europe and the United States, which offers one more reason that Chinese scholars studying the Middle East should pay attention to this valuable system.

II. Valuing Documents and Materials from the Research Topic

Our research of Islam began with translating and interpreting religious scriptures. These scholars include Daiyu Wang, Zhi Liu, Zunqi Wu (about 1598-1698) and Dexin Ma (1794-1874) during the Ming Dynasty and the Qing Dynasty and Jingzhai Wang (1879-1949), Shiqian Pang (1902-1978) and Jian Ma (1906-1978). They all had a determined academic motive so that they paid great attention to the authority of the original work or translations, most of which were carefully chosen on their visits abroad or when they were studying abroad. One flaw of this emphasis on first-hand materials is that their research achievements might be influenced by the knowledge structures and mentality of the translator or scholar, but they are nothing like the European Orientalism with “political imperialism controlling the whole research field, people’s imagination and academic institutes.”¹³ In that sense, the historical and academic values are more objective and convincing.

After 1949, the concern of the Middle East in China shifted from only the religious perspective to many more fields. After the establishment of diplomatic relation between China and Egypt, generations of Arabic and Persian learners began to take diplomatic, trade, cultural, journalistic and educational posts and the exchanges with Islamic countries in the Middle East kept on increasing. In the field of academic studies, however, there were only the translations of *The Koran*, *The*

¹² *The Declaration of the Forum on Cooperation between China and Arab States*,

<http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/chn/ziliao/wzzt/2006zt/zahzltdejbjhy/zywx/hycg/1253844.htm>

¹³ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, Trans, Yugen Wang, (Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, 1999), p.18.

Arabian Nights, some poems and short stories. Due to objective reasons, there were no translations of academic works of Middle East countries and there were not many academic research achievements about the Middle East in a real sense, either. Since the 1970s, in order to increase China's understanding of other countries, the Party Central Committee arranged the translation of foreign historical and geographical works. At that time, I was asked to translate *The History of Maghreb* and later I also took part in the translation of two geographical works *Sudan* and *Egypt* at the invitation of Northwest University. Nevertheless, these translations were marked "Intra-limit Issue," "This book is only for intra-reference. Please do refer to the original work for quotations and indicate the origins from the original edition." Apparently it would be rather difficult to carry out the research of the Middle East just relying on these two books. What's more, there were few editions of the original works to choose from. The translator could not refute but do what he or she was told. As a result, these translations were of little value or use for academic research. China's opening and reform policy got eliminated many handicaps in scientific research. It was not until then that cultural and academic activities really started to thrive in an unprecedented manner. In 1990, I published an article, *Ten Years of Hard Work for a Harvest*, in the 2nd issue of *Arab World Studies*. After a brief introduction of the enormous translation achievements of Arab literature, I mentioned a number of academic translations such as *Arab-The Civilization History Islam* by Zhong Na, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta* by Jinpeng Ma and the two translations of *The Koran* by Jian Ma and Song Lin. I also related some academic works compiled by Chinese scholars, *The War History of the Middle East since World War Two* by Guoxing Ji and Hefeng Chen, *A Concise History of Arab in Medieval Times* by Yingde Guo, *A Panorama of Islam* by Yijiu Jin, to name a few. The following decade saw an obvious decrease of translations of Middle East contemporary literature after China's entry into the intellectual property organizations under the United Nations. However, the Gulf War once again drew the world's attention to the Middle East. During the first years of the 21st century, the American attempt to control the Islamic world and its reaction to these attempts spurred a wave of clashes. Surprisingly, the number of theses and books about the Middle East increased considerably in China; among them there are biographies of leaders of the Middle East and various works about international anti-terrorism, the history, society, religion, political regimes, culture, literature, and art of the Middle East. Furthermore, there are many excellent works during this period. It is, we could say, the most prosperous period ever since the beginning of our study of the Middle East.

Despite the above achievements and the prosperity of our research, I would like to mention two problems that we should notice in establishing a Chinese discourse system for Middle East studies:

One is that we must keep a balance in quoting foreign documents or materials.

It is impossible to study the Middle East without mentioning the US for it plays a major role in many conflicts in the Middle East. In that sense, it is totally acceptable that we mention the US all along. To be frank, an unavoidable fact is that the international relations theory of the US, realism, neo-liberalism or constructivism, takes a strong position in the study of international relations and has an apparent influence on the policies and practice of the American government. However, Chinese scholars, who are supposed to observe the independent and peaceful foreign policy, should also take into account the feelings and reaction of the countries and people in the Middle East, the recipients of the Middle East policy of the US, as well as the views of the governments, scholars and the media in the Middle East. Otherwise, it would be impossible to be impartial in practice; without due respect and understanding of Middle East countries, it would be impossible to carry on the Chinese tradition of regarding all others as equals and the discourse system featuring fairness and objectivity. In some articles and books about the Middle East, I have seen American documents and materials everywhere but no materials from Middle East countries, not even a word from relevant translations. I have also read some program application forms, in which I found, more often than not that there were only the names of American or European books or papers in the introduction of oversea research while there was not even one article from the specified country. That, of course, is not right. Professor Yongnian Zheng at Nottingham University said in his article "We Must Guard against Americanization of China's Thinking," "the language of American social science is not universal. American concepts and theories represent the conclusions and abstractions of the American experience. Applying the full set of American social science concepts and theories mechanically to China is not only inappropriate as a means of understanding Chinese reality, but also for developing social sciences in China."¹⁴ Likewise, applying the full set of American concepts and theories mechanically to the Middle East cannot explain the current situation there, either. Moreover, policies made under American concepts and theories have met with many setbacks in the Middle East and they have to be adapted again and again.

For a long time, we have been suffering from a severe lack of first-hand materials from Middle East countries in our research and there are few translated theoretical works directly translated from Arabic or Persian. One reason is the fact that we are short of exchanges, translators and publication access. Our awareness of this problem must be enhanced if we want to change this situation. With its strategic position, resources and unique religious beliefs and values, the Middle East is attracting more attention from the international community. The modern history of the world shows that the rise of any power is impossible without the

¹⁴ Yongnian Zheng, "We Must Guard against Americanization of China's Thinking," *Lianhe Zaobao*, Singapore, August 21, 2007, and *The Reference News*, August 22, 2007.

Middle East. In order to realize our medium and long term goals of building a well-off society in an all-round way and promoting a harmonious world, it has become more importantly urgent for us to increase our political and economic cooperation and cultural dialogue with the Middle East. The materials issue is an urgent task that we must manage to complete so that our research of the Middle East may meet with the needs of the times or even take the lead while we may come to some forward-looking and strategic judgments. Of course, it is unrealistic to require all those who study the Middle East to be learners of the local languages in the Middle East. Yet the governments, research centers and mainstream media in the Middle East all have English websites; our researchers should take advantage of these websites for references. The Editorial Department of Xinhua News Agency also gathered and translated many highly valuable political comments and academic articles about the Middle East. The Al Jazeera channel in English has vast resources that can be tapped by opening the channel's website, www.AlJazeera/English.com. In the long run, more efforts should be made to strengthen our academic exchanges and cooperation with Middle East countries. We do not have enough institutes or personnel specialized in the study of the Middle East. Instead, much of this research work is taken up by those in the fields of international relations, diplomacy, economics, religion, strategy and other regional studies. It will be of great help for the establishment of a Chinese discourse system of the Middle East studies if these scholars could visit the Middle East from time to time in international exchanges, during which they could, at least, learn about the lifestyles and cultures of the local Muslims, listen to the analysis or comments of local scholars on affairs related to their countries or areas and systematically collect some relevant materials over time. I am sure it would be quite rewarding and mutually beneficial both for Middle East and Islamic scholars and the Chinese scholars dedicated to better understanding of Middle Eastern and Islamic cultures.

The other beneficial development is the start of modern study of the Middle East is in response to the need of Sinicization of Islam. What the scholars are concerned about is the existence and development of Chinese Islam. After three to four hundred years of academic accumulation, Chinese Muslims have developed a set of vocabulary and translated terms that are different from those in Protestant and Catholic Christianity. Chinese scholars or translators must notice the differences in their writings. For example, Zhenzhu (Allah) should not be written as God, Ibrahim should not be translated into Abraham and those terms already established by Chinese Muslims such as Adan (Adam), Musa (Moses), Maieryan (Maria) and Adianyuan (Eden) should be written as they are utilized by Muslims in China. Judging from the political perspective, this academic consideration is a necessity. Although originally a foreign religion to China, Islam has somehow undertaken Sinicization in its spread in China over thousands of years and the

general believers have long been integrated into the full Chinese family and formed a strong tradition of loving the country and their religion simultaneously. After all, Islam is an international religion, and the fastest growing religion in the world. The Chinese Muslims, more than two hundred million in total, have a strong emotional tie with Muslims overseas, especially Muslims in the Middle East. As a rule, their conditions often catch the attention of foreign media or relative organizations. Likely, Chinese Muslims also have shown their concern, more or less, about religious incidents happening abroad such as the cartoon case in which Danish papers reprinted negative cartoons against the Islamic prophet Muhammad, inappropriate comments of Pope Benedict, XVI, head of the Roman Catholic Church which he made early in his papacy about the Crusades and even the conflicts between the Shiite organizations of Lebanese Islam and the Christian dominated government. As a matter of fact, many famous Muslim scholars in China have been keeping an eye on the views and comments made by Chinese Middle East experts. Therefore, in our research of the Middle East, we must hold to the principle of taking both domestic and international politics into consideration, which is also an important guideline in the establishment of a discourse system with Chinese characteristics.

III. Following the Spirit of the Times

I mentioned above that I really admire the idea of “harmonious coexistence” advocated by Chinese religions because it reflects the trend and spirit of our time. “Harmonious” in “Harmonious coexistence” does not refer to the God of marriage in Chinese myth; it is short for “harmonious cooperation”. “Coexistence” is short for coexistence and development. “Harmonious coexistence” means for Chinese religions not only a summary of historical experiences but also a mainstream value in tune with the reality of contemporary China. It sheds light on the future developmental direction of all Chinese religions and meets with the historical progress that the international community seeks peace and development in the age of globalization.

At the macro level, our research of the Middle East and the following policy-making as well as the establishment of a Chinese discourse system for Middle East studies must meet with the grounding of economic globalization, the themes of the times, i.e., peace and development and follow the spirit of our time forged in the trend of democratization of international relations. In analyzing the contradiction between the US and the Islamic world, we should pay attention to their interpretation and disparities in terms of the spirit of the times for the latter reveals the core values of a country.

It is well known today that the Iraq War triggered by the US violated the

values and principles in United Nations Charter and the *Millennium Summit Declaration* and is also against the positive spirit of our times. The *Greater Middle East Initiative* that the US put forward after the Iraq War attempted to impose American values on Iraq and other Arabic and Islamic countries in the greater Middle East areas through its democratization procedure only to be refused or strongly modified by almost all the Arabic and Islamic countries. They publicly declared that "reform cannot be imposed by the outside" and "Democratic systems are not commodities for export to other nations." The real reason behind these statements is that the American way of disposing the "democratic deficit" in the Arabic and Islamic countries in the Middle East does not meet with the already existing core values of the area. Moreover, too many scandals and crimes happened along the American political rebuilding of a democracy model in Iraq. For instance, the maltreatment of prisoners in the Abu Ghraib Prison in Baghdad, the rapes of Iraqi women, slaughters of Iraqi civilians and so on have severely violated the mores of the Islamic society, which is one reason why the US was stuck in its Iraq security problem over the past several years. This fact clearly tells us that although the US, often acting against the tide of our times, overturned the Saddam Hussein regime with its mighty military strength but could never conquer or change the core values of the local people. Instead of bringing peace to the Middle East, the US caused the sharp rise of Islamic radicals abroad and increasing criticism and objection at home. It was soon proofed many defeats of the ruling Republican Party during the mid-term congressional elections in November 2006, and more recently in the US 2008 elections.

Under the heavy pressure of the US, the governments and the elite of the Arab and Islamic countries in the Middle East, on the one hand, are highly wary of current Middle East policy of the US and very careful about their response; on the other hand, they have realized that they are lagging behind the in-depth development of globalization and their theories. Government systems and mechanisms are also behind the times. So far they have brought forth such topics as how to realize modernization while maintaining the national culture and civilization individualities and the functions of culture in social reform. Apparently they also prefer to choose a suitable regime and developmental road through reform; yet the reform must meet with their Islamic beliefs, which have existed for more than 1400 years, and carry on the uniqueness of Arab and Islamic countries. The most difficult problem is how to express and interpret their core values with a discourse that follows the spirit of the times in the 21st century.

As an apocalyptic religion with a long history, Islam created a splendid Islamic civilization and gave much contribution to the progress of the human society. This civilization stands out with numerous classic works, achievements and notes of generations of masters in many different fields. The past half-century has witnessed the rapid increase of a large number of Islamic believers and Islam is

still spreading and expanding rapidly today. The root reason is that it can keep up with the progress of the times and adapt itself to the development of science and technology. This quality of advancing with the times is still alive mainly because of its developing jurisprudence and dogmatics. In other words, religious believers and scholars of religions closely watched the changes of the objective environment caused by social progress and they have frequently chosen appropriate contemporary doctrines from classic doctrines so as to give the believers the correct guidance. In practice, the religious people and scholars in the Middle East have come across many handicaps in carrying out such work.

We need not talk only about ancient times. Let us take the contemporary history for example. In the late 1970s, an Islamic movement happened after Iran's Islamic Revolution. This movement spread almost to the whole Middle East and North Africa. Scholars around the world, including Chinese scholars, have given it various names, the Islamic Renaissance or the Islamic Fundamentalism Movement. In nature, it was a mass movement of the Islamic people who were unsatisfied with their reality during that period. They fought for social justice and rejected external interventions. Despite the purpose of changing their situations, violence occurred because it was used by various extremists and clericalists. It was no easy job to study or discuss the adaptation of the reestablishment of core values in such a stormy environment. However, soon after Professor Samuel Phillips Huntington put forward "The Clash of Civilizations" in the 1990s and in his 1996 book by that name, Arab countries started to respond. In 1995 when I attended the annual conference of the Royal Academy for Islamic Civilization Research, Jordan, El Hassan bin Talal, Crown Prince of Jordan at that time, proposed "radical reform of Islam, reasonable interpretation of the Islamic doctrines of tolerance, peace, kindness, moderation and justice and learning from the strong points of other culture for the development of the Islamic people." He also quoted from the *Hadith* that Islam should "Seek knowledge even in China."¹⁵ The Islamic world came under unprecedented pressure after the occurrence of the 2001 9/11 attacks. However, all the Arab and Islamic governments declared in one voice that they strongly objected to terrorism in any form. Research institutes and the academic world also devoted themselves to promoting the Islamic doctrines of peace, moderation, toleration and the doctrine of the mean in the hope of eradicating extremist thoughts and behaviors that might lead to violence. Jordan initiated the "World Culture Forum" in 2002 and an international academic seminar about "Love in the Koran" in September, 2008. In April 2005, the Department of Religious Funds of the Sultanate of Oman held an academic seminar about "Globalization and Islam," calling for "the nine major balances between apocalypse (revelation of

¹⁵ Weilie Zhu, "Understanding Islam---Different Civilizations Should Talk," *The Far East View of the Middle East* (Shanghai: Shanghai Education Publishing House, 2000), p.294.

Allah) and reason, material and spirit, rights and duties, individual and the collective, prayer for revelation and responsibilities, classic scriptures and creativity, reality and the ideal, invariables and variables, and relation to dogmatics and the times." It is obvious that the governments, academic institutes and cultural elite are already sorting out the core values of the Islamic world and interpreting them in accordance with the spirit of the current times. The essence of the core values of the Islamic world, an important religious, ethnic and political force in the international arena, is undergoing changes and Middle East experts should attach serious attention to this phenomenon. It is also an important problem for Chinese scholars who should take notice in establishing a discourse system of Middle East studies.

However, the academics and those engaged in the translation of classic works are living in too small a world after all. We must make sure of two things in order to make the achievements of our scholars available to the Muslims: one is the guarantee of a supportive policy or system and the help of more popular and more influential resources such as the media and textbooks and the more important one, is the establishment of a good external environment.

In my opinion, there must be two basic internal and two basic external conditions for Islamic countries to carry out reform. The former include: one, they must uphold their inherent beliefs and values; two, they must uphold their identities, i.e., national attributes, state identities and cultural identities. The latter refer to: ending foreign occupation and ending foreign invasion and intervention. The Arabs, Persians and Turks who believe in Islam have strong and sincere feelings towards Islam and also a very strong national pride. In terms of sovereignty, territorial integration or their beliefs and core values they should never swallow the anger nor resign themselves to adversity; rather they should fight to the death, instead. That is why all Arab countries agree with fighting against terrorism in any form but never agree with ending the struggle against foreign invasion and terrorist occupation. Although suicide attacks have been strongly condemned by all countries, scriptures about resistance and killing oneself for justice are still often partially referred to during the religious services in some mosques or within some religious institutes. Therefore, the Palestine issue and the foreign occupation in Iraq must be adequately solved before peace returns to the Middle East or before the reform in Islamic countries can be implemented and integrated as soon as possible into the mainstream of peace and development in the age of globalization. Without this prerequisite, it would be difficult for the hot spots of the Middle East to cool down. Besides, the international community especially powers like Europe and the US must respect the religious beliefs, core values, national identities and cultural identities of the Arab and Islamic countries and the regimes and developmental roads which they have chosen for themselves instead of imposing their will on these countries as superior or commanding

masters.

Then, what humanistic philosophy should be the guideline in China's active participation in Middle East affairs and the establishment of its discourse system? On April 23, 2006, President Hu Jintao made an address entitled "Promoting Middle East Peace and Building a Harmonious World" to Saudi Arabia's Shura Consultative Council. I believe that it is a rather practical and enlightening sample address of such thinking. President Hu points out three conditions for building a harmonious world: that is, all countries should strive for harmonious coexistence among all countries, harmonious development of the global economy and harmonious progress of different civilizations. In view of the reality of the Middle East, President Hu said that efforts should be made in the three following aspects: realizing regional peace and stability, promoting mutual respect and encouraging cooperation in development.¹⁶ With the Chinese core value of establishing a harmonious world as the guideline, this speech is also in line with the spirit of the age. It was warmly welcomed and highly thought of by all the members of Arabia's Shura Consultative Council. It was unprecedented in the history of the Council, according to some Saudi Arabia friends of mine, for the Council members stood and applauded it for a long time.

I have been told by many ambassadors and scholars from the Middle East countries that China's promotion of harmony is in concert with the paramount object of Muslims and social justice. Therefore, we may well make the following summary: respect and understanding are the common basis of the harmonious society, which overlaps with the theory of "harmonious coexistence" advocated by religious people, and the harmonious region and harmonious world that should be reflected in the Chinese discourse system of Middle East studies; without respect and understanding there would be no equality and without equality there would be no fairness and social justice while fairness and social justice are an essential condition and object of establishing a harmonious society and a harmonious world.

The study of the establishment of a Chinese discourse system for Middle East studies is a significant program and also a part of the endeavor of interpreting the nature of socialism with "Chinese characteristics". This article makes some simple analysis of the program from the perspective of Middle East studies. Possibly some of the views here are lacking in depth. I look forward to constructive criticism so that we may contribute more to the establishment of a Chinese discourse system for Middle East studies.

¹⁶ Hu Jintao, "Promoting Middle East Peace and Building a Harmonious World," *People's Daily*, April 24, 2006.