

# Studies on Religion and China's National Security in the Globalization Era

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**Abstract:** *Since the 1970s, the global resurgence of religion, the politicization and internationalization of religion, as well as the raging violent religious extremism, have posed a severe challenge to national sovereignty and international order. The impact of religion on national security has become an inevitable problem facing the world. For more than 60 years since the founding of the PRC, religion has always been an important issue in its national security considerations, while "anti-foreign religious infiltration" and "combating the three forces of terrorism, national separatism and religious extremism" have become the official guidelines of discussions concerning religion and national security. In the context of the global resurgence of religion, changes in China's religious security situation and the development of non-traditional security studies, research on religion and China's national security has begun to break through the conventional pattern of "anti-filtration study" and started to become more academic and empirical. This paper has outlined the history and current situation of studies about religion and China's national*

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*security and discussed some basic issues of this research area.*

**Key Words:** *Religion; Religious Extremism; China's National Security; Securitization*

There has always been an indissoluble bond between religion and national security, which is determined by the very nature of religion. Religion and religious beliefs are often related to the core values of a nation. Compared to general social ideas and values, it is more durable and less flexible, since "political commitments with divine sanction often brook no compromise." (Banchoff, T., 2008: 3). Religion and religious organizations also have features such as mass mobilization, transnational connections as well as the power to relativize secular authority and legitimize violence. Hence religious issues are more likely to be deemed as national security issues or to be securitized. Therefore, "fundamental 'structural affinities'" (Laustsen, C. & Waever, O., 2003: 169; Liu, Q., 2011: 67-83) exist between religion which is sacred and national security which is realistic. Since the 1970s, the global resurgence of religion, the politicization and internationalization of religion, as well as the raging violent religious extremism, have posed a severe challenge to national sovereignty and international order. The impact of religion on national security has become an inevitable problem facing the world (Xu, Y., 2010: 160-168).

Before cutting to the chase, we first need to briefly define "national security", "religious security", "China's religious security" and other related concepts. "National security" usually refers to the circumstances where a state is in a situation which allows it to maintain its own existence, stability and development against internal and external serious security threats (Aydinli, E., & Rosenau, J., 2005: 32). According to Thomas Jefferson, a country's national security is to protect or seek to promote its vital interests, because "it perceives it as bearing directly on its continued existence as an independent entity, its territorial integrity, or on the lives of its people." (Farr, T., 2008: 309). "Religious security" is an important part

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of national security, meaning the stability of religious situation in a sovereign state which is free from serious threat of religious nature and external religious forces (Liu, Q., 2007). "China's religious security" means that the religious affairs in China are conducive to maintain the unity of the country, and that external forces do not constitute a serious threat to China's national sovereignty, political system and other core interests in the religious sphere (Xu, Y. & Zhang, Y., 2009: 110). In other words, "China's religious security" refers to "optimal coexistence" instead of the "dangerous confrontation" between different religions as well as between religion and China's national sovereignty, political and social systems and other basic social actors (Yu, X., 2004).

It should be noted that the definition of religious security is often selective, or is not comprehensive. This is because these definitions describe a unidirectional relationship between religion and national security, meaning that they mainly refer to the impact of religion on government, yet less to the impact of government on religion. In fact, a country's religious security at least includes the following three levels of interaction. 1. The survival of religion or belief is subject to internal (e.g. other religions, beliefs or actors) or external (e.g. state, technology, industrialization, modernization, etc.) threats. 2. Conflicts between various religions cause threats to the country and their own survival. 3. Religion may lead to serious threats to the country and the government (Laustsen, C. & Waever, O., 2003: 160). These three levels tend to reinforce each other. For example, we can hardly imagine that Political Islam and even the rise of violent religious extremism have nothing to do with the West's long-established policy of hegemonism, or modernization led by the West and symbolized by Western lifestyle. However, the development of the thoughts and movements of Political Islam has in turn posed serious threats to the system of international relations dominated by the West and national security of the Western countries. Given that states often use the name of national security to suppress religion, to preserve religion's own security or to

remove states' "existential threats" to religion is perhaps the security even more vulnerable and harder to expect. To fully cover the relations and means of coexistence, cooperation and confrontation among the above-mentioned three levers of interactions makes the scope of this paper too broad to manage. Therefore, based on the traditional understanding, this paper is to focus on the discussion of the impact of religion on China's national security.

## **I. History of Religion and China's National Security Studies**

The above-mentioned unidirectional focus, in fact, is also present in the assessment of positive and negative impacts of religion on national security. Because of historical background, social reality and Communist ideology, such studies in China used to feature the negative impact of religion on China's national security. Like the dual roles religion plays in the field of international relations, the "source of unrest" and the "messenger of peace", religion is also both a "spoiler" and a "builder" to national security. The relationship between religion and national security can be "dangerous confrontation", "optimal coexistence" or "optimal interaction". For example, in the United States, because of the role of "identity giver" religion plays in American history and also the separation of church and state tradition, religious identity is not considered threatening. To put it differently, it is a key feature of American social life that religious affiliation does not directly challenge the existing social structure (Wilson, J., 2013: 84-85). As the incubator of civic consciousness and the foundation for social moral constraints and political structures, such symbiotic, mutually reinforcing relationship between religion and the state, society and popular culture of America is sometimes referred to as "unconventional partner." (Xu, Y., 2004: 15-16). Religion was even regarded as the "soul of the nation" related to the fundamental

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national interests and direction of the United States as a country.<sup>①</sup> In recent years, based on “democratic peace theory”, a “religious freedom peace theory” has been developed in the US, arguing for combating religious extremism and terrorism by “promoting religious freedom”, which maximizes in theory if not in practice the positive effect of religion on US national security.<sup>②</sup> In recent years, China’s religious policy has also been in gradual transition, from focusing on the ideological characteristics of religion (confrontation with the dominating political ideology) to emphasizing the social function of religion (coordination with and adaptation to the society). Religious relations is considered one of the five relations (inter-party relations,

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<sup>①</sup> In Robert N. Bellah’s words, the concept of the United States being “the kingdom of God” has not faded away even to the current time. Robert N. Bellah, Phillip E. Hammond, *Varieties of Civil Religion*, New York: Happer & Row, 1980, p.xiii. Religious historian Sydney E. Mead has quoted G. K. Chesterton and used his argument that US is “the Nation with the Soul of a Church” as the title for his seminal article about American religion. See Sydney E. Mead, “The Nation with the Soul of a Church,” in *Church History*, vol. 36, no.3, September 1967, pp.262-283; Sydney E. Mead, *The Nation with the Soul of a Church*, New York: Harper & Row, 1975. Also see Xu Yihua, “Religion and Sino-US relations in the Post-Missionary Era,” in Xu Yihua, Tu Yichao, Liu Qian, eds., *Religion and American Society-Religion and American Foreign Relations*, vol.7, Beijing: Current Affairs Press, 2012, pp. 92-94.

<sup>②</sup> This mainly refers to the American foreign and security establishment has begun to look at religious issues from a national security and strategic perspective, not only seeing religious freedom as a human rights issue, but also regarding it as “a defining element of national security”, or some kind of “hard” geopolitical and “homeland security” issue. In the words of Boston University scholar Elizabeth H. Prodronou, in the context of “1998 International Religious Freedom Act” and the 9/11 terrorist attacks, “the religious factor in Washington’s formation and conduct of foreign policy has become securitized.” See Elizabeth H. Prodronou, “US Foreign Policy and Global Religious Pluralism,” in Thomas Banchoff, ed., *Religious Pluralism, Globalization, and World Politics*, p.298. American scholar of politics and religion Jack Miles has the following comprehensive statement about “religious freedom peace”: “It is an oft-repeated truism that democratic capitalist states do not make war on other democratic capitalist states in the pursuit of political or economic power. This can be expanded to include religion: societies in which there is freedom of religion do not make religious war on other religiously free societies.” Therefore “no long-term offensive against its religiously motivated terrorism will be more effective in the long run than the promotion of freedom of religion in the very nations where it most actively recruits.” Jack Miles, “Religion and American Foreign Policy,” vol.46, no.1, *Survival*, Spring 2004, pp.32-33.

ethnic relations, religious relations, stratum relations and relations between domestic and overseas Chinese) that need to be properly coordinated and processed by the government. Religious harmony is not only seen as an important factor and criterion in building a so-called "harmonious society", but also as a greater pursuit in dealing with church-state relations. <sup>①</sup> In such changing circumstances and context, it should become an important aspect for the studies on religion and national security in China to pay more attention to the positive effect of religion on China's national security and country's foreign relations with the hope to achieve "optimal interaction" between religion and China's national security.

For more than 60 years since the founding of the PRC, religion has always been an important issue in China's national security considerations. In other words, religion has long been securitized. Since the takeover of the Chinese Communist Party, due to their close personnel, ideological, institutional and economical contacts with Western countries, the Kuomintang regime and other so-called "feudal reactionary forces", and also because of China's deteriorated international security situation after the outbreak of the Korean War, most of the religions and religious organizations were regarded as dissident forces that need to be transformed and even hostile forces that need to be suppressed. Not only that, the new regime's Marxist political ideology deemed religion unenlightened and antagonistic, which also strengthened the practice of securitizing religious issues (Xu, Y. & Liu, Q., 2001: 1-2).

In the early 1950s, after carrying out the campaigns such as "religious accusation", "religious reform", "democratic transformation", "socialist education" within various religions, the ruling party has set its religious policy that theoretically aims at

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<sup>①</sup> About religious harmony being the new connotation and higher level in the religious work of the party and government in China, see Religion Affair Bureau's Communist Party Study Group, "Religious Harmony: A Higher Level of Religious Work," *People's Daily*, January 13, 2010, Theory Edition; also in *Religion and the World*, 2010(2), pp. 1-3.

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respecting religious beliefs, uniting the masses of believers and actively guiding religions to adapt to the socialist society. Since established, the policy has been officially sustained in the subsequent long-term practice, although during the time it suffered changes and even serious deviation due to various political movements (Editorial Board of Religious Work the Contemporary China, 1998). However, the practice and policy of fighting against the western imperialists' use of religion to invade China, banning and suppressing reactionary secret societies, abolishing religious feudal privileges and the system of exploitation and oppression, exposing and combating counter-revolutionaries and villains under the veil of religion, preventing the infiltration of foreign religious forces, cracking down the so-called three forces (religious extremism, ethnic separatism and international terrorism) and safeguarding four elements (safeguard the sanctity of the law, the people's interests, ethnic unity and unification of the nation) constitute another path of the religious policy of the ruling party. In recent decades, preventing foreign religious infiltration, combating the three forces and safeguarding four elements have become the basic principles and standard discourse of Chinese government in the field of religious security. These two paths of CCP's religious policy (i.e. united front and securitization) complement each other, becoming the two major perspectives to examine the attitudes and policy of the party and the government toward religion (Xu, Y. & Liu, Q., 2001: 2).

Correspondent with the religious policy is a long-lasting discourse in political and academic circles about religion and China's national security. This discourse generally has the following characteristics. It is far more policy-related or countermeasure-related and highly ideological than academic; it have a distinct concept of enemy, and a strong stance against religious infiltration from abroad. Especially it takes Christianity with Western background as the main object to guard against. Also it has a tendency of securitizing religious issues. It usually treats religious issues as traditional security issues,

which means that religious issues are often handled in the same way as national sovereignty, ideology and regime's security issues.

From 1949 until the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), religious studies in China were basically paralyzed. Under the circumstances where there was only criticism of religion and no research on religion in the academic and publishing circles<sup>①</sup>, "anti-religious infiltration" became the general tone of the discussion on religious security and even common religious issues. These discussions on religion and national security then constituted a whole set of the "anti-infiltration theory" in China.<sup>②</sup> Currently in the

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<sup>①</sup> In the first 20 years since 1949, the only scholarly work in the field of Christian studies was Yang Zhen (Zhao Fushan)'s *History of Christianity*, vol.1, Beijing: Sanlian Book Store, 1979. Other "influential" papers about Chinese Christian Church history are mostly about "missionary cases" and "anti-Christian movements". See Xu Yihua, "Re-examine the Study of Chinese Christian Church History in China," Lin Zhiping, ed., *From Risk to Prominence: Essay Collection of 2011 Zhongyuan University Mainland, Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan Church History Research Symposium*, Taipei: Christian Cosmic Light, 2002, pp. 65-86; Xu Yihua, "A Survey of the Studies of Chinese Christian Church History in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Mainland China," in Xu Yihua and Zhang Qingxiong, eds., *Christianity Scholarship*, vol.7, Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, 2008, pp. 1-10.

<sup>②</sup> This kind of "anti religious infiltration" writings are too numerous to enumerate. Chinese journal full text database can be consulted; see also Guo Peiqing, "Anti-Religious Infiltration Review," *Journal of Central Institute of Socialism*, 2007(6). And in *Theory and Practice of the Religious Work - The Essay Collection Of 2003 National Religious Work Theory Conference* by Religious Culture Publishing House, the essays collected about anti-religious infiltration include "Recognize Situation Unremittingly and Actively Resist the Infiltration of Foreign Religions," "A Analysis of Resisting External Forces Using Religion to Infiltrate China," "Channels, Characteristics of Religious Infiltration and Countermeasures against It", "On the Relationship between Resisting Infiltration and Opening Up" and other articles. The religious infiltration is described as "activities and propaganda of a variety of foreign groups, organizations and individuals using religion in violation of our constitution, laws, regulations and policies. There are mainly two aspects: one is the foreign hostile forces using religion as the tool of infiltration, to subvert the socialist system in China under the signboard of religion and undermine China's national unification and ethnic unity; two is an attempt to control religious groups, interfere with religious affairs, establish religious organizations and meeting places, and proselytize in China..... The nature of infiltration is to subvert the government and the socialist system of China, damage China's unity and control Chinese religious groups and religious affairs." See



mainstream academia, unlike the increasingly declined significance of the “opium theory” which used to be the dominant theory in religious studies in China, the “anti-infiltration theory” is still influential as part of official discourse in the field of religious policy and research.

## **II. Reasons for the Rapid Development of Study on Religion and China's National Security in Recent Years**

Since the reform and opening up in late 1970s, especially in the past decade, not only have religious studies been restored in China, but they have also presented vigorous development. Research on religion and China's national security has also broken the conventional pattern of the “anti-infiltration theory,” entered a fast development track and started to become more academic and empirical. To answer why this has happened, the following points may be listed.

First, throughout the history, the interaction of religion and politics has never been interrupted, but since the second half of the 20th century, this interaction has come from the previous period of relative calm into the current active period. Timothy Shah, scholar of US Council on Foreign Relations, saw the Six-Day War of 1967 as an important turning point of religious development globally. In this war, “the Arab world's crushing defeat persuaded many embittered Arabs turn from Nasser's secular pan-Arabism to radical Islam.” (Micklethwait, J. & Wooldridge, A., 2011: 20). Again, Israel's “miraculous” victory also strengthened the influence of religious forces in the country's politics. The 1978 Islamic revolution in Iran, and the formation of the Moral Majority and the Christian Right in the US, marked the rise and “political awakening” of religious conservatives in both the Eastern and Western worlds.

With the global resurgence of religion as well as the rising

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Zhang Xia, “Reflections on Resisting the Infiltration of Foreign Religions in the New Period,” *Science and Atheism*, 2006(4), p. 48.

religious conservatives and fundamentalists, politicization of religion and religionization of politics have appeared in many countries. International relations have entered into an era when religious conflicts have replaced ideological conflicts which used to be the foundation for confrontation between the two military blocs. "God is Back", "the revenge of God", "globalized God", "the re-enchantment of the world", "desecularization", "transnational religion and fading state", "religious nationalism vs. secular state", "faith-based diplomacy" and so on have become the religious labels of the new era. In the 9/11 incident, attacks against the United States as the world's sole superpower by forces of religious extremism and terrorism marked the climax of "the fourth wave of international terrorism".<sup>①</sup> Accordingly religious terrorism was turned into an issue concerning "regime maintenance" and "homeland security", and religious security was put on the national security and even military counter-terrorism agenda in relevant countries. "The prospective marriage of religious extremism with weapons of mass destruction" was considered for a time being "the greatest threat facing the world." (Johnson, D., 2003: 3). Fueled by the international political and religious forces, religious extremism, ethnic separatism and international terrorism are upgrading their political and violent actions against China. Now they have apparently exceeded the so-called "Western religious infiltration" and become the most direct, unpredictable and violent threats to China's national security<sup>②</sup>.

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<sup>①</sup> Scholars argue that since the late 1800s, the international community has experienced four waves of terrorism, namely the anarchist wave from the late 19th to the early 20th century, the wave of anti-colonialism from the 1920s to the 1960s, the ideological wave from the 1970s to 1980s and the wave of religious extremism that began in the 1980s. See Zhang Jiadong, "Four Waves of Modern Terrorism," *International Watch*, 2007(6). See also Xu Yihua, et al., *Religion and Contemporary International Relations*, Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2012, Chapter 7, "International Religious Terrorism".

<sup>②</sup> It is not stringent enough to say that the three forces of religious extremism, ethnic separatism, (international) terrorism are threats to China's national security. This is because "religious extremism" is not necessarily violent. As Professor Zhou Xiepan said that in many cases the main expression of religious extremism is

Secondly, the international religious freedom movement has bred the formation of international system of religious human rights or "human rights complex"<sup>①</sup> in which the United States takes the dominant role. Various religious NGOs are focusing on issues of human rights and often playing consciously and unconsciously the role of faith-based diplomats or even informal executor of Western countries' foreign policies<sup>②</sup>. To roughly make a description, the religious influence on US foreign policy is gradually reflected in "turning sovereignty issues into human rights issues", "turning human rights issues into religious issues, turning religious issues into security issues" and other diplomatic practices. These practices correspond to a set of so-called international rules and norms advocated and implemented by the West, including "human rights above sovereignty", "responsibility to protect" (based on humanitarian principles, the international community has a responsibility to protect civilians of sovereign states from "mass atrocities") and "religious freedom peace theory" (the religious version of democratic peace theory). These rules and norms have become the theoretical basis and driving force of the "gospelized" US foreign policy in the context of the global resurgence of religion and 9/11 incident, especially during the Bush administration (Xu, Y., 2011: 199-205).

As an information "reducer" or "amplifier", Internet is playing an

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"ascetic rather than terroristic". See Wang Yizhou, ed., *History of Terrorism*, Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2002, p.248. In fact, "religious extremism" can also refer to some religious organizations such as the Quakers upholding the ideology and practice of extreme pacifism, opposing all violence and wars. Therefore, accurate wording should be "violent religious extremism".

<sup>①</sup>About international system of religious human rights or "human rights complex", see Xu Yihua, et al, *Religion and Contemporary International Relationship*, chapter 5, "Religion and International Human Rights".

<sup>②</sup> On International Religious NGOs, see Xu Yihua, Qin Qian and Fan Lizhu, eds., *Religion and American Society--Religious Nongovernmental Organizations*, vol.5, Beijing: Current Affairs Press, 2009; Xu Yihua, et al., *Religion and Contemporary International Relationship*, Chapter 12, "International Religious Nongovernmental Organizations".

increasingly important role in constructing the religious image of other countries, intensifying the political participation of believers and rapidly internationalizing religious issues. Internet as representative of the emerging media, features low threshold, high flow, quick speed, wide participation, no center, cross-border, weak supervision and other characteristics, which to a large extent cause the lagging of laws and regulations on religion in China<sup>①</sup>. In addition, global flow of various religions, the development of missionary movements and the formation of the “international diaspora community” are also changing the traditional pattern of world religions and exacerbating the international and inter-ethnic “wars of identity”. “The southward shift” of Christian population, the rise of “the Third Church”, Pentecostalism and “reversed missions”<sup>②</sup> would also cause large-scale proselytism, which is enough to subvert the people’s traditional view of the missionary movement and the missionaries and to have an impact on the existing social and political structures of the relevant

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<sup>①</sup> About the role and influence of online religion, see Zhao Bing, *Virtualized Religious Communication and National Security*, Fudan University School of International Relations and Public Affairs doctoral dissertation, 2011; also see Xu Yihua, ed., *Religion and American society - Religion in the Internet Age*, vol.3 (Beijing: Current Affairs Press, 2005); Xu Yihua, et al., *Religion and Contemporary International Relations*, Chapter 3, “Religion in the Internet Age”.

<sup>②</sup> It should be noted that, despite the southward movement of the Christian population, the centers of theology, institutions and economic resources are still in the “global north”. After examining all literature on the “new missionary movement”, Princeton University’s renowned religious scholar Robert Wuthnow concluded that the pattern of the Christian missionary movement had experienced no significant change; Not only does American Christian Church take a predominate role in the world in the provision of missionary personnel, financial and humanitarian assistance programs, but also it has never been more active. See Robert Wuthnow, *Boundless Faith: the Global Outreach of American Churches*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009; About the southward movement of the Christian population, see Dana L. Robert, translated by Xu Yihua, “Shifting Southward: Global Christianity Since 1945,” in Xu Yihua, ed., *Religion and American Society-contemporary missionary movement*, vol.6, Beijing: Current Affairs Press, 2009; Xu Yihua, “‘Four Leaps’ in Contemporary International Missionary Movements,” *World Religion and Culture*, 2010(1); Xu Yihua, et al., *Religion and contemporary International Relations*, Chapter 11, “Contemporary Christian Missionary Movement”.

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countries and regions. The United States has the largest religious exporting industry featuring its pastorpreneurs, religious philanthropy, Christian media, overseas missionaries, religious advocacy groups and other aspects, and the global resurgence of religion is deeply influenced by this religious superpower (Micklethwait, J. & Wooldridge, A., 2011: 226-234). The above-mentioned various international religious movements are often not violent, but they may have a larger impact and a wider range of grass root support both at home and abroad. Also they have the potential to propel the "color revolution". Hence they have been increasingly viewed as a more frequent factor affecting China's national security.

Thirdly, as the global resurgence of religion and non-traditional security issues are highlighted, the association between religion, international relations and security began to receive the attention of scholars of international relations. To some extent, "religious awakening" or "religious introspection" has taken place in Western international relations research and teaching. To combine religious factors with the study of international relations, and thereby expand the connotation and extension of international relations theory, has become a new trend in the IR studies (Xu, Y., 2011(9): 11-16). For security studies, the international community faces a more complex security challenges in the post-Cold War era, and people's concept of security has also come to change. Security research has gradually expanded from the traditional political and military sectors to economics, technology, society, information, environment, energy and other sectors. The new security concept has "non-traditional security concept", "comprehensive security" and "human security" and other such expressions. It encourages the following changes to occur in the traditional concept of security. The main subject of security changes from state-centric to pluralistic, the focus of security shifts from sovereignty to human rights, the range of security turns from national to global, and the means of security alters from military alone to

comprehensive measures (Fan, Y., 2006: 21-22). In the West, security research is increasingly extended to the field of religion<sup>①</sup>, and religion as non-traditional security or an independent sector is increasingly gaining the attention of IR scholars. <sup>②</sup>

### **III. Current Studies on Religion and China's National Security**

Under the influence of the above-mentioned factors, the academic circles in China especially the field of international relations began to pay more attention to non-traditional security issues. Since the non-traditional security concept was formally introduced into China in 1994, especially since the securitization theory by the Copenhagen School was translated and introduced to China, the non-traditional security and the securitization theory have "had a significant impact on China's security cognition." <sup>③</sup> Various research institutes and

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<sup>①</sup> For instance, the Copenhagen School of international relations used to categorize religion as a part of social sector, but now considers religion as an independent sector. See "In Defense of Religion: Sacred Referent Objects for Securitization," p.151.

<sup>②</sup> About research on religion and national security abroad, see Thomas F. Farr, *World of Faith and Freedom, Why International Religious Liberty Is Vital to American National Security*; Scott M. Thomas, *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations: Struggle for the Soul of the Twenty-First Century*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005; Robert A. Seiple and Dennis R. Hoover, eds., *Religion and Security: The New Nexus in International Relations*, Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2004; Jonathan Fox and Shmuel Sandler, *Brining Religion into International Relations*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004; K. R. Dark, ed., *Religion and International Relations*, New York: Palgrave Publisher, Ltd, 2000; Pavlos Hatzopoulos and Fabio Petito, eds., *Religion in International Relations: The Return from Exile*. See also Liu Qian, "Studies of Association between Religion and National Security by American Religious Scholars," *Socialism Research*, 2008 (6); Liu Qian, "A Review on Religion and Security in the West," *Social Sciences Abroad*, 2009(2).

<sup>③</sup> Yu Xiaofeng and Li Jia, "Non-Traditional Security: China's Cognition and Response (1978-2008)," *World Economics and Politics*, 2008 (11), p. 92. About introduction of the concept of non-traditional security into China, see Wang Yong, "On Interdependence and China's National Security," *World Economics and Politics*, 1994(6), pp. 39-44; about translation of "securitization" theory, see Barry Buzan &

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projects related to non-traditional security were gradually established. Religion as a non-traditional security issue began to receive attention, which led to the emergence of a considerable amount of relevant treatises. The influence and role of culture and religion in China's national security strategy also began to gain the attention of the scholars (Xu, Y., 2012: 21-23) and became the subjects of multiple national social science funds and doctoral dissertations. On the basis of these research institutions and projects, studies of religion and China's national security have entered a new stage.

At present, the academic studies of religion and China's national security seem to have the following characteristics and problems. First is emphasizing culture while neglecting religion. Religious phenomenon is usually discussed as a part of culture. This shows that religious studies in China have not broken away from the convention which is to interpret religion as the epiphenomenon of a certain social existence (such as politics and economics). The academic circle is also restricted by the marginalized status and sensitivity of this research subject.

Secondly, religious studies are mainly "driven by the threat of terrorism at home and abroad." Certain policy-oriented research on the three forces, especially on terrorism with Islamic background, is relatively well-developed and has become an integral part of counter-terrorism research. This is undoubtedly concerned with the social reality of China's national security (Xu, Y., 2012: 22-23), but there is also similar phenomenon of viewing religion "primarily through the prism of security" (*Editor's Forward*, 2007: v-vi) in Western academia. Religion cannot be equated with terrorism, but religion

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Ole Waever, translated by Zhuning, *New Securitization Theory*, Hangzhou: Zhejiang People's Publishing House, 2003; Securitization "aims to explain the situation where some of the public issues require to be handled by unconventional political means". See Xu Yihua and Liu Qian, "Religious Impact on International Security and Its Implication for China," Jin Ze and Qiu Yonghui, eds., *Annual Report on Religions in China (2008)*, Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2009, p. 216.

often provides a legitimate basis and organizational vehicle for violence and separatist activities. Religion can be used in international mediation and reconciliation services, but it is also “one of the most common justifications for genocide and terrorism.” (Fox, J. & Sandler, S., 38; Xu, Y. & Zhang, Y., 2009: 113-114). Thus, one of the main tasks of the study on religion and China’s national security is to cut off the links between religion and violent extremism on theological and doctrinal levels, de-ideologize and de-politicize religion, and propagate the positive functions of religion in the promotion of social stability and international peace.

Thirdly, the “imbalances caused by the securitization of the studies”, namely that the academic circles have paid way more attention to the negative effects of religion on national security than its positive impacts. In China, religion as the means and resources to promote and preserve internal social stability and external security is yet to be developed both in theory and practice. With China’s all-round “going out” strategy and the unfolding global layout of Chinese interests, religion is increasingly becoming an important resource to implement China’s foreign strategy and improve China’s international image. Since there have been a large number of cases about religion’s positive functions in the Chinese society discussed in the current academic field, it has become an important research agenda to promote research on religion and China’s foreign relations, and to change the religious factor from a liability to an asset in the country’s public diplomacy and non-governmental exchanges (Xu, Y. & Zou, L., 2012: 43-58; Zhuo, X. & Xu, Y., 2012: 33-38), and thus “weaving a broader and more gentle protection network of Chinese overseas interests.” (Xu, Y. & Zou, L., 2013: 39).

Fourthly, there is a “bottleneck in theoretical and empirical research.” When discussing the current status of studies on religion and international relations in China, the author pointed out the defects that in the field there are “more than enough macro narratives and current affairs analysis and yet inadequate empirical and comparative



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studies." "Disciplines other than religion, philosophy and politics are seldom involved. And a complete literature database and systematic theoretical analysis framework are yet to establish." (Xu, Y., 2012: 23). These flaws also exist in studies on religion and national security which started off comparatively earlier. Lack of field surveys and data collection efforts on national, regional and even global scales and insufficient database constructing and data processing capabilities, are hardware bottlenecks restricting related studies. On the other hand, due to modern advanced information technology, most people including officials and scholars are no stranger to the details of religious incidents at home and abroad, especially the incidents involving religious terrorism, but they still do not have the ability to place these events in the context of the overall framework for understanding and interpretation, a phenomenon described by Charles Kimball as "detailed ignorance." (Kimball, C., 2011: 7-8).

Because of the sensitivity of the topic, the above-mentioned defects and phenomena are more prominent in the field of religion and national security. It is important to note that the history, context and threats of China's national security are significantly different from those of other countries. Therefore, although the securitization theory of the Copenhagen School has provided the scholars with novel analytical tools of security research, it is considered not quite suitable for the social conditions of developing countries, including China since it tends to ignore the differences among countries, especially the East-West differences in the degree of social development as well as the size of the security threats (Wang, Y., 2006: 373-375; Zhu, N., 2003; Xu, Y. & Liu, Q., 2009:217-218). Instead, the concept of non-traditional security, especially the concept of de-securitization, has even been denounced by some as a security "trap" (Han, L., 2000: 67-68) aimed at weakening the sovereignty of non-Western countries. Therefore, the follow-up work on religion and China's national security studies should be to propose topics, narratives and methods based on China's own social conditions, as well as to establish the theoretical framework

and paradigm for the study of religion and China's national security.

#### **IV Conclusion**

These are just a “thin description” about the current studies on religion and China’s national security in the hope of leading to more discussions and criticisms. In fact, in terms of everyday practice and academic research, religion is generally subject to special treatment. For instance, people always say that religion has positives and negatives or that it has a multi-faceted nature. It can “help the weak and poor” and “promote good and suppress evil”, but it can also “do evil” and “play the jackal to the tiger”. It is a “messenger of peace” but also a “source of unrest”.<sup>①</sup> In fact, whether it is a technological invention (such as explosives and nuclear power), or humans themselves all have such extreme two sides. Besides, no matter whether its role or function is positive or negative, religion has seldom been the only factor. As Thomas Banchoff, Director of the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs at Georgetown University said, “Religion is never the sole cause of violence. It intersects in explosive ways with territorial disputes; unstable and oppressive institutions; economic and social inequalities; and ethnic, cultural, and linguistic divisions. But today as in previous eras, passionate religious identities and commitments have often served to exacerbate tensions and promote bloodshed.”(Banchoff, T., 2008: 3).

Currently issues of religion and China’s national security have been placed under various research frameworks and perspectives for discussion. And the issues raised by these discussions are far beyond our best to reach a consensus. Such as whether or how to restore the environment for the folk beliefs to grow in order to keep faith/ religion ecology relatively balanced and to prevent massive “faith/

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<sup>①</sup> About the multi-faceted nature of religion in international relations and national security, see Xu Yihua and Zou Lei, “Geo-Religion and Implications for China,” pp. 31-33.

identity changes”; how to further open up and strengthen the cross-strait as well as foreign and domestic exchanges including exchanges of various folk beliefs and organized religions, on the basis of pioneering role of religious groups in launching Mainland-Taiwan “direct flight”, and thereby “increasing Chinese cultural and national identity, building our common spiritual home, promoting the peaceful development of cross-strait relations and accelerating the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation”<sup>①</sup>; how to strengthen China’s international soft power in the field of religion; how to explore the important resource of religion in public diplomacy and non-government exchange, to show the world the spirit of the Chinese nation, so that China’s current international appeal of the religious “sacred objects” (such as “Buddha tooth relic/Buddha’s finger bone relic”), “sacred places” (such as Matsu Temple in Meizhou) and practices (such as “Shaolin martial arts”, “Bible export and exhibition”) can be upgraded to the system, paradigms and ideological level, so as to gain more respect from the international community; how the relevant departments in the Chinese government should take religion into China’s foreign relations strategic considerations under the dual constraints of the traditional concept that “there is no small matter in religious affairs” and “there is no small matter in foreign affairs”; how they can make immediate and effective response to sudden security incidents involving religion, especially when these events pose a threat to China’s core interests, and so on. These problems present a challenge to China’s current religious policy and security concept itself.

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<sup>①</sup> Quoted from Mr. Jia Qinglin’s speech on July 11, 2009, entitled “Vigorously Strengthening Cross-strait Cultural and Educational Exchanges; Building Common Spiritual Home for Compatriots at Both Sides of the Taiwan Straits” at the Fifth Cross-strait Trade and Cultural Forum. Mr. Jia was then the chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

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