

The Role of Religion in the International Clash of Civilisations: Beliefs and Frictions

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Abstract: This paper is based on Samuel Huntington's theory of the "clash of civilisations" and explores the complex role of religion in the international clash of civilisations. He argues that the post-Cold War global conflict will no longer be a confrontation based on ideology or national interests, but rather a friction between civilisations, particularly over differences in religious beliefs. The role of religion in shaping international relations and inspiring conflict is revealed by analysing a number of key international events and trends, such as religious conflicts in the Middle East, tensions between the West and the Islamic world, and cross-civilizational interactions in the context of globalisation. Firstly, the article explores how religious identity has become an important criterion for distinguishing the self from the other in international relations, especially in the context of the confrontation between Islam and the Western world. Next, the article analyses how religious extremism affects international politics, particularly its role in international terrorism. In addition, it examines how globalisation has exacerbated the friction between religions and civilisations, while at the same time opening up new opportunities for dialogue and understanding between civilisations. Through these case studies, the aim is to shed light on the dual role of religiosity in the international political arena: on the one hand, as a catalyst for divergence and conflict among civilisations, and on the other hand, as a potential conduit for cross-cultural understanding and peaceful dialogue. The article concludes with a discussion of how religion-induced clashes of civilisations can be mitigated through cross-cultural dialogue and cooperation in a multicultural and religiously diverse contemporary international society, contributing to international peace and stability. The study not only provides new ideas and perspectives for understanding major issues in current international politics, but also offers profound insights into dealing with differences and conflicts among civilisations.

Keywords: Huntington, clash of civilisations theory, religion

1. Introduction

In the current field of international politics, the interaction between religion and the clash of civilisations presents a profound complexity and criticality. This complexity is reflected not only in the intersection and clash of civilisations, but also in the international relations strategies on how to understand and deal with these clashes. Religion, as an important component of civilisational identity, often plays a key role in the international political arena, both in relations between states and in global political dynamics.

The thesis aims to explore how religion can inspire conflicts between civilisations, as well as shape particular trajectories and patterns in international politics. To this end, the following research hypothesis is formulated: religious beliefs and practices are not only deeply rooted in individual and collective identities, but also provoke and shape conflicts at the international level. These conflicts may stem from differences in beliefs, historical strife, or differing perspectives on global affairs. By analysing specific cases, such as religious conflicts in the Middle East and tensions between the West and the Islamic world, this paper will show concretely how religion influences the development and resolution of international clashes of civilisations. Through an in-depth analysis of the role religion plays in the interaction between civilisations, it aims to provide a deeper understanding of the relationship between religion and the clash of civilisations in international politics. This is of significant academic value not only for the theory of international relations, but also for the handling and resolution of these conflicts in practice. The study hopes to provide the international community with more effective strategies and perspectives in dealing with the clash of civilisations.

2. Main body

2.1. Framework of the Clash of Civilisations Theory

2.1.1. Huntington's Clash of Civilisations Theory

Huntington's clash of civilisations theory, put forward in the 1990s, is an interpretation of the new pattern of international relations after the Cold War. It argues that as ideological confrontation waned, cultural and religious differences became the new focus of international conflict. Huntington divided global culture into different circles of civilisation, such as the West, Islam, Hinduism, etc., each with its own unique historical traditions, linguistic norms, cultural practices and religious beliefs within the circle.

He argues that globalisation has not only facilitated cross-civilisation exchanges, but also exacerbated friction between civilisations, especially the differences between Western and non-Western civilisations, creating a significant rift in international politics.

2.1.2. New Dynamics of International Politics in the Post-Cold War Era

Huntington's theory further points out that in the post-Cold War period, although the clash of ideologies diminished, the differences in civilisations became the new core issue of international relations. During this period, the interactions between civilisations on the international stage became more complex, and the impact was not only limited to international political relations, but also permeated the internal political and social structures of countries. The clash of civilisations manifested itself from the macro international confrontation to the micro socio-cultural level. Against the background of globalisation, Huntington emphasises the rise of civilisational self-awareness and its impact on international relations and the global political landscape, thus providing a new perspective for understanding contemporary international politics.

2.1.3. Huntington's Cultural Shift

From the 1980s onwards, Huntington made a clear cultural shift from "hard politics" topics such as military and authority to cultural and identity issues. In fact, his cultural shift has been in evidence for a long time.

In *The Soldier and the State*, Huntington argues that the emergence of military professionalism and objective civilian control requires consideration of both the realities of power relations and the dominant local ideology. In *Change*, he points out that modernisation involves a fundamental shift in

values, attitudes and expectations. A complex society needs to define, in terms of basic principles or moral duties, the bonds that can link social groups, and these bonds link communities that are distinct from each other. In turn, democratic transformation cannot be originated or consolidated without cultural and conceptual factors.[1]

2.2. Religious Identity and International Relations

2.2.1. The Role of Religious Identity in the International Political Framework

Religious identity, as a core element of individual and group identity, plays a decisive role in international politics. It is not only a reflection of one's faith, but also an important symbol of collective cultural and social identity. In the context of international politics, religious identity is often used to define "us" and "them", creating a distinction between the self and the other. Such distinctions are not only visible in cultural and social practices, but also have a direct impact on political decision-making and international interactions. Historically, differences in religious beliefs have led to major conflicts, such as the Crusades, and in modern times, differences in religious identities have also played a role in, for example, the struggle against religious extremism.

2.2.2. The case of religious antagonism between the Islamic world and the West

The confrontation between the Islamic world and the West is a classic example of how differences in religious identity play out in international politics. It is not only based on differences in religious beliefs, but also involves a wide range of interactions in the historical, political, economic and cultural spheres. For example, the democratic values and market economy of the West differ significantly in some respects from the political and social structures of the Islamic world. Historical events such as the Crusades and European colonial history, as well as recent conflicts in the Middle East, have fuelled misunderstanding and mistrust on both sides.

In the aftermath of the Iraq War, the long-standing rivalry between the two major factions of Islam, the Sunnis and the Shias, was further fuelled. Regime change led to an inter-sectarian power imbalance, triggering a Sunni revolt and the rise of the extremist group Islamic State. This sectarian confrontation has led to deep social divisions and conflicts. At the same time, the events of The Satanic Verses highlight the clash of cultures and beliefs between the Western and Islamic worlds. Salman Rushdie's novel triggered a strong reaction from Islamic countries, which led to tensions and antagonisms on a global scale.

Historical crusades (late eleventh to late thirteenth centuries) and colonial history play a key role in the religious conflict. The Crusades, a series of military expeditions launched by European Christian nations to recapture holy sites such as Jerusalem, not only caused severe bloodshed, but also left a deep historical legacy and hostility between Christianity and Islam. During the colonial period, the domination of European countries over other continents was often accompanied by the spread of religion and cultural repression, setting the stage for religious tensions and conflicts in many modern regions.

2.3. Religious extremism and international politics

The role of religious extremism in contemporary international politics has become increasingly prominent, and it has not only changed the trajectory of international relations, but also posed a serious threat to global security.

2.3.1. Analysis of the Causes of Religious Extremism

The rise of religious extremism can be traced to a variety of complex factors. First, political instability

and economic backwardness have provided fertile ground for extremist ideas. Political instability and frequent economic problems in the Middle East have created conditions for the spread and acceptance of extremist ideas. Social inequality and a sense of injustice are also key factors. In certain social and political contexts, these factors interact with each other, and extremist religious ideas are thus widely spread.

2.3.2. The role of religious extremism in international terrorism

Religious extremism has played a central role in shaping contemporary international terrorist activities. Terrorist organisations, represented by Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, usually carry out violent activities in the name of religious beliefs. These activities not only spread fear but also aim to promote their extremist ideologies. Such acts of violence in the name of religion seriously undermine international peace and security, while at the same time damaging the public image of religions and global relations among religions.

Islamic civilisation has great potential for development, but in the short term it still lacks a core State and a sense of cohesion. This characteristic is the source of both the current weakness of Islamic civilisation and its potential for conflict. It may clash with all countries of the world, including those within the Islamic world, through marginalisation.[2]

2.3.3. Impact of religious extremist activities

Suicide attacks, kidnappings and other terrorist activities resulting from religious extremism have not only caused a large number of civilian casualties, but also triggered complex chain reactions in the international political arena. While actively combating terrorism, States are faced with the challenge of balancing human rights protection and national security. In addition, religious extremism has exacerbated religious and cultural conflicts in the international community, posing a threat to international cooperation and global governance.

Taking the activities of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq as an example, the organisation has been rapidly expanding its power by taking advantage of local political instability and social conflicts. Through their extreme religious philosophy, they have attracted a large number of followers and carried out a series of violent actions, such as mass killings targeting civilians, destroying cultural heritage and carrying out public executions. These acts have not only had a profound impact on local societies, but have also attracted widespread attention and strong condemnation from the international community. It demonstrates how in a given political and social environment, extremism can spread rapidly and with serious consequences.

2.4. Globalisation and friction between civilisations

2.4.1. The deep-rooted impact of globalisation on friction between religions and civilisations

Globalisation, as a multidimensional and complex process, encompasses the convergence of economic, cultural, technological and social dimensions. While this process promotes global interconnectivity, it also inevitably triggers friction among civilisations. It has led to frequent and deeper interactions between civilisations, but these close encounters have not always been smooth or harmonious. It is sometimes seen as a shock to traditional and indigenous cultures, especially in terms of religious and cultural values. For example, the widespread dissemination of Western culture may trigger protective reactions against indigenous religious and cultural values in non-Western societies. Japan and India, because of their adoption of Western political systems and values, can be classified politically, if not culturally, as the West's own. Islamic countries and China, on the other hand, because they are far removed from Western political systems and values, and because they are unlikely to

adopt them in the future for a variety of reasons (including, of course, cultural ones), their civilisations pose a major threat to Western civilisation.[3] In addition, the uneven distribution of globalisation in terms of economics and technology may lead to economic and power differentials between civilisations, thus exacerbating friction between civilisations. Such friction is evident in civilisations' understanding of and responses to the global order.

2.4.2. Opportunities for cross-civilizational dialogue

The rapid development of information technology has greatly facilitated communication among civilisations, making it easier for people to access and understand the perspectives and cultures of other civilisations. Such exchanges are not only confined to integration at the cultural level, but also touch on deeper exchanges of values and beliefs. Globalisation has also contributed to the spread of education and knowledge, helping to dissolve stereotypes and misunderstandings between civilisations. Mutual understanding and respect among civilisations can be deepened through educational and cultural exchange initiatives such as international student exchange programmes and cultural festivals. At the same time, international organisations and multilateral forums provide a platform for civilisations to discuss global issues together, which is important for finding common ground and mitigating conflicts.

2.4.3. The dual role of religion in international politics

Religion has demonstrated its complex and dual role in the global political arena. On the one hand, it can be a catalyst for exacerbating conflicts, while on the other hand, it can also evolve into an important medium for promoting peaceful dialogue.

2.4.3.1. Religion as a catalyst for conflict

Religious differences are often seen as a source of disagreement and conflict among civilisations. Religious beliefs are deeply rooted in the identity of individuals and groups, and can cause tensions and antagonisms when they clash with the core values of other civilisations. Different religious concepts and practices between Islamic and Western civilisations have greatly deepened misunderstanding and mistrust between the two sides, leading to a series of international conflicts and terrorist activities. The rise of religious extremism has also caused tensions in international politics, making religion a key variable in global security.

2.4.3.2. Religions for peaceful dialogue

Religions equally have the potential to serve as a bridge for cross-cultural understanding and international peace. Most religious traditions emphasize the importance of peace, tolerance, and dialogue, principles that can be used to promote mutual understanding among civilizations. Leaders and organizations of the world's major religions often engage in international dialogue and work to reduce tensions and resolve conflicts among civilizations. Through these religious efforts, common understanding and respect across civilisational differences can be built, promoting harmonious coexistence in the international community. In this process, religion not only serves as a channel of communication, but also as a key force for global coherence and peace efforts.

2.5. Mitigating the clash of civilisations triggered by religion

There will always be a tendency towards conflict and antagonism among civilisations, and to avoid a clash of civilisations, a two-pronged effort must be made: on the one hand, it establishes a dominant culture within a civilisation to the exclusion of other alien cultures and maintains cultural unity in

order to achieve a stable order within a civilisation; and on the other hand, it recognises the plurality of civilisations and the equality of civilisations and abolishes the concept of a universal culture to maintain the mode of mutual checks and balances among civilisations.[4]

In the context of globalisation, religious differences are often at the heart of clashes of civilisations. In order to mitigate these clashes and promote harmonious coexistence among civilizations, measures for cross-cultural dialogue and cooperation are essential.

As far as political goals are concerned, religious public diplomacy is committed to guiding international public opinion, improving the image of the country, and promoting people-to-people communication, and at the same time pays attention to the spiritual and cultural dimensions of the world peace process, and its practical basis contains elements such as religious emotion, security perception, identity, and historical memory.

As far as religious sentiment is concerned, the actors involved in religious public diplomacy should have similar faith backgrounds or generally recognise the social value of religious ethics. value of religious ethics in society. In terms of security perceptions, diplomatic actors should break through the shackles of perceptions and face up to all kinds of non-religious factors. face up to various non-traditional security issues involving religious factors and ensure that diplomatic activities contribute to peacebuilding.

In terms of identity, diplomacy should be guided by the principle of "peace with differences, seeking differences, and seeking peace with others". The main body of diplomacy should adhere to the principle of "peace and differences, seeking common ground while reserving differences", and build mutual trust within a single religion and among different religions. The main body of diplomacy should adhere to the principle of "harmony and differences, seeking common ground while reserving differences", and build mutual trust within a single religion and among different religions, so as to bridge differences and expand consensus.

As far as historical memory is concerned, if the subjects of diplomacy have a record of religious co-operation with each other, this will In terms of historical memory, if subjects of diplomacy have a record of religious cooperation with each other, this will bring additional facilities for communication.[5]

2.5.1.Strategic importance of intercultural dialogue and cooperation

Intercultural dialogue is a key way to enhance understanding of and respect for civilisations. Through this dialogue, individuals from different civilizational backgrounds are able to exchange views and deepen mutual understanding, thus reducing misunderstanding and prejudice. This dialogue should go beyond the national level to encompass interactions between communities, religious groups as well as individuals. Common educational projects, cultural exchange activities and international conferences are effective platforms for building trust and understanding among civilisations. Through these interactions, common human values and goals can be uncovered, effectively reducing friction caused by religious differences.

2.5.2.The positive role of religion in a multicultural society

In a multicultural social environment, religion plays an important role in promoting the harmonious coexistence of different groups. Religious leaders and groups should actively promote the concepts of peace and tolerance, while opposing extremism and bigotry. The education system should incorporate the teaching of multiculturalism and religious tolerance in order to foster understanding and respect for different faiths and cultures among the younger generation. Governments and social organizations should formulate and implement policies aimed at promoting religious freedom and equality and ensuring that all civilizations and religious groups are free from discrimination and

prejudice.

3. Conclusion

This study has explored in depth the role of religion in the international clash of civilisations. Firstly, religious identity is recognised as an important criterion for distinguishing the 'self' from the 'other' in international politics. This is particularly evident in the case of Islam's confrontation with the Western world. Religious extremism plays a dual role in the international political arena: on the one hand, it serves as a catalyst for conflict, especially in the context of international terrorism; on the other hand, it reveals how globalisation has exacerbated friction between civilisations, while at the same time offering new opportunities for dialogue among civilisations.

After analysing the impact of globalization on religion and civilizational friction, it is concluded that, while globalization has brought about more contact and friction between civilizations, it has also provided new platforms for cross-civilizational dialogue and understanding. This suggests that in a multicultural and religiously diverse international society, mitigating religion-induced clashes of civilizations through cross-cultural dialogue and cooperation is crucial to maintaining international peace and stability.

Finally, it was pointed out that the direction of future research should include a more in-depth exploration of the specific role of religion in different political and cultural contexts and how the positive power of religion can be effectively harnessed to promote reconciliation and cooperation among civilisations. Future research should also consider the applicability and limitations of the theory of the clash of civilizations in the context of the current changes in the international political landscape, so as to provide a more comprehensive perspective for understanding and dealing with differences and conflicts among civilizations.

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