The Impact of Communication Technology on Religion

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Abstract—As a special social ideology, religion is one of the social cultures. In the long history of mankind, it has been playing a pivotal role. Religion is also expanding with the development of human communication technology, and the two influence each other. Specific technology makes specific communication possible, and specific communication leads to specific social and cultural forms. The development of communication technology has gone from simple to complex, and from the period of oral communication, to the period of print media, and then to the period of electronic media and the period of digital media. With the development of communication technology, religion has experienced its formation, privilege era, popularity, secularization, and pluralism era. People can see that every change in communication technology has led to religious change. Based on a thorough study, this paper clarifies the relationship between communication technology and religion, which influences and restricts each other. It also provides a theoretical basis and beneficial exploration for religious governance in China.

Keywords—communication technology; communication media; religion

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the 21st century, with the rapid development of media technology, people have experienced new life styles and space-time experiences, and new developments have taken place in the field of religious communication. The energy interaction and complementarity between new media and old media bring a brand-new development trend to religious communication. However, the development of communication technology has brought positive and negative effects to religion. It is of great practical significance and theoretical value to study the influence of the change of communication technology on religion.

Different communication technologies produce different carriers, which are the material and cultural media undertaking religious doctrines, the form of dependence on which religions can be disseminated, and different carriers have different effects on the expression, preservation and acceptance of religious doctrines.

II. THE CHANGE OF COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS CHANGE

The history of human communication has roughly gone through four stages: oral communication, writing communication, printing communication, and electronic communication. Communication technology in each historical stage has a profound impact on the development of religion.

A. Oral Communication Is an Era of Spontaneous Growth of Religion

In primitive society, people have not yet formed a relatively mature written language system that can be used in a certain range. Religious information is mainly transmitted through voice symbols (such as chanting, and playing simple instruments) between wizards and members of the common clan, body symbols (such as, expressions, gestures, dances and other ritual acts), and image symbols (such as makeup, clothing, Totems and simple hieroglyphic). The most developed communication symbol is the oral language, but it is also just named for things, because of emotion uprising, with a great intuitive, situational and casual nature. It was the only advanced available communication form at that time, but also restricted the level of thinking of primitive human beings, thus restricting the level of people's concept of God.

As these means of communication are non-reusable and long-term preservation, they greatly limit the scope of religious dissemination and the accumulation and improvement of religious concepts and practices. Primitive religious worship cannot break through the level of clan worship, and is confined to clan tribes. With the increase of clan tribe members, the dissemination scope will be expanded. With the decrease of clan tribe members, the spread scope will be narrowed. The clan prosperity will bring the worship prosperity, and the clan destroy will bring the worship destroy. This is a form of spontaneous communication that follows the laws of nature.

B. The Stage of Writing Communication Is the Privileged Era of Religion

After entering the class society, due to the division of mental and physical labor, written language and words have become increasingly perfect and systematic through the

processing of mental workers, and have been the most advanced means of communication for more than 2000 years. Writing language is a highly abstract symbolic system. Its unification and universality in the broad social scope is an indispensable condition for the emergence of artificial religion. Because of the spread of written language, people's concept of God gradually gets rid of the natural worship based on animism, and they have formed a highly abstract ideological system of deity. Religion has gradually evolved from polytheism to monotheism and main theism. The universal use of written language makes it possible for world religions to come into being. The founders of worldwide religions such as Buddhism, Christianity and Islam did not write books and put forward their ideas in oral preaching. If their disciples had not made the records, sorted out and processed their sermons to form classics, their ideas would not have been preserved, or spread to the world step by step. However, writing language has many limitations. It cannot be produced in batches, and writing materials are very expensive and difficult to obtain. Therefore, owning and reading written religious books has been the privilege of a very small number of people in society for a long time, and these people include the nobles and missionaries. Religious information of the general believers can only be obtained from the oral dissemination of privileged classes. This factor was one of the objective reasons for the emergence and long-term maintenance of the hierarchy in medieval Europe.

In a sense, whoever has the means of spreading belief in truth has the truth of belief. Ordinary civilians have no chance to explore "pure apocalypse" because they cannot read the Bible, so they have to listen to what the priests say. If they want to get close to God, to be saved, to go to heaven, they have to resort to huge religious groups.

C. The Stage of Printing Communication Is the Era of Popularization of Religious Beliefs

The invention of printing has influenced the whole process of human civilization, and has epoch-making significance in the history of human culture. It improves productivity, liberates countless copywriters, shortens the publishing cycle, speeds up the dissemination of knowledge and information, reduces the cost of book production, and enlarges the breadth and depth of information exchange. Therefore, the application of printing has produced enormous economic benefits. As far as social benefits are concerned, it enables books bearing rich ancient cultures to be published and preserved, and makes the cultural blood of human beings breathe and continue to this day. A large number of books and materials break through the geographical restrictions and closely link people of different skin colors and languages, which greatly promote the exchange and integration of human culture. Although the inventor of engraving printing and the date of its birth are still controversial, the original engraving printing has a close relationship with Buddhism from the perspective of existing physical objects. Monasteries and Buddhists used the popular engraving printing as a tool to propagate Buddhism early. The production and dissemination of Buddhist classics

is a wonderful flower in the history of printing, and it plays an important role in the history of human cultural exchanges.

Movable-type printing was first invented in China. After the improvement, Europe took the lead in using metal movable-type printing, which was used extensively to spread religion. Around 1450 A.D., Mainz Gutenberg, a German, invented metal movable-type printing, which enabled mankind to enter the era of printing communication. The first batch of Gutenberg's metal movable-type printing was 200 Bibles. The Bible, the source of religious beliefs in Europe, was printed in batches, and became a book in the hands of street citizens. It gradually became a habit and right to read, think and judge on the basis of everyone's own ability and mind. This should be regarded as one of the prerequisites of religious reform movement in the 16th century. The main content of this important event which affects the process of world history is "justification by faith", that is, to take the Bible as the supreme criterion of belief, and to abandon the intermediary of clergy and communicate directly with God. It is obviously inconceivable for the ordinary people who cannot even get the Bible to be justified by faith without the mass printing of classics and the emergence of this form of printing communication.

After more than five centuries of development, the printing communication of religion has proved its lasting and far-reaching influence. Even today, printed books are still the basic tool for religious propaganda. It has the advantages of accurate expression, repeated use, convenient retrieval, low cost, easy preservation and mass production, and it is irreplaceable. But in terms of timeliness, it does not have too many advantages. It takes a long time for newspapers and magazines to reach a certain range of readers, no matter how fast they are edited. It cannot convey the dynamic and vivid personality power of the communicator through image and language to the audience (religious people), thus losing the special religious experience brought by the situational effect to the audience. It is also limited by the reader's reading ability and various artificial or natural spatial barriers.

D. Electronic Communication Is an Era of Pluralism and Secularization of Religious Beliefs

Since the 1920s, another revolution in communication technology has taken place. The invention and popularization of movies, radio broadcasting and television marks the arrival of the era of electronic communication. This has greatly changed human life, and has had unprecedented impact on world religions.

After the emergence of electronic media, it was used for missionary purposes by the church. The American church took the lead in applying this new communication technology to missionary work. As early as the 1940s, the famous missionary Charles Fuller hosted religious programs on radio. He called his audience "friends of the radio kingdom". Like in church, he asked them to take out the Bible, listened to his sermons, and encouraged them to write to him regularly to share their beliefs. The first person to preach on television was Fulton Sin, the Roman Catholic priest. In 1952, he began to host Mass on television religious

programs. In the 1990s, religion communication in western countries has become so dependent on electronic media that it can hardly move forward. Since the 1980s, the rapid development of the Internet has affected all aspects of life. The Internet has also penetrated into religion, which has had a profound impact on religion. People live in the Internet age, so it has more profound practical significance.

The Internet has opened another door for the spread and development of religion. Religion has crossed the boundaries among family, society, country and belief. Under the comprehensive effect of many competitive advantages, such as convenience, rapidity, strong interaction and low cost, online religion have developed rapidly. For this reason, some western scholars point out that in the era after the advent of television, the Internet has provided the most powerful "marketing tools" for churches. At present, any kind of network platform based on the Internet has become a tool for religious communication and development. While the Internet greatly promotes the development of religion, various kinds of false and ugly phenomena in the society under the banner of religion, such as terrorism, religious extremism, network fraud, cults, etc., also use the Internet tide to fish in troubled waters, which has threatened the healthy and orderly development of religion, and challenged the bottom line of human values.

In traditional religions, religious believers should carry out religious activities. Collective religious activities of religious believers should generally be held in registered places of religious activities, organized by places of religious activities or religious organizations, presided over by religious clergymen or other persons conforming to the provisions of this religion, and carried out in accordance with the doctrine and religious rules. Due to traditional habits, religious believers have religious life in their own homes, and carry out activities such as worship of Buddha, chanting sutras, burning incense, worship, prayer, lecture, preaching, mass, baptism, abstinence, fasting, evening master and retrospect, mainly involving family members. These activities are also normal religious activities. Traditional religious activities are limited by objective conditions such as place, personnel, and time. The emergence of network religion greatly facilitates the development of religious activities such as religious organizations and believers' religious participation, exchange and sharing.

III. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY AND RELIGION

Although communication technology has a tremendous impact on the development of modern religion, it does not mean that religion is only a purely dependent variable. Communication technology is a purely independent variable factor. As a relatively independent social system, religion has its own law of occurrence and development, and its occurrence and development also have a certain impact on other social systems, including the communication system. This is mainly manifested in the following aspects:

First, religion has a restrictive effect on the behavior and content of mass communication. Religion is not only an ideological belief, but also a religion believer's social and cultural identity and way of life. It is a very sensitive social problem. Therefore, if the mass communication ignores the religious concept of the audience in its operation, it cannot give full play to its role, and even cause unnecessary disputes. In the past few years, Rushdie, a British writer, wrote Satan's Psalms. He was sentenced to death by Khomeini according to the Islamic Code, and was offered a reward for arrest. He is believed to have insulted Muslims' religious feelings. He still lives in seclusion. Although he has declared his religion to be Islamic, he is still not forgiven.

Secondly, the development of religion and mass communication is unbalanced and asymmetric. All religions use the mass media to expand their influence, but this does not mean that if they have advanced means of communication and have done a lot of propaganda, their organizations will certainly grow proportionally and correspondingly. Apart from being influenced by other factors, the development of religion mainly follows its own logic. Nowadays, Western countries such as Europe and America should have the most advanced means of communication in the world. Religious organizations in these countries spend a lot of manpower and material resources in their mission plans, institutions and equipment to the whole world, especially the third world. But Christianity is not the fastest growing religion in all of these countries. The traditional religions in the backward countries of the third world, even some primitive tribal religions, do not have or seldom have advanced communication technology, but grow up latently in the developed countries.

Thirdly, religion influences the effect of mass communication. In some countries and regions of the world, the influence of religious forces is deep-rooted. In order to achieve good results, mass communication has to rely on the influence of religion. In this regard, there is nothing more telling than the fact that politicians in some countries use the power of religious leaders to propagate themselves in the media during their campaigns. During the reign of former Iranian King Balevi, he used various means of communication to propagate his "white revolution" (westernization) program. As it was contrary to the prevailing Islamic fundamentalism belief in the country, the propaganda effect was largely offset, which caused widespread discontent and resentment. The exiled religious leader Khomeini called on the people to boycott the rule of Balevi by radio, and the blood flowed into the river at all costs. Finally, he ousted Balevi from power. In these important historical events, the enlargement and reduction of the communication effect are closely related to the religious beliefs of the people of that country. Although every country in the world has religion, the extent to which religious organizations use electronic media varies from country to country. The degree of social and economic development, the level of scientific and technological development and popularization, the restrictions of laws and regulations on religious communication in different countries, and the traditional practices of different religions and denominations in missionary areas will all affect the degree of religious communication.

IV. CONCLUSION

This article has a general understanding of the religious changes caused by the changes in communication technology. As a unique spiritual activity and ideology of human beings, religion plays an important role in human development. It is difficult to examine, grasp and analyze this prospect comprehensively. The emergence and development, change and transformation of religion are closely related to communication technology, which resonates with and interacts with religious civilization. Especially, since the 21st century, the media has become the most important factor to change the religious pattern, which has a profound impact on the survival and development of religion in content and form.

According to the specific national conditions of China, how to predict and grasp the influence of communication technology on religion, improve the level of government decision-making, and safeguard national security and national unity is of great practical significance. Because of the author's limited academic level, this paper only discusses the impact of communication technology on religion from a macro perspective, and its research needs to be deepened, which needs to be discussed in the future.

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