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Redefinition and Interpretation of "Religiosity" Based on the Reflection of Buddha Nature

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Abstract: Nowadays, scholars expect to measure religiosity in different ways, but these measurements run counter to the purpose for which "religiosity" was originally coined, which was to be highlighted and differentiated from "religion" under the "the crisis of modernity of religion"; so, this important concept should be redefined. However, the redefinition and analysis of religiosity needs to include the contribution of religious studies, thus correcting the bias of sociology of religion towards sociology, as well as the reflection on pluralism of religions. Among them, thinking about Buddha nature can provide a valuable reference for the redefining of "religiosity". First of all, the discussion of Buddha nature can provide a philosophical and value-level supplement to the understanding of "religiosity", making the originally flattened empirical interpretation three-dimensional; secondly, the reflection on Buddha nature influenced by Chinese culture can provide oriental wisdom for the definition of religiosity. For example, Chineseized Buddhist thought incorporates the traditional Chinese understanding of human nature. On the basis of the discussion of Buddha nature, it can be seen that "religiosity" has different emphases in different religions, but there are still areas of consistency under these different understandings and expressions. Thus, the redefinition of "religiosity" should both reflect these consistencies and address the reasons for the inconsistencies through a hierarchical division. Since the redefinition of "religiosity" is not only conducive to inter-religious dialogue, but also relates to the answer to a series of important questions, such as the prediction of the future of religions, its meaning needs to be updated in accordance with the changes in the times.

Keywords: religiosity; Buddha nature; religiousness; religion

In the last century, with the spread of secularization, religious entities have been considered to be gradually shrinking, and the concept of "religion" has been gradually deconstructed, while the concern for "religiosity" has been increasing. However, what is "religiosity"? When "religion" has been questioned and discarded, why has "religiosity" become the subject of scholar's attention? Moreover, is religiosity the same as religiousness? In other words, can religiosity be measured? And how should this concept be understood in the current situation, where secularization and de-secularization are constantly at war? The answers to these questions will affect a wide range of issues in religious studies, including not only the understanding of the history and present state of religion, but also a prediction of the future development of religion. Despite the importance of this concept, the definition and application of "religiosity" in religious studies or the sociology of religion in China remain in a rough state, either "vaguely defined" or "defined according to need". There is a lack of systematic elaboration of religiosity. Here, we hope to redefine "religiosity" by referring to the discussion of the connotation of Buddha nature, so as to recognize the richness, hierarchy, and importance of this concept, and bring it back to the core field of sociology of religion, so that it can truly respond to the spiritual needs of contemporary people.

1. Why "Religiosity" Was Highlighted?

Although "religiosity" has existed since the birth of the word "religion", it has been given far less thought and attention than "religion". But along with the deconstruction of

concept of "religion", "religiosity" has become more and more prominent; a process that has been influenced by the context and thinking of a particular era. It is necessary to trace this past, thus opening up a discussion of "religiosity".

It is well known that the Enlightenment brought about a division between the rational and the sensual in mankind, whereby "other means and methods of apprehending the truth than reason were called into question", including the revelation and sensual intuition contained in religion (Fan et al. 2010, pp. 114–15). By the end of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, the Western world was under the increased influence of modernization, especially the development of science and technology, which triggered a heated debate around religious beliefs, and the modern world seemed to have become a world of "rationalized" order, in the words of Max Weber, which not only led to the formation of a sense of "the crisis of modernity of religion", but also led to a series of assertions, including the classical thesis of the secularization of religion (Chen and He 2010; Wei 2012).

Scholars of the time found that traditional forms of religious belief were unable to cope with the challenges of modernization, and that religion was being labeled as "false", and even the concept of "religion" itself was being discarded, thus diminishing the appeal and influence of traditional religious communities. As a result, traditional religious communities have lost their appeal and influence, and pessimistic judgments about the development of religion, such as Peter Berger's initial judgment of secularization, have been presented (X. Li 2015, pp. 444–45). It is in this theoretical development that the notion of "religiosity" was gradually taken out of "religion". Representative scholars such as Georg Simmel, John Dewey, Wilfred Smith, and Rodney Stark have presented different aspects of this process of differentiation and published their interpretations of religiosity.

In Georg Simmel's view, religiosity is the transcendental impulse of man's spiritual nature that aspires to dedicate itself to another higher being, which is an "inner prescriptive nature of this life", and from which it acts on various social relations and gives rise to different kinds of religious entities (Georg 1906, p. 48). In this way, "religiosity" and "religion" are clearly distinguished, representing the internal and external form of religion, and individual religiosity does not disappear with the demise of the external form of religion. On the one hand, with the development of modernization, this external form increasingly brings about the confused situation of the modern man, especially the intellectual confusion, which makes the inner form of religion imprisoned (Ibid., p. 46). On the other hand, religiosity is the key to escaping the crisis of modernity of religion, it is only futile to devote oneself to the modernization of religious doctrines and institutions (Ibid., p. 30). For Georg Simmel, external forms of religion are not needed at all by those who are intensely religious; rather, it is those who are not very religious who need the aid of external forms of religion (Ibid., p. 56). In short, religiosity is not the same as religion and is inherently different in degree.

John Dewey also recognized the crisis of modernity of religion and hoped to find a way to relieve the crisis on the basis of social experience, making a conceptual distinction between "religious", "some kind of religion", and "religion" (Wang and Chen 2018, p. 4). In his view, there is no such thing as religion in general sense, because the differences between specific religious beliefs are too great, and religion is "an assortment of various things", so that there is no singular religion, but there is a unified "religious attitude", i.e., "Whether to a goal as a cosmogony or as an everyday one, provided it is characterized by an ideal and a goal, and is convinced of the value of this ideal or goal, and has an enduring enthusiasm for overcoming difficulties to reach this goal" (Chang 2008). Moreover, this religious attitude is both generated on the basis of experience and is a nature of experience (Ibid). However, instead of truly resolving this crisis, such an interpretive path deprives religion of its self-contained value, deconstructing the very nature of religion while at the same time also reducing religiosity to an adjective modifying an attitude, whose connotations and boundaries cannot be pinpointed down, and which can also be confused with non-religious attitudes. Nevertheless, Dewey's desire to free "the attributes of religios-

ity from the accretions that surround it", i.e., from tangible patterns of religious beliefs, practices, and organizations that limit the credibility and influence of religion, makes the separation of the two seem easy to him (Wang and Chen 2018, pp. 10, 17).

In addition, Wilfred Smith shifted his focus from the external form of religion to the concept itself. In his opinion, "religion" as a concept is too rich in connotations. In the process of using it, not only does it not increase people's understanding of the phenomenon of religion, but on the contrary, because of its ambiguity, it brings negative impacts and it is simply discarded in favor of the terms "faith (single indivisible quality)"and "cumulative religious traditions", which denote the internal and external aspects of religious life, respectively (L. Li 2008; W. C. Smith 1991, p. 12). Smith argues that religiosity is also separated from religion, and that although it is included in the concept of religion, with the effect of alienation, the external form of religion slowly fails to truly express human's inner beliefs, or is completely detached from them. Smith divides the connotations of the concept of religion into the following meanings, namely, personal piety, public systems (of beliefs, rituals, values, or other such systems, and is associated with associations in a particular space and time), and religion in general, in which personal piety becomes synonymous with religiosity, or religiousness becomes the main criterion for measuring religiosity, which can be differentiated from human indifference in that religiosity is diverse and ever changing (W. C. Smith 1991, pp. 49–50). In short, although Smith rejected "religion", he retained the adjective form "religious", arguing that religious life is a property of man, not because man is a believer in a particular religious community, but because of one's connection with the "transcendent" (Ibid., p. 386).

Such a divergence is taken for granted in Rodney Stark's study as a matter of course. However, Stark believes that the views of the above scholars belong to an old paradigm, i.e., the view that religion is "false and harmful", that it is doomed to decline, and it is a side phenomenon. Accordingly, Stark proposes a new paradigm of rational choice, in which religion becomes a "universal system of compensatory objects based on supernatural assumptions", and religiosity becomes an important basis for measuring the development of specific religious groups (Stark and Finke 2003). Under his thesis, religiosity needs to be dependent on specific forms of religion, which are not only non-universal, but also have quantitative gaps, not only in modern societies, but also in pre-modern ones (Ibid., pp. 17, 69). Thus, Stark lays the theoretical groundwork for religiosity to be equated with religiousness, even though, according to his data, the relevant judgments in classical secularization theory are constantly questioned. Although Stark does not agree with the above scholars, showing through various data that religion has not completely weakened and placing religiosity in a narrow perspective, he still makes a distinction between religiosity and religion.

In addition to the above scholars, there are many scholars who also have expressed themselves similarly, such as William James, Thomas Luckmann, Karel Dobbelaere, Jonathan Z. Smith, and Brent Nongbri etc. An individual's religiosity is differentiated from religion, especially from traditional forms and concepts of religion, to form "institutionally non-specialized social forms of religion" (Guo 2019). It is in this process of continuous differentiation that "religion" as a concept or as an external form of specific beliefs has been criticized, and a series of religions that are different from traditional religions, such as "invisible religion" and "personal religion" have emerged. These assertions are undoubtedly closely linked to the functionalist perspective of the sociology of religion, which argues that the function of religion creates its universality, and that the decline in traditional religions is therefore justified when its function is replaced by ever-deepening institutions or tools of modernization (Guo and Zhang 2012). Some later scholars, such as Jonathan Smith, argued that the concept of religion is solely the creation of the scholar's study; Brent Nongbri thought it as a recent modern and European construction, further destabilizing the universal applicability of the concept of "religion" (J. Z. Smith 1988; Brent 2013). On the other hand, "religiosity" is viewed in a different light, and scholars agree that, in contrast to the outer form of religion which has been destroyed by secularization, religion is still alive on

the inside. In other words, the individual has not been secularized completely, because religiosity is still retained within the individual. In their view, this is the bottom line from which there is no turning back, and an opportunity for a return to the most natural state of religion (Guo 2019). In short, the reason why religiosity is being reflected upon and interpreted is due to the series of "stress reactions" triggered by the deepening of modernity, in which scholars have compromised with modernization, but have preserved the spark of religion's continued existence. Should this distinction be continued in the present situation, in which secularization has not been completed and the de-secularizing currents of religious revival and innovation continue to counterattack? If the answer is no, how does one go about redefining "religiosity"?

It should be added that although religiosity has been taken out of religion, its understanding has been restricted to the sociological perspective, that is, scholars have focus on the relationship between religion, religiosity and society, and they hoped to find the answer to the question of "realizing social consensus in a society of individual freedom" through the above discussion (Wei 2011). In other words, in the sociology of religion, religion is embodied as a social form, and religiosity is channeled into social relations, so is this all there is to religiosity? And how can it be corrected from this sociological bias?

2. Religiosity and Religiousness

Despite Georg Simmel's focus on religiosity as an intrinsic form of religion, it is argued that its distribution is not homogeneous, that there are differences between people (Georg 1906, p. 53). However, in his view the strength of this religiosity is innate, and there is no way to change it later in life, but it can be reflected in differences in the outward form of the religion they choose, and Simmel does not go any further than that in terms of exactly how it is measured. With the development of sociology of religion, especially under the influence of scientism, this kind of abstract generalization of religious phenomena was replaced by micro empirical research, and the measurement of religiosity became one of the main topics of this cross-discipline. Many scholars believe that religiosity does have the difference between strong and weak and it can be measured. G. W. Allport formulated a "Religious Orientation Scale" for this purpose (Wu 2018). On this basis, there has been a progression from one-dimensional to multi-dimensional measurements. For example, Milton Yinger's list of flexible propositional forms for determining the religiosity of believers (Dai and Peng 2007, pp. 53–54). Especially after the 1980s, with the rise of rational choice theory, the confinement of religiosity to external forms of religion was no longer a concern, and the line between religiousness and religiosity became blurred, even equating religiousness with religiosity (Gao and Liu 2008). In the study of Charles Y. Glock and Rodney Stark, the religiousness of believers can be determined through experience, ritual, piety, faith, knowledge, ethics, social relations, and personal salvation beliefs (Dai and Peng 2007, p. 55). Thereafter, it was found that religiosity served different psychological needs; its use extends well beyond the sociology of religion.

The reason why religiosity is constantly being quantified is that, on the one hand, the measurement of religiosity can show the development of a certain faith group, i.e., the extent to which the believers are devoted to the corresponding faith, including the knowledge of the doctrine, religious practice, and expression of emotions. On the other hand, it can also be used to judge the number of religious believers in the wider community through the relevant measurements, i.e., whether or not they demonstrate religiousness is a criterion for judging religious believers. Both of these studies are of great practical significance, as they can provide concrete data on the development of religious communities in a particular organization or region, or even globally. However, implicit in this large body of research is the premise that religiosity is equated with religiousness, which is, the degree of piety in a specific form of religion. However, this definition also leads to an inherent contradiction between the two research directions mentioned earlier. This is due both to the fact that the quantitative counting of religious believers is inherently provisional or lagging, and to the fact that the caliber of the measurement of religiosity itself cannot be

truly standardized, but only in terms of the recognition of a certain religion in a certain geographic area or on a small scale. In other words, the caliber of the current measurement of religiosity is limited by the different dimensions of religiosity in different faith communities. This is why it is not yet possible to produce accurate statistics on the number of believers in any one country or globally. In addition to explaining the state of belief, the measurement of religiosity is also relevant to the study of religion and health, religion and population, and other related topics, which will not be repeated here (Wu 2018).

In the studies of sociology of religion in China, scholars also measure the religiosity of believers through experience, ritual, knowledge, and other aspects of expression. Although the number of related studies is not large, there still exists a situation in which religiosity is equated with religiousness, not only because of blind adherence to the application of the study, but also because of a tendency of reduction in understanding. First of all, in the process of the development of Chinese religious studies, generally for the introduction and exploration of important theories and concepts in Western studies, the accuracy or otherwise of translation and interpretation will affect the development of the study and the reader's understanding. For example, scholars Dai Kangsheng and Peng Yao directly define religiosity as a criterion for judging whether a person is a believer and his or her degree of religiousness (Dai and Peng 2007, p. 53). It can be said that almost no scholars have stated the ins and outs of the concept of "religiosity", but more often equate religiosity with religiousness without any criticism, and directly apply or selectively use the existing Western measurement methods to conduct related research (For example: Xu et al. 2015; Wang and Wang 2011). Secondly, equating religiousness with religiosity is a sociological understanding and expression that lacks the relevant reflections of religious studies. As Mircea Eliade summarizes, a religious person, i.e., one who possesses religiosity, is not the same as a religious person, and similarly religiosity cannot be equated with religiousness, since religiousness is relative to a tangible object of faith (Mircea 2002). That is to say, religiosity as understood by religiousness can only be embodied in a religious adherent of a specific religious community, a reduced equivalence for the sake of more precise measurement. However, religiosity is not just a concept that is dependent on a specific object of belief. It not only exhibits religiousness, but also contains the reasons and motivations for why religiousness should be exhibited. Again, equating religiosity with religiousness is an inversion of the original relationship between religiosity and religion. As can be seen from the above history of the discourse on religiosity, religiosity is the foundation and source of motivation for the emergence of religion, i.e., it is the existing religiosity that gives rise to the externalized form of religion. However, equating religiosity with religiousness implies that religiosity needs to be dependent on specific religious forms, and the basic logical relationship between the two is completely inverted.

Although there is a growing tendency to equate religiosity with religiousness, to the extent that few scholars even mention the difference between the two, this is further and further away from the original purpose of taking religiosity out of religion, which measures the inter-relationships of believers to a specific entity of faith that has been denied, at least partially, from the very beginning of the relevant discussion. Reformation leader Jean Calvin equated religiosity with "the disposition which impels one to worship"; John Dewey also argued that "religious" as an adjective "does not refer to anything in the way that an entity can be specified", and is not capable of being like a religion, but merely an attitude (Wei 2011, 2019; Wang and Chen 2018, pp. 7–8). In addition, Thomas Luckmann finds that religiosity is property that is dependent on religion and changes as religion changes, and that to equate religion only with tangible forms of religion would be to share the view of secularization theory, which holds that religion is in crisis and that religiosity diminishes with it (Wei 2016). This means that when religiosity is equated with religiousness, it is in a state of dynamic flux, i.e., it does not have a general prescriptive nature. Then again, Rodney Stark and others used rationalism to explain the phenomenon of religion, judging that religious behavior is not irrational. And, that religiosity is traced back to a

more thoroughgoing inquiry: why do people seek these rewards and compensations for their beliefs?

It follows that "religiosity" should not be taken simply as religiousness, but does this mean that religiosity cannot be measured? The answer to this question will not be known until religiosity is specifically redefined.

3. Exploration of Buddha Nature Contributes to Redefining Religiosity

From the above discussion, it can be seen that the concept of religiosity has been highlighted and equated with religiousness in a special context. At present, in order to avoid confusion in understanding, there is a real need to redefine this concept in the Chinese situation in a clear and applicable way, and the relevant discussions around Buddha nature can provide assistance in defining religiosity, for example, the discussions on what is Buddha, whether all beings can become Buddhas, and how the conditions for Buddhahood are quite enlightening.

3.1. Expanding the Perspective of Understanding "Religiosity" by the Doctrine of Buddha Nature

Most of the discussions and measurements of religiosity in the Western world have been centered around the Christian faith community, lacking the relevant contributions of religious studies, and thus favoring Western sociological ideas and methods in the process of discourse. Then, redefining religiosity with reference to the relevant discussion of Buddha nature can bring about inter-religious dialogues as well as correct to some extent the bias brought about by the dominance of sociology and Christianity.

First of all, a very important question before the redefinition of religiosity is whether religiosity must be connected with a transcendental or transcendent object. In existing studies, scholars have always discussed religiosity in such a connection. For example, Feng Chuantao takes religiosity as the essential attribute of religion, which is "the dependence, trust and reverence of human beings for God or heaven presented in piety and sincerity to be manifested" (Feng 2015). The connection between religiosity and transcendent objects is made because the definition of religiosity is entangled with the definition of religion, or the narrow definition of religion is applied directly to religiosity without distinguishing between the connection and the difference between the two. As John Dewey discovered, theism and personal immortality are still upheld, even though much about religion is now no longer accepted (Wang and Chen 2018, p. 17). The veneration of the divine is linked to the scholarly tradition since the founding of religion, especially from Mircea Eliade onwards, where the relationship between religion and the sacred has been constantly emphasized, i.e., religiosity as an element of the sacred, and as a result, a number of functions are created, yet with dissemination and interpretation, the sacred has been reduced either to a supernatural or transcendental object, or approximated to some kind of collective authority (Jin 2015). Religiosity is thus connected to the transcendent object precisely because it is the "the foundation and ground of existence, the authorization and the measure" of religion (Wei 2011).

When religiosity is removed from religion, what is denied is not only institutionalized forms of religion, but also transcendental objects or collective authority (Guo and Zhang 2012). In today's world of evolving rationality, it is difficult to accept assertions that are incompatible with scientific understanding, so how can the definition of religiosity avoid falling into a dilemma similar to that of "religion"? This external transcendental or collective authority is the first thing that needs to be corrected. Or furthermore, the redefinition of religiosity should avoid the connection with specific deities, which in the history of mankind can be seen in many cases as a result of differences in the understanding of the concept of deities that have led to much hatred and persecution (Charles Shirō 2014). Unlike other world religions, the Buddhist faith is not obsessed with the worship of a bodhisattva or a deity, but rather talks about how to reach enlightenment, a state of nirvana, and how to enhance one's ability to become a bodhisattva. In the Buddhist understanding, there is only one difference between man and Buddha, that is, all living beings have not

yet disposed of the dark clouds of ignorance. Because all living beings do not know and do not see, and do not understand the use of Buddha nature, and so, suffer endlessly. Only through religious practice can living beings finally dispose of these dark clouds, showing the most real nature of man, transformed into perfect wisdom. So that all living beings are the Buddha, Buddha is all living beings. As John Dewey saw: "All beliefs and concepts involved ...... are associated with the supernatural, and that association leads to an element of skepticism about them... are exhausting the very life of religiosity" (Wang and Chen 2018, p. 17). The first step in the redefinition of religiosity, then, is to break the above connections and return religiosity to the sacred rather than the deity.

Another question of great importance for the redefinition of religiosity is whether the subject of religiosity is the individual believer, the concrete community of faith, or the human being as a class of beings. The answer to this question will present different facets of the meaning of "religiosity" and offer possibilities for discussion in different disciplines. In the existing discussions on the subject of religiosity, there is a consensus that individuals are religious, whereas the religiosity of specific communities of faith is neglected because of the denial of their external form, and there is no unanimity as to whether all human beings are religious.

In terms of personal religiosity, Georg Simmel argues that only individuals can be religious, and in the field of psychology of religion, Michael Argyle also argues that religiosity can be used to describe a person's personality in terms of religious attitudes, religious beliefs, religious behaviors, religious experiences, etc. (Argyle 2005). The promotion of the individual is an extension of the "human-centeredness" that has existed since the Renaissance and the Enlightenment to the present day. However, some scholars have argued that this sacred nature does not exist in the individual alone but is realized through social interaction (Du 2022). The first part of the reflection on religiosity is basically carried out against the background of the trend of secularization. Nowadays, in addition to the decline and contraction of religions, there are also revivals, innovations, and expansions of religions, and specific forms of religions have not been completely detached from the needs of human beings and have been proved to contribute to the physical and mental health of human beings through rational measurements, so that it is necessary to affirm the religiosity of the religious communities (Stark and Finke 2003, p. 24).

In this increasingly rational society, there is a need for universally consistent content to unite us (Charles Shirō 2014). In the discussion of Buddha nature, there are constant references to the self-interested and altruistic nature of Buddha nature, which takes on an altruistic character due to the fact that the practice of Buddhism is constantly good, ultimately for the sake of full enlightenment, and the need to realize this wisdom in compassion "to treat every sentient being with the same non-differentiating compassion", enhancing social harmony and peace (Maria Reis 2010; Schneider 2021). Especially from the Tendai Sect's standpoint, self-cultivation and the enlightenment of all sentient beings are regarded as one and the same thing, because self-cultivation and the enlightenment of all sentient beings are both present in the Buddha nature of all sentiment beings, and one's liberation cannot be separated from all sentient beings, and one's self-liberation can only be accomplished and one can only show oneself to be a true liberator through the process of the enlightenment of sentient beings (Chen 2020). Based on the nature of Buddha nature, it can be said that religiosity, in addition to bringing about human breakthrough, also offers the possibility of good relations between people. Or in other words, religiosity itself requires a kind of goodness and compassion for others, whereby it is possible to find commonalities with other non-religious believers while forming a community of faith, which emphasizes the commonalities rather than the differences of human beings. Religiosity, like Buddha nature, should demonstrate the wisdom to bridge differences and divisions.

So, as to whether religiosity is an instinctive attribute of human beings, some scholars believe that religiosity is indeed an instinctive attribute, similar to lust (Chen and He 2010). Marsilio Ficino also believes that *religio* is an instinctive attribute of human beings distinct from all things and is a universal instinct to pursue the divine (Wei 2011, 2012; W.

C. Smith 1991, pp. 34–35). In addition, Thomas Luckmann does not abandon the concept of "religion" as the above mentioned scholars do, but returns to the archetype meaning of the existence of religion as a whole, arguing that the generation of the world of meaning, which embodies the essential being of man, is a religious process, i.e., the unification of religion and religiosity in the subject of human beings (Wei 2016). However, the discussion of Buddha nature is not limited to human beings, but extends to all things in the world, and Buddha nature can reveal itself in any place and at any time, and everything in this world is its manifestation, which is why the question of "whether or not heartless things have Buddha nature" has arisen among the issues of Buddha nature, and is also important for the contemplation of the relationship between human beings and the universe. Here, we do not have enough space to explore such a grand topic, but we will rather limit religiosity to the human subject, which is the original driving force for the formation of religion shared by all human beings. It can also be embodied in the groups formed by human beings, that is to say, the characteristics embodied in specific religious forms. Of course, it can be manifested in individual persons, which is presented in the associations and manifestations of individual believers to specific objects of faith.

As can be seen from the above reflections, the definition of religiosity requires considerable flexibility or inclusiveness. So that, on the one hand, it can integrate and permeate existing relevant thinking, and on the other hand, it still leaves some room for expansion, so that it can continue to be renewed and enriched in the future. Furthermore, as modernization has deeply affected the world, it is also necessary to see its negative impact, and the definition of religiosity should respond to the needs of the times (He 1996). In a deeply modernized world, as Erving Goffman argues, the state of the modern individual is like that of a deity on an island. The definition of religiosity should not only be responsive to the times by exalting the rational individual but should also provide a basis for the integration of society. So that the emphasis on religiosity should not only be at the level of the individual, but also at the level of the human race in a more universal sense (Du 2022). Finally, it is equally important that the reflection on religiosity should not only start from a sociological perspective, but should be supplemented by religious studies, adding to religiosity its self-contained connotation, that is, its connection with the sacred, which is a kind of real reality, and the redefinition of religiosity is also a deeper inquiry into this connection (Mircea 2002, p. 6). The attempt to define religiosity with reference to the discussion of Buddha nature is not a complete innovation, but a generalization and condensation, an updating and emphasizing of the existing discourses in the field of religious studies and sociology of religion.

Religiosity, then, can be defined as the spiritual trait of human beings that breaks through their own limitations in pursuit of the sacred, which, while orienting the human being to himself or herself, defines the order of the world as humanly comprehensible and gives him or her ultimate meaning as well as moral standards (Wei 2012). It is worth noting that here, the sacred is the antithesis of human finitude, and as Mircea Eliade says, the sacred is the source of life and its reproduction, the sacred has been materialized in different cultural traditions or understood as a direction or a realm (Mircea 2002, p. 6). Religiosity allows one to realize and face one's own finitude, whether it is when one engages in various activities in the natural environment, or when one sees birth, old age, sickness, and death, or in the process of human interaction, this self-consciousness of finitude follows one. But religiosity does more than that, it generates a hope and an impulse to go beyond the finite, and the direction of the endeavor is the real, life-giving actuality. It can be said that this is both a breakthrough from the finite nature of man, especially his biological nature, and the need to establish an order that is comprehensible to man, on the basis of which the "notion that there is a universal order in all existence" will be further developed (Pals 2005, p. 339).

When this spiritual power is exerted, man's knowledge of and interaction with the world enters a new phase, and this results in a series of words and practices related to the sacred, which constitute the underpinnings of human civilizations, which is why, even though some people today are not followers of a specific religion, they still inherit the

legacy of certain religions and still retain the memory of religions, which is determined by their own religiosity (Mircea 2002, pp. 119, 125). From this, it follows that religiosity is a fundamental prescriptive nature of man as a human being, and that it is born out of it to safeguard the various forms of religion that transcend the finite; in short, religion is the objectified product of religiosity. The reason why religiosity is separated from religion is that traditional religion, which can effectively guarantee the self-transcendence of human beings, loses its flexibility and fails to effectively meet the requirements of religiosity with the changes in the times, so people look forward to new forms to externalize their religiosity.

3.2. The Doctrine of Buddha Nature Deepens the Level of Meaning of "Religiosity"

After more than a century of exploration, the connotations of religiosity have been enriched, from being an internal motivation for the externalization of religion to being an object of measurement; a process that presents the multiple layers that religiosity processes. As Georg Simmel stated, religiosity has different characteristics, stability, substitution effect, and diffusion effect, but it is important to note that these characteristics are not unified in all levels of religiosity, but are reflected by its different orientations and levels (Gao and Liu 2008). After redefining religiosity, it is important not to lose sight of its hierarchical nature, which allows for the integration of existing perceptions and the layering of the meanings of religiosity. According to Donald A. Carson's hierarchical division of religion, which distinguishes religious pluralism into empirical, value, and philosophical levels, provides an important reference for the hierarchical differentiation of religiosity (W. C. Smith 1991, p. 7). In addition, according to George H. Mead, human activities construct their object environments, which means that religiosity presents different religious patterns at different levels of activity, which means that the level of religiosity determines the level of its object religion (Randall and Michael 2014, pp. 269–70).

From a philosophical point of view, religiosity is the initial impetus for human beings to break through their own limitations and the basic orientation for pursuit of the sacred, and the thinking and behavior of a sacred and transcendent nature originate from this universal human nature. In the discussion of Buddha nature in the North and South Dynasties, there was an important issue, namely, whether Buddha nature is "beginning" or "original". One claimed that Buddha nature can only be found after obtaining the fruits of the Buddha, while another claimed that Buddha nature is innate, which shows that the starting point of the two is different (Zhang 2015). Although this discussion has continued for a long time in Chinese Mahayana Buddhism, whether it is Tendai, Huayan or Zen sect, it is believed that Buddha nature is through cause and effect, and that there is no difference between sect. It is established that Buddha nature is universal and that everyone can become a Buddha, and the most well-known expression is "icchantika would attain Buddhahood (一闡提人皆有佛性)". However, the existence of the possibility of attaining Buddhahood does not mean that one can eventually become a Buddha, but requires appropriate karmic results (Liu 2023). Nonetheless, the universality of Buddha nature sets the direction for people's lives, that is, to become Buddhas, and there is no difference between living beings from the perspective of the Buddha's fruition. The universality of Buddha nature shows us the universality of religiosity at the philosophical level, which is the cornerstone of the equality and union of human beings. At the same time, the seed of Buddha nature is not floating around among all beings, but is deeply rooted, with a universality, and at the same time a stability, that provides a guarantee for all beings to overcome the obstacles to enlightenment (Schneider 2021; Lai 2010). However, in the realm of Christianity, there has always been the idea of the elect due to its hierarchical structure, and this has led Western scholars to form the view that religiosity is not universal and that it varies in strength and weakness when discussing the issue of religiosity. However, this strong or weak religiosity can be contrasted with the perspective of lineage among the Buddha nature, that is, the difference between the five natures of all beings.

It is at this level that religiosity has stability and universality, and being born a human being instinctively sees his or her own limitations and shortcomings and develops the in-

tention and motivation to break through them, so that there is no difference in the degree of religiosity between the more and the less at this level, but rather only affirmative judgments. In this way, religiosity, as the essence of the human being, distinguishes human beings from other animals. As a result, religiosity is considered here to have a universal and essential dimension, i.e., an ultimate, transcendental concern, or rather, it cannot be defined without an inquiry into the essence, and religiosity is supposed to be universal and general (Wei 2016). When it is associated with the sacred, it gives religiosity a stable and general meaning, without which religiosity cannot be completely divorced from religion, but can only be attached to specific forms of religion. In short, religiosity does not need to be connected to transcendental objects, but rather to return to the sacredness of religion, which is at the root of what makes it a religion.

In the view of Mahayana Buddhism, although everyone possesses the Buddha nature, people need to go through religious practices in order to reach enlightenment and ultimately become Buddhas. Moreover, in the practice of Buddha nature, there is a difference between epiphany and gradualism. In addition to one's own efforts, i.e., in addition to the various practices based on bodhicitta, the Buddha nature will facilitate one's religious practice and transformation, and the Eternal Buddha will guide those who have gone astray, and open their eyes to the right path (Maria Reis 2010). A more dialectical understanding of religiosity can be gained from the Buddhist perspective, as it is both the source of motivation to break through one's own limitations, as well as the end itself that one wants to reach, and the help one needs to reach the end. These Chineseized reflections on Buddha nature are derived from Indian Buddhism but have been enriched and renewed by differences in understanding, but these understandings do not affect the essence of Buddha nature (Lai 2010, p. 16). Accordingly, there are expressions of religiosity in various cultures, but on the one hand, religiosity can be expressed in various ways of externalization of human beings, including not only religious beliefs, scientific creations, or culture and art, which means that these different ways of expression, although different in form, share the most basic unifying cornerstone, that is, the cognition of and transcendence of the finiteness of the self, and thus are able to communicate with each other and refer to each other, and that religiosity does not need to be differentiated. On the other hand, religiosity can be externalized in the social situation of different cultures in the form of specific religious forms, including multiple deities or transcendental realms, religious thoughts and feelings, ritual practices and religious systems, and forming differentiated religious beliefs.

Thus, at the value level, each form of religious expression is born out of different conditions of existence and cultural foundations. From the value level, there is no difference between Christianity, Buddhism, and other forms of religion, but only a difference in content, and thus the ability to be replaced by each other, which lays the groundwork for the transformation in belief. However, with the development of the times, specific religious forms can become fixed, or even ossified, to the extent that they are far from, or unable to satisfy, vibrant religiosity. Although there is a tendency for traditional forms of religion to decline in different social regions, tangible forms of religion give people a certain degree of security in the pursuit of the infinite, i.e., the pursuit of the infinite is symbolized by finite elements, and in addition, believers who share the same aspirations form a community of mutual identity.

In addition, on an empirical level, each faith group and believer is able to express religiousness in different ways, including religious concepts and emotions, religious behaviors and activities, and religious organizations and systems (Duan 2021, p. 54). As in the discussion of Buddha nature, although Tendai sect and Huayan sect share common ground, there are also differences in their thinking about Buddha nature. For example, Tendai sect believes that Buddha nature has good and evil, while Huayan sect believes that Buddha nature is pure, and consequently, the corresponding religious practices will be different (Lai 2010, p. 155). It is worth noting that because modern society holds up the banner of the triumph of reason, all aspects of religion are constantly being quantified and interpreted, and religiosity cannot escape. On the one hand, from the source, religiosity, like religion,

is not irrational, but can be unified with the principle of rationality, and religion is born out of religiosity on the basis of the limited knowledge of human beings and the observation of the external world, and even more so, it is in the hope of entering into a state of order in comparison. On the other hand, then, religiosity is embodied in the empirical level of the human being's knowledge, behavior, emotion, and intention, etc. Religiosity can be described and measured, and its external manifestation cannot be separated from the criterion of reason. However, it cannot be said that religiosity is completely rational, because in addition to the various choices based on the calculation of costs and benefits, the process of externalizing religiosity also involves blind adherence to a particular traditional, cultural, or social habit. In addition, the measurement of religiosity in different cultural traditions requires a comprehensive understanding of the characteristics of their beliefs, on the basis of which an appropriate measurement scheme can be constructed (Wu 2018).

Because of the rich hierarchical meanings, there is both a consistency of religiosity at the level of existence and differences in external forms between people, which also lead to different choices in the tendency of people's religious beliefs, and the differentiation between "devout inhabitant" and "spiritual seeker" (Gao and Liu 2008). Despite the deepening of modernity, people are still constrained by the traditional cultural environment, which is shaped by traditional religions. From this we can see that religiosity has its own level of change, and what can be measured is only a part of the content that is manifested through human subjective initiative, and it is subject to a specific sociocultural environment, just as the meaning of the sacred also lies in a specific cultural field and may coincide with the external form of religion, or may be expressed through a specific culture or art or other forms, and thus there is no uniform caliber of measurement (Jin 2015). As Georg Simmel argues, it is not the most essential religiosity that can be quantified, because the most essential religiosity does not need to be measured.

In a word, religiosity has a multi-level orientation, and religion as an object of religiosity also has multiple connotations. The reason why there are inconsistencies and even opposing views in the past discussions is mainly because scholars only talk about the connotations at one level. It should be said that this redefinition attempts to break through the distinction between normative and descriptive terms, and it is to be hoped that different views on the concept of religion can also be integrated by a hierarchical division of religiosity. Scholars have long argued that religion has sui generis and irreducible character, and it is presumed to be distinct from politics and other secular areas of life, and by redefining religiosity, it is possible to reconnect religion with other secular areas of life.

3.3. The Importance of Redefining "Religiosity"

It can be argued that a unified definition of religiosity is not an easy task, but why keep trying? Why is it necessary to bring the concept of "religiosity" back to the center of religious studies? The main reason is that it has become mainstream to equate religiosity with religiousness, which, however, goes against the essence of religiosity, just as scholars in the last century wanted to save secularized religions by taking religiosity out of them. Too much emphasis on the external form of religion or its connection to the external form will make the understanding of religion present a situation of putting the cart before the horse, and the understanding of religiosity will be too flat and one dimensional. Furthermore, over the past century or so, a series of issues have come to the forefront in the studies of religion, and the interpretation of the concept of religiosity has affected the understanding of and the response to these important issues, such as the secularization and de-secularization of religion, religious dialogue, and so on.

First, on an empirical level, religiosity can be an effective response to the debate between secularization and de-secularization trends in religion, which not only relates to the understanding of the present state of religion but also affects the prediction of its future. Rodney Stark argues that some of the observations in classical secularization theory are realistic, for example, that religious institutions lose their corresponding social power and influence, but that individual religiosity does not decline significantly; in other words, sec-

ularization at the individual level cannot be equated with a decline in individual religiosity (Guo 2019). As a result, despite the proliferation of classical theories of secularization, most of them revolve around social differentiation, rationalization, and secularization, with increasingly negative judgments about the future of religion, even to the point of abandoning traditional forms of religious belief altogether (X. Li 2015, p. 445). However, once religiosity is divorced from religion, the process of secularization reveals its self-limiting characteristics, that is, in the process of continuous secularization, anti-secularization or de-secularization currents have emerged, including the religious revival and innovation (Sun 2015, p. 175). Of course, some scholars believe that the individualization of religion is also an expression of secularization, and as a result, there is a tendency for the diversification of religious forms (Wilke 2016). From this, we can see that when religiosity is no longer dependent on the existence of specific religious forms, the judgment of religion under secularization will be very different, and religion will not decline until it disappears, but will continue to play its corresponding functions and exist for a long time after it has been converted or renewed.

Secondly, for religious dialogue, the understanding of the multi-level connotation of religiosity is an important prerequisite for dialogue. On the one hand, it is possible to transcend concrete and tangible religious beliefs at the philosophical level, and recognize religiosity as a commonality among human beings, which can form a platform for in-depth and wider dialogue, and thus achieve effective understanding among religions; on the other hand, it is possible to achieve mutual recognition at the value level, i.e., there is no difference between superior and inferior products of religiosity, and establish the prerequisite for equal dialogue and mutual respect. In the discussion of Buddha nature, apart from thinking about the universality of Buddha nature, we also explore how to manifest Buddha nature, in which various ways of practicing Buddha nature are mentioned, such as through hearing, thinking, and practicing the three wisdoms, practicing the ten thousand acts, eliminating sins and breaking away from them, etc. That is to say, Buddha nature is in a hidden state in daily life, which is also very enlightening to understand religious nature, which is hidden in itself and can only be expressed through externalization. The process of manifesting Buddha nature is also a process of breaking down confusion. When there is a correct understanding of religiosity, members of the dialogue will realize that the differences in religious forms are not fundamental, but are limited by the specific social situation, just as Wilfred Smith argues that different religions, whether it is Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism, are all "complexes of theology and history." When religious dialogue returns to the value of religiosity, the "glasses" through which human religious life is viewed will be discarded, and the resulting controversy will be set aside or even ignored (W. C. Smith 1991, p. CC). The existing religious dialogues, which aim to achieve mutual understanding and recognition from religious doctrines and practices, are half-hearted or even have few results because the commonalities of such dialogues are usually found at the empirical level, which itself has a tendency to be differentiated, and the two run counter to each other. Furthermore, placing religiosity at the lowest level of human nature reveals that this not only advances the dialogues between religions, but also further brings about a reconciliation between religion and science, or eases the tit-for-tat between the two. Simply put, why both science and religion love the fixed and unchanging is because they both share the same understanding of the finite and transient nature of human beings, only differing in their orientation to transcendence (Wang and Chen 2018, p. 65). If the concept of "religion" was created to distinguish between "religious" and other as "not religious", then the redefinition of religiosity is intended to bridge the gap. Just as Ann Taves attempts to integrate the study of religion with other disciplines on an empirical level (Taves 2009).

Thirdly, from a broader perspective, facing up to the connotation of religiosity can overcome the negative impact of rationality brought about by the trend of modernization. With the deepening influence of rationality, especially the over reliance on instrumental rationality, not only are traditional forms of religion being questioned, but even religiosity is being stripped away in an ambiguous manner that blurs the sacred and the secular.

Attention is constantly projected onto definite numerical values, which are considered to be in accordance with scientific standards and objective understanding, and thus religiosity is equated with religiousness. However, what cannot be calculated or measured needs to be paid more attention to, so as to achieve the most in-depth and true understanding of human nature, to allow people to recognize the limits of the self and at the same time reflect on the relationship with the whole world, and to bridge the gap between people and their own nature, and other people and nature (He 1996). On this basis, the renewal rather than the abandonment of traditional forms of religion, whether it be "invisible religion" or "personal religion," is wishful thinking, because religiosity needs to be expressed on an experiential level, and since the diffuse nature of this externalized expression will inevitably lead to socially influential communities of faith, it is more important to cater to the expression of religiosity rather than to deny it and its manifestations.

Finally, bringing the concept of religiosity back to the core field of religious studies would also better address the relationship between religious studies and sociology in the joint study of religion. In order to make the study of religious phenomena more scientific and in line with mainstream sociological values, the cross-discipline of sociology of religion seems to have become an offshoot of sociology, to which religious studies contribute very little (Duan 2021). By redefining religiosity and confronting the relationship between religiosity and the sacred, the important role of religious studies can be better utilized to broaden the horizon of understanding and share the results of research. In the sociological perspective, it makes no sense to talk about religion in isolation from society, and in the perspective of religious studies, discussion in isolation from the human person itself, from the relationship between the human person and the world, and from the sacred is equally inadequate. Then again, there have been discussions on religiosity, whose usual subject of exposition is mostly Christianity, or formed under the general background of Christianity; however, the most basic research path of religious studies, i.e., comparative studies, which needs to explore religious phenomena on the basis of pluralistic religions, can provide richer empirical information for the study of religiosity, and the discussion of Buddha nature will only be taken as a brief reference here (Guo and Zhang 2012). At the same time, religiosity also provides rationality for non-religious people to understand religious phenomena, because religious phenomena no longer revolve around a specific form of religion, but rather refer to all the externalized expressions of religiosity, and thus not only can believers of a specific religious faith most accurately and comprehensively grasp religious phenomena, meaning that there is no internal or external distinction between human beings in front of religiosity.

To sum up, religiosity has not only become a shield against the trend of secularization in the last century, but also an important cornerstone for analyzing and interpreting the phenomenon of religion today. The attempts to redefine religiosity here are not only to return to a comprehensive understanding of it and explore the connotation of religiosity in a more comprehensive way, but also to re-exploit the value of the traditional forms of religion and to understand the intrinsic correlation between them and religiosity, and to affirm the contribution of the religious studies and rectify the sociological bias of the sociology of religion.

4. Conclusions

From the above discussion, it is clear that the understanding of religiosity both derives from and seeks to break free from religion, which is mainly triggered by the crisis of various traditional forms of religion in the process of secularization. However, both religion and religiosity are related to the sacred, and religiosity is a spiritual quality connected to the sacred, while religion is an expression of the sacred, which is relative to the finitude of human beings. As long as man's own finiteness cannot be eliminated, then this religiousness will not disappear. It is the push of religiosity that makes people continue pursuing all kinds of compensations, because these compensations are effective breakthroughs to the finiteness of the self. Then, possessing religiosity is not the same as becoming a religious

person, but a religious person is bound to possess a certain expression of religiosity; religiosity cannot be equated with religiousness, but religious piety is a way of externalizing religiosity. Thus, religiosity is both measurable and unmeasurable.

In addition, in the understanding of religiosity, existing studies have either focused on its ontological or epistemological level, and seldom discussed the meaning of religiosity in a hierarchical manner in a developmental process. Referring to the discussion of Buddha nature, we can see that religiosity displays different characteristics at the philosophical, value, and empirical levels, and thus the future discussion and application of religiosity should first clarify at which level it is developed, rather than just equating it with religiousness on an empirical level. In addition, it is important to emphasize the function and significance of religiosity in modern society, not only as an important concept for interpreting religious phenomena, but also as a channel for the integration of the modern ethical order of life (Wei 2012).

Then again, religiosity, as a human nature, will constantly seek external expression, but all kinds of expression will solidify and even affect the expression of religiosity, because human beings can only interpret their longing for the sacred through finite things or imagined infinite objects; therefore, religiosity needs to be constantly restored to ensure the truest understanding of it. With the development of the times, traditional concepts and their related understandings will of course become richer and even contradict each other; however, they should not be discarded just because they have pejorative connotations or point to pluralism. Reorganization and repositioning are necessary to revitalize them.

Finally, nowadays, when micro- and empirical research is highly sought after, it is even more important to give full play to the self-reflexive spirit of modernity, and to add a macroscopic perspective and abstract discernment to the study of religious phenomena, so as not only to find a solution to the crisis of religion itself, but also to provide a practical response to the real spiritual needs of mankind.

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