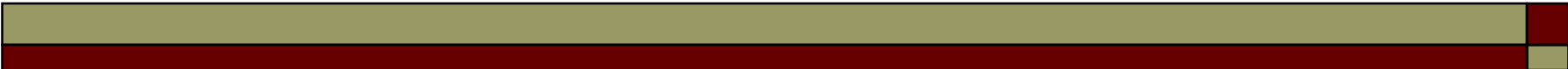


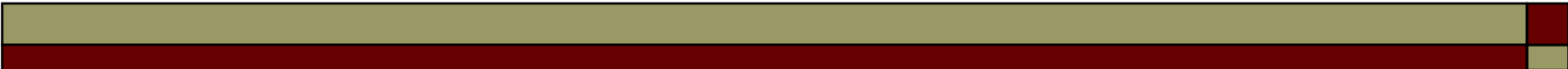
Chinese Religions at the Grassroots

Lecture 2: Religion-State Relations: The management of religious affairs in contemporary China



Questions

- ❑ Do current religious policies reflect traditional arrangements between state and religions?
- ❑ How has the dynamics of the state regulatory framework on religious life enabled some relationships more than others?



Traditional Chinese State Ritual System

- ❑ Sacrifices to imperial ancestors
- ❑ Heaven, Earth, Sun and Moon
- ❑ Sacrifice to Mountain and Water Spirits

Altar of Heaven

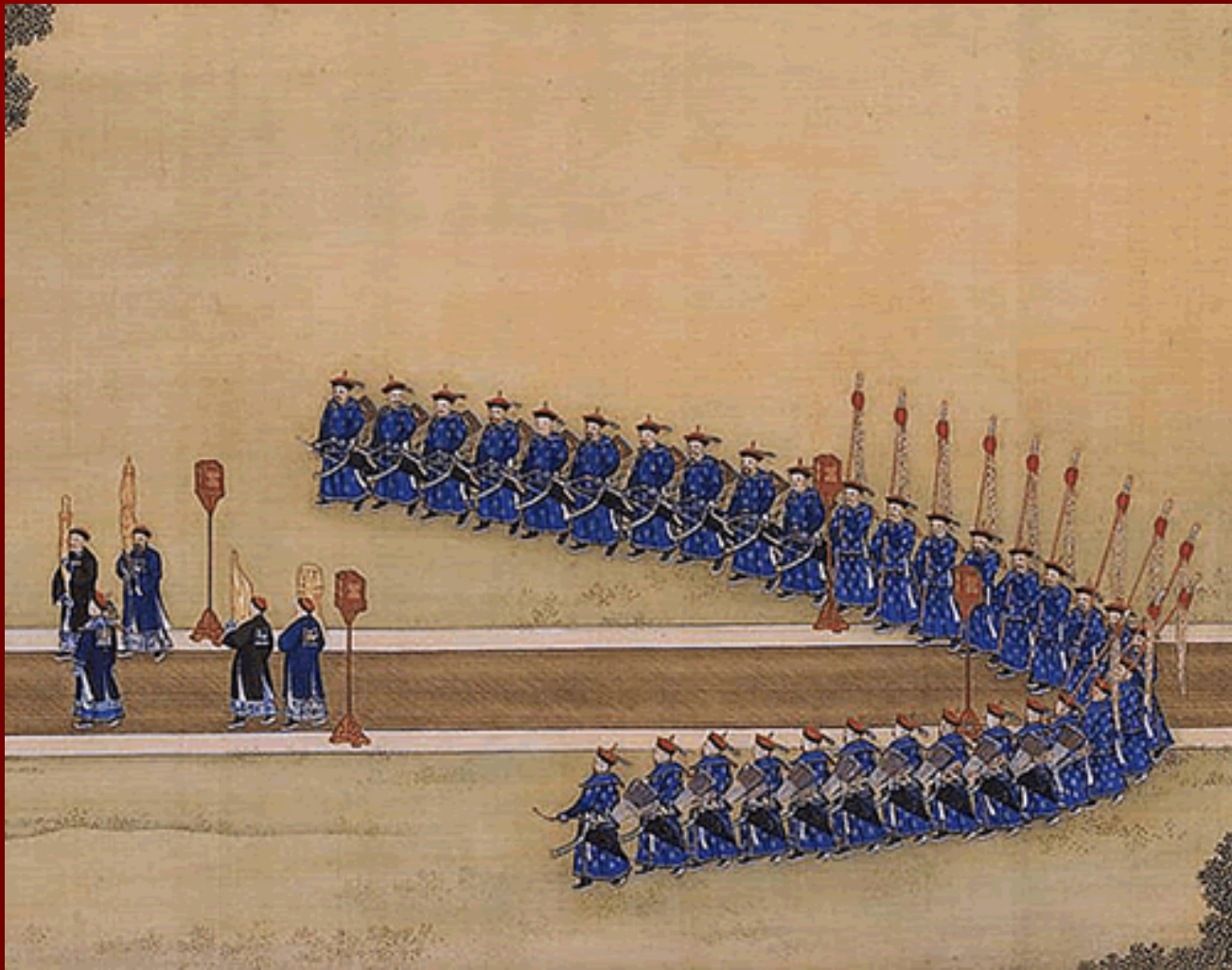


Altar of Heaven at the Temple of Heaven Complex in Present-day Beijing



Excavation Site of 6th-century Altar of Heaven in Xi'an, China's ancient capital





The Yongzheng Emperor Offering Sacrifices at the Altar of the God of Agriculture (detail),
1723-35

Anonymous court artists, Qing dynasty

Handscroll; ink and color on silk

61.8 x 467.8 cm

© The Palace Museum, Beijing

Earth God Shrines

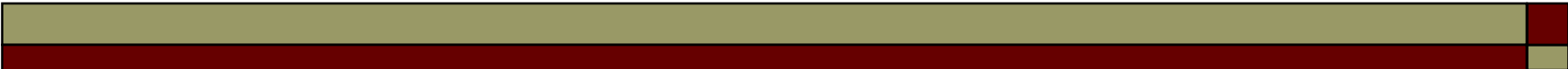


shè 社

- ❑ *Shuōwén* (1st century): 社 . From 礻 (礻 shì) ‘altar’ and 土 (tǔ) ‘earth’.
- ❑ “Altar to the spirits of the land; sacrifice to the spirits of the land; tutelary deity, village, society — the 社 religious rites for 社 the land” (transl. B. Karlgren)
- ❑ *shèqū* 社群 “community”; 社会 shèhuì “society”; 宗社 zōngshè “ancestral temple” → state, country

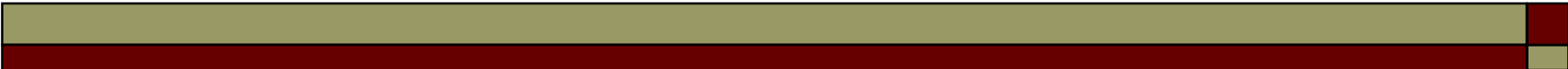
shè □

- Functioned as locus where blood sacrifices legitimised political authority
- Official “Boundary markers” established earthen mound whenever new state or dependency was established
- *shè* □ alter provides space for congregation → soil temporarily empowered with spirit-like powers
→ Spiritual underpinning of village community; community of those who worship



Regulation in imperial times

- ❑ State (imperial institution) claims supreme authority in religious matters
- ❑ System of state-sponsored ritual programmes dedicated to officially recognised deities and cosmic forces
- ❑ Bestowal of official (imperial) recognition onto popular local cults while banning others (co-optation)
- ❑ Establishment of a hierarchical system of clerical certificates (monk certificates) to regulate clerical service providers



“Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan” by Mao Zedong (1927)

- “The gods and goddesses are indeed miserable things. You have worshipped them for centuries, and they have not overthrown a single one of your local tyrants or evil gentry! Now you want to have your rent reduced. Let me ask, how will you go about it? Will you believe in the gods or in the peasant association?”
- “The peasants are the ones who made the idols, and when the time comes *the peasants will cast them aside with their own hands*; there is no need for anyone else to do it for them.” (DuBois 2011: 201)

Yan'an Period (1936-1945)

- Different attitudes towards Hui and Mongols on the one hand, and Han
- religion considered an “inseparable aspect of social life” of minorities
- continuous trend to create national religious organizations, e.g. “China Muslim Salvation Association” 中国回民救国协会 (1938); Chinese Federation of Religious Believers 中国宗教徒联谊会 (1943)
- collaboration with secret societies (Gelao hui) or sworn brotherhoods with aim to make them superfluous

Civil War (1945-1949)

- religions mostly support Kuomintang (KMT)
 - Vatican established diplomatic relations with Nanjing government in 1946; Catholics not allowed to read Communist publications
- redemptive societies side with KMT
- January 4, 1949: ban of ‘sects and secret societies’; *huimen* 会门 *daomen* 道门; accusation of being “feudal” and “counter-revolutionaries” (*fandong huidaomen* 反动会道门)
- after October ‘49: extermination of *huidaomen*

Zhou Enlai, speech 25 June 1950

Two types of religion:

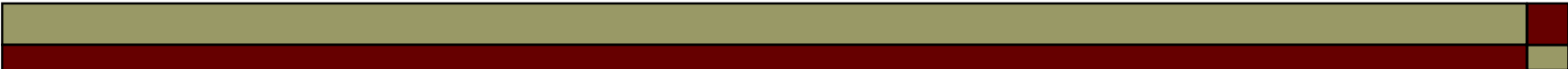
- ❑ Connected to ethnic minorities
- ❑ Linked to imperialism (Christianity)

“Whoever tries to abolish religion artificially will find it impossible. The Soviet Union is a socialist country but it still has religion. We emphatically do not intend to do this. If we imagine that things we don’t like will simply cease to exist, then that is not in accordance with objective reality.” (Smith 2015, p. 73)

- ❑ Soviet Union: “anti-religious policy”
- ❑ PRC: “religious policy” → “any idea about taking coercive action is useless and positively harmful” (ibid., p. 79)

Land reform (1950s)

- Land and property owned by the following organizations was taken away by the state or redistributed:
 - Temples
 - Native place associations
 - Guilds
 - Communities (local temples)
- Loss of property meant that many deities were relocated to private households → “household idiom of religious service”



Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) – Political sacralization

The sun is reddest, / Chairman Mao is closest.

Your brilliant thought / Will forever illuminate my [or:
our] heart.

The spring wind is warmest, / Chairman Mao is closest.

Your revolutionary party line / Will forever guide
[my/our] journey.

Your achievements are higher than the sky.

Your loving kindness is deeper than the sea.

The sun in my heart will never set.

Your heart will forever be close to ours.

Absolute truth/authority

- ❑ Leninist's state inability to tolerate the truth claims and final authority of any social organization even if it is not political
 - Mao period (1949-1976): “it was not the religiousness of Chinese religious institutions that invited suppression but their institutionality” (Chau, *Chinese Religion*, p. 164)
- ❑ Party is only source of spiritual vision and ultimate meaning

Idol worship

**Respectfully wish Chairman Mao
eternal life! 1968**

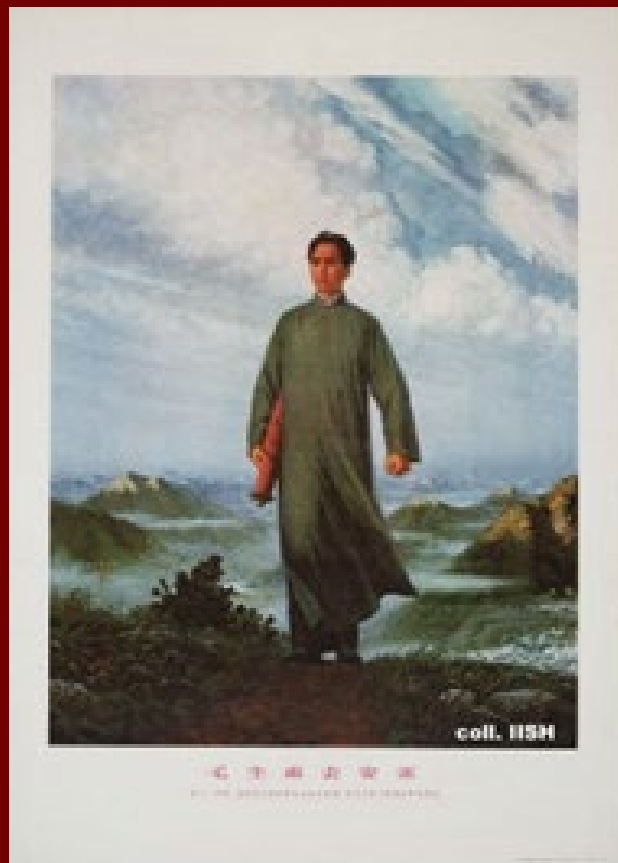


**Advance victoriously while following
Chairman Mao's revolutionary line in
literature and the arts, 1968**



Salvation

Mao goes to Anyuan, 1967



Hunan Communist Group c. 1970



Paradise

Our great motherland is thriving



Amitābha in the Pure Land

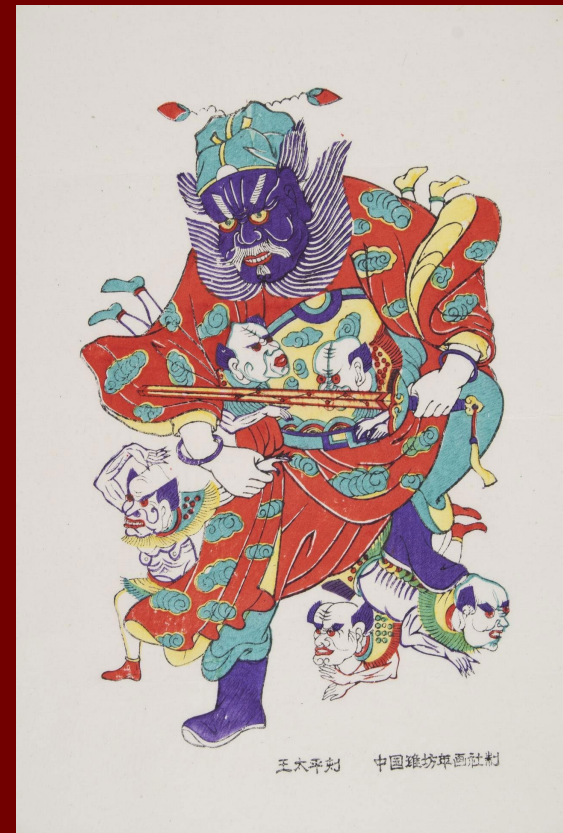


Quelling the demons

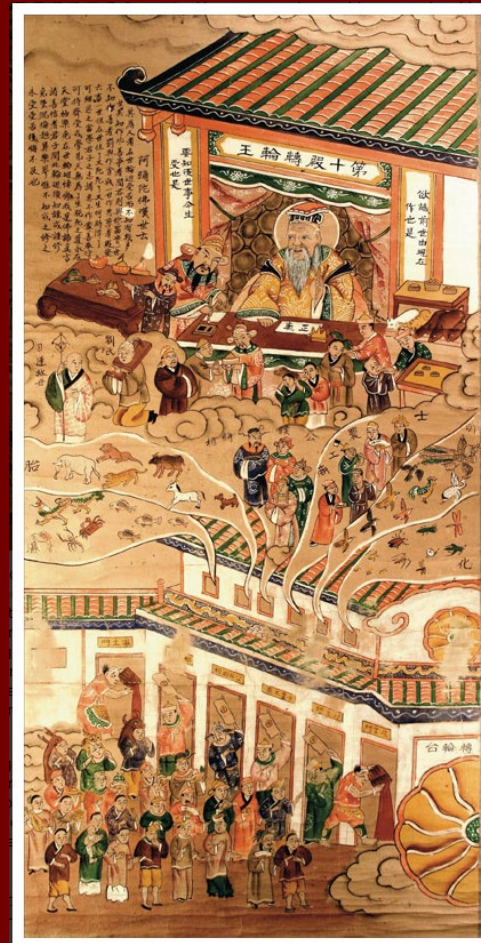
Smash down Li Jingquan and his small handful of confederates, 1967



Zhong Kui, the demon queller



“Wage the struggle against the right deviationist wind of reversing verdicts to the end!”



Institutional relations with 5 religions

- “religion sector” 宗教界, consisting of friendly elements
- high-ranking clerics appointed to political positions
- establishments of ‘patriotic’ organisation, replacing the Republican ones
 - China Islamic Association (May 1953)
 - China Buddhist Association (May 1953)
 - China Taoist Association (April 1957)
 - Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (June 1957)
 - Protestant Three-Self Patriotic Movement (July 1954)
 - self-governing, self-financing, self-expanding/propagating

SARA - State Administration of Religious Affairs

- Religious Affairs Bureaus (*zongjiaoju* 宗教局; since 1954) mission is “to implement the policy of religious freedom”
- United Front Department (CCP dept., *tongzhanbu* 统战部)
- often overlapping with RAB (and Nationalities Commission) at lower levels
- Notion of religion: ‘five characteristics’
 - long-term nature (*changqixing*)
 - mass nature (*qunzhongxing*)
 - ethnic nature (*minzuxing*)
 - international nature (*guojixing*)
 - complex nature (*fuzaxing*)

Religious Freedom, cont.

- ❑ Restrictions on religious freedom if religion:
 - ❑ posed a challenge or threat to the state
 - ❑ threat to public order
 - ❑ damaged the national image.
 - ❑ → Religious rights defined by ‘administrators’
- ❑ **Organisational forms (corporatist model):**
 - ❑ Charity
 - ❑ National organization
 - ❑ Religious group, redemptive society

Sociopolitical consequences

- ❑ All ‘members’ of religions regarded as co-religionists
- ❑ Regular meetings between leaders of religious organisations (exchange of ideas and strategies to survive/expand under challenging circumstances)
- ❑ Contacts across religious boundaries
- ❑ Temple activism aiming to register with SARA
- ❑ Religious groups seeking to register as “intangible cultural heritage” (e.g., locally famous temple festivals) → different set of regulations under Ministry of Culture; ‘culture’ is less sensitive affiliation than ‘religion’

The “religion sphere” (*zongjiaojie* 宗教界)

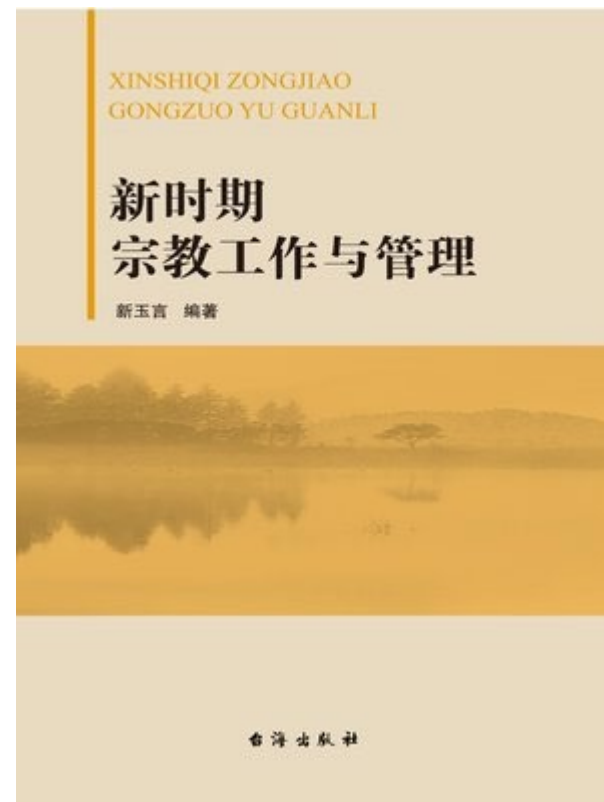
- Refers to “all religious people”
- Relatively fuzzy, semi-formal sociopolitical domain comprising publicly acknowledged social actors (clerics, activists, journalists, bloggers)
- Religion sphere equivalent to other functional spheres, such as education sphere, health and medicine sphere, arts sphere, science sphere
- Spheres can have sub-spheres, e.g., popular religion sphere, Buddhism sphere
- Argument: Formation and maintenance of the ‘spheres’ aligns with construction of the sovereignty of the nation

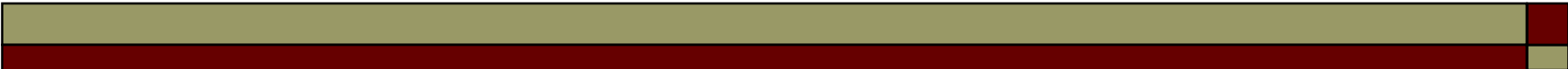
“Religion sphere” *zongjiaojie* □ □ □

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□ □ □ □ □ (Bringing into full play
the positive function of persons in
the religion sphere and the religious
masses)

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□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □
(Bringing into full play the positive
functions of persons in the religion
sphere and the religious masses in
the development of the economy and
society)

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □
□ □ □ (Consolidating and
developing the Party's patriotic
united front with the religion sphere)





Summary

- ❑ Not separation of religion and state but integration of the two
- ❑ Liberalisation towards religious activities does not mean that the state retreats from the religion sphere. It often means that the state supports religious activities.