

national Catholic Church, rather than to the Vatican. The lax attitude toward popular organizations changed quickly in 1999 with the campaign against Falun Gong, which revealed a new sensitivity of the Chinese state toward religious ideas and organizations.

SEE ALSO *Religious Policy*; *Secret Societies*; *White Lotus*.

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RELIGIOUS POLICY

China has long had an extremely varied religious landscape, with numerous forms of religious practice and organization embedded in local society and resistant to state control and standardization. When taking a long-term perspective, one can see how Chinese regimes have deployed efforts aimed at controlling and reforming this religious landscape, with results that rarely met their own standards. Some observers of the present situation, notably in mainland China, contend that it exhibits a fundamental continuity from imperial times, after the parenthesis of the Maoist years. According to them, present-day local officials, just like their Qing predecessors, despise popular religious culture but tolerate it unless it grows dangerous, in which case they repress it mercilessly. This line of analysis suggests that such continuity evidences a specificity of Chinese state and society in the management of religious pluralism.

On the other hand, there are also strong arguments in favor of rupture in the state-and-religion relationships between the late imperial period and the modern Republican and socialist regimes. The religious policy rupture initiated in 1898 ushered in an era of state nationalization of local temples and other religious institutions and resources. Within two decades, the imperial policy of

separating orthodoxy and heterodoxy was replaced with a policy of recognizing world religions while repressing all other practices branded as superstition. The first policy represents a project to reform Chinese religion from the inside, while the second amounts to managing religion from the outside.

LATE QING POLICIES

Religion as a category was introduced in China only around 1900 and was indeed used to redefine new policies. But if one starts from an anthropological definition of religion as including all institutions and practices dealing with death, gods, and destiny, then it appears that the late imperial state did have a coherent set of religious policies. Such policies were articulated with other issues of cultural policy, such as bans on operas and other performing arts, and with social control, as they overlapped to a great extent with the categories of “reforming the customs,” *zheng fengsu*, or moral education, *jiaohua*.

These religious policies did not regulate beliefs so much as institutions and rituals—the Qing state, like its predecessors, being based on ritual orthopraxy as much as law. The state attempted to control who could perform which rituals, where, and when, and with what resources. These attempts were backed by a considerable number of restrictive laws, found in the Code (*Da Qing lǚli*), imperial edicts and proclamations, Board of Rites and provincial regulations, jurisprudence, and proclamations by local officials. When reading these documents, one cannot fail to be impressed by the large array of practices that were banned. For instance, only state-supervised ordained and licensed individuals could act as Buddhist and Daoist clerics, and they could not engage in any activity outside their monastery, nor build any new monasteries. In addition, local cults were limited to those recognized by the state; all congregational groups (voluntary associations of people unrelated by blood or residence or profession) were banned, including so-called sectarians and Christians, as well as groups organizing temple festivals; family rituals were precisely regulated (mandatory burying, no cremation); prayers to heaven and the Big Dipper were illegal, as were spirit writing and possession; women were banned from entering temples; and so forth.

Starting from these prohibitions, one might agree with Dutch sinologist J. J. M. de Groot (1854–1921), who, in 1903, described the imperial state as fundamentally repressive and intolerant. Since then, many scholars have taken an opposite approach, focusing on actual practice rather than normative texts, and choosing to describe the Qing state and society as open, allowing subjects to believe and practice the religion they liked as long as they satisfied a certain set of demands for

prescribed behaviors. And indeed, there certainly existed more religious diversity among both the governing elites and the population at large in Qing China than in other eighteenth- and nineteenth-century empires.

The normative texts describe a utopian project for building a society along the lines of fundamentalist Confucianism. The bottom line of the local officials' mission, as far as religion was concerned, was to enforce the basic distinction between the licit (patriarchal, ascriptive forms of religious organization: territorial communities, lineages, guilds) and the illicit (congregational religion based on common faith): "immoral temples have to be destroyed everywhere, temples to orthodox gods have to be supported everywhere" says a phrase found in the introduction to the section on temples in many local gazetteers.

GRAY ZONES OF TOLERANCE

The licit/illicit distinction expressed in sociological terms is convincing. On the ground, however, although the distinction was clear enough in some cases, such as with Christianity during the ban (1724–1842) or some congregational (sectarian) groups that turned violent—these being the best studied and the most violent aspects of Qing religious policy—in many other cases it was murky. Categories used to describe illegal religious practices, such as *xie*, "heterodox," or *yin*, "immoral," had different extensions according to the authors, genre, or context. Some officials used these categories broadly to label everything not expressly authorized, while others, probably the vast majority, used them to designate illegal religious activities they deemed particularly harmful, calling for suppression. Because of such distinctions, and also because in many cases the licit and illicit were intimately mixed, officials were, in practice, forced to devise compromises and open a gray zone between the allowed practices and the actively banned ones.

For instance, a cult such as Guandi (the deified hero Guan Yu, known as the "God of War" or "Martial saint," he was the official protector of the state and promoted as a paragon of loyalty) was official and state-supported, but there were many Guandi temples that were not authorized, many congregations (technically illegal) running Guandi temples (whether authorized or not), and a mixture of state-sanctioned rituals (spring and autumn sacrifices according to Confucian liturgy) and technically illegal rituals (processions with penitents and women, spirit-writing cults) taking place in such temples. Another case was Islam, which was deliberately although tacitly underregulated and left out of the purview of the bans on congregations.

In short, the gray zone resulted from a certain underregulation, in spite of the imposing number of laws, decrees, and official proclamations. For instance, the

imperial state regulated which cults were authorized and which ones were banned, but it said practically nothing about how to manage a temple once it could legally exist, besides the basic principle that all religious property was inalienable and could not be sold or mortgaged. In this underregulated realm, local society developed contractual relationships (for instance, between lay leaders and religious specialists), and Qing magistrates upheld and enforced such contracts when they were asked to adjudicate conflicts.

The resulting interaction of local officials and local religion implied several modes of relationship: mutual ignorance, cooperation, negotiation (through intermediaries such as local gentry and clerical elites), and conflict (closing or destroying temples, banning festivals, arresting religious specialists), all of which were common. The actual combination of these modes went through huge variations in time (depending on occasional top-down campaigns of mobilization ordered by the emperor, combined with a general attempt at better controlling "popular" culture and religion in the post-Taiping years) and space (with different local religious systems having varying capacities to resist state encroachment). Another factor of difference was the degree of commitment of officials to religious policies, for reasons of both career strategy and personal belief and worldview. Elite religiosities informed religious policies and the way the policies favored certain institutions, cults, practices, and rituals over others.

A NEW PARADIGM

Paralleling the change of the political regime from an imperial state built on ritual orthopraxy and cosmological conceptions of power and order to a secular republic, twentieth-century changes in religious policy were informed by a paradigmatic shift in the way religion was conceived. The new paradigms of the political management of religion, of Western origin, all have in common a post-Enlightenment definition of religion as a churchlike institution separate from society, and include processes of negotiation between church and state for privileges and uses of the public sphere.

The effect on the Chinese world of these paradigms began at the turn of the twentieth century when the Western categories that underpin these paradigms were first introduced in China and then used by the dying empire and by the Republic of China to elaborate new religious policies. The bottom line of these policies was the recognition and limited support for those "religions" that could prove they fit a certain definition of this alien category, along with active suppression of anything else, which was categorized as "superstition." It is in this framework that the successive Chinese regimes conducted a policy

branded as secular, even though this secularism should be considered a claim rather than a fact. The new religious policies of the Republican regime entailed the abandonment by the state of the imperial regime's religious prerogatives and the creation of a realm where "religions" could manage their own affairs within a framework of control and regulation set up by the "secular" state. Creating such a realm proved to be more complex than initially imagined by Republican leaders.

A 1901 article introduced into the Chinese language a word, *zongjiao*, destined to translate the Western notion of "religion" (see Bastid-Bruguière 1998). This word was from the start paired with its opposite, "superstition," *mixin*. Both were taken from Japanese, in which they had been coined some years earlier. These neologisms were part of a larger set of imported categories used to reclassify the whole of knowledge and social and political practices, including such words as *science* or *philosophy*. Chinese intellectuals initially debated the meaning of these notions, which were foreign to the late imperial Chinese world where religious life and social organization were deeply intertwined. During the first years of the century, *zongjiao* was almost synonymous with Christianity, but soon also included Islam, which was logical, in that *zongjiao* translated Western models of "religion." It was only gradually that *zongjiao* came to include Daoism and Buddhism. Heated arguments for or against the inclusion of Confucianism in this category raged for many years, before those arguing against inclusion gained the upper hand by the 1920s. For its part, most of Chinese religion remained excluded and is still categorized as "custom," "folklore," or "superstition," even though this has been changing since the beginning of the twenty-first century with the formation of new, more positive, official categories such as "popular faith" (*minjian xinyang*).

The notion of "religion" brought a theoretical justification to a vast project conducted by various sections of the late imperial and Republican political elite aimed at reconfiguring the religious field and drastically reducing the realm of legitimate religion. This project shrank the encompassing category of orthodoxy defined by the imperial regime to a few "religions" on a Christian-based model. One of the consequences of the drastic reduction was the confiscation and destruction of a large number of local temples, formerly orthodox but now labeled superstitious. This destruction was conducted in the name of antisuperstition, but also in order to appropriate the material and symbolical resources of local religious institutions for the purpose of state building. The emergence of this project can be traced to the 1898 reforms and the key figure of Kang Youwei (1858–1927).

The provisional constitution of the Republic of China, proclaimed on March 11, 1912, stipulates the "freedom of

religious belief" (*xinjiao ziyou*). This text did not guarantee protection against destruction and violence in temples, but it encouraged legislators and thinkers to elaborate on the difference between legitimate "religion" and "superstition." This approach to religious policies was carried over and formalized by the Nationalist regime after 1927. After having rejected early temptations of an outright ban on religions, the regime decided to work with recognized, institutional religions along a corporatist model, while launching an all-out fight against "superstitions." This fight included bans on traditional festivals, a few of which (notably New Year) were given a modern meaning and incorporated into the new, Gregorian calendar; the invention and promotion of secular family rituals (weddings and funerals, including cremation); and the taxing or banning of superstitious activities (divination) and items (paper offerings and money). All of these policies, first launched by the Guomindang (GMD; Nationalist Party), were later carried out to greater effect under the People's Republic of China (PRC). Some GMD activists also trained students to vandalize temples, initiating a far-reaching destruction of religious art and memory (texts, archives).

The criteria by which the modern Chinese state decided whether to include or not a religious tradition within its list of recognized religions have mostly remained hazy, with few explicit guidelines. The Chinese state's attitude has been pragmatic: A religion was recognized if it could prove it was "pure" (spiritual and ethical in nature), well organized (with a national association), and useful (patriotic and contributing to social welfare and progress). Therefore, the official list of recognized religions was never closed, but encompassed those for which a national religious association was officially registered by the state; requests for such registration were always treated on a case-by-case basis. In practice, the current list of five recognized religions (Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, Buddhism, and Daoism) appeared as early as 1912, but at various points in Republican history, other traditions, including the new religious groups known in recent scholarship as *redemptive societies*, were added to the list when their association was officially recognized. In the early twenty-first century, the world of religious-affairs officials is again caught in speculation about enlarging this list.

Taiwan, which was under Japanese rule (1895–1945), did not experience the 1898 reforms and the subsequent violent antisuperstition policies; it worked after 1945 with the Republican legislative framework and worldview that was highly distrustful of local "popular" religion. However, the religious structures of local society have survived there, and since the liberalization of the 1980s have flourished again, along with an extraordinary effervescence of new religious movements. Hong Kong, established along a colonial and postcolonial trajectory, and with less religious

vibrancy, has always remained a religiously liberal and pluralistic society.

THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

Meanwhile, the PRC went through religious repression of unprecedented scale, with the annihilation of various “sectarian groups” (notably the Yiguandao) as early as 1950, and the nationalization of all religious property (temple lands and buildings, lineage trusts). The only legal religious activities were the small-scale training and publications of the patriotic associations of the five recognized religions. Even this activity closed down during the Cultural Revolution, to operate anew after 1979. Since then, religious leaders have negotiated endlessly with many different state agencies to gradually recover their temples (but not their lands) and for the right to perform various rituals and activities. Alongside this realm of state-controlled, official religion, a gray zone has reemerged, with local temples being rebuilt and festivals reconvening (at a rate that varies considerably depending on the area) with tenuous legality. And the state now focuses its repression not so much on superstition (divination and spirit possession being increasingly ignored since the 1980s), as it did during the Maoist years, but on “evil cults,” *xiejiao*, a reinvention of the old imperial concept, now used to label mass movements such as the Falun Gong or new Protestant sects.

SEE ALSO *Anti-Christian/Anti-Missionary Movements; Buddhism; Catholicism; Daoism; Falun Gong; Islam; Missionaries; Popular Religion; Protestantism; Religious Organizations; Religious Specialists since 1800; State Cult; Three-Self Patriotic Movement; White Lotus.*

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RELIGIOUS SPECIALISTS SINCE 1800

Due to its pluralistic nature, modern Chinese religion is characterized by the coexistence of several kinds of religious specialists who provide liturgical and spiritual services. Even if Muslim *ahong* and Christian priests are excluded, the variety of specialists who fulfill important liturgical functions is impressive, and includes Buddhists, Daoists, Confucians, spirit-mediums (also called shamans), diviners (including those specialized as geomancers), leaders and preachers of lay devotional or self-cultivational (sectarian) movements, and a whole array of ritual specialists and musicians, including actors, puppeteers, and storytellers reciting devotional literature. This variety is well documented for the nineteenth century and, in spite of century-long efforts at suppressing “superstitious occupations” and far-reaching recompositions of the division of religious labor in all parts of the Chinese world, these religious specialists are all still there.

CATEGORIES

The categories of religious specialist, ritual specialist, priest, cleric, monk, nun, and so forth are not standardized when discussing China, as these are simply heuristic categories. The different roles of religious specialists can in some cases be performed by the same person (e.g., Daoist and diviner, diviner and spirit-medium). It remains useful, however, to distinguish between clerical and nonclerical specialists. If *clergy* is defined as a body of professional religious specialists identified by a unified, supralocal written tradition (a canon), a liturgy, institutions, and rules of conduct, then there were three clergies in nineteenth-century China: the Confucians, the Buddhists (of both Chinese and Tibeto-Mongol traditions), and the Daoists of the two elite orders (Quanzhen and Zhengyi). By contrast, the other types of specialist—spirit-mediums, diviners, leaders of lay movements, and musicians—were not organized as clergies and did not define themselves through China-wide institutions. The three clergies had in common a certain degree of nationwide unification, though no overarching organization. They also had training and ordination centers—such as the Buddhist or Daoist monasteries or the Confucian academies (*shuyuan*)—where the canon was kept and specialists trained in exegesis and liturgy. These institutions defined the clerical traditions of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism—known as the *Three Teachings*—from those other specialists who worked without such institutions.

The case of the Confucian clergy is very specific. Under a broad definition of *religious specialist*, it could be coherent to define the late imperial gentry (*shenshi*, a legal status that refers to all those who had passed at least the first degree of