



WAS MAO
SUCCESSFUL IN
STAMPING OUT
RELIGION IN CHINA?

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Religion In 1945

- Freedom of speech, press, assembly, association, political conviction and religious belief and freedom of the person are the people's most important freedoms.
- All religions are permitted in China's Liberated Areas, in accordance with the principle of freedom of religious belief.
- All believers in Protestantism, Catholicism, Islamism, Buddhism and other faiths enjoy the protection of the people's government so long as they are abiding by its laws.
- Everyone is free to believe or not to believe; neither compulsion nor discrimination is permitted.

Why Did Mao View Religion As A Threat?



- Mao Zedong expressed his strong personal antipathy to religion
- Declared that it was poison and compared the Christian missionaries in China to the Nazis in Europe
- It was logical, therefore, and to be expected that the PRC under Mao would not tolerate religion
- Almost immediately after the Chinese Communist came to power, the attack on religion began

Why Did Mao View Religion As A Threat? (CONT.)

- The officially stated justification was since the workers were now in power there was no longer any reason for religion to exist
- The triumph of the workers had ended the need for such escapism
- For religion to continue openly would be an affront to the new Chinese Communist world
- Religious worship had now to be replaced by loyalty to the Communist party and the state



What Measures Did The Government Take To Suppress Religion?



- Christian churches were forcibly closed, their property seized or destroyed and their ministers physically abused
- Foreign priest and nuns were expelled from China
- Wall posters, the traditional way by which Chinese governments spread their propaganda, and loud speakers at every corner kept up a running condemnation of religion
- Confucianism, Buddhism and Christianity were denounced as worthless superstitions that had no place in the new nation

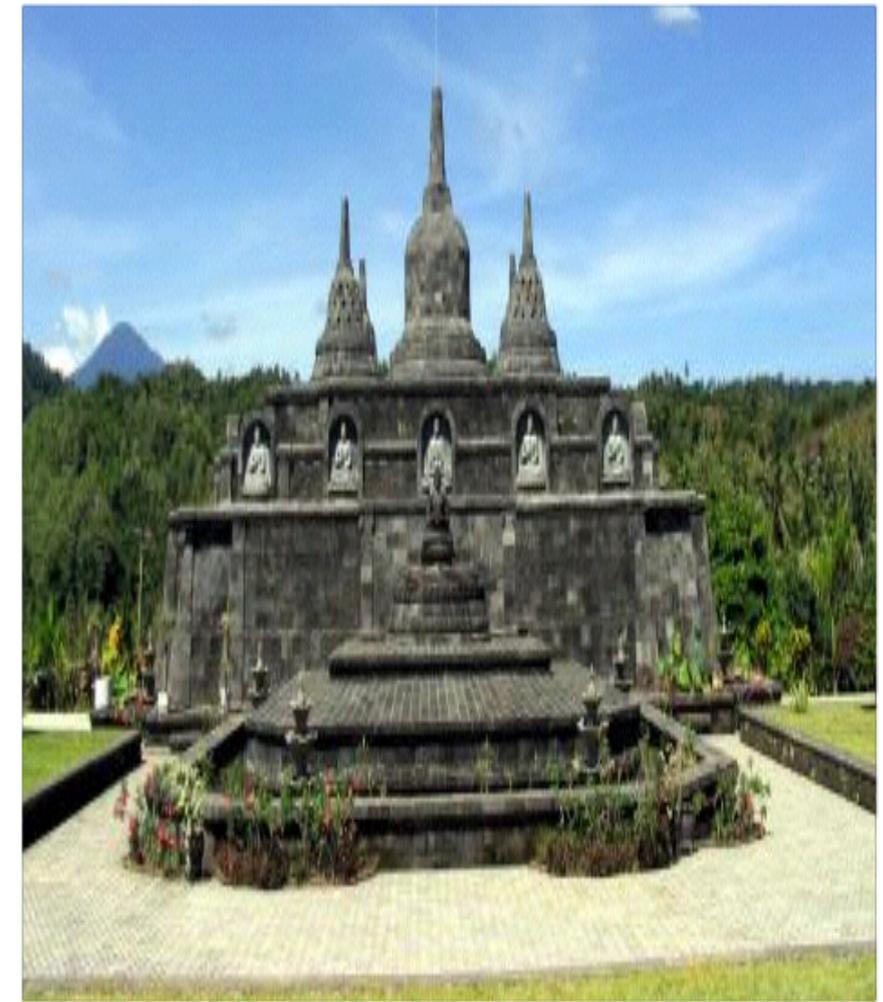
State Attack On Religion



- The Chinese traditional faiths, Buddhism and Confucianism were forbidden to be openly practiced
- As were the major foreign religions, Christianity and Islam
- Priest and monks were prohibited from wearing their distinctive dress
- Any who disobeyed this order were liable to arrest and imprisonment

State Attack On Religion (CONT.)

- There were cases of the police encouraging bystanders to strip the clothes off the clergy who dared to walk abroad in their traditional distinctive clothing
- Foreign clergy were expelled from China
- Temples, churches, shrines and monasteries were closed down or turned into offices and public buildings
- Ancestor worship was also condemned as a superstition that was no longer acceptable in the new China



How Was Propaganda Used To Undermine Tradition And Customs?

- The customs and ritual that had helped to shape the life of the peasants were banned
- These included songs and dances they performed at weddings and festivals
- Chants that had accompanied their work in the fields
- The sagas and narratives with the wondering poets had entertained whole villages

How Was Propaganda Used To Undermine Tradition And Customs? (CONT.)

- Traditional ways were replaced by political meetings and discussions organized by the party
- The experiment of collectivization that Mao introduced in the 1950s was meant to destroy the time honoured pattern of rural life
- Peasants were now expected to embrace Maoism as their new faith
- Troops of agitation propaganda performers toured the countryside putting on shows and plays that the villagers were required to attend and sit through

毛主席是我們心中最紅最紅的紅太陽

Attacks On Chinese Customs And Traditions



- The shows were put on in halls and public spaces

- sometimes the players arrived in brightly painted trucks carrying slogans and images extolling the wonders and the benefits of the new Maoist world

- The sides of the truck could serve as a screen on which propaganda films were projected after dark

- They could also be removed to convert the truck into a stage

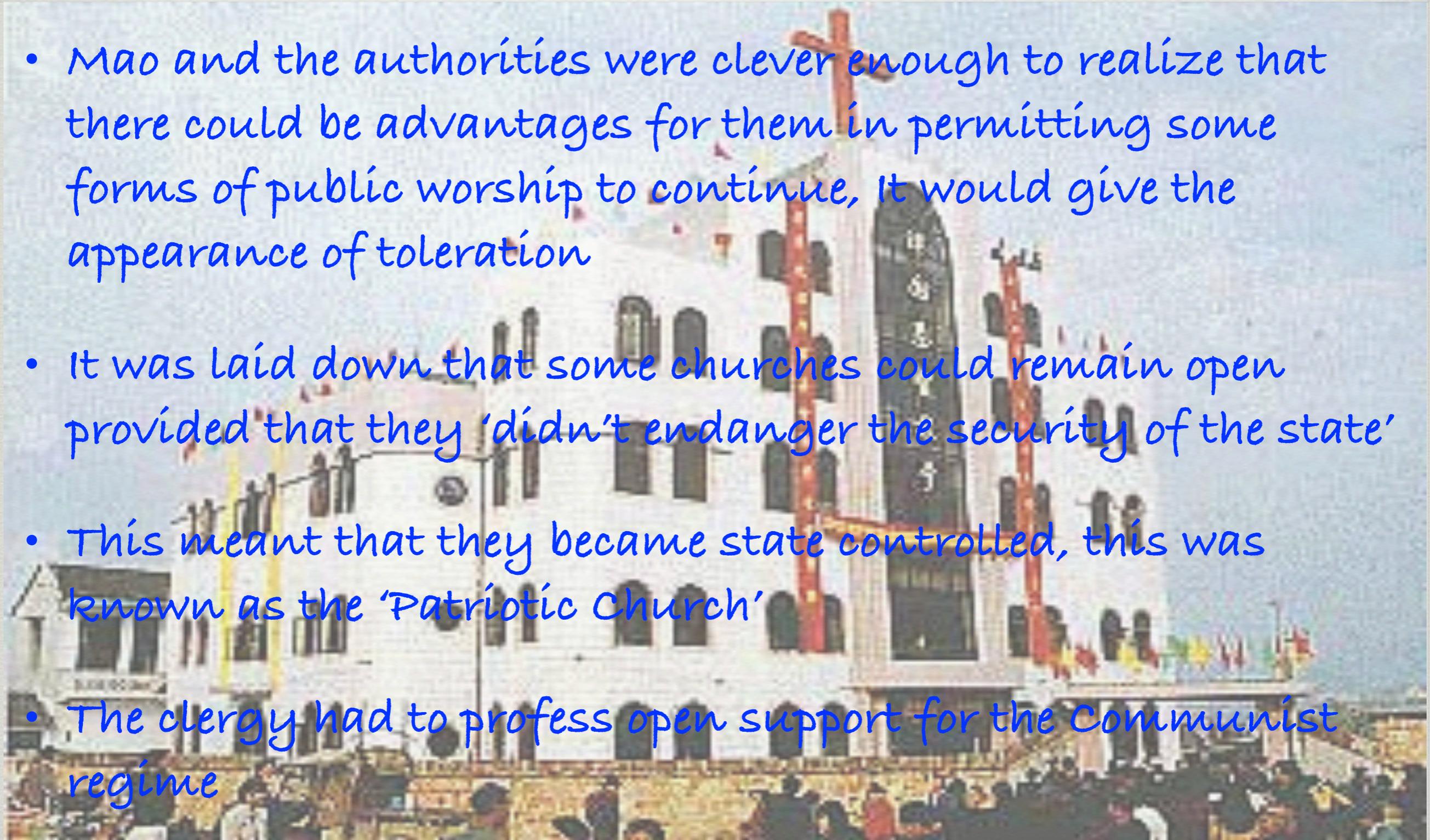


Messages In The Propaganda

- The messages of the films and the live performances was always the same
- The shows were played at knockabout pantomime level, the baddies were always bad and the goodies were always good
- The landlords were obviously the worse of the baddies
- Religious figures such as scheming Confucian officials and exploiting priest also appeared to be hissed at

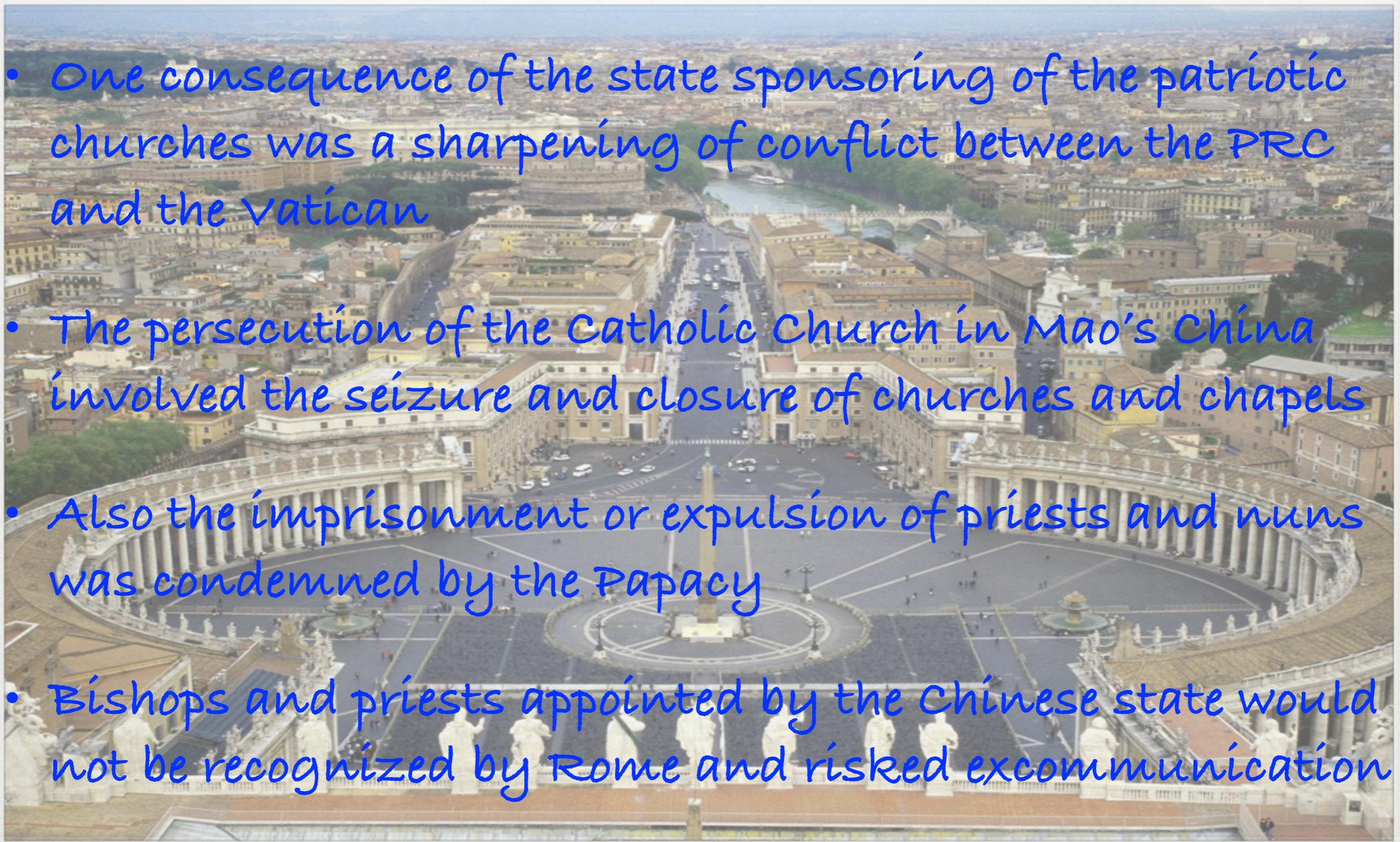
What Were 'Patriotic Churches' And Why Were They Allowed?

- Mao and the authorities were clever enough to realize that there could be advantages for them in permitting some forms of public worship to continue, it would give the appearance of toleration
- It was laid down that some churches could remain open provided that they 'didn't endanger the security of the state'
- This meant that they became state controlled, this was known as the 'Patriotic Church'
- The clergy had to profess open support for the Communist regime



The PRC's Clash With The Vatican

- One consequence of the state sponsoring of the patriotic churches was a sharpening of conflict between the PRC and the Vatican
- The persecution of the Catholic Church in Mao's China involved the seizure and closure of churches and chapels
- Also the imprisonment or expulsion of priests and nuns was condemned by the Papacy
- Bishops and priests appointed by the Chinese state would not be recognized by Rome and risked excommunication



How Was Religion Persecuted Against During The Cultural Revolution?

- The PRC's decision to allow a semblance of religion to remain was an unadmitted recognition that religious faith was so deep rooted in Chinese tradition that it was unrealistic to think that it would be eradicated easily
- However, the persecution still continued
- During the Cultural Revolution of 1966, religion was denounced as belonging to the 'four olds' and the attack on it intensified
- No public worship or ceremony was allowed

How Was Religion Persecuted Against During The Cultural Revolution? (CONT.)

- Any clergy who had survived the earlier persecutions were rounded up and imprisoned
- The repression was so severe that it provoked an international outcry
- Representatives of the world's major faiths, denominations and philosophies called on the PRC to call off the persecutions and show humanity

Campaigns Against 'Confucius and Co'

- There was little response from Mao's government to the appeals
- The suppression of religion continued
- Confucianism was denounced as representing all that was worst in China's past
- The name of Confucius was linked to any person or movement that the authorities wished to denounce

Campaigns Against 'Confucius and Co' (CONT.)

- 'Confucius and Co' became a standard term of abuse directed at any suspect group or organizations
- When Lin Biao came under fire during the Cultural Revolution, the slogan coined to attack him was 'criticize 'Lin Biao and Confucius'

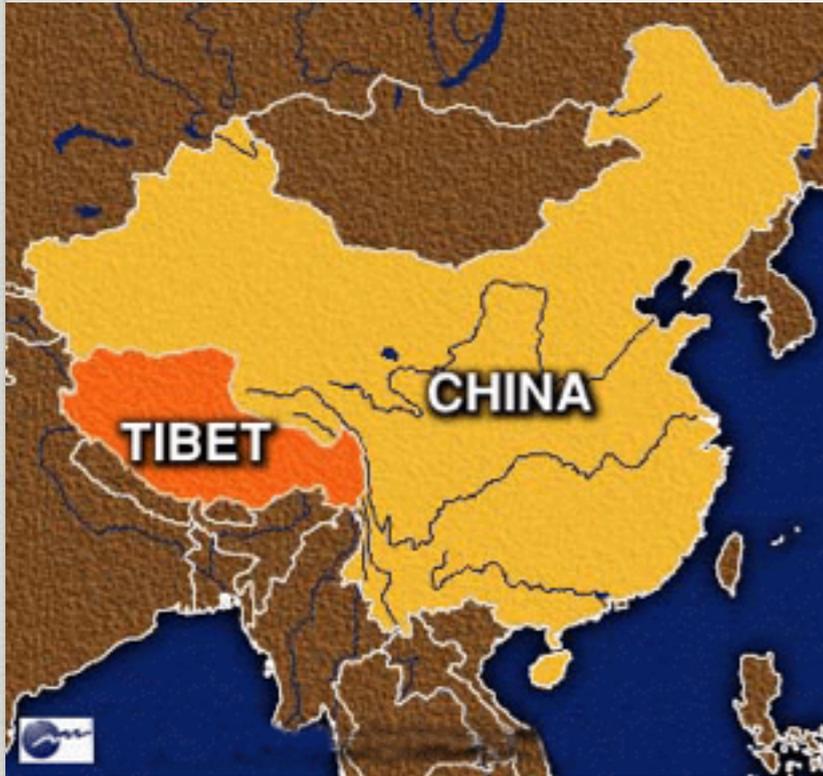


How Did Religion And Regionalism Overlap In China?



- A basic fear of the PRC government was that religion might encourage the breakaway tendencies in the western provinces
- From the beginning of its rule in 1949, the PRC made sure that the Chinese that they would not grant independence to any of its provinces or regions
- In 1950, it sent the PLA into Tibet, Xinjiang and Guangdong to enforce authority
- It claimed that the strength, indeed the survival of the PRC as a nation demanded total unity and obedience to central control

How Did Religion And Regionalism Overlap In China? (CONT.)



- It was Tibet's Lama faith, a particular form of Buddhism that inspired Tibetan nationalism in its resistance to Chinese occupation
- The PRC was concerned that religion and nationalism would prove an equally dangerous mix in Tibet's northern neighbour, Xinjiang
- Here the majority of the population was made up of devoted Muslims
- The position of Xinjiang was also feared by the Chinese, as the western borders of Xinjiang lay Pakistan, Tajikistan, all strongly Muslim countries

CONCLUSION:

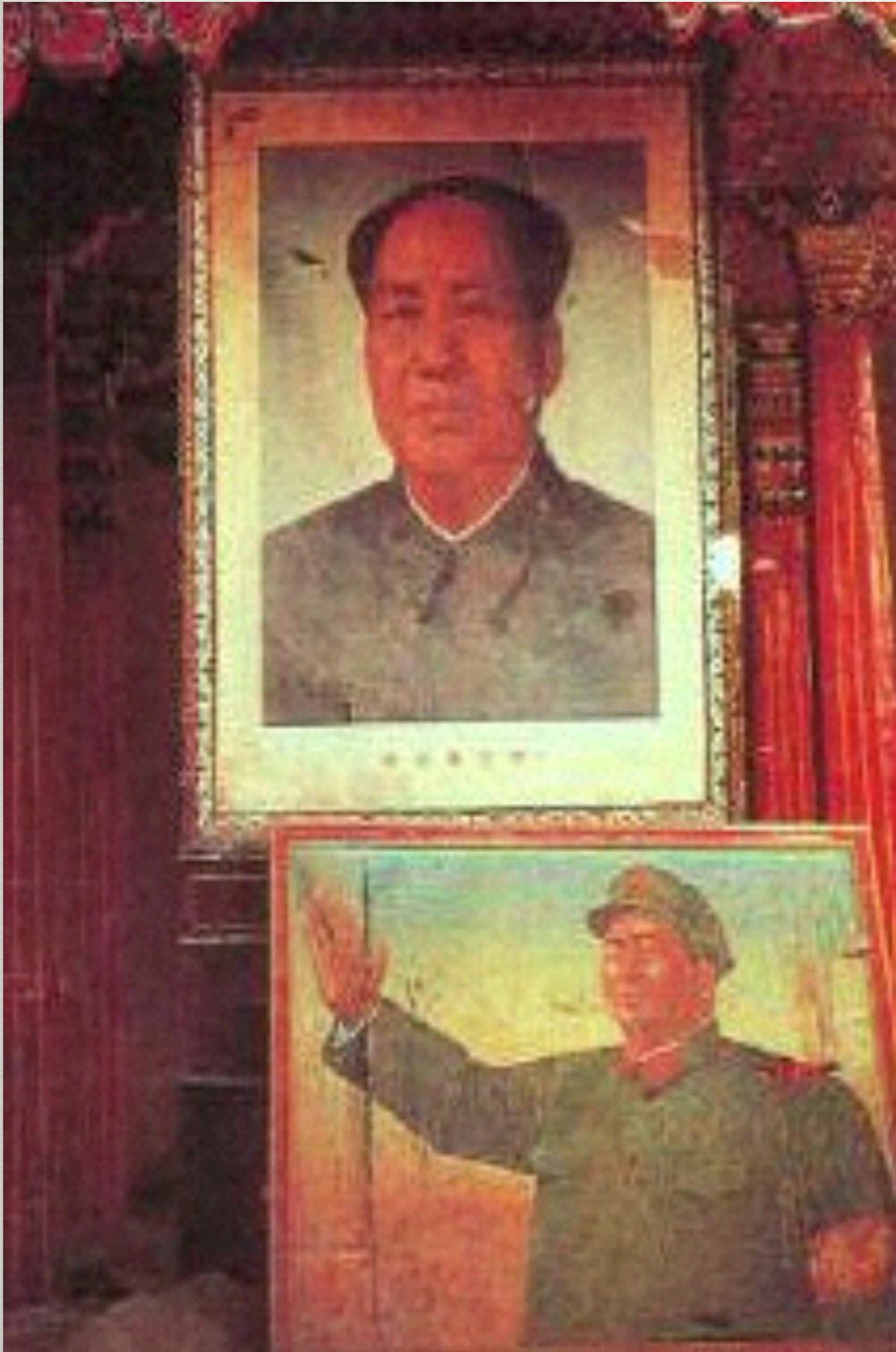
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Conclusion



- There was a limit to how much Mao could stamp out China's religion
- He was trying to reshape private belief
- In the more remote areas it remained strong
- In Tibet the Lama Faith inspired continued resistance to Chinese occupation

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