The Transformation in State Responses to Chinese Popular Religious Cults

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the historical transformation of the relationship between Chinese state authority and popular religious lives. In particular, this study examines the causes of the Northern Song (Bei Song 北宋, 960-1127) government's growing interest in popular religious cults, which reflected innovative approaches toward popular religion by the New Policy reformers (Xinfadang 新法黨). The reform movement was dedicated to state-centered statecraft, and thus the reformers sought to establish official control over popular cults through a state-centered administrative system. They attempted to establish a hierarchical order throughout the spiritual realm by creating a comprehensive pantheon that combined the officially-recognized deities entered in the state register of sacrifices with local popular cults. Therefore, the Northern Song reformers' new approach toward the popular cults brought about significant changes in the relationship between the state and local religion in Chinese history.

Keywords: Song dynasty, popular religious cults, New Policy reformers, state religions, universal pantheon

Introduction

Chinese popular religious cults underwent exceptional growth during the Song dynasty (960-1279). In particular, Song sources, such as local gazetteers, demonstrate that major popular religions spread nationwide during that period. These sources therefore suggest that ordinary people's worship of popular deities suddenly emerged during the Song. However, recent scholarship has shown that popular cults had been undergoing successive transformations since long before the Song. Still, scholars recognize that the changes in popular religious cults during the Song period mark a watershed in the history of Chinese religion. These changes have been examined by scholars with a variety of foci, including state intervention (Watson 1985; Sue 2003), merchants' support (Hansen 1990), the interrelationship between popular religions and ecclesiastical religions (Dean 1993; Kleeman 1994; Katz 1995), and the escalating importance of ordinary people in religious activities (von Glahn 2004).

Our knowledge of the momentous changes in popular religious cults during the Song period, however, derives to a significant degree from the profusion of government records concerning the suppression of licentious cults, granting of official titles, and construction of temples. Therefore, in order to fully fathom the...
consequences of the transformation of popular religious cults in the Song period, it is necessary to understand the changes in the state's response to them. A close examination of the socio-political changes in the approaches of state authorities to popular religious cults will refine our grasp of the nature of religious change during the Song period.

Pre-Song Dynasties’ Lack of Interest in Popular Religious Cults

The suppression of illicit cults can be traced back to the pre-Qin period (Qin Dynasty, 221-206 BCE) in Chinese history. However, these efforts occurred only intermittently, and were not systematized or institutionalized before the Northern Song period. Moreover, there were only a few cases in which the state granted titles or plaques to popular deities to honor them for the miraculous deeds they performed for the benefit of the general populace. It was only during the Song dynasty that an unprecedented change in the frequency and scope of both the persecution of illicit cults and the official patronage of local deities occurred. Above all, the state response to popular cults changed drastically due to the marked growth in the number and diversity of popular cults. The development of popular cults resulted not only from changing socio-economic circumstances during the Song period, such as the commercial revolution of the Jiangnan 江南 region and the growth of cities (Hansen 1990), but also from the social and psychological impact of those changes, such as a craving for wealth among lay people and psychological anxiety in an affluent and mobile society (von Glahn 2004).

Nevertheless, these explanations for the rise of popular religious cults do not sufficiently explain the sharp increase in the persecution of illicit cults and the granting of titles and plaques to approved cults during the Song period. Explanations emphasizing social factors omit consideration of the transformation in the actual agents of the suppression or patronage of popular cults. Furthermore, our perception of the unparalleled and unprecedented growth of popular religious cults during the Song period has been shaped by the rapid increase of popular religious temples, the sharp rise in the granting of titles and plaques, and the significant amount of written records describing the state of popular religious cults. However, apart from the proliferation of popular cults at the onset of the Song Dynasty, we also have evidence of the existence of large numbers of such religious groups during the Tang period (618-907). For instance, the suppression of illicit cults by Di Renjie 狄仁杰 of the mid-Tang period, which included the abolition of 1,700 illicit temples in the Wu and Chu 吴楚 regions in 688, and that of Li Deyu 李德裕 of the late-Tang period, in which 1,115 temples in the Western Zhejiang (Zhe-xi 浙西) region alone were abolished in 796, verify that there had already been

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1 According to Sue Takashi’s studies on the state’s granting titles or plaques to the approved popular religions during the Song Dynasties, the state sent inspectors to examine popular religions for which the local people had made petitions, asking for the awarding of titles and plaques. They tried to verify the authenticity of these petitions and then reported the results to the superior office. The state drew on their reports to award deserving deities who had been proven to benefit the local people, for instance by saving them from disasters or bandits through their spiritual power (Sue 1994).
a large number of popular cults that could be regarded as illicit in Jiangnan during
the Tang period (Di Renjie: *Xin tang shu* 115. 4208; *Jiu tang shu* 89. 2887; Li Deyu;
*Jiu tang shu* 174. 4511; *Xin tang shu* 180. 5328). In addition, a variety of Tang ghost
stories (guaiqi xiaoshuo 怪奇小說) or tales of local popular deities collected in the
*Extensive Records of the Taiping Era* (Taiping guangji 太平廣記) published during
the reign of Song Taizong 太宗 provide a glimpse into the pre-Song atmosphere of
gods and spirits.

The great popularity of the *chenghuang* (the City God; literally, “wall and
moat” 城隍) cult during Tang also demonstrates the wide prevalence of popular
cults before Song times (Johnson 1985). The term *chenghuang* did not refer to
any celestial deity but rather to anthropomorphized local tutelary gods. In these
cases, a local person who was respected for his virtuous deeds was venerated as
a god by locals after his death and enshrined in a *chenghuang* temple. Before the
Song dynasty, most prefectures had their own tutelary gods, and the local prefects
patronized the prefectures’ tutelary gods by enshrining them in *chenghuang*
temples, which had been approved by the Tang government, to win public
support. Although the central government of the Tang Dynasty was hostile toward
unsanctioned cults and temples, as seen in the persecutions conducted by Di Renjie
and Li Deyu, the local prefects did not necessarily follow state policy. Instead,
they often maintained good relationships with the devotees of local popular cults.
It is not uncommon to find cases in which the Tang local prefects prayed to local
popular deities in the chronicles of local temples that were included in the Southern
Song local gazetteers. Nevertheless, most of these popular deities began to be
awarded official titles or plaques beginning in the late Tang or the Five Dynasties
period (Sue 1994, 102). Consequently, since it is obvious that there were numerous
popular cults of varying scale and numbers of devotees during the Tang dynasty,
the basic premise that the growth of popular cults in the Song period was abrupt
and unprecedented needs to be reconsidered.

Nevertheless, in comparison with the number of titles and plaques granted
to popular religious cults during the Song dynasty, the number bestowed by the
Tang government makes it clear that it was relatively indifferent to them. Because
of this lack of interest, they did not leave sufficient records for us to fully grasp
the general state of popular religion. In contrast to the scarcity of pre-Song records,
the abundant Song documentation resulted from the growing involvement of
the state and the literati in the religious lives of the general populace. In order to
understand the state’s and the literati’s growing interest in the popular religious
cults of the Song period, we must comprehend not only the socio-economic and
socio-psychological shifts in Song society, but also the underlying cause of the
transformation of the state’s attitudes toward popular religious cults during this
period.

**The Emergence of the New Policy Reformers and Their Reforms of the State Ritual
System**

The most significant reason for the transition in the Song government’s stance on
the local cults was, first of all, the emergence of a new political force during the
mid-Northern Song period. Wang Anshi’s reforms brought forth unprecedented changes in the relationship between the state and popular religious beliefs. In order to comprehend the basic intention of the Northern Song reformist group’s policy toward popular religion, it is essential to understand their policies’ overall features, particularly their comprehensive vision of social reform. While most of Wang Anshi’s reforms, including his financial, military, and educational policies, had practical secular goals, his reform of state ritual revealed the idealistic and metaphysical aspects of his ideology. In practice, Wang Anshi and his partners in the New Policy faction had actively engaged in disputes with their antagonists over the reform of state rituals and successfully realized their intention to introduce a new state system that would encompass the ritual life of all social strata from the emperor down to ordinary families. Consequently, the reform group’s ambitious plan to regulate every deity in the pantheon reflected the overall agenda of the reform movement.

In the beginning, the literati culture of the Song dynasty simply followed that of the Tang dynasty. For example, early Song literati like Yang Yi 杨億 (974-1020) and Liu Jun 劉筠 (971-1031) adhered to the literary and cultural traditions of Tang. The late Tang poet Li Shangyin 李商隱 (812-858) and the Tang Xikun style (xikunti 西崑體) poetry gained great popularity among the early Song literati. In addition, they continued to rely on the interpretations of Kong Yingda’s 孔穎達 (574-648) Correct Meaning of the Five Classics (Wujing zhengyi 五經正義) in their reading of the Confucian corpus. It was the new reform groups of the mid Northern Song, which included literati such as Fan Zhongyan 范仲淹 (989-1052) and Ouyang Xiu 欧陽脩 (1007-1072), who first challenged the previously unquestioned acceptance of the cultural tradition of the Tang Dynasty and established the new tradition of the Song Dynasty. Above all, in terms of literary writing, they disavowed the Xikun style and strongly advocated a revival of the “ancient prose” (guwen 古文) writing style. Fan and Ouyang condemned the existing writing as incapable of conveying the Way (dao 道) or teachings of Confucius, primarily because it adhered so much to form that it lacked meaningful content. Furthermore, they asserted that, as Han Yu 韓愈 (768-824) and Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773-819) of the late Tang period had already affirmed, literati would be able to retain the true Way of Confucianism only by returning to ancient writing as their model.

However, their program of reform was not just confined to literary writing but also led to their political engagement and to an enthusiastic pursuit of a new political order. When Fan Zhongyan and his followers were able to seize control of the Song court during the Qingli 慶歷 reign (1041-1048) of Emperor Renzong 仁宗, they initiated a reform of politics known as the New Policies of the Qingli Reign (Qingli xinzheng 慶歷新政) in 1043-1044. First of all, members of the new regime initiated a reform of the system of recruiting government officials because they sought to replace the old bureaucrats with new blood who sympathized with their vision of the New Policies. They also recognized the need for supporters at court to

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2 The name Xikun came from their Anthology of Verses Exchanged at Kunlun Mountain (Xikun chouchangji 西崑酬唱集) (1005).
secure the continuity of the New Policies. Therefore, they drastically reduced the quotas for recruiting officials based on kinship ties through the yin 薞 privilege and instead revised the civil service examinations to require answers in guwen writing. In order to foster enough candidates for bureaucratic appointments, they also contributed to the development of numerous institutions of learning across many provinces. Thus, despite the fact that their reform movement was short-lived, it changed the entire trend of elite learning into a guwen-based system, largely by virtue of their successful efforts in education.

This new trend of learning also greatly influenced later politics insofar as it led to the development in both the New Policy faction and the anti-reform faction of a philosophical basis for their positions. Furthermore, the reforms were not restricted to political, social, and educational areas but also included a modification of state ritual. In 1065, in his capacity as assistant chief councilor (canzhi zhengshi 參知政事), Ouyang Xiu appointed two low-level officials, Su Xun 蘇洵 and Yao Pi 姚頼, to compile a handbook of state rituals that were performed regularly, entitled The Bureau of Ceremonial’s Handbook of State Ritual (Taichang ying’eli 太常因革禮) that would serve as a reference for carrying out state rituals (Xu Zizhi tongjian changbian 206 續資治通鑑長編).

It was Wang Anshi and his New Policy faction who took over the political heritage of the Qingli New Policies and pushed forward its ambitious plan of comprehensive reform. The existing studies of Wang Anshi’s reform have focused mainly on the areas of politics, finances, and education. However, historical records such as the Long Draft of the Continuation of the Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Governance (Xu Zizhi tongjian changbian 續資治通鑑長編) demonstrate that Wang Anshi and the New Policy faction actively promoted a reform of the overall state ritual system (Kojima 1989). In the Chinese traditional ritual system, sacrificial rituals were the most cherished, and among them the suburban sacrifice (jiaosi 郊祀) held pride of place because it was dedicated to Haotian shangdi 昊天上帝, who symbolized the concept of Heaven that was regarded as the source of the Way in Confucianism. Therefore, the transformation of the suburban sacrifice clearly revealed the overall goal and direction of the program of ritual reform. The two crucial issues regarding the suburban sacrifice were 1) which of the ancestral tablets of the imperial family would be placed beside (peisi 陪祀) Haotian shangdi 昊天上帝, the highest celestial deity, in the arrangement of tablets (shenwei 神位) on the high altar, and 2) whether sacrifices dedicated to Tian 天 (Heaven) and Di 地 (Earth) would be held together or separately. Wang Anshi argued that officially the tablet of Emperor Taizu 太祖, who had established the Song dynasty, should be placed there instead of the progenitor of the Imperial family (Zhao Tiao 趙朓, his posthumous title being Xizu 僖祖), who should be enshrined in the royal ancestral shrine (Zongmiao 宗廟). In terms of the second issue, he argued that according to yin-yang theory, the sacrificial ritual dedicated to Heaven should be carried out at the Southern Altar of the suburban sacrifice, the Round Altar (Yuanqitian 圓丘壇), because both Heaven and the southward direction are yang in nature, and the sacrifice to Earth should be held at the Northern Altar (Fangqitian 方丘壇, which literally means the Square Altar).
According to Kojima Tsuyoshi’s analysis of these shifts, Wang’s first measure signified that the founder of the dynasty was more exalted than the first ancestor of the Imperial family (Kojima 1989, 167-76). Therefore, the emperor would no longer carry out sacrificial rituals to Haotian shangdi indirectly via private ancestors of the royal family, but rather would worship the highest god directly as the representative of the dynasty. Meanwhile, the second measure meant that Heaven and Earth were no longer venerated as transcendental beings; they should instead be regarded as natural forces that were governed by natural law, namely yin-yang theory (Kojima 1989, 193-94). Wang Anshi’s reforms illustrate the downgrading of the symbolic meaning and the transcendent status of Heaven. Thereafter, Heaven, which had been beyond the natural order and could be addressed only through the ancestors’ otherworldly assistance, became an identifiable entity that could be defined by natural law. That is, although Heaven was ranked highest in the sacred world, a measure of relative status was assigned to it for the first time. Furthermore, the suburban sacrifice itself would be held every three years on a regular basis, and its procedure and scale were greatly simplified. The overall trend of demythologization in the reforms of sacrificial ritual was also corroborated by the abolition of the Feng and Shan ritual. As a result, it was never held again after it was performed in 1008 during the reign of Emperor Zhenzong. Consequently, the principal intention of the reform of the suburban sacrifice ritual was to demythologize Heaven and Earth and transform them from transcendental beings into natural forces.

Wang Anshi’s Reforms of the Popular Cults

In his analysis of the state’s dramatically increasing interest in popular cults since the late Northern Song, Matsumoto Kōichi argued that Song authorities tried to establish order in heaven and on earth by imposing uniformity on the celestial pantheon and the popular worship of the gods (Matsumoto 1986). According to Matsumoto, the Song authorities recognized the necessity of the systematic
regulation of local temples, and as a tentative measure they selectively promoted popular cults. During the Xining reign (1068-1077), factional conflict centered on the New Policy reforms led to political upheaval in the Song court. Valerie Hansen attributed the sharp rise and systemization of the Song state’s investiture of popular deities in part to the political reforms instituted by Wang Anshi (王安石) (Hansen 1990, 81). Hansen argued that the shift of government policy in religious matters was inextricably bound up with Wang Anshi’s political reforms. Unfortunately, however, her argument suggesting a correlation between the granting of titles and plaques to popular deities and the political reforms of Wang Anshi lacks concrete and specific evidence.

Sue Takashi sheds light on the concrete correlation between the two. He regards the severe political struggle between the New Policy faction (新法黨) and the Old Policy faction (舊法黨) as the underlying cause of the increase in grants of titles and plaques during Emperor Shenzong’s reign (神宗, r. 1067-1085) (Sue 2001, 80-86). After Shenzong ascended to the throne in 1067, Wang Anshi commenced his reform plan, leading to a serious political conflict with the anti-reform group led by Sima Guang (司馬光) that lasted until the end of the Northern Song. The anti-reform group blamed the occurrence of a severe drought in 1074 on the political mistakes of the reformers and demanded the resignation of the entire reform leadership (Sue 2001, 73-77). Since their demand, which was based on the theory of correlative cosmology (tianren xiangguanshuo 天人相關說), attracted public approval, they succeeded in persuading Shenzong to withdraw his support for Wang Anshi’s group. As a result, the reform agenda was temporarily suspended. However, directly after the abolition of the New Policies, it happened to rain (Sue 2001, 80-86). Although the New Policy reform soon resumed after a complex series of events, the reformers, who had remained on the defensive as a result of the anti-reform group’s assaults, tried to regain the emperor’s favor by making counterarguments in two conflicting ways. On the one hand, they condemned the absurdity of the anti-reform group’s cosmological and metaphysical argument by contending that rainfall is determined by the will of Heaven and is not related to any mistake in the management of the state. On the other hand, however, they insisted that it rained directly after the abolition of the New Policies and continued raining despite the resumption of reform because Heaven had sent rain in response to the prayers they had offered before they lost power. In order to back up their argument, they held a magnificent suburban sacrifice (jiaoji 郊祀) to Heaven and then granted titles to influential local deities who had reportedly responded to the people’s prayers for rain. According to Sue Takashi, the drastic increase in titles and plaques granted to local cults during Shenzong’s reign was

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5 When the great drought reached its peak, Zheng Xia (鄭俠) petitioned Emperor Shenzong for the impeachment of the New Policy faction. In his petition, he argued that the continuing drought was the result of their misgovernment. In fact, he presented an album of pictures of the displaced people (流民) with the petition, and his appeal succeeded in changing the emperor’s mind. Therefore, Shenzong decided to proclaim the temporary suspension of the key provisions of the New Policies and to allow people to freely criticize them. Soon after, the news of a miraculous fall of much-needed rain arrived at the court from the drought-stricken areas.
nothing more than a temporary expedient to mitigate the anti-reform group's attacks. Consequently, it is obvious that the sharp rise in the issuing of titles and plaques to popular deities by the Song state was triggered directly by the rapidly changing political environment.

However, it is also worth noticing that the sharp increase in the Northern Song court's granting of titles and plaques was more than just a political expedient. We should also recognize that there had been gradual but fundamental changes in the state's stance toward popular religion. Although the frequency of awards to popular deities slightly decreased after it had reached its peak in 1075, there had been a general upward trend all through the Song Dynasty (Sue 2001, 80-86). Furthermore, the Song government began to establish a coherent management system for popular cults. For instance, in 1095 Emperor Zhezong 哲宗 ordered that every prefecture (zhou 州) should compile a list of temples of popular cults and record the history of the temples' construction. Since this control system not only applied to popular deities but also included Buddhist and Taoist temples, it was a part of a comprehensive and ambitious project to regulate all forms of religious worship throughout the empire. The overall increase in the state's recognition of popular deities during the latter half of the Northern Song period therefore resulted from the New Policy faction's deliberate approach to an overall reform of religious practice rather than merely from temporary political expediency.

Although the direct involvement of the Northern Song reformers with local cults was rather exceptional, their existing prayers to local deities clearly demonstrate that they took considerable interest in local beliefs. Wang Anshi, for instance, composed several prayers to a local deity when serving as a prefect in Yinxian 鄞縣 (present-day Ningbo City 寧波 in Zhejiang Province) between 1047 and 1050 (Linchuan xiansheng wenji 86). According to these prayers, Wang sincerely prayed to the local deity, Baojunshen 鮑君神, who had been a highly respected person due to his extraordinary accomplishments as a local prefect during the Han Dynasty period and was deified by his local followers after his death in the hope that as a deity he could offer them spiritual help. Wang performed sacrifices to the deity and composed a prayer for good weather during the rainy season (qiqingwen 祈晴文) and a prayer for rain during a drought (qiyuwen 祈雨文). When there were divine responses to his prayers, he also performed sacrifice with a prayer in thanks for rain (xieyuwen 謝雨文) to repay the deity. Regardless of his personal belief in the deity's spiritual help, he sought to reassure the public with his performance as a local prefect. Nevertheless, it is clearly demonstrated that Northern Song reformers like him fully appreciated the significance of the local cults in local communities. The sharp rise of titles granted to local cults was therefore not simply because it

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6 After the empire-wide drought ended, the Song government issued an edict mandating that local officials identify the deities who miraculously responded to the prayers for rain on November 25, 1074. Then in 1075, the state granted 34 titles to deities throughout the empire. Although the number of titles issued decreased after 1075, the annual average was roughly ten, much higher than before 1075.

7 This list was called the "register of prefectural sacrifices" (Zhou sidian 州祀典). See Song huiyao jigao, “li” 20: 9.
was politically expedient for the New Policy faction, but a result of their awareness of the cults’ significance in the reform of the spiritual realm.

As Hansen argued, the agenda of the Northern Song reformist faction extended into the spiritual world. That is, in order to complete their reforms in the secular world they realized the necessity of restructuring the framework of religious practice. The state’s jurisdiction over the spiritual world had not extended beyond the boundaries prescribed in imperial ritual codes, such as the *Ritual Code of the Kaiyuan Reign Period* (713-41) (*Datang kaiyuanli* 大唐開元禮), until the early Northern Song (*Songshi* 98: 2423). However, after 1074, when the Suburban Sacrifice was followed by the granting of titles and plaques to popular religious cults (*Song huiyao jigao*, “li” 20: 2), its jurisdiction began to expand beyond those limits into the domain of popular beliefs, which formerly had been located within the private sphere of lay commoners people. This clearly demonstrated that the state’s spiritual jurisdiction had begun to cover the whole pantheon from Haotian shangdi down to the lowest local popular deities.

**Cai Jing’s Reforms of Popular Cults during the Reign of Emperor Huizong**

The New Policy reform agenda, which was characterized by state activism, was continued by later reformist leaders led by Cai Jing 蔡京, who served as prime minister between 1102 and 1117 during the reign of Huizong (Chaffee 2006). These later reformist forces reinforced the main features of the preceding ritual reform and expanded their coverage of the ritual reforms.

The salient features of Cai Jing’s reform can be found in his policies regarding education and ritual. In terms of education, he intended to enlarge the three-stage process of recruiting government officials (*Sanshefa* 三舍法), which had been introduced by Wang Anshi. The *Sanshefa* focused on the establishment of a coherent system covering every level of schooling from primary education to the training of government officials based on the ideals of universal education found in the *Rites of Zhou* (*Zhouli* 周禮), which Wang Anshi had prioritized among the Confucian Classics (Bol 1992, 237). In other words, they advocated that national educational institutions should take overall responsibility from beginning to end for fostering the ruling elite.

In terms of the reform of the state ritual system, the later reformist forces faithfully continued their predecessor’s policy. For instance, in 1113, Cai Jing’s group integrated the New Policy faction’s ideals of state rituals into a new state code, *The New Ritual Code of the Zhenghe Reign Period* (*Zhenghe Wulixirixi* 政和五禮新儀). This new ritual code included regulations for funeral rites and ancestral

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8. *Datang kaiyuanli* (大唐開元禮) was compiled during the Kaiyuan reign of Tang Xuanzong (玄宗, r. 712-756). Although a new state ritual code, the *Ritual Code of the Kaibao Reign Period* (968-976) (*Kaibao tongli* 開寶通禮), was compiled during the Kaibao reign of the Song founder Emperor Taizu (960-976), it was simply an imitation of the *Datang kaiyuanli* because of the urgent needs for state rites at that time.

9. Wang Anshi set up a bureau for the compilation of classics and published *The New Meanings of the Three Classics* (*sanjing xinyi* 三經新義), as well as commentaries on the *Book of Odes* (*shijing*), the *Book of Documents* (*shujing*) and the *Rituals of Zhou*. Among them, Wang personally wrote the commentary of the *Rituals of Zhou* (*Zhouguan xinyi* 周官新義).
sacrifices, even for the general populace who had no official rank. These ritual regulations for ordinary people had not been found in any previous state ritual code. This was the first attempt by the imperial state to extend its control to the customary realm of people’s practices. Wang Anshi previously had admonished Emperor Shenzong of the urgency of rectifying all state rituals (Xu Zhitongjian changbian 215), and his ideals finally materialized as a ritual code drawn up by the later reformist forces.

Two years earlier, before their compilation of the state ritual code, the later reformers initiated a reform of the administrative system for popular cults. In the beginning of the second decade of his ministerial service, Cai Jing introduced an innovation in the policy towards popular cults. The system of granting titles and plaques to local temples adopted in 1101 had become open to abuse as the Song state had used such awards as a way of winning commoners’ support. As a result, during the Chongning reign (1102-1106) of Huizong, the granting of titles and plaques rose to an unprecedented level. In particular, during Huizong’s reign, the screening system of popular cults, which already functioned largely as a formality, began to give out too many permits to reward the popular religions. It was natural, therefore, that the later reformist group became aware of the need to remedy this abuse. Above all, they resumed direct persecution of “illicit cults.” In January of 1111, they targeted 1,038 unauthorized popular temples in the capital city, Kaifeng, tearing them down and moving the deities’ images to Buddhist and Taoist temples or officially authorized temples, such as those dedicated to the Zhenwu 真武 and Tudi 土地 deities (Song huiyao jigao, "li" 20: 14-15). This suppression shows that while the state did not see these deities as deserving of their own temples, it did deem them worthy of being housed as subordinate figures in officially-sanctioned temples. The purpose of this action was to regulate, not suppress, the worship of these deities. Furthermore, this persecution of popular cults was followed by a ban prohibiting laypeople from building any new popular temples in the capital. This persecution of the cults in the capital demonstrated that the screening system initiated in 1101 had not been working as intended.

The reformist leadership realized the necessity of an institutional overhaul of the administrative system for popular cults. In a memorial to the throne six months after the January 1101 crackdown, the head of the Archival Bureau (Mishujian 秘書監), He Zhitong 何志同, argued that the Board of Rites (Libu 礼部) should compile a register of sacrifices to standardize the criteria for classifying popular cults and distribute it to every prefecture (Song huiyao jigao, “li” 20: 9-10). He argued that

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10 Zhenghe Walixinyi 179 (the rites of the marriage ceremony for ordinary people, shuren hunyi 庶人婚儀), 186 (the rites of the coming of age ceremonial of ordinary people, shuren shuzi guanyi 庶人庶子冠儀), 218-20 (the rites of the funeral ceremonial of ordinary people, volumes 1, 2, and 3, shuren sangyi shang·zhong·xia 庶人喪儀上·中·下).

11 By citing a reference to the phrase “unify the ethical values to homogenize civic mores” from the Classic of Rites (“一道德以同俗” Liji 礼記· 王制: 5: 22), Wang told Emperor Shenzong that it was urgent to “unify ethical values to transform civic mores” (“一道德以變風俗”). That is, he stressed the significance of reforming popular customs in his audience with the emperor: “熙寧三年（1070）九月己丑王安石對神宗言：‘陛下明哲, 庶越前世人主, 但剛健不足, 未能一道德以變風俗, 故異論紛紛不止。’”
local governments should investigate the temples within their jurisdiction and
categorize them into three groups: 1) officially authorized temples that had already
received titles and plaques, 2) unauthorized temples that had no titles and plaques
but deserved titles and plaques due to the benefits they provided the people, and
3) unauthorized temples that were arbitrarily built by commoners and were not
worthy of respect. Through this classification of local temples, he intended to
completely rectify the problems of the previous system of control.

However, the later reformist forces’ ambitious plan to ensure control
over popular cults failed to work properly because of the socio-political chaos
and the ensuing total collapse of the New Policy faction around the end of the
Northern Song dynasty. In fact, the granting of titles and plaques to popular deities
reached its peak during the Xuanhe reign (1119-1125) of Huizong. After a minor
interruption, the number of titles and plaques granted drastically increased in
1121, which was the year that the destructive Fang La rebellion ended. As Sue
Takashi argued, the lavish recognition of local deities was an immediate result of
the Song state’s need to restore order in the aftermath of that destructive rebellion
(Sue 2003). On the grounds of political expediency, the authorities ignored the
proper procedures and principles for granting titles and plaques. Since the state’s
only concern was to verify whether or not the popular deity had contributed to
the suppression of the rebellion, the officials were not concerned about practical
examples of its spiritual interaction with the local people, and they uniformly
attributed to the gods of the popular cults the power to protect people from the
rebels, and thus credited such beneficial divine intervention to the local popular
cults. In order to restore the government’s control over the areas where the
rebellion had occurred, the Song dynasty recognized the local cults because it
assumed that these wielded great influence among the local people. The Song
officials’ effort to establish sound procedures and principles for granting titles and
plaques was frustrated by the devastating rebellion, and they could not afford to
restore the administrative system over popular cults because of the continuing
socio-political chaos during the late Northern Song and early Southern Song
period.

**The Establishment of a Universal Pantheon**
The typical structure of the state pantheon, which was divided into three
hierarchical classes, was first established during the Sui 隋 dynasty (581-618 CE)
on the basis of the classical form of the *Rituals of Zhou*, and elaborated during the
subsequent Tang and Song periods (For the transformation of the state pantheon,
please refer to Table 1 in the appendix). A rigorous hierarchical order was imposed
on the deities of the pantheon, and their sacrificial rituals were also performed
in differentiated spaces and times according to their ranks in this hierarchy. The
official deities contained in the three-tiered state pantheon had been limited to 1)
deified natural forces such as Heaven, Earth, and notable mountains and rivers, 2)
natural phenomena such as wind, clouds, thunder, and rain, and 3) deified humans
such as the imperial ancestors or the emperors of previous dynasties. While
commoner deities worshiped by the local populace had traditionally been excluded
from the state pantheon, beginning in the mid-Northern Song period the central government displayed a clear intention to incorporate them into an extended form of their ritual system.

The New Policy group’s redefinition of the nature of celestial deities in the register of state sacrifices and their incorporation of the various new popular cults into the register of prefectural sacrifices were, in fact, closely connected. They did not promote the two policies separately; rather, the policy concerning the popular cults became subordinate to the policy related to the official celestial deities. For instance, during Emperor Shenzong’s reign, the performance of the suburban sacrifice, which was not just the sacrificial ritual for Haotian shangdi, “the highest celestial deity” but was also the most comprehensive one in that it was dedicated to all other celestial deities together as secondary deities, was frequently followed by the bestowal of titles and plaques to the popular cults. The reformers had conceived of the idea of building up a universal pantheon that included not only every celestial deity but also the authorized local popular deities. In order to arrange them according to the celestial hierarchy in the pantheon, they first erased the transcendent nature of Haotian shangdi while at the same time placing it in the highest position of the hierarchy. Next, on the basis of the hierarchy of the state ritual code, Haotian shangdi was followed by lower celestial deities that were enrolled in the register of state sacrifices. At the lowest level of the hierarchy there were local official deities such as prefectural-level gods of earth and grain (zhouxian sheji 州縣社稷) followed by the authorized local deities included in the registries of prefectural sacrifices that had been compiled since Emperor Zhezong’s reign. From then on, when the Song officials petitioned for help from the unseen spiritual forces and then expressed gratitude to them for their assistance, the objects of the state’s sacrificial performances ranged from official celestial deities to local popular gods. Consequently, this organizational structure served as evidence of their ambitious plan to construct a universal pantheon.

The establishment of the universal pantheon was a product of the New Policy group’s restructuring of the spiritual world. The reformist forces sought to systematize the spiritual world by establishing a screening system that would sift out improper spirits and assign every deserving spirit its proper place in the hierarchy. In fact, we can see that the Northern Song reformist leaders were greatly concerned with systematizing the customary realm of people’s religious practices. In contrast to the Tang aristocratic ruling class, whose status depended on their family background and noble lineage, the newly emergent ruling class of Song, which entered government service through the civil service examinations, intended to establish a centralized state by exercising direct control over the general populace. That is, they aimed to fulfill their ideal of “state activism” by promoting the intervention of state authority in every local community, which until then had enjoyed a measure of autonomy. Furthermore, they applied their ideal of state activism not only to the secular realm but also to the spiritual realm.

The ideal of state activism was officially abolished when the Emperor Huizong was taken hostage by the Jin army. The Southern Song government publicly abrogated the ritual system Huizong adopted in the New Ritual Code of
The Transformation in State Responses to Chinese Popular Religious Cults

The Zhenghe Reign. However, while fighting for its survival against the invading northern enemy the Southern Song state could not undertake a time-consuming and costly project like the compilation of a new state ritual code and instead just supplemented the earlier Bureau of Ceremonial's Chronicle of State Ritual by revising the outdated rites in it (Songshi 98, 2424). Furthermore, since the political leaders of the Southern Song court needed to win public support, they could not but uphold the previous systems of awarding titles and plaques to deities popular in local communities (Hansen 1990, 80). Therefore, it is obvious that the high frequency of awards granted to local deities throughout the Song dynasty did not simply reflect a proliferation of popular cults; it was also a product of the Song state's conscious policy toward them.

Conclusion
The sharp rise in granting titles and plaques to local cults during the Northern Song period can be attributed to a shift in the state's attitude toward them. The New Policy reformers extended their state-centered approach to civil governance to the regulation of local cults, establishing for the first time in Chinese history a comprehensive administration system over them that reached throughout the country. In particular, the Northern Song reformers tried to impose a hierarchical order on the whole spiritual realm. As a result, they established a universal pantheon that arranged not only the official deities in the state register of sacrifices but also the authorized local cults in the prefectural registers of sacrifices according to a coherent hierarchical order. Finally, it is significant that the Northern Song reformers' state activism had a decisive effect on the state's growing involvement in the local cults through the institutionalization of the relationship between state rituals and local deities.

This state-centered approach came to an end, however, when the New Policy faction finally collapsed with the demise of the Northern Song court. A new type of literati governance emerged during the Southern Song period, and the Daoxue literati in particular sought to redefine the relationship between local deities and civil government. Since the Southern Song literati leaders had typically spent their careers serving as local prefects or remaining in the community and exercising informal leadership, they were experienced in dealing with local popular cults. They began to closely scrutinize popular cults and to keep records of them in their writings. Furthermore, their approach to popular beliefs reflected their different philosophical background. In their philosophy, they disagreed fundamentally with Wang Anshi's state activism and instead advocated the primacy of the autonomous order of the local community under the leadership of the Confucian literati. Therefore, they rejected the Northern Song reformist forces' top-down and state-centered approach to regulating popular religious beliefs and practices. Instead of perfecting an ideal system for controlling those beliefs, the new literati focused

12 For the political circumstances of the early years of the Southern Song period, please refer to James T. C. Liu 1988, 81-104. In particular, Liu argues that while the long lasting autocracy of the Southern Song court alienated the literati, it set the stage for the rise of Zhu Xi and his followers.
on converting the core values of popular cults into Confucian ethical ones and correcting abuses connected to these cults that might cause social unrest.¹³

¹³ Western scholarship on the new intellectual trends among the Song literati developed in earnest between the 1950s and the 1970s, represented especially by the work of Wing-tsit Chan and William Theodore de Bary on the emergence of “Neo-Confucianism.” Since this first generation of scholars followed traditional Chinese scholarship, they focused their attention primarily on the philosophical ideas of Zhu Xi, as in Chan 1973 and de Bary, Chan, and Watson 1960. However, this tendency to focus on the dominance of Zhu Xi’s influence among the Song literati began to be challenged in the early 1980s by the next generation of scholars, such as Hoyt Tillman and Peter Bol. Although they had different perspectives, these scholars agreed that the scope of Song intellectual history should be broadened to include the ideas of other contemporary scholars and statesmen, for example the “utilitarian” philosophy of Chen Liang and the literary aesthetics of Su Shi. Their works clarified not only the overall intellectual environment of the Song period but also illuminated the process whereby Zhu Xi’s ideas gained both intellectual ascendency and acceptance as the official orthodoxy between the late Southern Song and Ming periods. See Tillman 1992, 1982; Bol 1992.
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Appendix

Table 1 The Transformation of the Chinese State Pantheon

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources</th>
<th>Late Warring States (戦國) period (Rites of Zhou)</th>
<th>Sui Dynasty (Kaihuang Ritual Code)</th>
<th>Tang Dynasty (Kaiyuan Ritual Code)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prefectural Sacrifice</td>
<td>Heaven (天) &amp; Imperial Ancestral Temple (宗廟)</td>
<td>High Ancestor of Bright Heaven &amp; Five Gods of the Cardinal Directions</td>
<td>High Ancestor of Bright Heaven &amp; Five Gods of the Cardinal Directions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Sacrifice</td>
<td>Sun (日) &amp; Five Planets</td>
<td>Sun (日) &amp; Five Planets</td>
<td>Sun (日) &amp; Five Planets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Sacrifice</td>
<td>Sun (日) &amp; Five Planets</td>
<td>Sun (日) &amp; Five Planets</td>
<td>Sun (日) &amp; Five Planets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Sacrifice</td>
<td>Sacrifices to Five Household Gods, etc.</td>
<td>Star of Center</td>
<td>Star of the Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefectural Sacrifice</td>
<td></td>
<td>Star of Destiny</td>
<td>Star of the Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources</td>
<td>Zhouli zhisu 周禮注疏, commentary by ZhengXuan 蛟玄 (Eastern Han) and sub-commentary by Jia Gongyan 賈公彥 (Tang) 6: 117</td>
<td>Zhouli zhisu 周禮注疏, commentary by ZhengXuan 蛟玄 (Eastern Han) and sub-commentary by Jia Gongyan 賈公彥 (Tang) 6: 117</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Sacrifice</td>
<td>Middle Sacrifice</td>
<td>Minor Sacrifice</td>
<td>Prefectural Sacrifice</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>The Reign of Zhenzong</strong> (神宗) (91)</td>
<td>Seven Sacrifices (qisi 七祀): ① Star of Destiny ② Door God (hu 户) ③ Kitchen God (zao 竈 or zaozheng 堆神) ④ Courtyard God ⑤ Gate God (men 門) ⑥ God of Pestilence (li 厉 or ligui 厲鬼) ⑦ Path God (liang 行)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>The Reign of Shenzong</strong> (神宗) (92)</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

**Table 2 The Deities Added to the Previous State Pantheon from Zhenzong’s Reign to Huizong’s Reign**
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Sacrifice (13)</th>
<th>Middle Sacrifice (25)</th>
<th>Minor Sacrifice (8)</th>
<th>Unclassified Sacrifice Ritual in the State Ritual Code</th>
<th>Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td><strong>The Reign of Ming Taizu (明太祖)</strong> (The Collection of State Rituals of the Great Ming or Daming)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Modifications after the compilation of the Daming jili</td>
<td>Sun Moon First Agriculturist City God Confucius Mountains and Rivers (Emperor's personal performance of the sacrifices)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3** The State Pantheon of the Ming Dynasty
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