“Chairman Mao and the Ferocious General: Value Pluralism, Value Play, and Ritual Subjunctives in Chinese Religion”

Tensions among plural values may be inevitable in human life, but value pluralism as an ideal is not. This talk explores how value pluralism can be achieved and how it can be lost through a focus on two case studies of religion in eastern China: one involves an unlikely pairing of Chairman Mao and a deity called the Ferocious General, and the other documents a group devoted to a village deity, which broke bitterly apart. The lecture ties successful value pluralism to a willingness to accept ambiguous boundaries, treating values systems as subjunctive states that allow for play at their boundaries, rather than as incommensurables.