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Isabelle Charleux

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## CHAPTER 4

# Chinese, Tibetan and Mongol Buddhists on Wutaishan (China) from the eighteenth to the twenty-first century



ISABELLE CHARLEUX

The Wutaishan 五臺山 Mountain in North China, one of the most important Buddhist pilgrimage destinations of East Asia, attracted pilgrims from the entire Buddhist world during the first millennium. It was believed to be the abode of Manjushri, the embodiment of the buddhas' wisdom. From the eighteenth to the twenty-first century, this holy site mostly attracted Mongol and Tibetan followers of Tibetan Gélukpa Buddhism and Chinese<sup>1</sup> followers of Chinese Buddhism, as well as a small number of other ethnicities such as Manchus, Nepalese and Japanese. Two different clergies live on the mountain: monks of Tibetan Gélukpa Buddhism or lamas (called the yellow monks because they dress in yellow), and monks and nuns of Chinese Buddhism or *heshang* 和尚 (called the blue monks because they dress in blue).<sup>2</sup> In addition, local popular Chinese cults are flourishing. Wutaishan remains one of the most active Buddhist centres in modern and contemporary China.

The phenomenon of a shared place of pilgrimage is commonplace in China, where Daoism, Confucianism and Buddhism have cohabited, competed and influenced each other for centuries on the same sites, due to less centralized control and less emphasis on exclusivity than in some other cultures (Naquin and Yü 1992b; Robson 2009). But Wutaishan stood out

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1 Here 'Chinese' must be understood as denoting the Han 'ethnicity'. I will mostly consider here the two main categories of pilgrims, the Chinese and Mongols – but further studies on this topic should include Tibetans.

2 I will use the terms of yellow and blue monasteries and clergy in this article to avoid any reference to ethnicity.

in inner (Han) China, as the Mongol and Tibetan presence has made it the China's main international pilgrimage site, where various ethnicities viewed as 'Barbarians' interacted with Han Chinese. Wutaishan thus became the main place in China where the Chinese and Tibeto-Mongol Buddhist traditions met in the modern period, entered into competition and eventually dialogued, when in the 1930s Chinese masters studied with Tibetan masters and created a Chinese Gélukpa form of Buddhism (Tuttle 2006). On Wutaishan, questions of competition between religious traditions are superimposed upon questions of ethnicity. It may be interesting to compare this situation with pilgrimages of Uyghur and Chinese Hui to the same holy Muslim sites in Xinjiang.

When Buddhists of different traditions and different ethnicities worshipped at the same site, did they make the same pilgrimage, or should the Wutaishan pilgrimage be viewed as the sum of a number of multi-vocal ethnic pilgrimages? In my book *Nomads on Pilgrimage* (2015),<sup>3</sup> I evidence the contribution of the Mongol pilgrims to the general economic and religious development of Wutaishan in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The pilgrimage to Wutaishan was an opportunity for major economic exchanges between Mongol herders (who sold cattle and flocks at the Chinese market), Wutaishan monks and Chinese merchants. Taihuai 臺懷, the central village of Wutaishan, was a busy trade centre that allowed a population of traders and shopkeepers, and also peasants and beggars, to live off the success of the pilgrimage. But were interactions limited to commercial issues, and how far could they go in other fields, for instance of religion, intellectual exchange or personal friendship? Did these different peoples cohabit without conflicts? Could they share a feeling of *communitas* and share common goals, expectations and experiences, or did they behave as individuals with distinct ethnicities and religious traditions? Theories in pilgrimage studies can help us make sense of the very rich Wutaishan material. I will discuss two hypotheses made by Elverskog (2011) about Wutaishan as a central place of *communitas*,

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3 In my book on the Mongols' pilgrimages to Wutaishan, I used both written and visual historical sources combined with modern anthropological observation. The Mongols left more than 340 stone inscriptions that give clues about why they came to Wutaishan and where they came from. I photographed or copied all the legible stelae and created a database (some of these stelae are listed in Ürinkiyaya 1999:2141–7, nos. 12610–47 and pp. 2178–211, nos. 12786–996). I also used a travel account written by Miyvacir (2008 [1942]), a Mongol duke of the Alasha banner (Western Inner Mongolia) about a pilgrimage he made to Wutaishan in 1938, guidebooks written by Mongol and Tibetan clerics, and travel accounts and gazetteers written by Chinese pilgrims and literati, as well as Western travel literature.

first among Mongols, and second between Mongols, Manchus, Tibetans and Chinese in the Qing empire.

### **Is Wutaishan Chinese, Mongol or Tibetan?**

The geographical configuration of Wutaishan is rather original. It does not look like other Chinese pilgrimage sites – which typically are steep mountains with staircases leading from one monastery to the other, up to the summit, and can be climbed in one or two days; neither does it look like a holy Tibetan mountain which must be circumambulated in a clockwise direction. Wutaishan literally means ‘Five-terraced mountain(s)’, referring to its five summits with flat tops (all of them about 3,000 metres above sea level), one at each of the cardinal points and the fifth in the middle, surrounding a high valley. The main monasteries are grouped around a gigantic white stupa enshrining a relic of buddha Shakyamuni, but all told, in the early twentieth century there were no less than 99 blue and 26 yellow monasteries, plus hundreds of sacred springs, stones, grottoes and trees (‘numinous sites’) to visit. There was great freedom about the number and order of places to visit: depending on one’s financial means and the aim of the visit, one could make a short (3- or 4-day) journey to worship the dozen must-see places (called the ‘small pilgrimage’), a one-week journey including a pilgrimage to the peaks, weather permitting (the ‘great pilgrimage’),<sup>4</sup> or a one-month stay to worship most of the holy sites and walk in the mountains, hoping to receive a vision of the Bodhisattva.<sup>5</sup>

Wutaishan is located at the crossroads between Tibet, China and Mongolia. Its landscape, vistas and flora are close to that of the Eastern Tibetan plateau, and Tibetan devotees sometimes consider it as a Tibetan area. For Chinese visitors, Wutaishan has a strong Tibetan flavour, with its population of yellow-clad lamas, its many Tibetan-style stupas, prayer-wheels and Tantric iconography. In the Manchu Qing dynasty (1644–1911), Wutaishan was called ‘the Tibet of China’ on an imperial stone inscription, and was seen as a Tibetan enclave on the edge of Chinese territory. The head lama of Wutaishan was the representative of the Dalai Lama in China. However, in the nineteenth century, the crowds of Mongols with their yurts

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4 The pilgrimage of Duke Miyvacir in 1938 is quite representative of the minimum tour for a Mongol (2008 [1942]:403–7). For Chinese pilgrims, see the accounts of the lay Buddhist Gao Henian 2000 [1949] who visited Wutaishan in 1903 and 1912, and of the renowned Chan master Xuyun (1840?–1959) who visited Wutaishan in 1882–3 (Xuyun 1988).

5 Nowadays, due to modern means of transport and the high cost of travel, modern pilgrims generally spend no more than two or three days on Wutaishan.

and flocks who came to worship and trade considerably outnumbered other ethnicities, so Wutaishan also appeared to be an extension of the Mongol plateau. Wutaishan was therefore a perfect meeting place for Buddhists of Tibet, China and Mongolia.

Yet the temples' architecture was kept purely Chinese, except for the Tibetan white bottle-shaped stupas and prayer-wheels.<sup>6</sup> From the thirteenth century on, Tibetan Buddhist communities settled in eighteen ancient, damaged Chinese monasteries, restored them, and adapted their practices and way of life to these Chinese buildings. The eight yellow monasteries that were founded anew in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries also adopted Chinese architecture, as if Wutaishan was a sanctuary that respected older architectural styles. However, the statues inside and decoration of the yellow monasteries were purely Tibetan. Conversely, the blue monasteries borrowed Tibetan elements such as stupas, prayer-wheels and Tibetan forms of deities. In addition, some monasteries often hired monks of another tradition (and ethnicity) to attract more donors. Wutaishan monasteries therefore seem to have more common features than differences, to such an extent that it is not always obvious for a pilgrim whether he/she is visiting a yellow or a blue monastery.

### **A layered history**

Wutaishan was a holy place for Daoists in the first centuries AD, then from the fourth century onwards Chinese Buddhists of different schools appropriated the mountain. In the thirteenth century, the Mongol emperors of the Yuan dynasty established Tibetan Buddhist monasteries. In addition, the Chinese lay population practised rites of the Chinese popular religion, and the cults of the God of Wealth, Emperor Guan 關帝 and the Jade Emperor, along with processions, opera and communal rituals are still very much alive.

Wutaishan was strongly linked to imperial power, because it was a key sacred site for the ritual protection of the empires that ruled China. Tantric rituals for the protection of the state were practised in the Tang dynasty by Chinese and Central Asian masters; later, the Ming and Qing emperors entrusted lamas to perform similar rituals. The eighteenth-century Changkya Khutugtu Rölpé Dorjé (1717–86) threw bolts of fire from Wutaishan over a distance of hundreds of kilometres to crush a southern rebellion, thus protecting the Qing armies. The Qing emperors presented themselves to Tibetans and Mongols as emanations of the Bodhisattva Manjushri and were patrons of the Gélukpa School, making Wutaishan a key political place for

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<sup>6</sup> Only one monastery, the Cifusi, presents minor architectural Tibetan characteristics.



Figure 1 Pilgrims from Central Tibet examining a Xerox copy of the xylograph map of Wutaishan made in 1846. © Isabelle Charleux.

establishing their multi-ethnic empire. Three of them visited Wutaishan in person.

Tibetan Buddhists superimposed their imprint upon the layered past of Wutaishan. Besides building Chinese-style monasteries and Tibetan-style stupas, they established new rituals and festivals, introduced new narratives (apparitions of Tibetan Buddhist deities, legends of Tsongkhapa's visit) and 'discovered' new 'numinous sites' where deities and saints such as Padmasambhava and Avalokiteshvara revealed themselves to devotees or left footprints on a rock. The xylograph map of Wutaishan made in 1846 by a Mongol lama at the Cifusi Monastery (Figure 1), along with Tibetan and Mongolian guidebooks to Wutaishan, shows the superimposition of these different narratives (Chou 2007). The Tibetan Buddhists viewed Wutaishan as populated by a greater number of buddhas, saints and deities than the Chinese: besides Manjushri (who is one of the most important Bodhisattvas in both traditions) and the dragons he tamed (who were turned into one of his manifestations), Yamantaka (Manjushri's fierce manifestation) is a main protector of the place, and Tsongkhapa or his reincarnation, Padmasambhava, Avalokiteshvara and the White Old Man are said to have appeared or resided there, thus diluting the importance of Manjushri.

In the early twentieth century, the yellow monasteries lost their influence because of economic and political difficulties, and survived thanks to



Figure 2 'Han lamas' of the syncretic Tibeto-Chinese tradition of Buddhism, Guangzongsi Monastery. © Isabelle Charleux.

Mongols' donations. But the Chinese tradition of Master Li Xiangshan 李向善, known as Puji Heshang 普濟和尚, who collected large amounts of donations in North China, invigorated the Wutaishan monastic economy. He propagated teachings of the 'Way of Nine Palaces', a northern Chinese religious movement that emphasized the syncretism between Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism. From 1877 to 1937, he and his disciples appropriated more than twenty monasteries on Wutaishan that were integrated into a national Chinese network, and spent seven million silver dollars to restore or rebuild them. These monasteries were furnished with Buddhist, Daoist and popular Chinese icons (Laozi, Confucius, the Jade Emperor etc.).

While the Way of Nine Palaces declined in the 1940s, the syncretic Tibeto-Chinese tradition of Buddhism flourished on Wutaishan, when the three Chinese masters Nenghai (1886–1967), Fazun (1886–1980, a pioneer in the translation of major Gélukpa doctrinal texts into Chinese) and Qinghai (1922–

90) were active on the mountain. The 'Han lamas' re-appropriated seven old yellow and blue monasteries. Their tradition radiated out from Wutaishan to the whole of China, and their second- and third-generation Han and Mongol disciples continue to practise Chinese Gélukpa Buddhism there (Figure 2).

### **Cohabitation and cultural mixing of blue and yellow monk communities**

The Chinese and Tibetan (Tibeto-Mongol) traditions of Buddhism both stem from the same tradition, the Great Vehicle of Buddhism (Mahayana), but differ in their liturgies, rituals, organization of the canon, way of life, practices and pantheon. Esotericism forms an important component of the Tibetan tradition, while it was almost completely removed from the Chinese tradition in the ninth century. Chinese, Tibetan and Mongol monks wear different garments and are visually distinct (with the exception of modern Chinese Gélukpa lamas).

Chinese fantasies concerning Tibetan monks were and are still composed of a mixture of fascination and repulsion, and have produced long-lasting stereotypes. The Tibetan tradition gained influence in China from the thirteenth century onwards but suffered strong criticism from Confucian officials, who were horrified by Tantric deities in sexual union and performances of magic feats (Charleux 2002). Many Chinese perceived Tibetan Buddhism as a corrupted form of religion practised by 'Barbarians': lamas looked like monks but were not – they ate meat and (some of them) could marry. Of course racism against Barbarians added to the accusations of heterodoxy. But some Chinese who were fascinated by esoteric teachings and magic powers took a Tibetan master and became lamas themselves.

Although the Qing state tried to segregate ethnicities and considered the 'teaching of the lamas' as distinct from (Chinese) Buddhism, and reserved for Tibetans and Mongols only, Wutaishan appeared to be an exception in China. A priori, *heshang* were Chinese and lamas were Tibetans and Mongols, but the clergy of the yellow and blue monasteries was not completely homogeneous ethnically. In the early Qing, Wutaishan's mixed Buddhist communities reflected the multi-ethnicity of the empire. A few Chinese and Manchu lamas lived in the yellow monasteries along with Tibetan and Mongol lamas, and Chinese *heshang* and lamas performed imperially sponsored rituals together for the protection of the state.

Besides, in the early twentieth century, a Mongol monk educated both in Mongolian and in Chinese could, (and still can) be trained in a Chinese monastery, and later relatively easily change affiliation. The Chinese Gélukpa community, which was initially ethnically Han, now accepts Inner Mongols and even Tibetans from Amdo into their ranks (the language spoken in these





Figure 3 Crowds of pilgrims attending the great festival and Chinese opera of the Wanfo/Wuyemiao (Dragon King Temple). © Isabelle Charleux.

monasteries is Mandarin). Inner Mongol and Tibetan nuns also enrol in Chinese Buddhist nunneries because they can obtain a higher ordination than in Tibetan Buddhism.

The second reason for this religious and cultural mixing was economic: unlike local temples, which were supported by the community, the main source of income for many pilgrimage centres was anonymous donors. Before the nineteenth century, all great and historically important monasteries received subsidies and donations from the imperial court. But after the decline of the Manchu patronage followed by the economic crisis of the mid-nineteenth century, the competition became stiffer: all monasteries had to turn towards pilgrims' donations to survive, especially those of the Mongols, who came by the thousands. In the early twentieth century, in order to welcome and receive donations from Mongol pilgrims, three large blue monasteries (Tayuansi, Xiantongsi, Shuxiangsi) invited a few Mongol lamas to be in residence, and conducted regular offices both in Chinese and in Tibetan. This practice has survived into the twenty-first century: in 2007, at the great festival of the Five Dragon Kings Temple, while Chinese opera was performed on the stage of the first courtyard (Figure 3), a Mongol lama was invited to read Tibetan texts in the back courtyard. However, nowadays the situation is generally reversed, as donations now mostly come from the Chinese: so the Tibetan monasteries have rooms for Chinese ancestors' tablets and a greater number of Chinese icons. The Wutaishan monasteries also used to send their more persuasive

monks to China, Tibet, Mongolia and as far as Buryatia to collect funds: these monks went from place to place to gather donations in money, gold or cattle.

Competition therefore existed between blue and yellow monasteries, which both borrowed from each other and tried to attract the same pilgrims. As explained above, yellow monasteries first appropriated ancient blue temples; then the disciples of Monk Puji and the Chinese Gélukpa gained influence and appropriated ancient Tibetan monasteries. During the nineteenth century, antagonism appeared between the Han lamas of the Luohousi Monastery and the Tibetan and Mongol lamas of its monastic hostelry, the Shifangtang, and the latter founded a new monastery. But generally speaking the monasteries competed peacefully with each other to attract visitors and their donations, offering the same services while at the same time distinguishing themselves by having a particular statue, stupa, relic or famous living saint.

This porous ethnic and religious frontier between Chinese and Tibeto-Mongol Buddhist communities exists in other Chinese places such as Beijing, Chengdu or Amdo, but the cultural mixing appears to be much more extensive on Wutaishan.

### **Did Chinese, Mongols and Tibetans undertake the same or different pilgrimages?**

The Wutaishan pilgrimage had a different meaning for Chinese and Mongol pilgrims, but Wutaishan is first and foremost the residence of the Bodhisattva Manjushri, and all pilgrims wished to encounter one of the various guises of the Bodhisattva or witness one of his luminous manifestations. Many of them made the vow to go on pilgrimage once in their life, or to thank Manjushri when a prayer was fulfilled. For Chinese pilgrims, Wutaishan was one of the four sacred mountains to visit (along with Putuoshan in Zhejiang province, Jiuhuashan in Anhui province and Emeishan in Sichuan province), each being the abode of a particular Bodhisattva. Mongol pilgrims said that any good Buddhist had to do the pilgrimage at least once in their lifetime, and they found it highly desirable to be buried there in order to be reborn in paradise.

Pilgrims were monks and laypersons, both men and women, and belonged to all social classes, from literati and nobles to commoners. Pilgrims' records and stone inscriptions show that Chinese and Mongols had similar reasons to undertake the pilgrimage: to accumulate merit and gain a better reincarnation (the official Buddhist aim), gain blessings, fortune, health, longevity, reputation, and sometimes to ask for a particular wish (curing a disease, asking for a heir) or to do a penance. Other non-religious reasons to visit Wutaishan often added to the motivation of making a pilgrimage: trade (many Mongols sold cattle and horses to the Chinese at the great fair of the sixth lunar month), leisure/tourism (literati enjoying the scenery and writing



Figure 4 Lama-pilgrim from Amdo (Eastern Tibet) in great prostration towards the Great White Stupa of the Tayuansi Monastery. © Isabelle Charleux.



Figure 5 Groups of monk- and lay pilgrims praying in the shadow towards the Great White Stupa of the Tayuansi Monastery. © Isabelle Charleux.



Figure 6 Mongol lamas perform a ritual requested by pilgrims and bless Mongol and Han Chinese pilgrims, Luohousi Monastery. © Isabelle Charleux.

poems), political motivations (travelling with the emperor), research (on the history of Buddhism on Wutaishan) and so forth.

### Gestures and practices at monasteries

All pilgrims share basic Buddhist gestures and practices. Pilgrims preferably made the pilgrimage on foot (except for the old and infirm), and while walking, prayed and counted the beads of their rosaries. They all made prostrations, ranging from simple bows to full-length prostrations (Figures 4 and 5). Some penitent Mongols and Chinese made and still make full-length prostrations every third step, all the way from their homes, generally begging for their food on the way. Foreign travellers have described their pitiful appearance with ragged clothes and bleeding wounds in spite of protection on their hands and knees. In all Buddhist cultures, religious merit is gained through penitence, but also through giving to the clergy. Major donations were recorded in stone, and smaller ones on paper certificates. Pilgrims also asked for specific rituals (for a long life, to consecrate statues, or to pray for their dead parents), attended monks' assemblies and mass teachings and festivals (Figure 6).

The main difference between Mongol and Tibetan, and Chinese practices was the importance of circumambulation for the former two. One of the terms for pilgrimage in Tibetan is *nékor*, lit. 'circuiting, going around a place',



Figure 7 Han Chinese pilgrims turning a prayer wheel while circumambulating it, Tayuansi Monastery. © Isabelle Charleux.

and in Mongolian, *ergil mörgül*, lit. ‘circumambulation while praying/bowing’. In their respective countries, Mongols and Tibetans used to circumambulate the precincts of monasteries – usually following a path punctuated by small shrines, prayer-wheels and stupas – as well as stupas, statues, individual and groups of temples, shrines, cairns, holy trees and whole mountains. This practice, which goes back to Indian Buddhism, was followed by Central Asians and Chinese during the first millennium, but was later abandoned by the Chinese. On Wutaishan, the Chinese architecture of monasteries did not facilitate or even allow for circumambulation, but Mongols and Tibetans practised it wherever it was possible: around stupas, the central Lingjiu 靈鷲 Peak and around the monasteries that were not located right next to a cliff or a precipice.

The other differences in practices and behaviour amongst Chinese, Tibetan and Mongol pilgrims appear to be rather minor. Tibetan and Mongol pilgrims prayed while turning a hand-held prayer-wheel, burnt juniper instead of incense (when available), wrote prayers and ex-votos on ‘wind-horse’ flags, threw ‘wind-horse’ papers to be scattered by the wind, asked to be blessed by reincarnated lamas and received from them protective objects (knots, amulets, pills). The Chinese pilgrims always burnt incense when kowtowing in front of icons, set off firecrackers, and practised *fangsheng* 放生 (i.e. releasing animals)

and rites to their ancestors (they burnt paper offerings to be transmitted to the dead).

Twenty-first century Chinese pilgrims are also observed performing circumambulations around stupas, turning prayer-wheels (Figure 7), crawling into the womb cave at Fomudong and asking high lamas to bless them; and Mongols and Tibetans also burn paper offerings to the dead and release live squirrels. However, practices may be the same while understandings differ.

### **Worship of natural numinous sites**

When visiting a monastery, the pilgrims enjoyed the mediation of the residing monks and were expected to follow a codified behaviour and to perform normative devotional practices (the basic one, nowadays, being to make three prostrations in front of the statues while a monk hits a gong three times, indicating that the deity has received the homage, and then putting some money in the donation box). But when they visited natural sites endowed with numinous powers, without the mediation of monks, the pilgrims generally adopted an attitude of 'open behavioural code' with emphasis on personal direct experience.<sup>7</sup> With less institutional control, devotional practices and beliefs at the 'numinous traces' (*lingji* 靈蹟) often stemmed from indigenous (Mongol, Tibetan or Chinese) practices turned towards this-worldly expectations: they generally aimed at bringing good luck and material benefits to this life. All pilgrims collected products of the mountain: water at one of the many sacred springs that cured a thousand illnesses, miraculous ice that never melted, stones, earth, pine cones etc.; and rubbed their bodies on buddhas' footprints in stone. Everything that grew on Wutaishan was filled with spiritual power, which was believed to be transferable to individual pilgrims. Pilgrims might also spend the night on a peak hoping to see an apparition of the Bodhisattva or to see the 'buddha lights' for which Wutaishan was famous. Thus, the holy site was experienced with the five senses: contact – with holy footprints, with the earth through prostrations; taste – by ingesting products of the mountain; and the sight, smell and sound of numinous apparitions and phenomena.<sup>8</sup> The Mongols also practised rituals of their own popular religion such as crawling into a narrow womb cave, a rite of rebirth and fertility. This ritual was common in various parts of Mongolia but was unknown in China and in Tibet (Tibetans have 'karma testing' rituals between rocks or in narrow tunnel caves, which

7 On pilgrimages ranging in structure from the highly formal (stressing social ritual) like the *hajj* to Mecca, to the highly informal (oriented towards personal expression), see Morinis 1992:14–15.

8 For similar practices in Tibetan pilgrimages, see Buffetrille 1996:296–307; Huber 1994:38.

are different from the womb-cave fertility rituals). Nowadays on Wutaishan, Chinese and Tibetan pilgrims also crawl into the womb cave, following the Mongols' practice. It is well known that at pilgrimage sites shared by different religions or religious schools, the pilgrims tend to imitate what others do and to borrow rituals that do not belong to their own tradition.<sup>9</sup>

### **The monasteries visited by pilgrims of different ethnicities and confessions**

Pilgrims to Wutaishan had a tendency to favour worship at and donations to monasteries of their own confession, but also visited some famous and ancient monasteries of the other Buddhist tradition. The pilgrims started at the White Stupa and the monasteries of Lingjiu Peak, kowtowed to the holy icon of Manjushri in the Pusading and to the one in the Shuxiangsi to inform the Bodhisattva that they had come to fulfil a vow, and continued their pilgrimage according to their priorities, their aim and the weather (on Wutaishan, sudden snowstorms, thunderstorms and hailstorms can happen even in mid-summer and prevent pilgrims from visiting the terraces).

### **Mongols' Interest in Chinese Buddhism**

During the late Qing period, the Mongols showed interest in Chinese Buddhism (Atwood 1992–3) and in its Indian heritage (the White Ashoka Stupa, the Sandalwood buddha); they were conscious of belonging to a Qing multi-ethnic empire united by Buddhism (Elverskog 2006). Mongol devotees from Beijing built a pavilion to enshrine a copy of a famous Sino-Indian statue within the Dailuoding (a blue monastery), and even wrote a whole guidebook about the Shuxiangsi (a blue monastery).<sup>10</sup>

The literate Mongols and Tibetans had access to the Mongol and Tibetan guidebooks, as well as the Chinese gazetteers translated in their own language that informed them that they should see particular sites or icons. The guidebooks as well as the 1846 map propagated the mountain's lore, which was continuously enriched with new stories and events.

Chinese and Mongol pilgrims also interpreted some deities and their icons differently. For instance, the icon of the 'Mother of buddha(s)' (Fomu 佛母), an epithet of Prajnaparamita (in the Fomudong and the Yuhuangmiao 玉皇廟/Puhuasi 普化寺) – an archetypal female deity – was commonly identified

9 See the chapters in Albera and Couroucli (eds.) 2009. According to them, holy sites that stand outside the control of religious or political authorities are believed to have more efficacy, and at these sites, inter-confessional frontiers become blurred.

10 *Üjesküleṅ secig-ün erike kemegdekü oruṣiba*, written around 1813.

Monasteries	Buddhist tradition	Specificity	Stelae in		
			Ch.	Mon.	Tib.
<i>Monasteries visited by all pilgrims</i>					
Tayuansi 塔院寺	blue (+ lamas)	White Stupa enshrining a relic of Shakyamuni, stele with (a reproduction of) the footprints of Shakyamuni, small stupa enshrining a hair of Manjushri	13	61	–
Shuxiangsi 殊像寺	blue (+ lamas)	'True portrait' of Manjushri with the Buckwheat Head	4	1	–
Xiantongsi 顯通寺	blue (+ lamas)	Beamless Hall, Bronze Hall, 5 stupas representing the 5 terraces, famous ancient relics	5	5	1
Pusading 菩薩頂	yellow	Imperial monastery, 'true portrait' of Manjushri, 108 steps representing the 108 passions to crush with the feet, in order to be cleansed from defilement and freed of sufferings	–	1	–
Luohousi 羅睺寺	yellow	Revolving lotus that opens to reveal a buddha statue when activated by a hidden mechanism, Pine Tree Holy Stupa, White Manjushri	1	47	–
Yuanzhaosi 圓照寺	yellow	Stele of the 'Begging Manjushri', Shariputra's funerary stupa	4	7	–
Dailuoding 黛螺頂	blue	5 statues of Manjushri representing the 5 terraces, Sandalwood buddha	–	2	–
Jin'gangku 金剛窟	yellow	Vajra Cave that closed itself when Monk Buddhapali disappeared with Manjushri in 683 AD, treasure cave, Manjushri's tooth and handprints	–	–	–
Shouningsi 壽寧寺	yellow	Statue of Old Manjushri	1	2	–
Wanfoge 萬佛閣	blue	Dragon King, now the most popular icon on Wutaishan	–	–	–
Fanxianshan 梵仙山	blue	Terrace to throw 'wind-horse' papers	–	–	–
5 monasteries of the 5 terraces	–	Many sacred springs, ponds, rocks, footprints of Manjushri etc.	–	1 per monastery	–
<i>Monasteries especially visited by Mongol and Tibetan pilgrims</i>					
Zhenhaisi 鎮海寺	yellow	Funerary stupa of the Third Changkya Khutugtu	–	5	–
Fomodong 佛母洞	blue	Womb cave	–	2	–
Guanyindong 觀音洞	yellow	Place where the Sixth Dalai Lama, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama and Avalokiteshvara have meditated; sacred spring that gives fertility	–	1	–



Monasteries	Buddhist tradition	Specificity	Stelae in		
			Ch.	Mon.	Tib.
Shancaidong 善財洞	yellow	Place where the Third Changkya Khutugtu lived and meditated; sacred spring	–	2	–
Baohuasi 寶華寺	yellow	Stupa enshrining a hair of Tsongkhapa	–	1	2
Shifangtang 十方堂	yellow	Lodging centre for lama pilgrims	–	182	3
Cifusi 慈福寺	yellow	Lodging centre for lama pilgrims	–	7	–
Sanquansi 三泉寺	yellow	Three sacred springs	–	9	1
<i>Monasteries especially visited by Chinese pilgrims</i>					
Nanshansi 南山寺	blue	108 stairs, stupa containing the bowl and the robe of Monk Puji	20	2	–
Longquansi 龍泉寺	blue	Puji's funerary stupa	–	–	–
Bishansi 碧山寺	blue	Monastery that organizes monks' ordinations	6	1	–
Qingliangshi 清涼寺石	blue	2.2 m-high stone called Manjushri's bed	–	–	–
Zhulinsi 竹林寺	blue	Famous historical monastery	–	–	–
Jin'gesi 金閣寺	blue	Famous historical monastery	–	–	–

Table 1 Major monasteries on Wutaishan and numbers of non-imperial donation stelae of the Qing and Republican periods

as Tara by the Mongols and the Tibetans, and as Bodhisattva Guanyin by the Chinese. The Indra Palace Temple (Dishigong 帝釋宮, from the name of the deity of Hindu origin) was renamed Yuhuangmiao (Temple of the Jade Emperor) in the Ming dynasty, when Daoists occupied its buildings and identified the Chinese Jade Emperor with Indra. And the Mongol lamas who ran this temple during the late nineteenth century worshipped the same deity under the name of Qormusta Tngri, i.e. the Mongol form of Ahura Mazda (identified with Indra by the Uyghur Buddhists, and transmitted to Mongols during the fourteenth century). As for the Dragon King of the Wanfoge (a local chthonian deity opposed to Buddhism, but tamed by Manjushri and turned into a protector of Wutaishan), he was the major deity of rain and good harvests for the local farmers. His cult developed considerably in the

11 The more than 340 stone inscriptions recording major Mongol donations of the late Qing and Republican periods are preserved on the site. This list is not exhaustive, as some inscriptions have disappeared or have been moved, degraded or lost. Comparatively, for that period, Chinese stelae of donations are much less numerous.

early twentieth century, and nowadays all pilgrims, including Tibetans and Mongols, make a vow in front of the Dragon king, who is said to be an emanation of Manjushri, and said to help pilgrims on their journey back home.

To sum up, all pilgrims frequented more or less the same monasteries and worshipped the same icons and relics, although they had their own preferences and different expectations. They shared many common devotional practices, and adapted some of them to the local context (Mongols erected stone inscriptions – which they very rarely did at home– and attended Chinese rituals; Chinese crawled into the womb cave). Although Chinese pilgrims' garments, the practice of burning incense and paper offerings, or Mongols' and Tibetans' prayer-wheels and circumambulations functioned as ethnic and religious markers, Wutaishan could be at the same time pan-Buddhist and multicultural.

### ***Communitas* between pilgrims on Wutaishan?**

Although Victor Turner's well-known concepts of *communitas* and *liminality*<sup>12</sup> have been seriously challenged by anthropologists,<sup>13</sup> who have emphasized individual experience in pilgrimage,<sup>14</sup> some particular case studies show that the Turnerian model should not be abandoned altogether.<sup>15</sup> Turner's theories come from the study of homogeneous, mono-confessional pilgrimage sites, but they prove even more interesting when applied to shared pilgrimage sites.<sup>16</sup> Due to the long tradition of cohabitation of different schools and religions, most of Chinese pilgrimage sites seem to be shared between Buddhist and Daoists, or between Chinese and Tibetan Buddhists, with more tolerance than, for instance, sacred sites frequented by both Christians and Muslims in the Near East (Naquin and Yü 1992b).

Do the sources I use to study the Wutaishan pilgrimage allow me to speak of a *communitas* according to Turner's meaning, i.e. at the margins or outside society, in a state of *liminality* or *antistructure* characterized by the

12 Turner 1978; Turner and Turner 1978. Turner's theory was inspired by the work of Arnold Van Gennep on rites of passage.

13 Notably Morinis 1992:7–8; Eade and Sallnow 1991:4–5; Albera 2009.

14 In the conclusion of the book he edited with M. Couroucli, Albera (2009:351) prefers speaking of pilgrims having common needs (of a supernatural help) and goals, but rarely interacting with each other.

15 See, for instance, Nancy Frey's study of the present-day Santiago pilgrimage, and Holmes-Rodman's study of a healing shrine in New Mexico (in Badone and Roseman 2004).

16 See the different studies on places where Christian and Muslims cohabitate around the Mediterranean Sea in Albera and Couroucli 2009. For an example of a pilgrimage shared by Hindus and Buddhists in Nepal, see Buffetrille 1994.



Figure 8 Photograph of Manjushri Bodhisattva appearing among the clouds, Scripture Hall, Xiantongsi Monastery. © Isabelle Charleux.

spontaneity of relationships and the abolition of social distinctions?<sup>17</sup> I argue that *temporary* forms of *communitas*, where ‘persons normally segregated in secular or profane society are, at least symbolically, integrated into a fluid, ecstatic community of common religious purpose’<sup>18</sup> were certainly almost palpable at some precise moments, for instance, during the great festival organized by the main yellow monasteries during the sixth lunar month, with masked dances gathering together two hundred lamas and a great procession of five hundred participants, during mass teachings, and, above all, during collective visions and miracles, such as the ‘buddha lights’ that were seen by large groups of people without distinction of ethnicity and rank (Figure 8). Rölpe Dorjé’s biography records that light phenomena were spotted by

17 According to Turner, pilgrimage is fundamentally anti-structural: the rules and constraints of daily life being temporarily suspended, pilgrims experience egalitarian relationships and create a new community.

18 Gimello 1992:136 n43, also 105, 132n. 31.

crowds, especially during and after Tibetan Buddhist empowerment rituals.<sup>19</sup> In the eighteenth century, the crowds of Chinese, Tibetans and Mongols asking for blessings, teachings and initiation from Rölpe Dorjé, and the communities of ‘foreign’ and Chinese monks performing rituals together under the leadership of the *jasag lama*, evoke forms of *communitas*. In the 1930s, Alley and Lapwood mention

a huge procession of lamas, Chinese priests and pilgrims, who had been attending an initiation ceremony at a temple up the valley. These were estimated to be about 3,000 persons in all, and their coloured gowns and robes as they filed along the mountain path showed up well against a hillside already bright with flowers.

(Alley and Lapwood 1935:119)

Pilgrims following the great procession of the sixth-month festival or queuing to enter the womb cave mingled with each other (a Chinese observer noticed that the festival was an opportunity for Chinese to approach pretty Mongol women). Because of the dangers of the roads (from tigers to bandits) and the risk of getting lost in the mountains,<sup>20</sup> pilgrims of different ethnicities occasionally travelled together on the roads leading to Wutaishan, and formed groups when they climbed to the terraces.<sup>21</sup>

*Communitas* is naturally present in discourses. Since Manjushri can appear on the mountain in many guises such as an old woman, a beggar in rags or a fox, to test people’s level of compassion, people say that one has to be kind to everybody because anybody could be Manjushri in a disguise,<sup>22</sup> and generally consciously adopt an attitude of generosity and friendly behaviour. For instance, Khejok Rinpoché’s modern Tibetan guide says that ‘in a pilgrimage, the pilgrims would cultivate a mind of faith and devotion on the way there.’<sup>23</sup> Yet the pilgrims’ discourses, like official propaganda of the site, tend to over-emphasize harmony and brotherhood over disappointment and tensions, and we must be very cautious about them.<sup>24</sup> Susan Naquin noticed

19 Biography of Rölpe Dorjé, transl. Chen Qingying and Ma Lianlong 1988:248–9.

20 Stories abound of pilgrims lost in the dark or in the fog and being saved by an emanation of Manjushri. See, for instance, Gao Henian 2000 [1949]:113–44.

21 Gao Henian 2000 [1949]:117.

22 See, for instance, Tuttle 2006:19. Nowadays many beggars in rags hope that people will give them money in case he/she could be the Bodhisattva.

23 Born in 1936, he is the abbot of Dhétsang Monastery in Eastern Tibet. He now teaches in Australia, and made a pilgrimage to Wutaishan in 1999 (Lim 1999).

24 Many scholars working on pilgrimages point out that this ideal of harmony and solidarity is often absent from the observed practices.

for the Chinese pilgrimage to Miaofengshan 妙峰山 that pilgrims behaved as if they formed one harmonious family. But

private feelings of discomfort, annoyance, or disappointment were to be suppressed; individuals were subtly pressured into such behaviour by their own and other's expectations.

(Naquin 1992c:363)

It would be safer to speak of peaceful cohabitation, religious tolerance, and curiosity for 'the other'<sup>25</sup> rather than a durable *communitas* in Turner's terms that levels the gap between ordinary pilgrims, monks, aristocrats and literati, or between different nationalities.<sup>26</sup> Temporary moments of *communitas* certainly happened, but cohabitation and tolerance were probably more common than interactions and cultural exchange. As I will show below, my sources rather describe situations that are closer to Eade and Sallnow's theory, which views pilgrimage as a mosaic in which actors are heterogeneous and viewpoints are diverse.<sup>27</sup> The Wutaishan pilgrimage is 'capable of accommodating diverse

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25 Comparing the sharing of religious sites in the Balkans and in India, Hayden (2002) argues that competitive sharing is compatible with the passive meaning of tolerance (i.e. non-interference), but incompatible with the active meaning of tolerance (acceptation of the Other, respect and recognition while disagreeing with others' beliefs and practices). Positive, active tolerance would be an illusion in the process of the complete appropriation of a holy site by a group. Albera (2009:356) criticizes Hayden and prefers to highlight the plurality of situations and the difficulty of building theories. See also Hayden's reviews in *Current Anthropology* 43(2) and especially Bowman's comments.

26 Similar observations for a mono-confessional pilgrimage site are made by Buffetrille (1997:88 and 2003): in present-day Tibet, 'pilgrimage groups as a rule do not mix with one another'; 'there is not necessarily good fellowship, brotherhood and equality among all the pilgrims [...] which does not exclude mutual aid in case of difficulty'; 'the quality of *communitas* that Turner (1969, 1974, 1978) observes in all the pilgrimages he studied, is in general not present in the Tibetan world, except during very short periods [...] contrary to what one might think, differences of social status persist during the pilgrimage'. See also Huber 1999:18. But Kapstein (1998:112), who insists on the festive dimension of a pilgrimage, does not reject the Turnerian model.

27 Eade and Sallnow (1991) deconstructed both the first trend of pilgrimage studies, of Durkheimian inspiration, that considers pilgrimage as an element of social cohesion that participates in the construction and the maintenance of larger collective identities such as territorial, political or religious communities, and Turner's theory. Both are still valid in pilgrimage studies though. See, for instance, in the Tibetan context Huber's study of a peripheral, popular pilgrimage where

meanings and practices', though it cannot be considered as being 'void' of beliefs and symbols.<sup>28</sup>

### **A *communitas* between Mongols?**

The stone inscriptions of Wutaishan offer us a glimpse of the Mongol donors as they wanted to appear: they do not talk about impoverished herders and indebted nobles (which they actually were); on the contrary, they showcase the extreme generosity of all patrons towards the Wutaishan monasteries. These Mongols travelling in groups mixing men and women, nobles, lamas and commoners, and pooling their money to pay for rituals and offerings to monasteries would seem to offer an image of community.

Elverskog (2011), who argued that a distinct pan-Mongol identity emerged at the end of the Qing dynasty, cemented by Buddhism and by the heritage of Chinggis Khan, while also being a local identity attached to the banner,<sup>29</sup> proposed that the Wutaishan pilgrimage played a prominent role in the creation of a 'Mongol identity'. The pilgrimage may have fostered 'bonds between the stratified social hierarchies institutionalized by the Qing state':

it is possible to imagine that Mongols of all social ranks came to share a new 'Mongol' *communitas*. [...] at Wutai Shan the boundaries and nature of what it meant to be Mongol, must have been both challenged and reconceptualized.

(Elverskog 2011:254)

As Elverskog acknowledges, this is a deduction 'based on an awareness of the larger historical context' but not on textual evidence. Mongols'

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identities and cultural practices were forged anew (1999:3–6, 174); also Albera 2009.

28 In opposition to other theories that emphasize a pilgrimage site that is 'full' of beliefs and symbols, Eade and Sallnow insist on its property of 'void', 'capable of accommodating diverse meanings and practices', of offering 'a variety of clients what each of them desires' (1991:15). They advocate analyzing each specific pilgrimage in terms of its particular social context and its "historically and culturally specific behaviors and meanings' (1991:3–5). Pilgrimage resists analysis and theorization: 'if one can no longer take for granted the meaning of a pilgrimage for its participants, one can no longer take for granted a uniform definition of the phenomenon of "pilgrimage" either' (*ibid.*: 3). Yet Eade's introduction to the second edition of *Contesting the Sacred* (2000) acknowledges that this argument may have been overstated.

29 Elverskog 2006. By 'Qing dynasty Mongols', Elverskog means 'Mongols belonging to the Qing empire', and among them, I assume, mostly Inner Mongol intellectuals.

consciousness of a common identity may of course have been enhanced during the pilgrimage by the simple fact of speaking the same language and travelling together in a foreign territory, but the sources I used do not confirm Elverskog's hypothesis. The stone inscriptions, with their conventional formulas, do not tell us the whole story. Commoners expressed their resentment and anger when they had to pay for their princes' journey to Wutaishan: the horses, cattle, sheep and large amounts of silver offered by nobles to Wutaishan monasteries were actually extorted from the banners' commoners. Following Eade and Sallnow's theory, I would rather say that what actually seemed more distinctive on Wutaishan was not the ethnicity or religious affiliation, but the great variety of pilgrims and pilgrimages: differences between penitents walking in great prostrations to expiate their sins, well-off pilgrims who made a comfortable journey and gave ostentatious offerings, monk-pilgrims seeking for spiritual encounters, and pilgrim-traders who bought and sold cattle at the market, seem to be more salient than differences between Mongol, Chinese or Tibetan pilgrims who shared similar expectations. Nothing allows us to assert Turner's crossing of social frontiers, of *communitas* between rich and poor, high lamas and penitents. Nobles' pilgrimages were certainly very different from commoners' pilgrimages. Similarly, early twentieth-century Chinese cleric accounts show erudite monks that share the Chinese culture of the literati, appreciating calligraphy and writing poems, but do not tell anything of the ordinary pilgrims' practices.

### ***Communitas* in a cosmopolitan Qing empire or mutual incomprehension?**

Elverskog's second deduction proposes a view of Wutaishan as an ideal place, where all the Buddhist populations of the Qing empire met and exchanged with each other, had the feeling of sharing a 'Qing identity'<sup>30</sup> and experienced a 'Qing *communitas*', where 'Chinese literati, Mongol herders, Tibetan lamas and Manchu bannermen all came together, jostling shoulders at temples and caves in the pursuit of blessings and merit.'

Coming into contact with the enormous cultural and religious diversity of the Qing empire, in many cases no doubt for the first time, must also have been an amazing experience. [...] pilgrimage to Wutai Shan created the field

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<sup>30</sup> Elverskog had argued in his book *Our Great Qing* (2006, esp. 135–46) that 'Qing dynasty Mongols' acquired a 'pan-Qing identity': thanks to the propaganda orchestrated by the Qing emperors, they viewed themselves as members of a broader community including Chinese, Manchus and Tibetans, in a multicultural empire which entailed a certain 'porousness between Qing culture(s)'.

where such ideas could grow. [...] it was the main, possibly the only place, where all of these new ideas were not only in the air, but also accessible to the widest range of social actors found in the Qing empire. [...] Pilgrimage to Wutai Shan therefore played a fundamental role in familiarizing the Mongols with the new cosmopolitan culture of the Qing since they not only partook of it while at the mountain, but also brought it home. [...] Indeed, how many places in the empire could Mongol nomads, Tibetan lamas, Manchu officials, and Chinese peasants all come together in direct contact and shop for the same commodities, much less partake in the same religious ceremony?

(Elverskog 2011:260–2)

This Qing cosmopolitanism<sup>31</sup> experienced on Wutaishan would have made cultural exchange possible, and in this favourable context Mongols created Sino-Mongol syncretic works in fields as diverse as Buddhist art, literature, theatre and astrology. It is true that some learned Mongols acted as intermediaries in the transmission of Chinese Buddhist history, literature and sciences, and helped bridge Tibeto-Mongol and Chinese Buddhist traditions. Great figures such as Mergen Gegeen or Gombojab had an interest in the Chinese Buddhist tradition and historiography; Chinese-speaking Mongols of Eastern Inner Mongolia, Höhhot, Beijing and Chengde translated the great Chinese novels into Mongolian, and translated, compiled or used as main sources Chinese works about religion, geomancy, astrology and medicine.<sup>32</sup>

Mongols' worship of Wutaishan must not be seen through the lens of Tibetan Buddhism only, but understood as the veneration of an ancient Buddhist holy site connected to India, and of an ancient Chinese Buddhist site.<sup>33</sup> Buddhism provided what was in effect a cultural *lingua franca*.<sup>34</sup> The stone inscriptions and pilgrims' records clearly show that even if every

31 Elverskog (2011:255) defines Qing cosmopolitanism as 'the ability of the various peoples within the Manchu state to see, think and act beyond the local, be they Mongol, Tibetan, Manchu, or Chinese'; but 'notions such as being Mongol, Tibetan, or Chinese did not dissipate into a fog of Manchu cosmopolitanism.'

32 Atwood 1992–3:17; Elverskog 2011:257–8.

33 According to Elverskog (2006), Mongols have been convinced that they belonged to a single Buddhist continuum extending from India to Mongolia. Being Mongol (within the Qing empire) had become synonymous with being a Gélukpa Buddhist and a subject of the Qing emperor. Historiographers re-wrote the history of Buddhism in Mongolia, inserting it in the longer history of Buddhism: Chinggis Khan and his descendants were recognized as reincarnations of ancient Indian and Tibetan kings, making the history of Mongolia actually start in India.

34 Kapstein 2009:xvii.



ethnicity had its own preferences, Mongols sponsored monasteries of both traditions, and Chinese laypeople were looking for Tibetan initiations.<sup>35</sup> The Mongolian and Tibetan guidebooks and the 1846 map included old Chinese lore of Wutaishan. In his guidebook, Rölpe Dorjé speaks of ‘the pilgrims’ without any distinction. As shown in Table 1, the salient feature of a Wutaishan monastery for pilgrims was not its current affiliation to Tibetan or Chinese Buddhism (whether it was staffed by lamas or *heshang*), but its peculiarity that distinguished it in this complex religious landscape: the stupa of a saint, miraculous statues and the ‘natural numinous traces.’ Sanctity and efficacy (of relics, of sacred icons, of great Buddhist masters) prevailed over sectarian and ethnic differences. The blurred visual frontier between a Gélukpa and a Chinese Buddhist monastery on Wutaishan perhaps enhanced the feeling that Buddhism was one though its traditions were many. Wutaishan was the only place in China where Mongols worshipped Chinese icons on a large scale.

Gray Tuttle also argued that the Tibetan (monastic and lay) elite and the Qing imperial elite (Manchu and Mongol) formed a ‘stable, mutually supportive community’, from which the Chinese were excluded.<sup>36</sup> On Wutaishan, these elites may have interacted with each other, especially during the emperors’ tours, but the sources I used cannot confirm or invalidate this hypothesis for late Qing period commoners. Visiting temples of different Buddhist traditions and worshipping ancient icons does not necessarily entail inter-ethnic and inter-religious dialogue. I would say that before being a ‘cosmopolitan Qing pilgrimage site’ for devotees, Wutaishan was first of all the holy residence of a revered Bodhisattva where one could increase one’s vital force and fortune, and ensure happiness in future lives. Following Eade and Sallnow (1991), I propose that the Wutaishan pilgrimage has a plurality of meanings, viewpoints and practices in which egalitarianism and nepotism, fraternity and conflict, unity and divisiveness cohabited. The prejudices, xenophobia or, at best, indifference that are commonly seen nowadays, along with mutual respect, tolerance and some temporary forms of *communitas*, certainly already existed one century ago.<sup>37</sup> Elverskog may have overestimated cultural exchanges and the cosmopolitan culture of the pilgrimage. Mongol commoners may have known stories translated from Chinese that circulated in Mongolia and worshipped Chinese icons, but it does not mean that they were interested in interacting

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35 Chinese interest in Tibetan Buddhism before the 1930s may have been underestimated, at least for the early Qing period and in some places such as Wutaishan, Beijing and Gansu (see Kapstein 2009).

36 Tuttle 2005:ch. 1.

37 Valtchinova (2009:114) showed that relations between pilgrims of different religions or traditions were in perpetual renegotiation on a Bulgarian pilgrimage.

with Chinese pilgrims or resident monks. Except in case of danger or fear of getting lost and other above-mentioned temporary forms of *communitas*, I found no example of pilgrims of different nationalities mixing with each other. The cultural and linguistic gap has always existed between Tibetan, Mongol and Chinese pilgrims, and even between Kalmyks and Khorchin Mongols, Tibetans from Amdo and from Central Tibet, Han from Shanxi and from Guangdong. Tuttle showed that interactions between Chinese and Tibetan Buddhism at the level of monastic teaching and practice were, before the 1930s, dampened by language and geographical barriers (2005:ch. 1). Except for Chinese shopkeepers and traders<sup>38</sup> who learned to speak some Mongolian, Mongolian-speaking Chinese monks, and some learned Mongols fluent in Tibetan or Chinese, the main cause of mutual incomprehension between the communities was language.<sup>39</sup> In 1912 the Chinese lay Buddhist Gao Henian who enquired about history and stories on Wutaishan complained that he could not discuss with Tibetan lamas.

Early twentieth-century Chinese sources give some insights on Chinese judgements of Mongol and Tibetan monks and pilgrims on Wutaishan. Chinese pilgrims and travellers completely ignored the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. In Chinese scholars' eyes, the Mongols and Tibetans looked exotic because of their costumes and, above all, their ostentatious religious fervour, which was labelled as superstition in modern anti-religious China. Zhang Dunggu, a geographer and Buddhist layman who visited Wutaishan in 1911, criticized Mongol lamas for whom monkhood was a lucrative job, but recognized that some pious and ascetic Mongols did not fear sufferings in their search for nirvana. Yet on the next page, he described the repulsive filthiness of the Mongols' faces and clothing, and was shocked by men and women who mixed in monks' rooms and sat together around the *kang* 炕 (heated sleeping platforms).<sup>40</sup> Describing an image of a woman under a bull and having sexual intercourse with it (probably an image of Yama), he explained that when the Xiongnu 'barbarians' were exterminated by the Han dynasty, only one woman was left and she had a son with a bull, who is the ancestor of the all Mongols. His depiction of the monks, who all drank alcohol and ate meat (which did not respect their precepts, as he understood them),

38 Zhang Dunggu 1911; Bai Meichu 2010 [1925]:*juan* 2, 92.

39 This was also true in the case of medieval European pilgrimages, where language barriers and the absence of promotion of cultural exchange lead to mutual incomprehension, contempt and the swindling of others (Sumption 1975:192).

40 Zhang Dunggu 1911:24–5. He quotes a local saying: '[At Wutaishan] houses built from piled rocks do not fall, monks at the gate are nor bitten by dogs, lamas in the bedchamber do not trouble people.' (1911:17).

did illegal things and possessed everything from land and shops to women, is part of the general anticlerical discourse of the time, especially that targeting the lamas (Charleux 2002). I have no comparable sources from a Mongol perspective, and I can only extrapolate from contemporary observations. But there is no doubt that the different ethnic communities observed each other with curiosity and interest, even if it was to discover the other's faults and vices.

### **Revival of the pilgrimage, 1980s–2010s**

Because of the rise of nationalisms, secularization, anticlericalism, ethnic tensions and tourism during the Republican, early communist and contemporary periods, we must be very careful in our attempts to compare the pilgrimages in the twenty-first century with those of the nineteenth century. Wutaishan is no longer an ecumenical Buddhist site in a multi-ethnic empire. But we have no other tools than comparison and extrapolation, as our sources do not tell us what pilgrims thought, felt or experienced.

Wutaishan is now one of the wealthiest Buddhist centres of China. In June 2009, it was named a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, and it received more than four million pilgrims and tourists that year, of which 20,000 were foreigners.<sup>41</sup> On this occasion, the provincial authorities decided to carry out major investments to improve infrastructure and attract tourists from China and abroad. In 2008, the 2.8 million paying visitors had brought 1.4 billion *yuan* (206 million US\$) in tourist revenues, according to government figures.<sup>42</sup> Since their land was confiscated, the Wutaishan monasteries have been economically dependent on pilgrims and compete between each other in attracting donations; they run hostels, ask for an entrance fee, organize a variety of rituals,<sup>43</sup> and take subscriptions to support the building and restoration of temples.

Through the Han Gélukpa School (which represents 11 per cent of the monastic community and has appropriated old Chinese Buddhist and Gélukpa monasteries), but also through visiting Tibetan masters, Tibetan Buddhism played a major part in the Buddhist revival in the late 1980s. In 1987, the Tibetan Nyingmapa master Jikmé Püntsock (also known as Khenpo

41 [whc.unesco.org/en/news/523](http://whc.unesco.org/en/news/523) (accessed 18 November 2011).

42 Saiget 2009 Tibetans from Tibet and Chinese from Shanxi Province who have a Buddhist registration (*jushi* 居士記) do not pay the entrance fees.

43 In 2012, the Shuxiangsi organized at least one ritual a day for pilgrims in summer and up to eight rituals per morning. A short ritual costs 3,000 *yuan*, a bigger one, 7,000 *yuan*. In 2006, two pilgrims from Inner Mongolia donated 6,000 *yuan* for a Chinese ritual.

Jikpün, 1933–2004), who had established the Larung Buddhist Institute near Serthar in Sichuan Province, led three thousand disciples (most of them being Chinese) to Wutaishan (that then counted less than 800 monks). There, he performed rituals of the Great Perfection tradition, gave mass teachings, empowerments, and revealed and concealed Buddhist texts and statues. He offered Tibetan statues to Wutaishan monasteries and re-consecrated icons (Chou 2011:ch. 3). Some of his Chinese disciples perpetuated his teachings at the Shancaidong. Jikmé Püntsook contributed to a revitalization of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition on Wutaishan and created a common ground for Chinese and Tibetans, but his Nyingmapa followers encountered some opposition from the local Gélukpa clergy. Other Tibetan masters of Gélukpa, Nyingmapa or Rimé traditions, living in China or abroad, such as Dilgo Khyentsé (1910–91), Akya (Ajia) Rinpoché (b. 1951), Khejok Rinpoché, Dzongsar Khyentsé Rinpoché (b. 1961) and Sakyong Mipham Rinpoché (b. 1962), contributed to re-empowering Wutaishan through initiations and treasure-discovery, and to reviving the pilgrimage. Funerary stupas of Tibetan masters built on Wutaishan create new ‘power places’. Miraculous apparitions of Manjushri in the sky, along with coloured haloes and rainbow lights were spotted by crowds, especially during rituals and initiations performed by Jikmé Püntsook (Germano 1998:84–7). New ‘numinous traces’ continue to be discovered.

Those who report miracles and discover new numinous sites, write new guidebooks and propagate new stories are Chinese Buddhist monks and Tibetan and Han Chinese lamas writing in Chinese or Tibetan; Mongols are no longer authors of pilgrimage lore. Due to the difficult survival of the Buddhist institutions of Inner Mongolia (owing to many factors, including state control, absence of reincarnations and leading figures, being cut off from Tibet, lack of monastic vocations, Sinicization and a rural exodus), Inner Mongols monks presently do not play an important role in the global revival of Tibeto-Mongol Buddhism in China. On Wutaishan, they are now much less numerous than Tibetan monks from Amdo (Tibetan and Mongol lamas represent 15 per cent of the resident clergy; in addition, about 2,000 Tibetan lamas from Labrang Monastery in Amdo go on pilgrimage to Wutaishan every year).<sup>44</sup>

According to my field observations (2007, 2009, 2010 and 2012), despite of the growing influence of Han Gélukpa lamas, the fact that Inner Mongols can communicate in Chinese, and the general interest of the Chinese in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, Tibetan, Mongol and Chinese pilgrims generally do not mix with each other and do not share food on Wutaishan.<sup>45</sup> Veiled

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44 Figures between 2000 and 2007.

45 While I have seen Chinese sharing their picnics with each other, I have never seen Chinese, Mongol and Tibetan pilgrims sharing food and eating together.

tensions and jealousy between ethnicities caused by religious and racial prejudices can be observed behind the apparent *communitas* that stems from the pilgrims' discourse and behaviour. Blue monasteries claim that they offer free meals and cheap lodging to every pilgrim, but in practice they do not accept Tibetans and Mongols in their refectory. Chinese Buddhist monks typically consider the lamas as 'impure' because they eat meat and have a freer life than their own: 'they are not true monks'. Chinese pilgrims also feel they are discriminated against because Tibetans are exempted from the expensive entrance tickets, while they are not. They criticize Tibetans and Mongols for being ignorant, filthy and superstitious. But they show curiosity towards Tibetan customs and sometimes approach Tibetan groups to examine their hand-held prayer-wheels and clothes. Most of the Han Chinese examine the non-Chinese stelae and cannot identify whether the script is Tibetan, Mongol or Manchu. But when a Mongol or a Tibetan reads an inscription aloud, Han Chinese group around him, manifest some surprise and ask him questions about the text.

On the other hand, the Mongol and Tibetan lamas complain that the Chinese are racist and do not try to understand their tradition. Mongols and Tibetans criticize the Chinese for being first and foremost interested in making money: they believe that the Chinese circumambulate stupas to obtain good luck in making money. A Tibetan told me that the Chinese love to wear amulets with the prayer '*Om mani padme hum!*', which they understand as the words 'all money in my home' in English.<sup>46</sup>

However, communication is now facilitated by the fact that many Tibetans and Inner Mongols can speak Chinese, and the monks' communities are less and less segregated, partly thanks to the rise of Han Gélukpa Buddhism and to general interest by Chinese in Tibetan Buddhism. The gap is actually broadening between the Inner Mongols, who have become Chinese citizens, many of whom speak Chinese or have even become Sinicized, and Mongols from Mongolia, for whom the pilgrimage is a very expensive journey in a foreign country they consider as 'hostile'.

But generally speaking these tensions are played down, and Mongol pilgrims continue to journey to Wutaishan hoping to experience *communitas* in an international Pure Land where all ethnicities are equal, and where one can occasionally meet Nepalese, Japanese, Koreans and even Westerners.

In conclusion, Wutaishan is a unique place in China, where the lamas and *heshang* cohabited, but without real dialogue until the twentieth century. In the end, Wutaishan was the place in China where the two traditions

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46 For mutual criticisms of Tibetan Buddhists and Chinese Buddhists in the Republican period, see Tuttle 2005:70–2.

merged, and we observe what Franck Frégosi calls a 'dynamic of religious hybridization', characterized by 'a transgression of the boundaries between the dominant confessions that shakes up their respective orthodoxies', and 'the creation of spaces of porosity between religious worlds' (2011:104). In order to attract pilgrims from different ethnicities, the monasteries adapted their offers to the pilgrims' needs, borrowed from each other and adopted a syncretic architecture, accumulating icons and rituals from both traditions. Although there was very little communication between the two clergies, monasteries adopted similar strategies, including the appropriation of other monasteries; but Mongol pilgrims also appropriated space through large cemeteries. Wutaishan will certainly never belong to one ethnicity or one religious order. But not all pilgrims are equal and their status is changeable. In the Qing dynasty, Mongols may have viewed Wutaishan as an ecumenical Buddhist site within a multi-ethnic empire. In the twenty-first century, Mongols from Mongolia are foreigners in Chinese territory, while Inner Mongols re-appropriate Wutaishan by their presence, their donations and their cemeteries. By their donations of specific statues and temple decorations, the Mongols contribute to the Tibetanization of blue monasteries, and the Chinese, to the Sinicization of yellow monasteries.

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