The Mongols on Wutaishan: Interactions and Encounters

Now that we have a more precise idea of who the Mongol pilgrims were in the late Qing and Republican periods, why they went especially to Wutaishan and how they reached their destination, let us examine what they actually did on the mountain—the sites they visited and the rituals they paid for. This chapter still focuses on Mongols but also deals with interactions and encounters between different ethnic and religious communities: the religious landscape of Wutaishan was shared between two traditions of Buddhism, plus Chinese popular religion, and between three main ethnicities. By studying the Mongols’ specific practices and the sites they worshipped, I will question whether they made the same pilgrimage as the Tibetans and Chinese or a different one, and I will examine how lay and monk pilgrims and locals interacted with each other—in religious, daily and commercial activities. Was the Wutaishan pilgrimage one or many? A related question is this: Did pilgrims have a feeling of communitas, sharing common goals, expectations and experience, or did they behave as individuals with distinct faiths, social status and ethnicities? In other words, should we follow Elverskog’s stimulating theory regarding the role of Wutaishan in the creation of a ‘Mongol identity,’ a ‘Qing identity,’ a ‘Qing culture,’ and a Qing ‘cosmopolitanism’ uniting Mongols, Chinese and Tibetans?

Accommodation and Reception of Pilgrims

Accommodating Mongol Pilgrims
The resident monks and shopkeepers, including Chinese, took initiatives to welcome and accommodate Mongol pilgrims on Wutaishan. The Mongols had four options for lodging: living in their own yurts, renting a room in inns or a house, staying in monasteries’ hostels or staying in private houses of (lama) relatives. Many Mongols carried their own yurt and stayed with their sheep and cattle in the pastures near Dailuoding and on the slopes of the Southern Terrace. For instance, when the Fourth Jebtsündamba journeyed from Höhhot to Wutaishan in 1802 “together with his lamas, officials and many servants,” they
“set up their tents on the land just below and to the east of Shuxiang Temple and stayed there.”

Some stayed in inns run by Chinese or rented a house at or near the village of Taihuai. Over half of the houses in Taihuai belonged to monasteries or to wealthy lamas, who rented them to pilgrims. Edkins noticed near Pusading “a collection of buildings looking like a small town, where the animals belonging to travelers and to the monasteries are taken care of: the pilgrims staying in inns could leave their animals there—probably those that they were planning to donate to the monasteries.

North of Pusading, “lodging-rooms for lamas formed quite a little town,” and many pilgrims resided there. Jiang Weiqiao counted about three hundred houses for lamas behind Pusading. On their doors were pasted parallel auspicious sentences in Mongolian, in the Chinese fashion:

May your age be the same as that of the pines in the southern mountains; May your happiness abound as the waters of the Eastern Sea.

Lay pilgrims could probably also reside in this district, since Edkins added that:

Many Mongol women were seen in this part, probably all belonging to pilgrim parties, who find quarters in rooms provided for them. Many ranges of buildings had upper and lower verandahs. Elsewhere are seen Tibetan houses with their small square windows in the upper part of a strong high wall.

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1 Dznyä na shri man’s Tibetan guidebook Ri bo rtse lnga’i dkar chag rab gsal me long 1994 [after 1827], passage transl. by Gray Tuttle, email, September 2011.
2 Edkins 1893 [1878]: 239-240.
3 Edkins 1893 [1878]: 234.
4 Before 2009, Taihuai extended southwest and west of Lingjiu Peak, on the two banks of the Qingshui River. Sadly, most of the village, along with its inns, was razed to the ground between 2007 and 2009 in order to accommodate the influx of tourists with Wutaishan’s new status as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
5 Edkins 1893 [1878]: 229; Pokotilov 1935 [1893]: 77.
6 Jiang Weiqiao 1961 [1918]: 22.
7 Edkins 1893 [1878]: 231.
8 Edkins 1893 [1878]: 229-230. Gilmour (1970 [1883]: 146) confirms that the houses south and north of Pusading were built in Tibetan style.