Conclusion

Wutaishan possesses all the components that make a ‘spiritual magnetic site’ according to Preston’s criteria. It boasts numinous traces such as springs associated with healing and good fortune. It is a site of apparitions of supernatural beings — Mañjuśrī, Tsongkhapa, Avalokiteśvara, Padmasambhava transmitting revelations, sacred texts and icons that were hidden when people were not ready to understand them or in times of troubles, to be revealed in their time. Wutaishan also had a geography sacralized by prestigious monasteries, relics and miraculous icons, and by the presence of Indian, Tibetan and Mongol saints and reincarnations. It was an awe-inspiring site combined with accessibility to a deity.1 Like Chinese mountains and some Japanese pilgrimage sites, Wutaishan includes more than a hundred built and natural sites. With their high altitude and harsh climate, plus various dangers ranging from tigers to storms, the terraces were difficult to access, requiring great effort and courage to reach. The pilgrimage was enhanced by acts of contrition (like progressing in full-length prostrations) and fasting. Yet dangers and hardships were less compared to journeys to Tibet, and the excellent pastures and vivid markets of Wutaishan appeared especially attractive to Mongol herders, who could bring their flocks with them. Women equally participated in the pilgrimage, and there were no specific prohibitions or places forbidden to them. In addition, the prestigious past of Wutaishan, which was remembered in local legends, connected the holy mountain to religious and political figures of ancient Tibet, China and India. The abode of Mañjuśrī never ceased to be an international pilgrimage site since the first millennium and, in the modern period, became increasingly associated with supernatural efficacy for Mongols.

For Mongols, Wutaishan could compete with the great Tibetan pilgrimage sites, which, comparatively speaking, attracted more monks and a smaller variety of social groups. As for the ‘national’ and local Mongol pilgrimages, and especially Urga, while their importance must not be underestimated, they could not completely replace the journey to Wutaishan. In the sacred geography of Mongolia, Wutaishan was located geographically abroad (yet not far) but spiritually at the heart of Mongol territory; it was shared by all Mongol groups, because it was not the particular mountain of a local Mongol community.

Since the Tang dynasty, Wutaishan was also an important site for the ritual protection of the dynasties that ruled China and served as ideal ground for the Yuan and the Qing empire-building projects. We have seen that the role of the

Qing emperors in the promotion of the pilgrimage among Mongols was weak compared to its promotion by the local clergy (especially the *ombo lamas*) and by the Mongols themselves, from lamas who wrote prayers and prescribed the pilgrimage as a cure to oral accounts of returning pilgrims. The number of pilgrims, the amounts of their donations, and their literary and visual production about Wutaishan show that the Mongols' craze for the holy mountain surpassed the initial encouragement. They not only recycled and distorted Buddhist lore and Sino-Manchu stories but also developed a unique popular folklore, Wutaishan being even included in shamanistic invocations. These productions are both causes and consequences of the pilgrimage: they stemmed from the experience of pilgrims and, when diffused, prompted future pilgrimages.

How can we explain that Mongols' pilgrimages to Wutaishan culminated during a period of economic depression and troubles, when Mongols' identity and social status were being redefined and when anticlerical discourses rose among the population, targeting a poorly educated clergy condemned for its corruption, lust and parasitism? Explanations are as many as the types of pilgrims: princes financed their pilgrimages by levying special taxes on their subjects; pilgrim-traders made profits by selling horses, oxen and sheep at a high price; penitents and poor pilgrims begged for food, while others spent all their savings in donations. The significant Mongol contribution to the Wutaishan economy, which allowed some circulation of resources, may have been partially counterbalanced by the profits made by the pilgrim-traders. The importance of donations to the Wutaishan monasteries also allows us to re-evaluate the prevalent picture of economic stagnation and to nuance it according to the period and places.

The variety of pilgrims, of aims and types of pilgrimages allows us to draw a picture with much sharper contrasts compared to the simple picture of *communitas* and of Qing dynasty cosmopolitanism. Some monasteries and sites were worshipped by all pilgrims, while others were especially visited by Mongols and Tibetans. The Mongols particularly liked caves and monasteries that had a venerable Chinese or Indian past (the Great White Stūpa and Buddha's footprints, Shuxiangsi, Xiantongsi) but neglected other sites which were praised in the Chinese gazetteers. Their patronage of Chinese institutions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries contributed to the survival of some temples and monasteries such as Wulangmiao and Yuhuangmiao/Puhuasi. Except for learned lamas from Tibet and Mongolia who came to Wutaishan to meet each other, interactions between common pilgrims seem to have been limited.

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