Abstract

Wutai-shan 五台山 located in the Shan-xi 山西 province of China is a prominent Buddhist pilgrimage site, held in profound religious awe. Despite her pro-Taoist past, Wutai-shan became the designed home of the celestial bodhisattva – Manjusri (Wenshu 文殊). It was an Buddhist utopia where visions and miracles were bestowed. This Buddhicisation occurred after connecting the mountain to influential scriptures. During Tang 唐, a new sacred geography was created, and Wutai, renowned for being an efficacious (ling 灵) site, erected as the new “World Mountain” in Asia. This dissertation seeks to illustrate the predominant factors behind the rise.

The patronage by the royalties played an important role in Wutai-shan emergence as a national and international pilgrimage centre. However, such imperial recognition was closely intertwined with the development of Buddhism itself and a mere dichotomy of the two tends to evade the complexity of the situation.

Subsequently, the cult of Manjusri will be discussed. Besides the establishments of the cult by indigenous Avatamsaka (Hua-yen 华严) and Guhya-yana (mi-jiao 密教) traditions, we witness the permeation of Tibetan Buddhism (Zang-mi 藏密) during the Mongol’s reign of Yuan 元. These influx of foreign culture revitalized the Manjusri cult as it encouraged the arrival of new pilgrims.

The Chinese phrase of going on a pilgrimage – Chao-shan chin hsiang 朝山进香 means “to present incense while paying one’s respect to a mountain”. Finally, this dissertation sets forth to examine the great variety of motivations for undertaking such spiritual journey and provide explanations to this intriguing phenomenon. In examining in depth the pilgrimage relating to Wutai, it is hoped that it might be possible to unravel the metaphysical attributes that the mountain enshrines.