

propaganda and education. I therefore suggest that, in conjunction with the present movement to increase production and practice economy, propaganda be conducted with fanfare against superstition and, above all, against the waste of food during the Ullambana festival.²⁸

Although the government had long been making sporadic attempts to discourage the celebration of Buddhist festivals,²⁹ the really serious effort was not to begin until 1963, as will be made clear in Chapter XI.

PILGRIMAGES

Because monks found it harder to travel about after Liberation (see Chapter IV), very few of them went on pilgrimage to "famous mountains" as they used to in the old days. Pilgrimages by laymen, however, continued. In 1956 over 37,000 visited Omei Shan and, on the average, stayed three or four days—barely long enough to climb to the summit and back.³⁰ An informant who was there for a week in August 1957 saw "several thousand people a day."³¹ In 1960-62 there were reports of devotees traveling from Shanghai to far-off Wu-t'ai Shan,³² thronging the island of P'u-t'o Shan,³³ and trudging up Nan-yüeh at the rate of seven to ten thousand a day.³⁴ Usually such crowds would be seen only during the pilgrimage season, which varied from mountain to mountain and centered on the birthday of the presiding bodhisattva, whom pilgrims came to worship.³⁵

Travel to a sacred mountain was tiring and expensive. There was not only the expense of train and bus tickets but of hotels along the way and of room and board in the monasteries of the sacred mountain.³⁶ Furthermore, pious Buddhists wanted to make a donation at every shrine. One purpose of their long journey was to gain the merit that arose from supporting the sangha in a holy place. Since they had less money than before 1949, they gave less, though probably as much as they could afford.

Not all who visited sacred mountains were pious Buddhists. Some claimed to be traveling for their health or recreation—or as

surrogates for elderly relatives who did not feel up to making the trip themselves but to whom the merit from it could be transferred. At Nan-yüeh, for example, Rewi Alley saw one 14-year-old boy carrying, at his grandfather's request, a large iron roof tile, "rather a rare thing today, as the practice is dying out." Such tiles had once been brought in great numbers, with the name of the donor engraved on each. Alley makes no estimate of the ratio of tourists to devotees. He says only that as the crowds walked up the path, "some" chanted sacred texts; and people "often" carried sticks of incense. "Every temple and grotto was paid respects to."³⁷

One of the most vivid descriptions of a pilgrimage comes from a European who visited the Baths of Yang Kuei-fei near Sian during the Lantern Festival in 1966. There were big crowds in one of the many temples there, so big that she could not get in. Inside she could hear the music of a percussion orchestra of drums, gongs, and wooden fish, and many of the people outside were mumbling prayers rhythmically and in a low voice. They were mostly extremely poor, wearing only a tattered jacket over the bare skin, with no outer garment, and having dirty towels wrapped around their heads. "Their faces were hard and *abrupti*. They stared about, more like animals than human beings—quite different from the townspeople."³⁸ On other occasions she saw worship going on at several of the famous Buddha caves—something that had seldom been reported even before 1949.³⁹

RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

Some lay devotees went to temples not for worship but to take part in some form of religious practice or self-cultivation. We have already seen instances of this in Chapter VII: many of the activities for which government programs provided a screen in 1950-57 were carried on by laymen as well as monks.

The commonest form of practice was to repeat the name of the Buddha Amitabha in a rhythmical chant, for hours on end, so as to dedicate oneself to rebirth in the Western Paradise. Many instances can be cited.⁴⁰ The least common practice was Ch'an medi-