

always back each other up, as everybody knows.”

“What a situation!” exclaimed Mao.

“That doesn’t mean that there are not some good officials,” the old man hastened to add. “I was concierge for seven or eight years and I worked for three magistrates. The first was grasping; the other two really did their best to be just. But people seem to have no conception of what is right or wrong. There was no justice in the community! You can imagine how the people complained of the magistrate who based his verdicts upon the generosity of his clients; but they complained as bitterly about the two who refused to accept bribes. I told the people it was no good to offer money but they wouldn’t believe us. ‘What sort of magistrate is he, who won’t accept a gift?’ they asked. It wasn’t worth while trying to be honest. No one believed it and they thought even worse of them than of those who made no bones about what they wanted. Wasn’t it better under those circumstances to take the money and have done with it? That’s probably why there are so few honest officials.”

We agreed that his conclusions were probably correct and after a few minutes of talk, we bade the old couple goodbye and continued on our way, talking further about the deplorable state of affairs. The majority of the lower classes were ignorant and believed whatever they heard, playing into the hands of unscrupulous officials who were supposed to administer justice.

In the distance we could barely make out the Wei Shan, looking like a low cloud, but gradually it took on the form of a mountain as we drew nearer.

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The Buddhist Monastery on Wei Shan

In the evening we arrived at the Wei Shan and as we approached, the uniform green background gradually resolved itself into trees surrounding the great white Buddhist temple. Soon we arrived at its foot and started up the slope.

At the gate two monks came out to welcome us and to escort us into the building. Presumably they thought we had traveled a great distance to worship Buddha, so to prevent subsequent misunderstanding we told them we had come to beg. They assured us, "Worshiping Buddha and begging are the same thing."

We didn't understand what they meant but we supposed the observation was the fruit of some deep philosophy. Possibly it was a corollary to Buddha's teaching that all men were equal. Without questioning them we followed through the second door and into the inner court where we saw about a hundred monks slowly walking up and down. We were given a room with the suggestion that we leave our bundles and take a bath. This we gratefully accepted.

When we returned, the monks wanted us to burn incense to Buddha, but we told them we had not come to worship. We explained that we had come to see the Fang Chang, the Abbot. They looked askance at our begging attire and said the Fang Chang would not receive just anyone! They added that when he gave one of his famous dissertations, we might see him. We explained that we not only wanted to see him, we wanted to talk with him and that this very night! They were visibly impressed by our insistence, but they dared not disturb him if he did not know us. Finally we persuaded them to take a note which I wrote very carefully and which we both signed.

In about ten minutes they reported that the Fang Chang would be pleased to talk with us at once and invited us to follow them to his room. He was a man of about fifty with a kind, distinguished face. The four walls were lined with books and besides Buddhist scriptures and commentaries, we noticed the Classics of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu. On a table in the middle of the large room there was only a tall vase of flowers, a low vase of orchids, and nothing else. We were not able to discuss Buddhist studies with him, but we had a fascinating discussion of the Classics which continued for an hour. The Fang Chang was very pleased and invited us to have supper with him, after which we returned to the big hall where a large number of monks were again gathered.

When they saw us come from the Fang Chang's room where we had dined, they presumed that we were guests of importance and

all of them stood to greet us. To be friends of the Fang Chang we must be eminent scholars and as such, first class calligraphers! They all asked us to write a few words on their fans and scrolls for them to keep as souvenirs. That kept us busy till almost midnight.

Next morning when we spoke of leaving, the monks told us the Fang Chang asked that we stay for a few days, that he would like us to visit him that afternoon. Meanwhile they took us to see the vegetable garden, the big kitchen, the refectory, and other parts of the building. The gardeners, cooks, water carrier, all the workers were monks!

When Mao and I went to the Fang Chang's room in the afternoon, he again received us cordially. This time he had apparently decided to talk "business," and in a gentle manner he extolled the virtues of Buddhism in an endeavor to waken our interest in religion. Though we had no desire to discuss religion, we listened politely, careful to give no sign of agreement or disagreement. We just let him talk. Finally when he mentioned Confucius and Lao Tzu, we found ourselves on familiar ground where we could express our opinions. But what really interested us was not Buddhism but the Buddhist organization in China. Now we asked him a series of questions.

When we asked how many monks there were in the monastery, he replied, "About a hundred monks live here permanently. But since there are always visitors here from distant parts, often we have three or four hundred here at one time. Visiting monks usually remain for a few days before going on their way. Years ago they had as many as eight hundred here, which was the record since the foundation of the monastery. But that was before my time."

"How does it happen," Mao asked, "that monks from other provinces several thousand kilometers distant, come to this monastery? What do they do here?"

The Fang Chang explained, "They come here to listen to talks on the scriptures and to receive religious instruction. The Fang Chang of this monastery have always been famous for their explanations and commentaries of the scriptures. The monastery is rich and it is no problem to give travelers board and lodging for a number of days. Monks all know about this place and, as you know,

monks are *ch'u chia jen*, people who have abandoned their homes; so for them all Buddhist temples and monasteries are their homes and they visit them in turn to receive instruction in each."

"How many monks are there in China?" I wanted to know.

"There are no exact statistics," Fang Chang continued. "Excluding Mongolia and Tibet there must be, in China proper, about ten thousand at least. With Mongolia and Tibet where the ratio of monks is extremely high, there must be about ten million, maybe more."

"And how many centers of instruction like this Wei Shan monastery are there in China?" I asked.

"There must be at least a hundred places like this and, counting the smaller ones, there are probably a thousand altogether."

"Are there any Buddhist books published?" asked Mao.

"Yes, indeed, a great many, especially in such centers as Shanghai, Nanking, Hangchow, and Hingpo."

"We are considering visiting the big Buddhist monasteries," I explained. "Could you write some letters of introduction for us?"

"That is not necessary. There is no need for you to have any letters of introduction, because everywhere you go you will be welcome the same as you are here."

When we had thanked him and told him we wished to leave the next day, he said that was as we wished, but he wanted to see us again before we left. We explained that we would like to get started early in the morning, so we again thanked him and made our farewells.

When we came into the big room, the monks again stood in greeting and knowing that we were leaving in the morning, they asked us to write lines and verses for each as mementos of our visit. They all crowded around with their respective requests and we did our best to oblige. Some of the monks themselves wrote beautifully formed characters and they were obviously surprised and disillusioned to see Mao Tse-Tung's coarse writing. We had seated ourselves at two small writing tables and at first there was a big crowd of monks around each, but before long they all drifted to mine and soon Mao had no more customers.

Among the monks were five youngsters of about fourteen years,

one of whom I remember to this day with deep affection. He was called Fa Yi.

Fa Yi, who was fifteen, had an excellent control of language for his age and his calligraphy was very beautiful. From the moment we arrived he seemed drawn to us and during our stay he lost not a moment's opportunity to talk with us. He was unable to tell us where he had come from and what his name had been before he became a monk. He only knew that someone had told him that he had arrived at the monastery as a year-old baby. We guessed that he was an illegitimate baby who had been brought up by the monks—a very common practice in China. Teasing, I said I could detect a resemblance to Mao Tse-tung, and he retaliated by saying there was no doubt but that he had my features.

Fa Yi was anxious to study books other than Buddhist scriptures, such as those on Confucius and the famous poems of the T'ang Dynasty. Already he could recite several T'ang poems. At first we suggested that he abandon his secluded existence and go out into the everyday life of the world. He was very eager to do this, but at the same time he was a bit afraid, because he knew no other home and he had no possessions. Why shouldn't he live like us, we asked, traveling freely without money and with only one change of clothes. This impressed him but, as he hesitated, we became afraid he might try to escape and follow us and that the Fang Chang would blame us for leading him astray. Also, he was still very young; so we tried to change the conversation and suggested that the best thing for him was to study hard and learn with the monks, many of whom were highly educated and cultured, and that he should not leave the monastery at this time.

That night I wrote him several verses in my very best calligraphy to keep as a souvenir. Next morning, at dawn, Mao and I left the monastery and set off down the mountainside. Fa Yi accompanied us to the foot and there he shed bitter tears as we parted. Poor, delicate Fa Yi! Pitiful Fa Yi!