

CONCLUSIONS

This study began with a consideration of narrative as a form of visual expression. Narrative imagery as it differed from iconic imagery within the tableaux at Baodingshan was found to be a problematic construct. A number of the narrative tableaux within Great Buddha Bend incorporated iconic imagery into their storylines, while similarly several of the more apparently iconic works could also be read as narrative. In order to better assess the imagery found at Great Buddha Bend, and to limit somewhat the scope of this study, the defining parameters of narrative were narrowed to include only those works which incorporated text, citing the presence of text as a valid indication of audience reception of the works in question as narrative.

Narrative was further defined as incorporating two basic elements - action that produces change, and time. The narrative works at Great Buddha Bend were then carefully analyzed with regard to the various methods in which text and image were combined within each tableau. Mode of representation was considered within each large relief, as well as within the relationship of the six works to each other within the grotto as a whole. From this analysis, it was determined that the individual reliefs actually were related pairs, dependent not so much on mode of representation, but rather on subject matter, and in essence formed a very broadly defined narrative network.

Within these pairs, time was represented on a variety of levels, resulting in the imagery being compartmentalized, much as was the tradition in Chinese oral and historical narration. The protagonists involved in "action that produces change" were also found to vary from tableau to tableau, with several utilizing a universal man or woman as the key player in the central drama, while others involved very specifically named individuals. These varying aspects of the changing subject matter of the narratives led to a closer consideration of the meaning inherent in each pairing.

The numerous components within each tableau demonstrated that mode of representation affected meaning, with some works clearly stating their intent with inscribed texts that paralleled the images, while other works left much more open to interpretation. These latter works, in which specific imagery was selected to represent a much more elaborate inscribed narrative, were considered within the context of having been consciously chosen by Zhao Zhifeng to highlight what was important to the overall textual narrative of the tableau.

Captioning and numbering was used with great effectiveness within all six of the tableaux in order to move the literate viewer through the works. For the illiterate, visual cues were provided in the form of symmetrical placement of the individual vignettes within a given tableau; once clued in to the order of things, he or she could easily move through a work, using the carved imagery as impetus for re-creating the story from memory, if the story were known. Clearly some of the stories may not have been known to the

Song dynasty worshipper venturing to Baodingshan for the first time, leading to several of the tableaux being ordered in such a way as to make an overall understanding of the work less vital than a comprehension of at least a portion of the work's singular components. Such a loose organization of the details also allowed for more flexibility on the part of the monk lecturers, who could selectively choose a part of a work to focus on, yet not lose the sum of the whole.

Working back and forth from big picture to small, I argued that the overall placement of the pairs of tableaux was due to a logic based on ceremonial practice as well as on traditional Chinese concerns for family. The first pairing - the Kindness of Parents tableau and the adjacent Repayment of Kindness tableau - clearly represented the filial debt which permeated all layers of society, and the difficulties encountered in attempting to repay a karmic reckoning which essentially could never be adequately recompensed. Even the Buddha himself was burdened with such a debt, and his many and heroic attempts at repayment only served to highlight how insignificant were the average soul's efforts. In true Chinese Buddhist fashion, Shakyamuni is set up as an example of the truly filial son, a position at first glance seemingly at odds with his choice of the monastic vocation. This argument is quickly and easily rebutted when it is made known how instrumental Shakyamuni in this as well as his previous incarnations had been in helping his parents achieve enlightenment, the ultimate in filial acts.

The second pairing - the Scripture on the Visualization of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life and the Scripture on the Ten Kings coupled with the hell tableau - reiterated the urgency of the first, further deepening the anxiety of the worshipper with promises of heaven as well as extensive descriptions of hell. A formula for relieving one's immediate filial debt was provided for in the form of ritual activities involving the Ten Kings of Hell as well as name recitation with regard to the Pure Land. Yet at the same time the message of indebtedness portrayed in these two works was broadened to additionally include the well being of previous and future generations.

The last pairing - the Asceticism of Layman Liu and the Taming of the Wild Buffalo tableaux - provided the worshipper with two very different Buddhist paths to follow, and also provided a lineage of spiritual ancestors for those endeavoring to reach enlightenment at Baodingshan. Representing two non-canonical texts, these works demonstrated how both layperson and monk alike could utilize self-sacrifice as a means to reach enlightenment. On a deeper level, the two tableaux address the traditional Chinese concern for lineage, defining Zhao Zhifeng within the parameters of his spiritual mentors Shan Hui and Master Liu. All those who followed in Zhao's footsteps at Baodingshan could then look to Zhao as their link to a lengthy and illustrious spiritual past.

The final chapter moved away from the more obvious sculpted imagery to focus more closely on the other half of the narrative works at Great Buddha Bend, the textual imagery. Here the discussion delved more

into meaning than mode of representation, away from an aesthetic appreciation of the texts inscribed at Baodingshan, and toward an historical and religious understanding of its import. What was discovered was that the textual imagery at Great Buddha Bend served a series of aims on behalf of the monastic community. The most obvious of these were ritual and pedagogical, with the monastic community being able to accommodate people from all walks of life at Baodingshan through the use of these large illustrated texts. As noted above, monks could walk the worshippers through the Great Buddha Bend complex, utilizing the inscribed texts to preach stories related to filial piety, ancestor worship, and the illustrious lineage of the site's creator, Zhao Zhifeng. Both the lay and monastic community could further utilize the texts in the form of ceremonial verses, which were incorporated into many of the tableaux. These verses were related to self-sacrifice and the accumulation of good merit, and allowed for a utilization of the Great Buddha Bend works on behalf of oneself and one's deceased ancestors.

The less obvious rationale for the textual imagery was that of preservation of the Buddhist faith within a time of chaos, a situation perhaps felt more urgently in Sichuan at this time than elsewhere in the Southern Song empire. Evidence for a program of preservation of the canon taking place at Baodingshan was found with the presence of the inscribed sutra catalogue in Little Buddha Bend. Since many more titles of scriptures are carved in the list than are found within the grotto below, the texts inscribed amongst the tableaux at Great Buddha Bend were argued to be exemplars of

the various methods to enlightenment which Zhao Zhifeng hoped to preserve for future generations. I postulate that mere survival of the Buddhist law after the age of *mofa* was perhaps not all that Zhao was after, preferring instead to continue to see the faith practiced rather than only preserved. As such, Zhao chose to incorporate a selection of texts within the larger sculptural program at Great Buddha Bend, ensuring that should one survive and not the other, the Buddhist faith would continue to be spread. Thus the combined text and image carved stone works at Great Buddha Bend can be seen as functioning on behalf of the people of the region on two distinct levels, edifying as well as safeguarding, for time eternal. That was what Zhao Zhifeng swore an oath to do, and given the status of Baodingshan almost 1000 years later, his efforts would appear to not have been in vain.