

INTRODUCTION

Upon first encountering the Buddhist imagery of Sichuan's Baodingshan 宝顶山 grotto in 1992, I was immediately struck by the many marked differences in not only the artistic mode of representation, but also in the subject matter. Here was a site that stood in stark contrast to everything that I had previously learned about Buddhist art in China. This was no honeycombed cliff of Buddha images; rather, it appeared as a cohesive whole, a well-thought out mile and a half of hillside carving reminiscent of the earlier individual cave programs of Dunhuang, Yungang, and Longmen. Baodingshan was like a cave turned inside-out, its subject matter eclectic, and its mode of representation not truly akin to earlier carved or painted precedents [fig. 1]. Thus I began to search for the underlying motivation for such a large-scale and unique work of art. Some areas of this quest have borne fruit, with some paths still remaining to be explored. While the Baodingshan site is composed of many very disparate elements, my main goal here is to consider the tableaux that form one section of Baodingshan's Great Buddha Bend grotto within the context of the narrative mode of

representation, and how it is utilized to best serve Song dynasty societal beliefs and concerns.¹

Thanks to the rise in printing during the Song dynasty, much more information is available on this period than for earlier times. Sichuan province was home to several large and well-known printing houses, and China overall was experiencing a transformation largely creditable to rising literacy rates and access to published information.² The area surrounding Baodingshan was located within one of the furthest flung circuits of the empire, and from data available through gazetteers, it becomes clear that this region of China was booming. The population soared, and intra-urban trade increased.³ In the eyes of Song dynasty officials, however, the region was “still very much a frontier area”, implying a freedom from government strictures found elsewhere in the more metropolitan areas of the land.⁴ The pilgrimage site constructed at Baodingshan must therefore be considered in light of this somewhat unique social context.

¹This differs from a brief earlier attempt at analyzing the overall structure of the grotto as a form of three-dimensional mandala. See Ernst Ostertag, Der Grottenzyklus von Dazu: ein Buddhistischer Initiationsweg [Vienna: Octopus Verlag, 1988].

²Peter J. Golas, “Rural China in the Song”, Journal of Asian Studies vol. 39, no. 2 [February 1980]: 291.

³Ibid., 294. Golas notes that in the nearby Kuizhou circuit, population increased over 1000% between 742 and 1078 CE.

⁴Ibid., 295. Winston Lo, 25, effectively argues that Sichuan during the Song dynasty remained a politically sensitive area, with special regulations in force regarding placement of civil service personnel in the region continuing up until the demise of the dynasty. During the Southern Song, Sichuan minted its own currency and was the first area to develop paper money in China. See Lo, Szechwan in Sung China: A Case Study in the Political Integration of the Chinese Empire [Taipei: University of Chinese Culture Press, 1982].

The Buddhist site of Baodingshan consists of a monastic complex and two grotto areas, Little Buddha Bend 小佛灣 and Great Buddha Bend 大佛灣[fig. 2].⁵ Located on a remote, rocky outcropping at an elevation of approximately 500 meters, fifteen kilometers north of Dazu City in Sichuan Province, Baodingshan, literally translated as “Precious Summit Mountain”, was an active pilgrimage site into at least the late Ming dynasty [1368-1644 CE].⁶ Primary construction at the site dates from the Southern Song period [1127-1270 CE], and it is in large part due to the lateness of its construction that the Baodingshan complex has received limited attention from modern-day art historians. Buddhist sculpture produced after the Tang dynasty [618-907 CE] has only recently been considered as a subject of study because most earlier art historical scholarship perceived the Tang as the high point of the

⁵It must be noted that contemporaneous sources do not designate the Baodingshan site as being composed of Great Buddha Bend and Little Buddha Bend. This is a modern convention that I adhere to solely for the sake of clarity.

⁶There is some question as to when Baodingshan was last in active use. Photos taken of the site during the excavations carried out in the 1940s would seem to suggest that at least parts of the site were in use during the Qing dynasty. Liu Chanjiu, ed., *Dazu shi ke yan jiu* [Research on the Dazu Rock Carvings] [Chengdu: Sichuan sheng she hui ke xue yuan chu ban she, 1985] [hereafter DZSKY]: 494-495, provides evidence for continued carving activity in the dating of reliefs numbered 23 through 26 to the Qing dynasty, with relief 25 being added as late as 1915.

Chinese sculptural tradition, with all later works viewed as derivative or inferior.⁷

The Baodingshan grotto complex is fundamentally different from earlier pilgrimage sites in China in its construction and layout. Even within Sichuan's local tradition, the creators of Buddhist cavesites tended to favor traditional niche-based iconography, in which a central iconic figure or grouping is enclosed within a distinct and limiting framework [fig. 3].⁸ At Baodingshan's Great Buddha Bend, however, the majority of the carved works flow from one tableau into another - large, deeply-cut reliefs reaching dimensions as great as eight meters high by twenty meters wide. Of the twenty-seven numbered original images in Great Buddha Bend, at least six are narrative reliefs.⁹ These large, almost three-dimensional tableaux contain

⁷Victor Segalen echoed the sentiments of many art historians when he stated "The T'ang dynasty is definitely the pinnacle of the crest line....The works of the Sung dynasty disfigured those of the T'ang. The Ming ran out of inventiveness. And, finally, the Ch'ing consummated the decadence." See The Great Statuary of China, trans. Eleanor LeVieux [Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1978]: 26.

⁸Patricia Karetzky, Early Buddhist Narrative Art [Lanham, New York: University of America Press, 2000]: 138-9, notes that "The unimportance of narratives at other sites of the Northern Dynasties - Gongxian, Longmen, and Xiangtangxiang - is significant in establishing the falling off of interest in scenes of the life of the Buddha."

⁹There are thirty-one reliefs found at Great Buddha Bend, including four carvings which were added in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and thus cannot be considered to have been part of the original conception of the site. The numbering system was implemented by the Chinese archaeologist Yang Jialuo during his work at Baodingshan in the 1940s. See Yang's write-up of the work in The Discovery (1945) of 6216 Statues Carved on Rocks During the T'ang and Sung Dynasties at Ta Tsu [Taipei: Encyclopedia Sinica Institute, 1968].

not only extensive carved inscriptions of Buddhist texts, but also depict significant aspects of these religious writings in sculpted form [fig. 4].¹⁰ These six tableaux represent apocryphal scriptures created in China in order to accommodate various indigenous Chinese beliefs within the Buddhist faith; preceding the narrative reliefs are iconic tableaux in which a singular deity or grouping of deities is the focus of the work.

Baodingshan further differs from other Chinese Buddhist religious sites in that it lacks the type of dedicatory inscriptions attributing karmic merit to the benefactor or his family as is seen at other Buddhist pilgrimage sites.¹¹ The majority of Song inscriptions at Baodingshan are scriptural in content, and the narrative tableaux are a clear combination of text and image. This absence of standard dedicatory inscriptions at Baodingshan suggests a different approach to the underlying conception and function of the site. This

¹⁰For a complete list of the tableaux found at both Great Buddha Bend and Little Buddha Bend, see Appendix A.

¹¹For examples of Yungang inscriptions, see James Caswell, Written and Unwritten: A New History of the Buddhist Caves at Yungang [Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1988]: 21-39. For Longmen, one of the most comprehensive sources for inscriptions is Liu Jinglong and Li Yukun, Longmen shi ku bei ke ti ji, 2 vols. [Beijing: Zhong guo da bai ke quan shu chu ban she, 1998]. The over 7000 inscriptions from Dunhuang can be found in several sources; see Paul Pelliot, Grottes de Touen-houang: carnet de notes de Paul Pelliot: inscriptions et peintures murales, 4 vols. [Lanzhou: Gansu renmin chubanshe, 1993], and Catalogue des manuscrits chinois de Touen-houang, 5 vols. [Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale 1970]. Also Roderick Whitfield, The Art of Central Asia: the Stein Collection in the British Museum [Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1982], and Makita Tairyō, Tonko to Chugoku Bukkyō [Tokyo: Daito Shuppansha, 1984].

would be in keeping with the evolved state of the Buddhist monastic establishment under the Song dynasty, where “the major monasteries were not forbidden cloisters but grand and open public institutions...with much of the teaching of Buddhist monks directed towards the laity rather than toward fellow monastics alone.”¹²

Unique to Baodingshan in a fashion which may serve to explain its very idiosyncratic character is the fact that one man is purported to have been largely responsible for the site’s layout and overall execution: the monk Zhao Zhifeng 趙智風[~1160-1240].¹³ Whereas work carried out at other Chinese cavesites was a product of centuries of accretion, with many patrons and many artistic hands, it is widely accepted that Baodingshan was the concept of one many, created over a relatively short period of time. Little evidence is available to enable us to flesh out Zhao’s lifestory; however, firmly establishing the existence of Zhao Zhifeng is vital, since the following

¹²Robert M. Gimello, “Marga and Culture: Learning, Letters, and Liberation in Northern Sung Ch’an” in Paths to Liberation, Robert M. Gimello and Robert E. Buswell, Jr., eds., 371-438, Kuroda Institute Studies in East Asian Buddhism no. 7 [Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992]: 379. Gimello, 414-415, argues that the monastic community exerted more influence than ever before over Chinese culture during the Song era, contrary to scholarly beliefs that Buddhism fell into decline after the persecutions of the Tang.

¹³It is known that Zhao was born in Dazu County in the twenty-ninth year of the *shao xing* era of the reign of Emperor Gaozong -1160 CE – and is said to have lived 80 years. See Dazu xian zhi: Sichuan sheng [Dazu County Gazetteer: Sichuan Province] [Taipei: Cheng wen chu ban she, 1976]: 498.

argument will focus on how the site was conceived of and created, and ultimately, what impetus may lie behind its unique configuration.

The scant remaining documentation proves a monk by the last name Zhao was active at the site during the Southern Song dynasty. Several pieces of evidence exist, two in the form of inscriptions carved at the Baodingshan site itself, while the third appears as a brief passage in a Song dynasty text, *Yu di ji sheng* 輿地紀勝 [The Scenery of the World Recorded]. One of the Song period inscriptions is found on a stele within Great Buddha Bend [fig. 5]. The final segment of the inscription is partially effaced, but what remains legible gives the name Yuwen Ji as the author, and states:

Near to the clouds, the ingenious pleases all eyes,
the scriptures appearing to encircle this divine
place, and [one] sees the transformation city.¹⁴
Such great filialness is unalterable!

Throughout the four seasons [one hears] first the
sound of pipes and bells overlapping.¹⁵ The

¹⁴ The transcribers of the text in DZSKYJ put an unknown character here, instead of what I read as 'fu', "near to". See R. H. Mathews, *Chinese-English Dictionary*, 17th edition [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993]: #1948a. The term "transformation city" may be a reference to the Flower Ornament Scripture. See *Fo xue da ci dian* [Encyclopedia of Buddhist Studies], vol. 1 [Taipei: Tian hua chu ban she, 1984]: 736b.

¹⁵ The specific Chinese term inscribed here is "lin jia" often used as a compound to refer to the scales of fish. I have followed a secondary meaning in translating 'lin' as

Precious Summit's distinguished Zhao Zhi carved the stone, in it tracing out the worthiness of his filial heart.

By completing this stanza of four lines, I establish in every mountain and stream such things as pipes and bells rippling like a Su Dongpo poem, the meaning of which is called 'divine wondrous merit'.¹⁶

Carved at the base of the Seven Buddha wall found within the environs of Little Buddha Bend at Baodingshan is the second inscription which specifically refers to an individual named Zhao being involved in the site's creation. 105 characters in length, this text was written in the *jia xi* era during the reign of Emperor Lizong, 1237-1240 CE.¹⁷ Its author, whose name is partially abraded in the inscription, is an official by the name of Cheng Zhi, whose title is listed as "Gentleman for Fostering Uprightness, Changzhou Administrative Assistant of Military Affairs".¹⁸ The accompanying text reads as follows:

'overlapping' or 'rippling', and "*jia*" as 'first' or 'chief'. The overall meaning of the passage is to create a sense of the sights and sounds of temple life.

¹⁶Poem written by Song scholar Yuwen Ji on stele found at Baodingshan, Dazu County, Sichuan. DZSKYJ, 265.

¹⁷Art Museum of Dazu Stone Carvings of Chongqing and the Institute of Dazu Stone Carvings Art of Sichuan Provincial Academy of Social Sciences, *Dazu shi ke ming wen lu* [The Collected Inscriptions from the Dazu Stone Carvings] [Chongqing: Chongqing chu ban she, 1999] [hereafter DZSKMWL]: 211.

¹⁸Ibid. "*Cheng zhi lang*" according to Hucker, 126, was a prestige title accorded to officials of ranks 6a-8b in the Sung, 6a alone in the Yuan and Ming. "*Pan guan*", re Hucker, 363, is described as being "from Sung through Yuan, a very common title at all levels of government with status seldom higher than rank 6, normally prefixed with the appropriate agency name and sometimes with a functional responsibility also indicated."

Reverend Master Zhao, named Zhifeng, was born in the *shao xing kang chen* year to a rice commissioner from Shaqi.¹⁹ At five *sui*, he entered the mountains to grasp the meaning of the sutras, swearing an oath to do so. At 16 *sui*, Zhao departed to the west, returning to this mountain to cultivate morality by constructing the revered master's temple in order to transmit the teaching of Reverend Master Liu's law. For this reason, the name of this mountain then came to be known as "Precious Summit".²⁰ [Zhao] offered up his ear, and refined by fire the top of his head in order to recompense his parents, distributing charms along with the Law. Those people [whom he had] saved handed down this warning, saying of his offering, "A red-hot iron wheel turned over the flesh, shaking [one] up like a fierce fire within a stove."²¹

This rather lengthy inscription pinpoints Zhao as the main protagonist behind the creation of Baodingshan, as well as one of the main spiritual benefactors for the region as a whole. This text, when combined with the following brief mention of Baodingshan in the thirteenth-century treatise *Yu di ji sheng* [The Scenery of the World Recorded], solidifies Zhao's presence and participation at the grotto site both in time and place. The *Yu*

¹⁹The *kang chen* cyclical year for the *shao xing* era of the reign of Emperor Gaozong or 1160 CE.

²⁰Here written as "*Bao feng*" rather than "*Bao ding*".

²¹DZSKMWL, 211.

di ji sheng mentions Zhao within the context of Baofengshan, 寶峰山 an alternate name for Baodingshan in the Song dynasty.²² The entry reads as follows:

Baofengshan is 30 *li* to the east in Dazu County; there is a shrine in the hillside. The Master of the Way Zhao Zhifeng cultivated morality at this place.²³

This fairly specific piece of geographical evidence provided by the author of *Yu di ji sheng* correlates quite well with what we know of the present position of Baodingshan. It also is quite significant in its connection of Zhao Zhifeng specifically to the Baodingshan site. From these sources, it becomes apparent that among his contemporaries Zhao was credited as the creator of Baodingshan, and would continue to be lauded for his work in later discussions of the site.

There are, however, detractors, the principle one being a Chinese scholar, Li Zhengxin.²⁴ His is an argument that bears some consideration as

²² Wang Xiangzhi, *Yu di ji sheng* [The Scenery of the World Recorded] vol. 2 [chuan 161, section 4] reprint [Taipei: Wen hai chu ban she, 1962]: 806. 'Baofengshan' also translates as "Precious Summit Mountain". See Mathews, # 1878 for 'feng'.

²³The Chinese measurement of a *li* is equal to approximately one-half kilometer. With Baodingshan's present position being 15 kilometers from Dazu City, the historical center of Dazu County, this would then equal the 30 *li* referred to by Wang Xiangzhi.

²⁴Li Zhengxin, "Ye tan Baodingshan mo ya zao xiang de nian dai wen ti" ["Further Discussion of the Question of Dating the Cliff Sculptures at Baodingshan"], *Wen wu* no. 8 [1981]: 85.

the repercussions play out within the realm of artistic control as well as within the sphere of dating and production. In brief, Li argues that not only is Zhao not the author of the Baodingshan complex, but also that the complex itself dates to the Tang dynasty, not the much later Southern Song.

Li's dating argument is partially accurate; he begins by noting that the Baodingshan site is not entirely Song dynasty in construction, citing the very concrete evidence of taboo characters found within Little Buddha Bend.²⁵ The use of taboo characters within some of the carved inscriptions, according to Li, dates the area's construction to the period of Empress Wu Zetian of the Tang dynasty.²⁶ Furthermore, Li notes that the two large characters 'fu' 福 ['good fortune'] and 'shou' 壽 ['longevity'] found on the north side of Great Buddha Bend beneath the tableau dedicated to the layman Liu are accompanied by an inscription written by a Northern Song official [fig. 6].²⁷ It

²⁵Taboo characters' were Chinese characters that were to be avoided in writing because they were included in names of respected individuals or were considered to be abhorrent. Both institutionalized and private taboos existed, the most common being the taboo on using characters found in the personal names of Chinese emperors along with those of their immediate ancestors, and sometimes the extended imperial family. For further reading on taboo characters, and their rise and fall in popularity, see Susan Cherniack, "Book Culture and Textual Transmission in Sung China," Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies vol. 54 no. 1 [June 1994]: 106-108

²⁶Li, 85.

²⁷Ibid. The official in question is one Chen Xiyi. Li does not quote his source on this point. The compilers of DZSKYJ, 494, date the 'fu' and 'shou' characters to a Qing dynasty individual of the same name.

is also pointed out that there are stele at various other sites on the mountain which date to earlier than the Southern Song. Most notable to Li is one inscription which dates to Tang Xuanzong's era, circa 856 CE.²⁸

Li would not be the first person to accord authorship of the Baodingshan site to someone other than Zhao Zhifeng. In the Ming dynasty work, *Shu zhong ming sheng ji*, 蜀中名胜紀 [Record of Famous Sites in Shu],

Cao Xuequan refers to Baodingshan as follows:

The county record states that at the Eastern Meditation Temple there is a stele inscribed by [Emperor] Song Huizong. The Western Meditation Temple was constructed in the Jin *yungho* period [345-356 CE]. At Precious Summit Temple, the Tang revered monk Liu studied Wu Daozi's brush style, and numerous miles of the encircling cliffs are chiseled with Buddhist statues of strange and uncanny things, the likes of which have never been seen again in either ancient or modern times.²⁹

Like Cao Xuequan, other Ming and Qing dynasty sources which refer to Baodingshan seem to cast doubt not necessarily upon the date of

²⁸Li, 86. It must be noted that Baodingshan as a religious area is quite extensive, and not simply limited to the grotto areas of Great Buddha Bend and Little Buddha Bend.

²⁹Cao Xuequan, *Shu zhong ming sheng ji* [Record of the Famous Sites in Shu], fascicle 17 [Reprint. Shanghai: Shang wu yin shu guan, 1936]: 15-16.

construction, but rather upon the site's conceptual author. The name most commonly raised in these sources is Revered Master Liu.

The rationale for the confusion becomes apparent when one grasps to whom Cao is referring. "The Tang revered monk Liu" undoubtedly makes the connection between a local Sichuan layperson, Liu, often referred to using the honorific 'benzun' 本尊 or "Revered Master", who became the focus of worship at a number of places within the area. Liu's image is seen in more than one carved tableaux at Baodingshan, and is in fact the centerpiece of one very large work, tableau number 21, which depicts the various austerities he inflicted upon himself in order to obtain enlightenment [fig. 7]. Although touted as a spiritual mentor at the Baodingshan site, there exists no written evidence actually placing Liu there, or indicating that he had an actual hand in the Tang dynasty works which still exist in Little Buddha Bend. To further comprehend the error of authorship, it is important to note that there is a record found on a stele in Little Buddha Bend that the temple site was originally sponsored out of respect for Liu.³⁰ Traveling during the later Ming dynasty, Cao simply conflated the imagery of the man, Master Liu, with the

³⁰ This is contained in a Song dynasty stele in Little Buddha Bend at Baodingshan. See DZSKMWL, 207-209.

place, Baodingshan. By making the two contemporaneous, Cao confused Liu, who is immortalized in stone at Great Buddha Bend, with his spiritual progeny, Zhao Zhifeng, who actually later created the site in his honor.

To my knowledge, no one refutes the notion that there was Buddhist activity at the Baodingshan site prior to its development by Zhao Zhifeng in the late Song dynasty. Yet Li alone postulates that major carving activity occurred within the Great Buddha Bend grotto area prior to this time.³¹ Clearly the Northern Song inscription and characters found on the north side of the grotto need to be considered; yet their appearance does not in any way contribute to the overall program of the site. In fact, their anomalous nature and placement within the grotto reinforces the argument that they were not part of a larger concept.

The lack of any truly substantive contradictory evidence, coupled with the presence of specific information regarding Zhao's activities at the site, allows for a discussion of Great Buddha Bend as the vision of one man, Zhao Zhifeng. Since most comparable Chinese Buddhist sites are the result of a build up of imagery resulting from devotional activities taking place over hundreds of years, Baodingshan affords a unique opportunity to explore how

³¹Li, 86, sees the Tang works as encompassing the Guardians of the Law, the "stories of the Buddha", and the Hell Scenes. Five Dynasties and Northern Song works include only the tableau to Master Liu while the Southern Song works are those that are Chan and Tantric.

one major Buddhist grotto site was conceived and constructed, serving as a reflection of late Song dynasty monastic and societal concerns. Among the principal Buddhist pilgrimage sites in China, none can claim to be the vision of one man, completed within the relatively finite space of one lifetime. Issues of overall thematic conception and mode of presentation coupled with relevance to religious function can therefore be considered within a fairly confined socio-historical timeframe.³²

Sources

Previous scholarship on Baodingshan has focused either on archaeologically cataloguing the entire site, or on discussing the religious significance of various images found within the site. No work has attempted an overall synthesis of any one grouping of the works at Great Buddha Bend, and little has been done to place the site within a religious or social framework. Comparative work has focused on the cave paintings of the Mogao Grottoes, near Dunhuang in Gansu Province. Throughout my analysis of the Great Buddha Bend tableaux, I will discuss those earlier

³²One grouping of images at Great Buddha Bend was in fact never completed; several of the images within the Radiant Kings [*ming wang*] remain simply blocked out, the local legend attributing their incomplete state to the local invasion of the Mongols in 1243 CE. See Li Fangyin, ed., *Dazu shi ke yi shu* [*The Art of the Dazu Rock Carvings*] [Chongqing: Chongqing chu ban she, 1990]: 287. Jacques Gernet notes that the Mongols had completed their takeover of Sichuan by 1253, *A History of Chinese Civilization*, trans. J. R. Foster [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993]: 716.

studies in which I consider comparison to Dunhuang to have been appropriately used as well as cite examples where such comparison is less applicable.³³

The most comprehensive compilation of material on Dazu County sites, including Baodingshan, is the 1985 publication edited by Liu Changjiu, *Dazu shi ke yan jiu* 大足石刻研究[Research on Dazu Rock Carvings]. This 573-page book reprints all Chinese writings on the rock carvings of Dazu County, Sichuan Province, published between 1945 and 1985 as well as descriptions of the imagery and transcriptions of most of the inscriptions found at the various sites. A 1999 publication, *Dazu shi ke ming wen lu* 大足石刻銘文錄[The Collected Inscriptions from the Dazu Stone Carvings], provides more complete transcriptions from the Dazu area in a very usable chronological framework. Individual scholarship pertaining to Baodingshan can be found in works published by Hu Wenhe, Li Fangyin, Ning Qiang, the Art Museum of Dazu Stone Carvings of Chongqing, and the Institute of Dazu Stone Carvings Art of Sichuan Provincial Academy of Social Sciences. Although

³³“Theories of origin” or “source analysis” are questionable with regard to this type of study, largely because Sichuan is at quite a remove from the one source most often cited, i.e., Dunhuang. Generally speaking, my choice of comparison will not be the wall paintings of Dunhuang, but rather the transportable imagery found at Dunhuang, i.e., scrolls and

several have been published in book format, the majority are to be found in *Sichuan wen wu* 四川文物 or *Dunhuang yan jiu*, 敦煌研究 two prominent Chinese archaeological/art historical journals.

Western literature on Sichuan's Buddhist art, and Baodingshan in particular, has been fairly limited. Two scholars, Angela Falco Howard and Henrik Sørensen, have published works on Sichuan, with Sørensen alone having published on Baodingshan specifically.³⁴ Along with these two colleagues in the field, my own work related to the hell tableau at Baodingshan comprises the majority of Western scholarship on Sichuan Buddhist art in general.³⁵

Methodology

In order to best illustrate a number of points, the six narrative tableaux have been subdivided into three groups of two, an arrangement linked in large part to their positioning within the grotto. I contend that the placement of the six tableaux reflects a greater purpose within the context of the site, with each of the tableaux conceptually sharing space with its neighbors. No study outside of the archaeological transcripts found in the *Dazu shi ke yan jiu*

books. It is my contention that the general concepts found in these more portable objects make for more appropriate comparison with the Sichuan sites.

³⁴ Henrik Sørensen, "A Study of the 'Ox-Herding Theme' as Sculptures at Mt. Baoding in Dazu County, Sichuan", *Artibus Asiae* no. 2 [1991]: 207-241.

³⁵ Karil Kucera, "Lessons in Stone: Baodingshan and its Hell Imagery", *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* no. 67 [1995]: 80-157.

has systematically analyzed the tableaux at Great Buddha Bend, and the information provided within the archaeological portion of this work is sketchy at best, oft-times leaving out mention of imagery that the compilers felt to be non-essential.

Prior to delving into the specifics surrounding these six narrative works, I will begin by considering issues of narrative. Defining parameters for narrative within a Buddhist construct will be the goal of the first chapter, in order to set up the analyses which follow each of the three central chapters devoted to the pairings of the Great Buddha Bend tableaux. Within each of those core chapters, formal analysis will be combined with a close reading of the inscribed scriptural passages to approach a clearer understanding of the inherent function and significance of the tableaux within a larger Chinese framework. All three chapters will conclude with theoretical analyses of the tableaux pairings, and their relationship to traditional Chinese concerns.

Chapter two, entitled “Filial Responsibilities: Owing Mother, Repaying Father”, looks at a conscious combining of two scriptures, one devoted to a son’s eternal indebtedness to his mother, the other demonstrating the great effort expended by the historical Buddha in order to repay his filial debts, often times depicting both of his parents, but with the main focus clearly on Shakyamuni’s father [figs. 8 and 9]. In analyzing the tableaux, I contend that the Southern Song monastic community desired to maintain a precarious balance between the uterine and paternal concerns of both the laity and the monks who utilized Great Buddha Bend.³⁶ This first pairing also sets the

³⁶I use the term “uterine” as coined by Margery Wolf, Women and Family in Rural Taiwan [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972], and utilized by Alan Cole in his analysis of the mother-son bond created within Chinese Buddhist monastic practice. Cole’s

stage with themes which will re-occur within the later groupings - Zhao Zhifeng's apparent desire to address traditional Chinese concerns through the use of select Buddhist texts and images, particularly those of filial piety and worries about the fate of deceased ancestors.³⁷

Chapter three moves further along within the grotto and discusses the next two narrative works: the The Scripture on the Visualization of the Buddha of Infinite Life tableau with its representations of the 16 Visualizations, and the hell tableau adjacent to it, featuring Dizang Bodhisattva and the Ten Kings of Hell along with eighteen hell scenes and a grouping of admonitions [figs. 10 and 11].³⁸ The pairing of these two works continues the theme of filial piety which began with the earlier two tableaux. Concerns for the recently deceased are the driving force behind both the Visualization Scripture imagery and the nearby hell scenes. The overarching theme of filial responsibility is reiterated in these two works, asking not what one could do to be saved from the torments of hell, but what one should do to ensure the safe journey of parents and ancestors to the Pure Land.

Chapter four, "In Praise of Spiritual Ancestors", looks not only at the manifestations of the previous two themes, but also considers the issue of lineage inherent within the last two narrative tableaux found within Great Buddha Bend. The tableaux discussed depict the austerities performed by the

work, Mothers and Sons in Chinese Buddhism [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998] will be discussed in Chapter Two.

³⁷I am not the first to argue for strong Confucian overtones at Great Buddha Bend – both Hu Wenhe and Ning Qiang note the strong filial aspects present in the first two tableaux. My earlier work on the hell tableau at Great Buddha Bend also incorporated issues of filial piety and indigenous Chinese ritual and traditions. However, this is the first study to look beyond individual works toward the site as a whole in considering traditional Chinese concerns.

³⁸Hereafter referred to as the Visualization Scripture and the hell tableau.

layman Liu, who would come to be worshipped in Sichuan as an incarnation of Vairocana, and the Taming of the Wild Buffalo tableau, which ends with a depiction of a monk in meditation [figs. 12 and 13]. These two narrative works can on one level be seen to reinforce the promise of enlightenment for all, both the lay and the monastic community. On another level, they also represent the ultimate filial act, that of reaching enlightenment, an action which benefited not only one's self, but previous and future generations as well. The narratives presented in these works further reinforce the dynamic between the Confucian ideal of the learned lay person and the Buddhist monk ideal seen in vignettes elsewhere in earlier tableaux.

The fifth chapter, "Text/Image", will then assess the various tableaux with regard to the relevance of text in itself as image within Great Buddha Bend grotto. Much has been done with regard to considerations of text as image within the realm of Chinese calligraphy, but in the case of the textual inscriptions at Great Buddha Bend grotto, I will be arguing not for a stylistic assessment of text as image, but rather for a theoretical consideration of this concept. This is in response to the large blocks of text which dominate the narrative tableaux, and could not have been ignored by the viewing public [fig. 14].

In addition to this theoretical treatment of textual imagery, various socio-historic rationale will also be discussed in order to come to an understanding of the import of such copious amounts of text being included in the program at Great Buddha Bend. Besides pedagogical and ritual concerns, consideration will be given to transformations taking place within Song China. One aspect to be deliberated will be the specific changes taking

place within Sichuan during the construction of the Baodingshan complex, with the upheaval accompanying the demise of the Southern Song dynasty seen as one potential impetus for the numerous inscribed textual passages.

Two issues will remain fundamental throughout my analysis of these works: one, the issue of narrative versus iconic imagery, and what constitutes “narrative” within Great Buddha Bend; and two, a consideration of how text and image were combined at the site to serve different purposes. Because these two issues are so fundamental to the overall discussion, I will begin by introducing some of the models to be considered in the later discussion with regard to the issue of narrative versus iconic in order to set the stage for later critical analysis. A theoretical analysis of text and image at Baodingshan will follow the three core chapters, thereby creating a bookend effect, with the issue of narrative versus iconic opening up the beginning of the discussion while text and image closes it.