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In my earlier studies of Baodingshan, I focused first on one singular narrative tableau, that of the hell scenes, contextualizing this work within a broader framework of Song Dynasty notions of hell. This study of narrative was followed by a more comprehensive consideration of all six narrative tableaux found on the north side of Great Buddha Bend, as well as within Little Buddha Bend. This larger analysis looked at not only the relationship between text and image within the individual tableaux, but also the larger issues of text and image interactions *between* the six narrative tableaux as well as audience reception and use of these works. In order to truly understand the complexity of these works, all of the inscribed Buddhist texts were translated, and an effort was made to try and compare them with other known recensions of these texts.

In my present manuscript-length study, I am looking at Baodingshan across time, considering both sacred and secular concepts of time manifested within the text and imagery found at the site. I present one aspect of this larger study here, an analysis of later activities at the site based upon the thoughts left behind as inscribed at the site by Ming, Qing and Republican-era visitors. A total of 101 non-scriptural texts dating to the Ming, Qing, and Republican eras are inscribed at Baodingshan; the content of these writings will be utilized in this study in an effort to gain a clearer understanding of audience and religious practice at the site over time.

β image of north side mingwang

The status of the monastic establishment at Baodingshan is uncertain for the years 1249 to 1425. Sichuan was one of the first areas within China to fall to the invading Mongols in the mid-13th century, and physical evidence found at Great

Buddha Bend in the form of incomplete sculptures has been used to argue for work stopping at the site with the arrival of the Mongols in the Dazu region. Later Ming and Qing textual sources carved within the larger Baodingshan site reiterate this timeline.

β Shengshousi image

It is clear, however, that the present-day constructions of the Shengshousi 圣寿寺 “Sagacious Longevity Temple” complex are Qing in style, and restoration stele at the Baodingshan site remark upon rebuilding parts of the complex as early as 1425. The Ming Dynasty (1368 -1644) was a time of renewal at the Baodingshan site, with a total of fourteen different restoration steles. Travelers were also visiting the site, leaving behind dedicatory inscriptions as well as inscribed records of their travels and thoughts on the site in both poetic and prose formats.

The Qing (1644-1911) and the Republican (1911-1949) eras also saw a relatively continuous flow of activities. Donors carried on with the upkeep of the site leaving thirty-eight records of their merit-building activities, and visitors persisted in presenting their thoughts and feelings.

β image of YJL at BDS

The site was “rediscovered” in 1945 by the eminent Sinologist Yang Chia-luo 杨家骆 and a team of researchers. From that expedition come the first photographs of the Baodingshan site. Yet earlier images of the complex exist in the form of 19th century woodblock prints created for the 1873 edition of the county gazetteer (*Dazu Xianzhi* 大足县志). Both of these earlier visual records will be touched upon within the following discussion to highlight changing audience perceptions at Baodingshan over time.

βimage of south side GBB from gazetteer

Within the gazetteer, Baodingshan is the first of only three religious sites to be depicted. This nineteenth-century depiction of the site is of interest as much for what it doesn't show as for what it does. From a bird's eye perspective, the focus is clearly on the Shengshousi 圣寿寺 with almost half of the two-page composition dominated by a detailed drawing of its three main halls and the Wansuilou 万岁楼. Only the south side of the cliff-face is depicted, leaving out the more elaborate carved narrative tableaux of the north side. Of those images found on the south side, the greatest attention has been lavished on the monumental iconic works such as the historical Buddha's *parinirvana*, which is coupled at Baodingshan with a depiction of the historical Buddha Sakyamuni's initial bath by *nagas*. There is also a 1000-Armed Guanyin statue, a monumental Huayan *bodhisattva* triad.

βdetail of south side GBB from gazetteer

The smaller, scattered figures evoke other works at the site – the sketchy, umbrella-holding figure to the left of the lion statue meant to reference one of the images from the elaborate ox-herding narrative sequence; the steps leading to figures carved below possibly meant to evoke those steps taken down to the lower level of the hell scenes.

This artist's rendition of the Baodingshan site highlights certain aspects of the site that were of central importance for visitors, and they form a framework within which to read and 'view' the inscriptional evidence of the later periods. What imagery do the authors remark upon? What sculpted works do they engage with?

β1413 inscription GBB

The earliest dated inscription to appear at Baodingshan after the fall of the Yuan Dynasty was written in 1413. Over the next several hundred years, activity at the site continued sporadically as evidenced by the inscribed texts left behind. The types of text vary in length from singular large character placards to extensive descriptive works, with shorter travel narratives and poems in between. They also vary in style, with a few writers more flamboyant in their use of the brush, while most took care to write evenly in a clean, standard script.

β inscriptions GBB – flamboyant/neat

These writings also vary in form. A number are free-standing stele, either placed among the tableaux at Great Buddha Bend or within the confines of Shengshousi. Those that are carved in to the living rock are often grouped, most likely due to the lack of open, uncarved areas elsewhere, with many placed at the westerly ends of both the north and south cliff faces.

β inscriptions GBB – westerly end/stele

Aesthetically the inscriptions run the gamut from mundane line-after-line of text carved onto a square block to the more nuanced works that balance large and small characters or whose outward shape is defined by more figurative borders.

β inscriptions GBB – small character block/figurative border

Scattered throughout Baodingshan, these writings add another layer of meaning to the site, presenting text as image of a different sort. These works not only represent an image of power with regard to scholarly authority, they also represent an image of time passed. ‘Time passed’ by men of a certain amount of leisure who also took the time to remark upon who they were, why they came, and what they thought of the sites and sounds of Baodingshan.

To turn first to ritual activities taking place at the site, because most of the inscriptions are dated, much more is known about when these later visitors came to Baodingshan than is known of Song Dynasty visitors to the site. Not including the restoration steles, dated inscriptions exist for virtually every month of the year, the exceptions being the sixth and seventh months, which were traditionally set aside for the monastic summer rain retreat. A number of dated inscriptions coincide with times of the year when ritual activities were undoubtedly taking place at the site, although they make no specific mention of them within their texts. These include several texts written on the eighth day of the fourth lunar month, the date generally set aside for the observance of the historical Buddha's birthday:

β inscription WJL

宝顶 'Precious Summit'

The eighth day of the fourth month, summer, 1873.

The Prefect of Dazu County, Wang Dejia of Chenggu respectfully wrote this.

Several other texts were written in the eleventh lunar month, when celebrations would be taking place to honor the Buddha's enlightenment. Others were written in the latter half of the eighth lunar month, perhaps in conjunction with the end of the annual activities related to the Ghost Festival:

β inscription HJ

Hu Jing of Kaifeng, Grand Master of Palace Accord, Prefect of Chongqing Prefecture, passed by here on public business. *Inscribed on the twenty-fourth day of the eighth month* of eleventh year of the Yongle era.

Several inscribed texts make mention of secular holidays such as Chongyang [the ninth day of the ninth month] and the New Year, events that were also commemorated at Buddhist sites:

β inscription Lu et al

Gentleman for Managing Affairs, Judge of Chongqing Prefecture Lu Jiangzhi, and Zhang Xian of Jindou, working on the people's behalf, together with Confucian school instructors Lu Ling and Liu Tianren of Dazu County, and assistant instructor Fan Jian of Wu Chang in the eleventh year of the Yongle era [1413], *in the month when chrysanthemums have their yellow flowers, three days before the Chongyang [Double Brightness] festival*, traveled to sincerely inscribe this.

Although very few of the inscriptions actually discuss in detail the quantity or type of Buddhist activity taking place at Baodingshan during these later eras, quite a few imply on-going activity. With only the subtlest of remarks, one Ming Dynasty visitor tells us that the site is relatively intact and someone is taking care of it:

β inscriptions by Youhe

In summer, the fifth month of 1443, I came to Dazu to nurture the people. I climbed the mountain at leisure, saw all the grottoes, and was moved to compose a poem in regulated verse to memorialize my visit:

The rocky peak towers aloft joined to the upper terrace;
Exquisite halls carved from the cliff are opened up to view;
Three thousand Buddhas appear in the clouds;
A myriad immortals come across the sea.

In the cliff there's a dragon always spouting water;
Before the grottoes there's not a beast without moss;
Brahma's temple is quiet, and visitors are few;
Ancient steps, meditation halls: not a speck of dust.

Written by the learned doctor Youhe of Jiangxi, Assistant Prefect of Chongqing Prefecture.

Others remark upon the power of Buddhism and Baodingshan to provide them with respite from the more cosmopolitan "dusty world", so often a lament among the *literati* down through the ages:

β inscription Kang Gui

In what year was the hermit's chamber opened?
The mountains' depths are folds of green;
Blue clouds constantly fill the doors;
Purple vapor wants to scrape the void.

*A single cup: I escape the vulgar world;
The dual marvel of the Lotus Sutra: I'm even calmer;
I've trod all the deva paths;
Carefree, my inspiration is unbounded.*

Kang Gui of Lingnan wrote this.

The give and take between the *literati* and the Buddhist establishment is also noted:

β inscription Yuan Yan

A poem harmonizing with Prefect Guo's rhymes on the wall, while visiting Baoding Temple. *Though its words are vulgar and not worthy of looking at, I'll use it to record the time of year.*

*Putting aside business for a spring outing, my view grows clear;
Greeting me from a distance with flutes and drums are several
mountain monks;
Observing customs, I feel ashamed for abandoning my new post;
Loving old things, I order the worker to clean the old inscriptions;
The grass is soft on the bank, the yellow calf sleeps;
At the mouth of Pine Fragrance Grotto, white clouds arise;
The grand sights of a thousand autumns I'll gather up;
In the meditation hall, who will forbid me to sigh?*

In the second month of spring, 1530, for two days I acquainted myself with the affairs of Dazu County. Yuan Yan of Guilin wrote this.

In exchange for a "spring outing" and the chance to leave one's mark for posterity, however humble, "though its words are vulgar and not worthy of looking at", Yuan Yan orders a worker to "clean the old inscriptions". Restoration of Buddhist imagery was a constant and long-standing merit-making practice, if not an excuse to escape the confines of the job and wander in the mountains!

Lastly, at least one author makes poetic reference to not only ritual practice, but also to specific sculptural elements at the site itself, allowing us to draw some conclusions regarding the depth and breadth of his knowledge of Buddhism. Writing in the summer of 1924, Yang Weixin, then the current Dazu County District Prefect, originally from Jijiang near Chongqing, comments on the sights and sounds of Baodingshan in one of three poems he provides. Yang specifically describes the final scene within the Chan oxherding tableau, where the moon represents enlightenment, poised on an open lotus pedestal:

β inscription Yang with images of oxherding

The Bodhi tree is old, its trunk become a shadow;
A green reflection on the dragon pond, the water isn't deep;
Having washed away the worldly dust,
the moon is Buddha nature;
Parting the clouds and mist, one sees the heart of Ch'an;
The white lotus reveals its divine majesty;
The green bamboo forest resounds with Sanskrit chants.
How many famous mountains lack such a sight?
It's all because the wind and moon
are worth their weight in gold.

β south side image with text

Some authors make very specific reference to the religious texts and imagery comprising the narrative works on the north side of Great Buddha Bend, in effect highlighting those portions of the site that had the greatest effect on them. One text dated to the Qing dynasty and found on a stele in Little Buddha Bend remarks on several of groupings of images, namely the hell tableau and its neighboring representation of the Pure Land. Li's reference to the "Buddha is the mind" may indicate the small "Six Vices" tableau placed between these two works:

The carved images at Dazu convert all living creatures. The king of demons heroic and majestic, evil ghosts and sprites, all are surrounded

by iron walls of a myriad fathoms, locked in for a thousand lengths. Why did the Buddha bring his great light from the West? The meaning is that the Buddha is the mind. Don't do evil deeds, but practice goodness. Then the thousand rivers will flow back to a single source, and every home will be in springtime. If it is as I say, then this is called the Buddha's preaching. If it's not as I say, then it's the Evil One. All hail Amida Buddha, and Guanyin from the west who saves us from suffering. Li Kaixian offered this in praise of the 82nd year of the honorable Master Fa of Changshou County. Changyuan's Wang Jia wrote and impressed his seal on it.

"The carved images at Dazu convert all living creatures" points to Li's awareness of the power of the place, while his emphasis on avoidance of evil deeds while practicing good in order that "every home will be in springtime" implies a worldly, this-time and this-place benefit to one's actions. And to whom does one turn to in order to achieve this? "All hail Amida Buddha and Guanyin from the West."

β inscription as editorial

At least one early twentieth-century author takes time to note the inscriptions on the north side of Great Buddha Bend, specifically referencing the "Dasheng bao'en jing", an abbreviated way of saying the "Dazang Fuoshuo da fangbian fo bao en jing" *The Buddha Preaches the Mahayana Scripture on the Skillful Means of the Buddha's Repayment of Kindness* 大藏佛说大方便佛报恩经. This tableau is also found on the north side of the Great Buddha Bend, alongside the narrative work depicting *The Scripture on the Kindness of Parents* 父母恩重经。 Jiang is knowledgeable enough to know that this text has not been carved in its entirety nor its contents completely illustrated:

...In Dazu, southwest of Ba [County], there's the famous Mt. Baoding. ... The mountain towers loftily, while its temples are bright. If you wish to seek immortals or Buddhas, or to picture sinners, then jump down a few paces, and look where you have gone. These are all scenes that the mortal eye cannot see, of which few know the details. I am particularly clear about the inscriptions, and so I have explained them somewhat briefly. If you don't believe me, then take up the

Dasheng bao'en jing and just see which lines have not been completely depicted, which passages have not been carved completely. ... I only hope that all living creatures will follow these examples in self-cultivation, so that they may hope for sageliness and hope for goodness, so that they may become Buddhas and immortals. In the first ten days of the second month of 1917, offspring of the Wei River, Jiang Zhizhang of Qiufang arrived here and wrote this essay.

The vast majority of the visitors who have left inscriptions at Baodingshan are men of letters, with district prefects being the most common. They come from mainly Sichuan or southwest China, although a few have clearly traveled to Dazu from further afield, most likely on government business.

β map of visitors origins

Yet their rationales for visiting Baodingshan clearly are quite varied. For many, it is a day trip away from their work; some even specifically state that they are in search of the utopic “Peach Blossom Spring”. Of course, numerous texts mention a “search for solitude” along with a desire “to encourage others to do good and become Buddhas and immortals” and to “do good” in general. Only one author honestly notes that his purpose for coming and leaving this inscription is to “follow in the footsteps of famous men”.

β inscription Zhang Shu

The lengthiest of the inscribed travel records and poems found at Baodingshan is in actuality a transcribed descriptive text of the site, written in 1818 by the Qing *literatus* Zhang Shu 张树 (ca. 1781–1847), who served briefly as Dazu County prefect. Fifty-six years later, this work was copied for inscription by the then district prefect of Dazu County, Wang Deji 王德嘉, who served in Dazu from 1872-

1875. This text also appears in Zhang Shu's 1837 published work *Yang Su Tang wen ji* 养素堂文集 'Literary Collection of the Hall of Plain Support'.

Of all of the men who passed time and left their mark in Dazu County, Zhang Shu is the most prolific. His lengthy description of Baodingshan is a comprehensive guide to virtually every aspect of the site, allowing the reader to mentally walk along with Zhang as he tours. After detailing the components of Little Buddha Bend as well as the halls above the carved cliff face, Zhang proceeds down to Great Buddha Bend passing through the central entrance from the complex above. Following a description of the various other iconic images he first encounters, Zhang then moves on to the main monumental work of the east cliff face:

β inscription Zhang and images

Turning a little, I arrive at a bend in the cliff, where there is carved a sleeping Buddha. His head as big as a house; his body length 90 feet. Beside him are carved about ten disciples, toward the Buddha all are as if weeping with grief. Again I turn to the west, toward the north cliff-face, where there are the nine dragon mouths. The nine dragon mouths spout pure spring water. Its flying drops increase the longevity of the newborn child, flow into the square pond, and flow through nine bends to enter the mountain stream.

While lavishing descriptive prose on the singular images of the south cliff face, Zhang makes little mention of the many tableaux of the north cliff face, hinting at them only. Clearly what has fascinated scholars today, myself included, that is the various textually-based, large-scale narrative tableaux, was of no great import for Zhang Shu. He describes the entire northern carved cliff-face, which encompasses the depictions, both textual and visual, of the *Scripture on the Kindness of Parents* 父母恩重经, the *Scripture on the Skillful Means of the Buddha's Repayment of Kindness* 大藏佛说大方便佛报恩经, the Pure Land of Amitayus, the Hell Scenes presided over by the

10 Kings of Hell and Dizang, and the Ten Austerities performed by Master Liu as follows:

β north side overview

Next I move on to the carved tableau of the Buddha's Tooth and the Six Vices. Then there is carved the hell transformation tableau, with strange demons in profusion; and the palaces of the Tusita Heaven, where many Buddhas pick flowers, and then a snowy mountain range with eagles on the cliff, where Sakyamuni welcomed his austerities. The scene makes the viewer's soul wander through its realm.

The one narrative tableau that does grab his attention is one whose imagery not surprisingly remains a crowd-pleaser to this day, the ox-herding tableau:

β oxherding overview

Again I return to the left side of the south cliff, and follow the cliff to the west, where are carved nine head of oxen, and ten oxherders. The oxen are either eating grass or drinking water or haltered lying down or leaning against trees or looking up to moo, or pulling against their ropes, not wanting to be lead. Some of the herding boys vigorously drag or whip their oxen, others sleep against a rock, or sit on a rock and play the flute, or stretch their necks to gaze, or wrestle with each other.

Zhang completes his survey of the Baodingshan site by returning to the top and resting in the Wansui Pavilion. There he sums up his thoughts on the site by quoting the sentiments of an earlier visitor to Baodingshan, that of Cao Xuequan 曹学佺 (1574-1647), the author of *Shu zhong ming sheng ji* 蜀中名胜纪 [Record of Famous Sites in Shu].

β hell scene image

Alas, I have rambled all over the world, and wherever I have climbed and observed, I have filled my eyes and ears. On my visit to Baoding today, I have gazed broadly at the cliffs and hollows, and scrutinized the Buddhist statues in detail, then raising my voice and startling the crowds, I can say: "As for Baoding Temple, the Tang Dynasty's Master Liu studied Wu Daozi's brushwork, and on the surrounding cliffs and pavilions

for miles he chiseled reliefs and carved statues; strange changelings and mysterious monsters; truly, there has been no other place like it, past or present."

Conversely, Wang Dejia, the county prefect who penned Zhang Shu's lengthy descriptive text for inscription at Baodingshan, is the author of one of the shortest inscriptions to appear at the site, the large two-character "Baoding 宝顶" carved on the western edge of the site, which greets visitors at the modern entrance to Great Buddha Bend.

β inscriptions WDJ BDS

This shorter work was composed one year prior to the transcription of the lengthier Zhang Shu inscription, further supporting the contention that the local populace visited the site on a more regular basis. Little is known about Wang Dejia; in signing his inscriptions, Wang notes that he comes from Chenggu 城固, a city in neighboring Shaanxi Province 陕西. It is not clear when he achieved *jinshi* status, but his three-year term (1873-1875) as prefect of Dazu County was a busy one. Wang was also in charge of the compilation of the county gazetteer, a text whose images were discussed above.

In addition, over the course of his three year term, Wang composed six other inscribed works at another Southern Song site in Dazu County, Nanshan 南山. Nanshan is Daoist in orientation. In the Qing Dynasty this sight was known as Jade Emperor Temple 玉皇观, and as such it appears in the gazetteer compiled by Wang Dejia.

β gazetteer Nanshan image

While it is possible Wang knew of Zhang Shu or his work prior to arriving in Dazu, if he did not, Wang surely encountered Zhang's written presence at Nanshan, where Zhang left behind four separate works, ranging in length from 747 characters to just nine.

Wang Deji's writings at Nanshan display a diversity of calligraphic styles, highlighting his own *literati* abilities.

β inscription WDJ at Nanshan large character

His 1873 two-character text, written in the same year as the two-character text of 'Baoding' 宝顶, is remarkably similar in composition and style to the Baoding text, the central pairing flanked by two pillars of calligraphic text done with a large brush in standard script.

β inscriptions WDJ 1874

Wang's two 1874 works display his abilities with running script, while his 1875 work demonstrates his virtuosity with the brush, having been written in a strong clerical script.

β inscription WDJ 1875

While Wang Deji fulfilled his obligation to the two major religious sites of Dazu, his sympathies apparently ran more closely to Daoism than Buddhism as evidenced by his decision to leave his own writings totaling more than 350 characters at Nanshan versus only a short inscription of 25 characters at Baodingshan. Although Wang does copy the thoughts of Zhang Shu with regard to Baodingshan in order that they might be inscribed - at more than 1300 characters, a major piece of calligraphy - Wang does not choose to also inscribe his own thoughts on the site. One can only surmise that Wang felt no compelling reason to do so,

perhaps happy in the fact that his large two-character placard dominated the textual scene at Great Buddha Bend; perhaps also not willing to put his own prose up against that of the better-known *litteratus* Zhang Shu.

Of even more interest is what Wang Dejia did *not* copy to have inscribed at Baodingshan, that is Zhang Shu's second text about Baodingshan, written after Zhang made a return visit to the site. Found within the *Yang su tang wenji*, Zhang writes that he *had* to return to Baodingshan to look more carefully at the inscriptions left by others, having neglected to do so adequately during his first visit to the site. After describing how he sat and drank wine while composing poetry, Zhang then begins a lengthy listing of almost every stele and carved *secular* inscription done by men of note found throughout the site.

It is noteworthy that Wang Dejia did *not* have this text carved. If he had done so, Wang could have literally placed himself in stone at the end of quite an illustrious lineage of lettered men who had visited and commented upon Baodingshan over the centuries. Wang's choice of Zhang Shu's first text on Baodginshan, largely descriptive and extolling the magic and mystery of the site, may have been seen as more appropriate for a wider public. The second text describing what was essentially the *litterati* lineage at Baodingshan may have been viewed as too narrow and specific to be of interest to all visitors, or perhaps a text best left to a *wenji*, where those "in the know" would encounter it and best appreciate it, leading them to eventually visit Baodingshan. It is also quite likely that the monastic community at Baodingshan had a say in which text was inscribed, perhaps choosing the descriptive text over the 'textual' text for any number of reasons. Overall, what is unusual is Wang Dejia's choice to inscribe a text written by someone else rather than compose his own for the occasion. Clearly Wang felt a link

to his predecessor Zhang Shu, and regardless of which text was inscribed, this was one way to visibly demonstrate that connection across time. Wang did *not* feel such a close link to Baodingshan itself.

Several other individual besides Wang Dejie had multiple inscriptions carved at Baodingshan. One was the Confucian instructor Liu Tianren, who was instrumental in documenting the early restoration work done on the site in the Ming Dynasty by the monks Hui Liao and Hui Xu in 1418. Another was a man named Zhan Fu 战符, “a person of Chu, regional chief of Zhongzhou 忠州”, who inscribed two separate poems describing the sites and sounds of Baodingshan, one entitled ‘Lingqiu Spring’, the other ‘Verses on the Cave of Complete Enlightenment’. Both reference specific features of Great Buddha Bend:

β Lingqiu Spring inscription

Lingqiu Spring

Through layered ranges of rock one *li* in length,
the divine spring seeps;
Who carved the lotus flower that floats before the Buddha?
Illuminating golden rays wash the clouds clean.
Before the cliff one delights again to see the devas.

β CCE inscription

Verses on the Cave of Complete Enlightenment

The cave’s mouth is guarded by spring clouds;
At the mountain’s waist, old carvings multiply;
Vimalakirti pursues past events;
My generation likes to speak of ‘emptiness’;
How dim the sound of pipes and chimes!
The venerable drinking cup rises free and easy;
Sitting in meditation, thoughts of the dusty world are cleansed;
Walking everywhere, how endless are the worlds!

β Yang Tan poem

There is also a series of 'connected writings', poems referencing an earlier inscribed work by one Yang Tan 杨昙, of whom little information is known. It reads:

Misty and distant, the divine mountain has a path leading to it;
Seeking solitude, directly I enter Brahma's temple;
The spring crosses rock walls, flowing cold;
The moon faces the flowered wall, and crosses over, empty;
The Buddha's bones are buried in disorder under yellow leaves;
Monks' clothes hang awry among the white clouds;
Among Amitabha's 84,000 pagodas,
which layer of lotus thrones am I on?
In spring of 1825, Jiangjin Graduate for Preeminence Yang Tan
inscribed this.

Yang's poem is followed by two others.

β Zhao Ciguan poem

The first cited here is by Zhao Ciguan, who also left an inscription at the nearby Buddhist site of Beishan in Dazu County. His two-part poem is entitled 'A poem using Yang Tan's original rhymes:

People in this earthly domain are of a nature to then follow;
Clouds and mountains, misty and distant is Brahma's Temple;
A spring through rock walls flows pure;
The moon crosses by the magnificent cliff,
the myriad of shapes is empty;
Evil doers deceived heaven and buried the Buddha's bones;
Cultivating sage traces among the white clouds;
I hold dear the clear and secluded place of the Seven Jewels;
Which among the layers of upright jade tablets on the terrace?
Written in the winter of the Renwu year [1882].

The Buddhist statues are extremely solemn;
People's minds make good karma;
On this winding route, I accompanied him to this holy site;
A fairieland in the world of man.
Chongqing's Zhao Ciguan.

β Wang Lie poem

The second poem by Wang Lie echoes Zhao's sentiments:

Amidst wild vines and smoke, the road is impassable;
Climbing the cliff, chopping brambles, I visit the Jade Palace;
Jinggui on the South Sea, the sound of the tide is still;
The moon reaches into the Western regions, the visible in the void;
The lonely meditation hall beyond the withered grass;
The Buddha's bones scattered in the setting sun.
On the day when the official traveled to [X],
the sun returns to the jade tablet in the morning;
Giving another layer of new life to the spiritual mountain.
In the fall of 1943, Bei County's Wang Lie inscribed this.

All three authors highlight certain physical aspects of the site - "A spring through rock walls flows pure", "Amidst wild vines and smoke", "Misty and distant, the divine mountain has a path leading to it" - as well as certain religious elements seen at the site - "Amitabha's 84,000 pagodas", "The Buddha statues are extremely solemn", "The lonely meditation hall". While allowing for elements of poetic license, at the same time these three also hint at the state of affairs at the site - "The Buddha's bones are buried in disorder under yellow leaves; monks' clothes hang awry among the white clouds", "beyond the withered grass".

While little is known of the lives of the majority of the men who had texts inscribed at Baodingshan, Zhang Shu being the exception to the rule, at least one individual played a fairly major role in socio-political movements of the twentieth-century. Peng Ruzun 彭汝尊 who at Baodingshan signs himself 'Zizai Daoren' 自在道人, penned a short, large-character text in 1932 (fig. 29). The text reads, 香焚宝鼎, "Incense burns in the precious vessel" or, if reading the last two characters as a homonym for Baoding 宝顶, "Incense burns at Baoding".

β Peng Ruzun inscription

Peng played a leading role in the formation of Tongshanshe 同善社 “The Society of Goodness”, a religious group founded by Peng in 1912. This group formed part of the larger “Way of Former Heaven” 先天道, which sought to unify *all* religions, including Christianity and Islam alongside Daoism, Buddhism and Confucianism. According to one source, Peng proclaimed himself the seventeenth patriarch of the Way of Former Heaven, and gave himself the title of ‘Buddha’, claiming to have been sent by Maitreya to save the world. After several years in Sichuan establishing a base for himself, Peng and his Tongshanshe followers relocated to Beijing, after which the movement spread throughout China. Involved with military as well as spiritual activities, the entire movement was forbidden in 1927 by the Republican government, perhaps fearing its ever-widening appeal. Yet Peng and his followers continued to engage in clandestine political and military activity. In 1949 the movement was effectively eliminated in mainland China through decree, followed by the suicide of Peng Ruzun in 1950 and the execution of his son. Branches of the group still exist in Hong Kong, Taiwan and other parts of Southeast Asia.

The Baodingshan inscriptional date of 1932 places Peng back in Sichuan after his movement has been outlawed by the Chinese government, and before the events that lead up to his death in 1950. It is not clear why Peng returned to Sichuan, but perhaps the most obvious answer is ‘there’s no place like home’. Peng was a native of neighboring Longshui township 龙水镇 and as such would have been familiar with the monastic establishments of Dazu and undoubtedly they would have been aware of his activities as well. Peng Ruzun left his mark on history in many ways,

but at least in Dazu County, Baodingshan was the only place where he chose to do so in the time-honored, traditional format of stone.

β BDS name

From the available information, one could conclude that Baodingshan was the playground of the male elite, the only evidence for any audience being these steles and inscriptions carved from calligraphy provided by men who all belonged to the upper echelon of society.

Fortuitous circumstances are in fact the only reason for such a sample being skewed in the *literati* class' favor. The monastic complex at Baodingshan burned at some point during the Yuan Dynasty, an event that destroyed all documentation at the site not carved in stone. Yet drawing from evidence found at other sites in Dazu County, it is safe to assume that the texts and images at Baodingshan were viewed by both men and women, rich as well as middle-class, layperson alongside monk. The number of inscriptions found at these other sites in Dazu and those of neighboring Anyue County attest to a prolific local Buddhist community with a diverse body of patrons.

β images of people at BDS today

This assumption would appear to be further supported by the wide breadth of imagery depicted at Great Buddha Bend as well as by the inclusion of both text and image. There is every reason to believe that the later audience at Baodingshan mirrored those of earlier times – in addition to the *literati* whose words were immortalized in stone, there were those other members of the community who utilized the imagery and texts to better the lives of themselves and their loved ones through donation and ritual practice over the course of their lifetime. This is hinted

at in the inscriptional evidence that the *literati* left behind, through allusions to dates or seasons, sounds or sights, reflecting the implicit rather than explicit nature of this *literati* form, while only giving glimpses into the realities of Baodingshan, the place.

I hope that this paper has helped give you an idea of how complex the history of Baodingshan has been, and how much more fascinating a study such as this will be in the years and centuries to come due to its new status as a World Heritage Site. Thank you.