

Imprinting the Living Rock with Buddhist Texts: On the Creation of a Regional Sacred Geography in Shandong in the Second Half of the Sixth Century^{*}

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Abstract: During the earliest phase of the production of stone-carved Buddhist texts in China, only selected passages were carved. Most scholars understand these text selections as forerunners of much longer texts carved from the Northern Qi dynasty (550–577) onwards under the open sky on cliff surfaces as well as inside of caves. This paper explores another aspect of the carving of selected *sūtra* passages prominent in Shandong Province during the second half of the sixth century by arguing that the repeated carving of the same short text in a variety of layouts helped to establish a regional network of sacred sites, where the words of the Buddha were imprinted on the living rock. Behind this network of sites was a social network of donors with a related doctrinal background. This early network of sites and selected texts was not restricted to Shandong Province, but also reached out to the border region of Hebei and Henan, in particular to the cave temples of Northern and Southern Xiangtangshan. Finally, the prominence of certain carved passages culled from the *Sūtra on the Great Perfection of Wisdom Spoken by Mañjuśrī*

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(*T* no. 232) within this network was fundamental for the emergence of Mañjuśrī veneration on Mount Wutai in Shanxi.

Keywords: Stone *sūtras*, sacred topography, Mañjuśrī veneration, Buddhist cave-temples, Buddhist mountains

Introduction

Stone inscriptions appear to be ubiquitous in China, where they fall into two main categories: inscriptions carved on stone slabs (*beiwén* 碑文, *beiming* 碑銘) in the form of horizontal tablets or upright steles; and inscriptions carved in the living rock, either under the open sky as *moya* 摩崖 cliff inscriptions, or on the inner walls of caves hewn from bedrock. The *moya* cliff inscriptions first peaked in the second half of the sixth century under the northern Qi dynasty (550–577), which established the capital Ye 鄴 in the south of today's Hebei Province. During this time, the Northern Qi ruling house of Gao patronized Buddhism.¹ The first ruler, Gao Yang (Emperor Wenxuan 文宣, r. 550–559), founded Cave Temple Monastery 石窟寺 on Mount Xiangtang 響堂山 close to the capital. This is the site known today as Northern Mount Xiangtang.² Gao Yang appointed the eminent monk Sengchou 僧稠 (480–560) as abbot of this monastery. Before this appointment, in 552, Gao Yang had Yunmen Monastery 雲門寺 built on Mount Long, located eighty Chinese miles to the southwest of the capital, as a residence for this famous monk.³

¹ For an outline of Buddhism under the Northern Qi, see Chen, 'Buddhism under the Northern Qi'.

² The site is located on the western slope of Tiangu Summit 天鼓峰 of Mount Gu 鼓山, east of He Village 和村 in Fengfeng mining area 峰峰礦區, Handan City 邯鄲市, Hebei. Comprehensive publications are Zhang, *Xiangtang Shan*, and Tsiang et al., *Echoes*.

During the last years of his life, from 555 onwards, Sengchou engaged in the renovation of a small meditation cave, which eventually became his memorial chapel.⁴ This is the middle cave of today's Xiaonanhai 小南海 complex in Anyang County 安陽縣, Anyang City, Henan.⁵ The selection of *jātakas* and accompanying cartouches carved inside the cave, as well as the *sūtra* excerpts carved on its external walls, bespeaks the enormous impact the Mahāyāna *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* had not only on the meditation practice of Sengchou, but also on the cave's iconographic program.⁶ Particularly striking among the cave's materials are repeated references to the practice of carving canonical texts into stone. Inside the cave this topic is illustrated by a story in which the bodhisattva receives a Dharma verse in exchange for his mortal body; before sacrificing himself, he wrote this verse everywhere, notably carving it in stone and on cliffs.⁷ This funda-

³ *Xu Gaoseng zhuan*, T no. 2060, 50: 554b14–17: 天保三年下勅於鄴城西南八十里, 龍山之陽, 為構精舍, 名雲門寺, 請以居之, 兼為石窟大寺主.

⁴ The votive inscription for the Xiaonanhai middle cave, carved on the outside wall above the entrance, was composed by his disciples, who report on his death in 560, and who write that the *sūtra* passages were carved after his death.

⁵ The decoration of this cave and its connection with Sengchou's preferred meditation practice was extensively studied by Jan Yün-hua [Ran Yunhua] 冉雲華 (Jan, 'Seng-ch'ou's Method of Dhyāna'; 'Chou chanshi yi'; and 'Dunhuang wenxian'), Yen Chuan-ying [Yan Juanying] 顏娟英 (Yen, 'Bei Qi Xiaonan hai shiku' and 'Bei Qi changuanku'), and Inamoto, 'Shōnankai'. See also Tsiang, 'Monumentalization', 234–36, 251–53, and Wenzel, 'Sengchous (480–560) religiöses Vermächtnis'.

⁶ Radich, 'Reading the Writing on the Wall'.

⁷ After the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*, at T no. 374, 12: 451a5–6: '然後處處, 若石、若壁、若樹、若道, 書寫此偈'. The verse for which the bodhisattva sacrifices his life (T no. 7, 1: 204c23–24; T no. 374, 12: 450a16, 451a1, 497b9–10) was also carved on the lintel of cave 6 at Southern Mount Xiangtang, and on the now destroyed Mount Jian 尖山 in Zoucheng 鄒城 (JS 16.1; see Wang and Tsai, *Shandong Volume 3*, 48–49, 128–34). As Radich, 'Reading the Writing on the Wall', 566–67, observes: 'the allusions to the MPNMS ... in the *jātakas* and accompanying cartouches seem almost like a *de facto* manifesto for some aspects of the

mental message of Xiaonanhai Cave was well understood during the following decades, which saw the proliferation of projects, small and large, to carve selected texts on cliffs and in caves.

The most extensive *sūtra* carving project under the Northern Qi was that of the powerful politician Tang Yong 唐邕 (?–581), which he arranged during the years 568–572. Tang Yong served as Minister under all rulers of the Northern Qi and was eventually declared Prince of Jinchang 晉昌王 in 572. Before this appointment, he had four Mahāyāna *sūtras*⁸ carved on a surface of about 65 m² inside and outside the so-called southern cave of the imperial caves of Northern Mount Xiangtang. Tang Yong recorded his project in a stele text placed next to his stone *sūtras*. Explaining his motivation, he writes that ‘silk scrolls can be spoiled, bamboo documents do not last long, metal tablets are difficult to preserve, and parchment and paper are easily destroyed, therefore ... the trace of the silver chisel has been ordered’ 縑緇有壞, 簡策非久, 金牒難求, 皮紙易滅. 於是.....命銀鉤之跡.⁹ Although the four *sūtras* named in Tang Yong’s stele inscription must have formed the core of his carving project, some additional

practice of carving canonical texts into cave walls (and other stone surfaces) in subsequent decades and even centuries’.

⁸ These four *sūtras* are: *Sūtra Spoken by Vimalakīrti* (*Weimojie suoshuo jing* 維摩詰所說經), T no. 475; *Śrīmālā-sūtra* (*Śrīmālādevī-siṃha-nāda-sūtra*; *Shengman shizibou yicheng da fangbian Fangguang jing* 勝鬘師子吼一乘大方便方廣經), T no. 353; *Sūtra Spoken by the Buddha on Maitreya’s Rebirth Below and Accomplishing Buddhahood* (*Mile chengfo jing* 彌勒成佛經; i.e. *Foshuo Mile xiasheng chengfo jing* 佛說彌勒下生成佛經, T no. 454); and *Sūtra Spoken by Buddha on Bo [Pushya?]* (*Foshuo Bo jing* 佛說孛經, T no. 790). The last text may be a revision by Zhi Qian of a text previous translation by Lokakṣema, see Nattier, *A Guide*, 133.

⁹ Translation by Tsiang, ‘Monumentalization’, 237. A similar formulation was used seven years later in the text of the *Stone Hymn* 石頌 at Mount Tie (Tie 2), which is dated to September 23, 579: ‘Silk and bamboo are easily ruined, but metal and stone are hard to destroy; entrusting [the texts] to a high mountain, they will last forever without end’. 縑竹易銷, 金石難滅; 託以高山, 永留不絕. Wang and Wenzel, *Shandong Volume 2*, 166.

short text passages and Buddha-names were carved on the stone walls inside and outside the southern cave. The same Buddha-names are also found at Southern Mount Xiangtang 南響堂山.¹⁰

It is remarkable that the short *sūtra* passages and Buddha-names carved in the caves at both the Northern and Southern Mount Xiangtang connect these imperial cave temples to inscription sites on the periphery of the empire in today's Shandong Province. Tang Yong's initiative appears to have prompted other, more modest, *sūtra* carving projects farther from the capital. Although he himself appears as a donor only at Northern Mount Xiangtang, we know that his wife, Lady Zhao 趙氏, was active at Mount Jian 尖山 in Zoucheng 鄒城, where she led a group of ladies who donated *sūtras* 經主 in 575.¹¹ Lady Zhao died in either the same or following year that the Mount Jian carvings were completed. A votive inscription by her mother at Mount Zhonghuang 中皇山 in She County 涉縣 mentions her sudden death.¹² Mount Zhonghuang is located a mere fifty kilometres from the capital at Ye. It is an impressive site with more than 150 m² of Buddhist texts carved inside two caves and on the adjacent cliffs. Today this site is known as Palace of Empress Nüwa (Wahuanggong 媧皇宮). Since no other votive inscriptions are found at this site, it is possible that Lady Zhao and her husband were somehow involved in this project as well.

The project 'Buddhist Stone Sutras in China', hosted by the Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, documented a total of twenty-one sites in Shandong with *moya* cliff inscriptions (Figure 1).¹³ Votive inscriptions were found at many of these sites, which reveal a

¹⁰ Located on the southern slope of Mount Gu 鼓山, northwest of Zhifang Village 紙坊村, Linshui Community 臨水鎮, at the northern banks of Fuyang River 滏陽河, Hebei.

¹¹ Wang and Tsai, *Shandong Volume 3*, 41.

¹² Wahuanggong 媧皇宮: Mount Fenghuang 鳳凰山, Suobao Community 索堡鎮, She County 涉縣, Handan City 邯鄲市, Hebei.

¹³ Wang and Ledderose, *Shandong Volume 1*; Wang and Wenzel, *Shandong Volume 2*; Wang and Tsai, *Shandong Volume 3*. Two more volumes in this province are planned.

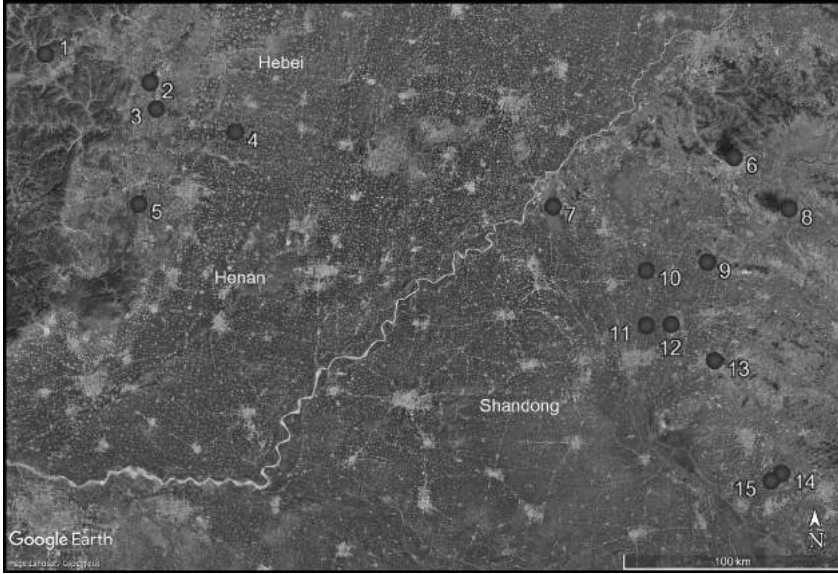


FIG. 1 Map (provided by GoogleTMEarth) of Northern Qi and Northern Zhou stone inscription sites. 1: Mount Zhonghuang in Shexian, Hebei. 2: Northern Mount Xiangtang, Handan, Hebei. 3: Southern Mount Xiangtang, Linshui, Hebei. 4: Capital Ye. 5: Xiaonanhai, Anyang, Henan. 6: Mount Tai, Tai'an, Shandong. 7: Dongping Lake (Mount Tianchi, East Mount Shuyuan, Mount Ergu, Mount Hongding, Mount Dazhai, Mount Sili, Mount Yuncui, Mount Yin), Shandong. 8: Mount Culai, Xintai, Shandong. 9: Mount Fenghuang, Ningyang, Shandong. 10: Mount Shuiniu, Wenshang, Shandong. 11: Mount Ziyang, Ziyang, Shandong. 12: Yanzhou, Shandong. 13: Zoucheng (Mount Yang, Mount Yi, Mount Tie, Mount Gang, Mount Ge, Mount Jian), Shandong. 14: Mount Tao, Tengzhou, Shandong. 15: Mount Long, Tengzhou, Shandong.

social network of wealthy gentry donors and Buddhist clerics, some of which must have had connections with the court at Ye. This was the case with Lady Zhao and her two co-donors, who were all married to statesmen recorded in the dynastic histories. Aside from this type of social network, the Shandong *sūtra* carvings can also be described as a network of sites with similar doctrinal and soteriological intent, as well as a network of calligraphy samples written in a similar style. In what follows, I will describe this network of inscriptions in greater detail, discuss what is known about the logistics behind their

distribution over the Shandong hills, and demonstrate the impact of this regional network upon the course of Buddhist practice during the seventh century.

A General Overview

Only one Shandong cliff inscription pre-dates the Northern Qi dynasty. This inscription survived only in a rubbing and is no longer visible on the rock. It was once part of the carvings at Yellow Stone Cliff 黃石崖 in the southern outskirts of the provincial capital Ji'nan. The text has no date, but it is thought to have been originally placed below a votive inscription to a Maitreya figure dated 526. Rather than presenting a coherent *sūtra* passage, the text combines two verses from the *Great Parinirvāṇa Sūtra*, and one passage from the *Lotus Sūtra* on the name of Bodhisattva Guanshiyin.¹⁴

Aside from this early inscription, all other Shandong cliff inscriptions date to the Northern Qi (550–577) or Northern Zhou (557–581) dynasties. We have secure dates for those inscriptions carved within the years 560 (HT 2),¹⁵ 562 (EG 3), 564 (HDS 18, Yi 2), 570 (CLS 4, CLS 8), and 575 (JS 2), and even more specific dates indicating the year, month, and day such as the following: May 20, 575 (JS 7), June 24, 575 (JS 4), September 23, 579 (Tie 2), March 27, 580 (Ge 2), and July 29, 580 (GS E).

¹⁴ Wang and Tsai, *Shandong Volume 3*, 165, 171–72, 176–81. Note that this text combination quotes the same verse from the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* (T no. 7, 1: 204c23–24 ; T no. 374, 12: 450a16, 451a1, 497b9–10) that was also illustrated later in Sengchou's memorial chapel at Xiaonanhai, and is found among the carvings on Mount Jian (JS 16.1), which date to 575, see Wang and Tsai, *Shandong Volume 3*, 48–49, 128–34.

¹⁵ This refers to the date of the votive inscription on the rear of a stele, which was found in the ruins of former Haitan Monastery 海檀寺 in Dongping County 東平縣. The *Guanshiyin Sūtra* 觀世音經 is carved on the stele's front side. The stele is documented in Wang and Ledderose, *Shandong Volume 1*, 464–89. In the meantime, it has disappeared and is no longer in its original location.

However, some Shandong cliff inscriptions may have been carved even earlier than these secure dates. The surviving fragment of a *sūtra* passage (Sili 1) on Mount Sili 司里山 was damaged by a votive inscription which dates to 561. In addition, some colophons on Mount Hongding 洪頂山 do not utilize reign eras, but refer to a Buddhist calendar, thus dating the respective inscriptions ‘to the year such and such after Śākyamuni [entered into nirvāṇa] under the twin trees’. If the underlying Buddhist calendar is identical with the one used by Master Huisi 慧思 (515–577), then the inscriptions on Mount Hongding would date to the years 553 (HDS 15) and 556 (HDS 7).

In sum, it is relatively safe to claim that the majority of the Shandong cliff inscriptions were carved during the years 553 to 580. Not even the Buddhist persecution under Emperor Wu 武帝 (r. 559–578) of the Northern Zhou dynasty seems to have significantly affected the *sūtra* carving projects. Immediately following the persecution, in 579 and 580, three of the largest inscription sites were created at Mount Tie 鐵山 (579), Mount Ge 葛山 (March 27, 580), and Mount Gang 崗山 (July 29, 580).

The following table arranges the twenty-one inscription sites in Shandong, dating to the Northern Qi and Northern Zhou dynasties, according to their total carved surface areas. They are sorted into sizes XS (0.2–2.2 m²), S (4–9.1 m²), M (31–<100 m²), L (132–175 m²), XL (> 500 m²), and XXL (>1,000 m²). The sites indicated with underline contain evidence for the involvement of monk Seng’an Daoyi 僧安道壹 (to be discussed below):

TABLE 1 Inscription sites in Shandong according to size

XS 0.2–2.2 m ²	S 4–9.1 m ²	M 31– <100 m ²	L 132–175 m ²	XL > 500 m ²	XXL > 1,000 m ²
Mount Tianchi 天池山 (Dongping Lake) (undated) ~0.2 m ²	Mount Yang 陽山 (Zoucheng) (undated) destroyed ~ 4 m ²	Mount Yi 嶧山 (Zoucheng) (564, 570–572) ~31 m ²	Mount Hongding 洪頂山 (Dongping Lake) (553?, 556?, 564) ~132 m ²	Mount Tie 鐵山 (Zoucheng) (579) ~560 m ²	Mount Tai 泰山 (Tai’an) (undated) ~1300 m ²

XS 0.2–2.2 m ²	S 4–9.1 m ²	M 31– <100 m ²	L 132–175 m ²	XL > 500 m ²	XXL > 1,000 m ²
Mount Dazhai 大寨山 (Dongping Lake) (undated) ~0.3 m ²	Mount Shuiniu 水牛山 (Wenshang xian) (undated) ~ 4 m ²	Mount Sili 司里山 (Dongping Lake) (before 561) ~31–35 m ²	Mount Ge 葛山 (Zoucheng) (March 27, 580) ~175 m ²		
Mount Yuncui 雲翠山 (Dongping Lake) (undated) ~0.6 m ²	Mount Ziyang 嵒陽山 (Ziyang xian) (undated) destroyed ~7 m ²	Mount Gang 崗山 (Zoucheng) (July 29, 580) partly lost > 64.4 m ²			
East Mount Shuyuan 書院東山 (Dongping Lake) (undated) ~0.95 m ²	Mount Yin 銀山 (Dongping Lake) (undated) ~8.2 m ²	<u>Mount Jian</u> 尖山 (Zoucheng) (575) destroyed >89 m ²			
Mount Fenghuang 鳳凰山 (Ningyang xian) (undated) ~1 m ²	<u>Mount Ergu</u> 二鼓山 (Dongping Lake) (562) ~9 m ²				
Mount Long 龍山 (Tengzhou) (undated) partly lost ~ 1.2 m ²	Mount Culai 徂徠山 (Xintai) (570) ~9.1 m ²				
Mount Tao 陶山 (Tengzhou) (undated) ~2.2 m ²					

As this table shows, carved surface areas of the inscription sites vary considerably in size. This table does not show the fact that the total number of individual inscriptions at each site also varies. This does not necessarily mean, however, that smaller sites always host lesser inscriptions than larger sites. In general, three different types of inscription sites may be distinguished:

1. Small sites with a single carved Buddha-name or *sūtra* passage, occasionally accompanied by one or more colophons.
2. Cluster sites of various sizes hosting several inscriptions, usually a mixture of Buddha-names, *sūtra* passages, and historical inscriptions.
3. Sites with large walk-over surfaces which feature an extended *sūtra* passage or *sūtra* chapter in several hundred characters, with or without accompanying votive inscriptions or colophons.

Inscription sites with the smallest carved surface area, below one square metre, usually consist of a single Buddha-name, as is the case with the ‘Buddha King of Great Emptiness’ 大空王佛 on Mount Tianchi 天池山 (undated) or the ‘Buddha Amitābha’ on Mount Dazhai 大寨山 (undated). Sometimes this single Buddha-name is accompanied by one or more colophons, like on Mount Yuncui 雲翠山 (undated), where the names of five monks are recorded next to ‘Buddha King of Great Emptiness’. The slightly larger Buddha-name carved on East Mount Shuyuan still covers less than one square metre. On Mount Long 龍山 (undated), one single passage in ninety-eight characters was carved, on slightly more than one square metre. Next, we find combinations of Buddha-names in modest sizes, like the five names carved on Mount Fenghuang 鳳凰山 (undated). Mount Tao 陶山 (undated) also combines three Buddha-names and adds one ‘Perfection of Wisdom’ 般若波羅蜜 to this group of invocations.

Single *sūtra* passages without colophons on Mount Yang 陽山 (undated) and Mount Shuiniu 水牛山 (undated) cover around four square metres of cliff surface. Next in size are single, large Buddha-names with a total height of five to six metres, accompanied by much smaller colophons or votive inscriptions, like the ‘Buddha

King of Great Emptiness' on Mount Ziyang 嵚陽山 (undated) and on Mount Ergu 二鼓山 (562).

A special case is Mount Yin. Here we find a single carving which reads: 'Great Perfection of Wisdom Spoken by the Buddha' 佛說摩訶般若波羅蜜. Although this reads like a *sūtra* title, no *sūtra* text was carved in or around the area. The final site in this list of extra small and small sites is Mount Culai 徂徠山 (dated 570), with a carved surface area of about nine square metres. However, Mount Culai is more a combination of two small sites, one on Radiant Buddha Cliff 映佛巖 (Figure 2), with a carved surface area of about 6.3 m², and one on a single boulder the size of a man, with a total carved surface area of about 2.8 m².

Medium sized sites begin at a total carved surface area of around thirty-one square metres on Mount Yi 嶧山 (dated 564, 570–572). However, just like Mount Culai, Mount Yi is not a coherent site, but rather a combination of two small sites. We find two *sūtra* passages with colophons carved separately, one on the Summit of the Five Flowers 五華峰, covering twenty-three square metres, and another one next to the Cave of the Bewitching Fairy 妖精洞 (Figures 3 and 4), covering only eight square metres.

The other three medium sized sites are coherent; they may be best described as clusters of a varying number of inscriptions, including Buddha-names, *sūtra* passages, and historical colophons. Mount Sili 司里山 (begun before 561), with a total carved surface area of thirty-one to thirty-five square metres, features three short *sūtra* passages, but unfortunately there are no colophons that directly relate to them. The passages are also heavily damaged and therefore difficult to reconstruct.

The inscriptions on Mount Gang 崗山 (colophon dated to July 29, 580) are unique in Shandong. Single segments of a *sūtra* passage (Figures 10 and 11) are spread in varying sizes over cliffs and boulders along a pilgrim path leading uphill. Because some text segments can no longer be located, the total carved surface area can only be estimated as between 64.4 m² and no more than one hundred square metres. Mount Gang features two different *sūtra* passages, one of them carved twice, as well as Buddha-names, and one colophon by donors dated to 580. The surface carved on Mount Jian 尖山 (dated to 575)



FIG. 2 Radiant Buddha Cliff 映佛巖 on Mount Culai, with ninety-eight-character passage (CLS 1) carved on the lower part of the boulder. Photograph taken in 2007 by Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities.



FIG. 3 Cliff with carving of the ninety-eight-character passage next to the Cave of the Bewitching Fairy 妖精洞 on Mount Yi. Photograph taken in 2008 by Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities.



FIG. 4 Rubbing of the ninety-eight-character passage next to the Cave of the Bewitching Fairy 妖精洞 on Mount Yi. H. 343 cm x W. 232 cm. Collection of the former Shandong Stone Carving Art Museum 山東省石刻藝術博物館 in Ji'nan. Photograph taken in 2005 by Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities.

is of comparable size. With the exception of one verse carved on Pot Stand Rocks 支鍋石 nearby, all inscriptions—two *sūtra* passages, one large Buddha-name and numerous colophons—were arranged on a single sloping boulder. Mount Jian was used to quarry stones in the 1960s, thus only rubbings of the inscriptions survived. A reconstruction of the original inscriptions yields a total surface area of no less than eighty-nine square metres.

Among the large sites with a total surface area of at least one hundred square metres, we find Mount Hongding 洪頂山 (553?, 556?, 564), which is of the cluster type, and hosts twenty-three individual inscriptions lined up along the cliffs of the northern and southern slope of the valley. It is notable that the *sūtra* passages, Buddha-names, and colophons on the northern slope, covering an area of about 115 square metres compared to only eighteen square metres on the southern slope, may have been carved earlier than those on the southern slope, which have a secure date of 564.

The large site of Mount Ge 葛山 (dated by colophon to March 27, 580) features a long *sūtra* passage from chapter twelve of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa-sūtra* 維摩詰所說經 (*T* no. 475, 14: 554c28–555a24) covering about 175 square metres of a coherent surface, which may be assigned to the category of ‘giant stele’. One year earlier, a wealthy local clan together with a Buddhist association donated the carving on Mount Tie 鐵山 (579). The donors carved a long passage from the ‘Chapter on the Bodhisattva of Oceanlike Wisdom’ (‘Haiyi pusa pin’ 海慧菩薩品) of the *Vast and Universal Great Compilation Sūtra* (*Da fangguang daji jing* 大方等大集經; *T* no. 397, 13: 50a16–c13) on a surface measuring around 560 square metres. In addition, they carved the outline of a giant stele out of the sloping boulder, complete with soaring dragons above, and a pair of supporting turtles below. The *sūtra* text is accompanied by a fine piece of literature entitled *Stone Hymn*, which, among other things, indicates the date of the donation, September 23, 579.

The only stone carving in Shandong larger than this giant stele on Mount Tie is the *Diamond Sūtra* carving in Sūtra Stone Valley on Mount Tai 泰山. This carving covers a surface area close to 1,300 square metres, and was either never dated, or the original colophon has completely worn away.

Theories about the Evolution of Shandong Cliff Inscriptions

Lists and tables like the one I present here have tempted scholars to draw some general conclusions about the evolution of stone *sūtra* carvings in Shandong Province. For example, smaller inscription sites are taken to be earlier than larger sites. In addition, because the Buddha-names carved on Mount Yuncui and Ergu have colophons indicating names of *bhikṣus* 比丘, it is generally assumed that single carvings of the ‘Buddha King of Great Emptiness’ Buddha-name such as these were mainly sponsored by small ‘brotherhoods’ of monks. These ‘brotherhoods’ may have even been linked. The name of one monk, *bhikṣu* Sengtai 僧太, is found at both sites.¹⁶ Consequently, speculations arose about the activities of a group of monks from the former Chongfan Monastery 崇梵寺 in the area of today’s Pingyin County 平陰縣, where the inscriptions are located.¹⁷

Scholars also postulated that the length of the carved texts increase over time: The shortest inscriptions are Buddha-names which consist of just a few characters; next are *sūtra* passages of ever increasing length, in fifty-two or ninety-eight characters for example; up to the *sūtra* passage carved on Mount Tie in 930 characters, and on Mount Tai in originally 2,748 characters.

However, these observations, in my opinion, over-simplify the evolutionary process of the Shandong inscriptions. Apart from the Buddha-name on Mount Ergu, dated to 562, all small or very small sites are undated. In addition, the large site on Mount Hongding (at least the carvings on its northern slope) may have been established even earlier than the secure date of 562 found on the southern slope. Further, the three fragmented *sūtra* passages on Mount Sili may have been carved before 561. On the other hand, it is true that three of the largest carving projects, the ‘giant stele’ type sites on Mount Tie and Mount Ge, as well as the pilgrim path on Mount Gang, were established rather late. These carvings were created after the Buddhist persecution under Zhou Wudi. However, we need not forget that the

¹⁶ Wang and Ledderose, *Shandong Volume 1*, 343, 352–54, 365.

¹⁷ Kiriya, ‘Bei Qi da shamen An Daoyi’, 51, 74; Lai, ‘Seng’an kejing’, 107.

largest carving of all, on Mount Tai, provides no clue of its date, and thus cannot be included into this grouping of large and late sites.

Modern academic research on the Shandong *moya* cliff inscriptions began after the sensational discovery of the inscription valley on Mount Hongding during the 1980s. Most of the larger sites in Shandong—Mount Tai, Mount Tie, Mount Ge, but also Mount Culai—are long known and have been noted in epigraphic literature since the end of the eighteenth century. The first research that went beyond listings of sites and inscription titles were investigations into the family history of some of the identified donors: The Kuang 匡 family at Mount Tie, the Wei 韋 family at Mount Jian, and Wang Zichun 王子椿 at Mount Culai. The first scholar to connect two Shandong sites was Nie Wen 聶鉞 (courtesy name Jianguang 劍光; 1711–1796), who noticed that the clerical script at Mount Culai was similar to that of the *Diamond Sūtra* engraving on Mount Tai, and thus concluded that the inscriptions at both sites must be from the same hand.¹⁸ Epigraphers before the invention of photography were prone to many misidentifications due to the shortcomings of their materials—collections of rubbings, often incorrectly ascribed to certain sites. Their attempts to connect individual inscription sites were random, as in the case of the eminent scholar Ruan Yuan, who—by mere studies of literal sources—proposed a connection between the inscriptions on Mount Jian (575) and the *sūtra* carving project of Tang Yong at Northern Mount Xiangtang. Although Ruan Yuan noted the similarity of the calligraphy of the inscriptions on Mount Jian and Mount Tai, he remains vague and does not draw any preliminary conclusions.¹⁹

¹⁸ Manuel Sassmann in Wang and Tsai, *Shandong Volume 3*, 251.

¹⁹ Ruan Yuan (1764–1849) writes in his *Shanzuo jinshi zhi* on Mount Tai: ‘Nie Jianguang (Nie Wen 聶鉞, 1711–1796) says in his *Itinerary of Mount Tai* that the inscription was written by Wang Zichun. He notes that Wu Shanfu (Wu Yujun 吳玉搢, 1699–1774) records in his *Extant Writings on Metal and Stone*: ‘Among the *sūtras* that Tang Yong had carved under the Northern Qi dynasty was the *Vimalakīrti* and other *sūtras*; the scope was not limited to one kind of *sūtra*. Now, the polished cliff inscriptions on Mount Jian in Zou County also include a colophon by Tang Yong, Prince of Jinchang; its calligraphy is the same

The situation improved when individual scholars left their studios and paid personal visits to the inscription sites, an activity known as ‘seeking out ancient steles’ (*fang gubei* 訪古碑). During their travels, they not only collected more rubbings, but completed the partial transcriptions of earlier publications, thereby correcting earlier mistakes. These extensive travels allowed for the discovery of interconnections between single sites and their respective donors.

The foremost travel destination for scholars of epigraphy was Mount Tai. In his *Eulogy on Sūtra Stone Valley on Mount Dai* (*Dai-shan Jingshi yu ge* 岱山經石峪歌), Wei Yuan 魏源 (1794–1857) writes:

The stone carving in Sūtra Stone Valley on Mount Tai is the *Diamond [Perfection of] Wisdom Sūtra*. It was carved in clerical script, with characters as large as a peck, powerful and unrestrained, elegant and simple. This inscription seems to be from the same hand as the *Mañjuśrī Wisdom Sūtra* carved at Mount Culai, at Shuiniu Cave,²⁰ and Mount Gang [i.e. Mount Tie] in Zoucheng, which were all written by Seng'an Daoyi (僧安道壹 or 僧安道一) of the Northern Qi dynasty....²¹

Although Wei Yuan confuses the giant stele carved at Mount Tie with nearby Mount Gang, he is to be credited with the first identification of major Shandong sites as works by Seng'an Daoyi. The slightly younger Li Zuoxian 李佐賢 (1807–1876) went one step further and suggested that the giant stele on Mount Tie, the *Diamond*

as this one. However, it can no longer be known if the characters were written by [Tang] Yong'. 聶劍光《泰山道里記》以爲北齊王子椿書。元案吳山夫《金石存》載：‘北齊唐邕寫經有《維摩詰》諸經，不止一種’。今鄒縣尖山摩崖，亦有晉昌王唐邕題字，筆法與此相同，或出邕書，未可知也。Ruan, *Shanzuo jinshi zhi*, 14483–14484.

²⁰ This probably refers to the Mount Shuiniu Stele (558–561?), which has an extended passage of the *Mañjuśrī Wisdom Sūtra*.

²¹ 魏源《岱山經石峪歌》：‘泰山經石峪摩崖，隸書《金剛般若經》，字大於斗，雄逸高古，與徂徠山水牛洞及鄒縣岡山之《文殊般若經》如出一手，皆北齊僧安道一所書。Wei Yuan, *Wei Yuan ji*, 732–33.

Sūtra on Mount Tai, and the large inscription on Mount Ge were all written by the same person, namely the monk An Daoyi,²² who is also mentioned in a colophon on Mount Jian.²³

Despite their merits, the conclusions drawn by Wei Yuan and Li Zuoxian should be accepted only with caution. The underlying assumption of these arguments is that the calligraphy of anonymous

²² The correct reading of the name of this monk, Seng'an Daoyi versus An Daoyi, is still subject to dispute. Zhang, 'Shandong beiya kejing', 65–67, first proposed to read 'Seng'an Daoyi' as a personal name composed of four characters, and explained that names of monks consist of two parts: The first is called *ming* 名, the second *zi* 字. Therefore, 'Seng'an' has to be the monk's name, which could be abbreviated by only using the second character. Lai, 'Seng'an kejing', 98–100; and Xu, 'Seng'an Daoyi', 242–45, followed him thereafter. Other authors continue to read the phrase as 'Monk [with family name] An [and personal name] Daoyi', see Yang, 'Seng'an Daoyi chukao', 51–52, and Kiriya in all his publications. This reading goes back to Duan Songling 段松苓 (1745–1800), *Shanzuo beimu*, 14844a, who created a precedent for reading 'seng' as a title and 'An' as a family name. In this article, I adopt the reading Seng'an Daoyi. As this monk calls himself *śramaṇa* Seng'an Daoyi, his title is '*śramaṇa*' 沙門, and I see no need to read the character *seng* 僧 as yet another title with the meaning 'monk'. In my opinion, *seng* 僧 is an integral part of a personal name.

²³ Li Zuoxian 李佐賢 (1807–1876), *Shiquan shuwu*, 14194: 'I come to the conclusion that [the *sūtra* at Mount Tai] is not in the slightest amount different from the calligraphy, composition, and size of the *sūtra* characters of the *sūtra* at Mount Ge and the carved *sūtra* at Minor Mount Tie in Zou County, and must have been written by the same person. The calligrapher of Mount Ge can no longer be identified. An examination of the *sūtra* on Minor Mount Tie connected it with the calligraphy of the monk An Daoyi; therefore, the characters of *Sūtra* Stone Valley also belong without doubt to the calligraphy of An Daoyi. The inscriptions carved under the Qi on Mount Jian also include a colophon by An Daoyi. Therefore, whether the *sūtra* inscription on Mount Tai was carved under the Qi or the Zhou cannot be decided quickly'. 余按鄒縣小鐵山刻經及葛山經，經字大小結構筆法與此絲毫無異，斷爲一人之筆。葛山之經，書人已不可考。鐵山之經，考係僧安道壹書，則經石峪字亦屬安道壹書，應無可疑。尖山齊刻經亦有安道壹題名，則泰山此刻，或齊或周末可遽定。

inscriptions without any signature or accompanying colophon is so close in style to inscriptions signed by Seng'an Daoyi that they must be from the same hand. However, the name of the monk Seng'an Daoyi is found only at three sites, Mount Jian, Mount Tie (Figure 5), and Mount Hongding (Figure 6). On Mount Ergu, we find the three-characters signature 'Seng Anyi' 僧安一 written after two monk's names and in front of the name of a lay donor, but the identification of this name with the longer 'Seng'an Daoyi' is still debated.

One of the mountains that features signatures by 'the great *śramaṇa* Seng'an Daoyi', Mount Hongding, was not yet known to the late Qing epigraphers. The inscriptions of Mount Hongding were long unnoticed by travelling scholars. Only when a local shepherd reported his rediscovery of the site to the authorities during the 1980s, an official survey was finally initiated. In 1998, the responsible authority, the Shandong Stone Carving Art Museum 山東省石刻藝術博物館 in Ji'nan, produced rubbings of all the inscriptions at the site, and set out to investigate them thoroughly via a series of publications and international conferences. The anthology, *Research on Cliff Inscriptions of the Northern Dynasties* (*Beichao moya kejing yanjiu* 北朝摩崖刻經研究), published in 1991 before Mount Hongding was properly surveyed, was consequently followed by two more volumes in 2003 and 2006, which published the ongoing academic research of Chinese and Japanese scholars alike. The relentless Lai Fei 賴非 of the Shandong Stone Carving Art Museum compiled volume twelve of the *Complete Collection of Chinese Calligraphy* (*Zhongguo shufa quanji* 中國書法全集) series, entitled *Beichao moya kejing* in 2000. This book laid the foundation for a deeper understanding of the Shandong *moya* cliff inscriptions.

Since the earliest examinations of these materials, scholars have been puzzled by how suddenly the cliff inscriptions emerged around the middle of the sixth century, and how abruptly they were discontinued during the seventh century. The clearly drawn spatial and temporal boundaries of the cliff inscription phenomenon turned out to be particularly thought-provoking, and the resulting scholarship produced some remarkable results. Once all the materials of the *moya* inscriptions carved under the Northern Qi and Northern Zhou dynasties in Hebei, Henan, and Shandong Provinces became



FIG. 5 Rubbing of the central text column of the votive inscription Tie 3 at the foot of the giant stele carving on Mount Tie, reading 'Seng'an Daoyi of the Eastern Range wrote the calligraphy for the sutra'. H. 330 cm x W. 51 cm. Collection of the former Shandong Stone Carving Art Museum 山東省石刻藝術博物館 in Ji'nan. Photograph taken in 2005 by Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities.



FIG. 6 Rubbing of the signature of Seng'an Daoyi next to the carving of the ninety-eight-character passage on the northern slope on Mount Hongding (HDS 16.1). H. 51 cm x W. 17 cm. Collection of the former Shandong Stone Carving Art Museum 山東省石刻藝術博物館 in Ji'nan. Photograph taken in 2008 by Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities.

available to scholars, comparative studies intensified, and ever more parallels between single sites were discovered. Because of the distinctive calligraphy of many of the engraved Buddha-names and *sūtra* passages, calligraphy experts like Lai Fei considered them not simply as works executed in a particular style or school, but as works left behind by a single person, the brilliant calligrapher monk Seng'an Daoyi. In an article published in 2003, Lai Fei ascribes the majority of the unsigned Buddha-names and *sūtra* passages to Seng'an Daoyi, purely on stylistic grounds. He considered Seng'an Daoyi as master calligrapher of almost all inscription sites, as well as the mastermind behind their planning. Utilizing the secure dates obtained from some sites, Lai Fei set out to construct a hypothetical biography of this monk, about whom all other historical sources are silent. He establishes a chronology of sites visited by Seng'an, with Mount Hongding and the XS and S sites as points of departure. Lai Fei goes so far as to say that because of the extreme inclination of the cliff, the calligrapher monk could not have been older than forty years when he wrote his giant 'Buddha King of Great Emptiness' on the northern slope of Mount Hongding. Based on distinctions concerning size, content, collaborators, calligraphic style, and intention of each inscription site, Lai Fei deduces two phases in the biography of Seng'an: before and after 575, the year in which the monk participated in the Mount Jian carvings. Lai Fei assumes that Seng'an travelled west towards the capital of Ye during the years 572–574, and wrote *sūtra* passages and more Buddha-names on both the Northern and Southern Mount Xiangtang. After he was introduced to the eminent official Tang Yong, the monk allegedly returned to today's Shandong Province in the entourage of the latter's wife, Lady Zhao, and began his most impressive projects, the carvings at Mount Jian, Mount Tai, Mount Tie, and finally on Mount Ge. Shortly thereafter, according to Lai Fei, Seng'an supposedly died, because the inscriptions on Mount Gang, dated 580, were written in someone else's calligraphy.²⁴ The

²⁴ Lai, 'Seng'an kejing', 120–31, provides a table that lists inscriptions by Seng'an at the Shandong sites (and on steles) and at Northern and Southern Mount Xiangtang. He indicates which passages were carved, how Seng'an's signatures read,

hypothetical construction of the *śramāṇa* Seng'an Daoyi's biography came to a head in an article by Kiriya Seiichi 桐谷征一, who divided the life of the monk into seven distinct phases. Kiriya claims to have found traces of Seng'an Daoyi at almost every inscription site in Hebei, Henan, and Shandong, and believes that the monk actively took part in Tang Yong's carving project, even writing the dedication text of the so-called Tang Yong stele with his own brush.²⁵

The research of Lai Fei and Kiriya Seiichi led to the canonization of the previously unknown monk Seng'an Daoyi among the most celebrated Chinese calligraphers. A larger than life-size statue was erected for him in public space, and his dates are now specified as ?–580, or even 504–580. His portrait graces the entrance to Mount Hongding, in which he is depicted with facial traits not unlike those seen in portraits of Chinese *Chan* masters; probably a reflection of the research done by Kiriya Seiichi, himself a Zen follower, who elsewhere advocated the idea that Seng'an practiced 'wall contemplation' 壁觀 on Mount Hongding.²⁶

The name Seng'an Daoyi is found on Mount Hongding (564; Figure 6), Mount Jian (575) and Mount Tie (579; Figure 5). The identity of the name in three characters 'Seng Anyi' 僧安一 next to the early 'Buddha King of Great Emptiness' inscription on Mount Ergu, dated 562, is not conclusive, but most probably refers to the same person. During his earlier years Seng'an Daoyi appears to have collaborated on Mount Hongding with another monk by the name of Fahong (法洪, as in HDS 18, 21.2, 23.2, or 法鴻 as in HDS 9.16), probably of Indian origin.²⁷ From 575 onwards, he enjoyed the

and provides the names of Seng'an's alleged collaborators. On this basis, he explains the distinctions concerning size, contents, collaborators, calligraphic style, and intention within two phases, before and after 575.

²⁵ Kiriya, 'Bei Qi da shamen An Daoyi', on the basis of his other articles, Kiriya, 'Sekiheki kokukyō no seiritsu'; Kiriya, 'Sentaku kara kettōyō he'; Kiriya, 'Daruma no hekikan'; Kiriya, 'Sekkōkukyō no ranshō'; Kiriya, 'Hokusei daishamon An Dōitsu'; and further developed in Kiriya, 'Tai Shan, Tie Shan kejing'.

²⁶ Kiriya, 'Daruma no hekikan', 143–50.

²⁷ Zhang, 'Shandong beiya kejing jingyi neihan suotan'.

support of wealthy laymen and laywomen from local clans. His area of activity then shifted from today's Dongping County near Lake Dongping to the city of Zoucheng, about one hundred kilometres to the south east of Dongping County. In Zoucheng, his name appears next to those of three male donors of the local Wei clan, who proudly claim descent from a famous Great Minister of the Han dynasty, Wei Xian 韋賢 (148–60 BCE): 'The great *śramaṇa* Seng'an Daoyi carved *sūtra* passages and a Buddha-name together with ... Wei Zishen, his wife, née Xu, and his sons, Wei Qinzhi and Wei Fu'er' 大沙門僧安與.....韋.....子深, 妻徐, 息欽之、伏兒等同刊經佛. The colophon (JS 4) is dated June 24, 575.²⁸ In another colophon (JS 11), 'the great chief donor of *sūtras* and the Buddha-name, Seng'an Daoyi' 大都經佛主大沙門僧安道壹, appears again in connection with a vow to conceive an aspiration for *bodhi* 大發心. This vow was taken by the two sons of Wei Zishen, Wei Qinzhi and Wei Fu'er, probably after the death of their father. Mount Jian also features separate colophons by female donors, most significantly that of the wife of Wei Zishen, Xu Faxian. She appears proudly as 'Donor of *Sūtras*, Xu Faxian, wife of Wei Zishen' 經主韋子深妻徐法仙 (JS 5) next to one of the two carved *sūtra* passages. Her name is found again in another colophon (JS 8) next to the carved Buddha-name, following that of three other ladies: Lady Zhao 趙, wife of Tang Yong 唐邕; Lady Dong 董, wife of Chen Dexin 陳德信; Lady [...], wife of Chen Demao 陳德茂. The ladies' husbands commemorated in this inscription were active at the court. Like Tang Yong, Chen Dexin is known from the dynastic histories as one of the advisors of Emperor Houzhu (r. 565–576).²⁹ Chen Demao was probably a younger relative of Chen Dexin. The names of five *bhikṣuṇīs* were carved next to the names of these three court ladies. This arrangement agrees with the custom of grouping donors' names or portraits according to gender, often to the left and right of their donation. It is also common that groups of lay believers were

²⁸ Wang and Tsai, *Shandong Volume 3*, 63–71.

²⁹ For the biography of Tang Yong, see *Beiqi shu*, *juan* 40: 530–52. Chen Dexin is mentioned in *Beiqi shu*, *juan* 8: 111–12; *juan* 11: 145; *juan* 42: 556; *juan* 50: 692–93.

joined or led by clerics, with monks preceding laymen, and nuns preceding laywomen. This also holds true for the inscriptions on Mount Jian. The selection of *sūtra* passages (Figure 9) and the name ‘Buddha King of Great Emptiness’ further suggests that Seng’an Daoyi, whom we have seen previously at Mount Hongding, acted as general spiritual leader of the carving project. The six characters carved on top of the long stretch of boulder, reading ‘*śramaṇa* Seng’an Daoyi’ 沙門僧安道壹, support this assumption.

It is worth noting that the male donors, father and sons of the Wei family, despite their celebrated ancestors, held posts only on the sub-prefectural level. By contrast, the female donors enjoyed higher social standing thanks to marriage ties. However, there is no indication that Tang Yong or the other two court gentleman were involved in the *sūtra* carving project at Mount Jian. Rather, evidence points to a network of female donors, into which the wife of Wei Zishen, Lady Xu, was embedded.

The most prestigious project in which Seng’an Daoyi was involved was the carving of the giant stele at Mount Tie. Below the stele text and its accompanying colophon, the *Stone Hymn*, is a votive inscription (Tie 3) in which the central text column reads: ‘Seng’an Daoyi of the Eastern Range wrote the calligraphy for the *sūtra* 東嶺僧安道壹書經 (Figure 5). To the left and right are the names and ranks of two lay donors, namely the ‘donor of the *sūtra*, Sun Qia, General who Calms the North, Great Commander in Chief, and Magistrate of Rencheng Commandery’, as well as that of the ‘Great Chief Overseer, Lü Changsong, the Qi dynasty Recruiter of Good Men, and General who Pacifies Yue; the Zhou dynasty Recorder of Rencheng Commandery’.³⁰ However, the main patrons of this sumptuous carving project were two brothers of the local clan of the Kuang 匡 family, as well as Li Tao 李桃, who led more unnamed members of a Buddhist association. Again, we see a carving project planned and executed by members of a local elite in the Zoucheng region. In this case, Seng’an Daoyi’s role seems to have been restricted to calligrapher of the selected *sūtra* text. The eulogy entitled *Stone Hymn* praises the

³⁰ Wang and Wenzel, *Shandong Volume 2*, 112, 175–84.

virtues of the donors, who donated their property to ‘paint the rock and picture a stele’, and to carve the dragons above and the tortoises below the stele text.³¹ But the eulogy also draws attention to Seng’an Daoyi’s excellent calligraphy, which is considered to be a result of his spiritual achievements: ‘And there was the great *śramaṇa*, Dharma Master An of the Qi, whose way has illuminated non-duality, whose virtue has awakened to the One Origin. Not only does he grasp all the mysteries—his calligraphic skill is of the very highest order’.³² The calligraphy of this Dharma Master is praised as even surpassing that of Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303–361).³³ Writing the *sūtra* text of the giant stele on Mount Tie can arguably be considered the climax of Seng’an’s career.

There is no doubt that a monk named Seng’an Daoyi was involved in the cliff carvings on the mountains Hongding (553?–564), Jian (575), and Tie (579), under both the Northern Qi and the Northern Zhou dynasties. It is equally undisputed that Seng’an favored a certain doctrinal program, which is manifested most clearly on Mount Hongding and Mount Jian (see below). At the latter site, he succeeded in attracting the support of the wealthy local Wei clan for the realization of his project. His growing fame likely secured him collaboration in the creation of the giant stele on Mount Tie, a project launched after the Buddhist persecution under Zhou Wudi came to an end. Moreover, the Mount Tie stele merited him a place in the pantheon of immortal Chinese calligraphers. However, there is no hard evidence that he himself entertained any connection with the court at Ye. The most serious point of criticism against Lai Fei and

³¹ Zhang, ‘Shandong beiya kejing jingyi neihan suotan’, 103.

³² 於是有叅大沙門安法師者，道鑒不二，德悟一原，匪直秘相咸韜，書工尤最。Wang and Wenzel, *Shandong Volume 2*, 156, 161, 164.

³³ Wang and Wenzel, *Shandong Volume 2*, 166: ‘Seeking the master’s treasured brushwork, in all regions [. . .] [. . .] high; its refinement surpasses [Wang] Xi[zhi] and [Wei] Dan, its marvels exceed [Zhang Bo]ying and [Zhong] You ...’ 尋師瑤翰區區高。精跨義誕，妙越英繇；.... For Wang Xizhi as an exemplary model under the Northern dynasties, see Bi, ‘The *Stone Hymn* and Art Criticism’, 35–40.

Kiriya Seiichi's suggested extension of the monk's biography is the fact that his signature is found nowhere at the Hebei or Henan inscription sites. The Buddha-names and *sūtra* passages carved there are at best written in his style, but not necessarily by his own hands. In addition, the names of female donors on Mount Jian suggest that it was a social network of female elite members which extended beyond Shandong Province right into the capital at Ye in southern Hebei.

A Network of Sites in a Sacred Geography

There is certainly a variety of interconnections between all the cliff inscription sites created under the Northern Qi and Zhou dynasties, but their correlations cannot be explained by simply assigning all of them to the same genius calligrapher-monk. To shed some light on this rather short-lived phenomenon (and the reasons for its short life span), we need to take a closer look on the nature of the network these inscription sites constitute.

In his introduction to the first volume of the series on *Buddhist Stone Sutras in Shandong*, Ledderose characterized the Shandong inscription sites as 'a sacred geography with meaningful topographies', where 'monks transformed the mountains of Shandong with their texts [and] ... also imbued the landscape with an aesthetic dimension'.³⁴ The idea of 'a great net of texts cast upon the mountains of this region' was picked up by Birnbaum, who wonders if this 'net of scripture had been cast upon them, or had emerged from within', why the carving projects stopped, and 'why in later centuries did this region not become a major pilgrimage center or site for significant long-term practice'.³⁵

The answer lies, I believe, in a closer analysis of the type of network that these inscription sites form.

³⁴ Ledderose, 'Buddhist Stone Sutras in Shandong', 43, 46.

³⁵ Birnbaum, 'Highland Inscriptions', 269–70.

A Network of Sites: Doctrinal Coherence

Apart from the repeated occurrence of Seng'an Daoyi's name, discussed in detail above, there are also repetitions of carved phrases. Several core doctrinal themes can be inferred from these repetitions. The most obvious case is the name 'Buddha King of Great Emptiness'. There are more than a dozen carvings of this Buddha-name in all sizes. The smallest, carved at Mount Tianchi, measures 70 x 33 cm. The largest is a giant carving on the northern slope of Mount Hongding, measuring 920 x 340 cm; it can be seen even from far across the valley. The majority of 'Buddha King of Great Emptiness' names have a height between one and two metres; the names on Mount Jian and Mount Ergu are close to six metres in height. Their most distinctive calligraphic feature is the particularly long and drawn out final stroke of the character for 'Buddha', 佛 *fó*.

The three largest 'Buddha King of Great Emptiness' carvings on Mount Hongding, Mount Jian, and Mount Ergu were written by Seng'an Daoyi. The votive inscription next to the large Buddha-name (HDS 7) on Mount Hongding announces that 'One thousand six hundred twenty three years after Śākyamuni [entered into nirvāṇa] under the twin trees [556], the Great *śramaṇa* Seng'an Daoyi wrote and carved: Buddha King of Great Emptiness, seven [...] [...] [...] [...] [...] [...] [...] 釋迦雙林後一千六百廿三年, 大沙門僧安道壹書刊大空王佛七□□□□□□□□.³⁶ The donors of the Buddha-name on Mount Jian are identified in the nearby inscription (JS 4) as Seng'an and Wei Zishen, including the latter's family. The name on Mount Ergu was donated by 'Seng Anyi'. On the basis of these examples, scholars defined Seng'an's personal style of calligraphy as featuring a

³⁶ Wang and Ledderose, *Shandong Volume 1*, 137–44. The number 'seven' is generally understood as referring to the number of Buddha-names written by Seng'an, and scholars have pointed to the names found on Mount Hongding, six in total, and the nearby smaller sites in Pingyin County, Mount Ergu, Yuncui, Tianchi, and East Mount Shuyuan, see Zhang Zong, 'Shandong beiya kejing jingyi neihan suotan', 14; Lai, 'Seng'an kejing', 96; Wang and Ledderose, *Shandong Volume 1*, 92.

long, drawn-out final stroke of the character *fo*, and characters written with double outlines 雙鉤, which gives them the impression of having been left unfinished.

In addition to the presence of votive inscriptions that confirm Seng'an Daoyi as calligrapher of the three largest Buddha-names in Shandong, the calligraphic style of these carvings is indeed quite close. They share a peculiar stylistic feature in which the top ends of the last two vertical strokes of the character *fo* 佛 are shaped in a way which has been described as 'hands of the Buddha'.³⁷ However, ascribing the smaller and unsigned 'Buddha King of Great Emptiness' carvings to Seng'an Daoyi may stretch the stylistic argument too far. Colophons next to the Buddha-names carved on Mount Yuncui and on the now destroyed Mount Ziyang give different donor names, and do not mention Seng'an. The names on Mount Culai, Mount Fenghuang, East Mount Shuyuan, Mount Tainchi and Southern Mount Xiangtang are unsigned. These Buddha-names may well have been written in the style of Seng'an, by his disciples, or by other Buddhist believers who were simply following the latest fancy, veneration of the 'Buddha King of Great Emptiness', a Buddha-name which is unique for this time and region, and is also not found in any canonical scripture.³⁸ The 'Buddha King of Great Emptiness' appears at many of the inscription sites, even on Mount Gang, which has arguably no connection to Seng'an Daoyi. Its calligraphic expression may have been originally created by the calligrapher monk, but the idea that it represents must have been current in the region at that time and was likely preached by nearby clerics.

The 'Buddha King of Great Emptiness' is the epitome of Mahāyāna teachings on emptiness, or rather, great emptiness, which is regarded as the foundation and only source of Buddhahood. It was considered

³⁷ Kiriya, 'Bei Qi da shamen An Daoyi', 71; Kitajima, 'Shujingren An Daoyi', 281.

³⁸ Only a 'Buddha King of Emptiness' 空王佛 (Dharmagaganābhyudgatarāja) is found in Buddhist scriptures. In the distant past, he used to be one of the teachers of the historical Buddha Śākyamuni, see Sueyling Tsai in Wang and Ledderose, *Shandong Volume 1*, 82–84.

essential for a bodhisattva to strive to correctly understand the meaning of emptiness. According to the *Buddha-treasury Sūtra* 佛藏經 (*T* no. 653):

[Buddha Śākyamuni] walked the path cultivated by nine billion, six-hundred million, two hundred and sixty-three Buddhas. He made offerings to the Buddhas, but because he had not obtained an understanding of emptiness, he could not get a Buddha to give him a prediction [of future Buddhahood]. Finally, he laid eyes on the Buddha Light of Emptiness, attained the forbearance [born of] non-arising, and only then attained a prediction bestowed [by a Buddha].³⁹

Emptiness is indeed the central feature of the doctrinal frame that brackets the entirety of Shandong inscriptions. Two lists enumerating eighteen or seventeen kinds of emptiness were carved, respectively, on Mount Hongding, and on Mount Culai. On Mount Hongding, a passage probably taken from the *Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom* (**Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra*, *Da zhidu lun* 大智度論; *T* no. 1509, 25: 393c1–5) on eighteen kinds of emptiness was carved in the shape of a stele which rests on a single tortoise with an uplifted head. Unfortunately, the text remains unfinished, and thus it is not possible to reliably reconstruct the exact wording.⁴⁰ The title given to the carved passage reads, ‘Mahāyāna Sūtra’ 摩訶衍經, an alternative title of the *Da zhidu lun* often found in manuscripts. The

³⁹ This paraphrase of *T* no. 653, 15: 797a1–b29 is found in the scripture *Elucidation of the Shallow and Profound Teachings, Matched to Faculties, on Conceiving an Aspiration for Bodhi [as found] in the Sūtras* (*Ming zhujing zhong duigen qianshen fa puti xinfa* 明諸經中對根淺深發菩提心法) by Xinxing 信行 (540–594), founder of the Three Levels Teaching 三階教. This particular scripture by Xinxing is preserved in a Dunhuang manuscript in Japan (now in the possession of the Kyo-U Library—Kyōu Shooku 杏雨書屋—in Osaka) and in a stone version, carved during the years 662–670 on the inner walls of a cave at Jinchuanwan 金川灣, Chunhua County 淳化縣, in Shaanxi Province; see Zhao and Ledderose, *Shaanxi Volume 1*, 525, 601.

⁴⁰ Wang and Ledderose, *Shandong Volume 1*, 89, 125–30.

large man-sized boulder on Mount Culai (CLS 5) presents a well-preserved text passage enumerating only seventeen kinds of emptiness. The phrasing of the carved text is unique. Closest matches to this carving are *T* no. 1509, 25: 661b3–6 (corresponding to *T* no. 223, 8: 383a26–29, where eighteen kinds of emptiness are enumerated, one is dropped in the carved text), and an Ishiyamadera 石山寺 manuscript of the *Da zhidu lun* (referenced in *T* no. 1509, 25: 655, notes 2 and 3), where only seventeen kinds of emptiness appear.⁴¹ One of the enumerated kinds of emptiness is the ‘great emptiness’ praised in the Buddha-name of ‘Buddha King of Great Emptiness’.

Emptiness is also the ultimate message of the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* passage carved on Mount Sili (Sili 4).⁴² In this passage (*T* no. 374, 12: 603b20–c9; *T* no. 375, 12: 851c25–852a16), the Buddha instructs his last convert, the 120 year-old Subhadra, to ‘cut off all existents’ 斷一切諸有 by practicing the Contemplation on the Real Attributes 觀實相. The selected passage is totally unrelated to all the other doctrines for which the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* is famous. Instead, the general tone of the passage is similar to *Prajñāpāramitā* scriptures as a whole, particularly the section in which it explains that all *dharma*s without exception are empty and provisional (一切諸法皆是虛假), and that understanding this truth is named Utmost Knowledge, Ultimate Truth, and Ultimate Emptiness (名畢竟智, 名第一義諦, 名第一義空).

The set of six perfections that a bodhisattva is supposed to master was another doctrinal feature popular among the donors of the Shandong inscriptions. Explanations of these six perfections were carved at four Shandong sites. The carved text passages were, however, selected from two different *sūtras*. The first is the *Sūtra of the Questions of Viśeṣacintibrahma* 思益梵天所問經 (*T* no. 586, 15: 46a26–46b1), which provided the source for the respective inscription on Mount Jian (JS 12),⁴³ and for the text of the so-called Pingyin Stele.⁴⁴ The second text source is the *Chapter on the Bodhisattva*

⁴¹ Wang and Tsai, *Shandong Volume 3*, 260–62, 296–304.

⁴² Wang and Ledderose, *Shandong Volume 1*, 406, 427–32.

⁴³ Wang and Tsai, *Shandong Volume 3*, 112–18.

of *Ocean-like Wisdom* 海慧菩薩品 in the *Great Sūtra Collection* (T no. 397, 13: 50b15–18). A quote drawn from this source was carved on Mount Hongding (HDS 2), and on Mount Tie, as part of Tie 1.⁴⁵ The passage carved on Mount Jian (JS 12) and the fragmentary stele found in Pingyin County refers to the six perfections (*pāramitās*) of a bodhisattva by their Sanskrit names: *dānapāramitā*, *śīlapāramitā*, *kṣāntipāramitā*, *vīryapāramitā*, *dhyanapāramitā*, and *prajñāpāramitā*. Each of these perfections are here defined in negative terms. For example, perfection of generosity, *dānapāramitā*, dictates that a bodhisattva is to give up all marks (若菩薩能捨諸相, 名為檀波羅蜜); perfection of discipline, *śīlapāramitā*, means he is to extinguish all that he has received and held on to (能滅諸所受持, 名為尸波羅蜜); and the perfection of wisdom, *prajñāpāramitā*, equals the knowledge that all *dharma*s are without inborn nature (知諸法无生性, 名為般若波羅蜜). By contrast, the passage taken from the *Great Sūtra Collection* (T no. 397, 13: 50b15–18), on which the inscriptions on Mount Hongding (HDS 2)⁴⁶ and on Mount Tie (Tie 1) depend, gives all but one⁴⁷ of the six perfections in Chinese translation as *shi* 施, *jie* 戒, *ren* 忍, *jingjin* 精進, and *zhahui* 智慧, and explains each of them by means of affirmative actions. For example: Generosity means to actively ‘harmonize one’s mind’ (能調心者, 名之為施); while discipline means to ‘keep body and mind clear and cool’ (身心清涼, 名之為戒); finally, perfection of wisdom here means to ‘contemplate true reality’ (觀真實故, 名為智慧). This definition of the six perfections constitutes just one small part of the entire carved passage (T no. 397, 13: 50a16–c13) on Mount Tie, in which the Buddha unfolds the path to awakening from beginning

⁴⁴ Wang and Ledderose, *Shandong Volume 1*, 453–58.

⁴⁵ The last passage is probably also carved at Mount Zhonghuang in Shexian, Hebei province, where the entire *Sūtra of the Questions of Viśeṣacintibrahma* was carved in stone. However, the cliff inscriptions at this site still await an encompassing documentation, including transcriptions in full.

⁴⁶ Wang and Ledderose, *Shandong Volume 1*, 103–107.

⁴⁷ The fifth perfection, *samādhi*, is not translated, but transliterated as *sanmei* 三昧.

to end, from the moment the practitioner conceives an aspiration for bodhi mind 發菩提心 until his bodhisattva practice is completed.

The donors of the Shandong sites venerated the sixth and last of the bodhisattva perfections, *prajñāpāramitā* 般若波羅蜜, the Perfection of Wisdom, in particular. On Mount Yin, ‘Great Perfection of Wisdom Spoken by the Buddha’ 佛說摩訶般若波羅蜜 was carved on a steep cliff in large characters. Each character measures up to one metre in height. Although this phrase reads like a *sūtra* title, no *sūtra* text was carved in the area. Therefore, this expression then pays homage to the ‘*mahā-prajñāpāramitā* spoken by the Buddha’.

Prajñāpāramitā is likewise exalted at other sites. These five characters form an independent carving on Mount Culai, which is followed by its own votive inscription. On Mount Tao, the same *prajñāpāramitā* is grouped together in a rare combination with two Buddha-names, Amitābha and Buddha Guanshiyin 觀世音佛, forming the donation of a single individual donor.⁴⁸ *Prajñāpāramitā*, therefore, may have been evoked like a Buddha-name. The unusual ‘Buddha Guanshiyin’ appears besides Mount Tao two more times on the Shandong mountains, on Mount Culai (CLS 9)⁴⁹ and Mount Hongding, where he is in the company of his successor, Buddha Dashizhi 大勢至佛. The figure of Guanshiyin as a fully accomplished Buddha is also found in a scripture classified as apocryphal by Sui and later catalogs, which survived via quotations in the Buddhist canon, and in two stone cut versions: the *Sūtra on the Ten Great Vows taken by Guanshiyin* (*Guanshiyin shi dayuan jing* 觀世音十大願經).⁵⁰ This small apocryphal scripture narrates how

⁴⁸ Wang and Tsai, *Shandong Volume 3*, 477–79, 480–83.

⁴⁹ Wang and Tsai, *Shandong Volume 3*, 256–58, 323–28.

⁵⁰ For the version carved on a stele at Mujing Monastery 木井寺 in She County 涉縣, Hebei (dated 573), see Ma, ‘Handan Beichao moya’, 43; Kuramoto ‘Hokuchō zōzōmei kenkyū’, 229, 232; Kuramoto, ‘Chūgoku ni okeru Kannon shinkō’, 11–12, and Kuramoto, *Hokuchō bukkō zōzōmei kenkyū*, 464, 467. For the version carved at Bahui Monastery 八會寺 in Quyang County 曲陽縣, Hebei (dated by colophon to 593), see Kegasawa, ‘Kahoku Kyokuyō no Hachieji bukkō sekkei’; Zhao, ‘Hebei Sheng Quyang Xian Bahui Si shijing

Prince Shanguang 善光 receives his prophecy of future Buddhahood from ‘Buddha Guanshiyin, King of Emptiness’ 空王觀世音佛, and thus vows to completely awakening himself as ‘Buddha Guanshiyin’. Included in the ten vows of Shanguang are two explicit references to *prajñāpāramitā*.⁵¹ In this way, the carvings of ‘Buddha Guanshiyin’ are connected to the general doctrinal themes that connect all inscription sites, *prajñāpāramitā* and the ‘Buddha King of Emptiness’.

The independence of the *prajñāpāramitā* 般若波羅蜜 carvings and the possibility that they were evoked like Buddha-names may provide an answer for why the inscriptions were carved in the first place. Part of them, at least, may have been considered to be endowed with an almost magical quality and functioned like spells. Inscription HDS 6 on Mount Hongding⁵² quotes from the *Perfection of Wisdom for Humane Kings* (*Foshuo Renwang boreboluomi jing* 佛說仁王般若波羅蜜經; T no. 245, 8: 832c23–26), an apocryphal scripture probably compiled in China during the 470s. The quoted text section invokes *prajñāpāramitā* and likens it to a series of talismanic objects:

The Buddha told King Prasenajit: This Perfection of Wisdom is the spiritual root of the consciousness of all Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and all beings. It is the father and mother of all kings. It is also named the Spiritual Talisman, the Demon-Exorcising Pearl, the Wish-Fulfilling Pearl, the State-Protecting Pearl, the Mirror of Heaven and Earth, and the Dragon-Jewel Spirit King.⁵³

While this enumeration of talismans has a Daoist flavor, another passage carved on Mount Sili (Sili 3)⁵⁴ praises the Perfection of Wisdom in a more familiar Mahāyāna manner. Here, *prajñāpāramitā* is named the Great Illuminating Spell, the Unsurpassed Spell, and the

kan’, 22; Kuramoto, ‘Hokuchō zōzōmei kenkyū’, 228, 232; Kuramoto, *Hokuchō bukkō zōzōmei kenkyū*, 460, 467–68.

⁵¹ Wang and Tsai, *Shandong Volume 3*, 477.

⁵² Wang and Ledderose, *Shandong Volume 1*, 89–90, 131–35.

⁵³ Translation by Orzech, *Politics and Transcendent Wisdom*, 85.

⁵⁴ Wang and Ledderose, *Shandong Volume 1*, 403–5.

Unequalled Spell, which caused in the past, causes in the present, and will cause in the future all Buddhas to attain supreme enlightenment. The inscribed text of Sili 3 is a modified quotation taken from the *Shorter Version of the Great Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra* (*Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā*, *Xiaopin bore boluomi jing* 小品般若波羅蜜經, *T* no. 227, 8: 543b25–c5). The original quotation was shortened in order to adjust it to the space available on the rock. However, the reconstruction of the text that was actually carved has to remain an approximation, because later carvings of sculptures damaged the lower part of the original inscription.⁵⁵

Two of the most frequently carved passages were drawn from the same *sūtra*, the *Sūtra on the Great Perfection of Wisdom Spoken by Mañjuśrī* (*Wenshshili suoshuo mohe boreboluomi jing* 文殊師利所說摩訶般若波羅蜜經) in *Mandra[sena]’s translation (*T* no. 232). The two passages were carved repeatedly on the Northern Qi territory. The first passage of fifty-two characters was carved two times, on Mount Hongding (HDS 1),⁵⁶ where it is preceded by the authorizing words ‘the Buddha said’ 佛言, and on Mount Shuiniu (SNS 1).⁵⁷ The same passage was perhaps also part of a longer text carved on the lintel over caves four and five at Southern Mount Xiangtang.⁵⁸ The fifty-two-character text answers two questions asked by Śāriputra: ‘What is named “Buddha”? And how does one contemplate the “Buddha”? 云何名佛? 云何觀佛? Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī elaborates: ‘Not produced, not extinguished, not come, not gone; not a name, not a mark—this is called “Buddha”. In the same way one contemplates the real marks of one’s own body, just so one contemplates the “Buddha”. Only those with wisdom can understand this. This is called “Buddha contemplation”’.

The selection of this fifty-two-character passage is most remarkable due to its definition of Buddha contemplation, which

⁵⁵ Reconstruction after Takuma, ‘Beichao moya kejing’, 205.

⁵⁶ Wang and Ledderose, *Shandong Volume 1*, 87–88, 97–101.

⁵⁷ Wang and Tsai, *Shandong Volume 3*, 417–19, 424–30.

⁵⁸ Ma, ‘Handan Beichao moya’, 51, writes that the characters are severely eroded, but he still counts more than eighty characters in total.

is said to be practiced ‘in the same way as one contemplates the real marks of one’s own body’ 如自觀身實相觀佛亦然. This formulation is not unique to the *Sūtra on the Great Perfection of Wisdom Spoken by Mañjuśrī*; it is also found in the twelfth ‘Chapter on the Vision of Akṣobhya Buddha’ 見阿閼佛品 (‘Jian Achuo pin’) in the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa-sūtra* (*Weimojie suosho jing* 維摩詰所說經; T no. 475, 14: 554c29–555a1). All Chinese editions of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa-sūtra* contain this phrase, while it is missing from the extant Sanskrit manuscript of this *sūtra*.⁵⁹ This phrase, which indicates a particular type of contemplation, seems to have been important to the donors of the Shandong inscriptions. The passage from the *Chapter on the Vision of Akṣobhya Buddha* that contains this phrase was carved two more times in Shandong, once on the boulder on Mount Ge, and a second time on a stele of which only rubbings survived.⁶⁰ In this way, three inscription sites, Mount Hongding, Mount Shuiniu, and Mount Ge (and one stele), are interlinked by the phrase: ‘in the same way as one contemplates the real marks of one’s own body, just so one contemplates the “Buddha”’ 如自觀身實相, 觀佛亦然.

The second passage taken from the *Sūtra on the Great Perfection of Wisdom Spoken by Mañjuśrī* comprises ninety-eight characters (T no. 232, 8: 731a15–21). It was carved on cliffs at six different inscription sites, eight times in total. That means that two sites, Mount Hongding and Mount Yi, present this passage twice. In addition, the ninety-eight-character passage was also carved on an as yet unknown number of stone steles. Three ninety-eight-character carvings were provided with a short *sūtra* title in four characters, reading *Wenshu bore* 文殊般若, *Mañjuśrī Prajñā* or *Mañjuśrī’s Wisdom* (Figure 7).

⁵⁹ Wang and Tsai, *Shandong Volume 3*, 418, note 883.

⁶⁰ The *Stele of the Great Qi Dynasty about Juan Xiuluo Recommended as Filial and Righteous by the Community Elders* (*Da Qi xianglao ju xiaoyi juan xiuluo zhi bei* 大齊鄉老舉孝義雋修羅之碑) is dated January 21, 561. The stele is lost, but was originally located in Tianming Monastery 天明寺, Sishui County 泗水縣. Rubbings are kept in Beijing tushuguan jinshizu, *Beijing tushuguan cang taben*, 7: 103–4.



FIG. 7 Rubbing of the title of the lost ninety-eight-character passage originally carved on Mount Jian, reading *Wenshu bore* 文殊般若, *Mañjuśrī Prajñā* or *Mañjuśrī's Wisdom*. H. 175 cm x W. 228 cm. Collection of the Shandong Museum 山東博物館 in Ji'nan. Photograph taken in 2005 by Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities.

This abbreviated title is also used in Buddhist catalogs for the full title, *Great Perfection of Wisdom Spoken by Mañjuśrī*. On the Summit of Five Flowers 五華峰 on Mount Yi 嶧山 (Yi 1),⁶¹ the abbreviated title was simply added in front of the carved text. Yet on Mount Jian, the four characters of the title were written in a much larger size than the *sūtra* text, which is located about seven metres below the title. The abbreviated title also appears on the undated Mount Shuiniu 水牛山 stele (SNS 2).⁶²

The ninety-eight-character passage is about how *prajñāpāramitā* should be practiced by the aspiring bodhisattva. Mañjuśrī inquires of the Buddha what *prajñāpāramitā* is, and the Buddha answers with an enumeration of negations that first define what *prajñāpāramitā* is not. *Prajñāpāramitā* is then equated with the site of bodhisattva-mahāsattva practice, which is neither a site of practice nor a site of non-practice, because ‘it is unthought and unconditioned’ 無念無作.

⁶¹ Wang and Wenzel, *Shandong Volume 2*, 60, 63–68.

⁶² Wang and Tsai, *Shandong Volume 3*, 419–22, 431–41.

Prajñāpāramitā as the foremost bodhisattva practice is the central doctrine of the cliff carvings. The carefully arranged four characters on the Mount Shuiniu stele head or atop the Mount Jian *sūtra* passage are much more than a simplified *sūtra* title; *Mañjuśrī Prajñā* 文殊般若 rather emblemizes the teachings of the *moya* cliff carvings as a whole. The patrons of the carving projects were equally obsessed with the ninety-eight-character passage, which they presented in various layouts, but always in identical wording. They arranged the ninety-eight characters either in portrait or in landscape format. In portrait format—represented by inscriptions HDS 22 (Figure 8), Yi 3 (Figures 3 and 4), and JS 6 (Figure 9)—each of the seven vertical columns comprise fourteen characters. The landscape format either arranges fourteen columns with seven characters (CLS 1; Figure 2), or ten columns with ten characters, which provides an even more unified look.⁶³ However, the latter layout, represented by inscriptions HDS 16.2 and Yi 1, leaves two blank spaces in the last column, which thus contains only eight characters.

With a small trick, the patrons further individualized those inscriptions which share the same layout, like HDS 16.2 and Yi 1 (in landscape format), and HDS 22, Yi 3, and JS 6 (in portrait format): They alternated between the complex form of the character *wu* 無 (Figure 8 and Figure 9) and its simplified form 无 (Figure 3). The otherwise identical inscriptions JS 6 (Figure 9) and HDS 22 (Figure 8) are further differentiated by providing HDS 22 with double grid lines between the characters.

In sum, the so-called ninety-eight-character passage provides strong evidence for the cohesiveness between all Shandong sites. As there is absolutely no variation in the wording, all carvings may have been based on the same prototype or even manuscript.

The same passage is also found among stone carvings outside of Shandong. On Southern Mount Xiangtang it was combined with

⁶³ The first recognition of this vertical and horizontal type of composition of the ninety-eight-character passage is credited to Lu and Lu, ‘Eastern Shaiqu Nunnery’, 280–83. However, the authors did not see these carvings as a network of inscription, but as calligraphy samples by Seng’an Daoyi.



FIG. 8 Rubbing of the ninety-eight-character passage on the southern slope on Mount Hongding (HDS 22). H. 389 cm x W. 250 cm. Collection of the former Shandong Stone Carving Art Museum 山東省石刻藝術博物館 in Ji'nan. Photograph taken in 2008 by Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities.



FIG. 9 Reconstruction of the lost ninety-eight-character passage originally carved on Mount Jian (JS 6), combining thirty-six sheets of rubbings in the collection of the Shandong Museum in Ji'nan and twenty-seven sheets of rubbings as published in Wang & A, *Si Shan moya kejing*, 3–11. H. 685 cm x W. 340 cm.

a short quote taken from the *Chapter on Bodhisattva Ocean-like Wisdom* of the *Great Sūtra Collection* (*T* no. 397, 13: 50b19–21), a quote also carved at Mount Tie (Tie 1). The quote enumerates the Four Immeasurable States of Mind (*si wuliangxin* 四無量心; *catvāri apramāṇāni*), namely Loving Kindness (*ci* 慈), Compassion (*bei* 悲), Joy (*xi* 喜) and Relinquishment (*she* 捨).

An expansion of the ninety-eight characters to a passage of 297 characters (*T* no. 232, 8: 731a1–21) was carved on the Mount Shuiniu stele, which originally stood on Mount Shuiniu,⁶⁴ and is now kept in the Wenshang County 汶上縣 museum.⁶⁵ The final section of the stele text features the ninety-eight-character passage. It is preceded by a passage that offers some context on soteriological aims: When Mañjuśrī wonders how to study the unfathomable *prajñāpāramitā*, the Buddha ensures him that his study of *prajñāpāramitā* is well under way, because he was able to pose the question about its study in the first place. What he needs to do now is to perfect the Samādhi of *Bodhi* Sovereignty 菩提自在三昧. This kind of *samādhi* will make him illuminate all the exceedingly deep Buddha *dharmas*, and know all Buddha-names without exception, and it will enable him to fathom thoroughly all Buddha worlds (i.e., will fully awaken him).⁶⁶ A votive inscription (SNS 3),⁶⁷ carved on both narrow sides of the Mount Shuiniu stele, names the donors responsible for carving this promising outlook. Nearly all donors belong either to a Yang 羊 or a Shu 束 family. The names of five members of this Yang family are still legible. Yang Zhong 羊鍾 ranks highest among them, and he is one of three individuals styled ‘*sūtra* donor’ 經主. He must have been a leading figure in carving the stele.⁶⁸ As Yang Zhong is said to be from Mount Tai 太山羊鍾, he may have

⁶⁴ Wang and Tsai, *Shandong Volume 3*, 419–22, 431–41.

⁶⁵ Lai, ‘Chuban shuoming’, 33. Lai, ‘Shandong Beichao Fojiao moya kejing’, 167–69.

⁶⁶ ‘得是三昧已，照明一切甚/7/ 深佛法，及知一切諸佛名字，亦悉了達諸佛世界’.

⁶⁷ Wang and Tsai, *Shandong Volume 3*, 422, 442–47.

⁶⁸ Wang and Tsai, *Shandong Volume 3*, 422.

been related to the famous General Yang Lie 羊烈 (513–586), who is mentioned in the *History of the Northern Qi Dynasty* (*Beiqi shu* 北齊書) as Governor of Yangping 陽平 during the years 558–561. Yangping is the region where Mount Shuiniu is located. The votive inscription also names more than eleven clerics who were involved in carving the stele. The clerics are affiliated with five different monasteries, but most of them came from the former Baishi Monastery 白石寺 near Baishi Village, which lies at a distance of about three kilometres from Mount Shuiniu.⁶⁹

At the Node of the Network: Yanzhou

The final piece in the puzzle is the city of Yanzhou 兗州. In 1994, numerous steles and stele fragments were unearthed at the Jinkou embankment 金口壩, among them an as yet unknown number of steles featuring the ninety-eight-character passage.⁷⁰ Part of these steles are now on display in the local museum. They can be reconstructed into inscriptions which follow the landscape format of ten columns with ten characters, or the portrait format of seven columns with fourteen characters.⁷¹ The material has not yet been properly published, but I have counted the fragments of at least nine such steles.

One limestone fragment of an image base was unearthed close to the Jinkou embankment stele fragments, in the southeastern quarter of modern Yanzhou on the banks of River Si 泗河 at Zhutiansi Village 諸天寺村. The fragment carries a votive inscription, which reveals that the stone was originally the base of an Amitābha triad, which has not survived. The image was donated in 564 by members of a Buddhist association 邑義人 led by Buddhist nuns and laywomen of the nunnery inside Eastern Shaiqiu 沙丘東城尼寺.⁷² This nunnery

⁶⁹ Wang and Tsai, *Shandong Volume 3*, 412–13.

⁷⁰ Lai, 'Beichao kejing de qiyuan', 13. Lai, *Shandong Beichao Fojiao moyu kejing diaocha*, 165–67. Shandong shike yishu bowuguan, *Shandong Fojiao kejing quanji*, vol. 1: 67–72.

⁷¹ Lu and Lu, 'Eastern Shaiqiu Nunnery', 281.

⁷² For transcription and English translation of the *Eastern Shaiqiu Nunnery*

was allegedly founded by the powerful Yang clan of Mount Tai in Yanzhou,⁷³ whom we already met as donors of the Mount Shuiniu stele. A passage in the biography of the above-mentioned Yang Lie in the *History of the Northern Qi Dynasty* describes the Yang clan's commitment to sending widows, childless and unmarried women to a nunnery the family founded during the *taihe* 泰和 era of the Northern Wei 北魏 dynasty (477–499) at the end of the fifth century.⁷⁴

The Eastern Shaqiu Nunnery in Yanzhou may have been the center of all carving activities in Shandong. It is located conveniently at the center of the inscription sites, and it was founded by the Yang clan of Mount Tai 太山羊, who donated the Mount Shuiniu stele text featuring the soteriological context of the ninety-eight-character passage. This passage, the most crucial text of all carving activities, was carved on steles erected inside the nunnery, but also spread to cliffs on the Shandong hills each time a new carving project was sponsored. It is important that this passage does not exhibit any text variation whatsoever, as if it were repeatedly copied from the same manuscript. Therefore, the ninety-eight-character passage is strong evidence for the claim that the cliff inscriptions and *sūtra* passages carved on steles under the Northern Qi and Northern Zhou dynasties formed a network of sacred sites which connected to a regional sacred geography. This sacred geography reaches from

Sculpture Inscription (Shaqiu Dongcheng nisi xiang ji 沙丘東城尼寺像記), see Lu and Lu, 'Eastern Shaqiu Nunnery', 272.

⁷³ Fan, 'Yanzhou faxian Bei Qi zaoxiangji'; Lai, *Shandong Beichao Fojiao moya kejing diaocha*, 202–3; Liu, *Tai Shan*, 160; and Lu and Lu, 'Eastern Shaqiu Nunnery', 276.

⁷⁴ *Beiqishu*, juan 43: 576: 'The family of [General Yang] Lie transmitted a vocation of embellishment of the inner chambers, which was praised in the world: Their female members did not remarry. During the *taihe* era (477–499) of the [Northern] Wei dynasty (386–534), [the family] founded a nunnery in Yanzhou, where the widows lived. Childless women [also] renounced secular life and became nuns. In their comportment, they all preserved the precepts'. 烈家傳素業，閨門修飾，為世所稱，一門女不再醮。魏太和中，於兗州造一尼寺女寡居。無子者並出家為尼，咸存戒行。 Translation by the author.

Mount Xiangtang, close to the capital Ye, to the large Mount Tai region in the west, and to today's Tengzhou City 滕州市 in the south. The repeated imprinting of the same text passage on the living rock, although arranged in individualized layouts, suggests a high degree of organization, and a well-considered strategy for the establishment of this regional sacred geography.

People Behind the Network

Finally, this leads us to the question of to what degree the composition of inscription sites was orchestrated, and which person or group of persons were responsible for their configuration. The 'great *śramaṇa* Seng'an Daoyi', a man totally unknown and unmentioned in historical sources, was pushed to the fore, to the point of being held personally responsible for the execution of almost all inscription sites within this regional network. However, only three sites provide hard evidence for his presence: Mount Hongding, Mount Jian, and Mount Tie. The earlier sites, Mount Hongding and Mount Jian, clearly indicate Seng'an's doctrinal preferences, the veneration of the 'Buddha King of Great Emptiness', an elucidation of the six *pāramitā* practices of a bodhisattva, and a focus on two passages drawn from the *Sūtra on the Great Perfection of Wisdom Spoken by Mañjuśrī*, one in fifty-two and one in ninety-eight characters. The ninety-eight-character passage exalts *prajñāpāramitā*, while the fifty-two-character passage recommends contemplating the Buddha as one contemplates one's own body.

On Mount Jian, where Seng'an was supported by the local Wei clan, we see the very core of his doctrinal program: Veneration of the 'Buddha King of Great Emptiness' is at the center, preceded by the ninety-eight-character passage on *Mañjuśrī's Prajñā*, followed by an explanation of the six perfections of the bodhisattva, here taken from the *Sūtra of the Questions of Viśeṣacintibrahma*. We may well assume that the doctrinal program of Mount Jian was selected by Seng'an alone, not only because he proudly left his name above the carvings, but also because his name is mentioned in the colophon JS 11 in connection with the ritual of conceiving an aspiration for *bodhi*, which implies that the two donors, Wei Qinzhi and Wei Fu'er, took

a vow in the presence of Seng'an.⁷⁵ The planning and execution of the giant stele on Mount Tie was accomplished by a large team, and Seng'an's role seems to have differed from his role in the construction of Mount Jian. Although he is praised beyond compare for his spiritual achievements and his calligraphy, which go hand in hand, the text passage carved at Mount Tie seems to have been selected by the local Buddhist association which was led by the wealthy Kuang brothers. This group then invited the famous monk Seng'an Daoyi, and 'requested that this Divine Brush ... inscribe with veneration the 930 characters of the Piercing the *Bodhi* Chapter of the *Great Sūtra Collection*' 乃請神豪於四顯之中, 敬寫大集經穿菩提品九百卅字.⁷⁶

There is no doubt that Seng'an Daoyi's calligraphy was held in high esteem during this time, and the Buddhist teachings he adhered to and preached fell on fertile ground. By implication, this means that his ideas were spread among his followers, that his calligraphy was copied by his admirers, and thus probably taken to places where he himself has not necessarily visited. The Summit of the Five Flowers on Mount Yi in Zoucheng provides an interesting example for this alleged multiplication of ideas and carvings. The ninety-eight-character passage on this summit (Yi 1) constitutes the earliest *moya* cliff inscription in the region of Zoucheng, as the colophon next to it (Yi 2) is dated to the year 564. However, Seng'an does not appear in the list of donors. Instead, the colophon mentions a *śramaṇa* Sengwan 僧万, as well as eight lay-donors, among them a person by the name of Lü Jiufei 呂九斐 from Dongping 東平. As we have seen, the layout of the inscription at the Summit of the Five Flowers is identical to that on the northern slope of Mount Hongding (HDS 16.2), located in Dongping. Thus, it is likely that donor Lü Jiufei knew about the Mount Hongding carvings in his home district, and that he introduced the idea and the blueprint for the carving of this key passage to Mount Yi. In this way, Mount Hongding may have inspired the carving on Mount Yi, which was then executed by a different group.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Wang and Tsai, *Shandong Volume 3*, 41.

⁷⁶ Wang and Tsai, *Shandong Volume 3*, 161, 164.

Several years later, between 570 and 572, a second ninety-eight-character passage was carved at the Cave of the Bewitching Fairy 妖精洞 (Yi 3) further down the mountain (Figures 3 and 4),⁷⁸ adopting the format of the second ninety-eight-character passage on Mount Hongding (HDS 22; Figure 8). Again, the donor was not Seng'an, but Dong Zhentuo 董玠陁, who calls himself 'Household Retainer of the Grand Guardian Hulü' 斛律太保家客. The Grand Guardian Hulü probably refers to Hulü Wudu 斛律武都 (?–572), the son of Hulü Guang 斛律光 (515–572).⁷⁹ Donors like Dong Zhentuo may have been in the possession of paper calligraphies by Seng'an, which were then transferred to the cliffs by carvers when a new donation was made. Alternatively, they may have ordered the writing of the *sūtra* passage, which was then executed in the style of the master calligrapher.

Social contacts like those maintained by the layman Lü Jiufei with his home district, or those fostered by Xu Faxian, the wife of Wei Zishen, to ladies closer to the imperial court than herself—including Lady Zhao, the wife of the powerful Tang Yong—were instrumental in the spread of particular teachings, as well as in the dissemination of a celebrated style of calligraphy. They paint a more diverse picture of the network of stone *sūtras* than those theories which ascribe the emergence and the fate of this network to the destiny of a single man.

In sum, the Shandong cliff inscriptions present a regional network of sacred sites initially launched by the otherwise unknown monk Seng'an Daoyi. Seng'an Daoyi secured the support of at least two powerful local families in the region of Zoucheng, the Wei and the Kuang families, and won fame for his celebrated calligraphy. However, he is not to be credited with the invention of cliff inscriptions *per se*. Rather, the eminent monk Sengchou, when he oversaw his own carving project at Xiaonanhai, understood the signs of the times and emphasized the need to carve Buddhist texts in stone.

Thanks to the Shandong carvings with Seng'an Daoyi's signature, and to the eulogies written in stone for Master An,⁸⁰ we have an idea

⁷⁷ Wang and Wenzel, *Shandong Volume 2*, 55.

⁷⁸ Wang and Wenzel, *Shandong Volume 2*, 60, 75–83.

⁷⁹ Wang and Wenzel, *Shandong Volume 2*, 55–57.

of the Buddhist doctrines he valued. These doctrines are heavily indebted to *prajñāpāramitā* thought, and bodhisattva practice. As a result of his local success, Seng'an's most favored texts and his calligraphy were copied and spread along a social network with strong connections to the uppermost classes of society. Yanzhou may have been the hub of activities from where the network of inscription sites was expanded. In Eastern Shaqiu Nunnery, female members of the upper classes cultivated Buddhist doctrines that were similar to the content of the texts carved on cliffs. The wording of the *Eastern Shaqiu Nunnery Sculpture Inscription* resounds with phrases (六度, 三空, 一道一原) also found on the southern cliff at Mount Hongding in the *Encomium to Fahong* (HDS18),⁸¹ and on Mount Tie in the *sūtra* passage (Tie 1) as well as the accompanying *Stone Hymn* (Tie 2).⁸² Although the possibility that this votive inscription was written by the hands of Seng'an Daoyi himself and thus presents a small-scale example of his calligraphy cannot be ruled out,⁸³ it is more important to note the doctrinal connections between the Eastern Shaqiu Nunnery votive inscription and the *moya* cliff carvings, as well as the fact that numerous steles with the ninety-eight-character passage were unearthed at the same site.

The Shandong inscription sites are connected by obvious doctrinal similarities, and passages selected from the *sūtra* abbreviated as *Mañjuśrī's Prajñā*, as well as the name of the omnipresent 'Buddha King of Great Emptiness', were circulated as far as the imperial cave temples of Mount Xiangtang. Carvings in the calligraphy of Seng'an are

⁸⁰ Apart from the *Stone Hymn* on Mount Tie which praises his accomplishments, an inscription entitled *Stele of Sire Serenity* 安公之碑 was carved on Mount Hongding (HDS 15), see Wang and Ledderose, *Shandong Volume 1*, 42, 74, 92, 243–49.

⁸¹ Wang and Ledderose, *Shandong Volume 1*, 93, 267–73.

⁸² Lu and Lu, 'Eastern Shaqiu Nunnery', 273–75.

⁸³ Not even Lu and Lu, 'Eastern Shaqiu Nunnery', dare to identify the inscription beyond doubt as the calligraphy of Seng'an Daoyi. Despite their careful stylistic analysis, they have to admit that it might as well have been written in the style of Seng'an by an admirer.

also found at Mount Xiangtang, yet none are signed and they appear rather modestly on remaining wall surfaces next to much larger donations, like the grand *sūtra* carving project conducted by Tang Yong.

Discontinuation of the Carvings and Rise of Mañjuśrī Veneration

The *moya* cliff carvings of the Northern Qi and Northern Zhou dynasties constitute a network of sacred sites which form a sacred geography, at least on a regional level. Initiatives like the cave-chapel by Sengchou or the carving project by Tang Yong were taken up by local figures like Seng'an and his followers, and then multiplied and spread across an ever-expanding region. Furthermore, the network of cliff carvings should be considered an indigenous Chinese phenomenon, which evolved from three non-Buddhist precedents; namely the inscriptions of the First Chinese Emperor, the Confucian stone classics, and Daoist inscriptions on polished cliffs.⁸⁴ The carvings from the second half of the sixth century thus constitute an indigenous form of a regional sacred geography, something not previously encountered in Buddhism.⁸⁵

Why, then, was all carving activity discontinued at the end of the Northern Zhou, and why did many inscription sites fall into oblivion during the centuries that followed? Birnbaum suggested that the answer to this question can be found in the nature of the carvings themselves: They are words—not images—of the Buddha, which implies that they cannot fulfill certain soteriological needs that otherwise may have qualified them for continuation.⁸⁶ There is some truth to this observation. At many inscription sites, also those outside of Shandong and of later date, texts carved inside and outside of caves

⁸⁴ Ledderose, 'Buddhist Stone Sutras in Shandong', 37–39.

⁸⁵ Robson, 'Buddhist Sacred Geography', 1357, suggested that in the Six Dynasties (222–589) 'a well-organized Chinese Buddhist sacred geography did not exist', and that 'Chinese Buddhists did not develop a uniquely indigenous form of sacred geography or establish sacred sites on uncharted terrain'.

⁸⁶ Birnbaum, 'Highland Inscriptions', 270.

were often damaged and replaced by images, as though donors were more interested in Buddhist imagery than the written words of the Buddha's teaching. However, this is only half the truth.

In his book, *Building a Sacred Mountain: The Buddhist Architecture of China's Mount Wutai*, Lin Wei-cheng analyses the distribution of stone carvings, which he groups into stone images and carved texts. On the territory of the Northern Qi, he identifies four regions in total, which are linked to three types of carvings. The largest region in the northern periphery is characterized by carvings of images only. Both *sūtra* texts and images were carved in the central region around the capital Ye. In two different regions in the periphery only stone *sūtras* were carved; the first of these contains the *sūtras* carved on Mount Zhonghuang in She County in Hebei, and the second comprises all Shandong *moya* inscription sites. Lin explains that the spread of devotional images and *sūtra* texts were motivated by eschatological concerns about the decline of the Dharma. He then examines the establishment of Five Terrace Mountain (Mount Wutai) as the most important Buddhist pilgrimage center, a process which is said to have begun also under the Northern Qi.⁸⁷ The identification of Mount Wutai as the abode of Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī was essential to establish the cult surrounding this most sacred of all Chinese Buddhist mountains. Lin argues that regional circumstances played a seminal role in the making of a formerly unknown mountain into the sacred locus of a new divinity. The stone *sūtras* carved under the Northern Qi dynasty must have driven this process, as Mañjuśrī figures prominently among them.

Mañjuśrī plays a seminal part in the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*, which contains the prophecy that the bodhisattva resides on Mountain Clear and Cool 清涼山, a name that happens to be another designation for Mount Wutai.⁸⁸ The *Avataṃsaka-sūtra's Treatise on the Ten*

⁸⁷ Lin, *Building a Sacred Mountain*, 63–64.

⁸⁸ T no. 278, 9: 590a3–5, in Buddhahadra's (359–429) translation of the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*, albeit the passage is generally considered a later interpolation: '東北方有菩薩住處, 名清涼山, 過去諸菩薩常於中住; 彼現有菩薩, 名文殊師利, 有一萬菩薩眷屬, 常為說法'.

Stages (*Shidi lun* 十地論) outlines the ten *bhumis* which a bodhisattva must master on his way to Buddhahood. Here, Mañjuśrī is introduced as a very advanced bodhisattva of the tenth *bhumi*. Notably, the *Shidi lun* was engraved on Mount Zhonghuang in She County. Mañjuśrī is also the dominant figure in the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa-sūtra*, which Tang Yong carved on Northern Mount Xiangtang. Moreover, as I demonstrated, the Shandong *moya* cliff inscriptions provide overwhelming evidence for Mañjuśrī veneration.⁸⁹ Considering Mount Wutai's position to the north of the sacred Northern Qi geography, it is clear that Mount Wutai was associated with Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī. Already in pre-Tang times, pilgrims travelled to Mount Wutai in hopes of gaining a vision of the great bodhisattva. Later, from the second half of the seventh century onward, foreign monks also made pilgrimages to Mount Wutai in the hope of a personal encounter with Mañjuśrī.

There is an obvious connection between the *moya* inscriptions and the cult of Mañjuśrī. However, I suggest that the Shandong sites made an even larger contribution to the rise of Mount Wutai as a pilgrim destination. The key site in this contribution is Mount Gang, which differs from all other sites with stone inscriptions. As we have seen, most sites belong to the cluster type and feature groups of inscriptions distributed over cliffs; the largest inscriptions are located on huge walk-over surfaces and imitate the form of a stele; and, finally, *sūtras* were usually carved inside and outside of caves, either as pure text or in combination with images. The inscriptions on Mount Gang do not fit into any of these categories.

On Mount Gang, a *sūtra* passage of 188 characters is broken down in segments of varying length, and distributed along a pilgrim path leading uphill. Visitors can read just a few characters of the *sūtra* at a time, before they have to move on to the next text segment located further up the mountain. The path begins at the foot of the mountain, and ends on the mountain's plateau, where the visitor can enjoy a view of the surrounding landscape. The chosen text passage is actually engraved twice: Once along a short route (A) of only five

⁸⁹ Lin, *Building a Sacred Mountain*, 60–87.

text segments, and a second time along a much longer route (B) of at least thirty-one segments, some of which were lost over the centuries. It is assumed that the shorter route A was created first, and the longer route B later. In accordance with the natural topography of this mountain, the text segments of route B were carved on steep cliffs in the lower region of Mount Gang, in the middle region on a waterfall of medium-sized or small stones, and on the more level western plateau they are carved on free-standing large boulders atop the mountain.

When climbing the mountain, the visitor not only follows the text segments, but passes stones on which Buddha-names are carved, and halfway up the mountain he encounters Chicken Beak Rock 雞嘴石, on which a different text passage is found. The opening passage of the *Sūtra Spoken by the Buddha on the Contemplation of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life* (*Foshuo guan Wuliangshou Fo jing* 佛說觀無量壽佛經; *T* no. 365, 12: 340c29–341a10) is carved on two sides of this imposing bolder. This passage tells the story of King Bimbisāra, who was imprisoned by his unfilial son, Ajātaśatru. Thanks to Queen Vaidehī's unwavering loyalty and faith, the king was able to survive until he took refuge in the Buddha and accepted the Eight Precepts. At this point, the carved passage ends. We can assume that lay people climbing Mount Gang were encouraged to accept bodhisattva precepts at this point of their journey.⁹⁰ The original intention for starting out on this journey is revealed by the contents of the text segmented along the pilgrim's path: It is the beginning of the introduction to *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* (*Ru Lengqie jing* 入楞伽經) in Bodhiruci's translation (*T* no. 671, 16: 514c7–18). Compared to the introduction of the earlier translation by Guṇabhadra (Qiu nabatuoluo 求那跋陀羅; 394–468),⁹¹ Bodhiruci's introduction is more detailed and elaborate. It names the place where the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* was preached—by the shore of the southern ocean on the peak of Mount Laṅkā—as well as the members of the assembly—the great *bhikṣu-saṅgha*, and a great multitude of bodhisattvas—and

⁹⁰ Wang and Wenzel, *Shandong Volume 2*, 254.

⁹¹ Located at *T* no. 670, 16: 479a–514b.

it embarks on a lyrical description of a landscape populated by ‘transcendents, worthies and saints of old’, who ‘pondered the true Dharma’ in ‘numinous abodes, innumerable grottoes and caves formed of masses of gems’. This lyrical description adds a strong Chinese flavor to Bodhiruci’s introduction, and because it is not found in Guṇabhadra’s earlier translation, nor in Śikṣānanda’s later revision (*T* no. 672), it is suspected to be an interpolation. Bodhiruci’s text is best characterized as a presentation of an idealized, paradisiacal landscape with flower gardens, fragrant trees, light breezes and wondrous tones, where the Buddha preaches to an assembly of saintly beings. The text segmented in its lower and middle part of the longer pilgrim’s path describes the features of this paradisiacal landscape (Figure 10), echoing the Chinese translations of Pure Land texts, such as the longer and shorter *Sukhāvatīvyūha-sūtras*. When the pilgrim finally reaches the upper plateau, the text arrives at the description of the members of the assembly, the ‘great *bhikṣu-saṅgha*, and the great multitude of bodhisattvas, all of whom had arrived together from the various kinds of Buddhahands in the other quarters [of the cosmos], and gathered into an assembly’. Before the carved text ends, it praises the achievements of the *bodhisattva-mahāsattvas*, who ‘are completely endowed with incalculable *samādhis* of mastery [providing them with] supernatural power with which they swiftly go around converting’. On top of the plateau of Mount Gang (Figure 11), the pilgrim thus finds himself among the assembly to whom the Buddha preaches, and he is ensured that countless bodhisattvas are at work to usher him along his own ardent way to awakening.⁹²

In this way, Mount Gang, the youngest of all Shandong inscription sites, introduces the possibility of pilgrimage whereby the pilgrim who ascends Mount Gang up to its peak is rewarded by the presence of bodhisattvas of numerous Buddha-lands. Endowed with supernatural powers as a result of their mastery of *samādhi*, and eager to convert and liberate beings, these bodhisattvas are manifest in front of the pilgrim. The pilgrim himself is well prepared: While

⁹² For a complete transcription and translation of the text passage carved at Mount Gang, see Wang and Wenzel, *Shandong Volume 2*, 289–91.



FIG. 10 Rubbing of the carved text segment numbered B8 of the beginning of the introduction to the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* 入楞伽經 in Bodhiruci's translation (*T* no. 671, 16: 514c7–18) on Mount Gang. Height 231 cm, width 291 cm. The segment reads: 'Further, there are countless flower gardens and fragrant trees, veritable gems in fragrant groves, where light breezes blow, rustling the branches and moving the leaves. Hundreds and thousands of wondrous...' Collection of the former Shandong Stone Carving Art Museum 山東省石刻藝術博物館 in Ji'nan. Photograph taken in 2005 by Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities.

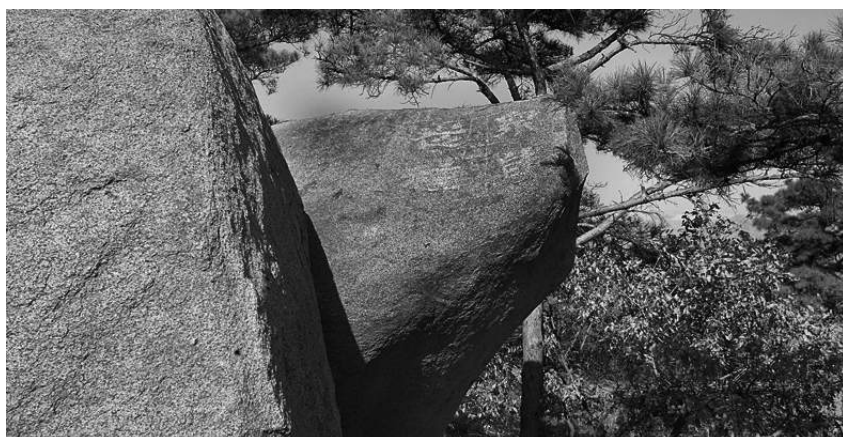


FIG. 11 Text segment numbered B 26, reading 'a multitude [of bodhisattvas] all of whom, from the various...', carved on a boulder of the western plateau on Mount Gang. Photograph taken in 2005 by Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities.

climbing the mountain, he reads the text segments and visualizes the gems, fragrant groves, wondrous fragrances and tones, spread throughout the layered cliffs that twist and turn, where immortals, worthies and saints of old have pondered the true Dharma. Following the model of King Bimbisāra, he himself may have taken or renewed the bodhisattva precepts at Chicken Beak Rock. When he finally reaches the top of the mountain, his visualizations and vows will have produced a state of mind in which he awaits his personal encounter with one of the bodhisattvas who ‘go around converting’ 遊化.

The pilgrim path on Mount Gang is a ground-breaking innovation that determined the fate of the *moya* cliff inscriptions. It paved the way for a new conception of mountains as sites where one could encounter saintly figures like Mañjuśrī. The network of sacred topographies formed by the Shandong cliff inscriptions was eventually superseded by the new pilgrim center on Mount Wutai, which grew into an international destination. The mystical residence of bodhisattva Mañjuśrī thus gradually overshadowed the earlier dedications to *Mañjuśrī’s Prajñā* which fostered Mount Wutai’s success.

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Abbreviations

- SSX* *Shike shiliao xinbian* 石刻史料新編. See Bibliography, Secondary Sources, Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi bianjibu.
- T* *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經. See Bibliography, Secondary Sources, Takakusu and Watanabe, eds.

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