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DONGSHAN ZHANG

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

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In so doing, the seeds of goodness that you have planted in me can grow into many fruits of goodness in the future.

ABSTRACT

To study the religious sculpted-image stelae of China between the 490s and the 550s, I begin by revisiting the previous studies of Chinese stele, covering the scholarship from the Northern Song Dynasty to the twenty-first century, and dedicated the entire first chapter to the writing of a new historiography—the history of the study of sculpted-image stele as Chinese stele. With this historiography, I propose a new framework of interpretation based on the notion of stele-image duality: the making of merit. The remaining chapters continue to reveal the long-ignored ritual connection between Chinese stele and Buddhist icons—that they have both been employed to facilitate merit-making rituals in Chinese history.

The second chapter shows that in the studies of Northern Dynasties sculpted-image stele, the stele by itself should be considered the product of a ritual process during which the Buddhist icons could be properly installed, and a stele as such eventually turns into a tableau of merit producing and transferring. The third chapter shows how certain image makers of the Northern Dynasties relied upon the format of stele to meet their ancestral offering needs. It examines a group of stele made during the Eastern Wei period, which demonstrate strong formal and ritual elements of Buddhist sculpted-image stelae as well as clear features of funerary stelae. These materials present different manners of interaction between the coexisting funerary pictorial space and religious pictorial space. The fourth chapter traces the origin of the sculpted-image stele to the Guyang Mode so as to historicize the process through which the stele-image duality came into being. The dissertation ends by arguing that the form of stele was employed in the Guyang Cave because a social competition took place there in a manner highly comparable to those of the Han Dynasty society.

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation studies religious[1] "zaoxiang bei"造像碑(hereafter, sculpted-image stele/stelae)[2] of China, a hybrid form of sculpture that demonstrates features of both stone stelae and niched icons, created between the 490s and the 550s, when the art form initially took its shape. It differentiates itself from existing studies on similar subjects by placing sculpted-image stele back into the overall history of stele in China. In so doing, it shifts the scholarly focus from the existing "Buddhist sculptural approach" to how sculpted-image stele inherited ritual functions from the stelae in previous dynasties and how it innovated protocols for successors.

But did the sculpted-image stele have successors? Religious sculpted-image stele came to rise around the last two decades of the fifth century and reached its peak during the sixth century in Northern China. However, during the last few decades of the sixth century, the art form quickly perished, and almost completely[3] exited from the stage of Chinese art. Why did it appear in history so swiftly and disappear so abruptly? For many people who are familiar with the history of Chinese art, this question may have crossed their mind at some point.

This dissertation seeks to address this seemingly hard question by saying that this notion of "abruption" is by itself misleading. Largely, it originates in the fact that the existing studies

[1] This dissertation uses the term "religion" in a rather narrow sense: it basically refers to the two dominant institutionalized religions in China at the time, Buddhism and Daoism. In contrast, the belief in ancestral spirits as well as what could be termed as "Confucianism" are not considered institutionalized.

[2] Although the dissertation title features "stele," which commonly refers to the collective body of upright rectangular stone tablets, they only constitute part of my materials. Other types that attract my attention include specially framed inscriptions engraved on walls inside a cave temple and some on natural boulders. These different types of invocation either clearly name themselves "stele," or exhibit certain obvious defining characteristics of a Chinese stele: possessing an upright rectangular body, intertwined-dragon top, and/or supporting tortoise. They reveal the commissioners' strong expectation that viewers should conceive these objects to be stelae, and thus they are treated by this dissertation as stelae in a wider sense.

As for the term "zaoxing"造像, a proper translation in the context of Chinese religious art would be sculpted image. I would like to express my gratitude towards both Dr. Katherine Renhe Tsiang and Professor Martin Powers for their suggestions regarding this translation.

[3] Indeed, people were still making sculpted-image stelae during the Tang Dynasty (618-907), but both the quality and quantity of the Tang-dynasty works are no longer comparable to those of the Northern Dynasties.

treat the sculpted-image stele simply as "another type of Buddhist sculpture," which restrains the scholars from fully unleashing the material's potential. In dealing with this, this dissertation approaches its material in two directions. Firstly, it will confront the question regarding the origins of both the texts and images that constitute sculpted-image stelae. At the same time, it does not intend to refuse to consider most Northern Wei sculpted-image stele to be religious art—they certainly are. I only want to steer my attention more towards how the sculpted-image stele triggered new ritual practices at the intersection between Chinese religious art and Chinese funerary art by its creation of a new relation between stele and image.

Although this dissertation claims to reconstruct the "Northern Wei phase of the Chinese stele history," it also perfectly furthers one's understanding of how religious art changed in China at the time—essentially, the two issues often pertain to a same historical process.

The Ignored Pre-modern Art Historical Writings on Chinese Sculpted-Image Stele

To achieve the goal of writing a historiography with high scholarly originality, here in the introduction, I will only perform a quick review of the existing scholarship that treats sculpted-image stele as purely Buddhist sculpture, mainly including a few of the most frequently cited works of the twentieth century. This is the result of a compromise, as similar review of scholarship has been done before this dissertation.

The silver lining of this compromise is that the first chapter of the dissertation can accommodate a truly thorough historiography on the study of sculpted-image stele as part of the "history of Chinese stele" from an art historical perspective, which matters the most to this dissertation. I hope to provide the historiography with originality by performing an excavation of

scholarship and recover a somewhat "ignored pre-modern episode of history writing on Chinese art."

The tradition of writing histories for fine art has been long in China. Take painting as an example. Xie He 謝赫(active c.a. late fifth century to early sixth century), with his Gu hua pin lu 古畫品錄(Ranking and Records of Ancient Painting), started the writing of the history of painting in China, and afterwards Chinese scholars from generation to generation continued working on art historical writings of a similar nature, and therefore developed a sophisticated evaluation system, which organizes materials by the names of renowned painters. [4] However, unlike painting and calligraphy, stone carvings, especially religious stone carvings created by anonymous craftsmen, had not been Chinese scholars' favorite subject of research during the process. The scholarly writings on the history of stone carvings only appeared much later in Chinese history.

Until the Northern and Southern Song Dynasties (960-1279), the rise of "jin shi xue" 金石學(antiquarianism) changed the situation. Those previously ignored objects created by anonymous craftsmen, such as bronzes and carvings came to become the new focus of scholarly interests. But at the beginning of this shift of paradigm, the methodology of the Northern Song antiquarians before the thirteenth century remained largely calligraphic, textual and historical. At the time, the calligraphic quality, the religious belief, and the historical messages about the commoners' everyday concerns presented by the Buddhist carvings appears less than attractive to the Northern Song scholars. Therefore, a history writing dedicated to Buddhist carvings was still implausible at the time. In contrast, the Southern Song antiquarians showed a significantly greater amount of interest in the images on stone carvings in general. Further later in history,

[4] Xie He 謝赫, *Gu hua pin lu* 古畫品錄(Ranking and Records of Ancient Painting)(Beijing : Renmin meishu chuban she), 1959.

between the eighteenth and nineteenth century, true art historical writing dedicated to Buddhist carvings started to appear.

After the short introduction of the dissertation, in the first chapter, the reader will see a formal rewriting of the historiography of Chinese stone carving, emphasizing the "ignored pre-modern art historical writings on Chinese sculpted-Image stele." Surprisingly, some of the fundamental questions that pre-modern scholars encountered are still unsolved and this situation has been keeping modern scholars from a deeper understanding of the ritual changes incurred by sculpted-image stele at the intersection of Chinese religious are and funerary art.

A Brief Review of Existing Scholarship

1. Archaeological Explorations of the Twentieth Century

During the early twentieth century, several groups of Japanese explorers went to China to investigate archaeological sites and artifacts. Sekino Tadashi 關野貞,Tokiwa Daijio 常盤大定, and their expedition team visited many major Buddhist cave sites and temples, producing *Buddhist Monuments in China* 支那佛教史跡,[5] the first monograph on Chinese Buddhist art and architecture. Dealing with the only two sculpted-image stelae mentioned in the book, the authors adopted the same methods that they adopted to deal with other types of Buddhist sculpture, which is to combine the close description of imagery with a reading of the inscriptions. Overall, many of the high-quality photos and rubbings published by Sekino and Tokiwa then became important sources for later scholars. The works of these scholars also stirred up a wave of plundering of Chinese religious sculptures, including sculpted-image stelae, sponsored by Japanese and Westerners antique dealers and other individuals.

[5] Sekino Tadashi 關野貞 and Tokiwa Daijo 常盤大定, *Shina Bukkyo shiseki* 支那佛教史蹟(Buddhist Monuments in China) (Tokyo : Bukkyo Shiseki Kenkyukai ,1925-1928), vol. II, 123-126.

Once removed from their original locations, the displaced stelae were placed behind glass windows in museums and private collections. In so doing, the Western collections, on one hand, "killed" the object by depriving them of their original context, and on the other hand, introduced these materials to Western audiences, especially the first generation of art historians on Chinese art in the West.

2. Early Periodization With Formalism

Osvald Siren in 1925 published his book *Chinese Sculpture Between the 5th century and 14th century*, an early example of a comprehensive history of Chinese Buddhist art written with Western methodology. Siren divides the development of Chinese Buddhist sculpture into four phases: the archaic phase, the developing phase, the mature phase, and the declining and flourishing phase, which became the classic evolutionary model. Among all the Northern Dynasties' objects introduced by the book, (except for the severely damaged ones) seventy-seven are called "stelae" by Siren, but fifty-nine of them should be called "beiping zaoxiang"背屏造像 (back-screen statues) in today's term. [6]

This difficulty of terminology that Siren faced reveals the important question of how to distinguish sculpted-image stelae from other types of freestanding Buddhist sculpture from a totally formal perspective. This dissertation argues that the key formal characteristic that distinguishes a sculpted-image stele from other types of freestanding Buddhist sculpture is its overall shape in which the icons are generally inside niches on the stelae. In other words, the

[6] Meanwhile, beyond these fifty-nine pieces, a large number of other back-screen statues were treated as generic Buddhist statues, without being called "stelae" by Siren.After a closer examination, we can see that Siren called all the screen-as-the-back statues with more than one icon (for example, a triad constituted by one Buddha and two bodhisattvas) "stelae", and often treated the screen-in-back statues with only one icon as a regular free-standing statue.

icons sunk below the surface of the object.[7] Indeed, icons, as well as narratives, could also appear in incised lines or bas-relief, which also keep all images within the stelae surface instead of protruding outside. Since the back-screen statues are essentially round sculpture with a large panel attached to the back of the principal icon, which is too disparate from the conventional Chinese understanding of a stele, this dissertation will not include these materials in the discussion.

3. Typological Classification and Iconographical Studies

As the one who established the tradition of studying Chinese Buddhist art with archaeological methods in China, Su Bai 宿白's scholarship has influenced generations of Chinese scholars in the field. Consequently, in the study of sculpted-image stele, archaeological typology has always been one of the mainstream methods. One of the early representative writers in this regards is Li Jingjie 李静杰.

Li categorizes all Chinese sculpted-image stelae into four geographical groups: north-eastern Central Plain, northwest, southern Jiangsu, and Sichuan. [8] Within the northern-eastern Central Plain group, Li categorizes the stelae according to their outward shapes, features of small niches, and features of icons.

In regard to the outward shapes, the stelae are generally divided into the flat type and the square-pillar type. Within the flat type, the stelae are further divided into six types based the different shapes of the stele heads: 1) Head in the shape of a roof. 2) Flat head. 3) Arched head. 4) Head in the shape of intertwined dragons. 5) Head in the shape of a square basin. 6) Head in the

[7] This proposal of mine was partially due to the inspiration from Dorothy Wong's hypothesis that Buddhist sculpted-image stele rooted in cave-temple statue niches. See Wong, *Chinese Steles:Pre-Buddhist and Buddhist Use of a Symbolic Form* (Honolulu : University of Hawaii Press, 2004), 123.

[8] Li Jingjie 李静杰, "Fojiao zaoxiangbei fen qi yu fen qu" 佛教造像碑分期与分区 (Peridization and Geographical Categorization of Buddhist Sculpted-image stele), *Buddhist Studies* 佛教研究, 1997(06): 34- 51.

shape of a “gui”-jade tablet. Within type 2), which are the stelae with a flat head, there are two sub-types: a. rectangular body, and b. trapezoidal body. Within type 3), which are the stelae with an arched head, there are three sub-types: I. slightly arched, II. with a pointy arch, and III. with a hemispheric arch. Within type 4), which are the stelae with a head in the shape of intertwined dragons, there are three sub-types: I. dragon claws downwards or facing each other at the opposite sides, and II. dragons claws holding a jewel.

The square-pillar type can be further divided into three kinds according to the shapes and features of the stele seen from the narrow sides: 1) on the recto and the narrow sides, icons are all in high relief; 2) the narrow sides are trapezoidal with niched icons; and 3) the narrow sides are rectangular with niched icons.

Li analyzes the small niches from two angles: the outward shapes and the spatial arrangement. There are six different kinds of outward shapes: 1) with a round niche top and a pointy lintel, 2) with a round niche top, 3) square niche, 4) no niche, and 5) niche in the shape of a canopy. The first kind of niches are further divided into four sub-types based on their decors: a. with seven Buddhas in relief, b. with fire patterns, c. with no patterns, and d. with floral patterns. The “b” sub-type can be further divided two ways: dense patterns and loose patterns. The fifth kind of niches are divided in to three sub-types. There are two types of the small niches’ spatial arrangement: 1) vertical arrangement and 2) horizontal arrangement. The first type can be further divided into two sub-types, and the second can be divided into three sub-types.

Furthermore, Li analyzes the icons from four angles: the combinations of figures, draperies, bodies of the bodhisattvas, and the shapes of the seat under the principle icon. There are nine different combinations, in which different numbers of Buddha, disciples, bodhisattvas, and Brahmans appear. The draperies of the Buddha are divided into five different types,

depending on how much they cover the shoulders and the chest, and the draperies and bodhisattvas are divided into nine types. Based on how thin, think, or muscular they are, the bodhisattva bodies are divided into seven types. There are six different shapes of seats under the principle icons in total.

With the above criteria established, Li categorizes eighty exemplary stelae, which are all clearly dated (to the time interval between Northern Wei Dynasty and early Tang Dynasty) by inscriptions, accordingly. Li then goes on to list these stelae from early to late, and based on this list, he is able to list the five major types of sculpted-image stele, which came one after another throughout history. Theoretically, any Chinese sculpted-image stele can be identified as one of the five types, and its general date of creation can be determined as a result.

Moreover, integrating the list with the information of the eighty stelae's locations of original discovery, Li outlines the main features of the stelae from each of the seven smaller areas of origin with the overall north-eastern Central Plain group. With similar approaches, Li generated the lists for all the four major areas in China.

Among all Chinese provinces, Shaanxi yields the group of sculpted-image stelae that exhibit distinct Daoist or Buddho-Daoist elements, and as the largest cluster among all Chinese sculpted-image stelae, they also attracted the earliest intensive scholarly attention. Between the 1950s and the 1980s, Shi Zhangru 石璋如, Yaosheng 耀生, Han Wei 韩伟, and Yin Zhiyi 阴志毅 published a series of investigation reports, introducing the archaeological information (locations of original discovery, scale, iconography, inscriptions, etc. of this group of stelae, a large part of which are nowadays in the Yaowangshan Museum collection.[9]

[9] Shi Zhangru 石璋如, "Shaanxi Yaoxian de bei lin yu shiku"陕西耀縣的碑林與石窟(The Stele Forest and Cave Temples of Yaoxian, Shaanxi), *Bulletin of the Institute of History and Philology* 歷史語言研究所集刊, 24(1953): 145-172. Yaosheng 耀生, "Yaoxian shike wenzi luezhi 耀县石刻文字略志"(Brief Records of the Stone Inscriptions of Yaoxian), *Kaogu* 考古(Archaeology), issue 3(1995): 134-151. Han Wei 韩

Li Song 李淞, in 2002, published *Chang'an yishu yu zhongjiao wenming* 长安艺术与宗教文明(The Art and Religious Civilization of Chang'an), in which he periodizes the sculpted-image stelae from Shaanxi based on the style of the worshiper figures. His believes the method is effective because "…the dynasties which lasted a relatively long time is beyond doubt, such as Northern Wei of more than one hundred years…Even in the case of Northern Zhou, which lasted only twenty some years, within each of its reigns, including Wucheng, Baoding, Tianhe, Jiande, and so on, the images of the worshiper figures are different from each other…Therefore, I intend to arrange the worshiper figures chronologically, and thus establish the patterns with absolute dating. Based on this, we could deduce the dating of those stelae without clearly inscribed dates…"[10]

Luo Hongcai 罗宏才 is interested in what sequence the four sides of a Buddho-Daoist sculpted-image stele should be read. To determine the obverse of a stele, Luo firstly searches for the cases in which inscriptions clearly refer to a certain side as the recto ("yang" side). In other cases, Luo finds that it is on the obverse that the sun-and-moon motif is located. Starting from the obverse, Luo argues, a Northern-Dynasties visitor of stele would circumambulate it in the same manner that he/she would circumambulate a central pillar in a cave temple, and the direction would vary based on whether the stele is Buddhist or Daoist. The "final side" of a stele should always be where the dedicatory inscription is located. Although we may not always be able to generalize these rules to all Northern Dynasties Buddo-Daoist stelae, Luo's close

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伟, Yin Zhiyi 阴志毅, "Yaoxian Yaowangshan de fodao hunhe zaoxiang bei"耀县药王山的佛道混合造像碑(The Buddho-Daoist Sculpted-image stelae of Yaowangshan, Yaoxian), *Kaogu yu wenyu* 考古与文物(Archaeology and Cultural Relics), issue 5(1984): 46-51.

[10] Li Song 李淞, *Chang'an yishu yu zongjiao wenming* 长安艺术与宗教文明(The Ar and Religious Civilization of Chang'an) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002), 337-345.

attention to the spatial relationship between every side of a stele is helpful to the reconstruction of a stele's inner program.[11]

One major issue that has long been troubling scholars working on this group of materials is how to determine the identities of certain icons. For example, many scholars have participated in a dispute of whether the niche on the reverse of the Wei Wenlang stele features the "Twin Buddhas" from *Lotus Sutra*, or a Buddhist deity together with a Daoist deity.[12]

4. Sociological Perspective

Stanley Abe, on the other hand, looked at the Shaanxi stelae from a more sociological perspective in Chapter Five of *Ordinary Images*.[13] For example, in his analysis of the famous Wei Wenlang stele, Abe emphasizes that members from the same extended family could each hold belief quite different from others: some choose Buddhism (Wei Wenlang himself), and some choose Daoism (Changsheng), and the two belief systems cohabit with each other instead of being in conflict. Through the study of a series of such cases, Abe states that the strong mixture of belief and stylistic systems roots in "…a range of available alternatives in any given local tradition and the type of imagery that was most appropriate for patrons of differing backgrounds."[14]

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[11] Luo Hongcai 罗宏才, *Zhongguo fo dao zaoxiangbei yanjiu: yi guanzhong diqu wei kaocha zhongxin* 中国佛道造像碑研究: 以关中地区为考察中心(The Study of Chinese Buddho-Daoist Sculpted-image stele: Centered on the Guanzhong Area)(Shanghai: Shanghai daxue chuban she, 2008).

[12] Both Miao Zhe 繆哲 and Eugene Yuejin Wang 汪悦进 believe that the two figures in the niche on the obverse should be interpreted in the textual context of the "Twin-Buddha" excerpt of the Lotus Sutra. Almost all others scholars believe that one of the two figures is Buddhist and the other Daoist. See Stanley Abe, *Ordinary Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 297. Ishimatsu Hinako 石松日奈子, "Yaoxian Yaowangshan bowuguan Wei Wenlang zaoxiangbei de zhizao niandai" 耀县药王山博物馆魏文朗造像碑的制造年代(The Date of the Wei Wenlang Stele in the Yaowangshan Museum, Yaoxian), *Daojiao meishu xin lun* 道教美术新论(New Theories of Daoist Art) (Jinan: Shandong meishu chuban she, 2008),79-80. Hu Wenhe 胡文和, *Zhongguo daojiao shike yishu shi* 中国道教石刻艺术史(The History of Chinese Daoist Art of Stone Carving) (Beijing: Gaodeng jiaoyu chuban she, 2004), 26. Li Song, *Chang'an yishu yu zongjiao wenming*, 439-451. Luo Hongcai, *Zhongguo fo dao zaoxiangbei yanjiu: yi guanzhong diqu wei kaocha zhongxin*, 67. Miao Zhe 繆哲, "Wei Wenlang Zaoxiangbei kaoshi" 魏文朗造像碑考释(The Investigation and Interpretation of the Wei Wenlang Stele), *Meishu shi yanjiu ji kan* 美术史研究集刊(Journal of Studies of Art History), no. 21(2006): 1- 66. Eugene Yuejin, Wang, *Shaping the Lotus Sutra: Buddhist Visual Culture in Medieval China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 41- 44. Dorothy Wong, *Chinese Steles*, 109.

[13] Stanley Abe, *Ordinary Images*(Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 259-313.

[14] Abe, 297.

In regard to the Yao Boduo stele, Abe starts from the doctrines of the Daoist Lingbao sect and proceeds to discuss the connection and difference between "Laozi," "Huang Laojun," and other related ways of addressing the same Daoist deity. Abe argues that this stele reflects how the Lingbao sect was attempting to annihilate teachings from Buddhism and other Daoist sects, such as the Tianshi sect.

Writing in the year 2002, Stanley Abe was one of the earliest to lead the entire field to contemplate a fundamental issue: the relationship between class and art.

5. Historical Studies

Inscriptions on the sculpted-image stelae have also been used as excavated texts by historians. Hou Xudong published *Wu liu shiji beifang minzhong fojiao xinyang* 五、六世纪北方民众佛教信仰(Buddhist Belief of the Northern People during the Fifth and Sixth Centuries: Centered on Dedicatory Inscriptions) in 1998, a comprehensive study of the dedicatory inscriptions.[15] In a way, Hou has inherited Jacque Gernet's methods of social history from the 1950s, as he puts the donors of the stelae in groups according to their social classes: court members, local officials, monks, and lay believers. Hou's main interest is the intellectual history of medieval Chinese Buddhists.

6. A Comprehensive Study of Buddhist Sculpted-image Stele

Last but not least, the latest book dedicated to the comprehensive study of Buddhist sculpted-image stelae during the Northern and Southern Dynasties is *Chinese Steles: Pre-Buddhist and Buddhist Use of a Symbolic Form* by Dorothy C. Wong in 2004. Wong widely

[15] Hou Xudong 侯旭东, *Wu liu shiji beifang minzhong fojiao Xinyang: yi zaoxiang ji wei zhongxin de kaocha* 五、六世纪北方民众佛教信仰: 以造像记为中心的考察(Buddhist Belief of the Northern People during the Fifth and Sixth Centuries: Centered on Dedicatory Inscriptions) (Beijing: zhongguo shehui kexue chuban she, 1998).

collected Buddhist stelae of the Northern Dynasties from published sources as well as her field work, providing later researchers with a rather comprehensive database.

With the materials that she amassed, Wong makes her groundbreaking contribution by identifying several major traditions of stele making in different areas, including the Central Plain, the Guanzhong area, the northwest, and the southwest. Unlike the previous typological categorization, such as those done by Li Jingjie, Wong focuses on how stele-makers from different regions chose their favorite iconography as well as the different religious thoughts reflected by each of the icons: Shakyamuni and Pure Land thoughts in Shanxi, Maitreya in Henan, and the mixed Buddho-Daoist type in Shaanxi. Within this framework, Wong also carefully points out the metropolitan hubs which emitted artistic influences on surrounding provincial areas, as well as the large-scale royally sponsored Buddhist sculptural projects within each religion, which might have created the initial inspiration for the small-scale sculptural works commissioned by people from lower social classes, such as Pingcheng and the Yungang Grottoes in Shanxi, Luoyang and Longmen Grottoes in Henan, and Chang'an in Shaanxi. The successful characterization of the leading religious thoughts behind the sculpted-image stelae from each geographical unit was pioneering in the field at the time. Wong's work served as my initial knowledge base when I began to navigate through the field, and I am genuinely grateful for that.

Since the publication of Wong's book, many new materials have been published. Here is a brief list: *Zhongguo liushi haiwai fojiao zaoxiang zonghe tu mu* 中国流失海外佛教造像总合图目(The Comprehensive Illustrated Index of Chinese Buddhist Sculpture Lost to the Overseas)

in 2005,[16] *Han wei liuchao bei ke jiao zhu* 漢魏六朝碑刻校注(Proofreading and Comments on the Stone Carvings of the Han Dynasties, Wei Dynasty, and the Six Dynasties) in 2008,[17] *Beichao fojiao shike tapian bai pin* 北朝佛教石刻拓片百品(One Hundred Pieces of Rubbings of Northern-Dynasties Buddhist Stone Carvings) in 2008,[18] *Zhongguo beichao shike tapian jingpin ji* 中国北朝石刻拓片精品集 in 2008(Collection of Selected Items of Chinese Northern-Dynasties Rubbings of Stone Carvings),[19] and most importantly, *Shaanxi Yaowangshan beike yishu zong ji* 陝西藥王山碑刻藝術總集(The Comprehensive Collection of the Art of the Shaanxi Yaowangshan Stelae and Carvings) in 2013.[20] These recently available materials also call for a new round of scholarly discussion.

Methodology

Throughout the dissertation, I will support my arguments with close formal analysis. But most of the arguments are not primarily stylistic by themselves: issues such as the transmission of a specific sculptural style between a certain metropolitan center and the provincial areas under its influence, or the establishment of a new chronology based on the development of styles will receive minimum attention. Since this dissertation does not participate much in conversations of this nature, I reserve limited space for the stylistic history of Chinese Buddhist art in the review of scholarship.

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[16] Sun Di 孙迪, *Zhongguo liushi haiwai fojiao zaoxiang zong he tu mu* 中国流失海外佛教造像总合图目(The Comprehensive Illustrated Index of Chinese Buddhist Sculpture Lost to the Overseas) (Beijing: Waiwen chuban she, 2005).

[17] Mao Yuanming 毛遠明, *Han wei liuchao bei ke jiao zhu* 漢魏六朝碑刻校註(Proofreading and Comments on the Stone Carvings of the Han Dynasties, Wei Dynasty, and the Six Dynasties)(Beijing: Xian zhuang shu ju, 2008).

[18] Yen Chuan-ying 顏娟英, *Beichao fojiao shike tapian bai pin* 北朝佛教石刻拓片百品(One Hundred Pieces of Rubbings of Northern-Dynasties Buddhist Stone Carvings) (Taibei: Zhongyang yanjiu yuan lishi yuyan yanjiu suo, 2008).

[19] Li Renqing 李仁清, *Zhongguo beichao shiku tapian jingpin ji* 中国北朝石刻拓片精品集(Collection of Selected Items of Chinese Northern-Dynasties Rubbings of Stone Carvings) (Zhengzhou: Daxiang chuban she, 2008).

[20] Zhang Yan 張燕, *Shaanxi Yaowangshan bei ke yishu zong ji* 陝西藥王山碑刻藝術總集(The Comprehensive Collection of the Art of the Shaanxi Yaowangshan Stelae and Carvings)(Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chuban she, 2013).

At the same time, the identification of icons is often necessary throughout the dissertation. But the focus generally is not on iconography neither. Readers will see that the dissertation rarely cites long passages from a variety of Buddhist sutras so as to determine the identity of a particularly mysterious icon so as to disclose the profound philosophical thinking behind it. It might not have been the case that many commissioners, carvers, or users of the stelae in the sixth century had ever managed to acquire systematical knowledge of the sophisticated Buddhist teachings recorded by canons. Their level of education was questionable for this purpose—most of them were probably illiterate. Therefore, I generally do not spill ink on matters such as whether it is Maitreya or the young Gautama prince who sits under the tree in meditation, or whether the deity is Daoist or Buddhist. Hopefully, the readers will find that my iconographical decisions are straightforward enough. For this reason, my review on iconographical studies will also be relatively brief.

Indeed, the dissertation shows strong interests in both the inscriptions and the images of worshiper figures on sculpted-image stelae, but I do not focus on the issue of patronage per se. Many analytical tools frequently employed by historians, such as race, gender, and class will come into play only occasionally in this dissertation. The readers will not see a social art history based on massive analysis of inscribed texts.

What I intend to do is to reconstruct the process of how people who had practiced Buddhism and/or Daoism in the sixth century transformed their usage of stele. To this end, I adopt the methodology with two major aspects:

1) Ritual analysis. Firstly, I steer the analysis towards one of the major ritual functions of stele—the making of merit. With this, the first chapter explains the connection and difference between stelae of Eastern Han (25-220) and sculpted-image stelae of the early sixth century.

Secondly, I intend to demonstrate how the sculpted-image stele formed unprecedented ritual appearance in the offering ceremonies, outside of the mourning ceremonies or the burial ceremonies, where stele previously often appeared. This underlines the discussion throughout all of the chapters of the dissertation.

2) Spatial Analysis. The final chapter revolves around the space inside Guyang Cave, illuminating one of the possible origins of the sculpted-image stele, when stelae separated themselves from the walls of cave temples and became spatially "self-sustaining." Chapters II and III deal with the construction of pictorial space within every individual stele, where ancestral offering space negotiates with religious worshiping space. The two chapters also treat the interaction between images from aboveground and those from the underground.

In fact, the total sum of the two methodological aspects contributes to a "middle-level"[21] study in the end. My primary aim of studying an object, or a specific space with a group of objects in it, is to reconstruct its inner program. We will see that styles of the ten stelae inside Guyang Cave have to be understood in the cave's temporal and spatial context, and that images (both divine and human) on the different sides of a given stelae constitute a pictorial program revealing the deepest religious as well as familial concerns of the commissioners.

Materials

There are mainly three batches of materials. The first batch, which constitutes the main body of Chapter I, includes works by major pre-modern Chinese antiquarians (*jin shi xue* scholars), such as Zhao Mingcheng 趙明誠's *Jin shi lu* 金石錄, Hong Kuo 洪适's *Li shi* 隸釋 and Hong Mai 洪邁's *Li xu* 隸續, Ruan Yuan 阮元's "Nan tie bei bei lun"南帖北碑論, Huang

[21] This term was coined by Wu Hung. See Wu Hung, *The Wu Liang Shrine: The Ideology of Early Chinese Pictorial Art*(Stanford, CA : Stanford University Press, 1989), 70.

Yi 黃易's *Ziyun shan tan bei tu* 紫雲山探碑圖, Wang Chang 王昶's *Jin shi cui bian* 金石萃編 as well as Ye Changchi 葉昌熾's *Yu shi* 語石. Presenting a thorough historiography of Chinese stele, the dissertation achieves two other goals with these materials. Firstly, the methods once practiced by generations of Chinese antiquarians are evidence in support of the my argument, and the scholarly reception of sculpted-image stele is also the demonstration of the objects' ritual efficacy in history. Secondly, the works by antiquarians contain valuable opinions and primary sources, whose potential has yet to be fully unleashed.

The second batch consists of the sculpted-image stelae from provinces such Shaanxi, Shanxi, and Henan. (Figure 1.1) In regard to the total number of existing sculpted-image stelae of the Northern Dynasties, each scholar holds different opinions. For example, Dorothy Wong estimates that there are more than 200 such stelae known to have survived.[22] The largest single group should be the ones from the Yaowangshan area, Shaanxi, with over one hundred stele in the collection of the Yaowangshan Museum. Among the hundreds of cases available in different formats for study, I attempt to closely examine a few select representatives. Chapter II focuses on how the unification of stele and image created the new "tableau" for ritual performances.[23] Chapter III further zooms in to the "religious votive stele for the deceased" by extending attention to the stelae on the middle ground between Buddhist sculpted-image stele and funerary stele. (Figures 1.2)

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[22] Wong, *Chinese Steles*, 1.

[23] I am borrowing the term "tableau" from Wu Hung. See Wu Hung, "The Invisible Miniature: Framing the Soul in Chinese Art and Architecture," *Art History*, vol.38 (2) (Apr 1,2015): 291. In that case, Wu talks about the case of "soul jars," where he cites the viewpoints in a Chinese publication and selects the English term tableau to describe the situation where"on top of a jar, a multitude of hand-made miniature images constitute a complex tableau." Further later in the article, Wu uses the the multi-layered coffin complex of Lady Dai at Mawangdui as an example, and described its tableau constituted of a series of miniatures of musicians as "a self-conscious miniature construct."

In my case of sculpted-image stele, the term tableau suitable fits in a similar manner. The stele provides a pictorial surface with relatively limited space and a clear boundary. Within this deliberately defined space, the moment when a multitude of figures (in the size of "miniatures," naturally) carrying out certain ritual performances is captured and crystallized. In a sense, the pictorial surface offered by the stele functions as a "self-conscious" stage for performances.

The last batch of materials comes from Guyang Cave in Longmen. The final chapter deals with ten cases in which stelae are juxtaposed with niched icons. (Figure 1.3) The cases in the Guyang Cave help me recover the unclear historical transition between funerary stele of the East Han period and the sculpted-image stele of Northern Dynasties. To this end, I firstly categorize the stelae at the Guyang Cave into three groups. Through the categorization, I introduce the one-stele-plus-one-image "Guyang Mode," which signifies a transitional period, as both stele and image were still two divided entities attached to the walls of cave temples. The era of sculpted-image stele came right after the "Guyang Mode," when stele and image reached the full unification, becoming self-sufficient both spatially and ritually.

Chronologically speaking, the stelae on the walls of the Guyang Caves happen to predate the free-standing sculpted-images stelae studied in this dissertation. The current arrangement of placing the study of the Guyang Mode at the final chapter is due to the fact that I can conveniently demonstrate the fact that a sculpted-image stele should be considered as the product of the ritual at the completion of an iconic image instead of a ready-made structure, through the study of the elaborate pictorial program of the stele by Wu Hongbiao. The ritual process is the intrinsic ritual connection between the free-standing sculpted-image stele and the Guyang Mode. In other words, understanding the stele by Wu Hongbiao prepares a reader for the decoding of the ritual program constructed by the stelae in the Guyang Cave. Therefore, I reserve Chapter II, "tableau," for the stele by Wu Hongbiao. In contrast, in the final chapter, "returning to the origin," I will rely more upon formal analysis when discussing the Guyang Mode as the transition between the stelae of the Eastern Han period and the sculpted-image stelae of the Northern Wei Dynasty.

Chapter Outlines

1. Introduction

The introduction opens with how this dissertation distinguishes itself from the existing scholarship on related materials, and thus exposes the reason for writing the dissertation: only by viewing the Buddhist sculpted-image stele as the "Northern Dynasties phase of the history of Chinese stele" can we further our understanding of how religious art changed in China during the fifth and sixth century. In order to make space for the re-writing of the historiography of Chinese stele from an art historical perspective in Chapter I, I include a brief historiography of sculpted-image stele as pure Buddhist sculpture in this part. Afterwards, I introduce the four batches of materials used in the dissertation and explains his methodology: with ritual analysis and spatial analysis, he intends to conduct a middle-level study. This part ends with outlines of the dissertation chapters.

2. Chapter I, Duality

The careful review of scholarship on the history of Chinese stele includes the following major parts: Song Dynasty (960-1279) antiquarianism, Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) antiquarianism, expedition and scholarship of the Japanese and Westerners in early twentieth century, and the modern scholarship in China. By conversing with generations of predecessors, I keep contemplating the relationship between stele and image in China and reaches a new theoretical framework for the dissertation: the making of merit as the key to understanding the transition from the Eastern Han funerary stele to sculpted-image stele. This framework guides the entire discussion in the following chapters.

3. Chapter II, Tableau

This chapter uses examples from the Yaowangshan museum to demonstrate how a Northern Wei sculpted-image stele, as the product of a ritual process, could turn into a self-sustaining tableau incorporating the niched icon, texts, and images of worshipers. Within the pictorial space newly formed at this time, the worshiping of religious deities and the offerings for deceased family members coexisted. More importantly, the offering ritual was partially achieved through the religious worshiping as the stele makers could transfer their religious merit to the deceased. This chapter also reveals how the pictorial space newly formed by Chinese sculpted-image stele rendered the ancestral offerings eternal and how it assisted the stele makers in transcending the "great boundary."

4. Chapter III, Fusion

As discussed in Chapter I, sculpted-image stele bestowed ancestral offerings with new publicness. Based on the new publicness, people from different clans, during their worshiping of deities, were able to come together and perform collective ancestral offerings with the same stele. Closely examining both the sculpted-image stelae demonstrating strong funerary concerns, and the funerary stelae showing Buddhist elements, I intend to show how appeals of the Mahayana Buddhism helped people break the barrier between clans in their ancestral offering affairs.

5. Chapter IV, Return to The Origin

The concluding chapter attempts to restate the dissertation's key notion that "Chinese sculpted-image stele was the product of a ritual process" by tracing the historical origin of this particular art form. Since many similar scholarly attempts already exist and often there are no

quick resolutions at the end, this chapter simply intends to offer another historicization through formal analysis so as to more patiently demonstrate the transitional process between the Han Dynasty funerary stele and Northern Wei sculpted-image stele. It proposes that the Guyang Cave at the Longmen Grottoes is one of the critical sites where the transition happened. Both the format and ritual functions of the stelae in the cave are closely related to the Han Dynasty funerary stele. More importantly, in the cave, the unique "Guyang Mode" appeared.

This chapter starts by defining the "Guyang Mode": the juxtaposition of a stele and a niched icon on the walls. This particular stele-image relationship revealed in the Guyang mode indicates that it was a transitional form between two other forms of sculpture: icon niches on the walls of cave temples and free-standing sculpted-image stelae. Eventually, I hope to understand people's ritual needs behind their new choice of the unification of stele and image with the stele being the defining outward form.

CHAPTER I, DUALITY

Introduction: The Term "Zaoxiang bei"

Nowadays a hybrid form of sculpture that demonstrates features of both stone stelae and niched icons[24] are called *"*Zaoxiang" (literally meaning "sculpted image") "bei"造像碑 (sculpted-image stele/stelae). Li Jingjie is one of the modern scholars who started systematic research on sculpted-image stele relatively early. In 1998, he introduced how the term first came into being: *Jin shi lu* 金石錄(The Records of Metal and Stone) already called them "Zaoxiang bei." This name gradually became adopted by antiquarians of Qing Dynasty and the cultural relics workers later." [25] The book *Jin shi lu* by Northern Song (960-1127) antiquarian Zhao Mingcheng 趙明誠(1081-1129) is one of the earliest catalogues of Chinese bronzes and stone inscriptions. Unfortunately, Li's short article does not expound on Zhao Mingcheng's usage of the term "Zaoxiang bei" specifically, which is an important yet tricky issue. Instead, Li briefly reviews how the term got passed down between generations of scholars in China, and offers certain suggestions regarding the term's usage.

In fact, in his many years of fieldwork, Li Jingjie personally examined a large number of sculpted-image stelae. The notes he took turned out to greatly benefit the research of a historian, Hou Xudong. With help from Li and other efforts, Hou managed to collect more than one thousand and six hundred entries of "zaoxiang ji"造像記(Records of sculpted-image, or dedicatory inscriptions) of the Northern Dynasties, in order to conduct a study on the religious belief of people in Northern China between the fifth and sixth centuries. Until today, Hou's

[24] In order for the object to be a "stele," which basically is in the shape of a cuboid, the icons have to be inside niches. See more later in this chapter's review of Osvald Siren's scholarship.

[25] Li Jingjie 李靜杰, "Fojiao zaoxiangbei fen qi yu fen qu" 佛教造像碑分期与分区(Peridization and Geographical Categorization of Buddhist Sculpted-image stele), *Buddhist Studies* 佛教研究, 1997(06): 84.

database, which collected inscriptions from both sculpted-image stelae and round-sculptures, is still one of the most comprehensive.[26] A thorough examining of Hou's database reveals that there is no such inscription that calls the object itself "Zaoxiang bei."[27] This proves that the term is essentially a creation by later scholars, instead of something that appeared as early as the Northern Dynasties.[28]

To lay a firm foundation for the entire dissertation, I use Chapter I to clarify the aforementioned terminological issues. For this purpose, this chapter carefully combs through the several major scholarly traditions on Chinese stele, especially sculpted-image stele, in chronological order: Song Dynasty antiquarianism, Qing Dynasty antiquarianism, modern archaeology, and art history.

I hope that the contents of this chapter will deliver two layers of value. Firstly, there is the historiographical value. The chapter intends to exhibit how scholars from different periods understand and use terms such as "stele," "image," and "sculpted-image stele." Seeing the continuous development of these core terms' meaning over time, I better define the parameter of my research. Secondly, there is the art historical value. Modern art historians indeed are enjoying the tremendous ever-growing sources of primary materials brought to them by advanced archaeology. However, inside the works by generations of pre-modern scholars, there is still a sizable stock of precious primary materials calling for our deeper attention. Excavating this stock of materials can effectively compensate for the shortcoming of modern archaeology: most of the

[26] The database of Kuramoto Hisanori 倉本尚徳's 2016 book is also comprehensive. See Kuramoto Hisanori 倉本尚徳, *Hokucho Bukkyo Zozomei Kenkyu* 北朝仏教造像銘研究(Studies of Inscriptions on Northern Dynasties Buddhist Sculpture) (Kyoto: Hozo kan), 2016.

[27] In my investigation of this issue, I mainly focused on the objects from the database that are listed as "zaoxiang bei" by Hou Xudong. However, as Hou's book only offers the names of objects without the full inscriptions, it is necessary for us to check whether the object name themselves are actually "zaoxiang bei." Therefore, from Hou's database I identified all the objects which happen to appear in other publications, which provide full inscriptions. As a result, I found that there is no object with a "zaoxiang bei" inscription. Since a large portion of Hou's database comes from an unpublished manuscript by Li Jingjie, it is also possible that the names of objects from Hou's database reflect Li's influence. Therefore, I went on to read a catalogue published by Li Jingjie himself in 1995, named *Shi fo xuan cui* 石佛选粹(Select Stone Buddhas). The first chapter of Li's catalogue is exactly "zaoxiang bei," and no inscription on any object from the chapter uses the term. After this long investigation, I reassured myself that modern scholars, in many cases, give the name "zaoxiang bei" to objects with inscriptions that do not mention the term. See Li Jingjie, *Shi fo xuan cui* 石佛选粹(Select Stone Buddhas)(Beijing: Zhongguo shijieyu chuban she, 1995).

[28] Other than Li Jingjie's manuscript, all entries in Hou's book come from the major compilations of Chinese stone inscriptions by both pre-modern and modern scholars. These compilations generally provide full inscriptions, and none of the inscriptions use the term "zaoxiang bei."

objects have long perished in history and are no longer directly accessible to us. Luckily, early scholars have registered some of these objects in their writings, and with the help of a long historical distance, this dissertation aims to converse with the important objects otherwise lost.

More than twenty years have passed after Li Jingjie's article, and the terminological issues are still largely unresolved today, despite that many other scholars have touched upon the subject one way or another. Aside from contemplating the issues themselves, this dissertation also seeks to lead the discussion into a deeper level, which pertains to the stele-image relationship transformed by the newly appeared hybridity of stele and niched icons. The readers will see that the discussion of the stele-image relationship, initiated in the first chapter, threads all subsequent chapters and holds them together.

Overall, in the first chapter, I attempt to combine two conversations: one between himself and previous scholars, and the other between himself and primary materials. In so doing, at the end of the chapter, I propose a framework of interpretation of my own: the making of merit.

The Term "Bei" (Stele)

Before officially beginning to discuss Zhao Mingcheng's take on sculpted-image stele, it is necessary to individually review the meaning of the words "stele" and "image" in the cultural history of China.

Scholars who use both Chinese and English in their research have generally been translating the Chinese term "bei"碑 as stele/stelae, and this dissertation simply adopts the widely-accepted translation. Since the time of the "Jin shi xue" (antiquarianism), generations of Chinese researchers have been consulting two of the most important texts on pre-Qin Chinese ritual thoughts, *Yi li* 儀禮(Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial Rites) and *Li ji* 禮記(Book of Rites),

along with Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127-200)'s commentaries on them, when discussing the originality of Chinese stelae. Here are a few most frequently cited entries, among others:

1) "The 'ding'-tripods (are) nine, and are placed in front of the western stairs, the accompanying 'ding'-tripods (are) at the inner side, facing east, with north being the upper side. Its upper limit is at the stele, being placed towards south…the hundred jars of vinegar and minced meat flank the stele, with ten jars forming a column, vinegar being on the east side." 鼎九, 設於西階前, 陪鼎當內廉, 東面北上. 上當碑, 南陳…醢醢百瓮, 夾碑, 十以為列,醢在東.[29]

2) "A palace must have a stele, so as to recognize shadow of the sun, based on which to tell Yin from Yang. (If the stele is in an) ancestral temple, it is what the sacrificial animal is to be tied towards. In terms of their material, (they are made) of stone in temples and palaces, and wood on tombs." 宮必有碑, 所以識日影, 引陰陽也. 宗廟則麗牲焉以取毛血. 其材, 宮廟以石, 窆用木.[30]

3) "The guest is at the inner side (north) to the stele, to hear orders. Then he ascends from the western stairs, coming from the left side, to receive the 'gui'-jade, and then retreats to the stand with his back towards the right room."賓自碑內聽命, 升自西階, 自左, 南面受圭, 退負右房而立.[31]

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[29] From Chapter: "Embassy Ceremonial Rites" 聘禮, *Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial Rites* 儀禮. See Li Xueqin 李学勤, *Yili zhu shu* 仪礼注疏 (The Annotation of the Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial Rites), (Beijing: Peking University Press, 1999), 409.

[30] Zheng Xuan's commentary on the phrase "Its upper limit is at the stele, being placed towards south."鄭玄註: 上當碑, 南陳. From Chapter: "Embassy Ceremonial Rites"聘禮, *Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial Rites* 儀禮. See Li, Yili zhu shu, 429.

[31] From Chapter: "Embassy Ceremonial Rites"聘禮, *Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial Rites* 儀禮. See Li, Yili zhu shu, 429.

4) “At the day of sacrifice, the lord drags the sacrificial animal…as (he) has entered the temple gate, (he) ties the (animal) to the stele…”祭之日, 君牽牲…既入廟門, 麗於碑…[32]

5) “For a lord’s burial… (there are) four robes and two stelae…For an official’s burial… (there are) two robes and two stelae…For a gentleman’s burial… (there are) two robes and no stelae…Whenever (lowering the coffins into the tomb pit and therefore) closing a tomb, ones use four robes and they let the (coffins) go away from the stelae, with their back towards the dragging…”君葬…四綍二碑…大夫葬…二綍二碑…士葬…二綍無碑…凡封, 用四綍去碑負引…[33]

6) “Great stelae, which are made by cutting huge trees, have the shape resembling stone stelae. (People) erect them on the four corners both in front of and at the back of the outer coffin. (People) puncture a (great stelae) in the middle to turn it into a *lulu*-windlass. When lowering an inner coffin, (people) tie the inner coffin to the great wooden stelae.” 豐碑, 斫大木為之, 形如石碑. 於槨前後四角樹之, 穿中於間為鹿盧 .下棺以繂繞.[34]

With these received texts at hand, which are dated to a time no later than Eastern Han (25-220), modern researchers on the subject are even more fortunate to enjoy access to the ever-growing stock of objects found by archaeologists. For example, according to Zhao Chao, archaeologists found four large stele seats, which are supposed to have held wood stelae, from the Tomb of Duke of Qin at Fengxian, Shaanxi, in 1986,[35] and this discovery certifies the use of ‘lulu’-windlass in burial practices as recorded by Zheng Xuan’s commentary. Based on evidence

32 From Chapter: “Offering Etiquette”祭義, *Book of Rites* 禮記. See Li xueqin 李学勤, *Li ji zhengyi* 礼记正义(True Meaning of the Book of Rites) (Beijing: Peking University Press, 1999), 1321.

33 From Chapter: “The Great Records on Mourning”喪大記, *Book of Rites* 禮記. See Li, *Li ji zhengyi*, 1288-1289.

34 Zheng Xuan’s commentary on the phrase “Houses of dukes compare (theirs) to great stelae.”鄭玄注: 公室視豐碑. From Chapter: “Sandalwood Bow”檀弓, *Book of Rites* 禮記. See Li, *Li ji zhengyi*, 297.

35 Zhao Chao 赵超, *Zhongguo gudai shike gailun* 中国古代石刻概论(Introduction of the Pre-modern Chinese Stone Carvings)(Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1997), 9-10.

of this type and the many existing Eastern-Han stelae found all across China, I divide the development of prototypical[36] Chinese stelae before Eastern Han into two phases.

In phase one, the prototypes appeared in a variety of unrelated ritual context, including (but possibly unlimited to): 1) in sacrificial ceremonies at ancestral temples, as an erected object to which the sacrificial animals were tied; 2) at palaces, as a position/status marker; and 3) at tomb sites, as part of the "lulu"-windlass. Therefore, the term "stele" could ambiguously refer to one type of objects in some cases, and another very different type in other cases.

In phase two, no later than Eastern Han, the term's meaning became more stabilized and precise. Stelae appeared much less in sacrificial ceremonies at ancestral temples, and their two other ritual functions, marking position and burial facility, reached a fusion. Initially, a stele might have been active only during the burial ceremony, and stopped functioning after the tomb was sealed. However, due to unclear reasons, people seemed to have not always dismantled these burial stelae afterwards. Even later, these erected objects on top of sealed tombs came to serve as markers of the tomb (and thus the deceased). Under some circumstances, people attempted to adapt these tomb stelae into writing support, on which to record and present the deeds of the buried. It transforms a stele from temporary facility as part of the burial ceremony, to the permanent installment as part of the tomb complex.

At this same time, tomb stelae went through another important transformation—stone, instead of wood, became the sole material. Xu Shen 許慎(ca. 30-134) from Eastern Han period, in his *shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 (On Characters), states: "Stele, erected stone."碑, 竖石也.[37]

[36] They are called "prototypes" in the sense that they haven't reached the more "standardized"/ "mature" stage as they would be in Eastern Han. The maturing of Chinese stele which will be further discussed later in the chapter.

[37] Xu Shen 許慎, with annotations by Duan Yucai 段玉裁, *Shuo wen jie zi duan zhu* 說文解字段注(Duan's Annotation of the "Explanation of Words")(Chengdu: Chengdu guji shudian, 1981), 477.

This is in clear contrast to the situation of pre-Qin periods as described in the previously discussed Zheng Xuan's *Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial Rites*: "In terms of their material, (they are made) of stone in temples and palaces, and wood on tombs." Since stele had widely become part of the permanent installment of the tomb complex in Eastern Han, people also became inclined to employ a more durable material.

More broadly speaking, the material of stone had generally become increasingly used for funerary architecture and image during Eastern Han. Wu Hung calls the phenomenon the sudden "Chinese Discovery of Stone": "Before this time, temples and tombs were uniformly timber-framed, and very few stone steles or statues furnished a pre-Han graveyard." [38] Wu also points out the :"While all the natural characteristics of stone—strength plainness, and especially endurance—became analogous to eternity, wood, which was relatively fragile and vulnerable to natural elements, was associated with temporal mortal existence. From this dichotomy emerged two kinds of architecture: structures made of wood used by the living and structure made of stone dedicated to the dead, the gods and immortals... "[39] Until this point, funerary stele, which is arguably the best representative of all types of Chinese stelae, finally came into shape in Chinese history.[40]

By revisiting the early formation of Chinese stele as such, hereby I observe the core characteristics of stele since Eastern Han: 1) being upright, 2) being a cuboid, 3) being made of stone, and 4) publicly displaying information. This dissertation thus uses these as guidelines to limit the scope of materials that it consults.

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[38] Wu Hung, "The Prince of Jade Revisited: the Material Symbolism of Jade as Observed in Mancheng Tombs," in *Chinese Jades*, ed. Rosemary E. Scott (London: Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art, 1997), 153.

[39] Ibid., 154.

[40] The process of stele being absorbed by the Chinese funerary monumental structures might have been part of tomb architecture's overall transformation at the time. The centuries between the Warring States Period (475 BCE – 221BCE) and Eastern Han period were also the time when the ancestral offering ritual moved "from temple to tomb."

From Eleventh Century to Mid-Qing: the Discovery of Image in Stele

From Northern Song (960-1127) to the middle part of Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), generations of antiquarians, on step after another, discovered the "Power of Images"[41] in their studies of stele. It was Zhao Mingcheng who added Buddhist sculpted-image stele to the scholarly conversation at an early stage, Hong Kuo 洪括 who attempted to preserve images on stele with publication for the first time, Huang Yi 黃易 who made the earliest archaeological efforts to conserve and exhibit images made of stone for didactic purposes, and Ruan Yuan 阮元 who introduced "Bei xue"碑学(the Calligraphic Study of Stele) so as to locate the "authentic forms of carvings" as opposed to the mi-shaped characters on the ever-decaying wood prints. The expansion of the research on "image in stele" characterized one aspect of the development of Chinese antiquarianism through history.

1. The Earliest Appearance of the Term "Zaoxiang bei" in *Jin shi lu*

Li Jingjie is correct to point out that the characters "zao xiang bei" do appear in Zhao Mingcheng's *Records on Metal and Stone*. For example, in volume two's table of contents, entry #310 is named "Wei Zhao Futucheng zao xiang bei" 偽趙浮圖澄造像碑. [42] However, in volume twenty, where Zhao writes comments on this object, he gives it another name—"Zhao Futucheng zao shijia xiang bei" 趙浮圖澄造釋迦像碑[43]—and the term "zaoxiang bei" is compressed into "xiang bei." Therefore, to Zhao, "zaoxiang bei" is not yet a codified term for a

[41] David, Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 1989.

[42] Zhao Mingcheng, *Jin shi lu* 金石錄(The Records of Metal and Stone), number 48 in Yan Gengwang 嚴耕望, *Shike shiliao congshu* 石刻史料叢書(The Compilation of Historical Materials from Stone Carvings)(Taipei: Yi wen yin shu guan, 1967), vol. 2, 6.

[43] Zhao Mingcheng quotes a Tang Dynasty (618-907) work *Wenjian ji* 聞見記(Records of those Heard and Saw) by a certain Feng Yan. See Zhao, Jin shi lu, vol. 20, 12.

particular group of objects. In other words, *Records on Metal and Stone* does not establish "zaoxiang bei" as a sub-category of Chinese stele.

Besides entry #310, *Records on Metal and Stone* does not present many other sculpted-image stelae of the Northern Dynasties. A few more stelae named "zao xiang bei"[44] appear later in the Tang-Dynasty section of the book, but Zhao provides only one of them with comments:

> "To the right is 'Tang Huiyi si mile xiang bei', with characters in clerical script by Li Chao. Li Chao's calligraphy was not appreciated at his time. Only Du Fu greatly praised it with poetry, comparing it to (the works of) Cai Youlin and Han Zemu. Now the existing calligraphy (by Li) carved on stone is extremely rare—only this stele and 'Epigraph of Peng Yuanyao'. I got them both, and find that their art of writing is not extremely good, not comparable to Han and Cai's works." 右 "唐慧義寺彌勒像碑," 李潮八分書. 潮書初不見重於當時, 獨杜甫詩盛稱之, 以比蔡有林, 韓擇木. 今石刻在者絕少, 唯此碑與 "彭元曜墓誌"耳. 餘皆得之, 其筆法亦不絕工, 非韓蔡比也. [45]

At the end of this comment, when he says "Now the existing calligraphy (by Li) carved on stone is extremely rare—only this stele and 'Epigraph of Peng Yuanyao'. I have got them both…," Zhao takes the term "stele" to mean "rubbing made from carved stones" since he proudly emphasizes that he has "got them," meaning that these are among his collection of rubbings. To Zhao, rubbings are as good as actual objects, since what matters is simply the calligraphy carved on the objects, and rubbings already deliver that.

This attitude is generally shared by most antiquarians. In fact, *Records on Metal and Stone* is one of the earliest works that established the rules of the entire Chinese antiquarian study: it aims at collecting materials as comprehensive and "representative" as possible. The best

[44] I only came to this conclusion based on the version of *Jin shi lu* that I chose to read. There might be the possibility that in other versions of the same book, names of objects are different.

[45] Zhao, *Jin shi lu*, vol. 27, 10.

evidence is that the basic structure of major antiquarian works is dynastic, and there must be objects characterizing or representing each dynasty. This dynastic discourse roots deeply in the Chinese tradition of historical writing since at least Sima Qian 司馬遷(ca. 145 BCE -?), if not even earlier(for example, Confucius). The entire Chinese civilization had always been understood as a series of successive dynasties.

But the dynastic discourse causes trouble for Zhao. He has only so much space (which turns out to be thirty volumes) in his book, so he must leave the "insignificant" things out so as to keep those which best characterize and represent each dynasty's achievement in stele. Apparently, sculpted-image stelae belong to the insignificant group.

The earliest appearance of a sculpted-image-stelae-related entry[46] in Zhao's book is at volume twenty: entry#310. Between entry#310 and the end of the entire list of objects of the book(entry #2000), Zhao Mingcheng includes 1691entries/objects. Among them, only thirty-seven entries are named "zao xiang bei," and eighteen entries are called "zao xiang ji." More importantly, Zhao barely writes any comment for these entries. From volume twenty to the end of the book, Zhao offers comments for 307 entries, among which one is for a *zao xiang ji*, [47] and two are for "zao xiang bei."

In contrast, Zhao devotes most of his attention to funerary stele and epitaph. Not only are they the most frequently seen objects in Zhao's list, but also do most comments go to them. After all, besides calligraphy, the concern of antiquarianism is largely the textual information carried by the objects, which can supplement people's knowledge of history from the received texts. Even in the mere two cases when "zao xiang bei" receive Zhao's special attention, it is still often due to their relatively high calligraphic or historical value.

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[46] Including both sculpted-image stelae and "zaoxiang ji"造像記(the records of image making), which may come from either sculpted-image stelae or other types of religious sculptures.

[47] "The records of making an image by Liu Fei" 劉飛造像記, See Zhao, *Jin shi lu*, vol. 27, 1.

One case is the aforementioned "Tang Huiyi si mile xiang bei." The identity of the calligrapher is clear, and his name, Li Chao, also appears in received texts. Li Chao's calligraphy, according to Zhao Mingcheng, was neglected in the Tang dynasty, which also might have resulted in the rarity of his works during Zhao's time. Ironically, because of the somehow deserted status of Li's calligraphy, Zhao decided to pay a little more attention to the stele.

The other case is the "Wei Zhao Futucheng zao xiang bei," also aforementioned. The commissioner of the stele is presumably the renowned Buddhist monk Futucheng from Kucha, who firstly came to Luoyang at the end of the Western Jin Dynasty (266-310), and later worked with Emperor Shi Le (274-333) of the Later Zhao Dynasty (319-351). To an antiquarian, the stele inscription appears to be a highly valuable source for the study of an important historical figure.

Overall, based on terminological customs established by earlier scholars and his own judgment of the objects' value, Zhao Mingcheng uses the phrase "zao xiang bei" loosely, rather than denoting a well-defined category.

2. Stele-Image Relationship Seen in Hong Kuo's *Li Shi*

Hong Kuo 洪适(1117-1184) was the first person who included both the texts and the images that he found on stelae in his publication, *Li shi* 隶释(Clerical Script's Explanation), and *Li xu* 隶续(Continuation on the Clerical Script). The titles of his works show that Hong's major interest lies in the stone carvings of the Han Dynasty (202 BCE – 220 CE), when the clerical script assumed the dominant position in Chinese calligraphy. However, by comparing the introduction of *Li shi*, by Hong Kuo himself, and the introduction of *Li xu*, by his younger brother Hong Mai 洪遵(active twelfth century), the readers will find that the latter is not merely

a “continuation” of the former. Apart from continuing to collect more cases of Han-dynasty stone carvings, as the “Explanation” does, the “Continuation” demonstrates different methodology and purposes.

According to its introduction, the methods of the “Explanation” include this statement: “On the one hand, transcribing a character and produce its sound; on the other hand, recognizing a character and produce its explanation”既法其字為之韻，覆辨其字為之釋.[48] And its purpose is stated as “to let those learn the clerical script manage to read stele with this book, as if the actual characters are in front of them. Moreover, chewing and tasting its essence (sound and meaning) are a help to the art of ink.”使學隸者借書以讀碑，則歷歷在目. 而咀味菁華亦翰墨之一助.[49] In addition to these things, the “Continuation” aims at more, as it states in this passage:

> “The art of calligraphy (on the objects we see) is not necessarily the same to others,’ (whenever we) find the calligraphy (on some objects we see) unlike (others), then we roughly raise a dozen characters as examples, and carve them on the stone (printing plates), and it is called ‘carrying on the clerical script’. (If) the characters are the same, but their structures are different, so uneven (that the characters) are unable to regulate, then we categorize them based on their sounds, and it is called ‘sounding the clerical script.’ As for things such as dragon-turtles, “jue”-tripods, “lin”-unicorns, nine-tailed foxes, jade “cong,” jade “huang,” jade “zhang,” jade “gui,” which are strange and rare in name and shape, whenever (we) see them on the surfaces of tablets, then (we) model after their image, and it is called ‘picturing the clerical script.’”書法不必同人, 視之無如也,

[48] Hong Kuo 洪括, *Li Shi* 隸釋(Clerical Script’s Explanation), (Qiantang Wang shi lousong shuwu, 1871), 1.
[49] Hong Kuo, *Li Shi*, 1.

則毛舉十數字, 刊諸石, 曰隸纘. 其字同, 其體異, 參差不可齊, 則倚聲而彙之, 曰隸韻. 龍龜, 爵, 麟, 九尾之狐, 琮, 璜, 璋, 圭, 名物怪奇, 凡見於扁顏者,各肖其像, 曰隸圖.[50] Moreover, the purpose of the "Continuation" is stated as: "After having explained them, since (we) again acquired more, then we list (the newly acquired) after the (previously published) twenty-seven volumes, and it is called 'Continuation on Clerical Script.'" 既釋之而又得之, 則列於廿七以往, 曰隸續.[51]

It is clear that the "Continuation" initially was made to accommodate the materials that the previous "Explanation" had not. It is also because of this reason that the first two layers of the methodology of the "Continuation," i.e. "carrying on clerical script" 隸纘 and "sounding the clerical script"隶韵, can still be traced back to the "Explanation" to some degree. However, image eventually debuts in the "Continuation."

There is one commonality in all three layers of the methodology of the "Continuation": irregularity. "Carrying on clerical script"隸纘 is to collect the unusual calligraphic styles, "sounding the clerical script"隸韻 is to determine the sounds of the abnormally structured characters, and "picturing the clerical script"隸图 is to show those strange and rare in name and shape. It is because these are so irregular that the book has to particularly discuss them.

Stretching this point a bit further, it could be speculated that even the act of showing images itself might have seemed "irregular" to Hong Kuo's contemporaries. After all, the custom of the time was still to focus only on texts. It is also in this sense that Hong Kuo pushed the Song-Dynasty antiquarianism forward. Although Hong Kuo claims that the book is for the sake

[50] Hong Mai 洪邁, *Li Xu* 隸續(Clerical Script's Continuation), (Qiantang Wang shi lousong shuwu, 1871), 1.
[51] Ibid, 1.

of calligraphy learners, the connection between the showing of images and the learning of calligraphy is not self-evident.

Subconsciously, Hong Kuo had already realized the power of images. The visuality of calligraphy resides in the strokes of characters. The characters, in turn, reside on stelae, on which the things "strange and rare in name and shape" also reside. The incidental neighboring of the two within the same space might have enlightened Hong Kuo: his interest in the visuality of characters transferred onto that of the things "strange and rare in name and shape."

The case of "Fan Min Stele"樊敏碑 is a suitable example to elaborate on this speculation. Most volumes of *Li xu*, such as the first four volumes and those after the eleventh volume, conduct either the work of "carrying on clerical script" or "sounding clerical script," whereas Chapters V and VI focus largely on images. Hong Kuo studies "Fan Min Stele" at the beginning of Chapter V.[52] In fact, the same stele has already appeared once in volume eleven of the earlier "Explanation" book. Over there, Hong Kuo firstly transcribes the full text of the inscription, and then conducts historical explanation on certain selected terms by consulting received texts. In contrast, when it comes to *Li xu* (the "Continuation"), Hong Kuo firstly presents a "bei tu"碑圖 (image of the stele), illustrating the general shape of the object as well as the decorative patterns on it, and then he devotes a discussion to the calligraphy of the inscribed characters at length. This indicates that the visuality of characters and the images of other things do come into Hong Kuo's mind simultaneously.

If the case of "Fan Min Stele" showcases Hong Kuo's visual interest in image, then his handling of the "Wu Liang ci"武梁祠(Wu Liang shrine) probably reveals his primitive understanding of iconography. Like "Fan Min Stele," most of the images in volume five of *Li xu*

[52] Ibid, vol. 5, 1-2.

present the general shape of the objects and the decorative patterns on them, and these images do not directly relate to the inscribed texts. Often, the decorative patterns belong to the *xiang rui* 祥瑞(auspicious things) category, and can suit any stele.

However, volume six studies the Wu Liang shrine, and the images become narrative,[53] or more precisely, "episodic," as Wu Hung puts it. A particular inscription usually corresponds to a particular image, "pointing at the meaning of" the image. Therefore, Hong Kuo handles this case differently from other cases. In volume five, Hong Kuo often present the images of objects without the inscriptions, as he has already included the inscriptions in the previously published "Explanation" book. In the case of Wu Liang shrine, Hong Kuo carefully juxtaposes word with image.

To sum up, Hong Kuo advanced the contemporary antiquarianism by realizing that image in stele is also a useful type of material, and it needs to be processed differently. Moreover, his work makes a primitive distinction between "decorative images" and "narrative images," and the latter could even assume the position equal to words.

3. Stele-Image Relationship Seen in Huang Yi's Archaeological Activities

A revival of antiquarianism occurred more than five hundred years after Hong Kuo's time, in the mid-Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). With such a long interval in between, progresses indeed took place, and among the progressive figures, Huang Yi 黃易(1744-1802) stands out by bringing the act of "fang bei"訪碑(stele visiting) into his circle. Through the many trips of stele visiting, Huang's understanding of the stele-image relationship also reached a level even higher

[53] Ibid, vol. 6, 1-15.

than that of Hong Kuo. Huang's preservation and exhibition of pictorial stone slabs demonstrate his clear faith in the power of images, which is no less than the power of words.

This is best reflected by Huang's archaeological project of Wu Liang shrine. As a memoir for the projects, Huang painted an album leaf[54] with his own inscription, named *Ziyunshan tan bei tu* 紫雲山探碑圖(Visiting stele Stelae on Ziyunshan). The inscription goes:

> "In the autumn of the Bingwu year of Qianlong, in the gazetteer of Jiaxiang county I saw that the stone chambers on Ziyunshan is in a dilapidated status. (There is an) *ancient stelae* [italic by author] with piercing. After rubbings were made, people found that there was the 'Stele of Wu Ban, Senior Scribe of Dunhuang of Han Dynasty', alongside images from Wu Liang shrine. (Therefore,) with Li Tieqiao from Ji'ning, Li Meicun from Hongtong, Gao Zhengyan from Nanming, I went to conduct inspection. One after another, we searched and acquired three stone chambers: the front one, the back one, and the left one. (Among the pieces of stone,) there are pictures of auspicious things, stone "que"-pillars of the Wu clan, and the pictorial stone slab of Confucius meeting Laozi. I have never acquired more *stelae* [italic by author] than this time, and it is a pleasure of life time. Together with sires within the four seas who enjoy ancient things, I reestablished the Wu clan shrine, placing the many *stelae* [italic by author] inside. I moved the one and only pictorial stone slab of Confucius meeting Laozi to the Hall of Brightening the Ethics in the prefecture academy Ji'ning, passing it down forever." 乾隆丙午秋, 見嘉祥縣志, 紫雲山石室零落. 古碑有孔, 拓視乃漢敦煌長史武斑碑及武梁祠堂畫像, 與濟寧李鐵橋, 洪洞李梅村, 南明高正炎往視, 次第搜得前後左三石室, 祥瑞圖,. 武氏石闕, 孔子

[54] It is part of a series of album leaves, called "De bei shier tu"得碑十二圖(Twelve Pictures on Acquiring Stelae). For more information, see Cai Hongru 蔡鸿茹, "Huang Yi de bei shier tu" 黃易得碑十二图(The 'Twelve Pictures on Acquiring Stelae by Huang Yi'). *Wenwu* 文物(Cultral Relics) no. 3(1996), 77- 78.

見老子畫像石, 得碑之多無逾於此, 生平至快之事也. 同海內好古諸公重立武氏祠堂, 置諸碑於內. 移孔子見老子畫像一石於濟寧州學明倫堂垂永久焉.[55]

Huang Yi mentions the term "stele/stelae" three times. The first time, Huang's meaning of stele is relatively simple: "Stele of Wu Ban, Senior Scribe of Dunhuang of Han Dynasty." However, the second and third times, Huang's usage of the term changes. When he expresses the great pleasure that he takes in unprecedented amount of acquisition, by "stele" he means assorted stone carvings, including: "pictures of auspicious things, stone "que"-pillars of the Wu clan, and the pictorial stone slab of Confucius meeting Laozi." In addition, at the end when Huang introduces his handling of the "many stelae," he still means all the stones that he found. These cases reveal Huang's consistent consideration of stone-carved images as stele.

Indeed, it can be argued that this attitude of using the term "stele" loosely was widely shared by many scholars. However, when taking Huang's preservation and exhibition strategies of the objects from Wu Liang shrine into consideration, one will see Huang's groundbreaking understanding of the stele-image relationship: he treats stone slabs carved with words and those with images as equally valuable historical sources.

Instead of preserving it with other findings on site, Huang "moved the one and only pictorial stone slab of 'Confucius meeting Laozi' to 'the Hall of Brightening the Ethics' in the Prefecture Academy of Ji'ning, passing it down forever." As a Confucian scholar-official, it was natural for Huang Yi to pay the highest respect to the image of the great master, so much so that he designated a special venue for it. The prefecture academy was proper—it was not only the space where young scholars were educated under the national ideology's guidance and eventually execute the governance of the entire Qing empire after the civil service exams, but

[55] Ibid, 77-78.

also where the Temple of Confucius is located. In fact, the renowned "bei lin" 碑林(Stele Forest) of Xi'an is the most exemplary of its kind, and used to be the location of both the official academy and Temple of Confucius.

However, for centuries in the Stele Forest of Xi'an, pre-modern Chinese literati were more inclined to preserve and exhibit stelae with lengthy inscriptions instead of those dominated by images. Huang Yi's curation deviates from this tradition, as image is the focus of his exhibit. The name of the Hall, *minglun* 明倫, where the pictorial slab of Confucius meeting Laozi is exhibited, literally means "Brightening the Ethics." The term *minglun* comes from *Mengzi* 孟子 (Mencius): "It was called xiao during the Xia Dynasty, xu during the Shang Dynasty, xiang during the Zhou Dynasty, but the learning activities were in common during the Three Dynasties, as they all brightened the human ethics with it."夏曰校, 殷曰序, 周曰庠, 學則三代共之, 皆所以明人倫也.[56] Therefore, from generation to generation in China, it was for the principal academy of a certain region to uphold the duty of "brightening the human ethics" for the locals. In this sense, the "Hall of Brightening the Ethics" in Ji'ning should be the central structure of the Prefecture Academy.

Although it is not clear what other facilities originally sat in the hall, based on this name, it can be safely speculated that the local elites wished to preach the most crucial moral principles to the future rulers of the empire. Solemnly situating an image in the center of the local department of political publicity, Huang must have held elevated confidence in the stone tablet's power of mind transforming—image could be equally powerful as all words to this end.

[56] Mencuis, *Mengzi* 孟子(Mencius)(Jinan: Shandong youyi chuban she, 1993), 170.

Observing Huang Yi's scholarship, one feels a beautiful coincidence. He has many layers of identities: "calligrapher, seal carver, painter, and collector of rubbings,"[57] so much so that Wu Hung determines to call him a "cultural geographer."[58] Perhaps the coincidental combination of painting skills and antiquarian knowledge in a single person resulted in Huang's high sensibility of the power of images in stele.

4. "Bei xue"

Generally speaking, many aspects of Huang Yi's scholarship, such as examining objects in situ, reflect the influence from the so-called "Qian-Jia School"乾嘉學派 of the Qing dynasty, which emphasized the "kao ju"考據(evidential scholarship) practices. Slightly later than Huang Yi, another group of antiquarians with the searching-for-evidence spirit started their reform on the researches of stele, triggering a new set of theories on calligraphy, which are collectively called "bei xue"碑學(The Study of Stele).

Ruan Yuan 阮元(1764-1849) initiated the reform in his essay "Nan bei shu pai lun"南北書派論(On the Southern School and Northern School of Calligraphy).[59] The essay opens up mildly with a widely-accepted assumption at its time: the dynastic evolution in the history of Chinese calligraphy. Firstly, it emphasizes a critical moment of transformation in the history of Chinese calligraphy: "From clerical script to standard script and running-cursive script, this transformation took place around late Han, Wei, and Jin dynasties."蓋由隸字變為正書, 行草, 其轉移皆在漢末, 魏, 晉之間.[60] Following this comes the most progressive proposal, which

[57] Wu Hung, "Ji: Traces in Chinese Landscape and Landscape Art," Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie, vol. 17(2008): 178.
[58] Wu, "Ji: Traces in Chinese Landscape and Landscape Art": 179.
[59] Ruan Yuan 阮沅, *Yanjing shi ji* 揅经室集(The Compilation of Essays in the Room of Studying Classics)(Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 1993), 591-596.
[60] Ruan Yuan, *Yanjing shi ji*, 591.

argues that after the critical moment of transformation, there appeared the so-called "southern and northern schools": "As for the division of the standard script and running-cursive script into the southern and northern schools, (the calligraphic style of) Eastern Jin, Song, Qi, Liang, and Chen became the southern school, while (the calligraphic style of) Zhao, Yan, Wei, Qi, Zhou, and Sui became the northern school."而正書, 行草之分為南, 北兩派者, 則東晉, 宋, 齊, 梁, 陳為南派, 趙 , 燕, 魏, 齊, 周, 隋為北派也.[61]

Also according to him, each of the two schools has its distinct characteristics. "The southern school is the style at the Left-to-the-Yangtze-River region. It is relaxed, unrestrained, refined, and exquisite, and thus good for writing letters. Sometimes, (writings on these letters) deduce so many strokes that (the characters) are unrecognizable. As for the heritage of the seal script and clerical script, they have changed much during the Eastern Jin dynasty, not to mention the Song and Qi dynasties. The northern school, on the other hand, is the ancient method of the Central Plain. It is reserved, clumsy, and crude, and thus good for inscribing stelae and plaques…the two schools are different as if one is the Yangtze River and the other Yellow River, and the nobles from the south and north had never communicate with and learn from each other." 南派乃江左風流, 疏放妍妙, 長於啟牘, 減筆至不可識. 而篆隸遺法, 東晉已多改變, 無論宋, 齊矣. 北派則是中原古法, 拘謹拙陋, 長於碑榜…兩派判若江河, 南北世族不相通習.[62]

Ruan Yuan's proposal on a division between the north and south in analyzing the calligraphic styles of China, which strongly reminds one of Dong Qichang 董其昌(1555-1636)'s theory on Chinese painting, creates a new focus of discussion in the field of calligraphy at the time, and becomes the theoretical foundation of the entire "Bei xue" movement. In such a

[61] Ibid..
[62] Ibid..

dynastic evolutionary model, it is unavoidable for things to rise and fall. Ruan's discussion then proceeds onto the gradual diminishing of the northern school over time:

> "When it comes to the beginning of Tang dynasty, Emperor Taizong is merely good at the calligraphy of Wang Xizhi's style…from then on, he made the calligraphy of the Wang family to occlude both the south and north schools. Although the Wang school is manifested, the silk and paper (bearing their writings) were not many, so what the world learned more was still the north school. During the Song dynasty ruled by the Zhao clan, the copybooks published by the national library became popular, and (people) did not value the stele and tablets in the Central Plain, and thus the north school diminished."至唐初, 太宗獨善王羲之書…始令王氏一家兼掩南北矣. 然此時王派雖顯, 縑楮無多,世間所習猶為北派. 趙宋閣帖盛行, 不重中原碑版, 於是北派愈微矣.[63]

Here, Ruan secretively made the connections between "tie"帖(copybooks) with the southern school, and stele with the northern school. This move becomes the pivotal point where Ruan switches attention from the distant past to his campaign regarding current issues.

To complete his strike, Ruan composed another essay, "Beitie nanbei lun"北碑南帖論 (On the Northern Stele and the Southern Copybooks). [64] This time, Ruan frankly waves the flag to promote the northern school (and thus stele), signifying the official birth of "bei xue." It firstly continues the discussion on stylistic distinctions between the two schools initiated by the previous essay, only that it shifts the focus more towards the technological side: "Therefore, (to make) short letters and long volumes in a free manner, it is the copybook-style that excels. (To make) deep carvings of model calligraphy with square and strict grids, then the stele-style triumphs…to sum up: during the Han and Tang periods, the methods of stele was

[63] Ibid..
[64] Ruan Yuan, *Yanjing shi ji*, 596-598.

flourishing…during the Song and Yuan periods…the custom of copybook was flourishing.” 是故短箋長卷, 意態揮灑, 則帖擅其長. 界格方嚴, 法書深刻, 則碑據其勝… 要之, 漢,唐碑版之法盛… 宋, 元…而字帖之風盛.[65]

Which school shall the contemporaneous calligraphers follow, copybooks or stelae? By saying “I intend to discuss the metal and stone…who would join me?”擬議金石…其誰與歸?[66] Ruan Yuan calls on his followers to join him in returning to “metal and stone.” One of Ruan’s followers, Bao Shichen 包世臣(1775-1855), directly challenges the problematic calligraphic usage of copybooks, which had been the custom at the time. In *Yi zhou shuang ji* 藝舟雙楫(The Twin Oars of the Boat of Art), Bao takes himself as an example: “My calligraphy was acquired through (writings on) letters (which were transmitted through copybooks), and (its style) is hurt by its (trivial) delicacy”余書得自簡牘, 頗傷婉麗.[67] Therefore, Bao insists on studying stele so as to break the old custom. Due to the reformative theories advocated by Ruan and his followers, many Qing Dynasty calligraphers quickly switched from copybooks to stelae. Late Qing scholar Kang Youwei 康有為(1858-1927) considered the time between the reigns of Xianfeng and Tongzhi, when Ruan Yuan and Bao Shichen were active, to be a watershed of the entire field of Qing Dynasty calligraphy: what came before the line was “learning of the past,” and afterwards it became “learning of today.” [68]

It looks as if the “bei xue” movement concerned itself mostly with how to choose between the northern and southern calligraphic styles, but in fact it also aimed at achieving a

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[65] Ruan Yuan, *Yanjing shi ji*, 598.

[66] Ibid..

[67] Bao Shichen 包世臣, with Zhu Jia 祝嘉’s comments, *Yi zhou shuang ji shu zheng* 藝舟雙楫疏證(Dredging and Proof of the Twin Oars of the Boat of Art)(Hong Kong: Zhonghua shu ju, 1978), 3.

[68] Kang Youwei 康有为, with Cui Erping 崔尔平’s comments, *Guang yi zhou shuang ji zhu* 广艺舟双楫注(Comments on the Canton Twin Oars of the Boat of Art)(Shanghai: Shanghai shu hua chuban she, 1981), 5-7.

technological advancement of preserving images with high fidelity, and it is in this sense that Ruan and Bao's reform was driven by the contemporaneous searching-for-evidence spirit.

Chinese calligraphy is a form of art which creates images with strokes of characters. One of the primary ways in which calligraphers of all times polish their skills has been copying the works of previous generations. Therefore, securing the authenticity of works to copy is critical to the sustainability of the art. When explaining the stagnation in the development of calligraphy in China, modern scholar Zhu Jia points out that "every time after the reprinting of a copybook, the quality decreases,"[69] which led Bao Shichen's contemporaries to constantly lose confidence in their sources of materials. It was against this background that the "bei xue" supporters found the many existent stelae to be more reliable sources. Relying on these could help calligraphers avoid the distorting of characters caused by the repeating carvings of print plates.

Reflecting on "bei xue" from today's viewpoint, it appears that its historical contribution resides in the fact that it took stele to intervene in a reform of fine art. Besides Huang Yi's archaeology, this is another case advocating the materiality of objects, triggered by the searching-for-evidence spirit.

From Mid-Qing to Modern Times: The Discovery of The Stele-Image Duality

During the second half of the Qing Dynasty, some antiquarians made a significant change of directions in their research on sculpted-image stele, as they started to officially recognize the sculpted-image stele's status as an independent category of Chinese stele. As this new group of materials are supposed to be studied independently now, scholars have to come up with a new way to define the group, which in turn incurred new terminological issues. Until even today, these unresolved issues are still on the mind of scholars.

[69] Bao Shichen,with Zhu Jia's comments, *Yi zhou shuang ji shu zheng*, 3.

In the following section, a reader will see how scholars from late Qing to modern times, such as Wang Chang 王昶, Ye Changchi 葉昌熾, Daijo Tokiwa, and Osvald Siren, each made contributions regarding the terminology and classification of sculpted-image stele. Revisiting their works one by one, a reader also gradually comes to see an important aspect of sculpted-image stele's essence: the stele-image duality. This baseline determines that a more balanced approach emphasizing the ritual value of sculpted-image stele both as religious art and as (funerary) stele, rather than the pure Buddhist sculptural approach, is more meaningful to the expansion of the scholarly conversation in this regard.

1. Sculpted-image Stelae Seen in Wang Chang's *Jinshi cui bian*

One of the most achieving Qing dynasty antiquarians who systematically studied sculpted-image stele is Wang Chang 王昶, whose most important work is *Jin shi cui bian* 金石萃編(The Select Compilation of Collected Metal and Stone). Firstly, it has to be admitted that Wang's work still retains a variety of methods that he inherited from his Song dynasty predecessors, such as Zhao Mingcheng. Wang's book's organizational principle is still dynastic. When dealing with individual objects, other than transcribing the inscriptions, Wang still pays major attention to the research on historical and geographical information that the inscriptions offer by consulting received texts. In some cases, Wang offers short evaluation on the calligraphic quality of the inscribed characters.

But Wang was also working at a time when the Qian-Jia school was popular, and his work demonstrates influence of this new trend. Like other contemporary antiquarians, Wang adopted the *zhu lu* 著錄(storing-and-recording) approach. He carefully notes the physical

condition of each object, including the size, number of inscribed characters, and how the columns of characters are arranged, revealing his interest in empirical studies.

Wang's work, for the first time, reserves independent space for the systematic study of sculpted-image stele. In volume 39, Wang included an essay titled "Beichao zaoxiang zhu bei zong lun"北朝造像諸碑總論(Overall Comments on the Many Sculpted-image stelae of the Northern Dynasties).[70]

The essay consists of three main components. Firstly, it offers an overview: the time period when sculpted-image stele prevailed in China, the popular icons, the many shapes of stele, the carving techniques, proper classifiers, and the inscriptions. Secondly, it proposes a hypothesis on the origination of sculpted-image stele in history. Lastly, from the stele inscriptions, it identifies the titles that the participants of the stele-erecting project once held.

In fact, many studies on sculpted-image stele within the recent thirty years still concern themselves with issues alike, which reveals how groundbreaking Wang Chang's work was. In the concluding section of this chapter, when discussing modern scholars in the field, such as Zhao Chao, the dissertation will return to the subject of how antiquarianism, especially the works by people like Wang Chang, are still deeply shaping today's scholarship.

Wang Chang's unprecedented systematic understanding of sculpted-image stele appears in his exhaustive collection of materials. From volume twenty-seven, which contains the chapter "Northern Wei Dynasty, I," to the middle part of "Sui Dynasty" in volume thirty-nine, with more than ten volumes, Wang discusses the stone carvings dated to the Northern Dynasties, among which there are about one hundred Buddhist pieces, according to Wang himself.

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[70] Wang Chang 王昶, *Jin shi cui bian* 金石粹编(The Select Compilation of Collected Metal and Stone), (Shanghai : Sao ye shan fang 掃業山房, 1919), vol. 39, 4-5.

In these volumes, there are also several cases, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist, whose titles contain both the terms "stele" and "image." One of them has its original title inscription on the stele head, and thus we know that it was the stele-maker who came up with it. This serves as powerful evidence on how people of the Northern Dynasties understand the stele-image relationship.

The inscribed title says "Wude zi fujun deng yiqiao shixiang zhi bei"武德子府君等義橋石像之碑(Stone Image Stele of the Bridge of Righteousness by Late Viscount of Wude and Others). Wang Chang further records: "The stele, including its head, is as tall as seven 'chi' and five 'cun,' as wide as three 'chi' and three 'cun.' There are twenty-six lines, forty-two characters in each line on the upper half. There are twenty-seven lines, three characters in each line. Standard script. Now it is at the Wude town of Henei."碑連額高七尺五寸, 廣三尺三寸. 上截二十六行, 行四十二字. 下截二十七行, 行三字, 正書. 今在河内武德鎮.[71]

Among all the inscriptions dated to the Northern Dynasties available today, the phrase "shixiang zhibei," or stone image stele, seems to be the closest to later-invented term "zaoxiang bei," or sculpted-image stele. Later on, the stele inscription reveals more information regarding its images: "…(we) transported stone and erected this stele. Respectfully we carved pictures and images, exhausting the skillfulness of Gongshu Ban and Ma Jun, depleting the decoration with red 'huo'-pigment…built on the eighth day, a day of guisi, of the fourth month, a month of bingxu, of the seventh year of Wuding, a year of yisi, Great Wei, by Yang Ying" …運石立碑, 敬鐫畧像, 窮般馬之巧, 盡艧之餙…大魏武定七季, 歲次己巳, 四月丙戌, 八日癸巳建. 楊膺.[72]

It is clear that the stele bears images, and the images are unlikely to be religious.The patrons' purpose for erecting this stele was non-religious: celebrating the bridge denoted by a

[71] Wang Chang, *Jin shi cui bian*, vol. 31, 5.
[72] Ibid., 5-6.

deceased local gentleman is quite different from a religious sculpted-image stele for worshiping purposes. This case proves that the unification of stele and image in Northern Dynasties did not only take place within the realm of religious art.

It is important to remember that the stele is clearly titled "Stone Image Stele," which indicates that its "pictures and images" are unlikely to be trivial decorative patterns such as those seen on Han Dynasty stelae. If it were a Han Dynasty stele, the inscription would probably boastfully state that the writing was conducted by certain renowned calligraphers, instead of drawing readers' attention to its pictures and images. More interestingly, this stele emphasizes the superb quality of its images by comparing them to works of two ancient masters of architecture and engineering: Gongshu Ban 公輸班(a.k.a 魯班 Ban of Lu) and Ma Jun 馬鈞, rendering the stele a flavor of "private art," instead of "ritual art." After all, it was indeed erected right around the dawn of Chinese "private art" during the Northern and Southern Dynasties (roughly from the fourth to the sixth century), initiated by masters such as Gu Kaizhi 顧愷之 (active late fourth century). In this regard, Wu Hung says: "…this rebellion against traditional monumental art was part of an effort to redefine art and artistic creation during the Northern and Southern Dynasties. This crucial period literally divides the course of Chinese art into two broad phases. The mainstream of earlier Chinese art from Neolithic times to the end of the Han can be characterized as 'ritual art tradition,' in which political and religious concepts were transformed into material symbols…From the third and fourth centuries on, however, there appeared a group of individuals—scholar-artists and art critics—who began to forge their own history…All the people mentioned by name in this chapter—Lu Ji, Tao Qian, Yu Yuanwei, Kong Jingtong, and

Gu Kaizhi—belonged to this group. Their work, both literary and artistic, reflected their concern with abstract artistic elements…" [73]

On the one hand, it could be possible that some Chinese craftsmen received inspiration from their Buddhist countrymen who commissioned sculpted-image stelae and thus reshaped their own non-Buddhist stele accordingly. On the other hand, it could also be possible that the practice of making stelae with images took place in China totally outside of any Buddhist context. However, due to the current limitation of materials, I have to put this issue on hiatus temporarily, hoping to resolve it in a separate article.

2. Wang Chang's Trouble: Stele or Image?

As mentioned above, one of Wang's most signification contributions is that he began to study Buddhist sculpted-image stele as an independent sub-category of stele. But this also caused him trouble with terminology and definition, which none of his predecessors had encountered. His essay, "Overall Comments on the many sculpted-image stelae of the Northern Dynasties," is placed in volume thirty-nine of the book, concluding the section on the Northern Wei dynasty, which runs through volume twenty-seven to volume thirty-nine. Within this section, apart from the "one hundred kinds" of Buddhist carvings, which include many pieces of sculpted-image stelae, Wang basically only includes traditional types of stelae in an antiquarians sense, such as funerary stelae, songde bei 頌德碑(laudatory stelae), and so forth. Judging from this arrangement of materials, it seems that Wang takes sculpted-image stele to be closely related other types of stelae. But the opening of his essay reveals an opinion somewhat contradictory:

"The practice of making images and at the same time erecting stelae began from Northern Wei and ended around the middle part of Tang dynasty. Generally speaking, the

[73] Wu Hung, *Monumentality in Early Chinese Art and Architecture,* (CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 279-280.

(images that people) made the most include: Shakyamuni, Amitabha, Maitreya, Avalokitesvara, and Mahasthamaprapta. (They were either) carved on mountain cliffs, or carved on stelae, or made in cave temples, or made in Buddhist shrines, or made on stupas…there must be a record when making an image. After the record, there must be a eulogy, and then inscribed names (of makers). The rubbings that I have acquired, if we count them from Northern Wei from Sui, are about one hundred kinds. As for others that are scattered in monasteries and yards of pagodas, they should be uncountable." 造像立碑始於北魏迄於唐之中葉. 大抵所造者釋伽, 弥陁, 弥勒, 及觀音, 勢至爲多.或刻山崖, 或刻碑石, 造石窟, 或造佛堪(或作龕,或作磡), 或造浮圖…造像必有記, 記後或有銘頌, 後題名. 昶所得搨本, 計自北魏至隋, 約百餘種. 則其餘之散軼寺廟塔院者, 當不可勝紀也.[74]

Listing "stelae" as one type of medium on which Buddhist images could be made, among other types of Buddhist stone images, such as those on mountain cliffs, in cave temples, Buddhist shrines, or stupas, Wang apparently considers sculpted-image stele to be a type of Buddhist image. In fact, Wang's ambiguity on under which category he should list sculpted-image stele—image or stele—runs through the works of all the four subsequently introduced scholars, representing different periods and cultures.

3. Sculpted-image Stelae Seen in Ye Changchi's *Yu shi*

One of Wang Chang's admirers, Ye Changchi 葉昌熾, who lived into the beginning of the twentieth century to witness the official ending of the Chinese imperial system, demonstrates a stronger tendency towards modern art history in his book *Yu shi* 語石(Speaking About Stone).

[74] Wang Chang, *Jin shi cui bian*, vol. 39, 4- 5.

The book Speaking about Stone breaks free from to the previous antiquarian works on two levels. Firstly, *Yu shi* develops a new organizing structure. The previous antiquarian works mostly aim at conducting "zhu lu"著錄(storing and recording) of objects in a dynastic manner, and the discussion appears only in the format of comments attached to each recorded object. In contrast, Ye's book is organized around a series of key topics or concepts, and objects appear as examples to support the discussion under each topic.

Building upon this new structure, Ye makes his even bigger contribution: an essay on sculpted-image stele with discussion verging on the methodology of modern art history. The essay is in volume 5, which is about the Buddhist sculpture between the Northern Dynasties and the Tang Dynasty. In Ye's discussion on "bei xiang"碑像, or "stele-image," Ye raises a few examples, including "Mount-Sumeru Stupa by Faxian"法顯造須彌塔, and "Image by Yuchi Shanbao" 尉遲山保造象, and he closely describes the human figures on these and other objects: "With big eyebrows and an arched back, (the image) is life-like, and it is the image of Faxian"龐眉駘背, 栩栩如生, 即法顯像也.[75] Also, "among other carved (images of figures), some are in the posture of kneeing down, some hold savory flowers, and some hold things like banners, canopies, flags or staffs."他刻有作跪象者, 或執香花或執幡幢旌節之類.[76]

Through his close observation, Ye even proposes primitive formal analysis: "Once I have seen a stone, with figures all in profile, and their clothes and hats look surprisingly ancient. (The figures) still retain the styles passed down by Xiaotangshan or Wu Liang shrine."嘗見一石均側立形, 衣冠奇古, 尚有孝堂山武梁祠遺意.[77] Here Ye firstly identifies the style of certain images and then he takes that to build connection between later and earlier images so as to

[75] Ye Changchi 葉昌熾, *Yu shi* 語石(Speaking About Stone), (Prints by author himself, 1909), vol. 5, 4.
[76] Ibid, vol. 5, 4.
[77] Ibid, vol. 5, 4.

historicize his observation. With the method of formal analysis, Ye even developed a primitive understanding of the total history of Chinese art. In his study of the "Du Fali's three carvings at Longmen" 龍門杜法力三刻,[78] Ye compared its pictorial program, which are constituted by three consecutive pictures, "Images of the Generals of the Five Paths and the Lot"五道將軍等象, "Images of Ox-headed Prison Guards at the Heavenly and Underworld Offices"天曹地府牛頭獄卒象, and "Images of Yamaraja, Lords of the Southern Stars and Northern Stars"閻婆王南斗北辰象, to the "Transformation of Hell"地獄變 purported by the famous Tang-Dynasty painter, Wu Daozi 吳道子(c.a. 700), through which he argues that "Du Fali's three carvings at Longmen": "…is the origin of later times' painting and sculpture (of this type)"為後來繪塼之濫觴.[79]

The fact that Ye is able to compare the styles of Northern Dynasties Buddhist sculpture to styles of both Han Dynasty art, and Tang Dynasty art, reveals a primitive but rather organic history of Chinese art in his mind. Moreover, Ye clearly highlights the critical transitional position that the Northern-dynasties art occupies between Han and Tang.

This comparative mindset does not only assist Ye in discovering possible transmission of styles between different periods, but also in making iconographical connection between different cultures. In this case, Ye firstly raises the two of the most popular motifs of Buddhist art that he has seen on stone carvings as examples. On "Image made by ninety people from Beikong village, Henei county, during the first year of Wuding, Wei Dynasty" 河內縣北孔村魏武定元年九十人造像, Ye finds twelve images of Shakyamuni's life stories. Then on "Image made by Qi Shiyuan

[78] Ibid, vol. 5, 7.
[79] Ibid..

in Xian Mausoleum, during the thirteenth year of Zhenguan, Tang Dynasty" 唐貞觀十三年齊士員獻陵造像, Ye finds a curse by Qi Shiyuan, inscribed on top of the icon:

> "Those who hit the Buddha image and destroy words of sutras…would in the next life, constantly fall in hell, and life after life, they would not recover their human bodies, and they would always suffer from the retribution of disasters and poverty."敲打佛象破滅經字…來世恆墮地獄世世不復人身, 常值災窮之報.[80]

To facilitate the viewers' visualization of hell, Qi Shiyuan even inscribed four entries from a certain "ming lv"冥律(laws of the dark), which vividly describe the different ways in which people suffer in hell due to their behaviors. With these two Buddhist motifs at hand, Ye then moves on to comparing them to Confucian motifs in Chinese art: "With our methods, to make an analogy with Shakyamuni, Maitreya and the lot, it should be the images of (Confucian) sages. (The sage's life stories) should be pictures about the Altar of Apricot Trees, and Queli—they would look exactly like those stories of Zhou and Qin dynasties depicted in the Wu Liang shrine."以我法喻之釋迦彌勒之類, 聖賢像也. 此則如杏壇闕里諸圖—與武梁石室畫周秦故事正同.[81]

To Ye, iconographically speaking, the images of Shakyamuni's life stories and those of Confucius functioned in similar ways within each of their own cultural contexts. At the same time, Qi Shiyuan's warning to deter vandalism, made by the invocation of hell, also echoes the admonishing inscriptions with a similar purpose in the Wu Liang shrine. By combining both formal analysis and iconographical study, Ye eventually arrives at the contemplation on the big picture:

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[80] Ibid, vol. 5, 9.
[81] Ibid, vol. 5, 9.

"Investigating the images of the Six Dynasties, (I see that) they are made either by polishing stone into shrines or by melting metal into molds. The matters of painting and clay modeling started after Sui and Tang, but the numbers (of survival) do not compare to one percent of images on stone. On the 'Celestial-Venerable-of-the-Primordial-Beginning Image-modeling Stele, by Qi Guan, during the eighth year of Zhenguan' that I have seen, there is the character 'su' that one can see the earliest… During the reign of Guangshun, Later Zhou dynasty, there was the 'Hall-of-the-Judges-in-Hell Image-modeling pillar'. During the fifth year of Qingying, Song Dynasty, (there was) the 'Records of Repairing the (Image)of the Nine Mothers and Sons in Famensi', (in it there are the names) of the modeler Wang Ze, and the painter Ren Wende. This is the beginning of modeled-clay images."考六朝造象非琢石成龕即熔金為範, 繪塑之事皆起於隋唐以後, 然不敵造石百一. 餘所見石刻貞觀八年祁觀元始天尊塑象碑, 始見塑字….周廣順中, 有判官堂塑象幢. 宋慶應五年, 法門寺重修九子母記, 塑人王澤, 畫人任文德. 此並塑象之緣起也. [82]

Utilizing his specialty as an antiquarian, philology, Ye discusses the earliest uses of the terms "su"塑 and "su"塑, as seen in archaeological materials. From there, Ye manages to lead the discussion into a few of the most important issues in Chinese art history: when did painting and clay models begin in Chinese (Buddhist) art? What were the major changes of art throughout the Six Dynasties? Today, Ye's conclusions may no longer seem relevant. But the questions he raised do show the concerns of an art historian.

Although Ye's methodology demonstrates so much advancement at the time, it is still largely antiquarian. This is partially due to the fact that Ye Changchi chose to follow Chang

[82] Ibid, vol. 5, 8.

Wang in many ways. For example, Ye concludes his discussion by returning to issues such as the images sponsors' titles and so forth. Research of this kind roots deeply in Wang Chang's scholarship—Ye even attaches the entire essay "Overall Comments on the many sculpted-image stelae of the Northern Dynasties" by Wang Chang to volume five of *Speaking About Stone*.

In fact, Wang Chang's ambiguity on the terminological issue, in regard to whether sculpted-image stele should be called "image" or "stele," also causes conflict between Ye's own book and a work that is highly related to Ye's *Yu shi*. Not very long after Ye's publication of *Yu shi*, Ke Changsi 柯昌泗 composed the *Yu shi yi tong ping* 語石異同評(Comments on "Yu Shi"). In Ke's comments of Ye's volume 1, where Ye makes general comments on all Northern-Dynasties stone carvings, Ke comments on the term "Wei-stele": "Since later Wei, stelae and tablets became so many that they are not able to be counted, and the world generally views them all as 'Wei Stelae.' (If we) try and categorize them, then sculpted-image stelae are the most, epitaphs are the second most, temple stelae and funerary stelae are the third most."後魏以降，碑版多不可數，世俗概目為魏碑。試以類分，造像最多，誌銘次之，寺碑墓碑又次之.[83] Ke seems to be arguing that the sculpted-image stele should be treated as a type of stele, which is different from Ye's understanding in vol. 5 of *Yu shi*.

4. Summary

Since the rise of Qian-Jia school's empirical studies, scholars' attention to image in stele gradually increased. From Huang Yi, Ruan Yuan, and Wang Chang, who lived in the middle part of Qing Dynasty, to Ye Changchi at the end of Qing Dynasty, more and more possible methodological common ground between the study of stone-carved images and that of other

[83] Ye Changchi, with commnets by Ke Changsi 柯昌泗, *Yu shi and yu shi yi tong ping* 語石語石異同評(Speaking About Stone, and the Comments), (Beijing: zhonghua shu ju, 1994), 16.

artistic forms, such as literati painting, steadily appeared. For example, Ruan Yuan's division of the Southern and Northern schools of Chinese calligraphy, shows strong affinity to Dong Qichang's theory on the two schools of Chinese painting. Moreover, Ye Changchi's formal analysis on sculpted-image stele echoes even more the study of literati painting by pre-modern art historians, represented by Dong Qichang. However, none of these scholars bothered to value the images on stele, the "craftsmanship," as much as literati painting, the "fine art," and thus scholars were not able to break the methodological boundary between the two genres. Therefore, pre-modern Chinese scholarship on sculpted-image stele could only stop at this point.

5. Japanese Archaeological Studies: *Shina Bukkyo shiseki* by Tadashi and Tokiwa

During the 1920s and 1930s, the Japanese and Western scholars introduced modern methodology into the research of sculpted-image stele. At the time, several foreign teams of expeditions set foot on Chinese soils, investigating and seizing religious cultural relics. The seized artifacts were later put on the international art market or brought into collections of Japanese and Western museums, and they facilitated the early overseas research of sculpted-image stele.

Tadashi Sekino 関野貞 and Tokiwa Daijo 常盤大定's *Shina Bukkyo shiseki* 支那仏教史蹟(Buddhist Monuments in China) is the first comprehensive study of Chinese Buddhist art, and it is still widely consulted today. With the high-quality production of objects, thanks to modern photography technology, the book has become a valuable source of materials, and sometimes the only source of particular materials accessible to modern researchers. Moreover, it is also the earliest compilation of this kind written in both Japanese (including *kanji*, characters in Chinese), and English. This bilingual system is surprisingly useful for this dissertation's observation on

terminology: the terms chosen for “English translation” do not often correspond to the meaning of their Chinese counterparts.

In the book, there are two objects found in the Shaolin Temple, which can be considered sculpted-image stelae: one completed at the second year of Tianping, Eastern Wei(535), and the other completed at the first year of Wuping, Northern Qi(570). The approach from which Tadashi and Tokiwa treats these objects is essentially how they treat generic Buddhist statues: firstly, they introduce the icons seen on the object one after another; secondly, they transcribe the inscriptions as much as possible, with a special focus on certain characters in less standard forms.

To the stele completed at the second year of Tianping, Eastern Wei, the book gives the English title “A Rubbing of the Stele with the Buddhist Figures at Shao-lin Ssu, Sung Shan (A.D. 535).” [84] In the Japanese comments, the object is also considered to be a stele: “At the lower half of the stele’s recto, to the left and right are images of Bhikkhu Hongbao and Bhikkhuni Huirun, and inscriptions of their names…on the left and right sides of the stele body, there are inscriptions.”碑の正面下部, 左右に比丘僧洪寶, 比丘尼慧潤の像と其名と刻し…碑身左右兩側に刻字あり.[85]

To be clear, neither the term 造像銘 nor “stele”(bei 碑) appear in the stele’s inscription. The stele addresses itself as such: “(We) have always been vowing to sharpening an image…(therefore) build this image by carving stone.”宿願磬像…刊石建像…[86]

The reason why Tadashi and Tokiwa title the object “stele” is to address its outward shape as an upright stone tablet. But this does not reflect the object’s self-recognition. Probably

[84] Sekino Tadashi 關野貞 and Daijo Tokiwa 常盤大定, *Shina Bukkyo Shiseki* 支那佛教史蹟(Buddhist monuments in China)(Tokyo: Bukkyo Shiseki Kenkyukai, 1925), vol. 2, 123.
[85] Ibid.,150
[86] Ibid..

realizing this, Tadashi and Tokiwa chose to use the term "image," instead of stele in the Chinese/Japanese *kanji* title: 嵩山少林寺造像銘拓本.[87]

To address the same object, Tadashi and Tokiwa shift back and forth between image and stele in three different places, and this ambiguity is also seen in their treatment of the other sculpted-image stele completed at the first year of Wuping, Northern Qi.

6. Sculpted-image Stelae Seen in Osvald Siren's *Chinese Sculpture from the Fifth to the Fourteenth Century*

Meanwhile, in Europe and America, large-scale collections of Chinese stone carvings by museums also propelled the early systematical research on sculpted-image stele. One of the foremost representatives among these researchers is Osvald Siren, whose chief work is *Chinese Sculpture from the Fifth to the Fourteenth Century*, published in 1925. [88]

Similar to *Shina Bukkyo shiseki*, Siren's book also presents a wide range of high-quality reproductions of objects, which are mostly from the major private and museum collections of Europe, America, and Japan. The completion dates of the objects cover a time interval of ten centuries: between the fifth century and fourteenth century. In order to effectively present the materials to the readers, Siren adopts a framework that had been widely-accepted by the 1920s in the field of art history in Europe: the evolution of styles. As a result of his formal analysis, Siren puts the objects in four historically successive groups: "The Archaic period," "The Transition period," "the Period of Maturity," and "The Period of Decadence and Reflorescence." This is one of the earliest cases of the appliance of stylistic periodization on Chinese sculpture.

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[87] The book only offers the photograph of the rubbings. Although it says the rubbing of the inscription here, the rubbings do cover the complete surfaces of the four sides.

[88] Osvald Siren, *Chinese Sculpture from the Fifth to the Fourteenth Century* (London: E. Benn, limited, 1925).

Among all the objects dated to the Northern Dynasties in the book, except for the severely damaged ones, there are seventy-seven pieces titled "stele" by Siren. However, only eighteen of them would be recognized as actual sculpted-image stele by today's scholars. The other fifty-nine should be considered to be "bei ping" 背屏 (back-screen)statues by today's standards.[89]

As will be further discussed through the dissertation, a stele needs to be a cuboid, which provides the frame that integrates all words and images. In this sense, the dominant icon on a sculpted-image stele can only be inside a niche, instead of breaking the overall contour of the tablet. Therefore, although a back-screen statue also has a flat piece of plate behind the icon, its overall contour is based on the icon's body. This is against the Chinese common understanding of a stele.

The Stele-Image Duality

Between mid-Qing and the early twentieth century, that scholars fundamentally transformed their approaches as they began to study sculpted-image stele as an independent category. Due to this reason, scholars became increasingly troubled by how to address the issues of definition, terminology, and stele-image relationship. These issues have also become the interest of the scholars with modern methodology around the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century.

1. Responses from An Typological Perspective

[89] However, Siren does not consider all the back-screen statues to be stele. That is to say, beyond the aforementioned fifth-nine cases, there are other back-screen statues in the book, without the title "stele". After a close investigation, I find that those back-screen statues titled "stele" by Siren are mostly "sanzun xiang"三尊像(triple-figured-statue), and those not considered "stele" are single-figured. The second chapter of this dissertation will elaborate on this issue with more examples from Siren's book.

To sum up, the criteria against which Siren decides whether an object should be considered stele or not appears inconsistent.

Carrying on the method of Ma Heng 馬衡,[90] Lu Hejiu 陆和九, Zhu Jianxin 朱剑心, and alike, Zhao Chao became one of the representatives of Chinese scholars working on the categorization of stone carvings, around the end of the twentieth century. In his 1997 book *Zhongguo gudai shike gailun* 中国古代石刻概论(General Discussion on Pre-modern Chinese Stone Carvings),[91] Zhao firstly reflects upon the shortcoming of the antiquarian categorization: "Some inscribed texts in certain particular literary formats are used only on the stone carvings in a particular shape…but often, some stone carvings with identical functions and literary formats do have several different kinds of outward shapes. Therefore, (the antiquarian method of) categorizing stone carvings either purely depends on their outward shapes or purely depends on the literary formats, and it is not well-rounded."[92]

Building upon the works of his predecessors, Zhao Chao structures his book surrounding a new categorization of stone carvings: "The principle to define a main type is the outward shape, and (I will also) analyze the shapes of individual objects and their variants throughout the evolving process of the basic outward shape of the entire main type. Within each main type, (I will) further categorize and explain the objects based on the contents, functions and literary formats of their inscribed texts." Zhao's main types include, "keshi 刻石(carved stone), bei 碑(stele), muzhi 墓志(epitaph), taming 塔铭(inscription on stupa), jingchuang 经幢(sutra pillar), zaoxiang tiji 造像题记(sculpted-image inscription), huaxiang shi 画像石(pictorial slabs), jing ban 经版(sutra tablets), diquan 地券(land contracts), 建筑物附属零散刻铭(scattered inscription

[90] Ma Heng 馬衡 taught Chinese antiquarianism at Peking University during the 1920, and his syllabus was later adapted into the book *Zhongguo jinshixue gaiyao* 中國金石學概要(Synopsis of Chinese Antiquarianism). Ma's book consists of two halves: bronzes of all times, and stone carvings of all times. The book also reflects on the antiquarianism tradition with the critical mind of a modern archaeologist. When discussing stone carvings at the second half, it does not stop at categorizing materials but also attempts to clarify many pairs of concepts that had been used interchangeably in a casual manner by previous antiquarians, such as "keshi"刻石 and "bei"碑, and "zaoxiang" 造像 and "huaxiang" 畫像. By emphasizing the differences in the objects' shapes, functions, and genres, Ma establishes new boundaries between categories. See Ma Heng, *Zhongguo jin shi xue gai yao* 中國金石學概要(Synopsis of Chinese Jin Shi Xue)(Taibei, Yi wen yin shu guan, 1967), part II, 1-68.

[91] A revised edition came out in 2019.

[92] Zhao Chao 赵超, *Zhongguo gudai shike gai lun* 中国古代石刻概论(General Discussion on Pre-modern Chinese Stone Carvings)(Beijing: Wenwu chuban she, 1997), 1.

on architecture), and so forth." [93] As for the basic feature of the type "stele," Zhao believes that "…they all share one thing in common, which is their main body is made up with a stone cuboid, and it is where inscriptions are mostly placed."[94]

Zhao Chao then proceeds to make further categorization within the type "stele." Firstly, Zhao revisits Ye Changchi's *Speaking About Stone*'s opinion on this matter: "*Speaking of Stone* categorizes stele based on the textual content and literary formats of inscriptions: 'Generally speaking, as for the cases of stele erection, there are four ways in total. First, worshiping the holy, praising the sages, presenting the loyal, and publicizing the filial-pious… Second, engraving achievements…Third, recording events…Fourth, compiling words.'" [95] To Zhao, Ye' categorization is unsatisfactory, because the four categories do not exhaustively cover all types of Chinese stelae, and they do not precisely reflect the essence of each type. Therefore, Zhao proposes his categorization: "…based on the literary formats and functions of the currently accessible stone carvings shaped into stele, roughly categorizes them as such:…mu bei 墓碑 (funerary stele), gongde bei 功德碑 (merit stele), jishi bei 纪事碑(event recording stele), 经典及其他书刻碑(stele of canons and other books), "zaoxiang bei"造像碑(sculpted-image stele), timing bei 题名碑(stele of people's names), zongjiao bei 宗教碑(religious stele), ditu 地图 (maps), tianwen tu 天文图(astronomical charts), litu bei 礼图碑(stele of ritual pictures), and shuhua bei 书画碑(stele of painting and calligraphy)."[96] Apparently, despite that Zhao includes certain aspects of modern archaeological/typological methodology in his research of stele, he still largely carries on the antiquarian model of categorization. Zhao's major contribution is that

[93] Ibid., 13.
[94] Ibid., 16.
[95] Ibid., 17.
[96] Ibid., 17-32.

he includes more types of materials in his research, and refines Ye Changchi's categories by paying more attention to the typology.

Indeed, it can be helpful for modern scholars to keep borrowing from antiquarianism. However, as has been pointed out earlier, there are many issues that pre-modern methods unable to address. For example, what are the historical origins of the new stele-image relationship seen in the Northern Dynasties? If stele of the Han Dynasty could be one of them, then how can one articulate the development from the Han Dynasty stele to sculpted-image stele?

2. New Trials by Art Historians

Contemporary art historians have long realized the shortcomings of the existing research on stone carvings, and they have also proposed new ways to study sculpted-image stele. A popular choice has been the model of "sinicization of Buddhist art." But this model triggers other problems. For example, when addressing the link between Han Dynasty stele and sculpted-image stele of the Northern Dynasties, a widely seen explanation argues that many sculpted-image stelae also have the three main components of an elaborate Han Dynasty stele: a multi-dragon stele head, a stele body, and a stele seat, and therefore the link is self-evident. On the other hand, when discussing the difference between the two, one could easily say: "Han Dynasty stele only bear words, with minimum amount of decorative patterns, but sculpted-image stele, due to the influence of Buddhism/Buddhist art, bear elaborate icons and other images."

While this formal analysis is not technically wrong, it is superficial. In fact, Winston Kyan, in his doctoral dissertation, has already criticized the model of sinicization: it encourages scholars to look for evidence showing that in Chinese Buddhist art, there are certain elements for the "expressions of Chinese identity," and certain other elements regarded as

"foreign/Indian/Buddhist."[97] It is also my opinion that we could only speak of "Chinese stele" and "Buddhist art" as two independent entities before the unification, and the unified form itself should only be studied as an organic whole in its historical context.

This approach could easily lead scholars to devote most of their attention only to the religious icons—after all, there is not much potential of visuality in the "stele-ness" from an art historical perspective, unless one is interested in calligraphy. As a result, the entire stele becomes nothing but a box, which comes with the religious icons. As long as the icons receive enough attention, the box become disposable. Therefore, all studies on the subject have to stay within the boundaries of religious sculpture.

3. The Stele-Image Duality

In the classrooms of modern physics around the world, all teachers conduct the famous double-slit experiment. The experiment helps resolve a question that had been troubling physicists from Isaac Newton to Albert Einstein for about three centuries: sometimes they found the essence of electrons to be waves, and sometimes they found it to be comprised of particles. However, the double-slit experiment proves that electrons behave as waves and particles at the same time, and thus the wave-particle duality. This new finding, according to one of the most important physicists in the twentieth century, Richard Feynman, is "at the heart" of research regarding quantum mechanics.[98] I would like to take this finding in physics to make an analogy here and consider the essence of sculpted-image stele to be stele-image duality: it has to be studied as both image and stele, at the same time.

[97] Winston Kyan, "Body and the Family"(Ph. D. Diss., University of Chicago, 2006), 2.
[98] Salvator Cannavo, *Quantum Theory: A Philosopher's Overview*(Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2009), 9-14.

Scholars' understanding of the objects' essence determines the approach from which they deal with the objects. As mentioned, the issue of the stele-image duality had already started to trouble scholars during mid-Qing Dynasty, and it became even more pronounced in modern scholarship of the twentieth century. Yet even today, scholars still have not chosen to confront it directly.

Most modern scholars have been dodging the trouble by considering sculpted-image stele as simply "another kind of Buddhist sculpture," and have remained largely silent in regard to their ritual function as stele in Chinese history. A few more sagacious scholars have paid special attention to the local societies who were responsible for erecting some of the sculpted-image stelae during the Northern Dynasties: "yiyi"義邑. Among them, Dorothy Wong even suggests a certain connection between "yiyi" and "she"社-societies of the pre-Qin periods, because the she-societies erected "she shi"社石(Stone of she).[99] However, even works in this direction still remain at the textual level, instead of developing new frameworks to analyze images. Therefore, when it comes to the pictorial program of individual sculpted-image stelae, discussion on the stele's ritual function beyond the religious icon appears very little.

In this dissertation, the meaning of the term duality is two-folded. Firstly, as the second chapter will show, in the case of a sculpted-image stele, the stele by itself is the product of a ritual process during which the image/icon could be properly installed. Secondly, as the third chapter will show, certain image makers in the Northern Dynasties relied upon stele to meet their ancestral offering needs. In addition, the fourth chapter will trace the origin of the sculpted-image stele so as to historicize the process through which the duality came into being.

[99] Dorothy Wong, *Chinese Steles*, 36- 38.

New Framework: The Making of Merit

This dissertation would like to develop a new framework of interpretation which originates in the concept of stele-image duality: to examine how merit functions through the medium of sculpted-image stele. More specifically, this dissertation refocuses on "people." I believe that each individual stele's pictorial program is the presentation of the belief and needs of its makers and users. From this angle, I unravel the myth of sculpted-image stele's merit producing mechanism (the producers and their intention) and transferring mechanism (the receivers and distribution process).

This new framework helps one understand the transition between the stele of the Han Dynasty and the sculpted-image stele of the Northern Dynasties because it reveals the latter's essential inheritance of the ideas regarding merit from the former.[100] After explaining the inheriting relationship clearly, this dissertation can proceed to introduce the double-layered innovation brought into the ritual art of Northern Dynasties by sculpted-image stele. The prerequisite for the inheriting relationship to exist, on the other hand, resides in the fact that no matter which components of Northern-Dynasties sculpted-image stele are considered "Chinese/Han Dynasty," or which components are considered "foreign/Indian/Buddhist," they are all perfectly compatible with the aim of producing and distributing merit. If one has to explain this matter with the "Chinese/Buddhist" dichotomy from a sinicization perspective, then it should be as such: Chinese stele and Buddhist art agree with each other on the subject of merit.

[100] Dorothy Wong's book does touch upon the very important issue of sculpted-image stele's commemoration function. Unfortunately, the discussion ends quickly within two pages and it only allows Wong to conclude that "we don't know how the stelae were used." In fact, it is safe to say that sculpted-image stelae was used for Buddhist worshiping purposes. As already mentioned by the review of scholarship earlier in this chapter, Luo Hongcai's analysis of the Buddho-Daoist sculpted-image stele's sequence of viewing, or "mian xu"面序, excellently shows that the makers of stelae deliberately designed programs to regulate the behavior of stele users. The circumambulation conducted by the stele users, which is reconstructed by Luo, largely resembles the Buddhist behavior of circumambulating a stupa. In fact, even Dorothy Wong herself acknowledges that "Some donor's titles suggest rituals related directly to the stele or to images on the stele (or to the rituals held at the temple), such as kaiguangming zhu(donor of the ritual of consecrating the image, such as dotting the pupils of icons)…" Therefore, the icons on sculpted-image stelae were treated as efficacious as other types of Buddhist icons. This is the reason why makers of stelae performed consecration ritual for their newly made objects to ensure the efficacy. Wong, 69-70.

1. The Idea of Merit

Since the arrival of Buddhism, the phrase "gongde"功德 prevailed the Chinese texts. *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms* 漢英佛學大辭典[101] lists its many possible meanings, including1.virtue; 2. achievement; 3.power to do meritorious works; 4. merit, and so forth. In academic practice, scholars generally translate it as merit.

The compound comprising of the letters "gong"功 and "de"德 did not exist in the Chinese language before the arrival of Buddhism. In Chinese, "gong" basically means achievement, or merit, and "de" means virtue. However, the same concept delivered by the compound did exist in the indigenous belief of China, and the concept is "vowing to perform certain virtuous deeds in honor of certain spiritual beings, and by fulfilling the vows, merit in a religious sense is produced." The merit can be owned by the vow keepers by default, and in some cases, can also be shared with others nominated by the vow keepers (usually members within the clan). At least since the Shang Dynasty (c.a. 1600-1050 B.C.E.), that has been how ancestral offering ceremonies functioned.

Patricia Ebrey, in her 1980 article, a comprehensive study of Han Dynasty stele, brilliantly analyzes how the Han people, through the erection of funerary stelae, facilitated the making of merit. In regard to the identity of the merit producers/stele erectors, Ebrey raises the funerary stele of Cao Quan 曹全 as an example, and says: "Han epitaphs offer an item of information seldom found on later funerary inscriptions: lists of contributors. The reason for this is that in the Han funerary stelae were not always set up by family members; political subordinates, clients, or local gentlemen also often initiated the project."[102]

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[101] William Edward Soothill, *Han ying fo xue da ci dian* 漢英佛學大辭典(A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms)(Taipei: Xin wen feng chuban gongsi, 1982), 167.

[102] Patricia Ebrey, "Later Han Stone Inscriptions," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 40, no. 2 (December 1980): 333.

The group of people mentioned in the final sentence has a special title in Chinese "mensheng guli"門生故吏. "Guli" simply means someone who worked for the deceased being honored by the stele. "Mensheng" was the particular product of the mixture of Chinese systems of education and selection of officials. During the Han Dynasty, the chief official of a certain area or department was often also the nominal chief educator, who would forge a personal connection with his juniors in addition to the co-working relationship. His followers, as a result, would be, on the one hand, his political allies, and on the other hand, his students, and thus "mensheng," which literally means students coming out from one's own door. Therefore, the group which funded the funerary stele of Cao Quan were basically those who participated deeply in the local politics together with Cao Quan.

Most of Cao Quan's *mensheng guli* could only have come from certain clans in the area that Cao governed. Eastern Han period (25-220) was a time of "haoqiang zhengzhi"豪強政治 (politics of powerful clans). The powerful clans controlled the central government from generation to generation, especially toward the end of the dynasty. For example, the famous Yang clan from the Hongnong 弘農 area, secured the title of a Duke three times during four generations. Another clan, which also secured the title of a Duke for generations, the Yuan clan from the Runan 汝南 area, went even further and generated two of the strongest warlords who once sought to battle for the throne at the time. This reflects the reason why on the funerary stele of Cao Quan, as in the cases of most funerary stelae of the time, the sponsors had to emphasize their own places of birth and official titles—under the system of powerful clan politics, the combination of these two factors largely determined how one identified with interest groups.

In regard to how local elites controlled the office-holders, Zhou Tianyou 周天游 in his 1989 article makes a good summary: "During the Western and Eastern Han periods, the

governors of local areas were appointed by the court, but the clerks were appointed by the governors. With very few exceptions, the clerks were selected from the local gentlemen…during Eastern Han, once a governor of a commandery assumed duty, they usually immediately invited members of the big clans to take over the important positions, sometimes even entirely passed power to them…the chief officials and powerful clans used each other, forming parties of interest."[103]

With this historical background in mind, a reader can easily understand the intention of people's stele-erecting behaviors. At the end of the article, Ebrey studies the long list the sponsors' names, and she finds that most of them came from a Zhang clan. The members of Zhang clan indeed attempted to shape Cao Quan into a model civil servant who fulfilled the roles to which local elites had expected of him, with the stele inscription. As Ebrey points out: "Another aspect of the self-perception of the local elite is their view of the role of the Magistrate. The laudatory description of Ts'ao Ch'uan's merits can be read as an account of how the local elite liked to see Magistrates act. Ts'ao Ch'uan consulted the community leaders about suppressing the rebels. Moreover, he was an effective executive, so that the economic life of the county was quickly restored. He also saw as one of his major responsibilities acting as a patron to the local gentlemen and using his greater expertise and unique ritual role to aid them. Thus, Ts'ao Ch'uan was seen not simply in negative terms as someone who failed to oppress them, but in positive terms as someone who filled roles the local elites could not fill themselves."[104]

Therefore, the inscription on Cao Quan's funerary stele, which was authorized by the sponsors, was to praise Cao's good governance, but intended also to deliver such a message: "officials who are willing to cooperate with the powerful clans will receive the highest honor

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[103] Zhou Tianyou 周天游, "Donghan menfa xingcheng de shangceng jianzhu zhu yinsu" 东汉门阀形成的上层建筑诸因素(The Superstructural Reasons of the Eastern-Han Powerful Clans' Formation), *Academic Forum* 学术界, no. 5(1989): 40.

[104] Ebrey"Later Han Stone Inscriptions" : 350.

after passing away." In so doing, the local elites sought a promise for the protection of their privileges from society, especially the potential successors of Cao Quan.

In order to suit this purpose and ensure the effective distribution of merit to all stele sponsors (and thus shareholders), funerary stele of the Han Dynasty evolved into a widely accepted program. The stele of Cao Quan is again an excellent example. The epitaph inscription on the stele recto consists of three parts: an introduction of Cao Quan's ancestry, his achievements, and a concluding eulogy. That is to say, the recto side generally displays the legacy of the deceased. On the verso, there is the long list of names of stele sponsors, who were the *mensheng guli* of the deceased, claiming to be the heirs of Cao's legacy: the good virtue and political ideal of the deceased.

Fame that accumulated from this type of public campaign would immediately turn into tangible benefit in the political atmosphere of the time. In the"chaju"察舉(examining and raising) system, through which most politicians were promoted at the time, the practice of "pinping renwu"品評人物(ranking and evaluating people) was decisive to people's careers: "the so-called "pinping renwu," was in fact powerful clans' tool to classify candidates based on their economic and political background, as well as their virtue and talents, so as to prioritize their rights for offices. Therefore, before the 'Nine-Ranking Center-Upright system' of the Cao Wei period, it was customary for people to acquire offices according to their rankings, which were generated by local clans' 'public discussion'." [105] By sponsoring the funerary stele of one's own lord and master, one increased the ranking of oneself in public discussion. As a result, one might climb even higher on the political ladder. In the case of the stele of Cao Quan, the merit is firstly

[105] Zhou"Donghan menfa xingcheng de shangceng jianzhu zhu yinsu" : 44.

distributed to the deceased Cao Quan himself, but by honoring a "contract" with Cao Quan with the stele, each sponsor also received a "kickback" of merit.

One quote from *Li ji* 禮記(Book of Rites) suitably summarizes Han Dynasty stele's mechanism of merit producing.

> "In terms of inscriptions, (as long as) one is praised, all benefit from it. It is because of this reason, that when a gentleman looks at an inscription, on the one hand, he admires what the inscription praises; on the other hand, he admires the act of making such an inscription. As for the people who made the inscription, their wisdom is suitable to be seen, their benevolence is suitable to be followed, and their knowledge is suitable to benefited from, and he can be called a sage." 夫銘者, 一稱而上下皆得焉耳矣. 是故君子之觀於銘也, 既美其所稱.又美其所為.為之者, 明足以見之, 仁足以與之, 知足以利之, 可謂賢矣. [106]

This contractual relationship of sharing merit between the object-maker and the party that the object honors existed not only in Chinese stele but also in Buddhist art. The purposes of making an image of Buddha do indeed include praising and honoring Buddha himself, but the makers are also supposed to receive their share. Moreover, Buddhist art further extends the scope of sharing so much so that merit can even be ceded by the immediate makers to the people that they nominate (usually their close relatives).[107] Although there probably is not enough evidence to prove whether the phenomenon was purely a coincidence or the result of people's choice, history took place thusly: this common ground between Chinese stele and Buddhist art cleared their way toward unification in the Northern Dynasties.

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[106] From Chapter : "Principles of Offerings"祭統, *Book of Rite* 禮記. See Li, *Li ji zhengyi*, 1362.

[107] Research on the concept of Religious merit are plenty, I do not go in detail here. Moreover, in the following chapters, readers will see many cases of votive inscriptions on sculpted-image stele, which also explains the matter.

2. Another Common Ground between Stele and Image Before Unification

Speaking of the common ground between Chinese stele and Buddhist art, I recall that he began the dissertation by introducing the key characteristics of Chinese stele, and the one regarding its ritual function is “publicly displaying information." Unsurprisingly, much research on Chinese stele has been revolving around this aspect, aiming at analyzing its variants in different contexts. Textual references in this regard are plenty, and I raise one discussion from Eastern Han as an example:

> “Stele, (means) to carry things on the back. It was originally set up during burials…(with this) a subordinate recalls the magnificence of his lord and father, which they inscribe on the stele. People from later times followed this example. Therefore, (a stele) should be erected at the entrance of the road, where it is apparent, inscribing the text on it. This is called stele. ”碑, 被也. 此本葬時所設也…臣追述君父之功美, 以書其上, 後人因焉. 故建於道陌之頭, 顯見之處, 名其文, 謂之碑也.[108]

From this example and many other similar ones, a reader finds that one can understand the displaying nature of stelae from the perspectives of spatiality, materiality, and temporality. Spatially speaking, since a stele is generally situated at an open and public location, the message that it displays becomes as accessible as possible to all members of society. Materially and temporally speaking, from Eastern Han on, stelae were generally made of stone, and thus long-lasting. Therefore, the message that it displays becomes as accessible as possible throughout time. Stelae’s high displaying efficiency in both space and time allows it to suitably fulfill the many

[108] Liu Xi 劉熙, with comments and editing by Bi Yuan 畢沅, and Wang Xianqian 王先謙, *Shi Ming Shu Zheng Bu* 釋名疏證補(Editing, Comments and Supplements of *Interpreting Names*)(China: publisher not identified, 1896), vol. 6, 17.

ritual roles: commemoration of significant people and events, assurance for legal matters, social or aesthetic regulation, and so forth.

However, what scholars have ignored is that these beneficial characteristics of the stele also perfectly satisfy the needs of a religious icon. Therefore, in addition to their agreement on merit, the Chinese stele and Buddhist sculpture are predestined for unification in this sense as well.

3. The Development of The Merit Producing Mechanism

The merit producing mechanism, which originated in the Han Dynasty funerary stele, continued to develop on the sculpted-image stele of Northern Dynasties. For example, Han Dynasty funerary stelae present only names of sponsors without their images, and the sponsors' presence on a stele is purely due to their relationship with the deceased. In contrast, many sculpted-image stelae present images of the stele makers around the icons, and for this reason, these people are no long merely "sponsors," but also "worshipers"—that is to say, a new relationship between them and the deities emerges on stele.

The entire transformation of the merit producing mechanism from the Han Dynasty stelae to the Northern Dynasties stelae is complicated, and I need to write another dissertation to fully explain it. As a beginning of the long explanation, I hereby offer a quick summary, with a focus on a double-layered innovation incurred by sculpted-image stele.

4. A Double-Layered Innovation

As mentioned previously, Chinese stelae's high accessibility in both space and time also perfectly satisfies the needs of a religious icon. The new form of the stele, as result of the

unification between the two, acquired an unprecedented ritual role, for the first time in Chinese history: it became the object of worshiping behaviors.

This is the first layer of the sculpted-image stele's innovation on the ritual art of Northern Dynasties: the "worshiping of stele" and this innovation instantly increased the publicness of the stele in China—stele makers were suddenly willing to open up the merit producing and sharing to everyone who worship the stele, instead of keeping it within their own clans. The example of the stele by Zhang Rongqian, which is discussed in Chapter III, showcases this innovation most clearly.

Because the sculpted-image stele presents religious icons, it naturally invites every visitor to interact with it. Whoever visits the stele can always join the stele makers as well as their clan members, alive or deceased, whose images are eternally present on the stele, in worshiping the Buddha. Everyone receives merit as a result—it can even be said that the ever-coming visitors, by the worshiping behaviors, constantly generate new merit for the stele makers. In contrast, a Han Dynasty (funerary) stele does not invite visitors to participate in its merit producing—the visitors are only supposed to assume the role of viewers.

It is also for this reason, after the erection of a Han stele, especially after those who erected the stele (and had their names inscribed) passed away, that the stele's merit producing would significantly diminish, at least in the socio-political sense. But the sculpted-image stele's merit producing lasts much longer—technically speaking, as long as there are still believers of the religion worshiping the stele, new merit is produced. For example, nowadays in a small cave excavated during Eastern Wei (534-550), near Mt. Tianzhushan in Shandong, believers from nearby villages still make constant offering to the icons inside. (Figure 3.9) Despite that the local government repeatedly announcing that burning incenses inside the cave severely damages the

cultural relics and attempting to prevent the villagers from performing these rituals, the situation continues.

Because of the first layer of the innovation, a sculpted-image stele also became a "(Buddhist) votive stele for the deceased," and this is the second layer of the innovation. A sculpted-image stele initially invited people to produce merit by worshiping the icons. Meanwhile, by frequently presenting the images of stele makers' deceased clan members, a sculpted-image stele made sure that the deceased also participated in the worshiping activities.[109] In this sense, the stele makers implemented the "eternal offerings" to their deceased clan members through the stele. The Stele by Wu Hongbiao, which is discussed in Chapter II, showcases this innovation most clearly.

This layer of innovation also transformed the relationship between stele and the entire death-related ritual: the pictorial programs of many sculpted-image stelae constructed unprecedented space for the performance of offering ritual, outside of ancestral temples and tombs, which had traditionally been the two major sites for offering-making. From the pre-Qin times to Eastern Han, stelae had always played major roles in the "zang li"葬禮(burial ritual) , but during the Northern Dynasties, sculpted-image stele started to serve in "ji li"祭禮(offering ritual).

Conclusion

It seemed that one of the primary "expedient means," to borrow a term from the *Lotus Sutra*, through which people in China initially chose to receive and conceive Buddhism was their funerary practices, creating the prerequisite for the unification of the stele and image. The

[109] Chapter III will discuss the matter of "eternal offerings" in detail.

successful unification of the (funerary)stele and (Buddhist) iconic images during the Northern Dynasties rooted in their material, spatial and ritual compatibility. In terms of those sculpted-image stelae that demonstrate clear funerary/offering purposes, merit in turn connects the worship of religious icons with the offering to the deceased. The latter connection centers the discussion taking place in the following chapters, because other forms of Chinese art in later times carried the connection on.

The following chapters will elaborate on the connection by contemplating why stelae and images constantly function as an integrated totality in different scenarios. Chapter II, through the study of the Northern Wei stelae at Yaowangshan, establishes the key word of the dissertation, "tableau." In such a tableau, both living people and the deceased jointly participate in the making of religious merit. The third chapter continues to reflect on how the interaction between the religious space and funerary space further developed on the stelae dated to the Eastern Wei (534-550). Chapter IV shifts the focus to a slightly early period, the late fifth century and the beginning of the sixth century, so as to demonstrate the transitional relationship between stele and image at the eve of the unification through the study of the Guyang Cave, Longmen Grottoes.

CHAPTER II, TABLEAU

This chapter begins by taking two stelae in the Yaowangshan Museum, Shaanxi province, as examples, one by Wei Wenlang, and one by Wu Hongbiao and his brothers, to present a categorization of Northern Wei sculpted-image stelae. The two stelae show different modes of pictorial space construction. One is more stratified and static, and the other is more organic and dynamic. But within the pictorial space of both modes, the icons, images of the deceased, images of the living, and texts jointly achieve a balance in an unprecedented manner in the history of Chinese sculpture. By analyzing the pictorial spatial balance, this chapter attempts to demonstrate that a sculpted-image stele should be generally considered something that "took shape during a ritual process," "rather than being a ready-made structure."[110]

In the ritual process, all people depicted on a sculpted-image stele, both deceased and alive, are carrying out their ritual performance centered on the main niched icon, turning the stele into a tableau. Serving as the tableau for ritual performances, in turn, becomes the essence by which sculpted-image stele differentiates itself from all other forms of Chinese religious sculpture, such as freestanding statues, and niched icons inside cave temples.[111] It was also due to the newly achieved spatial balance that many Northern Wei sculpted-image stelae managed to merge the space of religious worship with the space of offering to the deceased into an organic entirety, and the entirety created an unprecedented merit producing mechanism.

Category I

[110] Wu Hung, "Art In Ritual Context: Rethinking Mawangdui,"*Early China*, vol. 17 (1992): 112.

[111] This is also the reason why I cannot agree with Osvald Siren's classification, in which he treats many "beiping xiang"背屏像, or "back-screen statues," as stele. Besides the fact that the the outward shape of any back-screen image is far from being an cuboid, its spatiality is fundamentally different from that of a stele, as the back screen is nothing but the aureole of the icon. Instead, a sculpted-image stele contains the icon in a niche within its frame. See Osvald, Siren, *Chinese Sculpture From the Fifth to the Fourteenth Century*(London: E. Benn, limited, 1925).

On the stelae in this category, the deceased and their living family members are depicted in two realms distinctly separated by a clear boundary. The pictorial program features strict hierarchy.

Take the famous Stele by Wei Wenlang as an example. (Figures 2.1-2.2) The pictorial surface of the stele is divided into two large halves (Figure 2.3): the upper half and the lower half, with a "transitional zone" in the middle. The upper half simply consists of the main niched icon and the apsaras atop. The lower half, in contrast, encompasses a much larger number of images, and on the recto of the stele, the lower half can be further divided into two registers: a procession at the upper register, and a row of worshiper figures with their palms closed in front of their chests at the bottom register. In between the upper and lower halves of the stele, animals and single-storied buildings constitute a transitional zone. In this part of the dissertation, by analyzing images in the transitional zone and the lower half of the stele, I propose an interpretation of the stele by Wei Wenlang's pictorial program.

1. The Transitional Zone

Next to the left foot of the couch on which the niched twin icons sit, there is a single-storied building with a hip roof(or "wudian ding"庑殿顶 in Chinese) bearing pointy ornaments at the ends of the roof ridge. (Figure 2.3) To the left of the building, there are the inscriptions presenting the identities of the two figures siting inside: "Ma Tang, the mother" 母馬堂 and "Wei You, the father" 父魏游.[112]

In fact, architectural structures alike appear frequently on other Northern Wei sculpted-image stelae as well. For example, on the stele by Wu Hongbiao, such single-storied building

[112] See Zhang Yan 張燕, *Shaanxi Yaowangshan beike yishu zong ji* 陝西藥王山碑刻藝術總集(The Comprehensive Collection of the Art of the Stelae at Yaowangshan, Shaanxi Province)(Shanghai: Shanghai ci shu chuban she, 2013), vol. 1, 129.

with a hip roof appears four times: 1) at the top of the recto side of the stele among other heavenly creatures, 2) to the left of the main niche of the recto side, 3) main niche of the verso, 4) and at the bottom of the verso side. (Figures 1.1 and 2.7)

Moreover, another stele in Yaowangshan, dated to the second year of Shengui (519) by Fumeng Wenqing has the single-storied building twice, on top of the main niche near the apsaras, and below the main niche near an ox-wagon, at the right side of the stele. (Figures 2.8-2.10)

In the case of the stele by Wei Wenalng, there are many reasons to believe that the building does not represent a lodging for people in this earthly world. Firstly, the list of names inscribed next to the figures at the bottom of the stele indicates the presence of the grandchildren of the stele patron, Wei Wenlang. For example, the fourth figure to the right at the bottom register is identified by inscription to be "Wei Faxing, the grandson." (Figure 2.1) The fact that Wei Wenlang having grandchildren makes Wenlang's parents the great-grandparents. At the moment of the completion of the stele, both Ma Tang and Wei You were either at a very late stage of their lives, or, more likely, deceased. Secondly, in the lengthy votive inscription at the bottom of the verso, the phrase "mourning and filial piety have not been achieved"哀孝不赴[113] appears, seemingly to be relating the the purpose of making the stele to benefiting the deceased parents. Thirdly, buildings of such kind appear several other times on the stele, and two of the icon niches on the left and right sides of the stele also happen to be shaped into such buildings. (Figures 2.4-2.5) Fourthly, beneath the bodies of Wei Wenlang's parents, there is a couch, and the twin icons inside the main niche on the stele recto also sit on a similar one. Lastly, below the couch of Wei Wenlang's parents, there is a monster supporting the bed, and another supporting monster of such kind also appears below the niched icon at the bottom of the right side of the stele.

[113] Zhang Yan's reading. See Zhang, *Shaanxi Yaowangshan beike yishu zong ji,* vol. 1, 118.

Therefore, such buildings appearing in the area blow the niched-icon on the sculpted-image stelae are likely to symbolize a certain type of dwellings of the deceased.

In addition, similar building on the stele by "Three Hundred and Fifty Society Members from Three Counties"三縣二百五十邑子 is of a much larger scale and more delicate execution. (Figure 2.11) Seen from the side, the shaping of the roof tiles and window grids is carried out with both meticulousness and skill resembling those of Chinese "jie hua"界畫(painting of the rulers) of much later times. Four musical apsaras reveal themselves below the windows, and a pair of dragons flank the building. This could demonstrate that one of the things symbolized by such buildings is "tiangong"天宫, or heavenly palace, particularly when such a building stands above the main niched-icon.

The two kinds of symbolization, the dwellings of the deceased and the heavenly palace, are interconnected on the Northern Wei stele: the fact that figural depictions of the deceased are placed inside the building, on the one hand, refers to their unearthly status, and on the other hand, reveals their family members' wish for them to ascend to the heavenly palace in their afterlife. Regarding the historical background of this interconnection, He Zhiguo, in his 2016 article, has already pointed out that the motif of Maitreya's heavenly palace found in China originated from the images of heavenly gate of Queen Mother of the West from tombs of the Han and Jin periods.[114]

The images of such dwellings of the deceased on the Northern Wei sculpted-image stele is highly comparable to some of the contemporaneous stone mortuary apparatus, such as the Stone Chamber of Shi Jun. (Figure 2.12) Structurally speaking, the Stone Chamber of Shi Jun and the images of the dwellings of the deceased that this dissertation has thus far discussed are

[114] He Zhiguo 何志国, "Tianmen, Tiangong, Doushuai tiangong: Dunhuang di 275 ku mile tiangong tuxiang de laiyuan" 天门·天宫·兜率天宫—敦煌第 275 窟弥勒天宫图像的来源, (Heavenly Gate, Heavenly Palace, and Tushita Heavenly Palace: the Origins of the Image of Maitreya's Heavenly Palace in Mogao Cave No. 257), *Dunhuang yanjiu* 敦煌研究(Dunhuang Research)2016, vol.1: 1-11.

alike in many ways. For example, they all have the hip-roof signifying the ceremonial nature of the architecture. Moreover, the deceased couple sitting inside the building on the stele by Wei Wenlang also resemble the images of the deceased couples found on the back walls of the contemporaneous stone mortuary apparatus, or on the back walls of many tomb chamber. For example, the deceased couples in both cases face the viewer directly. As Xu Jin's dissertation has pointed out, offerings were made inside Shi Jun's tomb, in front of the stone chamber, before the tomb was sealed, which showcases one of the major roles that the Northern Wei stone mortuary apparatus once played.[115] With this in mind, one may borrow a term from Wu Hung to interpret the deceased couple seen on the stele by Wei Wenlang as "iconic,"[116] in the sense that they are in a full frontal view and constantly addressing viewers from outside the stele's pictorial program, especially their son, Wei Wenlang, who was supposed to make offerings to his deceased parents. Therefore, the building depicted on the stele turns into a space of ancestral offerings.

With the seamless fusing of the space of ancestral offerings and the space of religious worship, the stele by Wei Wenlang creates its sophisticated merit producing mechanism. Within the ancestral-offering space, the deceased receive offerings from their offspring, and the offerings that they receive are nothing but the religious merit that their offspring would have acquired through building an image of a deity and other worshiping behaviors, which are partly reflected in the space of religious worship on the stele. With the religious merit offered by the son, Wei Wenlang's deceased parents were expected for a destination of blessing in their afterlife, such as ascending to the Buddhist heavenly palace. Therefore, the possible phrase "ai xiao"哀孝(mourning and filial piety) found in the stele's inscription (Figure 2.13) could have

[115] Xu Jin, "Engraving Identities in Stone: Mortuary Equipment of The Northern Dynasties(386-581 CE)" (Ph. D Diss., University of Chicago, 2017), 94-117.
[116] Wu Hung, *The Wu Liang Shrine: The Ideology of Early Chinese Pictorial Art* (Stanford University Press, 1989), 110.

referred to the fact that commemorating the deceased with their images on a stele is a way of the son's "mourning" and building an image so as to offer the parents merit demonstrates the son's "filial piety."

Above Wei Wenlang's deceased parents, there is a deer looking back. (Figures 2.1-2) In the same area on the stele's verso, there is one more deer with the same posture. Here in a mountainous landscape, a crouching tiger is on the hunt chasing the frightened deer, while a wild boar hides itself deeply in the mountain and a bird perches high. It is possible to read the first deer on the stele's recto side as looking back at both its companion and predator on the stele's verso side. This means that these groups of animals depicted on two sides of the stele form a continuous natural scene.

This beautiful natural scenery might seem a bit outlandish within the religious-worshiping and ancestral-offering context at first glance. But a comparison between this scene and a similar one on the stele by Wu Hongbiao sheds light on how its meaning perfectly helps the construction of the entire pictorial program of the stele by Wei Wenlang.

At the top of the stele by Wu Hongbiao to the right, there is also a natural scene, (Figure 2.14) and the resemblance between this one and the one on the stele by Wei Wenlang is uncanny: it also depicts one tiger crouching behind two deer looking back, only this time a bird appears below the deer-hunting tiger. Other images which are also nearby include two apsaras, two moons, a sun, two figures, and a building. The exact interpretation of this part of the stele by Wu Hongbiao will come later in this chapter, but for the moment, a small spoiler can be given—that it generally depicts a transcending/heavenly realm.

Though I would not go so far as to claim that the deer and tiger in landscape on the stele by Wei Wenlang definitely presents the heavenly realm itself, it is possible to argue that it is not

entirely earthly either. More likely, the natural scenery and the buildings nearby jointly form a transitional zone and divider between the upper half of the pictorial program (heaven/pure land of Buddha), and the lower half (people/earthly beings).

2. The Lower Half

The lower half is clearly separated from the upper half not only because of the existence of a transitional zone, but also because the pictorial spatiality of the lower half is radically different from that of the upper half. In the upper half, the main niche is at the absolute center of the program and all other images revolve around it. In contrast, the primary spatial rule of the lower half is to arrange people orderly in two registers: a procession occupies the upper register and a steady row of figures is at the bottom register. Two other secondary spatial rules, in turn, dominate each of the two orderly registers: the upper procession advances from right towards left with Wei Wenlang in lead and everyone else following him, and the bottom register unfolds itself from the middle to the sides. (Figure 2.2)

Wei Wenlang leads the procession on a tall horse, and the horse armors, Wei's tall hat, long robe, the elongated object in his right hand, and a young squire behind his horse holding an umbrella over his head jointly reveal his status as a military official. A nearby inscription says "Disciple Wei Wenlang riding on horse, wholeheartedly"弟子魏文朗乘馬一心. After Wei Wenlang's horse is an elaborate cart with long tassels or curtains hanging from its top, pulled by an ox and driven by a servant. The inscription identifies it as "Zhang Atong riding a… cart" 張阿童乘口車. It is very possible that Zhang Atong is none other than Wenlang's wife. Behind Zhang Atong are Wei Baozi 魏寶子, Wei Loulang 魏樓郎, and an unidentifiable person, and these people are perhaps all sons and daughters of Wenlang.

At the bottom register, eleven figures are all in a steady frontal view, with their palms closed in front of their chests. Inscriptions identify the male group on the right side as “Wei Hei, wholeheartedly” 魏黑一心， “Xianglang, wholeheartedly” 香郎一心, “Grandson Wei Sanbao” 孫魏三保, “Grandson Wei Faxing” 孫魏法興, “Son Wei Tongda”息魏通達, and “Wei Aju"魏阿舉, and the female group on the left side as “Wife (of a son) Jia Daohua”妻賈道花, “Wife (of a son) Tian Adeng”妻田阿登, “Granddaughter Sijiang”孫女思姜, and “Granddaughter XX”孫女口口.

The last bit of the procession extends beyond the stele’s recto and continues onto the bottom of the left side of the stele. (Figure 2.5)Here comes a troop of heavy cavalries, following Wei Wenlang’s family, providing both protection and honor.

The highly stratified pictorial program reveals the carefully maintained orders in the prosperous Wei family with many offspring. There are at least three types of orders showcased here: 1) the order of age, 2) the order of gender, and 3) the political order. The chief patron of the stele, Wei Wenlang, at the head of the entire procession, is the Master in every sense. He is male, one of the eldest among the living members of his family, and a military commander. As Wenlang’s primary female dependent, the wife Zhang Atong follows her husband tightly in the procession in her ox-cart. The means of transport, as opposed to her husband’s horse, is suitably feminine as well. Even further behind are probably three offspring of the power couple.

Underneath the procession is the row of eleven more members of the Wei family belonging to the second and third generations. With the “floating object” in the middle as the obvious boundary of gender, five males and six females solemnly stand on the two opposite sides.

Even among the troop of cavalries at the end of the procession, a political order ly exists. One rider, presumably the head of the troop, has his own squire holding a fancy umbrella for him and three ordinary solders ride in the row below him.

Outside of this system of clear orders, there are other "floating figures." The fact that they do not comfortably find a place within the system reflects their marginal or ambiguous relationship with Wei Wenlang's core family.

Underneath the main niche and besides the incense burner, there are a Buddhist priest and a Daoist priest half kneeling, and behind the Buddhist priest, who is identified by inscription to be Wei Sengmeng 魏僧猛 stands with what appear to be two of Wei Sengmeng's disciples, Zhang Huasheng 張花生, and "the Clear and True Wei Fahua"清真魏法花. Judging from the surnames of the the two disciples, it is fair to speculate that they originally came from the families of the chief stele patron and the patron's wife. Meanwhile, it is noticeable that Zhang Huasheng has a tonsure, Wei Fahua has the phrase "Clear and True"清真 in front of the name, and both their given names have a strong Buddhist flavor. These facts all point to the possibility that the two had already "abandoned the family" and been ordained as priests by the time of the making of the stele. This means that they have forgone part of their connection to their original family and therefore they could/would not participate in Wei Wenalng's procession.

Another example is the figure sittings cross-legged below Wei Wenlang's deceased parents' building, identified by inscription as " Wei Yuanji, wholeheartedly" 魏元姬一心. This female (possibly, judging by the name) member of the Wei clan, who is near the deceased couple, could have also been deceased. One other possibility is that she had been married into another household, and thus technically out of the Wei clan.

Although the lower half of the stele's verso is mostly occupied by the long votive inscription, there are still a few figures scattered around this area. (Figure 2.2) Towards the end of the lengthy votive inscription, a standing person closes his palms in front of his chest, identified by the inscription as "The daughter's husband Xiao Changsheng makes an offering at Buddha's time, wholeheartedly"女夫萧长茎一心供養佛時. In addition, Xiao Changsheng's image also appears near the "transitional zone" below a single-storied building to the right, identified by inscription as "Changsheng, wholeheartedly"苌生一心, and this time he is accompanied by a "female Daoist" 道女, who is supposed to be Xiao's wife, and a female member from the Wei clan—maybe a sister of Wei Wenlang. (Figure 2.2) Since she is married to Xiao now, the "Daoist woman" Wei is considered more of a member of her own core family, and thus does not have a spot on the recto, which is centered on Wei Wenlang's core family. Zhang Yan, the scholar who compiled the newest catalogue of the stelae in Yaowangshan Museum, argues that the icon in the main niche on this side of the stele is a Daoist, and if this argument is to be believed, the overall religious tone of the stele's verso is Daoist, which is also different from that of the recto.

The Xiao Changsheng couple are the only ones with figural representation and inscriptional identification on the verso, not to mention that Xiao's figural presence appears twice. To the left of him at the bottom, there is a list of people's names inscribed as well: "Wei Zoude, wholeheartedly"魏走德一心, "Wei Axuan, wholeheartedly"魏阿晅一心, "Wei Manhao" 魏蠻好, "Wei Ming-X"魏明口, "Li Xing, the Son"息李興, and "Wei Lu-X"魏鲁口, but there are no figural representation of them. Judging from their surnames, it can be inferred that these people are probably also relatives of Xiao's wife. But comparing to Xiao's wife, their relationship with the chief stele patron, Wei Wenlang, should be further away.

Generally speaking, Wei Wenlang's core family led the stele project and Xiao Changsheng perhaps offered important assistance on behalf of the Xiao family. Xiao's wife, the Daoist woman, who could be a sister of Wei Wenlang, possibly served as a go-between in the joint effort. Other than Wei Wenlang's core family and the Xiao Changsheng couple, no matter if it is a relative who had married out, or someone who had been ordained to be a priest, one can only enjoy marginal space outside of the figural presentational system of the stele. In some cases, when people's relationship to Wei Wenlang becomes overly thin, they do not receive figural depiction at all.

Many sculpted-image stelae of the Northern Dynasties adopt the spatial arrangement of the stele by Wei Wenlang: rows of worshiper figures pile up on top of each other at the lower part of the stele. In the extreme cases, the majority of the stele surface is covered by more than a hundred such figures, leaving the space for carving the main icon only, and nothing else. A Northern Wei example is the stele by "Two Hundred Fifth Society Members from Three Counties" dated to the fourth year of Zhengguang (523), also in the Yaowangshan Museum. (Figure 2.15) Below the main niche there is a wide strip separating the upper half from the lower half of the stele surface. Above this dividing strip is the heavenly realm containing the heavenly palace, various heavenly beings, a landscape, and the main icon. Below the dividing strip is the realm of earthly beings. More than a hundred worshiper figures are arranged in eight rows of grids from top to bottom, creating an astounding visual effect. Some of the worshiper figures, who are presumably of higher statues, are even raised up above the dividing strip and situated next to the niched icon. As opposed to the stelae built by a single family, such as the one by Wei Wenlang, stelae by "yiyi" societies were often sponsored by a much larger number of people,

and thus were more inclined to adopt the more economical and hierarchical structure for their pictorial surface.

Category II

On the stelae in this category, the boundary between the deceased and their living family members is much less clear than that in Category I, and the pictorial program features an even more harmonic fusion of the space of religious worship and the space of ancestral offering.

The stele by Wu Hongbiao is one of the best examples of this type and could be called a "Meta-sculpted-image stele," as it is self-explanatory in terms of what a sculpted-image stele truly is. (Figures 1.1, 2.6-7) The pictorial program still consists of a few different realms. On the stele's recto, there are dragons, assorted heavenly beasts, moons, and a sun at the top. The niched icon sits in the center. The areas near and below the niche is occupied by human beings riding horses, and a long votive inscription is further down.

On the stele's verso, the structure largely maintains the same as the recto, only that there is more pictorial space below the human beings on horses. (Figure 2.16) One can see a couple of acrobatic performers, and a figure sitting inside a single-storied building. At the extreme bottom to the right, a couple of ox-headed creatures are throwing a human being into a fire pot.

In this sense, there are still similarities between the spatial constructions of the stele by Wu Hongbiao and the stele by Wei Wenlang. However, the differences are also fundamental. First, the stele by Wu has at least one more realm vertically than the stele by Wei. Second, the stele by Wei has a carefully constructed "transitional zone" separating the upper half and lower half of its pictorial program, and the organizational rules of the two halves are completely

different from each other. In contrast, the separation between different realms on the stele by Wu Hongbiao is hardly observable.

Most importantly, unlike the highly stratified "realm of earthly beings" on the stele by Wei, the stele by Wu demonstrates a much more advanced sense of perspective in the presentation of this realm. On the stele's verso, a splendid procession appears. (Figures 2.17-19) Only this time, the leaders of the procession are two ox-carts, identified by inscriptions to be "Grandmother Liu Suo riding the cart"祖母劉索乘車 and "Mother Li Agong riding the cart"母李阿供乘車. Behind the carts are servants holding banners. Following the ox-carts are four riders on horseback: "Acting Magistrate of Lingwu during the Holy Emperor's Inspection Tour, Father Wu Shifeng, riding a horse" 聖皇巡方假靈武令父吳石鳳乘馬,"Wu Hongxing"吳洪興, "Wu Changshou"吳萇壽, and "Wu Honglong"吳洪龍. A servant holds a fan for Wu Shifeng from behind, reflecting Shifeng's honorable status as a former member of the Emperor's retinue. Besides the above members of the Wu clan, there are six more horse riders at the end of the procession, but there is no inscription to identify them, indicating that these figures are only mean to represent the generalized existence of guards of honor.

Although this rather large group appears to be divided into "three rows from top to bottom," any eye with slight training of art history would immediately realize that the people are traveling together as one close group, simultaneously and at one location, instead of on three different levels of elevation. That is to say, the "three rows piled up" on a two-dimensional pictorial surface are meant to depict the "depth of field": three anonymous guards are at the "top row" because they are the farthest away from the viewer, and the three at the "bottom row" are the nearest to the viewer. The honorable members of the Wu clan are apparently the focus of the

picture and thus placed in the center of the procession, surrounded by the guards from the left, the right, and behind.

The perspective on the stele's recto is even more advanced. If the perspective on the verso could be termed as "presenting depth with three parallel lines," then the recto has not only that but also "an inverted triangle." (Figure 2.20) On the two sides of the main niche, there are four rows of horse riders from top to bottom, and within each row there are two riders facing each other on the two opposite sides of the niche. (In the bottom row, there is a third rider who seemed to be added at a slightly later time). If one draws a diagonal line connecting all four riders on the left side and another connecting all four riders on the right side, then the two lines would eventually meet at the bottom of the stele. Then by connecting the two riders at the "top row," one will eventually see an inverted triangle. (Figure 19)

This structure tells a viewer that the eight horse riders who constitute the inverted triangle in the four rows are not in fact standing on top of each other. Instead, from "bottom" to "top," each of the four rows recedes gradually into depth, and all of them stand on the same level of elevation with the central icon. Their triangle formation simply means to prevent the two figures in the front row from blocking other figures in the back. Just like the situation on the stele's verso, it is the technique to depict the three-dimensional world on a two-dimensional pictorial surface.

A similar perspective also appears in the previously mentioned natural scene at the top of the stele. Among the two deer, the large one stands "lower" and the small one stands "higher," and the two are at an angle instead of lined up. On the one hand, this arrangement shows the visual/pictorial effect of "the nearer being the larger," and on the other hand, it avoids mutual blockage between figures with position yielding. (Figure 2.14)

Therefore, instead of presenting a group of figures in strictly stratified zones, the stele by Wu Hongbiao chose to create a more sophisticated yet integrated space, and this space turns into the tableau for ritual performances. The main venue of the ritual is on the recto of the stele, where the riders' group stands on the two opposite sides of the niche more steadily, and the procession on the verso could be on their way to joining the ritual.

In order to interpret the ritual, one has to again closely analyze the perspective and notice that the inverted triangle's base at the top passes almost through the center of the main niched-icon. This means that the riders do not "stand below the icon" but instead surround it, the same way the six anonymous guards surround the Wu clan in the procession at the stele's verso. In other words, the pictorial program of the stele's recto, instead of being a pure metaphorical depiction of a multilayered universe where human beings and deities reside in realms at different heights, it is in fact an honest report of a ritual that took place in reality.

For this reason, the niche does not primarily present a "deity" but the image of a deity—the specific stone image historically made and used by the riders surrounding it for their ritual. That is to say, what a viewer sees is both a "representation" of the image as a part of a picture reporting a historical event, and the true image as the icon "itself" for everyone to worship, including its makers and users in Northern Wei and all later passersby.

The majority of the pictorial surface presents an ongoing religious event. Ceremonies in celebration of the completion of such an iconic image, during which more words and images were carved, did frequently happen at the time. The inscription belonging to Yuan Xiang's niched icon inside the Guyang Cave at Longmen says: "…the appearance of the law's carving was completed. Because of this, (I) made a vegetarian feast, and inscribed stone to express my

heart, restating our previous vow..."...法容剋就. 因即造齋, 鐫石表心, 奉申前志...[117] The inscription on the stele by Yao Boduo is even more revealing in this regard: "…built a stone image…as if the true appearance emerges in our age…at this moment, people who are to make offerings and paying respect…the newly converted believers, worshiping toward the gate of profoundness. (They) have come, being overjoyed." 造石像一軀…若真容現於今世…于時, 奉敬之徒…信悞之賓, 望玄門而聖偶,不勝欣躍之至…[118]

Other than pure liturgical reasons, such ceremonies also turned into advertising events on different scales, announcing to all the community members that the brand new iconic image had been completed, and thus new space for religious activities had been formed.

The Essence of Northern Wei Sculpted-Image Stele: Tableau

The construction of space on the stele by Wu Hongbiao and his brothers is also comparable to that of the upper half of a stone carving excavated from Wanfosi, Chengdu, which is now at the Sichuan Provincial Museum. (Figure 2.21) The carving does not bear a date or any type of inscription, but based on its stylistic affinities with the several dated pieces excavated from the same hoard, it is highly possible that it was made sometime between the Southern Qi and Southern Liang Dynasties(479-557), which is roughly contemporaneous with the Northern Wei sculpted-image stelae.

Both the Wanfosi carving and the stele by Wu Hongbiao depict a three-dimensional ritual space on a two-dimensional pictorial surface, in which believers surround an icon. Apparently, the Wanfosi carving demonstrates an even higher level of perspectival sophistication, and it could even be considered as the prototype for the later "Pure Land Transformation" of the Tang

[117] Zhang Yan, *Shaanxi Yaowangshan beike yishu zong ji*, suppl., inscription no. 1843, 55.
[118] Zhang Yan, *Shaanxi Yaowangshan beike yishu zong ji*, vol.1, 4.

Dynasty (618-907) found in Mogao Caves.[119] However, in the Wanfosi picture, none of the participants possess any clear identification, whereas on the stele by Wu Hongbiao, it is the members of the Wu clan, both living and deceased, clearly identified by inscriptions, who were carrying out the ritual. It is in this sense that I argue that the innovative pictorial spatiality of the Northern Wei stele successfully fused the space of religious worship and the space of offering for the deceased.

This is the true essence that distinguishes sculpted-image stele from all other types of Buddhist sculpture: only a large cuboid piece of carefully prepared stone could offer the spacious, flat, continuous, and self-contained surface to unify all sorts of pictorial and textual elements so as to construct a tableau, which organically absorbs a niched icon and turns the icon into the central actor. More excitingly, the other actors surrounding the icon, who also help constitute the tableau, are actual human beings who in fact created the image. That is to say, Wu Hongbiao and his family created the tableau not only because they paid to have the piece of stone carved, but also because they personally acted out the play.

To borrow terms from Wu Hung again, the pictorial program of a stele of this type contains images both iconic and episodic.[120] The niched icon addresses not only the initial users who commissioned it but also every passerby afterwards. Meanwhile, revolving around the icon, many actors, who also happen to be the historical characters associated with the stele commissioner(s), constitute a tableau presenting the ritual not only to celebrate the birth of the image but also to crystallize an eternal offering ceremony. Below this show, or on the sides of the stele, a viewer sometimes even discovers a lengthy votive inscription serving as the "subtitle" of the show. The fact that a religious icon would suitably unify with a stele so as to harmoniously

[119] Wong, *Chinese Steles*, 151-174.
[120] See footnote 7.

conduct an entire show refers back to the term "stele-image duality" coined in the first chapter of this dissertation.

By seeing a sculpted-image stele as such a tableau, one will also be able to understand why sculpted-image stelae of the Northern Dynasties always use the word "image" instead of "stele" in their inscriptions to describe themselves. These inscriptions were generally engraved at the moment when the icons have been freshly carved. But the celebrating ritual, during/after which the pictorial and textual elements that constitute the stele would take shape, had not been finished yet. That is to say, the purpose of such a stele inscription was always to be celebrating the completion of the image.

Many Northern Dynasties sculpted-image stelae, such as the one in the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, dated to Western Wei (535-557), still have many blank cartouche next to worshiper figures, where names of more people could have been added. (Figure 2.22) Although it is not entirely clear what the possible reasons are for the existence of all these blank spots, it could be the indication that the completion of a sculpted-image stele was not often a one-time job, and certain rituals associated with the final completion sometimes may be left open-ended.

Again, Wu Hung's terms suitably shed light on this issue. Wu describes the "ming jing 銘旌," or name banner for Lady Dai as such: "the painting, rather than being an independent 'work of art,' was part of the whole tomb; and the tomb, rather than being a ready-made structure, took shape during a ritual process."[121] Similar to the name banner for Lady Dai, a Northern Wei sculpted-image stele, with the sophisticated pictorial structure like that of the stele by Wu Hongbiao, could also have taken shape during a ritual process, and the niched icon, instead of being an independent "work of art," was part of the tableau.

[121] Wu, "Art In Ritual Context: Rethinking Mawangdui," 112.

Continuing on the Stele By Wu Hongbiao and Brothers: The Pictorial Program

The inscription on this stele includes this sentence: "As the craftsman's achievement has been at its place, here comes such vows" 匠功既就,乃有斯願.[122] The vows mentioned here, which Wu Hongbiao and his family made after the image's completion are as following: "…both seniors and juniors in the household…both the bodies that have been given up and those deceased/aged, would encounter (the chance) to hear the law of the immortals, and to feed on and be covered by nature"…家口大小…捨身壽身，值聞仙法，依食自然… [123]

The phrase "both seniors and juniors in the household" generally refers to the living members of the family, and the phrase "the bodies that have been given up and those deceased/aged" might refer to the deceased ones, though the word "shou"壽 could mean a variety of things. In fact, on the stele's verso, near the main niche, one does find the names of "Great grandfather Wu Alu" 曾祖吳阿魯 and "Grandfather Wu Shun"祖吳順. Since the grandsons of Wu Hongbiao also have their figural presentation on the stele, it is highly possible that Hongbiao's great-grandfather Alu and grandfather Shun were not alive at that time.

The realm where the law of immortals could be heard is also further described by the inscription: "Ten thousand shapes (of creatures show their) rare transformation, and (there are) peaceful and clear images" 萬形奇變，澹泊淨象,[124] and the top area above the niche on the stele's recto side (Figure 2.23) can be identified as such a realm. At the right half of this area, one tiger crouches behind two deer looking back, and a bird appears below the deer and tiger. To the left of the bird, an apsaras is flying in the sky, and further down there is a circular object with

[122] Zhang Yan, *Shaanxi Yaowangshan beike yishu zong ji*, vol.1, 97.
[123] Ibid..
[124] Ibid..

a toad inside. Underneath the circular object, two birds of different species perch. In the middle and on top of the twin dragons, there is a large circular object, from inside of which clusters of lines radiate. On the left half, there are also an apsaras, a circular object with toads and rabbits inside, and a bird perching in a forest. It can be generally determined that this area presents a heavenly realm with sun, moons, and a series of heavenly creatures, and that they are the "ten thousand shapes of creatures" mentioned in the inscription.

Apart from these, there are a pair of figures and a small building in this realm, and in order to interpret this scene, one needs to consult the phrases that come immediately before the phrase "Ten thousand shapes (of creatures show their) rare transformation, and (there are) peaceful and clear images" in the inscription:

> "Lord Zhang, and Gentleman Yin, due to the fact that the essence had taken shape and revealed its traces, assisted the building of images with money and rice (constantly), until (they) achieved the path. Because of this reason, Daoist believers Wu Biao and his brothers, and their father and uncles, searched for (the essence) in the Daoist cannons upwards, and their benevolent heart rises from inside…built a stone image…" 張君, 尹生, 因精成顯跡, 錢米助像, 成道乃止. 是以道民吳標兄弟, 父叔, 仰尋經文,內發慈心...興建石像一區...[125]

The trigger of Wu Hongbiao's stele project was the inspiration that he received from past deeds of Zhang Daoling and Yin Xi, who were viewed as prominent Daoist immortals at the time.[126] Zhang, and Yin, during each of their lifetimes, had encountered events that could be considered to be "rui xiang"瑞像(auspicious images). In Dunhuang, quite a few caves feature the

[125] Ibid, 95,
[126] Ibid, 97, footnote #5.

stories of a Buddhist Liu Sahe (c.a. the third and fourth centuries),[127] who was believed to have encountered the sudden appearances of naturally formed images of Buddha along with other miraculous phenomenon in Liangzhou, and the events stimulated not only Liu's piety for the religion but also prompted large-scale image building projects. The stories of Liu are also known as the "Liangzhou Ruixiang" 涼州瑞像(the Auspicious Images in Liangzhou). The stories of Zhang and Yin as reflected by the stele here bear astonishing resemblance to that of the Buddhist rui xiang stories.

If the phrase "the peaceful and clear images" in the inscription refers to the two immortals, Zhang and Yin, then it is possible that the two figures at the top of the stele are the depictions of them. The small building nearby could either refer to one of the unfinished images by Zhang or Yin, or a baby in a cradle, indicating the rebirth in heaven. (Figures 2.24-25) Either way, this possible Daoist pictorial presentation of a *rui xiang* would be earlier than any Buddhist ones known to us today.

Taking into account the fact that Wu Hongbiao's family vowed to imitate the past deeds of Zhang and Yin by making an image so that they could ascend to the realm of the immortals, the majority of the pictorial program of the stele becomes rather clear. Members of the Wu clan, on both the recto and verso sides, are gathering for the ritual, which was the final step for the completion of the stele. With the finished image and the offerings that they would make in the ritual, the Wu clan wished that everyone, both deceased and alive, could ascend to the realm of immortals at the top of the stele. In this sense, the niched icon becomes their channel or gate to the higher realm, resembling the heavenly gate on the name banner of Lady Dai from Mawangdui. (Figure 2.26)

[127] Wu Hung "Rethinking Liu Sahe: The Creation of a Buddhist Saint and the Invention of a 'Miraculous Image.'" *Orientations* vol. 27, no. 10 (November 1996): 32-43.

Until this point, both the stele by Wu Hongbiao and that by Wei Wenlang share much in common regarding their conception of universe in the sense that both stelae present the heavenly realm and the earthly realm vertically on their surface. However, there indeed is a fundamental difference between the two and it has to do with the bottom right corner at the verso of the stele by Wu Hongbiao, which is also the only part of the stele's pictorial program left to be discussed. (Figure 2.16)

The picture here could be loosely divided into three parts. Firstly, at the upper left corner, it is a figure in a frontal view sitting inside a single-storied building. Secondly, to the right of the building, there is an acrobatic performance with one person holding a long pole and three people revolving around the pole at the top. Thirdly, at the extreme bottom, one ox-headed creature is stirring the firing materials inside a large pot with a long stick, and another such creature is fiercely holding a person upside down, attempting to throw the person into the pot. More people await behind the human-throwing scene. Besides these, there are a few more figures on both sides, whose activities are harder to determine.

The first and second parts of the picture are relatively easier to read. As discussed earlier, a person sitting inside a building of such style in a frontal view is very likely to be a deceased ancestor, and the ancestor here is enjoying the acrobatic performance to the right in his or her afterlife, which is a motif frequently seen on murals in tombs since the Han Dynasty.

The third part of the picture is possibly a loan from the contemporaneous Buddhist depiction of hell. In fact, the Northern Wei Dynasty is exactly the time when the depiction of hell initially flourished in China. But it is also because of this reason that such examples is relatively rare. One of the possibly largest set of a "Hell Transformation" of the Northern Dynasties known today is at Cave 127, Maijishan Grottoes. The cave was excavated roughly between the Northern

Wei and Western Wei periods, and according to Sun Xiaofeng, the Hell Transformation is located at the bottom of the front walls of the cave next to the inner end of the corridor.[128] Sun reports that "…the scenes of people being punished in hell are rather blurry and thus hard to be fully recognized now due to smoke, scratching, natural deterioration, and other reasons. Judging from what is left to be seen, one can tell that each picture generally…consists of one to two ghost soldiers, some instrument of torture, and a few people being tortured. "[129] This combination bears high resemblance to the image of hell on the stele by Wu Hongbiao.

The image of hell on the stele by Wu Hongbiao is one of the earliest examples of such type in the Chinese history of art, and it pertains to important methodological issues. These issues can include something as specific as how to study the Northern Wei sculpted-image stele, or as general as how to study religious art of China, the history of Chinese religions, or the entire history of exchange between China and the outside.

The key issue at stake is that, in most existing research, the stele by Wu Hongbiao is labeled as a "Daoist Stele." For example, the catalogue upon which I reply heavily, compiled by Zhang Yan, clearly divides the stelae at the Yaowangshan Museum into three groups: the Daoist group, the Buddho-Daoist group, and the Buddhist group. Zhang Yan lists the stele by Wu Hongbiao under the "Daoist Group." Many other scholars also generally adopt this view. Han Wei, Yin Zhiyi and Hu Wenhe have all published articles specifically on the Daoist sculpture of China and all these articles include the stele by Wu Hongbiao.[130]

Speaking from the perspectives of both the inscription and iconography, one can also say that the stele by Wu Hongbiao reveals very clear and strong Daoist inclination, and therefore

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[128] Sun Xiaofeng 孙晓峰, "Maijishan shiku di 127 ku yanjiu" 麦积山石窟第 127 窟研究(Study of Maijishan Cave 127)(PhD diss. Lanzhou University, 2014), 140.

[129] Ibid, 143.

[130] See Han Wei 韩伟 and Yin Zhiyi 阴志毅, "Yaowangshan de daojiao zaoxiang bei"耀县药王山的道教造像碑(The Daoist Sculpted-Image Stele in the Yaowangshan Museum, Yao County), *Kaogu yu wenwu* 考古与文物(Archaeology and Cultural Relics), no. 3(1987): 18- 26. Hu Wenhe 胡文和, *Zhongguo daojiao shike yishu shi* 中国道教石刻艺术史(Art History of the Chinese Daoist Stone Carving), (Beijing: Gao deng jiao yu chuban she, 2004).

such system of separating things into the "Buddhist" and "Daoist" groups is still fundamentally important. To those who are familiar with Chinese religious art before Tang Dynasty, the heated dispute revolving around the stele by Wei Wenlang is probably an unavoidable topic in their writing of historiography. This dissertation has already touched upon one aspect of the dispute, which is the issue of the stele's dating, and the other aspect of the dispute regarding whether the two icons in the niche at the stele's recto side are twin Buddhas or a Buddha along with a Daoist deity seems even harder to settle. In the past few decades, almost every scholar who has mentioned the stele in their writings is more or less involved in the dispute.

Indeed, distinguishing a Buddhist stele from a Daoist one could bear decisive importance to the reconstruction of the stele's pictorial program. However, I also believe that even if one takes an entirely different approach, the knowledge he or she would obtain from the same material could still be original and much. Over the seven years at the University of Chicago, one of the most thought-provoking sentences regarding the history of Chinese religions that I heard was said in one of the seminars held by Professor Paul Copp. The sentence is from Eric Zurker's article, "Perspectives in the Study of Chinese Buddhism": "if we want to complete our picture of what this Buddhism really was, we have to look outside Chinese Buddhism itself."[131]

One of the most important motifs in Buddhist art, and also a milestone of the transformation of Chinese people's view of the universe is the image of hell. However, the earliest well-preserved evidence available to scholars on the subject happens to be a so-called "Daoist" stele by Wu Hongbiao, dated to Northern Wei. This example fabulously embodies the final sentence in the last paragraph, which deeply shaped my view of Chinese religion. It is also for this reason that throughout the entire dissertation, I do not force myself to separate his

[131] Erik Zurcher,"Perspectives in the Study of Chinese Buddhism," in *Buddhism in China: Collected Papers of Erik Zurcher* , ed. Jonathan A. Silk (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 260.

materials into two utterly different systems: the Buddhist and the Daoist, as the artificiality of this separation should be self-evident given that the issues concern me the most only include the merging of the space of religious worship with the space of ancestral offering, as well as the stele-image duality.

To sum up, the images at the bottom of the verso side of the stele by Wu Hongbiao are a presentation of a mixed group of ideas regarding the underworld. Weaving it into the entire pictorial program of the stele, one sees a complete tripartite universe: heavenly realm of immortals at the top, earthly realm in the middle, and the underworld at the bottom. The stele commissioner(s) wish(es) that through their image-building activities and other worshiping behaviors, they would be able to assist all clan members, both deceased and alive, either to ascend to the heavenly realm, achieving immortality, or at least to maintain a luxurious and happy life in the underworld, avoiding punishment in hell.

Unlike the stele of Wei Wenlang, which emphasizes orders and hierarchy, the stele by Wu Hongbiao is more interested in the possible flows between different realms. With more mobility, the latter also creates a more dynamic mechanism of merit producing and transferring.

Sculpted-Image Stele: The "Less Sophisticated" Shapes And The "Fully Matured" Shape

A sculpted-image stele's capacity of serving as a tableau has gradually revealed itself in the above discussion. But not all existing samples of Northern Wei stelae encompass the visual and textual elements as sophisticated as the stele by Wu Hongbiao. For the sake of a more comprehensive discussion, I would like to perform a short formal analysis on a few objects that could be considered as less "sophisticated."

Formally speaking, all sculpted-image stelae could be considered a type of freestanding niched image within a larger frame, and Northern Wei freestanding niched images are in a variety of shapes. For example, the Osaka Municipal Museum has such an image, (Figures 2.26) and it is dated to Northern Wei before the capital was relocated to Luoyang.[132] Comparing this image and those niched-images in the Guyang Cave at Longmen, one would see the strong resemblance. Although the overall shape of the stone is still ovoid instead of cuboid, it is no longer a "back-screen statue" as the icon is housed inside a niche.

The second example, a piece by a certain Wei Wenlang, is dated to the twentieth year of Taihe (496) by the inscription (Figures 2.28-2.30), and there is a chance that the commissioner of this piece also commissioned the well-known stele causing the disputes introduced previously. At the twentieth year of Taihe, most of the earliest niches in the Guyang Cave had not been completed, and therefore this piece by Wei Wenalng is among the earliest batch of (prototypes of) sculpted-image stelae in China. The number of niched icons on this piece of stone is astonishing: on one of its wide sides, the main icon sits in the center and below it are five small niches in a row. On the opposite side, there are two niched icons of the same size in a column. On each of the two narrow sides, from top to bottom there are three niched icons. The entire stone is thoroughly covered by niches, and there is nearly no space left for much of anything else other than one passage of inscription. It is almost a "mini cave temple" inside out.

The third example, the stele by Yao Boduo, (Figure 2.31) also dated to the twentieth year of Taihe, is another early "prototypical" sculpted-image stele. It is prototypical in the sense that the niched icons completely takes over the top of the tablet, almost like a substitution of the decorative stele head in the shape of intertwined dragons frequently seen on Chinese stelae since

[132] Osaka Shiritsu Bijutsukan 大阪市立美術館(Osaka Municipal Museum), *Chugoku no sekibutsu: sogonnaru inori* 中国の石仏 : 荘厳なる祈り(Chinese Buddhist Stone Sculpture: Veneration of The Sublime)(Osaka: Osaka Shiritsu Bijutsukan,1995), pl.79.

the Han Dynasty, and the main body of the tablet is largely a writing support for the lengthy inscriptions.. The niched icons have not yet been fully integrated into the pictorial program of the stele.

Compared to the above examples, the stele by Wu Hongbiao seems to be in a more "sophisticated" form, encompassing all kinds of visual and textual elements needed for a tableau. The niche is closer to the physical center of the stele, and much space is relieved to accommodate images of people, people's apparatus, creatures of different species, landscape, architecture, and heavenly things. Moreover, all the different elements are in a spatial harmony, revolving around the niche.

This brief formal study of freestanding niched icons is more of an observation rather than a narrative of a linearly progressed history. In other words, the freestanding niched icons in all different shapes discussed here did not always necessarily evolve "from the simple to the sophisticated." Contrarily, there is no way to determine that the seemingly "simple" forms must predate the "sophisticated" forms, and even after the prevailing of the most sophisticated type, the making of the other types could still have carried on. The purpose of conducting such a typological study is to demonstrate that during the final years of the fifth century, which was the formative period of sculpted-image stele, many different trials of erecting freestanding niched images were made. Among these many trials, one of them gradually stood out and earned a little more popularity, and it opened up the possibility for the creation of a "tableau" with its pictorial program.

Beyond the Great Boundary

Northern Wei sculpted-image stele, as represented by the stelae by Wei Wenlang and Wu Hongbiao presented the images of the deceased in an aboveground and entirely public space open to anyone, which is rarely seen in Chinese history. Moreover, such stelae incorporated both the deceased, who were to receive offerings, and the alive, who were to make offerings, into a unified and continuous space, or the tableau.

This opened up the possibility for yet another transformation at the intersection of Chinese religious and funerary art. Before the emergence of sculpted-image stele, funeral stele/tomb stele had not been presenting the personal voices of the deceased. Instead, family and friends erected stelae to bid farewell to the deceased. During Northern Wei period, people transformed stele to allow the deceased to personally join the worship of religious deities, and thus for the first time in China, the agency with which one could receive religious merit thorough one's own effort was bestowed on the deceased.

In the Yaowangshan museum, stelae presenting strong agency of the deceased are many, and three of them with clear Northern Wei dates serve as good examples for a discussion. Generally speaking, there are two types of them. Type One presents the images of the deceased directly, and Type Two presents their agency through inscriptions.

1. Type One

Example 1): The Stele for Guo Lingfeng, dated to the Second year of Yongping (509).

On the recto side of the stele, (Figure 2. 32) there are three rows of figures, with their upper bodies carved in relief inside the niches, and lower bodies incised along with the horses they ride. The top row has one rider to the left, identified by inscription as "Guo Lingfeng, the deceased father" 亡父郭令鳳. The chief sponsor of the stele, who appears to be the youngest

living son of Guo Lingfeng, is at the middle row, along with his older brothers, who are identified by inscription as “Clear believer, Guo X-X making offering to Buddha wholeheartedly” 清信士郭口口一心供養佛, “Older Brother Guo X-Jun” 兄郭口儁, “Older Brother Guo Song-X” 兄郭松口, and “Older Brother Guo Wenya”兄郭文雅. The third generation of the Guo clan is at the bottom row, and are identified as “Son Guo Faxian”息郭法賢, “Son Guo Fahai”息郭法海, “Nephew Guo Xian(?)huan(?)” 侄郭先(?)歡(?), and “Wang Xing-X”王兴口.

Example 2): The Stele by Fumeng Wenqing, dated to the second year of Shengui (519).

Below the main niche on the recto side of the stele, (Fig.35) there are a pair of figures with their palms closed in front of their chests, identified by inscription as “Daoming” 道明 and “Wife Lei Nanzhi” 妻雷男昏. The inscriptions at the verso of the stele tell the relationship between the two and the stele commissioner Fumeng Wenqing 夫蒙文慶: “Owner of the image Fumeng Wenqing”像主夫蒙文慶, “Mother Lei Nanzhi” 母雷男昏, and “Father’s name is Daoming” 父名道明.

Moreover, the lengthy votive inscription at the bottom of the stele’s recto reports: “Fumeng Wenqing for his deceased father and deceased younger sister…”夫蒙文慶為亡父亡妹…[133] Therefore, it is clear that Wenqing’s father, Daoming, was already deceased at the time, and Wenqing built the stele for Daoming’s sake.

But it appears that Wenqing’s younger sister was also deceased, and Wenqing’s good wishes went to her as well. In fact, the lengthy votive inscription continues onto the right side of stele: “…disciple of Buddha, clear believer, deceased Guangji, (Wenqing wishes that this would)

[133] Zhang Yan, *Shaanxi Yaowangshan beike yishu zong ji*, vol. 1, 235.

let her be reborn in heaven."…佛弟子清信士亡光姬, 願使生天[134] Above this second half of the votive inscription and below the main niche on the stele's right side, (Figure 2.33) there is a picture of a person sitting inside a cart pulled by a mule, traveling towards a single-storied building, identified by inscription as " Clear believer Guangji" 清信士光姬. Since the image of the deceased father appears below the main niche at the stele's recto, at the same location of the stele's right side, the figure traveling in the mule-cart should be Wenqing's deceased sister, Guangji.

2. Type Two

Example: the Stele by Guo Tansheng 郭曇勝, dated to the fourth year of Yanchang (515).

The stele features the names of an astonishingly large number of deceased people, especially in the areas around the main niches on each side of the stele. On the recto, above the niche, there is a list of people's names inscribed: "Deceased Biqiu Faqing" 亡比丘法慶, "Biqiu Guo Tansheng making offerings"比丘郭曇勝供養, "Fu Guozhen making offerings wholeheartedly"傅國珍一心供養.(Figure 2.34) On the verso, above the niche, it says: "Deceased disciple Tanfeng" 亡弟子曇丰. To the left of the niche, it says: "Deceased Grandfather X-Nu-X,"祖亡父口奴口. To the right of the niche, it says: "Deceased Liang Yuanhui"亡者梁元諱. (Figure 2.35)

On the left side,there is a lengthy votive inscription that begins by saying: "Biqiu Guo X-sheng built a stone image, for his deceased disciple Tanfeng…" 比丘郭口勝造石像一區，為亡弟子曇丰….(Figure 2.36) On the right side, to the left of the niche, it says: "Deceased father

[134] Ibid., 237.

Guo Sengjing” 亡父郭僧景, and to the right, it says: “Deceased X Liang Feng wholeheartedly” 亡口梁丰一心. (Figure 2.37)

The three examples shown here are no longer simply “for the sake of the deceased,” but are also bestowing on the deceased the same kind of agency that the living people enjoy. In the two cases of Type One, the stelae place the images of the deceased among the images of people alive, including the commissioners of the stelae, and present the deceased as being in the action of worshiping. The example of type two, instead, inscribes not only the names of the deceased, but also their actions of worshiping. For example, the deceased Liang Feng, also “wholeheartedly” makes his offering to Buddha, as if he was still alive at the time. Similarly, on the stele by Wei Wenlang, as discussed earlier in this chapter, the deceased sister of Wei Wenlang riding the mule-cart, also has the inscription reading “Wei Yuanji, wholeheartedly.”

3. Beyond The Great Boundary

The fact that many Northern Wei stelae allow the deceased to actively participate in worshiping actions had triggered another change: the great boundary between the world of the deceased and the world of the living became weakened.

From the Han Dynasty to the Northern Dynasties, tomb murals and stone mortuary apparatus would only feature the images of the deceased as the receivers of offerings at most, and their living family members would not enter the pictorial program to join the deceased. Shen Ruiwen also touches upon this: “…tombs are different from religious architecture, such as cave temples, which are aboveground, as the latter would house images of the sponsors who are still alive. Although the tomb structures do have the motivation to express certain wishes of the people alive through the deceased, the depiction of the people alive along with the deceased

inside tomb architecture underground would be hard to understand. This is probably why it has not been seen that people alive depict themselves along the deceased in the tombs."[135]

Therefore, during the offering ceremonies performed in tomb chambers before the sealing of a tomb, the figural representation of the deceased is constrained in the two-dimensional pictorial surface on the walls, as opposed to the three-dimensional space surrounded by the walls, in which family and friends make the offerings. Between the transcending/holy deceased ancestors, and the mundane living offspring, there is a great boundary—one that also clearly separates the two-dimensional pictorial surface and the three-dimensional world. Such a boundary emphasizes the generational modeling and disciplining effects, as the offspring must worship the ancestors and make offerings so as to ensure their own privileges in the future.

However, Northern Wei sculpted-image stele presents both the "ancestors" and the "offspring" together within a same continuous pictorial space, only that the ancestors now have acquired another layer of identity—worshipers of Buddha. This, in turn, even reformed the Chinese ideas of ancestors.

During the Han Dynasty, people held huge uncertainty, or even fear, towards the deceased ancestors. The tomb of Lady Dai (Figure 2.26), as Wu Hung argues, is "polycentric," exactly because her family was highly uncertain regarding how to pinpoint one happy home for her in the afterlife.[136] Therefore, many different choices were offered to Lady Dai to ensure that she would rest in peace as much as possible and not harass the living after her death. To a certain degree, the "uncertainty" was exactly caused by the great boundary, as the living family members were not able to understand, let alone join, the afterlife journey of the ancestors.

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[135] Shen Ruiwen 沈睿文, "Beizhou shi jun shi tang W1_N5 de tuxiang neirong"北周史君石堂 W1_N5 的图像内容(The Pictorial Contents of Pieces W1 and N5 from The Northern-Zhou Stone Chamber of Shi jun), *Shaanxi lishi bowuguan guan kan* 陕西历史博物馆馆刊, issue 22, (2015): 14.

[136] Wu, "Art In Ritual Context: Rethinking Mawangdui," 142.

In contrast, many believers of Buddhism and Daoism in Northern Wei had found a rather definite answer to the question of what a preferable afterlife should be and more importantly, how to get there: achieving merit through a variety of religious activities, such as making an image of a deity, would decisively facilitate the journeys to either a Buddhist Pure Land or a Daoist Heaven. Moreover, both the living and the deceased are now able to participate in both the merit producing and transferring processes through a sculpted-image stele. In this sense, the deceased were no longer considered separated from the living, and this significantly reduced people's uncertainty and fear toward the deceased. Hou Xudong's comprehensive study on the Buddhist inscriptions of the Northern Dynasties also demonstrates that Buddhists at the time indeed believed that both the deceased and the living belonged to the same system of rebirth. [137]

This also helps settle a controversy in the study of Chinese cave temples regarding the term "kuzhu"窟主, which literally means "owner of the cave." I argue that the reason why scholars frequently hold opposite opinions on this issue is that they have not agreed upon whether the term should refer to "the chief owner of the merit produced by the cave" or "the chief owner of the materialized architectural form of the cave itself."

One cave that has been intensely discussed in this regard is Mogao Cave 156, dated to around the year 865. The pictorial program of the cave largely revolves around the presentation of Zhang Yichao 張議潮(799-872), the first Military Commissioner of the Army of Return to the Righteousness, and it seems that Yichao should be the chief owner of the merit produced by the cave. However, there is no textual evidence showing who personally commissioned the cave, and thus scholars do not know whether Yichao was also the owner of the cave in the material sense. At the same time, Yichao's nephew, who succeeded his role after Yichao's retirement, Zhang

[137] Hou Xudong 侯旭东, *Wu, liu shiji beifang minzhong fojiao xinyang: yi zaoxiang ji wei zhongxin de kaocha* 五、六世纪北方民众佛教信仰 : 以造像记为中心的考察(Buddhist Belief of the Northern People during the Fifth and Sixth Centuries: A Research Centered on the Sculpted-image Inscriptions)(Beijing : Zhongguo shehui kexue chuban she, 1998), 155-156.

Huaishen 張淮深(831-890), has a figural presence inside the corridor of the cave, where the chief cave commissioner usually stands. Customarily, a family member of the younger generation would commission a cave for the senior members of the family, honoring them with the merit produced by the cave. Therefore, it seems that Huaishen could have been the commissioner of the Cave. But if this hypothesis stands, then it is hard to explain why Yichao's deceased parents, instead of Yichao himself, occupy the prestigious position above the cave entrance.

The current discussion shows that Yichao's presence in the cave could be not only for him to receive honor and merit but also for him to serve as a pious worshiper of Buddha, and to further produce merit and transfer it to his own deceased parents. This way, Yichao's role is not in conflict with that of Huaishen, were Huaishen to be the factual cave commissioner.

In order not to stray too far away from the subject of the dissertation, I will temporarily stop on issues regarding Mogao Cave 156 and will devote a separate article to it in the future. But my purpose of plugging in this seemingly less relevant discussion is that it demonstrates that the innovative fusion of Buddhist art and funerary art triggered by Northern Wei sculpted-image stele did indeed have its heirs in the later history of Chinese art.

Eternal Offering

As has been discussed elsewhere in the dissertation, the Northern Wei sculpted-image stele's innovative spatiality does not only exist in the pictorial program that it presents, but also in the tablet's physical adaptability to a variety of locations. Whether it is in the open field in nature, the crossroad in a busy commercial area, or the yard of a Buddhist monastery, as long as the commissioner needs one, a sculpted-image stele stands there. Therefore, what was originally

an object often closely associated with the mourning rituals and burial rituals at tombs during the Han Dynasty, had become separated from the above scenarios. Indeed, Northern Wei sculpted-image stelae had never replaced tomb stelae, but they indeed created unprecedented funerary spaces, only that sculpted-image stelae, unlike tomb stelae, did not play too much of a role in either the mourning or burial rituals. Instead, it created a new milieu for the offering ritual, and this became a new development of Chinese stele after the Han Dynasty.

Unlike the offering rituals conducted at ancestral temples or tombs until the Han Dynasty, the Northern Wei sculpted-image stele, through its merging of the space of religious worship and the space of ancestral offering, fostered a new model of eternal offering. Before the invention of the sculpted-image stele, deceased ancestors had been pure "objectives of offering and worship," and in exchange, they were expected to protect and benefit their offspring, who make the offerings. The contractual relationship was only between two parties: ancestors and offspring. In the tableau of a sculpted-image stele, such as the ones by Wu Hongbiao or Fumeng Wenqing, the ancestors' roles become subtler—they are both "the objectives of offering" and the "worshipers of religious deities." Therefore, both the deceased and the living now share a common objective of worship, which is the religious deity. As an exchange, the religious deity is supposed to offer both the ancestors and the offspring an amiable next life. The contract is now between three parties. Consequently, the ancestors achieve self-sustainability regarding their own offerings.

To a certain degree, outside the traditional model of making ancestral offerings at a temple or a tomb, which depends on the presumably incessant efforts of endless generations of offspring, it opened up new space for ancestral offering. As a result, it is possible that the sculpted-image stele popularized itself very quickly among the commoners during the sixth century because it had never been easy for the commoners to afford incessant offerings at either

ancestral temples or tombs for generations. It is possible to say that the self-sustaining sculpted-image stele liberated both the ancestors and the offspring.

Summary

At the end of this chapter, I would like to revisit the methodological issue regarding sinicization. As has been argued in the first chapter, one could not speak of "Chinese stele" and "Buddhist/religious art" as two independent halves of a Northern Wei sculpted-image stele, which should only be studied as an organic whole in its historical context. Northern Wei stele's fusion of the space of ancestral offering and the space of religious worship discussed in this chapter is neither simply a "Western/Indian/Buddhist influence" on Chinese art, nor a "return to the ancient Chinese practice" following the model of funerary art in pre-Qin periods or the Han Dynasty tomb stele. These two statements appear to be opposite of each other but in fact share the same root, and statements as such have been plaguing the field for a long time. Hopefully the current discussion disproves both of them once more.

Like many other aspects of the Northern Wei art and material culture, the sculpted-image stele was merely a form invented by the residents of Northern China at the time, with whatever means available, in order to fulfill their particular ritual needs. More importantly, during the process of this invention, abstract ideas such as "Indian/foreign/Buddhism/Chinese/Han/ancient" most likely had never crossed people's minds.

The next chapter offers more exemplary stelae to shed light on these issues. Slightly different from examples discussed in this chapter, on those stelae one perceives more voices and images of people outside the family of the deceased, such as their friends and colleagues. Therefore, the examples might appear less like a "standardized" sculpted-image stele, and reveal

more affinities with the traditional tomb stele, which give more attention to the deceased rather than the religious deities.

CHAPTER III, FUSION

One of the short-lived dynasties that appeared after the collapse of the Northern Wei was the Eastern Wei (534-550). At the time, more stelae of a mixed nature fusing features of both Buddhist sculpted-image stelae and funerary stelae came into being. Among these stelae, at least three different major forms can be observed. Between the three forms, it must be realized, again, that no "stylistically evolutionary relationship" should be casually imagined—within the very short Eastern Wei Dynasty, there could hardly be any chance for that to happen. The main purpose of the following discussion on the three forms is to demonstrate the diversity of people's artistic strategies in response to their particular ritual needs at the time. By observing the diversity, one will see how certain images and motifs, in the contemporaneous fusion of Buddhist art and funerary art, migrated beyond the boundary between the two realms, and transformed their meanings in the new context at the destination.

The stele by Zhang Rongqian for his deceased father Zhang Fashou, (Figure 3.1) a stele representing the first form, largely maintains the basic layout of a typical religious sculpted-image stele. At the same time, the stele demonstrates clear features of contemporaneous funerary art. Pictorially speaking, the depiction of the deceased Zhang Fashou and wife, or the primary "recipients" of the merit made through the niched icon on the stele, is rather close to the images of the deceased found in contemporaneous tomb murals or stone mortuary equipment, instead of the typical "worshiper figures" seen in religious art. Textually speaking, other than the stylized wording normally seen in a dedicatory inscription (Chinese: zaoxiang ji, 造像記) on a contemporary Buddhist sculpture, the inscription on the stele by Zhang Rongqian reveals uncommonly strong concerns for his deceased family members, especially his late father.

Centering the stele's pictorial program on the such concerns, Zhang Rongqian presented three sets of Buddhist icons, done with three different carving techniques, for three different ritual purposes, resulting in three types of monumentality.[138]

The stele for Cheng Zhe, (Figure 3.2) which represents the second form, devotes only one of its wide sides to the niched icon along with other Buddhist images and reserves the other side entirely for a eulogy of the deceased Cheng. As the composition of the eulogy strictly follows the general rules of its genre at the time and mentions nothing regarding religion or the making of an image, there is a good chance that the entire object was used mainly for the purpose of a funeral, or that the stele was erected directly above the tomb. This would explain the different from the sculpted-image stelae discussed previously. Despite of this, at least on its image side, the stele still retains the basic layout of a sculpted-image stele, with the dominant niche in the center and incised figures surrounding it.

The Stele for Yue Yanqing, by Yue's friend Li Huijin (Figure 1.2) which represents the third form, has the least affinity with a religious sculpted-image stele, and the most with a funerary stele. Similar to the stele for Cheng Zhe, the stele for Yue Yanqing also has the eulogy for a deceased person on one of its wide sides, and the images entirely on the other side. However, no dominant niched icon appears on the stele. Instead, the rather large depiction of the deceased and his friend, who is also the stele commissioner, occupies the upper half of the stele's image side. Moreover, the style of the depiction of the two friends shows clear connection with the worshiper figures seen on the contemporaneous religious sculpture. Meanwhile, the lower half features an elaborate scene of a person watching acrobatic performances, which, in turn, originates in Han Dynasty bas-relief slabs found in tombs.

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[138] I use the word monumentality the way Wu Hung defines it. Firstly, it "denotes memory, continuity, and political, ethical, or religious obligations to a tradition." Secondly, it is neither "transhistorical" nor "transcultural", and has to be explored "within well-defined cultural and political traditions." In this dissertation, Chinese stele with religious and funerary functions during the Northern Dynasties presents clear monumentality. See Wu Hung, *Monumentality in Early Chinese Art and Architecture*, (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 1- 4.

Each of the three forms manifest a particular type of interaction between the religious space and funerary space within their pictorial program, and these interactions also convey themselves through the functional relationship between the different sides of each stele. In this sense, this chapter's strategy of approaching the three cases is also comparative.

The Stele By Zhang Rongqian: Three Types of "Monumentality"

1. Existing Scholarship On the Stele

The stele was once located inside the renowned Shaolin Temple but was destroyed during the fire in 1928, and thus currently people understand it through only its rubbings. Despite the loss of the original, the stele has long been regarded as academically significant. This is mostly due to the large "Thousand Buddha" combination occupying the verso side of the stele. The combination consists of forty-two Buddhas in total, each of which sits inside its own niche. (Figure 3.3) All of them come with an inscription clearly stating the name of each Buddha, and occasionally also stating the sponsors and purposes of making the images. It is also for this reason that scholars have mostly devoted their attention to these names of Buddhas, attempting to find out the sutra from which they came, and the possible Buddhist philosophical thinking behind said names.

Since as early as the nineteenth century, scholars have been publishing information regarding the stele. Chinese antiquarian Wang Chang transcribed the stele's inscriptions in *Jin shi cui bian* 金石萃编(The Select Compilation of Collected Metal and Stone).[139] At the beginning of the twentieth century, Édouard Chavannes (1865-1918) had pointed out that the *Lotus Sutra* was one of the major sources from which the names of Buddhas originated.[140]

[139] Wang Chang, *Jin shi cui bian*, vol. 30, 2-3.
[140] Edouard Chavannes, *Mission archéologique dans la Chine septentrionale* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1909), 581-583.

Japanese scholars Sekino and Daijo also mentioned the object in their expedition report *Buddhist Monuments in China*.[141] In the early twenty-first century, Dorothy Wong dedicated a whole article to the stele with a more thorough reading of the verso side, within which Wong provides a list of the names of all forty-two Buddhas on the verso side.[142] A Chinese translation of the expanded version of the article was later published in China.[143]

Wong finds out that, apart from the *Lotus Sutra*, *Suvarṇaprabhāsa* or the *Golden Light Sutra*, there was another major textual source of the Buddha names on the stele: *Sutra on the Universal Ornament of Attaining Buddhahood*.[144] Wong also emphasizes that both the *Lotus Sutra* and the *Golden Light Sutra* served as important theoretical foundation for the repentance rituals in Chinese Buddhism.[145] Therefore, Wong argues that some sponsors of the images on the stele must have held purposes closely related to the Buddhist repentance rituals conducted to compensate for the faults and crimes of people both alive and dead.[146] Unfortunately, Wong does not go into depth on this notion.

In fact, the wish for the benefits of the deceased is exactly the principal designing guideline of the stele's entire pictorial program. The stele's chief commissioner, Zhang Rongqian, with three sets of images on four sides of the stele, expressed his concerns for not only his deceased parents, but also a deceased brother. More importantly, Zhang Rongqian opened up the stele's verso side to a range of outsiders as the space for collective ancestral offering.

2. The First Two Types of Monumentality

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[141] Sekino and Daijo, *Shina Bukkyo Shiseki,* vol. 2, pl. 123.

[142] Dorothy Wong, "What's in a Buddha's Name: Case Study of a Sixth-Century Chinese Buddhist Stele from the Shaolin Monastery," in *Treasures Rediscovered: Chinese Stone Sculpture from the Sackler Collections at Columbia University*, ed. Swergold, Leopold, et al. (New York: Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery, Columbia University in the City of New York, 2008), 17-26.

[143] Dorothy Wong, "Fo ming yu chanyi: focusing on the stelae by Zhang Rongqian and Chen Hailong" 佛名与忏仪—以张荣迁碑和陈海龙碑为中心(What's in a Buddha's Name: Case Study of a Sixth-Century Chinese Buddhist Stele from the Shaolin Monastery), trans. Zhang Shanqing 张善庆, *Dunhuang Research,* issue 2(2010): 6-16.

[144] Wong, trans. by Zhang, "Fo ming yu chanyi": 6.

[145] Ibid., 22 -23.

[146] Ibid., 22 -23.

The dedicatory inscription on one of the stele's narrow sides contains rich information regarding the production process and the pictorial contents of the stele. The majority is presented here (Figure 3.4):

> "…for this reason, the chief patron of the Wushengsi Temple, Zhang Fashou, was able to, under the multi-layered parasols, cutting the trap of affection and earthly duties. During the second year of Xiping, by donating the house, (he) built the temple, wishing also to carve an image, so that the fortune would not stop. (He) measures and estimates the realm of the law, and his sensation lets the holy realm bud. If it were not for a person who had been buttressing (himself with good) causes and storing karma, and for many lives valued nothing else more than this, who could establish such grand and broad vows? His son, Rongqian, has the style name Xiuhe. His actions are loving, benevolent and filial. He learned finery and virtue from (early) generations. His heart admires the hidden and tranquil. The fine and true has been his long-time wish. (Therefore,) he carved the stone so as to build images. (On the stone,) there is (the triad of) Shakyamuni Buddha, Avalokitesvara, and Manjushri. This is to look up and tell the (deeds of) the deceased father, and settle and pacify the old wish. In addition, (Rongqian) at the sides of the (triad), "unrevealingly" created (the image of) the Buddha of the Infinite Life Span. (In so doing, Rongqian vows that) the fortune could contain the entire realm of the law, and that his deceased father and deceased mother's spirits could abandon this material form, both reach the Pure Land, and that they would hear the teachings of the bodhisattva, and realize the path and become Buddha. The Second Year of Tianping of the Great Wei. The eleventh day of the fourth month, and the year is Yimao. Bhikkhu Hongbao inscribes."

…是以務聖寺檀主張法壽能於五蓋重羅之下, 契斷恩愛塵勞之繒綱. 於熙平二年舍宅造寺宿願磬像, 福不止已. 規度法界, 尋其羅絡, 情苞聖境. 自非藉因積劫, 莫貴累世者, 熟能發茲宏闊願行者焉?!息榮迁, (字)修和. 行慈仁孝, 世習精懿, 誌慕幽寂, 妙真遐願. 刊石建像, 釋迦文佛, 觀音文殊. 仰述亡考, 平康舊願. 復於像側隱出無量壽佛. 福洽法界, 考妣等神,舍茲質形, 悉稟淨境, 同曉薩雲, 覺道成佛. 大魏天平二年. 歲次乙卯四月十一日. 比丘洪寶銘 .[147]

The artistic sophistication of Zhang Rongqian's image-making action accentuated his sincerity of filial piety for the deceased parents presented with the words above, as the inscription also demonstrates highly clear awareness of the differentiation between the ritual functions carried by the two images carved with two different types of techniques. Matching the inscription with the images, one sees that the main Shakyamuni triad occupies the stele's frontal niche and is in high relief. In addition to the niche, two more images are on the stele's two narrow sides, and the dedicatory inscription describes them as "at the sides of the (triad), 'unrevealingly' created (the image of) the Buddha of the Infinite Life Span." (Figures 3.4-3.5) Unlike the niched triad, one sees that the images of the Buddha of the Infinite Life Span, or Amitabha Buddha, are made in incision, and this is what the phrase "unrevealingly created," or "*yinchu*" in Chinese, means.

In the case of the niched triad, it was Zhang Rongqian's deceased father, Zhang Fashou, who firstly proposed the making of such images at the time when he donated the house to establish the Wushengsi Temple. However, due to unknown reasons, it seemed that Zhang Fashou was not able to fulfill his vow during his lifetime. Eighteen years after the establishment of the Wushengsi Temple, at the Second Year of Tianping (535), Fashou's son, Rongqian,

[147] Ibid., 8.

completed the images as per the deceased father's unfinished vow. In addition, the inscription also has the phrase that Zhang Rongqian "looked up and told the (deeds of) the deceased father, and in order to settle and pacify the old vow." It indicates that the iconographical arrangement for the Shakyamuni triad was initially the decision by Zhang Fashou. Although the father was supposed to make both the temple and the images with his own efforts so as to receive religious merit eighteen years ago, he did not completely succeed. Now as the son finished these efforts on behalf of the father, the overdue merit would finally go to the father as planned, even though the father was already deceased at the time.

In contrast, the merit producing mechanism of the incised images on the stele's two narrow sides is entirely different. One of the primary beliefs associated with the Amitabha Buddha is that by honoring or worshiping the Buddha in various ways, people would receive the unique merit to have a better chance of arriving at the West Pure Land in the afterlife. The inscription here states "(In so doing, Rongqian wishes that) the fortune could contain the entire realm of the law, and that his deceased father and deceased mother's spirits could abandon this materialized form, both reach the Pure Land, and that they would hear the teachings of the bodhisattva, and realize the path and become Buddha." Therefore, the ritual function of the incised images of the Amitabha Buddha on the narrow sides of the stele is rather clear: its purpose is to assist the deceased parents of Zhang Rongqian in their afterlife journey to the West Pure Land, entirely through the son's efforts. Zhang Rongqian transferred the religious merit produced through his making of the images of the Amitabha Buddha to his deceased parents without even their knowledge of it.

In other words, if Zhang Fashou did not encounter untimely death before he was able to personally witness the execution of the images of the Shakyamuni triad, there probably would

not even be the two incised images of the Amitabha Buddha. After all, the images of the Amitabha Buddha were meant to assist in his and his wife's afterlife journey to the West Pure Land. To this end, one cannot even be sure that the images in Zhang Fashou's mind were to be on a stele. According to the argument made in the previous chapter of this dissertation, the incised images added by the son were the products of the ritual carried out in celebration of the completion of the niched triad, and thus, they should be considered part of the tableau subordinate to the niched icon.

The technical differentiation between the two sets of images also signifies the hierarchical relationship between the two generations of patriarchs in the Zhang family, presented purposely by the son. The Shakyamuni triad demonstrates stronger three-dimensionality in the center of the tableau and is apparently more costly to make. The Amitabha Buddha are flatter, cheaper, marginal, and thus less monumental.[148] The son made the deliberate choice of a carving technique inferior to that of his father's image so as to present his humbleness, and therefore, filial piety.

This inference contains two assumptions that need to be clarified. 1) Was it possible for the Zhang family to possess enough knowledge of Buddhist thinking and imagery so as to make such sophisticated decisions? 2) Was it possible for the deceased Zhang Fashou's artistic/iconographical decisions to be accurately passed down to his son after eighteen years? These two issues bring one's attention back to the third person mentioned by the dedicatory inscription beside the father and son.

Near its ending, the inscription presents the name of the composer, Monk Hongbao, who was probably one of the keepers of the Wushengsi Temple. Hongbao's possible position of this type would have made him an ideal choice as the composer of this inscription, which reminds

[148] Wu, *Monumentality in Early Chinese Art and Architecture*, 24-44.

one of how the Han Dynasty "mensheng guli" (former subordinates and pupils) would compose memorial texts or even the epitaph for their deceased patrons. Apart from demonstrating the close relationship between Hongbao and the Zhang family, the elegantly composed and highly original inscription reveals Hongbao's brilliant cultivation of literature and Buddhist philosophy. Therefore, he could be one of those who advised the Zhang family on their Buddhist projects, including the making of images. At the same time, the eighteen-year operation of the Wushengsi Temple also facilitated its own careful recording of the religious initiatives by the Zhang family between generations.

The figural representations underneath the main niche also provides this hypothesis with support. (Figure 3.6) In front of the niche, there is an incense burner with two guardian lions on the sides. To the left, priest Hongbao leads Zhang Fashou in the worship of Buddha, and on the opposite side, there are the female priest Huirun and Zhang Fashou's wife Wei Qingji. On the one hand, it reiterates the relationship between the niched triad and Zhang Fashou, and on the other hand, it shows Hongbao's role as a Buddhist advisor of the Zhang family.

3. The Affinity between the Sculpted-Image Stele and the Cave Temple

Zhang Rongqian's strategy of highlighting the differences between the two sets of images' ritual functions by adopting two disparate approaches of media handling also illustrates the possible affinity between the sculpted-image stele and the cave temple of the Norther Dynasties, which will be further discussed in the final chapter of the dissertation. For the moment, it suffices to simply point out one aspect of this multilevel affinity: in both cases, the three-dimensional main icon defines the visual, spatial, and ritual program of the complex entity of the object or

architecture. The incised images or paintings, which are flatter or two-dimensional, are subordinate to the main icon.

With only a few possible exceptions, any Buddhist cave temple must have a main icon, or zhu zun 主尊 in Chinese, and the absolute majority of these main icons are three-dimensional sculptures. Such a main icon of a cave temple could be freestanding against a wall or attached to a back-screen. But more often than not, it is within a niche in the wall. Many of the cave temples in China, such as those in Longmen and Yungang Grottoes, primarily feature stone sculpture in their pictorial program, and therefore it is only natural that the main icon appears as a relatively large-scale stone statue. However, in Northwestern China, the stone in the mountains is too soft, which makes it hard to execute exquisite sculptures directly on the walls inside the cave temples, such as those in Dunhuang and Kizil Grottoes. Inside the cave temples of this type, wall paintings spread across the walls and ceilings, forming the pictorial program. But even in these cases, most of the caves still retain a niche so as to situate their three-dimensional main icon, which usually are in the format of clay sculpture.

The so-called “main wall” or “front side of the central pillar” has to be reserved for the niche of the main icon in a Buddhist cave temple of China. Therefore, the niche of the main icon directly faces the entrance of the temple, and thus becomes the first thing a visitor sees once the person enters the cave. After entering the cave, a visitor finds that their movement is still regulated by the main icon. For example, in a central-pillar cave, one has to firstly proceed to the right-hand side of the main icon so as to begin the circumambulation. In turn, the circumambulation further decides the sequence in which one sees each part of the cave’s pictorial program.

On the stele by Zhang Rongqian, one sees a highly comparable phenomenon. The main icon inside the niche defines the "recto" side of the stele, and it thus establishes the sequence in which a viewer goes through all images on the stele, underlining the viewer's understanding of the entire pictorial program. One could even imagine that if a viewer were to circumambulate the stele, then they would also firstly proceed to the right-hand side of the niched main icon. (Figure 3.1) In order to view all of the texts and images located on the four different sides of the stele, a viewer has to accept a sequence predetermined by the main niche for the movements of both their body and eyes.

Scholars such as Dorothy Wong have long been proposing that one of the possible sources of the sculpted-image stele of the Northern Dynasties could be the niches inside Buddhist cave temples. Many years have passed, yet no thorough work has been done in this regard. The discussion here aims to initiate a brief push on the conversation by contemplating it from the angle of how medium helped shape spatiality in Chinese Buddhist art.

4. The Pictorial Program of The Stele by Zhang Rongqian

The main niche on the recto side features Shakyamuni, Avalokitesvara, and Manjushri. Underneath the niche, by the side of the incense burner, Zhang Rongqian's deceased parents are led by Hongbao and Huirun to worship the Buddha above. On top of the niche, in the places corresponding to Zhang Rongqian's deceased parents' positions down below, there are also two worshiper figures on lotus flowers. (Figure 3.7) The Seven-Buddha images hovering overhead are a popular symbol of a blessed time in the future. In addition, since lotus flowers grow from underneath their feet, the two of them could possibly be the representation of Zhang Rongqian's

parents' rebirth in the future Pure Land, which is also reflected by the vows of the dedicatory inscription.

The verso side also contains rich visual and textual information. (Figure 3.3) On this side of the stele, forty-two small shallow niches of seated-Buddha images take up most of the space, representing the "Thousand Buddhas" from different times and worlds. The names of people who sponsored each of these images as well as the names of their family members to whom they wished to dedicate the merit are sometimes also inscribed near the niches. These image of sponsors came from a range of families other than Zhang Rongqian's own family, who might not be directly related to him.

In addition, at the bottom of the verso side of the stele, there are three short passages of dedicatory inscriptions, stating some of these image sponsors' vows for a variety of deceased and living people:

1. "Wish that Wang Chongli and his four brothers would all nicely gather in a grand household, being protected within the radiation of rules. Fathers and mothers of seven lives and all beings with in the realm of the law would become Buddha."願王崇禮兄弟五人悉得善集大家, 範度內外. 七世父母, 法界仓生成佛.[149]

2. "Zhang Rongqian(made an image) for his two brothers, one living and one deceased, and (he wishes) that Nanfang, whose style name is Ronghe, a healthy body, and constant noble status. (He also) wishes that the deceased would encounter the Buddha, and

[149] Dorothy Wong, "What's in a Buddha's Name: Case Study of a Sixth-Century Chinese Buddhist Stele from the Shaolin Monastery," 19.

become Buddha in the realm of law.”張榮千為存亡二弟, 南方字榮和, 身康常貴. 亡者遇佛, 法界成佛.[150]

3. “Zhang Taobang made two (images) of Buddha. One is for the old vow of the deceased parents. One is for all beings in the realm of law, and all fathers and mothers.”張桃棒造二佛, 一佛為亡父母舊願造, 一佛為法界眾生, 一切父母.[151]

5. Collective Offering and the Third Type of Monumentality

Based on the images and texts on the stele, one can infer that Zhang Rongqian was fully aware of the verso side’s pictorial program dominated by people who might be strangers to him, which means that it is not the result of any later alteration. Firstly, both the images of the Amitabha Buddha and the dedicatory inscription on the narrow sides, which were the direct results of Zhang Rongqian’s supervision, are complete. This means that after the completion, the stele’s thickness has not been reduced. Were any later people to “recycle” the stele by changing the appearance of its verso side for a different purpose, they would have to firstly chisel off the original carvings and polish the stone once more. In that case, the stele’s thickness could not stay intact.

Moreover, at the lower half of the verso side, among the “Thousand-Buddha”images, a certain “Rongqian” also left a short inscription next to two Buddha niches stating that there were sponsored by him: (Figure 3.8) “The sponsor of the images of the Tamala-bhadra Buddha and the Tathagata, Rongqian”多摩羅跋栴檀香神通佛, 名相如來二佛主榮千.[152] The last character

[150] Ibid..
[151] Ibid..
[152] Ibid..

for this person's name 千 is slightly different from the name of the principle patron of the stele, which is 迁, as mentioned in the relatively lengthy dedicatory inscription on one of the stele's narrow sides. But there are good reasons to believe that both names refer to the same person.

At the bottom of the verso side, among the short inscriptions, there is also one by this Zhang Rongqian 張榮千, and it says the style name of one of his brothers' is "Ronghe"榮和. At the same time, the long dedicatory inscription by Zhang Rongqian 張榮迁 on one of the stele's narrow sides has his style name, "Xiuhe"修和. Within a family of China at the time, it was customary to give the brothers names with one character in common, such as in this case: "he"和. Therefore, Rongqian 榮迁, whose style name was Xiuhe, was the brother of Ronghe, which means that he was exactly Rongqian 榮千.

After finishing the Shakyamuni triad and two images of the Amitabha Buddha on three sides of the stele, Zhang Rongqian opened up the space of the last side of the stele to outsiders. The people whose names appear on the verso side co-sponsored the entire stele project with Zhang Rongqian, and as an exchange, they received the space to make their own images of Buddhas so as to make merit for the sake of their family members, both deceased and alive. In total, by contributing to the making of the small niched images, many sponsors from outside of the Zhang family turned the entire verso side into a collective space of making offerings.

It seems that Zhang Rongqian had not been bothered by the fact that a large group of people from outside of his family occupied the verso of the stele that he initiated in order to complete his deceased father's old vow. But sharing an ancestral offering space with strangers had not been normal in previous Chinese history. In *Lun yu* 論語(The Analects), there is the saying: "(If it were) not your own ghost, yet you would still make offerings to it, this is called

fawning on (someone).”非其鬼而祭之, 諂也.[153] Although it might only have been one idea among many others at the time, and thus may not be considered an absolute universal belief of Chinese people, this saying at least points to the fact that people were not supposed to make offerings to random deceased people or wherever it seemed convenient, and there were clear boundaries between the ghosts to whom one should make offerings, and those one should not. During the Han Dynasty, members of a community from different clans might be able to aggregate so as to make offerings to the God of Earth and alike through the connection of the “she”社 society, but they would not jointly build a collective ancestral temple and place all ancestors from different clans inside.

But for some Buddhists in the sixth century, such as Zhang Rongqian, it became entirely acceptable to invite a large group of strangers to carve images on the back of an image dedicated to one’s own deceased ancestors, as long as they made adequate financial contribution. To some degree, the marks of the stranger’s contribution was beneficial rather than inconvenient.

Joining the collective offering on the verso side of the stele by making his own Buddha niches, Zhang Rongqian appeared to agree with this notion himself. Moreover, by adding two small niches to the stele, Zhang eventually presented three sets of images in three carving techniques. His ritual intention behind this technical differentiation was also quite clear: the large niched triad was to complete an old vow of his father’s, the incised images were to assist in his parents’ afterlife journey to the West Pure Land, and the small Buddha niches were for the benefit of his brothers, both the deceased one and the living one.

6. The Increased Publicness

[153] Confucius et al., *Lun yu* 論語(The Analects)(Jinan: Shandong Friendship Press, 1992), 48.

Such newly formed collective offering space on a Northern Dynasties stele, within which people with different surnames jointly sponsored a project so as to make merit and benefit their deceased relatives, as one sees in the case of the stele by Zhang Rongqian, was also a reflection of the new publicness achieved by sculpted-image stele at the time, which has been discussed in this dissertation's first chapter and will be discussed further in the final chapter. This chapter, until this point, has only been focusing on the object-production aspect of this new publicness. In fact, in the usage of the sculpted-image stele, especially the process through which the users made merit, Chinese stele's publicness was also greatly expanded because of its unification with image. As will be fully elaborated in the final chapter, the stele's high accessibility in both space and time also perfectly satisfies the needs of a Buddhist icon. As a result of the unification of the two forms of sculpture, the stele also acquired an unprecedented ritual role for the first time in Chinese history: it became the object of worship.

Since a sculpted-image stele presents religious icons, it could potentially invite every passerby to interact with it. From many dedicatory inscriptions of the Northern Dynasties, one can observe how passersby had reacted to the completion of these stelae. Three examples would suffice to demonstrate the situation, two of which have been deeply studied in the previous chapter.

1) The dedicatory inscription of the stele by Yao Boduo:

> "…built a stone image…as if the true appearance emerges in our age…at this moment, people who are to make offerings and paying respect…the newly converted believers, worshiping toward the gate of profoundness. (They) have come, being overjoyed."...造石

像一軀…若真容現於今世…于時, 奉敬之徒…信悞之賓, 望玄門而聖偶. 不勝欣躍之至.[154]

2) The dedicatory inscription of the stele by Fumeng Wenqing:

"Have built stone image of one piece…among those passersby who pay respect (to the image), no one did not receive enlightenment."造立石像一區…行徒禮敬, 莫不啟悟.[155]

3) The dedicatory inscription of the stele by Qi Shuanghu 錡雙胡:

"…sitting peacefully by the intersection of main avenues, being elevated, leveled, manifested and advocated. Attracting offerings from the entire township, and thus will not be deficient at any time."…安處路衝, 高平顯唱(倡). 討邑供養, 隨時不闕.[156]

To some degree, these descriptions contain literary exaggeration case by case, but such expectations of many passersby using the stelae must have rooted in people's contemporary practices.

Meanwhile, the stele commissioners also expressed clear intention of benefiting the deceased relatives, especially ancestors, in the inscriptions. In the case of the stele by Yao Boduo: "…wish that Daoist Yao Boduo's three "zong"-ancestors and five "zu"-ancestors, those relatives who deceased early and late…ascend to the South Palace and the land of the gods…"…願道民姚伯多三宗五祖, 七世父母, 前亡後死眷屬…上昇南宮神鄉之土…[157] Similarly, Fumeng Wenqing vowed: "…for his deceased father and deceased younger sister…built a stone image…as for the deceased Buddhist disciple, the Clear and Faithful, Guangji, I wish to let her be reborn in heaven…"…為亡父亡妹…造立石像…佛弟子清信士亡光姬, 願使生天…[158] And

[154] Zhang Yan, *Shaanxi Yaowangshan beike yishu zong ji*, 4.
[155] Ibid., 236.
[156] Ibid., 70.
[157] Ibid., 7.
[158] Ibid., 235.

Qi Shuanghu wished that "…the deceased master and deceased parents would long reside within the heavenly gate, be reborn on the lotuses, and deposit their spirit in the ten thousands of laws."…亡過師尊, 父母, 長志天闕, 託化紫蓮, 栖神万法.[159]

Therefore, in the eyes of these commissioners, to invite every possible passerby to worship their images was indirectly asking them to accumulate merit and in turn benefit the deceased ancestors as well. Whoever visits such a stele can always join the commissioners and their clan members, alive or deceased, whose images are eternally present on the stele, in the worshiping of Buddha. Everyone receives merit as a result—it can even be said that the ever-coming visitors, by the worshiping behaviors, constantly generate new merit for the stele commissioners. In contrast, Han Dynasty (funerary) stele does not invite passersby to participate in its merit producing—the passersby are only supposed to assume the role of viewers.

This synchronization of religious worship and ancestral offering carried out by people from multiple families or clans, which is called "collective offering" in this dissertation, reflected the teachings of the Bodhisattva Path advocated by the Mahayana Buddhism, which emphasized that one's total liberation is nothing but the total liberation of all sentient beings. Strangers unrelated to each other would attempt to jointly build and worship an icon in the shape of a sculpted-image stele because they all believed that the final benefit would extend to everyone, and that all the deceased share the same destination, for example, the West Pure Land. In this sense, Mahayana Buddhism broke the old boundaries between families and clans in the ancestral offering rituals.

It is also for this reason, after the erection of a Han stele, especially after those who erected the stele (and had their names inscribed) passed away, that the stele's merit producing effect would significantly diminish, at least in the socio-political sense. But the sculpted-image

[159] Ibid., 70.

stele's merit producing lasts much longer—technically speaking, as long as there still are believers of the religion worshiping the stele, new merit is produced. For example, nowadays in a small cave excavated during Eastern Wei (534-550), near Mt. Tiannzhushan in Shandong, believers from nearby villages still make constant offering to the icons inside. (Figure 3.9) Despite that the local government has repeatedly announced that burning incense inside the cave severely damages the cultural relics and has attempted to prevent the villagers from doing so, the situation continues.

Under the name of "worshiping the Buddhist icons," people with a variety of surnames justified their actions of getting together so as to make ancestral offerings by jointly building stelae during the Northern Dynasties. Their logic may not be that complicated: although it was unorthodox to jointly build a funerary stele for unrelated ancestors, it was entirely common to jointly build a stele with a religious icon in the middle. So long as each of the sponsors fairly received their portion of images and texts on the stele in order to clearly present their wishes for the deceased, the offering of merit for everyone was considered complete.

Ancestral offerings, or the general offerings for the deceased, were supposed to be strictly private fairs within each individual family or clan. But the religious worship was entirely open to public since the moment when Buddhism (more often than not in the form of Buddhist art) arrived at China. Many different forms of Buddhist sculpture in China during the Northern Dynasties might also have facilitated people's wishes to benefit their ancestors and other deceased family/clan members, but it was the sculpted-image stele that initially brought the "Buddhist" forms of ancestral offering and one of the most dominant Chinese forms of funerary equipment together. The unification of stele and Buddhist icon in China accentuated the synchronization of ancestral offering and religious worshiping rituals, and the accentuation

further liberated Chinese people's power of imagination in the expansion of the Chinese stele's ritual functions. The following two cases to be discussed are brilliant representatives of this liberation.

The Stele for Cheng Zhe: The Connection Between Image and Epitaph

One of the wide sides of the stele accommodates only a lengthy epitaph composed for the deceased Cheng Zhe. (Figure 3.10) Moreover, the text does not only avoid all possible Buddhist concerns as one usually sees in a dedicatory inscription on a Buddhist sculpted-image stele, but also skips all wording regarding the making of images. This assures a viewer that the stele must have functioned formally as a typical funerary stele. However, the other wide side of the stele retains the basic layout of a contemporaneous Buddhist sculpted-image stele, with a dominant niched icon in the middle. (Figure 3.2) This session attempts to articulate the possible ritual connection between the image side and the epitaph side.

Once again, both sides should be the direct result of the original commission, which, as the epitaph states, was sponsored by several members of the Cheng clan. This is firstly because that the deceased Cheng Zhe enjoyed the prestigious posthumous title of "Commandery Governor of the Dai County," bestowed on him by the emperor, and that the sponsors of the stele, other members of the Cheng clan, held similarly prestigious titles. Their power and wealth determined that it was unnecessary to recycle a piece of stone which had been carved into a Buddhist icon. On the other hand, judging from the fine quality of the Buddhist images, (Figure 3.2) one can also argue that it was impossible for its commissioners, who could afford hiring craftsmen with such level of skillfulness, to consider reusing a tomb stele.

In fact, the fine quality of the Buddhist images on the stele does not only refer to the splendid beauty of the niched icon. More importantly, the incised image surrounding the icon both inside and outside of the niche demonstrate the most sophisticated sense of space in pictorial art achieved during the Northern and Southern Dynasties, such as the binary view. [160](Figures 3.11-3.13)

The binary view can be observed inside the main niche. At both sides of the main icon, there is a pair of Buddhist monks with aureoles behind the heads. (Figures 3.11-3.12) The left pair has their back towards the viewer, walking into the deeper space where the Buddha is. Among the two monks on the right, one has his hands closed in front of his chest and his eyesight towards the Buddha. In contrast, the gesture of the other monk presents more nuances. Firstly, his eyesight is a bit downwards and is fixated more on the other pair of monks to the left, rather than the Buddha. Secondly, he extends his left hand to present the pose of leading the way. It appear as if he is inviting the viewer to join his movement towards the other side. In total, the two pairs, with the Buddha as the axis of symmetry, form a "the juxtaposition of 'front and back' images,"[161] as Wu Hung explained.

The juxtaposition firstly creates "a translucent 'window' onto an elusive world,"[162] which is similar to that of the images depicting the story of "Brothers of Wang Lin and the Bandits" on the sarcophagus at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. [163] (Figure 3.14) A viewer will see both the front side and back side of the same travelers at the two ends of the juxtaposition. One end presents an earlier moment in the travel, and the the end end present a later moment. Therefore, the juxtaposition features both a spatial change and a temporal change.

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[160] This term is coined by Wu Hung. See Wu Hung, *Monumentality in Early Chinese Art and Architecture,* 261- 276.
[161] Wu Hung. *Monumentality in Early Chinese Art and Architecture,* 264.
[162] Ibid., 265.
[163] Ibid..

In the case of the stele for Cheng Zhe, one might wonder what this elusive world would be. Interestingly, one of the Buddhist monks to the left walking into the depth reminds a viewer of the figural representation of Ning Mao carved outside the back wall of Ning Mao's house-shaped stone mortuary equipment at the Museum of Fine Art, Boston. (Figure 3.15) Huang Minglan proposes that the three figures on the back wall of the Ning Mao mortuary equipment are figural representation of Ning Mao at different stages of his life. [164]The central figural representation of Ning Mao shows particularly strong comparability with the monk on the stele for Cheng Zhe, as both figures walk away from the viewer with a lotus flower in hand. (Figure 3.11)

In his discussion of the figural representation of Ning Mao, Wu Hung argues that Ning Mao's departure into the deeper space symbolizes him "leaving this world,"[165] and therefore embarking on the "internal pursuit of spiritual peace."[166] Along this line, one could argue that in the case of the stele for Cheng Zhe, the elusive world inside the deeper space is a religiously transcendent realm. The aureoles behind the heads of the monks, signifying their unearthly status, also reflect the status of the realm to which they are advancing.

As previously discussed, the so-called "two pairs" of monks on both sides of the Buddha could be the depiction of two different moments of one imaginary journey conducted by the same two monks. The right pair shows the early moment when the monks are still walking towards the intended viewer. The monk in the lead spreads out his left hand, making an inviting gesture so as to ask the viewer to join him. The left pair features a later moment when the two

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[164] Zhongguo meishu quanji bianji weiyuan hui 中國美術全集編輯委員會(Editorial Committee of the Comprehensive Compendium of Chinese Art), *Shike xian hua* 石刻綫畫(Incised Stone Pictures), as *Zhongguo meishu quanji, huihua bian* 中國美術全集:繪畫編(The Comprehensive Compendium of Chinese Art: Painting), vol. 19 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chuban she 1988), "tuban shuoming"圖版說明 (Explanation of Plates), notes by Huang Minglan 黃明蘭, pl. 5.

[165] Ibid., 262.

[166] Ibid., 264.

monks are further in the journey, ahead of the intended viewer, having assumed the position of guides.

Another pair of monks also appear below the niched icon. Two figures, face to face, sit on their knees and feet, with blankets beneath and standing servants holding umbrellas behind, as if they are in a conversation. (Figure 3.13) The monks seat in a casual and even pleasant manner. In addition, there is no ritual paraphernalia such as an incense burner between them. Therefore, unlike many other Buddhist sculptures, in the area below the main icon, Cheng Zhe's stele does not present a scene of people making offerings to the Buddha.

Meanwhile, the scene should not be interpreted as a generic banquet or meeting scene found in the art of the Han Dynasty or the Northern and Southern Dynasties. Firstly, the two figures are Buddhist monks, as will be discussed later. Secondly, this image is below the main icon of the stele. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to present a scene of merriment making or casual meeting in such context. Instead, the conversation should be spiritual.

In fact, such formation can possibly reminds a reader of the motif called "gaoshi tu"高士图(Pictures of Elegant Gentlemen) by many scholars,[167] which appears frequently in the pictorial art of the Six Dynasties, especially in the funerary context. To be more specific, the scene is comparable to the brick murals of "Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Groove and Rong Qiqi" found in the Six Dynasties tombs near Nanjing. (Figure 3.16) In the example shown in Figure 3.16, the pairings of Shan Tao and Wang Rong, or Ji Kang and Ruan Ji on the top register, both demonstrate certain affinity with the images below the niche of the stele for Cheng Zhe.

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[167] See Zheng Yan 郑岩, *Wei jin nanbeichao bihua mu yanjiu* 魏晋南北朝壁画墓研究(The Study of the Tombs with Murals of the Wei, Jin, Northern and Southern Dynasties)(Beijing: Wenwu Press, 2002), 209-216. Wei Zheng 韦正, "Di xia de mingshi tu: lun zhulin qi xian yu Rong Qiqi mushi bihua de xingzhi" 地下的名士图——论竹林七贤与荣启期墓室壁画的性质(Underground Images of The Elegant Gentlemen: In Regard to the Tomb Murals of the Seven Sages of Bamboo Grooves and Rong Qiqi), *Minzu yishu* 民族艺术(Art of Ethnic Groups), no .3 (2005): 89-98. Yang Aiguo 杨爱国, "Mushi li de mingshi tu"墓室里的名士图(Image of Elegant Gentlemen in Tombs), *Xingxiang shixue* 形象史学(The History of Imagery), no. 19 (Autumn 2021): 130-144.

In his study of the "Birth of Pictorial Space" in Chinese art during the Six Dynasties, Wu Hung raises the brick murals of "Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Groove and Rong Qiqi" as an example, because the murals "...exhibit some new elements: more relaxed and varying poses, spatial cells formed by landscape elements, and an emphasis on fluent lines."[168] In the graduate seminar "Feminine Space in Chinese Painting" held 2017 at the University of Chicago, Wu Hung further emphasized another new element of pictorial space exhibited by the conversation between Ruan Ji and Ji Kang in the murals—that Ji Kang's body is slight higher that of Ruan Ji. In contrast, Rong Qiqi, Ruan Xian, Liu Ling, and Xiang Xiu, who sit by themselves without conversing with each other, are all on the same height of elevation. The images of the conversational Ji Kang and Ruan Ji present a particular interest of creating the sense of depth within a small scene of conversation. The scene of conversation below the main niche of the stele for Cheng Zhe manifests the same interest: the person to the right is placed slightly higher than the person on the opposite side. (Figure 3.13)

Wu Hung also describes the combination of the Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Groove with Rong Qiqi as "ahistorical," since Rong Qiqi"was said to have attained immortality in antiquity," but the Seven Worthies lived in the third century. [169] Wu is also surprised by how fast the Seven Worthies became canonized after their death and turned into the possibly most popular representatives of "hermits and recluses" [170] during the Six Dynaties. Nonetheless, Wu attributes the popularization of the images of the Seven Worthies and Rong Qiqi in tombs during the Six Dynasties to the fact that Daoism became fashionable.[171]

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[168] Wu Hung, "The Transparent Stone: Inverted Vision and Binary Imagery in Medieval Chinese Art," *Representations*, no. 46(Spring, 1994): 79.
[169] Wu Hung, *The Art of the Yellow Springs: Understanding Chinese Tombs*(Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010), 182.
[170] Ibid..
[171] Ibid..

However, the two seated figures on the stele for Cheng Zhe do not reveal the attributes of Daoist gentlemen. Instead, their robes of priests, tonsures, and more importantly the shallow inscriptions nearby,[172] jointly identify them to be Buddhist monks. This picture might have adopted the basic formation of the contemporaneous "Pictures of Elegant Gentlemen," which usually bore Daoist connotations, and modified it by inserting two Buddhist monks.

The highly original imagery on the icon side of the stele shows its possible interaction with the contemporaneous funerary sculptural art. Although the subject matters are still Buddhist, the pictorial composition and style could have come from artworks produced by belief systems which are usually not perceived as "Buddhist." This again takes a reader back to Erik Zurcher's idea of "understanding Chinese Buddhism by looking outside Buddhism." But the model of interaction between different belief and artistic systems as reflected by Cheng Zhe's stele in this chapter is the opposite of the model as reflected by Wu Hongbiao's stele, which has been discussed in Chapter II. In Chapter II, a so-called "Daoist" stele borrowed the imagery of hell from "Buddhist" art. In this chapter, a seemingly "Buddhist" stele possibly borrowed motifs from artworks with "Daoist" connotation and pictorial techniques from indigenous funerary images.

The possible affinity between the contemporaneous funerary art and the stele for Cheng Zhe indicates the possible ritual connection between the epitaph side and the image side of the stele, as the epitaph reveals that the stele was erected on Cheng Zhe's tomb. At the end of the third eulogy written for Cheng Zhe by Cheng Yizhi et al., there is the phrase: "We entrust (this message) by carving it on the dark stone, and rely upon it so as to laud the renowned clan"寄刊

[172] The characters are: 维（那）xx 供养 and 经（写）口口供养…

玄石, 托詠名門.[173] The term “dark stone” here could refer to either the actual coloration of the material, which is deep gray or black, as one sees now, or the fact that the material was dedicated for funerary purposes, as a customary idiom frequently seen in Chinese epitaphs, because the underworld the deceased dwelling in could also be called “xuan rang”玄壤(dark or divine soil).

In any case, it reveals that the selection of material in preparation for the making of this stele was a careful process costing not only money but also consideration. Meanwhile, a phrase near the end of the main body of the epitaph says: “Even the tomb has long been completed, and the mourning ceremonies also concluded, (can we let it) not reside near the mountain and river, being carved on stone and lauded continuously?!”虽宅兆久終, 喪制禮畢,宁不艤跡山河, 刊石流詠者哉!?[174]

The stele for Cheng Zhe was erected long after the tomb was sealed and probably several rounds of mourning ceremonies had ensued already. Therefore, as the result of careful preparation and designing, the stone, theoretically speaking, should have been esteemed by the commissioners as an elaborate tomb maker, and therefore must have been situated close to Cheng Zhe’s tomb. Although we do not know what Cheng Zhe’s tomb looked like, or whether there was also a stone chamber similar to the one of Ning Mao, it might be imagined that the people in charge of the carving of the icon side of the stele for Cheng Zhe was also familiar with the contemporaneous pictorial techniques used in funerary sculptures. That is to say, the highly original imagery on the icon side of the stele for Cheng Zhe possibly rooted in the stele’s funerary nature.

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[173] Zhou Guixiang 周桂香 and Guo Zhicheng 郭志成, “Shi lun Cheng Zhe bei ji qi lishi yishu jiazhi”试论程哲碑及其历史艺术价值 (Discussion on the historical and artistic value of the Stele of Cheng Zhe), *Wenwu jikan* 文物季刊(Culture Relics Quarterly), no. 2 (1997): 67.

[174] Zhou and Guo, “Shi lun Cheng Zhe bei ji qi lishi yishu jiazhi”: 67.

The Stele For Yue Yanqing By His Friend Li Huijin: The Appropriation

Similar to the stele for Cheng Zhe, the stele for Yue Yanqing in Columbia University's collection also has one of its wide sides entirely covered by the inscription of a eulogy and the other images. (Figures 3.17 and 1.2) Apart from the entry written for the stele in the catalogue, *Treasures Rediscovered: Chinese Stone Sculpture from the Sackler Collections at Columbia University*,[175] there is no published scholarship on the stele yet. Therefore, this author would like to firstly conduct a thorough introduction of the object to the field.

The lengthy inscription, occupying one of the wide sides and one of the narrow sides of the stele, is a eulogy/epitaph for the deceased Yue Yanqing, with only very vague religiously votive elements (see full transcription in the appendix). More importantly, although the other wide side presents a variety of images, throughout it, one does not observe a dominant niched icon. With these features, the stele differentiates itself from a contemporaneous Buddhist sculpted-image stele, but at the same time, it still presents clear stylistic affinity with the Buddhist sculptures.

At the top half of the stele's image side, a viewer sees two figures, and one is the deceased Yue Yanqing 樂延慶, the other the sponsor of the stele, Li Huijin 李會進, whose names are inscribed inside the two cartouche in the middle (Figure 1.2). The two seem to be conversing with each other, behind whom, attendants hold fans and canopies. The canopies, shown in profile, have a protruding tip on top, with the canopy cloth resting freely on the ribs and four tassels hung from the top. Similar canopies can also be found on contemporaneous Buddhist sculpted-image stelae, such the one in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (hereafter MMA)(dated to 528, Accession No. 65.29.1), and the one in the Museum of Fine Art Boston(hereafter MFA)(dated to 529, Accession No. 23.120). (Figure 3.19) Shifting the gaze

[175] Leopold Swergold et al., *Treasures Rediscovered: Chinese Stone Sculpture from the Sackler Collections at Columbia University* (New York: Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery, Columbia University in the City of New York, 2008), 96-99.

upwards, one finds an incense burner roughly in the shape of lotus between the legs of the dragons on the stele head. (Figure 1.2) Incense burners in a similar style also appear on the stelae at MMA and MFA (Figure 3.20). Five twisting lines flowing upward represent the smoke from the incense, which appears to be caught in the wind. The burner has a narrow mouth and a stout body shaped into lotus petals. Below the lotus petals is the stem with a ring in the center. Three waving parallel lines at the very bottom represent the large leaf on which the entire lotus sits. On the two sides of the lotus stem, there are two groups of inverted leaves pointing up, and in each group there are four leaves.

Turning to the other side of the stele, a viewer can discover another and more obvious Buddhist motif. At the center of the stele head, between the dragons' legs, there is a niche, inside which a figure sits (Figure 3.17). On both the MFA stele and MMA stele, (Figure 3.21) similar structures also appear. Although the face of the seated figure is chiseled off, based on its dhyana-mudra, its manner of sitting cross-legged, and the aureole around its head, the figure can be determined to be a Buddha.

The style of the canopies, the incense burner, and the niched Buddha of the stele for Yue Yanqing demonstrate its sculptors' good knowledge of the style of a six-century Buddhist sculpted-image stele. It may be argued that the stele sculptors, who had studied, admired, and maybe personally practiced the craft of contemporaneous sculpted-image stele, incorporated their related knowledge into the making of the stele for Yue Yanqing.

1. The Origin of the Intertwined Double-Dragon Head of Buddhist Sculpted-Image Stele

Above the seated Buddha, a pair of dragons form the decorative stele head. (Figure 3.17) The two dragons, facing opposite sides, both lower their heads until they reach the ground. Their rectangular heads are extraordinarily long, and much space is devoted to rendering their wide mouths, inside which the many squarish teeth are highlighted. Both dragons, slightly tilting their front claws, place their forelegs on the ground right next to their jaws. They simultaneously spread their long and slender bodies toward each other on the opposite side, and the two bodies meet and intertwine at the center of the stele. After intertwining, both dragons lower their rear legs to the ground, crossing the other's forelegs, with the tails wrapping around their own rear legs. The two dragons' intertwined bodies form a large arch, and their four legs firmly support the arch in the shape of two concentric triangles. The muscles on the legs and the scales over the dragon bodies are delineated with incised lines. In fact, these dragons are mentioned in the inscription: "In a place where the avenues in four directions intersect, (we) erect a Heavenly Palace and an intertwined double-dragon stele…"四衢道中建清口天宮一堰交龍碑一頭首…[176]

However, within the framework of Chinese stone sculptural arts, the Northern Wei Buddhist sculpted-images stelae do not monopolize the intertwined double-dragon top. The style had emerged as early as Eastern Han in China. However, the intertwined double-dragon head on the stele for Yue Yanqing might have an origin more complicated than a direct inheritance from earlier Chinese stele.

The words "intertwined double-dragon stele"交龍碑 and the term "Heavenly Palace"天宮 are juxtaposed in the cited inscription, and this juxtaposition is not a unique feature seen only on this particular stele, and this reveals one of the popular practices of erecting Buddhist sculpted-image stelae along with other structures as total combination in North China during the sixth

[176] See full transcription of the stele inscription in Appendix.

century. On another stele from Henan province, from where the stele for Yue Yanqing comes, "Xinghe sinian lishi he yi zaoxiang bei"興和四年李氏合邑造像碑(The fourth year of Xinghe (542 C.E.) Li family devotional society sculpted-image stele), the records of Heavenly Palace appears, too, as we read in its inscription:

> "From the former that the latter comes, our heart of belief becomes more and more pronounced. We value the merit and belittle the jewelry, and thus we exhaust our family treasure to build four Heavenly Palace *Futu*(stupa) and an intertwined double-dragon stone stele…"由前生後, 信心彌著, 重福輕珍, 復竭家玩, 次造天宮浮圖四堰, 交龍石碑像一軀...[177]

Similar to the stele for Yue Yanqing, four "Heavenly Palace" structures were erected along side the stele. This time, however, the term "Heavenly Palace" modifies the word "stupa," and thus one knows that the so-called Heavenly Palace mentioned in the stele for Yue Yanqing were also likely be a certain type of stupa. Cases of this kind introduce a conventionalized practice of juxtaposing an intertwined double-dragon stele with one or more stupa in such votive occasions in Henan area during the sixth century.

Textual sources help further clarify the phenomenon. The *Daban niepan jing* 大般涅槃经 (Mahayana Mahaparinirvana Sutra) has it that:

> "The cremation had already finished, (someone) had collected the sarira, and then within the capital city, where the four avenues intersect, (they) erected a stupa of seven treasures. The gates of the stupa open to four directions, and (they) place the sarira (inside), (so that)

[177] Li Renqing 李仁清, *Zhongguo Beichao Shike Tapian* Jingpinji 中國北朝石刻拓片精品集(A Selection of the Rubbings of the Stone Carving of the Northern-Dynasties in China)(Zhengzhou: Daxiang Chuban she, 2000), vol. 2, pl. 20, 384.

all in this world views it with reverence.”茶毘已訖, 收取舍利, 於都城內四衢道中起七寶塔. 塔門四開, 安置舍利, 一切世间所共瞻仰.[178]

The records of the total combination of erecting a sculpted-image stele and stupas in a metropolitan area (where the “avenues in four directions intersect”) during the sixth century do not only appear among archaeological materials, but also in textual materials, and this practice could connect the stele for Yue Yanqing and more importantly, contemporaneous Buddhist sculpted-image stele, to certain much earlier Buddhist tradition from even outside of China.

2. The Dating

The inscription gives the name of the place where the stele was erected, “Bei Xiuwu xian” 北修武縣(North Xiuwu County), but not a clear dating. However, the name North Xiuwu County precisely dates the stele to the period between 526 to 556 C.E.

North Xiuwu County is within the boundary of today’s Henan Province, which was the political, economic, and cultural heartland of the Northern Wei, the Eastern Wei and the Northern Qi Dynasties. The first few sentences of the inscription say: “North Xiuwu County, 口口 Eulogy of 口 stele 口口, Qing…Sir Yue, whose given name is Shan and his style name is Yanqing, 口 and he is from Chongli of Nanyang…” 北修武縣 口口 慶碑頌口 慶…樂子名善字延慶, 口南陽重里人也… The First Emperor of Qin 秦始皇 initially conferred the name Xiuwu to the county in history: “Xiuwu County was formerly to the northwest of its current

[178] Ruo Na Ba Tuo Luo 若那跋陀羅, *Da Ban Niepan Jing* 大般涅槃經(Mahayana Mahaparinirvana Sutra), in *Taisho Shinshu Daizokyo* 大正新修大藏經, ed. Takakusu Junjiro 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭 (Tokyo: Taisho Issaikyo Kankokai, 1924), vol. 12, 902.

location…and it was also called Nanyang …The First Emperor renamed it Xiuwu.” 修武縣故城西北修武…亦曰南陽矣…秦始皇改曰修武.[179] Afterwards, the name remained for two thousand more years, except for a very short period during the sixth century: “The Xiuwu County, in the second year of Xiaochang during the Northern Wei Dynasty (526 C.E.)…was divided and a North Xiuwu County was created…” 修武縣, 後魏孝昌二年...又分置北修武縣....[180]

Therefore, only once in history, North Xiuwu got its independence from Xiuwu and became a separate county. However, this did not last long. Thirty years later, the divided Xiuwu country became unified again: “In the seventh year of Tianbao during the Northern Qi Dynasty [556 C.E.]… Southern, Western, North Xiuwu, and Shanyang were combined and made into one county…”高齊天保七年…至是始合南北西修武山陽爲一縣...[181] In other words, the name “North Xiuwu County” had only existed during the period between 526 and 556 C.E.

In addition, the inscription also mentions the name of another relevant place: “Qing’s father and brothers altogether ask us [to erect this stele] in the plain to the south of Mount Bailu (White Deer)…”慶父兄並令進等故於白鹿山南原中… Textual sources on Xiuwu County has the information regarding Mount Bailu: “A clear-water river originates from Black Mountain in the north of Xiuwu County. Black Mountain is in the north of the county, while Mount Bailu is in the east, and that is where the clear-water river emerges…”清水出河內修武縣之北黑山, 黑山在縣北, 白鹿山東, 清水所出也...[182] A map from the *Gazetteer of Xiuwu Country* clearly

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[179] Li Daoyuan 酈道元, *Shui Jing Zhu* 水經注(Comments on the Classics of Water)(Shanghai: Shangwu yin shu guan, 1929), vol. 9, 57.

[180] Hong Liangji 洪亮吉, *Chong xiu Huaiqing fu zhi* 重修懷慶府志(The Renewed Gazetteer of the Huaiqing Prefecture)(China: 1764), vol. 1, 165. Erudtion Database, accessed 03/28/2022, 10:22pm.

[181] Yue Shi 樂史, *Tai Ping Huan Yu Ji* 太平寰宇記(Universal Geography of the Taiping Era), vol.53 (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 2007), 1097.

[182] Li, *Shui Jing Zhu*, vol. 9, 56.

pictures the location of Mount Bailu.[183] (Figure 3.22) Overall, by decoding the rich historical information hidden in the stele inscription, one can generally date the stele to the Eastern Wei period.

3. The Pictorial Program

The image side of the stele are in two halves. The upper half features Li Huijin and Yue Yanqing, and the lower half features a person seated under a tree to the left, watching assorted acrobatic performances to the right. (Figure 3.23) Scenes of this type appear frequently in the bas-relief of the Han Dynasty tombs. The symbolization of these scenes is relatively clear in the funerary context: the good wish for the deceased to arrive at a happy home in the afterlife. In addition, the inscription on the other side of the stele also mentions the term "Heavenly Palace," which may specifically refer to the happy home depicted in the images. As mentioned previously, before the arrival of Buddhism in China, the presentation of the images of the deceased aboveground had rarely appeared. Similarly, the acrobatic scenes on the stele for Yue Yanqing also directly came from the tomb art of the Han Dynasty, but during the Northern Dynasties, they could appear openly on the side of busy avenues in the new context offered by the sculpted-image stele.

Despite that this stelae and the stele for Cheng Zhe both present images entirely on one side, and the epitaph on the other, this stele's pictorial program is fundamentally different from that of the stele for Cheng Zhe. The two conversationalists below the niched icon of the stele for Cheng Zhe still appear as a certain type of spiritual leaders. Instead, the two conversationalists on the stele for Yue Yanqing take the dominant position of the pictorial program at the top half

[183] Xiao Guozhen 蕭國楨 and Jiao Fengtong 蕉封桐, *Xiuwu xian zhi* 修武縣志(Gazetteer of the Xiuwu Country)(China, 1932), vol. 1, 42. Erudtion Database, accessed 03/28/2022, 10:13pm.

of the stele. (Figure 1.2) This image directly presents the deceased Yue Yanqing, and the person conversing with him is exactly the commissioner of the stele and Yue's dear friend Li Huijin. Additionally, this image of "the conversation" received inspiration from a source entirely different from that on the stele for Cheng Zhe. Both Yue Yanqing and Li Huijin stand in a rather rigid posture, with clear grids surrounding their bodies. This motif closely resembles the Buddha worshiper figures seen on many Buddhist sculpted-image stelae of the Northern Dynasties. In some cases, rows of worshiper figures stand in two groups facing each other. (Figure 3.18)

Other examples of a similar nature, which feature worshipers of a high social status, appear in the images of processions at Longmen Grottoes. Inside the Guyang Cave, below the niche by Yuan Xiang, there is a group of such processions (Figure 4.9). On the front walls of the Bin Yang Central Cave near its entrance, there were the renowned Emperor's Procession and Empress's Procession. (Figure 4.2) The defining characteristics of worshipers in these images include: broad and long robes and hats, servants holding umbrellas behind, a relatively larger body of the main worshipers compared to their servants, and two groups of people face either other on the two sides of the cave entrance. The stele for Yue Yanqing modifies this pattern by piecing the two friends together without a Buddha on top or in between, and thus a conversation seems to appear among them.

It was rare to see the aboveground presentation of the image of a deceased person in Chinese art prior to this time. Since the Han Dynasty, images of the tomb occupants had been quite popular, which often appeared in the middle of the back wall of the main chamber, serving as the core of the pictorial program.[184] However, most of them were underground and not supposed to be seen by people after the tomb was sealed. Early Chinese Buddhist art offered

[184] Wu Hung, *The Art of the Yellow Springs: Understanding Chinese Tombs*, 73- 76.

another possibility—dead or alive, as sponsors or the merit recipient, people's images became allowed to be shown openly aboveground.

The stele for Yue Yanqing skillfully merged the many different sculptural traditions of the time. It inherited the Han Dynasty tradition of presenting the voice of the commissioner in the epitaph. But it also incorporated this with the customary practice of a contemporaneous Buddhist sculpted-image stele by adding the image of the commissioner onto the other side of the stele. In so doing, it also allowed the two friends, who were already separated by the great boundary between life and death, to reunite in one image.

The images of the two friends take the dominant position of the upper half the stele, pushing the incense burner, which is supposed to be associated with offerings for the Buddha, to the almost unnoticeable niche between the dragon legs on the decorative stele head.(Figure 1.2) On the opposite side of the stele, the long epitaph pushes the image of the Buddha to the similarly unnoticeable niche as well. (Figure 3.17)

On the one hand, this arrangement offers the two friends a timeless nature comparable to that of the pictures of "the Seven Worthies of Bamboo Groove and Rong Qiqi" seen in the brick murals inside the tombs of the South Dynasties.[185] On the other hand, this arrangement helps retain the stele's basic identity as a funerary stele by marginalizing the status of the image of the Buddha and the incense burner, despite the fact that the object absorbed many strategies of figural representation from the contemporaneous Buddhist sculpture.

Overall, the stele's peculiar structure could be characterized as an "innovative inheritance of the Han Dynasty funerary art." Both the images of the acrobatic scenes on the stele's image side and the long inscription on the epitaph side can be traced back to practices of the Han Dynasty. However, the acrobatic images were more often found underground in tomb chambers

[185] Ibid., 182.

as part of the program to constitute a happy home for the deceased in the afterlife. The tomb stelae, in contrast, were only erected aboveground. Therefore, the stele for Yue Yanqing mixed the different funerary practices of the Han Dynasty on multiple levels. Firstly, it brought the underground images and aboveground texts together, and when the underground met the aboveground, the stele patron's voices and the afterlife happy home of the deceased are juxtaposed. The commemoration of the past life and the clear depiction of the next life connected with each other, and this connection echoes the image of the conversation between the living Li Huijin and the deceased Yue Yanqing, in the sense that "the Great Boundary" was transcended again.

Secondly, the stele also transformed a Han Dynasty architectural element into a freestanding structure. Han Dynasty bas-relief slabs depicting the afterlife of the deceased were typically a part of the tomb chambers or the shrines in graveyards. Scenes such as the acrobatic performances were usually to constitute a sophisticated pictorial program inside a architectural space together with other images. The images may include banquets, transportation, estates, livestock, servants, musical performances, and so forth. They jointly present the ideal living environment/happy home for the deceased. More importantly, a certain form of presence of the deceased was supposed to be enclosed by the architecture full of such images. Complementing this happy home, other realms of the universe may also be presented, which created the poly-centric pictorial programs in many Han Dynasty tombs. [186]

The stele of Yue Yanqing, and many other Northern Dynasties stelae, such as the one by Wu Hongbiao, which is discussed in the Chapter II, started to present the acrobatic scenes more independently. These acrobatic scenes are without any architectural context, and the rest of the pictorial program of a Northern Dynasties stele often does not work together with the acrobatic

[186] Wu Hung, "Buddhist Elements in Early Chinese Art (2nd and 3rd Centuries A.D.)," *Artibus Asiae*, vol. 47, no. 3/4 (1986): 264- 273.

scenes so as to construct a happy-home space or universe to structurally enclose the deceased. That is to say, the Northern Dynasties stelae appropriated certain elements from the sophisticated symbolic system of the Han Dynasty tomb art and the appropriated elements started to bear the full symbolic meaning of an afterlife happy home.

Such practical choice of appropriation presents one exciting aspect of the artistic spirit of the Eastern Wei. The makers of the stele of Yue Yanqing took the niched Buddha from contemporaneous Buddhist sculpted-image stele, but abandoned the design of situating the Buddha at the center of the stele. Instead, the Buddha recedes to the small niche between the legs of the intertwined dragon at the stele head, maybe serving as a "foreign protective deity" similar to the Buddha found on the lintel of the Mahao tomb, Sichuan. [187] Meanwhile, in the stele's presentation of Yue Yanqing and Li Huijin, one sees clear stylistic affinity with the contemporaneous sculptural depiction of Buddha worshiper figures, but the stele gives Yue and Li the dominant position of the pictorial program, instead presenting them as venerating the Buddha.

4. Summary

This chapter examines three stelae dated to the Eastern Wei period, and all of their pictorial programs, to different degrees, demonstrate the mixed concerns of people as worshipers, sponsors, and the deceased. Each of the stele presents a unique pictorial mode in the expression of their mixed concerns. The stele by Zhang Rongqian largely presents the deceased as standardized Buddhist worshipers standing below the niched icon, as widely seen in generic Buddhist sculptures. Although a pair of figures still appear below the niched icon on the stele for Cheng Zhe, the seated figures show possible affinity with the style of the contemporaneous

[187] Wu, "Art In Ritual Context: Rethinking Mawangdui," 142.

"Pictures of Elegant Gentlemen." The niched icon on the stele for Yue Yanqing significantly dwindled to a small opening on the decorative stele head, rather than dominating the pictorial program. Instead, the images of the sponsor and the deceased take over half of the pictorial surface. Their identity as the "worshipers" has now diminished, and the focus of the pictorial program has been shifted to the bond between the two friends and the good wishes for the deceased's afterlife.

CHAPTER IV, RETURN TO THE ORIGIN

As per the discussion of the second and third chapters, a sculpted-image stele was generally part of the ritual at the completion of the central niched icon. Moreover, in the case of the stele by Zhang Rongqian, discussed in the third chapter, one sees that an icon had been promised by the father eighteen years prior to the eventual completion of the object in the shape of a stele, as re-conceived by the son. The stele by Zhang Rongqian further clarifies that a sculpted-image stele project could be considered as a two-part job: the first part is the completion of the main icon, and the second part is the completion of the stele. Similarly, the appearance of "the Guyang Mode" at the Longmen Grottoes could also be such a choice of complementing the icon with a stele.

In this sense, the image-stele relationship, where one is juxtaposed with the other, inside the Guyang Cave at Longmen, (hereafter "the Guyang Mode") could be directly related to the appearance of sculpted-image stele in late Northern Wei. Since the exact time of the initial excavation of the Guyang Cave still remains a debatable issue, I will not attempt to argue that "the earliest stele in the Guyang Cave" must predate all sculpted-image stelae. What is proposed here is a more general structural analysis. In the Guyang Cave, a stele exists as part of the ritual commemorating the completion of an icon, but the stele still stands freely by itself at the side of the icon. In contrast, a sculpted-image stele unifies the two, a formation which could be the next stage of the structural development of the image-stele relationship.

The first task of this chapter is to demonstrate one of the possible forces that propelled the transformation from the earlier juxtaposition to the later unification: people's new discovery of

the visuality of stele inside the Guyang Cave during the late Northern Wei period. This discovery paved the way for the stelae's integration of icons.

However, only when the formal analysis is brought into the discussion regarding people's thought about the world and themselves can an author fully historicize a phenomenon. Therefore, the second task of this chapter is to clarify how the Han Dynasty practices and thoughts associated with funerary stele became absorbed by the sculpted-image stele of the Northern Wei. I argue that a stele, since the Han Dynasty, had been assisting individuals and groups in their social competition, and as a ritual device, it must manifest value within its particular ritual space.

Review of Scholarship on the Guyang Cave

1. Study of the Calligraphy

As has been briefly introduced in Chapter I, the pursuit of "authentic works of past calligraphy" during the mid-Qing and late-Qing periods boosted the "Bei xue" movement, which steered people's attention from the calligraphy on printed model books to ancient stone inscriptions. The so-called *Longmen ershi pin* 龍門二十品(Twenty Masterpieces from The Longmen Grottoes)[188] have always been the primary representative of the *Wei*-stele style, greatly admired by the "bei xue"scholars. In fact, scholars' attention on these materials lasts until today.

1.1 The Earliest Interest in "Wei"-stele

1.1.1 The "tie"-Tradition and The Long-lasting Bias Against Stone Inscriptions

The earliest tie 帖 or model calligraphic works, often in the format of personal letters by famous calligraphers, compiled as a book for the purpose of later people's study and imitation is

[188] Nineteen of the twenty pieces are from the Guyang cave.

Chunhua ge tie 淳化閣帖(The Model Book of Chunhua Pavilion),[189] commissioned by Emperor Taizong of Song (939-997). This book contains the Song imperial archives' finest collection of personal letters by about one hundred major Chinese calligraphers. A few generations later, Emperor Huizong (1082-1135) improved the work and produced the *Dagaun tie* 大觀帖(The Model Book of Daguan). These model books, and other compendium of the same nature in later times, were subsequently engraved on wooden plates and widely distributed among calligraphy students in China. These materials led to the long tradition of learning calligraphy through "tie."

As mentioned in Chapter I, wood prints suffer from relatively quick deterioration, and thus re-carving became unavoidable. However, during the repeated re-carvings over hundreds of years, the wood prints' accuracy of presenting earlier writings kept deceasing, and eventually learners of later times lost their faith in model books. It was under this condition, scholars such as Ruan Yuan had to step up and persuade people to start to look at the "more faithful" stone inscriptions.

But it was a controversial move. The bias against the calligraphic value of stone inscriptions, especially the Buddhist ones of the Northern Wei, had long been popular among Chinese literati. Amy McNair named Ouyang Xiu as a proper example to demonstrate the origin of this bias. For example, in Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修's(1007-1072) *Ji gu lu* 集古錄(The Record of Collecting Antiques), which is the earliest work of "jin shi xue"(the Study of Metal and Stone), one of the most important stone inscriptions of the Northern Wei, "Shiping gong xiang"始平公像(Image for Duke of Shiping) in the Guyang Cave, does not show up at all.[190] This omission reveals Chinese literati's belief that such stone inscriptions do not meet the criteria of fine Chinese calligraphy: the inscriptions were done by anonymous artisans of low social standings instead of

[189] Amy McNair, "Engraved Calligraphy in China: Recension and Reception," *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 77, no. 1 (Mar., 1995): 107.
[190] Ibid., 111.

educated artists; their style was deemed too vulgar; the texts are often ungrammatical and full of mis-written characters; and their foreign Buddhist ideology was often loathed by the scholar-officials. Most importantly, their patrons were often considered no more than a group of "barbarians" invading the Chinese culture.[191]

1.1.2 The mid-Qing rediscovery of stone inscriptions

The Qian-Jia school's sudden increase of interest in Han Dynasty documents initially originated in their need of resolving the belief crisis among scholar-officials.[192] For this purpose, a group of the scholar-officials began to look for long-lost Han Dynasty inscriptions and meanwhile happened to "rediscover" their calligraphic value. This rediscovery in turn led to more sympathy and tolerance for the Northern Wei inscriptions, including those from the Guyang Cave. In the end, this movement prepared the historians of calligraphy such as Ruan Yuan, Bao Shichen, and Kang Youwei for their "bei xue" reform, which was discussed in Chapter I.

Responding to the historians of calligraphy, active calligraphers of the time actualized the Wei stele style in their works. Zhao Zhiqian 趙之謙(1829-1884) modeled his strokes after the characters on "The Image for Duke of Shiping" and Hu Zhen 胡震 (1817-1862) left audacious praise on one of the rubbing of the inscription.[193]

1.1.3 The Wei stele style and Kang Youwei's political agenda

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[191] Ibid., 112.

[192] Represented by the leader for school, Gu Yanwu 顧炎武. See Arthur W. Hummel, *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing period* (Global Oriental Classic Reprints, 2010), 422-424.

[193] McNair, "Engraved Calligraphy in China: Recension and Reception," 113.

Among all historians of calligraphy at the time, Kang Youwei probably provided the Northern Wei Inscriptions with the most words of praise. In *Canton Twin Oars of the Boat of Art*, Kang names two examples from the Guyang Cave: "(The characters on) 'The Sculpted Image by Yuan Xie' look like (a person carrying a)long spear, dwelling on his horse and delighting himself. (The characters on) 'The Sculpted Image by Xie Boda' look like (a person who) is both able to elegantly compose essays, and to actively execute military affairs."元燮造像, 如長戈修矛, 盤馬自喜. 解伯達造像. 雍容文章, 踴躍武事.[194] As for the overall quality of the inscriptions in Longmen read as follows, he said: "(The characters on) the sculpted images of Longmen are by the themselves a style, because they are alike in terms of ideas and shapes. They all appear powerful, tall, grand, and prosperous, extremely aiming at expressing their unrestrained-ness, and thus they are the utmost way of square brush."龍門造像自為一體, 意象相近. 皆雄峻偉茂, 極意發宕, 方筆之極軌也.[195]

Modern scholar Hua Rende considers Kang Youwei's tireless promotion of the Wei stele style to be a reflection of Kang's belief in "bian"变(change).[196] What Hua means is that Kang was arguing for a change from the soft and delicate "tie"-style to the robust Wei stele style. But I would also like to interpret Kang's idea of "change" within the social-political context of the time. Kang was one of the chief late-Qing political reformers with influence among both scholars and the Qing court, and his writings of all subjects frequently expressed his reformative views. Therefore, in the milieu of calligraphy, it is also possible that by favoring the ancient Wei stele over the popular yet dead-ended *tie* style, Kang was again spreading his propaganda of "Tuogu gaizhi"托古改制(reforming the system by appealing to the ancient practice).

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[194] Kang Youwei, with Comments by Cui Erping, *Guang yi zhou shuang ji zhu*, 182.
[195] Ibid., 188.
[196] Hua Rende 华人德, "Lun Wei bei ti" 论魏碑体(Discussion on the Wei-stele Style), *Zhongguo shufa* 中國書法(Chinese Calligraphy), no. 6(2000): 48.

1.2 The Forming of the Term “Twenty Masterpieces of Longmen”

It was within such atmosphere that the late-Qing people started to devote energy to the study of the stelae in the Longmen Grottoes, especially the Guyang Cave. Delin 德林 (active late nineteenth century) was the first one, proved by archaeological evidence, who made a selective compilation of inscription rubbings from Longmen (mostly the Guyang Cave),[197] and used the measurement “pin”品 on these selected rubbings. The title of his compilation is *Longmen shi pin*, or “Ten Masterpieces of Longmen.”[198] Afterwards, many others produced similar compilations, and the number of rubbings each compiler chose to include varies: four, five, twenty, fifty, or even more than a thousand.[199] One of the earliest compilations that chose to include twenty rubbings was *Jiao bei suibi* 校碑隨筆(Causal Writings on Collating Stelae) by Fang Ruo 方若 (1869-1954).[200] From that moment on, the number twenty gradually stayed and became the mainstream choice of calligraphy learners.

1.3 Modern Calligraphic Research

Unlike Kang Youwei’s passionate yet objective rhetoric, modern scholars tend to adopt a language much easier to comprehend when characterizing the Wei stele style as seen in Guyang Cave. From three aspects, Gong Dazhong articulate this characterization: 1. “Xingci”行次: the highly regulated spatial arrangement between characters; 2. “Jieti”结体: the well-balanced inner structure/arrangement between strokes within each character, with slightly upwards shifted center of gravity, generating solemnness; and 3. “Yongbi”用笔: each stroke is deeply cut by

[197] Zhongguo shufa bianji zu 中國書法編輯組, *Longmen ershi pin* 龍門二十品(Beijing: Wenwu chuban she, 1980), 7.
[198] Ibid., 7.
[199] Ibid..
[200] Fang Ruo 方若, with supplements by Wang Zhuanghong 王壯弘, *Zeng bu jiao bei suibi* 增補校碑隨筆(The Supplemented Casual Writings On Stele), (Shanghai: Shanghai shu hua chuban she, 1981), 241-243.

chisels, revealing the "feng"锋(imagined tip of brush) at the end of each stroke.[201] Overall, Gong considers the Wei stele style, which is chiefly represented by the Guyang Cave calligraphy, to have occupied a transitional position in the total history of Chinese calligraphy, as it carried on certain techniques developed in the earlier clerical script and also led to the emergence of the standard script of later times.[202]

To me, Gong's special contribution is his discussion on the unique stele with characters carved in relief, inside the Guyang Cave: the"Stele by Monk Huicheng," which many scholars have noticed, but very few have spilled ink on. Since this issue happens to be crucial to a hypothesis that this dissertation attempts to propose, Gong's opinion deserves a careful recapitulation here.

Firstly, Gong notices that the general sculptural style of all the images associated with this entire niche demonstrate an overly strong tendency of using high relief, a method totally unlike other seven niches that are also dated to the Guyang Cave's "Phase One" of construction. Then Gong identifies it with a much earlier style, which is seen in Cave 10 of the Yungang Grottoes. He proceeds to argue that the niche and stele by monk Huicheng should have been completed much earlier than all other niches in the cave, well before the relocation of the capital to Luoyang. At the time the craftsmen who worked on Huicheng's project were still following the protocols that they developed at the Yungang grottoes near the old capital Pingcheng, where they had carved sandstone without the knowledge of the total different texture of limestone at Longmen. The high-relief style, which seems less unsuitable for sculptures on limestone, was largely a residue from the craftsmen's previous experience working with sandstone, and this is reflected

[201] Gong Dazhong 宫大中, *Longmen shiku yishu* 龙门石窟艺术(The Art of the Longmen Grottoes)(Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chuban she, 1981), 220-221.
[202] Ibid., 218-220.

by both Huicheng's images around the niche and words on the stele.[203] Years later, after the relocation of capital, the craftsmen had become familiar with the masonry condition of the area, and when they continued to carried out more projects inside the Guyang Cave, they deviated from the Yungang protocols.

Later in this dissertation, during the discussion of the Stele by Huicheng, there will be a response to Gong's proposal. I attempt to understand the situation that not only the images, but also the stele by Monk Huicheng is entirely carved in relief. (Figure 4.16) In addition, the contribution in this regard by another scholar, Hyun-Sook Jung Lee, will also be considered together. For now, the focus shall remain on other scholars who have also made similar efforts in characterizing the calligraphic style of Guyang Cave with a modern vocabulary.

Hua Rende attributes the slanted-ness of the inscribed characters in the Guyang Cave to the standing posture of the people who brushed the characters onto the cave walls before the carving.[204] Hui-wen Lu argues that Emperor Xiaowen's policy of protecting and valuing the Han Dynasty funerary stelae near Luoyang partially resulted in the appearance of the format of stele on the cave walls.[205] Lu also believes that the Wei stele style is a continuation of the calligraphy of early dynasties, such as Eastern Han and Western Jin, preserved in forms such as the *Stone Classics*, locally at Luoyang at the time.[206]

The final section of Hyun-Sook Jung Lee's Ph. D. dissertation on the Guyang Cave explores its calligraphy. Beginning from the widely accepted notion that the calligraphy of the Guyang Cave is part of the larger transition from clerical script to standard script between the Han

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[203] Ibid., 213-214.
[204] Hua, "Lun Wei bei ti": 44.
[205] Hui-wen Lu, "Calligraphy of Stone Engravings in Northern Wei Loyang," in *Character & Context in Chinese Calligraphy*, ed.Cary Y Liu, Dora C Y Ching, and Judith G Smith(Princeton, N.J.: Art Museum, Princeton University, 1999), 80.
[206] Ibid., 82.

Dynasty and the Southern and Northern Dynasties,[207] Lee divided nineteen out of the "Twenty Masterpieces," which are from the Guyang Cave, into six stylistic groups.[208] Analyzing the nuances between the six groups, Lee argues that certain pieces in the cave carried on more of the heritage from the earlier Pingcheng style, while others leaned more towards the Southern/Sinicized style. Since Lee also believes that the evolution of the sculpted images' styles in Guyang Cave also reflects a process of Sinicization, by arguing that the totality of the Guyang Cave reflects strong marks of Emperor Xiaowen's political reform.

Apart from Gong Dazhong, Lee is probably the only scholar who has made an effort to explain the unusual characters in high relief on the stele by Monk Huicheng. Lee proposes a possible connection between the stele and epitaph stones found in tombs nearby and raises a few examples, including the "Epitaph Stones of the Zhang Family" dated to 260, which was carved in high relief. It is a pity that no further discussion follows these examples in Lee's dissertation.[209]

2. The Reconstruction of the Building Process and Total Program

Combining the textual study of the immense number of inscriptions, many of which are dated, and the stylistic analysis of the sculpted images inside Guyang Cave, most scholars on the Guyang Cave have chosen to direct their research towards reconstructing the building process of the cave. Many scholars believe that at the initial stage, or "Phase One," there was a grand design for the uppermost register of niches on the sidewalls as well as the Buddha statue triad at the deep end of the cave. After the initial stage, the cave ground was subsequently lowered twice, and more images were added into the newly excavated space.

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[207] Hyun-Sook Jung Lee,"The Longmen Guyang Cave: Sculpture and Calligraphy of the Northern Wei (386–534)," (Ph. D. Diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2005), 292.
[208] Ibid., 294.
[209] Ibid., 304.

Other than this, there are disagreements of all possible kinds among scholars in regard to the early history of Guyang Cave. For example, the disagreement on which year the earliest carving took place inside the cave began as early as Qing Dynasty: Sun Xingyan 孫星衍 proposed the theory of "the twelfth year of Taihe,"[210] but Wang Chang supported the "the twenty-second year of Taihe."[211] Until today, the opening date of Guyang Cave remains the single most rigorously debated issue in the study of the cave. Therefore, this dissertation would like to revisit the major publications on Guyang Cave by grouping them according to their different standpoints on the opening date.

2.1 The Seventeenth Year of Taihe (493)

2.1.1 Wen Yucheng 温玉成 was one of the earliest modern scholars to conduct a comprehensive study dedicated to the Guyang Cave.[212] Wen's article in 1993 carefully examines the early images on the cave's sidewalls, the ceilings, and the west wall, introducing their exact locations, iconography, styles, and inscriptions. In doing so, the article proposes a building process of the cave: at the earliest, before the seventeenth year of Taihe (493), there had been a small-scaled, naturally formed cave on site, and a few earliest niches might have appeared on the upper part of the west well near the ceiling at this time. Later in the next phase, between 493 and 495, the large statue triad on the west wall—the uppermost eight main niches on the sidewalls—began to take shape. After a few years, around 503, all of these niches were completed. At an even later stage, because the uppermost registers on the sidewalls had already been reserved/taken, a few other powerful patrons chose to move a bit higher up and build their niches

[210] Sun Xingyan 孫星衍, *Huan yu fang bei lu* 寰宇訪碑錄(Visiting Stelae Around the World), (Shanghai: Shangwu yin shu guan, 1935), 24.
[211] Wang, *Jin Shi Cui Bian*, vol. 27, 5.
[212] Wen Yucheng 温玉成, "Longmen guyang dong yanjiu" 龙门古阳洞研究(The Study of the Guyang Cave at Longmen), *Zhongyuan wenwu* 中原文物(Cultural Relics of Central China), special edition(June 1985): 143-212.

between the "uppermost register" and the ceiling, but these niches could generally be considered contemporaneous to most of the eight main niches. At the final stage, a few more years afterwards, the cave ground was lowered for the first time, and more images came to occupy the newly excavated space. Many scholars nowadays agree with Wen's general reconstruction, and have only slight reservation on the specific dating.

Since Wen believes that the date on "Stele by Monk Huicheng" should be read as "the twenty-second year of Taihe," he does not consider it to be the earliest dated niche in the cave. Instead, Wen takes the "Sculpted Image Built by Society Member, Sun Qiusheng et. al" to be the earliest one and dates it to the seventeenth year of Taihe.[213] Li Yunkun also holds this opinion.[214]

2.2 Nineteenth Year of Taihe (495)

This is the date accepted by most scholars currently in the field, and it comes from the "Sculpted Image by Lady Yuchi."

2.2.1 Mizuno Seiichi 水野清一 and Nagahiro Toshio 長広敏雄 visited the Longmen Grottoes during the Sino-Japanese war in the 1930s and published *A Study of the Buddhist cave-temples at Lung-men, Honan* 河南洛陽龍門石窟の研究 in 1941, which became the earliest comprehensive survey report of the site, providing photography, rubbings, drawings, and a numbering systems for the caves. The book pays careful attention to the Guyang Cave by including drawings of many niches inside the cave, introducing major niches at each level on the walls, and transcribing inscriptions. Mizuno and Nagahiro were the earliest among modern

[213] Ibid., 197.
[214] Ibid., 224.

scholars to choose "Sculpted Image by Lady Yuchi" as the earliest reliably dated niche in the cave, thus establishing 495 as the opening date for the cave.

2.2.2 In the first few years of the twenty-first century, a number of major researchers of the Guyang Cave published articles and book chapters one after another, pushing the conversation to a new height. The article by Ishimatsu Hinako 石松日奈子 in 2000 analyzes the stylistic evolving process of images from the "Western style" towards the "sinicized style" inside the Guyang Cave.[215] In order to demonstrate the transition, Ishimatsu divides the images into six groups from A to F, and periodizes them accordingly. Concluding her article, Ishimatsu discusses how the Guyang Cave served as one of the early sources of the Sinicized Buddhist sculpture, creating a indigenous style utterly different from the Western/foreign ones, and thus influencing the subsequent Chinese Buddhist art deeply.[216] In her formal analysis, Ishimatsu also brings in the social art historical perspective, believing that it was the Xianbei nobles who first had the large-scale niches executed, and commoners later followed their examples.

2.2.3 One of the representatives of social art historical studies is Stanley Abe's 2001 book *Ordinary Images*; the longest chapter is on the Guyang Cave. Abe categorizes the niches of Guyang by the social standings of their sponsors: "yiyi" societies, women, loyalists, and so forth. In one case, after examining a series of niches of varying sizes, Abe observes that "the expectation that the location and scale of a donation would be indicative of the class stand of the patrons is generally upheld…" [217] This showcases the primary concern of the book: to outline

[215] Ishimatsu Hinako 石松日奈子, "Ryumon sekkutsu koyodo zozo ko" 龍門石窟古陽洞造像考(The Study of the Sculpted Images of the Guyang Cave at Longmen Grottoes), *Ars buddhica*, no. 248 (Jan. 2000): 13 - 51.
[216] Ibid., 46.
[217] Stanley Abe, *Ordinary Images*, 205.

"the relationship of social class to the visual style of donation."[218] With a thorough study of the many niches, Abe's eventual reconstruction of Guyang Cave's inner program proposes that Monk Huicheng was the chief designer responsible for the four main niches at the four corners on the uppermost register. Afterwards, other patrons joined the program by making the other four niches.

Abe's mindset of noticing the art of commoners renders his work outstanding at the time. In the case of Guyang Cave, most other scholars focus on the eight main niches and a few other large-scale ones sponsored by the nobles. In contrast, Abe makes every effort to shed light on those clearly dated smaller niches with no prestigious patronage. For this, I am genuinely grateful to Abe: through Abe's publication, some important yet long-ignored stelae, such as the one by Monk Hui Shou, became fully accessible.[219]

Abe's work and this dissertation also share certain viewpoints in common on the overall nature of the stele inside the Guyang Cave. When discussing the stele by Monk Huicheng, Abe uses the term "a Han stele" to describe the object. As he subsequently argues that "the archaic, highly stylized language and allusions to traditional Han imagery, brimming with erudition, is meant to produce a self-representation appropriate for a member of an elite Han family,"[220] it is clear that by "Han," Abe does not only mean the Han Dynasty but also the Han Chinese people as a cultural group. The particular visual effect created by the "the combination of a Western-style Buddha and donors in northerner costume with the Han style bodhisattvas, stele, and inscription" is a "heterogeneity of visual style." [221]

[218] Ibid., 206.
[219] Ibid., 209- 210.
[220] Ibid., 200.
[221] Ibid., 200.

2.2.4 Another major study of Buddhist art tackling the issue of patronage is Amy McNair's *Donors of Longmen*. In the first chapter of the book, which is dedicated to the Guyang Cave, McNair argues that Monk Huicheng was the person responsible for the initial excavation of the entire cave as well as the total planning of the image making at Phase One, since the "Stele by Monk Huicheng" has the phrase "building a cave temple for the state"為國造石窟寺.[222] Combining formal analysis with close reading of critical inscriptions, McNair proposes a new reading of the cave's program: "…the eight large Buddha shrines, which I considered were intended to represent the seven rulers of the Northern Wei and the heir apparent." [223] Within this framework, McNair argues that although the large statue triad at the west wall was not sponsored by Emperor Xiaowen, it indeed represents his majesty.

In a chapter of less than excessive length, McNair presents a panoramic vision of the Guyang Cave with precision and insights. To young scholars who are committed to a faithful study of the cave, McNair's chapter serves suitably as a fast-track textbook. More specifically, to me, McNair's brief yet inspiring comment on the project by Monk Huicheng in regard to how the stele retains its own agency independent of the image generates an echo in my chest: "the inscriptions are not simply religious boilerplate but genuine artifacts of religious and social practice that indicate what the donors thought important to tell their contemporaries, posterity, and the karmic mechanism."[224]

2.3 The Second Year of Taihe (478)

2.3.1 The leading proponent for this dating is Liu Jinglong. Liu closely examines the relative physical locations of the niches by Yuan Xiang and Lady Yuchi, and discovers that the

[222] Amy McNair, *Donors of Longmen: Faith, Politics, and Patronage in Medieval Chinese Buddhist Sculpture* (Honolulu : University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 14.
[223] Ibid., 17. As McNair acknowledges, she received inspiration from Katherine Tsiang.
[224] Ibid., 19.

pointy head of the latter "penetrates"the bottom of the former, which implies a deliberate "yielding of way" gestured by the former niche. Therefore, the niche by Lady Yuchi must be the relatively early one, and because the niche by Yuan Xiang was started in the eighteenth year of Taihe, the niche by Lady Yuchi could only have been completed in the ninth year of Taihe instead of the widely believed nineteenth year of Taihe.[225] As a result, the "Sculpted Image for Duke Shiping," which is widely considered stylistically earlier than the niche by Yuan Xiang, could only have a completion date of the second year of Taihe (478) instead of the twelfth or twenty-second year of Taihe. Therefore, the opening date of Guyang cave should also be as such.

2.3.2 Liu does not stand alone with this proposal, as Katherine Renhe Tsiang attempts a more elaborate proof . Tsiang constructs her argument by considering the possibility of a variety of connections on different levels between Pingcheng and Luoyang, and said argument eventually distills into the affinities between the artistic styles of Yungang and Longmen. In her close study of the "Sculpted Image for Duke Shiping," Tsiang argues that its apparently early style is highly similar to the sculptures inside Cave 10 in Yungang, and thus it should be dated to the time around the 480s instead of the late 490s.

Moreover, Tsiang discovers that the uppermost eight main niches demonstrate the juxtaposition of different styles from both an earlier period and a much later period, and in the extreme case of "Sculpted Image for Duke Shiping," different areas of the same niche appear stylistically different. This points to the probability that carving activities inside the cave were

[225] Liu Jinglong 刘景龙, "Longmen shiku kaizao niandai xin kao" 龙门石窟开凿年代新考(The New Investigation of the Begging of Longmen Grottoes), *Guyang Cave: Cave 1443 of Longmen Grottoes*(Beijing : Ke xue chu ban she, 2001), suppl., 94- 95.

once put on hiatus for a substantial period of time and then resumed much later, which allows the possibility of a very early date of creation for the Guyang Cave: the year 478.[226]

3. Other Proposals

Scholars have proposed other possible dates of opening as well. For example, Zhang Naizhu argues for the twelfth year of Taihe (488),[227] and Jin Weinuo believes that it is the seventh year of Taihe (483).[228]

The Guyang Mode

Inscriptions in the Guyang Cave, which could have been a great source of information supplementing the stylistic periodization, have caused unexpected frustration for the scholars. Some of them have deteriorated hopelessly, and others may have been misrepresenting facts since their initial careless carving. To make things worse, the contradiction between information offered by different inscriptions creates an innate turbulence, plaguing every attempt of persuading the otherwise opinionated.

This dissertation takes a temporary break from the issue of the Guyang Cave's opening date, a question which has exhausted a great deal of scholarly energy. Instead, it restarts from the common ground shared by many scholars, in search of a "Guyang Mode" showcasing the earliest juxtaposition of stele and sculpted image. This mode developed into the beginning of a new phase of the intermingling of funerary and Buddhist art in China.

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[226] I would like to express my gratitude for Kathrine Tsiang's generous sharing of her manuscript before it was published. At the time when I finished my dissertation, Tsiang's article had come out. See Katherine Tsiang, "A Revisionist Reading of the Transition of Buddhist Cave-Making from Yungang to Longmen," *Archives of Asian Art*. volume 71, number 2(October 2021): 131- 170.

[227] Zhang Naizhu 张乃翥, "Longmen shiku shipinggong zaoxiang niandai guankui"龙门石窟始平公像龛造像年代管窥(One Perspective on the Dating of the Duke Shiping's Image in Longmen Grottoes), *Zhongyuan wenwu* 中原文物(Cultural Relics of Central China), no. 3(1983): 91.

[228] Longmen shiku yanjiusuo 龙门石窟研究所, *Longmen shiku yanjiu lunwen xuan* 龙门石窟研究论文选(Selected Articles on the Study of Longmen Grottoes)(Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu ch ban she, 1993), 5.

Near the end of the review of scholarship on the Guyang Cave earlier in the chapter, I quote a passage by McNair to raise the issue of a stele's agency independent of its image in Guyang Cave, and in the remaining half of the chapter, I would like to further unleash the potential of this independent agency by demonstrating how stele-image juxtaposition in turn paved the way for the full emergence of "zaoxiang bei," or sculpted-image stele, in the free-standing form. Since the stele-image juxtaposition phenomenon is known to people today largely only in the Guyang Cave, this dissertation calls it the "Guyang Mode." It was through the Guyang Mode that an inscription initially transformed itself from "words attached to the sculpted image" to the "independent stele juxtaposed with the sculpted image," which, in turn, could have become the first step towards the later "stele absorbing the sculpted images as its components."

1. Dorothy Wong's Study on the Unification of Stele and Image

Dorothy Wong's book, *Chinese Steles*, also has a section on the birth of sculpted-image stele in the late fifth century. She attributes the matter to three causes: the admiration of Han Dynasty stelae caused by Emperor Xiaowen's Sinicization policies, the passionate production of Buddhist sculptures due to Buddhism's status as the state religion, and the transformation of the traditional *she* society of China into the new Buddhist "yiyi" societies. Wong mentions that niched images such as those seen in Guyang Cave could have been the early source for sculpted-image stele, and she briefly proposes that the usage of stele in Guyang Cave was the result of the relocation of the Northern Wei capital to the heartland of the China proper.[229] In general, Wong approaches the issue from its socio-political background, contributing a macro-level, or high-level study, with the help of historically received texts.

[229] Wong, *Chinese Steles*, 54.

Unlike Wong's work, this chapter attempts a middle-level (in Wu Hung's term) study of the "preparatory phase" of the birth of sculpted-image stele. Within the space of Guyang Cave, this chapter looks for archaeological and art historical evidence in order to reconstruct the programs created by each pair of juxtaposed stele and niche. Along the way of reconstruction, this chapter hopes to demonstrate how the stele-image juxtaposition changed Buddhist sculpture's merit producing mechanism at the end of the fifth century.

2. The Stele's Agency

In Guyang cave, the stele earned its relative independent agency from images on both levels: form and content.

2.1 Form

The emergence of the Guyang Mode roots deeply in the building process of the entire cave, and the building process is rarely seen in the history of Chinese cave temples: a grand design for the cave existed at the earliest stage, but in the meantime, more than one patron also came to participate in the building by securing the space for their own niches. That is to say, there was high autonomy/democracy within a well coordinated program, whereas most cave temples in China do not explicitly exhibit so many voices working together.

The relationship between the earliest patrons of niches in the Guyang Cave, including Monk Huicheng, Wei Lingzang, Sun Qiusheng with his society, Lady Yuchi, Yuan Xiang, and Yang Dayan, was both cooperative and competitive. On the one hand, all of their niches, especially the so-called "Eight Main Niches" on the uppermost register of the sidewalls, come together to form an retinue of the great Buddha statue triad on the west wall. On the other hand, when planning

these niches, each of the patrons could have also been aware of their peers' plans. Therefore, it was tempting for everyone involved to ensure that their own niche stands out and is clearly claimed. Few other artistic forms of text making could serve better than the solemn and graceful stele to proclaim a patron's contribution and thus guarantee their portion of merit and blessing. The examples examined later in this section will show how the stelae in the Guyang Cave fulfilled the vanity of their patrons on so many levels just the way a Han Dynasty funerary stele would have done.

Consequently, after the mysterious first patron made the genius move of pairing their niche with a stele in the Guyang Cave, many others were compelled to follow the example.

2.2 Content

The "high-autonomy-within-coordination" building strategy in Guyang Cave also means that each niche is no longer primarily a standalone icon for worshiping but an organ belonging to the total sculptural body headed by the large Buddha statue triad on the west wall, and this in turn profoundly determines the relation between each niched image and their stele. As the image relinquishes certain amount of its iconicity, the accompanying inscription also gains leeway for re-orientation. Since every patron was in need of a unique voice so as to claim their portion of merit with the stele, it was only natural for them to remodel the originally Buddhist dedicatory inscription into a revelation of other types of desires. These desires include showing-off the generosity of a patron (or a group of patrons) or praising a general's military accomplishments, which had been more frequently seen on Han Dynasty stelae.

One example would suffice to demonstrate the consequence of this historical change. Many of the stelae inside the Guyang Cave have the title "*yizi xiang,*" which means "an image made by

and for society members." This was revolutionary on two levels. Firstly, before the introduction of the stele into the making of Buddhist images, there had never been a "title" formally inscribed on top of the image's dedicatory text. Secondly, the title "*yizi xiang*" does not concern itself with the iconography of the niched image but instead emphasizes the society members' merit. From this point on, the stele started to openly shift its primary concern from deities to people (patrons), which in fact reflects the essence of Han Dynasty stele-erecting behaviors.

A way to understand this new tendency of openly featuring people's concern with a stele title in religious image making behaviors is that before the appearance of the stele-image juxtaposition—or the Guyang Mode—the making of iconic images had primarily been a contractual relationship between deities and people. However, because of the innovation of the Guyang Mode, stele created a new space accommodating the contractual relationship between different parties of people, an issue which has been examined in the previous two chapters as well. For the moment, the discussion returns to how stele created its agency in the Guyang Cave.

3. Three Visual Strategies to Present Stele-ness

For a piece of artwork to possess any agency, it firstly has to become appealing to people's eyes in order to make them care. In the process of becoming appealing, stelae in Guyang Cave reveal different degrees of "stele-ness." Some of the stele makers put forth great effort to create the most rarely seen "sculpted image of a stele" in Chinese history, while others, with all their means, were attempting the seemingly impossible mission: to ensure a presentation, instead of a representation, of a true stele, complementing the niched image on the cave wall. However, even more niche patrons seemed to have been awkwardly modeling their stelae after earlier works without comprehending the true purposes behind them.

Among the more successfully created stelae in Guyang Cave, people can observe at least three different visual strategies to present stele-ness, and in order to showcase the strategies, this chapter selects ten cases of stele-image juxtaposition as examples because the relatively complete inscriptions on them are still accessible.[230] Examining these materials, this chapter conducts stylistic categorization but not periodization.

At the end of this categorization, one will see three major trends in the presentation of stele-ness in Guyang Cave: 1) The specific visual strategy employed by a stele depends on its location in the space. 2) The sculptural techniques used on statues influenced stele making. 3). Stelae increased the publicness of Buddhist statues.

3.1 Group I

In this group, every stele's head and main body are both strongly pronounced in high relief, and the base of each stele protrudes from the wall even higher. Below every niched icon, there is an incense burner with worshiper figures on both sides.

3.1.1 Example 1. Titled, "Shiping gong xiang yiqu"(An Image for The Duke of Shiping), with the stele by Monk Huicheng. Dated to 478 by inscription, but other proposals also exist: 488 or 498. (Figure 4.1)[231]

The niched icon is a Shakyamuni seated cross-legged, with hands folded in front. Below the niche is an incense burner with twin dragons wrapped around it, and on each side of the niche

[230] Besides the ten examples, there are also a few other cases in which the remainders of stelae could be recognized, but the inscribed texts are mostly gone. For example, a niche right underneath the "Shakyamuni Image by Wei Lingzang and Xue Fashao" once had an accompanying stele, and the head of the stelae is still there but its main body has been entirely destroyed by smaller niches of later times. Similar cases also exist on the cave ceiling: some are completely defaced, while others have never been finished. This dissertation does not discuss them at this moment.

Since the locations of these examples include only the uppermost register of the sidewalls, the cave ceiling, and the space in between, it can be inferred that all of them were completed during the earliest phase of the cave's construction, which is before the first lowering of the ground at about 505.

[231] Liu, *Guyang Cave: Cave 1443 of Longmen Grottoes*, vol. 1, pl. 110, 74, niche#N304, and suppl., inscription no. 1842, 55.

there are two worshiper figures. The cave wall surrounding the stele has been seriously chiseled off to render the high-relief body of the stele. The stele head is in the shape of two intertwined dragons, which are so deeply cut and artistically intricate that they almost appear as a free-standing piece of sculpture. Underneath the bodies and between the legs of the twin dragons is a small plaque, saying "An Image Dedicated to the Duke of Shiping." At the bottom of the stele, there is a tall supporting base decorated with floral patterns and four small niched Buddhas are indented.

The inscription consists of four parts: the apologetic rhetoric for making an image; Monk Huicheng's first motivation of making the image: the sake of the state; Monk Huicheng's second motivation of making the image: the sake of his deceased father; and the date and the names of the two makers of the inscriptions.

Similar to a few other stelae titled "yizi xiang" (image by/for society members) in the cave, the title of the stele by Monk Huicheng primarily concerns itself with the beneficiary of the stele: the Duke of Shiping. Monk Huicheng's practice reminds people of the Han Dynasty tradition of including the name of the deceased at the head of his own funerary stele as the stele's "title." For example, one of the most well-known funerary stelae from East Han, the stele for Zhang Qian, has such a title: "The Eulogy for the Late Lord Zhang,Head of Gucheng, Magistrate of Dangyin of the Han Dynasty"漢故轂城長蕩陰令張君表頌[232]

In addition, at the end of the text on the Stele by Huicheng, the names of the composer, Zhu Yizhang, and the calligrapher, Meng Da, appear. Inviting or hiring renowned writers and calligraphers to make the inscription on someone's funerary stele with all accessible means was a widely accepted custom during Eastern Han, and was the best way to show off the patron's feelings for and social connection with the deceased. Within the literati circle. it was believed

[232] Unknown, *Han Zhang Qian Bei* 漢張遷碑(Tokyo: Nigensha, 1958), vol. 16, 1.

that people competed with each other when making funerary stelae. For example, the most important calligraphers of late Easter Han, Cai Yong 蔡邕(133-192), is known to have brushed many funerary stelae. Since the issue has been thoroughly covered in Chapter I's discussion on the "Stele of Cao Quan," for the sake of efficiency, it is proper to simply state that the Monk Huicheng, by giving his late father's name to the stele, was again attempting to carry on an earlier tradition of Chinese stele making.

Yet the "stele-ness" of Huicheng's piece does not stop here, as its makers employed a unique visual strategy to present it to the viewers. Not only the twin-dragon head, the supporting base, the rectangular body of the stele are in rigorous high relief, but also all the characters and grids are in relief. (Figure 4.16) Very rarely does one see a stele entirely in relief in China at any point in history.

In this regard, Hyun-Sook Jung Lee proposes a hypothesis that the high-relief stele by Monk Huicheng could be related to earlier and contemporaneous epitaph stones buried in tombs.[233] Although Lee does not carry on the discussion more deeply, the proposal itself directs people to the important fact that characters carved in relief are generally rare in the history of Chinese stone carving, but epitaph stones, especially their lids, present plenty of these cases.

Modern scholar Liu Tao, in his *Zhongguo shufa shi* 中国书法史(The History of Chinese Calligraphy), points out that the characters widely seen on the Northern Wei epitaph lids "…are more often than in relief, and the carving techniques appear similar to those of relief sculptures…"[234] Liu further elaborates this proposal by describing these characters as "decorative."[235] For example, the characters on the lid of Yu Jing's epitaph, (Figure 4.17) made

[233] Hyun-Sook Jung Lee, "The Longmen Guyang Cave," 304.

[234] Liu Tao 刘涛, *Zhongguo shufa shi, Wei Jin Nanbeichao Juan* 中国书法史, 魏晋南北朝卷(History of Chinese History: the Wei, Jin, and the Northern and Southern Dynasties), (Nanjing: Jiangsu jiaoyu chuban she, 2002), 444.

[235] Ibid., 443.

in the year 526, have "strokes that are thickened, and the characters' overall forms are rather flattened, as if each of them is going through a metamorphosis from characters to birds, with highly lifelike heads and tails of birds at the beginnings and ends of many strokes, and therefore the decorative effect is strong…"[236]

Liu's insightful discussion reveals the seal script's peculiar status in Chinese calligraphy after the Han Dynasty—it was widely used as the embellishing or ceremonial element. During the Han Dynasty, the clerical script was believed to have generally replaced the seal script as the most prevailing script in use, and the characters from the Han Dynasty funerary stelae known today are indeed mostly in clerical script. The only area still frequently reserved for the seal script on the funerary stelae during the Han Dynasty was the center of the stele head, in which the title of a stele is inscribed. The special reservation of the stele head for the prevailing script of an earlier time was to present the stele title's status differently from that of the characters in the main body below. The strokes of a character in clerical script usually contain more complicated turnings and are more geometric than those of the same character in seal script, and thus more embellished. As a result, the carving of characters in the seal script is more costly. To borrow Wu Hung's term, those all contribute to the monumentality of the carved characters.

After Cao Cao's orders of restraining stele, the newly risen epitaph stone gradually fulfilled part of the functions of the Han Dynasty funerary stele. Abundant evidence supports this historical process. The Epitaph Stone of Liu Xian,[237] now on show at the Liaoning Provincial Museum, in the shape of a complete Han Dynasty funerary stele, is one of the best examples of the transitional phase between the aboveground funerary stele and the buried epitaph stones. (Figure 4. 18) Its main body is a strict cuboid, with both a finely carved intertwined-dragon stele

[236] Ibid., 443-444.

[237] Cao Xun 曹汛, "Beiwei Liu Xian muzhi"北魏刘贤墓志(The Northern-Wei Epitaph Stone of Liu Xian), *Kaogu* 考古(Archaeology), no. 7 (1984): 615-621.

head on top and a tortoise base underneath. More importantly, the archaeologists discovered the object from a tomb chamber, and according to their report, the object was in front of the coffin, facing the tomb entrance, which is the typical location where an epitaph stone would be situated. Cases of this type prove the direct connection between the Han Dynasty funerary stele and the epitaph stone of the Northern Dynasties.

In addition, at the center of the "stele head," there is the four-character title of the object: *Liu Xian Muzhi* or "Epitaph of Liu Xian." The characters are not only in standard script with strong mixed elements of the seal script, but also in relief. It could be fair to deduce that if the epitaph stone of Liu Xian were not in the shape of a stele but instead in the more prevailing form of later times—that is, in a form consisting of a lid independent from the main stone cube—then the "stele title" would be over the surface of its lid.

Therefore, the Han Dynasty stele title in seal script and its monument found its way to the lid of the Northern Dynasties epitaph stones. To this end, the latter even expanded the monumentality by more frequently employing the technique of high relief—after all, stele titles in relief appeared relatively less frequently even during the Han Dynasty. The transitional epitaph stone of Liu Xian also perfectly demonstrates this expansion, as its outward shape follows the design of a Han Dynasty funerary stele, but its title turns into characters in relief. After the transitional Northern Dynasties, the norm of epitaph stones in China generally settled to become the two-part form, as seen in the Tang Dynasty cases. In the two-part form, the titles on the lids are often in relief.

More often than not, transmission of both form and monumentality of this type might not have been a one-way process. The rapid development of the epitaph stones during the Northern Dynasties was a response to the vacuum created by the lack of funerary stelae. Therefore, the

epitaph stone inherited part of the funerary stele's form and monumentality. At the same time, the new styles created by the epitaph stone could also easily find their way in reverse to the contemporaneous making of stele.

Among the epitaph stones discussed by Liu Tao, there is the one for Han Xianzong,[238] (Figure 19) which was excavated in Luoyang, and its year of making was 499. It was finished at almost the same time and location with the niched icon and stele by Monk Huicheng inside the Guyang Cave. Considering the fact that Monk Huicheng commissioned both the image and stele for his deceased father, it does not appear odd that Huicheng's project shared carving techniques with contemporaneous epitaph stones. One might even argue that there is the chance that both the epitaph stone for Xianzong and Monk Huicheng's project were completed in the same workshops near Luoyang.

Indeed, every form or style can always have multiple historical sources. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, in regard to the "decorative-ness" of the characters carved in relief on the stele by Monk Huicheng in the Guyang Cave, Gong Dazhong also proposes his thought-provoking theory. Gong argues that the niche-stele complex build by Monk Huicheng for his late father, the Duke of Shiping, appears to be stylistically earlier than the other seven in the "Eight Main Niches" group at the uppermost register of the cave walls. Gong believes that its style is in fact that of an apsara in high relief near the window of the rear chamber in Cave 9 of the Yungang Grottoes, and it was the carvers at Yungang who brought the "high-relief style" to the Guyang Cave. But the carvers applied the style to not only the image associated with the niche, but also the entire stele on the side.[239]

[238] Liu Tao, *Zhongguo shufa shi,*443.
[239] Gong Dazhong, *Longmen shiku yishu*, 214.

Although it may not be easy to prove Gong's entire theory, his proposal regarding how the techniques of the apsaras in Cave 9 of Yungang was later applied to a stele deserves much attention. In Huicheng's project, both the niched icon and the stele were planned together, and the two pre-treated areas reserved for making both of them are adjacent to each other on the wall. Envisioning a sculpted image of Shakyamuni at one area, it would be possible for the carver in charge to envision sculpting the "image of a stele" as well. Every character and grid in relief on the stele by Monk Huicheng could have been conceived as part of the "sculpted image of stele" produced with the same techniques to sculpt Buddhist deities. Liu Tao's discussion regarding the decorative-ness of the characters carving on stone also supports this hypothesis. Liu shows the evidence that through a metamorphosis, characters can become images of birds on epitaph stones at the time. So the the boundary between the carving of characters and the carvings of images was not absolutely impenetrable. Along this line, one can even raise the example that the earliest forms of the Chinese characters on the Shang Dynasty (between c.a.1600 B.C.E. and c.a. 1046 B.C.E) oracle bones are directly related to pictorial representations.

This issue has to be considered together with the stele's peculiar location in the cave: the entrance, where strong natural light comes in from the side. At a similar location (the entrance) in another Northern Wei cave of Longmen, the Central Binyang Cave, there are also two groups of sculpture in high relief: there are also two groups of sculpture in high relief: Emperor's and Empress's retinue venerating Buddha. (Figure 4.2) In there, all figures are in three-quarter view, whereas their noses, breaking the overall contour of the figures, stand perpendicular to the cave wall and thus are oddly "in frontal view" to the viewers. The oversized perpendicular noses can effectively catch the natural light coming from the entrance and thus can project strong shadow

over the figures' faces, hence chiaroscuro, directing a viewer's eyesight to not only the noses themselves but also the entire faces of the figures.

A similar effect is achieved by every character and grid on Monk Huicheng's sculpted image of stele, impressing every viewer passing by, and due to this brilliant visual effect, an image of stele is able to present even stronger stele-ness than a regular stele would have done. Anyone who has looked at enough Chinese stelae would understand how hard it is to discern the many characters constituted by thin incised lines sunken into the stele surface, especially when one is inside a cave without direct lightening, had there been no pigment filled inside the incision. It is for this reason that many people would prefer reading the rubbing of a stele instead of the stele itself. It is called the "strategy of high relief" in this dissertation.

3.1.2 Example 2. "Yizi Xiang"(Image by/for the Society Members) with the stele by Sun Qiusheng et al. Different readings of the beginning date: either the seventh year of Taihe (483), or the seventeenth year of Taihe (493). Completion date: the third year of Jingming (502). (Figure 4.3)[240]

Its style and that of the stele by Monk Huicheng are highly alike. The niched icon is a Shakyamuni seated cross-legged, with hands folding in front. Below the niche is an incense burner with twin dragons, and on each side of the niche there should have been two worshiper figures. The stele head is in the shape of two intertwined dragons, slightly flatter compared to the ones on the stele by Monk Huicheng. Underneath the bodies and between the legs of the twin dragons is a small plaque reading "Image by/for society members," and the names and titles of the two patrons are at the sides. At the bottom of the stele, there is a tall supporting base with three small niched figures.

[240] Liu, *Guyang Cave: Cave 1443 of Longmen Grottoes*, vol. 1, pl. 226, 148, niche#S106, and suppl., inscription no. 2296, 78.

Two deep grooves run at the sides of the stele body, and outside the grooves are protruding, polished embankments enclosing the stele. Over the surface of the embankments, one can still detect the traces of fine decors in the shape of vines. These patterns also appear on the frames surrounding the Buddhist statues of the cave. The stele makers intentionally separated the stele from the rest of the cave wall with the embankments and by hollowing out the groves around the stele. This is the second strategy to present stele-ness in the Guyang Cave: "dig-and-build strategy."

As generally accepted in China, a typical stele needs to be a cuboid, free-standing, three-dimensional tablet. However, to those who were planning to built a niched icon on a cave wall, there was no easy way that a three-dimensional tablet could be erected to accompany the icon. However, by digging a hole on the wall, in the exact same manner of building a statue inside, one could also build a stele.

In other words, Sun Qiusheng and his society ordered a niche for their stele, and inside the niche, they requested for a design of the substantial "body," rather than only the "surface" of a stele. The stele makers had never intended to incise a two-dimensional "image of stele" on the wall, but to build a real one inside it, and in this sense, they treated the stele as an exact equal to the statue next to it. In Sun Qiusheng's case, it has always been the presentation of a stele, instead of a representation.

The inscribed text on the stele by Sun Qiusheng et al. is in two halves. The first half does not differ too much from a typical Buddhist dedicatory inscriptions found on many other sculptures. It prays for the patrons in this world and for their future afterlives. The second half is a long list of two hundred names of the society members who sponsored the project, and this list takes up about two-thirds of the overall stele surface. As Dorothy Wong has argued, the "yiyi"

societies at that time probably could have rooted in the *she* societies, which took shape during the pre-Qin periods. At the same time, Patricia Ebrey's study of the Stele of Cao Quan shows that similar lists appear on funerary stelae of the Han Dynasty as well. In this sense, it would be possible for one to believe that the name list on the stele by Sun Qiusheng et al. could be the heritage of the Chinese *she* society activities transmitted via the more recent medium of Eastern Han funerary stele.

The affinity between this stele and a typical Han funerary stele is also proved at the end of the first half of its inscribed text, where the names of the composer and calligrapher of the stele inscription appear. This is the second case of such kind seen in Guyang Cave, and the first one was the stele by Monk Huicheng. The two stelae, sitting on the opposite sides of the same cave, were to exhibit their own fanciness and thus their patrons' vanity in front of each other, and this show put on by both parties again reminds people of the public competition between Han Dynasty funerary stelae, which had also frequently been completed by renowned writers and calligraphers. Therefore, the competition between the stele users in Guyang Cave was the result of not only the cave's unique spatiality and building process, but also of the spirit of stele use passed down from the Han Dynasty.

3.1.3 Example 3. "Shijia xiang"(Image of Shakyamuni) and stele by Wei Lingzang and Xue Fashao. Date of beginning: late Taihe period. (Figure 4.4)[241]

Its style and that of the stele by Monk Huicheng, and Sun Qiusheng et al. are highly alike. The niched icon is a Shakyamuni seated cross-legged, with hands folded in front. Below the niche is an incense burner with twin dragons, and on each side of the niche there should have been three worshiper figures. The stele head is in the shape of two intertwined dragons in high

[241] Ibid., vol. 1, pl. 101, 70, niche#N234, and suppl., inscription no. 2024, 66.

relief. Underneath the bodies and between the legs of the twin dragons is a small plaque, reading "Image of Shakyamuni" and the names of the two patrons are on the sides. At the bottom of the stele, there is a tall supporting base with three small niched figures. Although the stele is largely destroyed now, the deeply cut grooves at the sides of the stele body still exist.

3.1.4 Example 4. "Yizi Xiang" (Image by/for the Society Members) and stele by Yang Dayan. Date: shortly after the year 499. (Figure 4.5)[242]

Its style and that of the stele by Monk Huicheng, Sun Qiusheng et al. and Wei Lingzang are highly alike. The niched icon is a Shakyamuni seated cross-legged, with hands folded in front. Below the niche is an incense burner with twin dragons, and on each side of the niche there should have been three worshiper figures, but further outside the base of the niche there are two more larger-scale standing figures. The stele head is in the shape of two intertwined dragons in high relief. Underneath the bodies and between the legs of the twin dragons is a small plaque reading "Image by/for Society Members. At the bottom of the stele, there is a tall supporting base with five small niched figures. The wall surface surrounding the stele are rigorously lowered, giving the stele a pronounced presentation. Besides the opening and closing remarks stating that the image was dedicated to the deceased Emperor Xiaowen, the entire text is laudatory of Yang's personal military achievements.

To sum up, stelae in Group I are all located at the uppermost register on the two side walls of the cave, belonging to the group of so-called "Eight Main Niches." Because they are close to the viewers standing on the ground, their makers were confident enough to employ the most nuanced visual strategies to present their stele-ness.

[242] Ibid., vol. 1, pl. 87, 63, niche#N228, and suppl., inscription no. 2023, 66.

3.2 Group II

The three-dimensionality of the stelae deceases significantly compared to group I, as everything becomes flatter. But the flatter supporting bases of both the niched statue and the stele shows unprecedented artistic originality.

3.2.1 Example 5. Niched Image and Stele by Lady Yuchi. The current status of dating information provided by the inscription creates uncertainty, and it could be read as either the ninth year of Taihe (485), or the nineteenth year of Taihe (495). (Figure 4.6)[243]

The icon in the niche is seated Maitreya with two pendent legs crossed at the angles. On both sides, there is a standing worshiper figure holding lotus branch in one hand. The head of the stele is still shaped into two intertwined dragons, and between their legs there is one blank pointy plaque. The grooves on the sides of the stele body are much shallower than group I.

The supporting base underneath the stele is rather flat, but the patterns on it is unique among all stelae in the Guyang Cave (Figure 4.7): an incense burner in the middle and two fairies on the sides—in the language of Buddhist art, this combination is solely reserved for icons of importance.

3.2.2 Example 6. Niched image and stele by Yuan Xiang. Beginning date of the project: the eighteenth year of Taihe (494). Completion date of the project: the twenty-second year of Taihe (498). (Figure 4.8)[244]

The style here is highly similar to that of Lady Yuchi's project. The icon in the niche is seated Maitreya with two pendent legs crossed at the angles, and near the knees there are two

[243] Ibid., vol. 1, pl. 65, 50, niche# N94, and suppl., inscription no. 1840, 55.
[244] Ibid., pl. 63, 48, niche#N51, and suppl., inscription no. 1843, 55.

lion on the sides. On both sides of Maitreya, there is a standing worshiper figure. The head of the stele is still shaped into two intertwined dragons, and between their legs there is one blank plaque. The grooves on the sides of the stele body are still observable. There is no base underneath the stele.

Below the niche, the elaborate procession of worshiper figures is also unique among all niches in Guyang Cave. (Figure 4.9) Kate Lingley has conducted an extensive study on the Northern Wei procession image of this type near Luoyang: not only does it appear in the Central Binyang Cave at Longmen but also a few more times in the Caves at Shuiyusi and Gaomiaoshan. [245]In many such cases, the procession image reflects the patronage from members related to the royal house. Therefore, it is understandable that Yuan Xiang, the King of Beihai, created such an image.

Since the stele inscription is crucial to the comprehension of the procession image's meaning, a translation of its majority is offered here:

> "At the eleventh day of the twelfth month of the eighteenth year of Taihe, the Emperor personally led the six armies, so as to attach Xiao the Rebel (and I, Yuan Xiang was to follow him). Those faces who follow the military and those who remain in the state bid farewell by the Luo River. Those voices who travel and those who stay are separated outside the Yi-Que gate. My mother, the Great Consort, with the holy and kind rules, cautioned about the trip. I, the son, with a keen and filial heart, reserved words and presented tears. At the day, the Great Consort returned home, and vowed by the river at the *Yi*-Que Gate, wishing both the mother and the son to be safe, to build an image of Maitreya so as to place it here. At the twenty-third day of the ninth month of the twenty-second year, the appearance of the law's carving was completed. Because of this, (I)

[245] Kate Lingley, "Widows, Monks, Magistrates, and Concubines" (Ph. D. Diss., University of Chicago, 2004).

made a vegetarian feast, and inscribed stone to express my heart, restating our previous vow...”維太和之十八年十二月十一日,皇帝親御六旌, 南伐蕭逆. 軍國二容, 別於洛汭. 行留兩音, 分於闕外. 太妃以聖善之規戒途, 戎旅弟子以資孝之心戈言奉淚. 其日,太妃還家, 伊川立願,母子平安, 造彌勒像一區以置於此. 至廿二年九月廿三日, 法容剋就. 因即造齋, 鐫石表心, 奉申前志...[246]

Between the completion of the Buddha statue and Yuan Xiang made the inscription to express his heart, he “made a vegetarian feast.” In many inscriptions found on Buddhist sculptures, it is recorded that as part of the consecration ceremony, or the “eye-opening” ceremony, right before a newly carved icon would be officially put into use, there often was a vegetarian feast. Among the many procedures of the ceremony, the collective Buddha-worshiping behavior would necessarily take place. Therefore, it is possible that the procession image underneath the niche by Yuan Xiang is a reflection of the ceremony mentioned by the stele: one half of the procession could be the males led by Yuan Xiang, and the other half on the opposite side could be the females led by Yuan Xiang’s mother.

To sum up, the two cases in this group are both located between the Eight Main Niches and the cave ceiling. Since they stand slightly higher than the previous group, more efforts were made to produce creative images at the bases of stele and niche, which are closer to the viewers on the ground.

3.3 Group III

Stelae become even flatter compared to group II and are poorly carved. No additional images exist underneath any stele or niche.

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[246] Ibid., suppl., inscription no. 1843, 55.

3.3.1 Example 7. Niched Image and Stele by King of Guangchuan's Great Consort Hou. Dated by inscription to the third year of Jingming (502). (Figures 4.10- 4.11)[247]

The icon in the niche is seated Maitreya with two pendent legs crossed at the angles, but much of the icon is gone now. The entire stele seems to be a cursory incision over the surface of the wall. The inscription has it that this was dedicated to Hou's late husband, the King of Guangchuan.

Not very far away, there is another image of Maitreya, which was also build by Great Consort Hou, for her grandson, dated to the fourth year of Jingming (503). [248](Figure 4.12) However, the Taihe-fourth-year Maitreya does not have a stele, and the inscription, which is much longer than the third-year one, goes underneath Maitreya in a square box. Within two years, the same person commissioned two images of Maitreya, and one of them comes with a stele, the other does not. This pair forms a perfect comparison through which one can discern how a Northern Wei noble conceived the relationship between image and stele.

The earlier inscription, which is inside a stele, has characters, each of which is four centimeters tall, much larger than characters in any other inscriptions in the cave, including the other one by Hou herself.[249] This contrast shows that some stele users in Guyang Cave, such as Great Consort Hou, had clear agendas behind their choices of the form, with the awareness of the ritual value that stele was able to bring to their image in the cave temple. Great Consort Hou was conscious of the fact the most privileged locations near the ground had already been taken by the Eight Main Niches, and she had to compromise by building her images at the very top of the cave, far away from viewers. To compensate for this disadvantage, she decided to employ much

[247] Liu, *Guyang Cave: Cave 1443 of Longmen Grottoes*, vol. 1, pl. 312, 196, niche#D87, and suppl., inscription no. 2272, 76.
[248] Ibid., vol. 1, pl. 315, 199, niche#D99, and suppl., inscription no. 2273, 76.
[249] Abe, *Ordinary Images*, 233.

larger characters for her inscription, even if it meant that the length of the text had to be greatly reduced. A stele on the ceiling, with characters much easier to be recognized from the ground, suitably re-positions Great Consort Hou's Maitreya back into the competition with the Eight Main Niches on the ground level for the viewers' attention. In so doing, Hou's stele reclaims its own stele-ness compared to other stelae, and also reconnects her Maitreya with the overall programme of the cave down below. Eventually the stele reunites the Great Consort with the community of the Northern Wei noble patrons at the ground level of the cave. Great Consort Hou's stele employs the "strategy of large characters."

In contrast, the later inscription, which neither comes in a stele nor has the large-scale characters, does not create a similar effect, and the stele-less image of Maitreya does not connect itself to the network created by the Eight Main Niches on the ground level of the cave. Sitting among the other icons located near the roof of the cave, the interaction between the Maitreya image and the viewer is also thinner. Similar to the murals painted on the roofs of some cave temples at Mogao, the stele-less Maitreya image is more likely to be what Wu Hung would call "an offering to the Buddha." [250]

3.3.2 Example 8. "Yizi xiang"(Image by/for Society Members) and Stele by Wei Taoshu et al.[251] Undated. (Figure 4.13)

The niche and stele are located right above the niche by Yang Dayang and are stylistically similar to those by Great Consort Hou in the third year of Taihe.

3.3.3 Example 9. Niched Image and Stele by Yin Aijiang et al.[252] Undated. (Figure 4.14)

[250] Wu Hung, "What's Bianxiang," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 52, no. 1 (Jun., 1992): 132- 135.
[251] Liu, *Guyang Cave: Cave 1443 of Longmen Grottoes*, vol. 1, pl. 56 , 43, niche#N85, and suppl., inscription no. 2067, 68.
[252] Ibid., vol. 1, pl. 313, 197, niche#D89, and suppl., inscription no. 2271, 76.

The niche and stele are located at the south side of the cave ceiling, right in the middle of the two niches by Great Consort Hou, and are stylistically similar to those by Great Consort Hou in the third year of Taihe.

3.3.4 Example 10."Yizi xiang" (Image by/for Society Members) and Stele by Ma Zhenbai et al. Dated to the fourth year of Taihe (503). (Figure 4.15)[253]

The image and stele complex are located at the south-west side of the cave ceiling. The niched image is serenely destroyed, and the stele is much like all others in the group.

3.3.5 Summary for Group III. The stelae in this group are generally located near or at the cave ceiling, many of which are much more cursory than the stelae in the first groups.

Conclusion: Trends of Stele Using in The Guyang Cave

1.The different visual strategies of presenting stele-ness in Guyang Cave depend on the locations of each stele. At the cave entrance, the stele by Monk Huicheng utilizes the natural light to create chiaroscuro so as to attract awareness. Even in a deeper location inside the cave, the high embankment surrounding Sun Qiusheng's stele is still able to catch adequate amount of light and thus throw thick shadow in the grooves, indicating the existence of a niche for the stele. At a higher location above these Eight Main Niches, the niches and stelae by Lady Yuchi and Yuan Xiang deliberately invest in their bases, which are relatively closer to the viewer's eye-level. But when a stele moves even higher to the ceiling area, even the designs of this type would not be revealing enough for a viewer standing on the ground. Therefore, Great Consort Hou employed unusually larger characters to reclaim its existence. As for other stele users, who were

[253] Ibid., vol. 1, pl. 71, 192, niche#D71, and suppl., inscription no. 2521, 90.

pushed up so far to the ceiling, such as examples 8-10, it is believable that they more or less gave up on the competition of attention, and reduced the design of their stelae to the extreme. In this sense, the form of stele becomes nearly an imitation of other works in the cave.

2. There was a possible merge between sculptural techniques of icons and the techniques of stele making. It is possible that both the niched image and stele by Monk Huicheng received inspiration from the high relief sculpture at Yungang alongside the characters seen on contemporaneous epitaph stones. To Sun Qiusheng and other members from his society, the boundary between building an icon and building a stele might not have been absolute.

3. Stele increased the publicness of image. Inside the extremely crowed Guyang Cave, where many niches pile up on each other, stelae create a network that connects many of these niches. The Eight Main Niches were possibly not only designed as icons to be worshiped by themselves, but also serve as components of an overall program of the cave. But many other images were not included in the initial program near the ground, for example the Maitreya built by Great Consort Hou in the third year of Taihe. Thanks to the stele, Hou's Maitreya regains the attention of the audiences on the ground, thus re-joining the Eight Main Niches near the ground.

The Afterlife of the Guyang Mode and the Birth of Sculpted-Image Stele

To conclude the final chapter of the dissertation, I would like to bring the discussion on the Guyang Mode into a larger historical framework to analyze how it turned into one of the possible origins of the new form known as sculpted-image stele, where image and stele eventually merged into one, during late Northern Wei. The critical evidence at stake here is the famous Stele by Yao Boduo, which is also dated to the year 496, generally contemporaneous with the earliest phase of the building of the Guyang Cave. The stele is extraordinarily important and

useful because on each of its four sides, there is a lengthy inscription, and the amount of information regarding the making and use of sculpted-image stele during Northern Wei provided by the four inscriptions in total far exceeds other contemporaneous examples. In particular, three out of the four inscriptions offer a rather detailed narration on why the stele's space choice was the most ideal. On the recto side the stele, it reads:

> "…built the stone image and depicted the deities. (The stele) is among the stars and clouds high and far, and between the tall mountains reaching the sky…the fields with rivers are broad, and they close and open solemnly. The gentlemen, with dignified manners, gather here. The descending philosophers…(therefore) we built and erect the stone image, and their virtues and establishments would become even more obvious. " … 既建石像, 圖藻靈仙. 在軒雲邇, 嶽峙霄間…濟濟川原, 雍穆開關. 俄俄風流, 君子交齊. 降生哲人...造像立石, 德立弥彰.[254]

On the stele's verso side, it mentions: "In front, it is near the Chang river. In the back…"前则臨葭川，後背…[255]

On the left side, it reads:

> The believers would reach fine endings…floating in heaven…befriending the immortals, visiting the Jade Capital…abandon the mundane and reach The Path…to the left it is calm, and the right it is peaceful. It looks back at a series of mountains to the north. The many springs convene here and flows into the tranquil river. Rippling and regular, (waves in the river) have forest at their sides. Solemn and brilliant scholars being able to be born within this space. The holy image is now complete, and it has destiny at this place. In trillions of *Kalpas* it will not move, (to welcome) the spirits and immortals passing by."

[254] Zhang Yan, *Shaanxi Yaowangshan beike yishu zong ji*, vol. 1, 4-5.
[255] Ibid., 5.

信者善終…虛中游翩…神仙為友，歷觀玉京...捨俗就道…左平右太, 北顧頻山. 眾泉合流, 注于慈川. 洸洸濟濟, 仁林挾邊. 穆穆英儒, 得生于間. 神像功就, 於茲有緣…兆劫不移,往來神仙.[256]

According to the narration presented by these inscriptions, the stele's ideal space choice guarantees the efficacy of any Daoist image-making activities, and thus it shall not (and will not) be moved. Firstly, the ideal-ness resides in the fact that the space is within the most splendid landscape surrounded by magnificent mountains and rivers. Because of such splendid landscape, all the "junzi"(gentlemen), "zheren"(philosophers), and "mumu yingru"(solemn and brilliant scholars), who are in fact the successful Daoist precedents that had achieved immortality, such as Zhang Daoling and Yin Xi, whose names appear on the Stele by Wu Hongbiao in Chapter II, would "gather," "descend," and "be born here."

As per the discussion in the first chapter, since the pre-Qin times, the Chinese understanding of the efficacy of image has been associated with its ability to summon immortals and other auspicious beings from heaven. It was along this line of thought that the makers of the Stele by Yao Boduo argued that the efficacy of their sculpted-image stele would be most magnified in the carefully selected landscape where the actual immortals are mostly likely to reveal themselves.

Such landscape with magnificent mountains and rivers, to the Northern Wei Daoists, was not only ideal for the efficacy of images but also for the building of sacred space. For example, with a series of "moya"摩崖 or polished-cliff inscriptions on Mount Yunfengshan in Shandong, Zheng Daozhao 鄭道昭 transformed the mountain into his own space of meeting the "Nine Immortals," whose names are seen at the mountain top.[257] Many of these transformative

[256] Ibid., 6-7.

[257] Wang Sili 王思礼, Jiao Desen 焦德森, and Lai Fei 赖非, *Yunfeng keshi diaocha yu yanjiu* 雲峯刻石调查与研究(The Investigation and Research of the Stone Carvings at Yunfengshan), 180-181.

inscriptions focus on the natural beauty of the surrounding landscape, which largely echoes the traditional imagination of the land of immortals in the Daoist discourses.[258]

Another Northern Wei sculpted-image stele, the stele by Qi Shuanghu, also in the Yaowangshan museum, has an inscription expounding on how critical the space is to the efficacy of image making, agreeing with the stele by Yao Boduo: "…although the true appearance has left, the teaching of the images are even more promoted… one stone image…the carving is now finished, for the true appearance to stop and respond." …真容雖遷, 像化弥振…石像一軀…彫剋成就, 与真容止應.[259] The phrase "for the true appearance to stop and respond" in the end is the key to unlocking the hidden secret of the efficacy. Although it is not entirely clear what the compound "zhi ying"止應 means specially in the religious context during Northern Wei, the character "zhi"can be generally translated as "to stop," and the character "ying" could mean "to respond." Therefore, one possible way to understand the phrase is that by letting the "true appearance" of the deity stop and dwell on the stone image, the image will be able to respond to the believers. To prepare for the deity's dwelling, the stone image has been situated in an ideal space favored by the deity, hence among the splendid mountains and rivers.

To sculpted-image stele of the Northern Wei, the ideal space for efficacy may not always be in the nature. Many stele inscriptions stated that their selection of space was well populated urban areas. For example, the aforementioned stele by Qi Shuanghu says that it "Peacefully stays at the intersections of avenues, a place that is elevated, peaceful, obvious, and prosperous."…安處路衝, 高平顯唱(倡). Therefore, "…offerings from the towns will not be in shortage at all

[258] Robert E. Harrist Jr., *Landscape of Words*(Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 93-156.
[259] Zhang Yan, *Shaanxi Yaowangshan beike yishu zong ji*, vol. 1, 70.

times.”討邑供養, 隨時不闕.[260] Urban areas as such greatly benefit the the worshiping and offering activities and thus enhance the efficacy of images in a more practical sense.

With an understanding of how the space in which an image is situated critically shapes its efficacy, one is able to see more aspects of the historical unification of image and stele and thus the formation of sculpted-image stele during the Northern Wei: in the early cases similar to the stele by Yao Boduo, the particular form of stele was able to offer a religious image unprecedented spatial liberty. As demonstrated by the cases in the Guyang Cave, image patrons of the Northern Wei have discovered a variety of stele’s efficacy enhancing effects on image. Meanwhile, as a self-sustaining supporting structure, contemporaneous freestanding stelae enabled more image patrons to choose from a variety of spaces to situated their images, liberating the niched icons from the walls of cave temples.

I have to admit, this hypothesis may only reflect one aspect of the complex historical process through which the stelae gradually absorbed the iconic images. Therefore, I do not intend to argue that the Guyang Cave was the ultimate source that the Northern Wei stone carvers studied in order to create new forms and styles.

Instead, this dissertation attempts to argue that during the last few years of the fifth century, in many different areas of the Northern Wei empire, such as Shaanxi and Henan, the believers of Buddhism and Daoism made a variety of trials on the making of both image and stele, and among these different trials, there should have been exchanges and echoes. My main interest is exactly in the common ideas based on which these exchanges and echos between different parties took place, and the particular form of sculpted-image stele was nothing but a result of this period of great dynamics and innovation.

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[260] Ibid., 70.

CONCLUSION

I begin by revisiting the previous studies of Chinese stele, covering the scholarship from the Northern Song Dynasty to the twenty-first century. To my surprise, some of the fundamental questions that pre-modern Chinese scholars encountered more than a hundred years ago could still guide us towards a deeper understanding of the true nature of sculpted-image stele. For example, sculpted-image stele have often been treated as a sub-type of Buddhist sculpture, and therefore, their ritual importance as Chinese stele has yet to be studied. This pertains to the issue of how to classify and define the objects which we call sculpted-image stele/stelae("zaoxiang bei") today. In fact, the Qing Dynasty antiquarians have also struggled with the issue.

It is because of this, I dedicated the entire first chapter to a new historiography—the history of the study of sculpted-image stele as Chinese stele. The chapter consists of two halves. The first half covers the scholarship between the eleventh century and mid-Qing Dynasty. It focuses on the major contributions of Zhao Mingcheng, Hong Kuo, Huang Yi, and Ruan Yuan. The second half covers the scholarship between the mid-Qing Dynasty to the modern times, including the works by Wang Chang, Ye Changchi, Tokiwa Daijo, and Osvald Siren. After this historiography, I propose my new framework of interpretation, which is built on the notion of stele-image duality: the making of merit. The following chapters of the dissertation continues to elaborate on this notion and reveals the long-ignored ritual connection between Chinese stele and Buddhist icons—that they have both been employed to facilitate merit-making rituals in the history.

The second chapter shows that in the studies of Northern Dynasties sculpted-image stele, the stele by itself should be considered the product of a ritual process during which the Buddhist

icons could be properly installed. I mainly discuss two Northern Wei examples from the collection of the Yaowangshan Museum in Shaanxi, the stele by Wei Wenlang and the stele by Wu Hongbiao, and argues that during the formative process, a stele eventually turns into a tableau of merit producing and transferring. The tableau centers itself on the religious icon, but also organically incorporates a series of other images and texts.

The third chapter shows how certain image makers of the Northern Dynasties relied upon the format of stele to meet their ancestral offering needs. It examines three stelae made during the Eastern Wei period, the stelae by Zhang Rongqian, the stele for Cheng Zhe, and the stele for Yue Yanqing, which demonstrate strong formal and ritual elements of Buddhist sculpted-image stelae as well as clear features of funerary stelae. I divide these stelae into three types: the first type retains the layout of a typical Buddhist sculpted-image stele but incorporates texts and images to make merit for the deceased people; the second type neatly separates the commemorative text of a funerary stele from the Buddhist pictorial program by putting them on two opposite sides of the stele; both the texts and images of the third type are devised straightforwardly for funerary purposes, but part of the design originates in contemporaneous Buddhist imagery. Each type presents a unique interaction between the coexisting funerary pictorial space and religious pictorial space.

The fourth chapter returns to the origin of the sculpted-image stele so as to historicize the process through which the stele-image duality came into being. As discussed in the first chapter, a sculpted-image stele takes shape during the process when a religious icon is installed. Examining the juxtaposition of stele and image inside the Guyang Cave, one can argue that in the Guyang Mode, there is also a similar phenomenon, in which the installing of religious icons incurred the erection of stelae. Moreover, the stelae facilitated the icons' merit-making process.

Therefore, the emergence of Buddhist sculpted-image stele during late Northern Wei could possibly be directly related to the Guyang Mode.

Turning the typological analysis into a discussion regarding people's ritual choices, the final chapter also reviews how the Han Dynasty concept of funerary stele merged into the making of sculpted-image stele during the Northern Dynasties. By examining ten cases in the Guyang Cave, I show that the form of stele was employed in the space because a possible social competition took place there in a manner highly comparable to that of the Han Dynasty society.

APPENDIX

A Full Transcription of The Inscription On The Stele For Yue Yanqing[261]

X*: unrecognized character;* □: *missing character;* (?): *Uncertain character.*

(Inscription Starts On The Obverse Side Of The Stele)

1.北修武縣 X □ 慶碑頌□ X 慶…

2.樂子名善字延慶 X 南陽重里人也其先 X 根…

3.之蹤引松柯於唐禹之跡宮爵出自殷周 X 軒….

4.漢(曾?)王(進?)軍孝風騰(a "十"pattern)祖 (祢?)以晉末因官鑒壞 ….

5.食 X 晉子基累世以皇宅遷輪中州兗片遂….

6.轉乎國之西白鹿原里(幼?)立花 (年?)與趙郡寄士…

7.袍裳之呢石木 X □ 來□ 歲 (庚?)未 桃 (年?)中 (檐?)鄉…

8.詠於閨中(用?)舊 (悲?)於 (星?)月而慶父母憂思愁容…

9.昔晉國有同袖之契楚有保 (西?)之友今之夺也…

10.其比而慶父兄並令進等故於白鹿山南原中…

11.北四衢道 (中?)建清 X 天宮一堰 交龍碑一頭首…

12.王 (鳴?)有 X 經之詩徐 (正?)王 (幹?)起枕中歌想故像…

13.之云 X (a lotus pattern) 其辞曰(a lotus pattern)要 慶子早立花 (年?)露鳥東曜…

14.行西桃顏 X 落天 X 其 X 賢不久居聖必天 (遷?) …

[261] Since the bottom part of the stele is now lost, the text is incomplete, and many broken sentences cannot make sense anymore.

15.婉弱方見 X X 等同和光子獨無天(characters “其二”) (a lotus pattern)時既…

16. (歲?)不我 (和?)念子之友忽尔乖離曰燭中田光□…

17.洪樹 X 天霜摧其枝忠必念子 (文?) X 遲□□□… (Inscription Continues To The Left Side Of The Stele)

(On The Left Side Of The Stele)

18.泣西兮情信之无為(characters “其三”) □慶之父兄曰 (結?) □

19. (憂?)X 石刊迩銘 (潤?)長樓花顏濟□早歸 X 立

20. (耳?)目冥靈一往千秋子去遠矣与誰交遊 (合?)

21.之億之弗覺喪眸□开一區涼舍一 (口?)地□

FIGURES

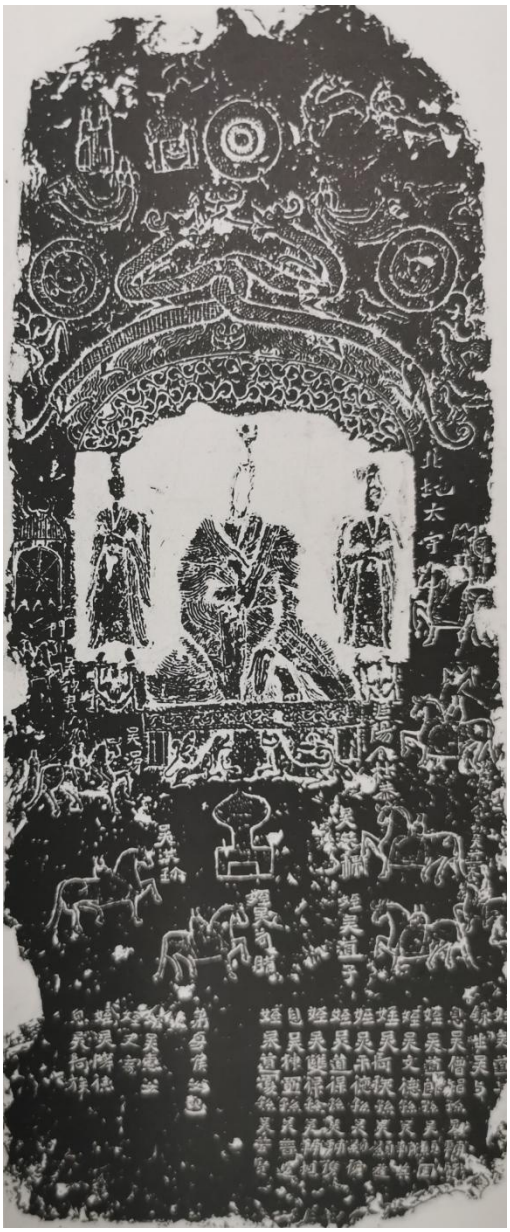

Figure 1.1 The Recto Side of the Stele by Wu Hongbiao. Early Sixth Century. Shaanxi. After *Shaanxi Yaowangshan beike yishu zong ji*, vol. 1, fig. 52.2.

Figure 1.2 The Image Side of the Stele by Li Huijin. 526-556 C.E.. Xiuwu, Henan. Photo Courtesy of Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.

Figure 1.3 The Niche and Stele By Sun Qiusheng et. al in the Guyang Cave. Late Fifth-century. Henan. After *Guyang Cave: Cave 1443 of Longmen Grottoes*, pl. 226.

Figure 2.1 The Recto Side of the Stele by Wei Wenlang. Late Fifth Century. Shaanxi. After *Shaanxi Yaowangshan beike yishu zong ji*, vol.1, pl. 63.2.

Figure 2.2 The Verso Side of the Stele by Wei Wenlang. Late Fifth Century. Shaanxi. After *Shaanxi Yaowangshan beike yishu zong ji*, vol.1, pl. 66.1.

Figure 2.3 The Two Halves and the Transitional Zone on the Recto Side of the Stele by Wei Wenlang. After *Shaanxi Yaowangshan beike yishu zong ji*, vol.1, pl. 63.2. Marked by Author.

Figure 2.4 The Right Side of the Stele by Wei Wenlang. Late Fifth Century. Shaanxi. After *Shaanxi Yaowangshan beike yishu zong ji*, vol.1, pl. 67.5.

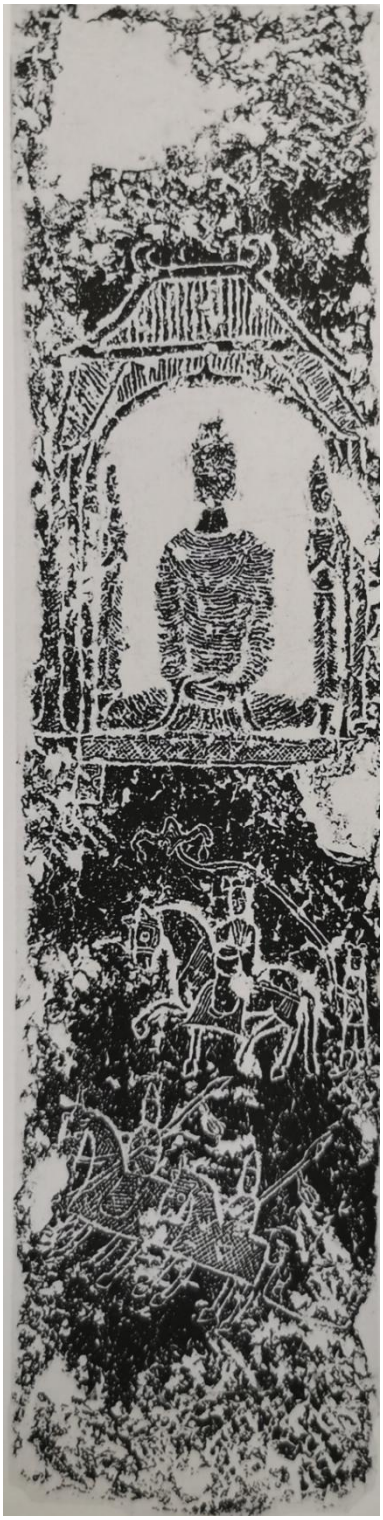

Figure 2.5 The Left Side of the Stele by Wei Wenlang. Late Fifth Century. Shaanxi. After *Shaanxi Yaowangshan beike yishu zong ji*, vol.1, pl. 67.1.

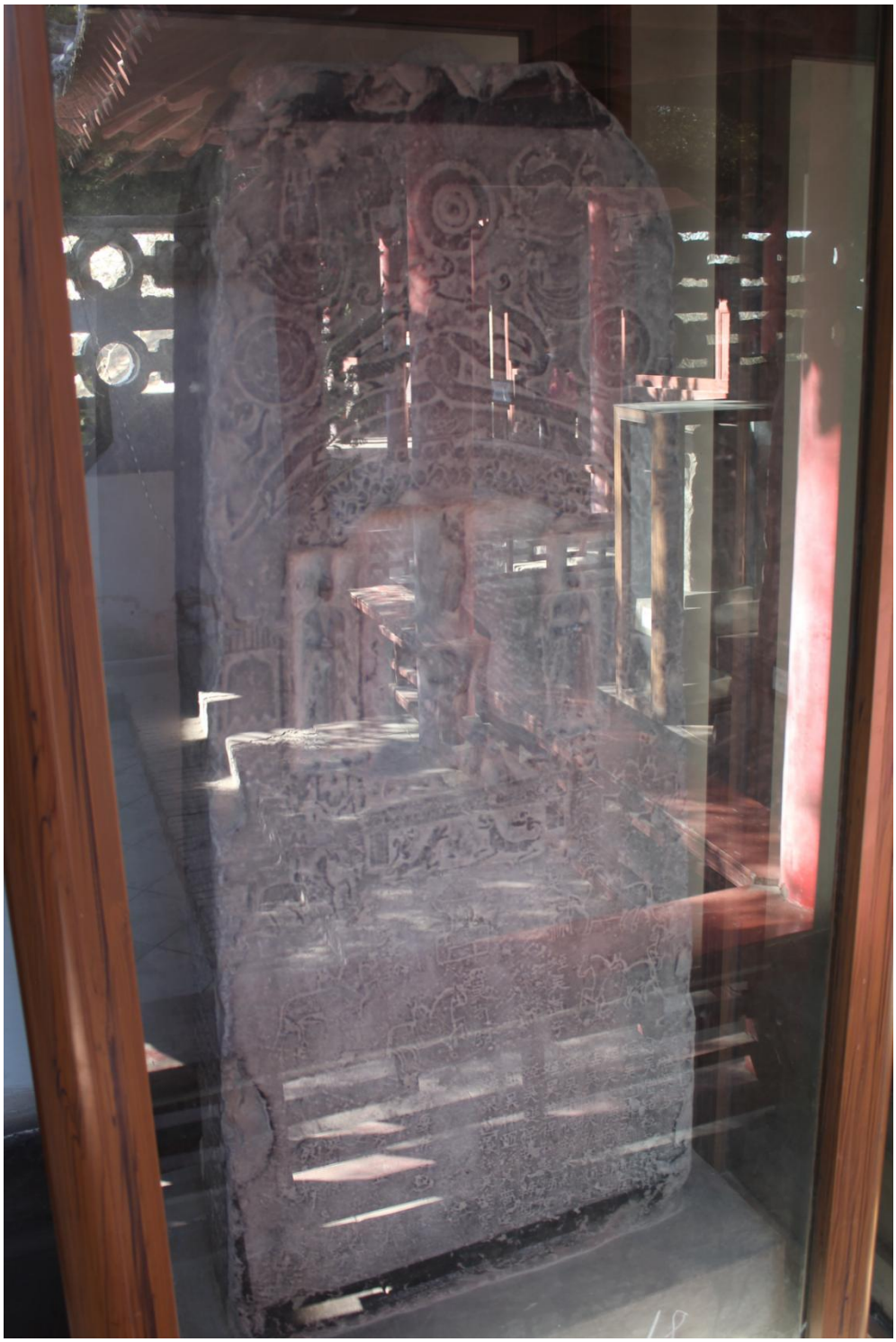

Figure 2.6 The Stele by Wu Hongbiao. Early Sixth Century. Collection of Yaowangshan Museum, Shaanxi. Photo by Author. After *Shaanxi Yaowangshan beike yishu zong ji*, vol. 1, fig. 53.2.

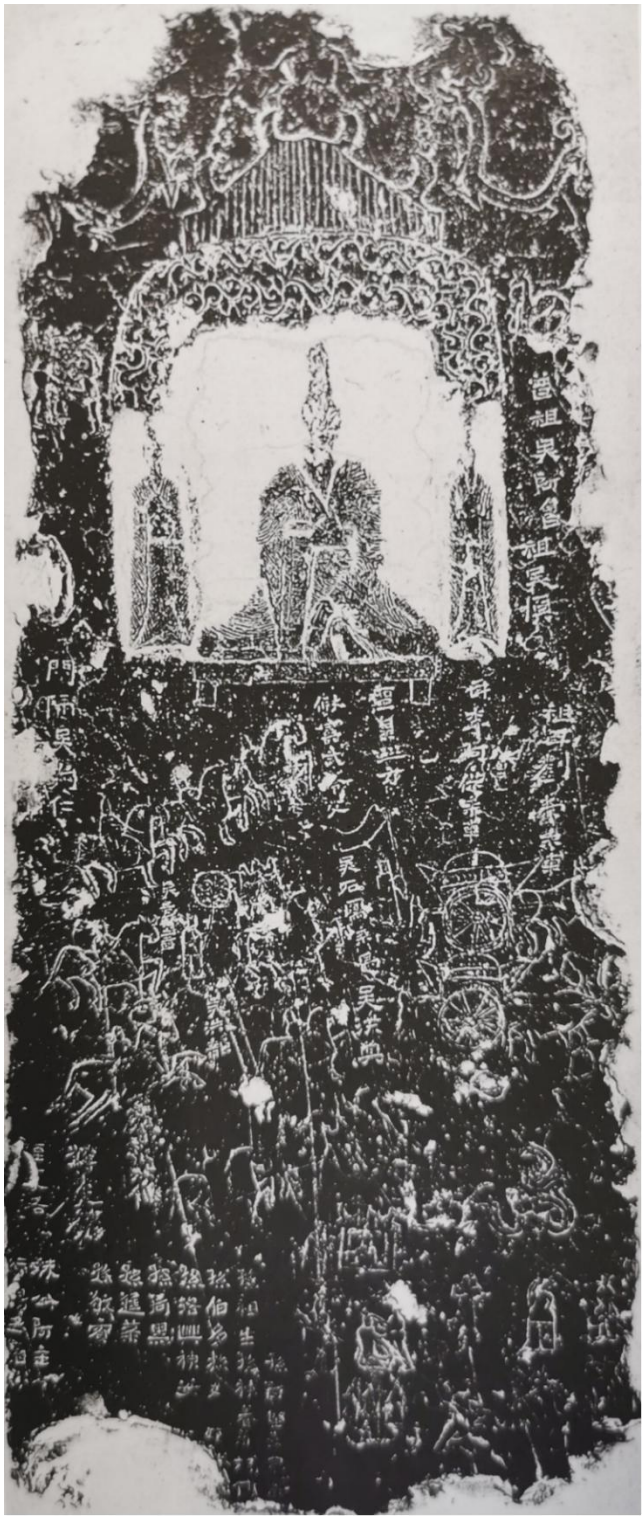

Figure 2.7 The Verso Side of the Stele by Wu Hongbiao. Early Sixth Century. Shaanxi. After *Shaanxi Yaowangshan beike yishu zong ji*, vol. 1, fig. 128.2.

Figure 2.8 The Recto Side of the Stele by Fumeng Wenqing. 519. Shaanxi. After *Shaanxi Yaowangshan beike yishu zong ji*, vol. 1, fig. 128.2.

Figure 2.9 The Verso Side of the Stele by Fumeng Wenqing. 519. Shaanxi. After *Shaanxi Yaowangshan beike yishu zong ji*, vol. 1, fig. 128.4.

Figure 2.10 The Right Side of the Stele by Fument Wenqing. 519. Shaanxi. After *Shaanxi Yaowangshan beike yishu zong ji*, vol. 1, fig. 128.3.

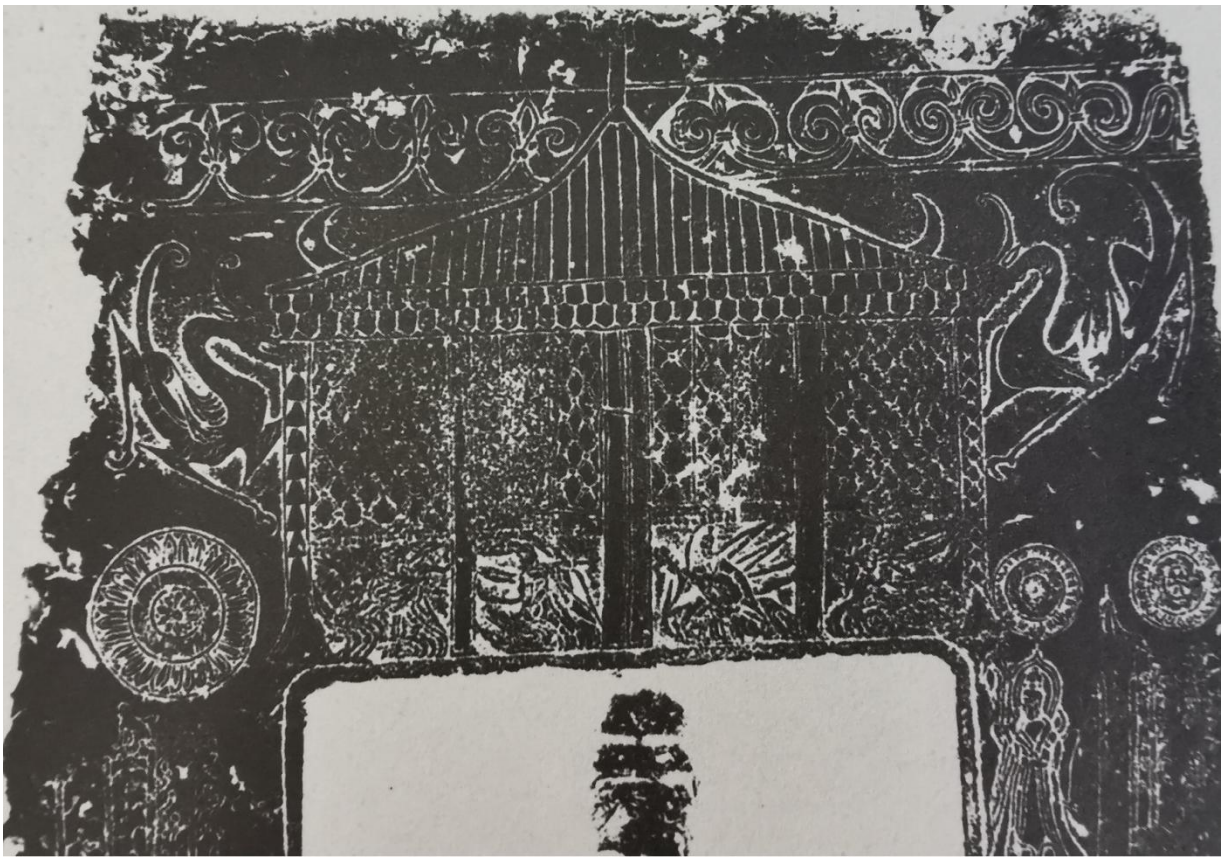

Figure 2.11 The Architecture on the Stele by “Three Hundred and Fifty Society Members from Three Counties.” 523. Shaanxi. After *Shaanxi Yaowangshan beike yishu zong ji*, vol. 1, fig. 136.1.

Figure 2.12 Stone Chamber of Shijun. 580. Xi'an, Shaanxi. The Collection of Xi'an Museum. Photo by Author.

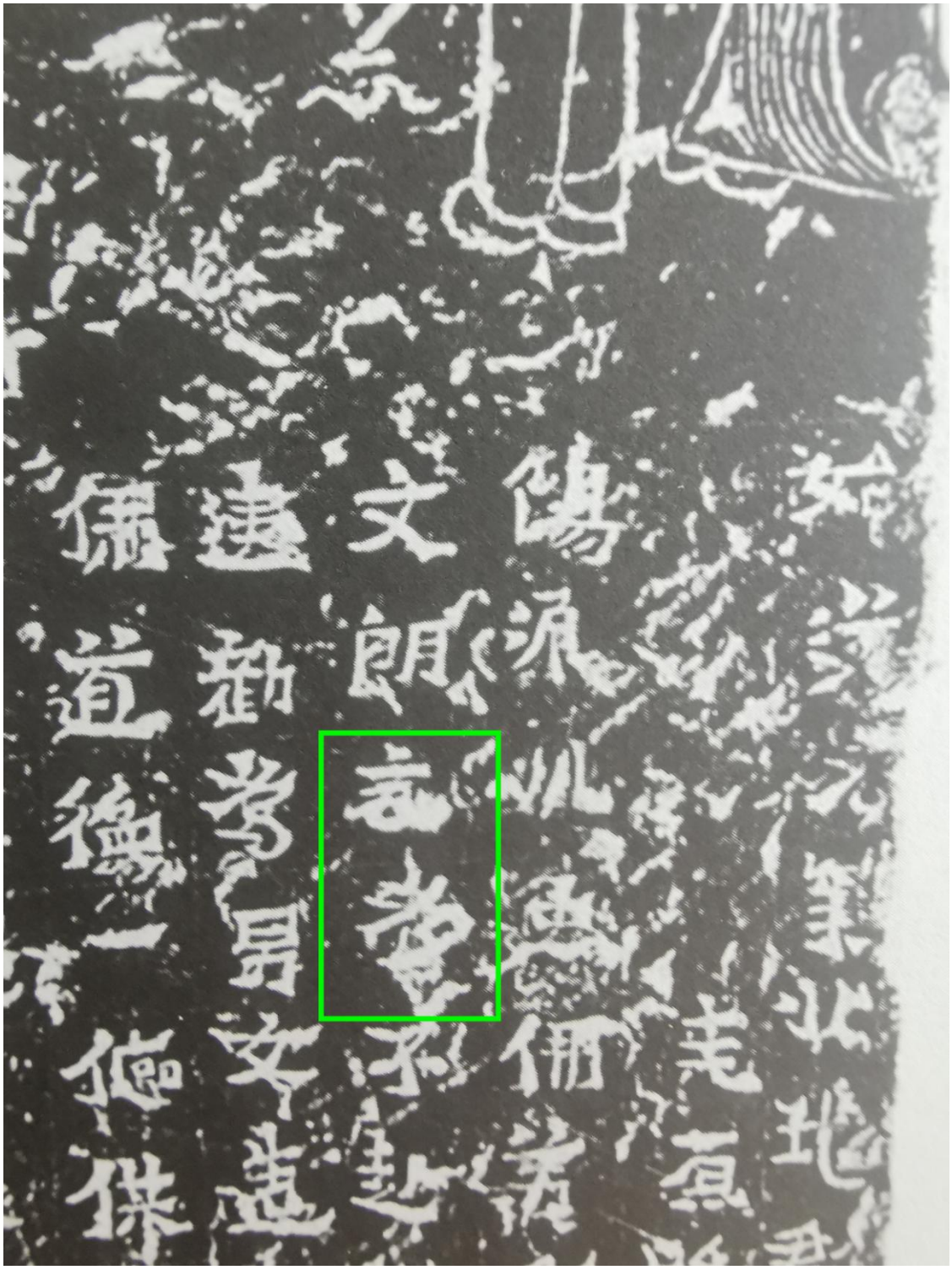

Figure 2.13 The Possible Phrase “ai xiao” 哀孝 Found In The Wei Wenlang Stele’s Inscription. Detail of Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.14 The Hunting Scene, On The Stele by Wu Hongbiao. Detail of Figure 1.1.

Figure 2.15 Recto Side of The Stele by "Three Hundred and Fifty Society Members from Three Counties." 523. Shaanxi. After *Shaanxi Yaowangshan beike yishu zong ji*, vol. 1, fig. 136.1.

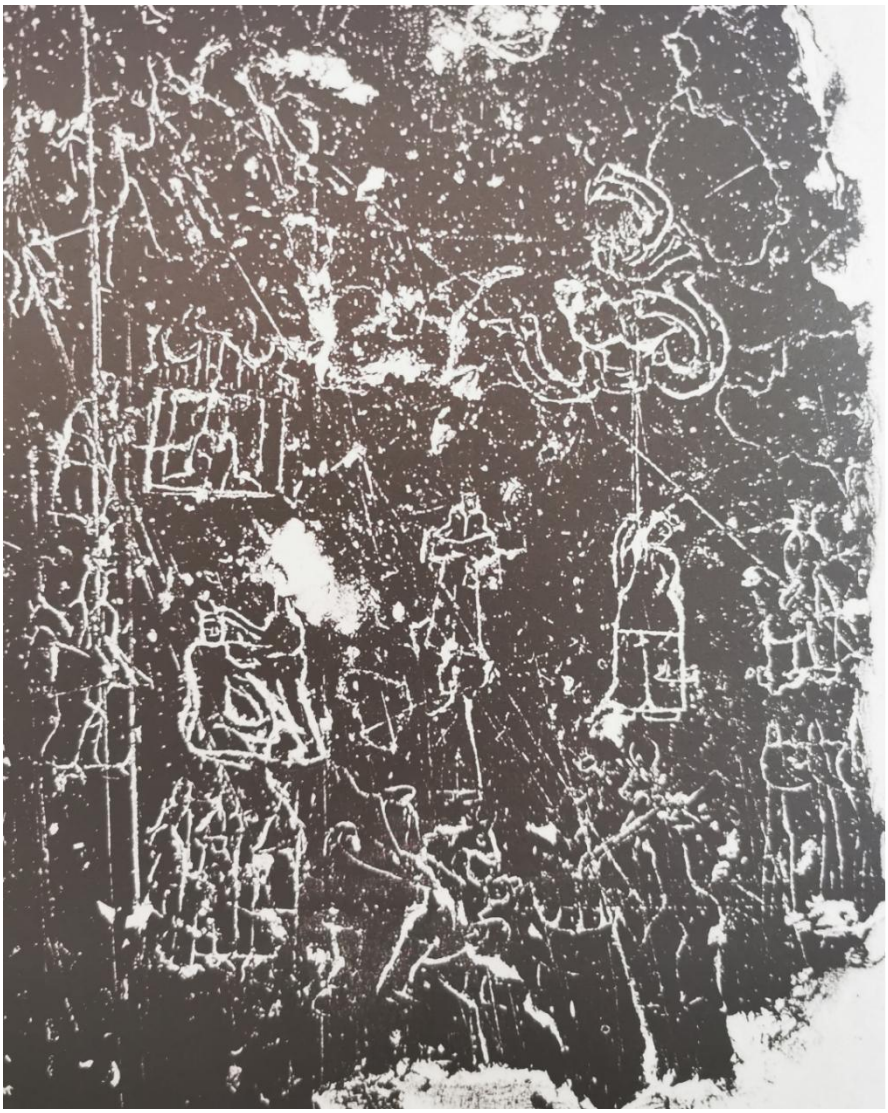

Figure 2.16 The Realm Below Human Beings On The Verso Side of the Stele By Wu Hongbiao. Detail of Figure 2.7.

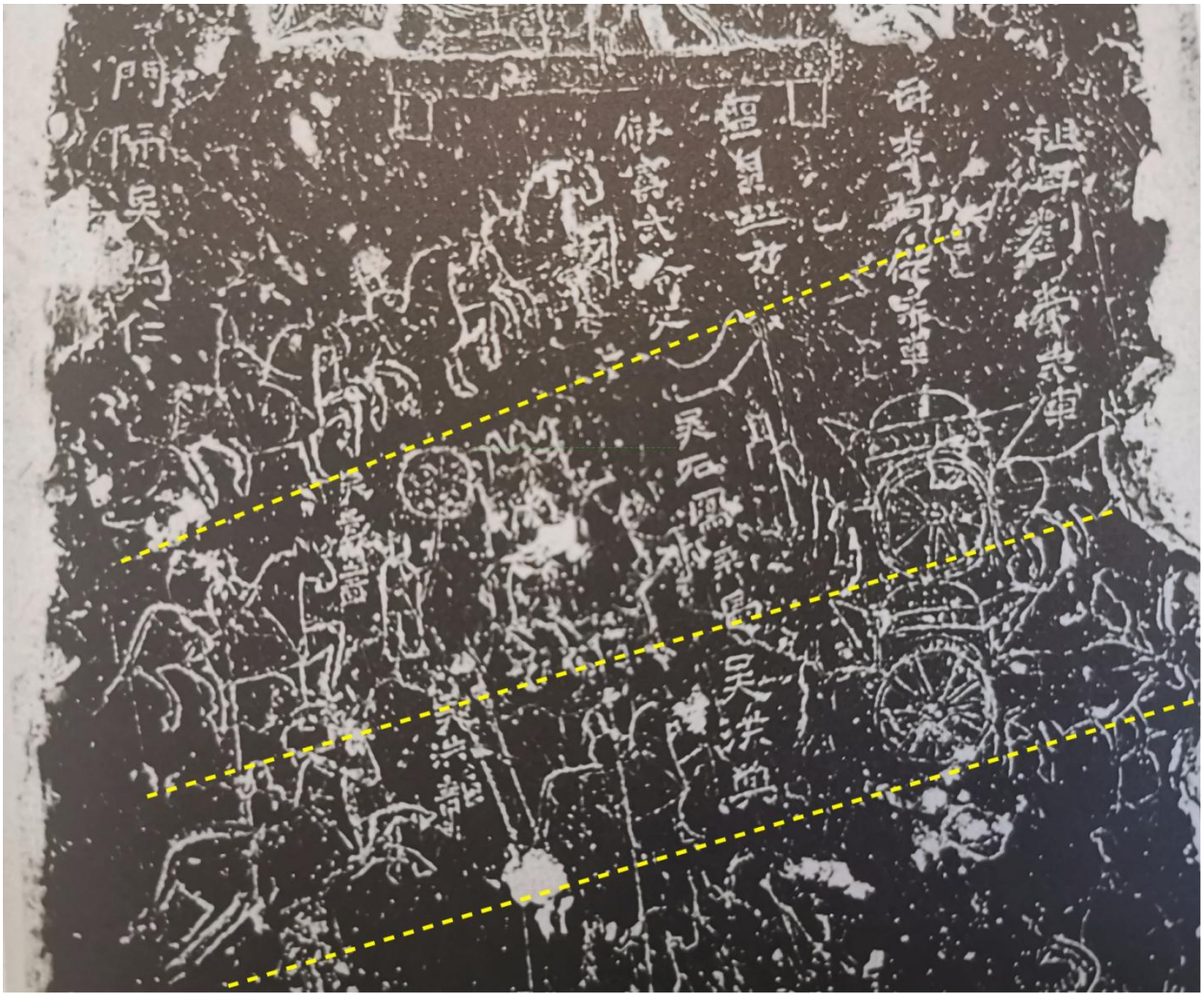

Figure 2.17 The Procession On The Recto Side of the Stele By Wu Hongbiao. Detail of Figure 2.7. Marked by Author.

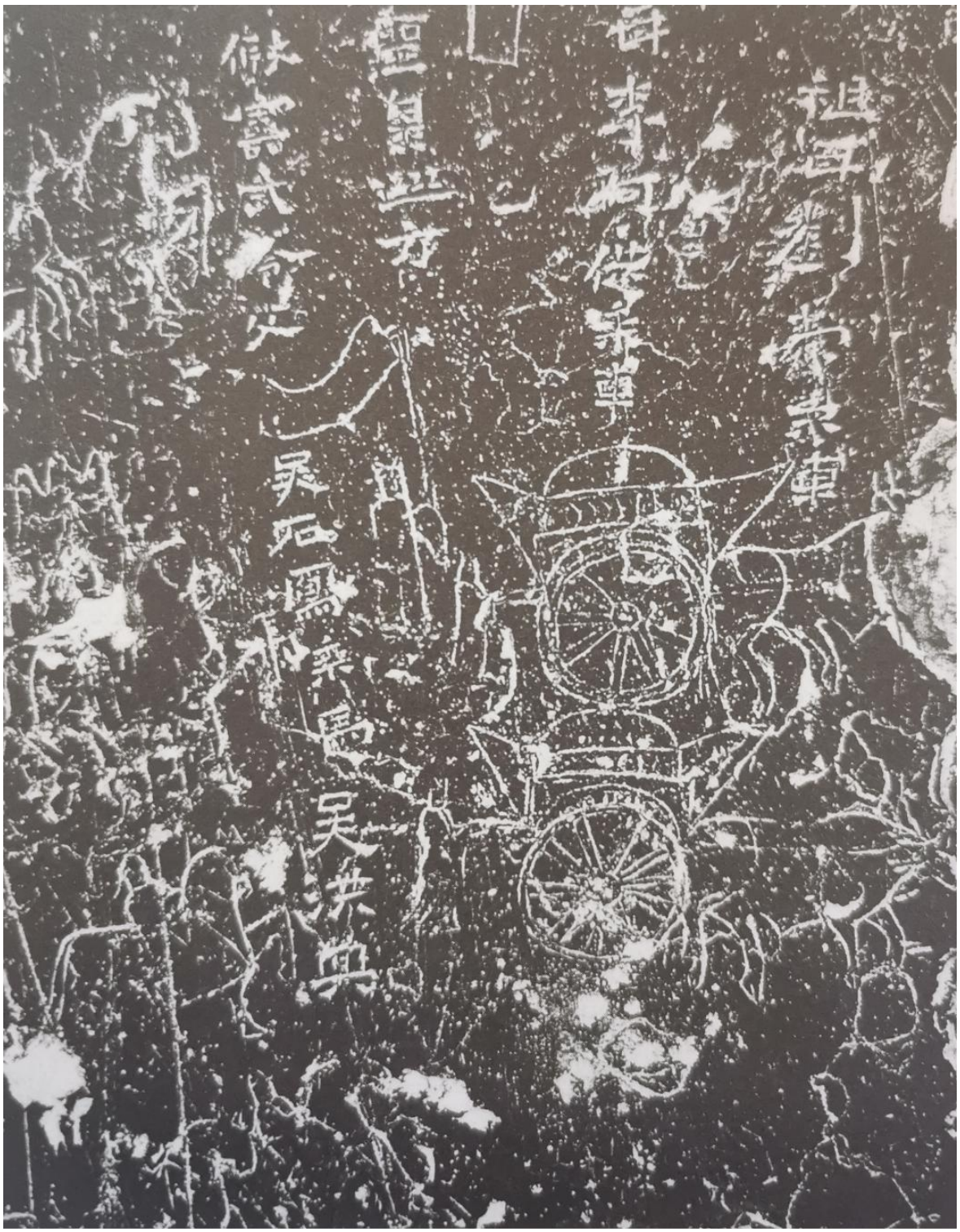

Figure 2.18 The Two Ox-carts On The Recto Side of the Stele By Wu Hongbiao. Detail of Figure 2.7.

Figure 2.19 The Horse riders Following The Two Ox-carts. Detail of Figure 2.7.

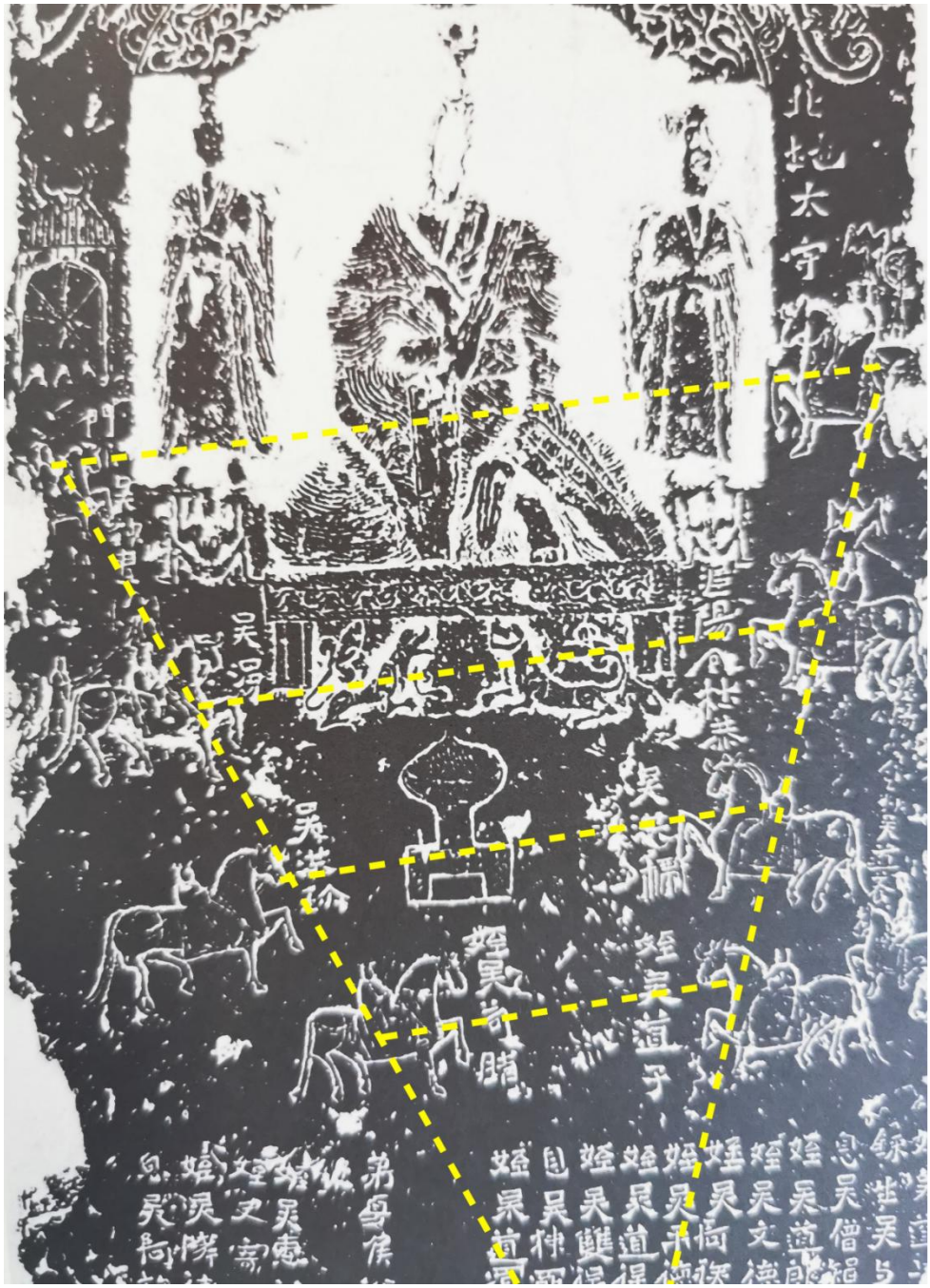

Figure 2.20 Perspective on the recto of stele by Wu Hongbiao: “Three Parallel Lines”and the “Inverted Triangle.” Detail of Figure 1.1. Marked By Author.

Figure 2.21 The Stone Tablet With Buddhist Images Carved in Low Relief. Southern Dynasties(420-589). Wanfosi, Chengdu, Sichuan. After *Sichuan chu tu Nanchao fojiao zaoxiang*, Fig. 36.2.

Figure 2.22 The Blank Cartouche on A Sculpted-image Stele. Western Wei(535-577). Shanxi. The Collection of Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. Accession No. 37-27. Photo by Author.

Figure 2.23 Top of The Stele by Wu Hongbiao. Detail of Figure 1.1.

Figure 2.24 Zhang Daoling and Yin Xi. Detail of Figure 1.1.

Figure 2.25 The Building Next to Zhang Daoling and Yin Xi. Detail of Figure 1.1.

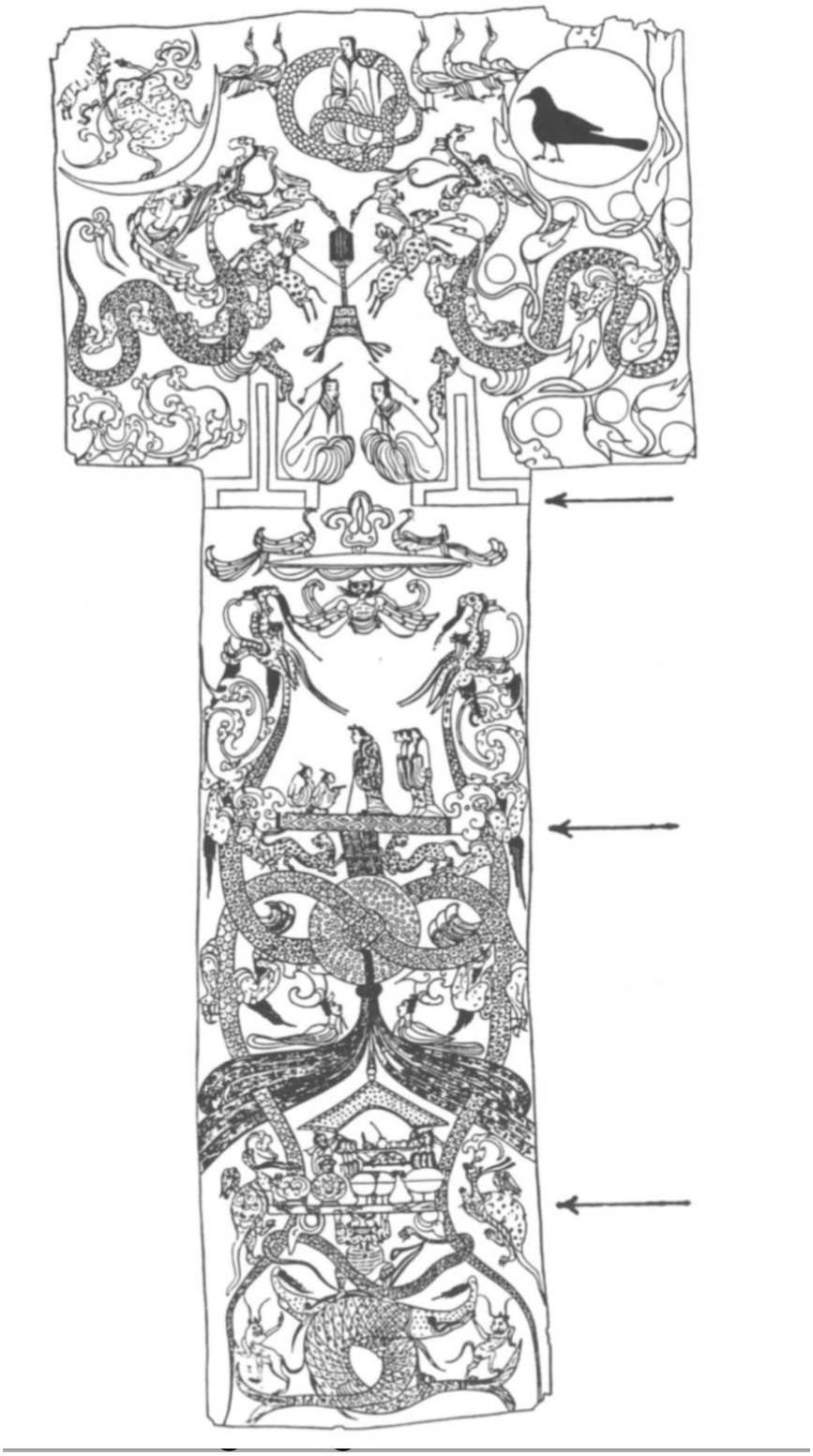

Figure 2.26 Drawing of Lady Dai's Name Banner. Second Century B.C.E.. Changsha, Hunan. After "Art in A Ritual Context: Rethinking Mawangdui," Fig. 4.

Figure 2.27 A Freestanding Niched Image. The Collection of Osaka Municipal Museum. After *Chugoku no sekibutsu: sogonnaru inori*, pl. 79.

Figure 2.28 The Recto Side of A Stele by Wei Wenlang. 496. Shaanxi. After *Shaanxi Yaowangshan beike yishu zong ji*, vol.1, pl. 106.2.

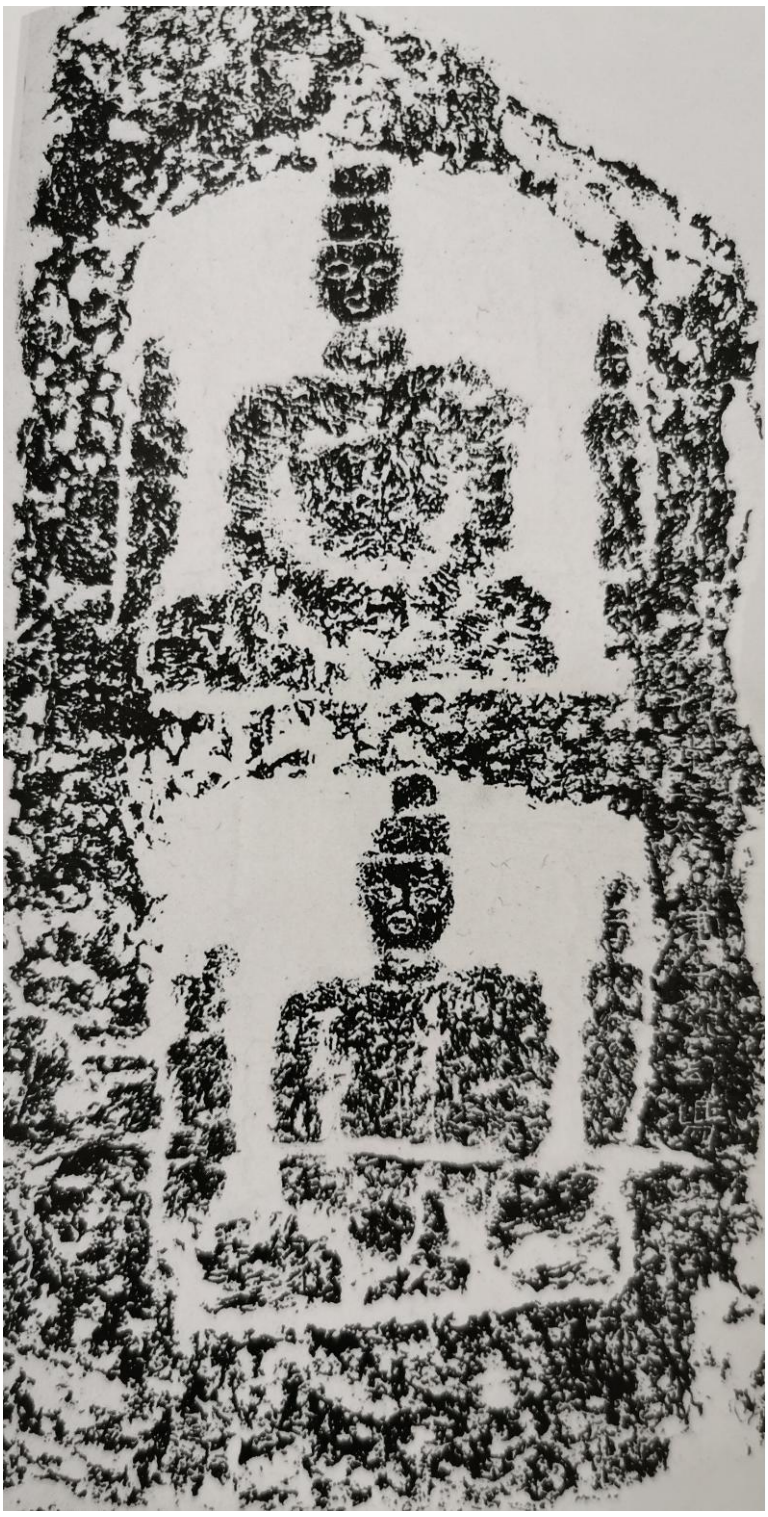

Figure 2.29 The Verso Side of A Stele by Wei Wenlang. 496. Shaanxi. After *Shaanxi Yaowangshan beike yishu zong ji*, vol.1, pl. 108.2.

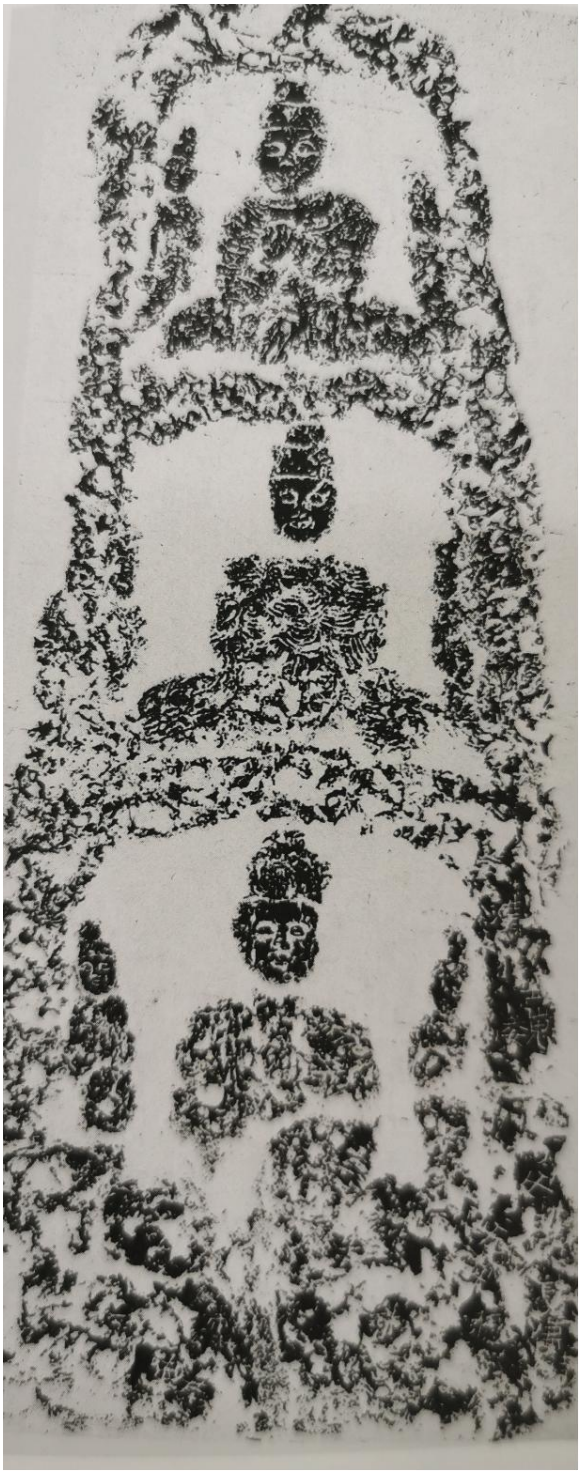

Figure 2.30 One of The Narrow Sides of A Stele by Wei Wenlang. 496. Shaanxi. After *Shaanxi Yaowangshan beike yishu zong ji*, vol.1, pl. 111.4.

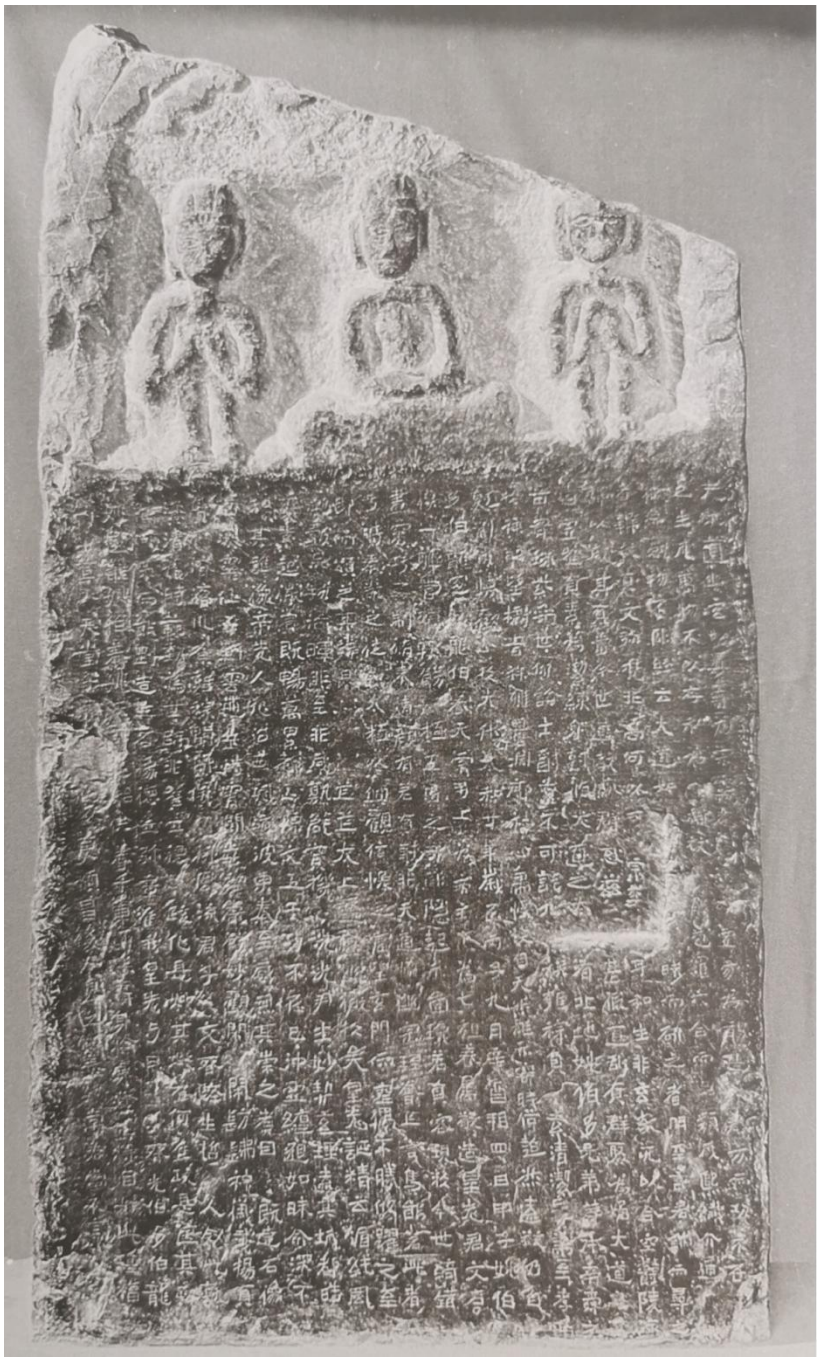

Figure 2.31 Recto Side of The Stele by Yao Boduo. 496. Shaanxi. After *Shaanxi Yaowangshan beike yishu zong ji*, vol.1, pl. 10.1.

Figure 2.32 The Recto Side of The Stele of Guo Lingfeng. 509. Shaanxi. After *Shaanxi Yaowangshan beike yishu zong ji*, vol.1, pl. 114.1.

Figure 2.33 “Clear believer Guangji” in a mule-cart. Detail of Figure 2.10. After *Shaanxi Yaowangshan beike yishu zong ji*, vol.1, pl. 128.3.

Figure 2.34 The Recto Side of the Stele by Guo Tansheng. 515. Shaanxi. After *Shaanxi Yaowangshan beike yishu zong ji*, vol.1, pl. 122.2.

Figure 2.35 The Verso Side of the Stele by Guo Tansheng. 515. Shaanxi. After *Shaanxi Yaowangshan beike yishu zong ji*, vol.1, pl. 122.3.

Figure 2.36 The Left Side of the Stele by Guo Tansheng. 515. Shaanxi. After *Shaanxi Yaowangshan beike yishu zong ji*, vol.1, pl. 123.1

Figure 2.37 The Right Side of the Stele by Guo Tansheng. 515. Shaanxi. After *Shaanxi Yaowangshan beike yishu zong ji*, vol.1, pl. 123.2.

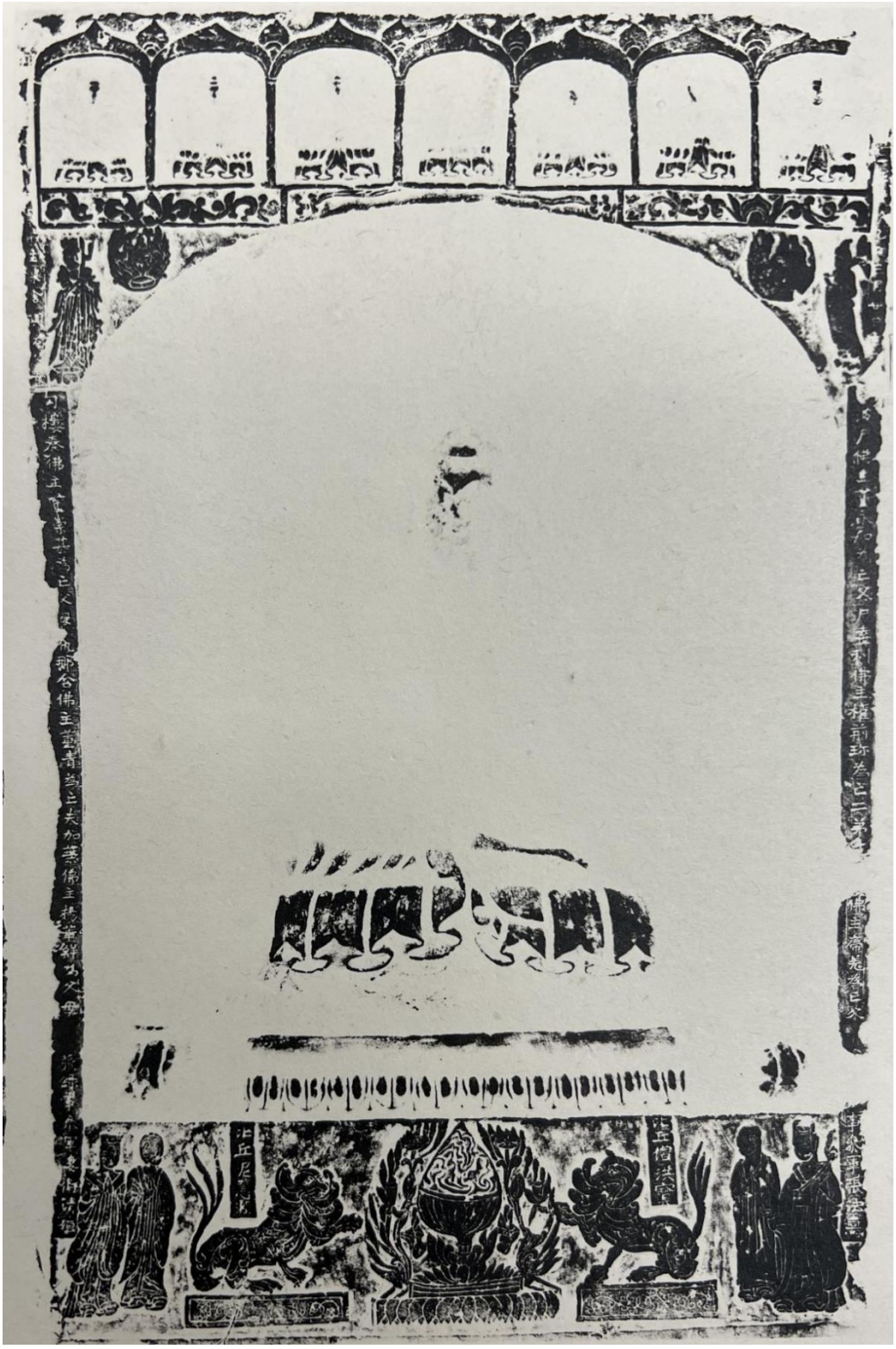

Figure 3.1 The Recto Side of the Stele by Zhang Rongqian. 535. Shaolinsi Temple, Henan. After *Shina Bukkyo Shiseki*, vol. 2, pl.123.

Figure 3.2 The Image Side of The Stele for Cheng Zhe. 534. Shanxi. The Collection of Shanxi Provincial Museum. The Collection of Shanxi Provincial Museum. Photo by Author.

Figure 3.3 The Verso Side of the Stele by Zhang Rongqian. 535. Shaolinsi Temple, Henan. After "What's in a Buddha's Name: Case Study of a Sixth-Century Chinese Buddhist Stele from the Shaolin Monastery," fig. 9.

Figure 3.4 The Incised Image of the Amitabha Buddha and Dedicatory Inscription on One of the Narrow Side of the Stele by Zhang Rongqian. 535. Shaolinsi Temple, Henan. After *Shina Bukkyo Shiseki*, vol. 2, pl.123.

Figure 3.5 The Incised Image of the Amitabha Buddha on One of the Narrow Sides of the Stele by Zhang Rongqian.535. Shaolinsi Temple, Henan. After *Shina Bukkyo Shiseki*, vol. 2, pl. 123.

Figure 3.6 The Four Figures Underneath the Main Niche of the Stele by Zhang Rongqian. Detail of Figure 3.1.

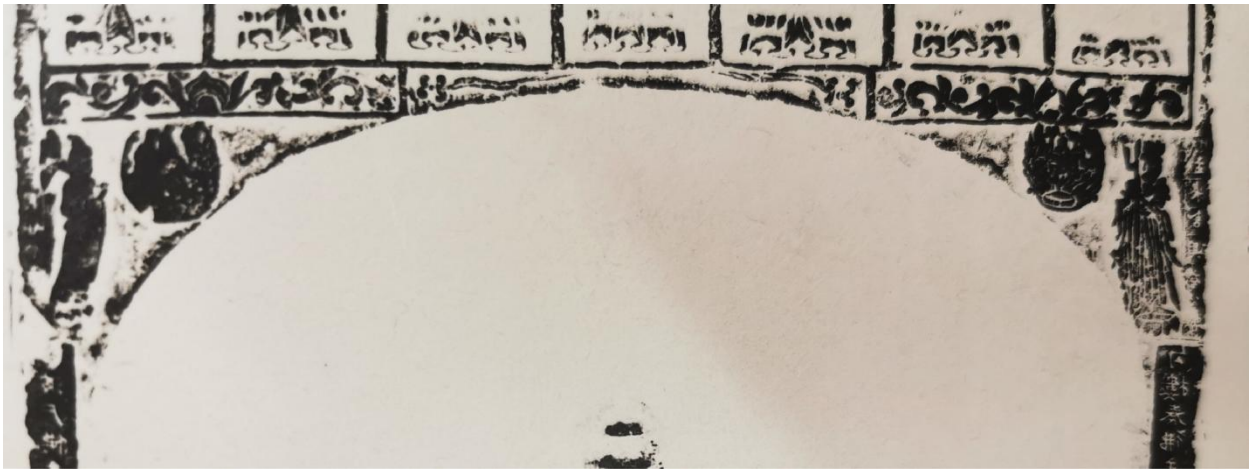

Figure 3.7 Two Worshiper Figures on Lotusw Flowers at the top of the Recto Side. Detail of Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.8 The Two Buddha-niches By A Certain Rongqian. Detail of Figure 3.3.

Figure 3.9 The Small Buddhist Cave Excavated during Eastern Wei(534-550). Near Mount Tianzhushan, Shandong. Photo by Author.

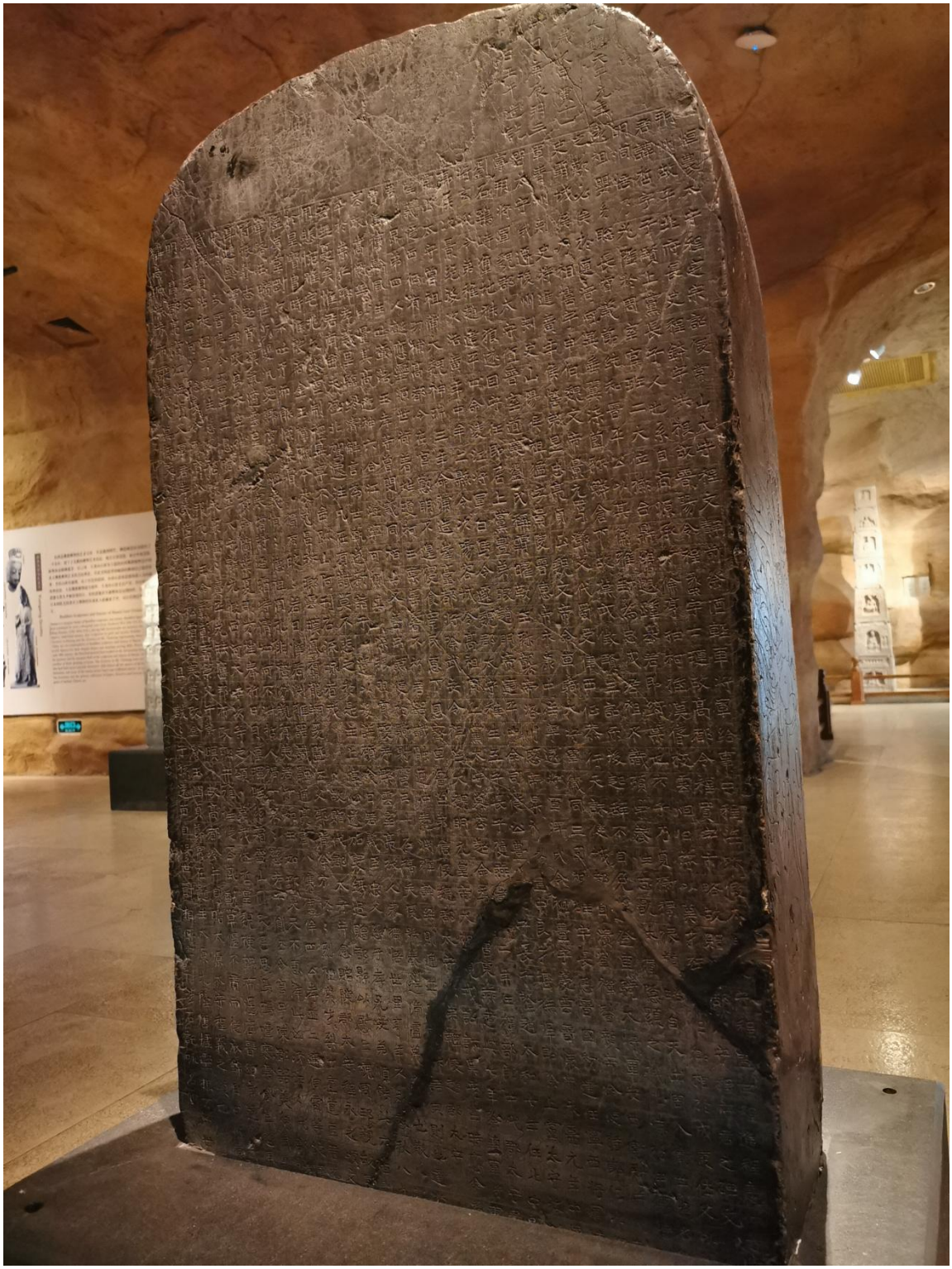

Figure 3.10 The Epitaph Side of The Stele for Cheng Zhe. 534. Shanxi. Photo by Author.

Figure 3.11 The Left Pair of Monks Inside the Main Niche. Detail of Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.12 The Right Pair of Monks Inside the Main Niche. Detail of Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.13 The Seated Figures Underneath the Main Niche. Detail of Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.14 The Story of “Brothers of Wang Lin and the Bandits” on the Sarcophagus. Late Fifth Century to Early Sixth Century. Henan. The Collection of Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. Photo Courtesy of Ma Boyao.

Figure 3.15 Back Wall of Ning Mao's House-shaped Stone Mortuary Equipment. 501. Luoyang, Henan. After *Art of The Yellow Springs: Understanding Chinese Tombs*, fig. 168.

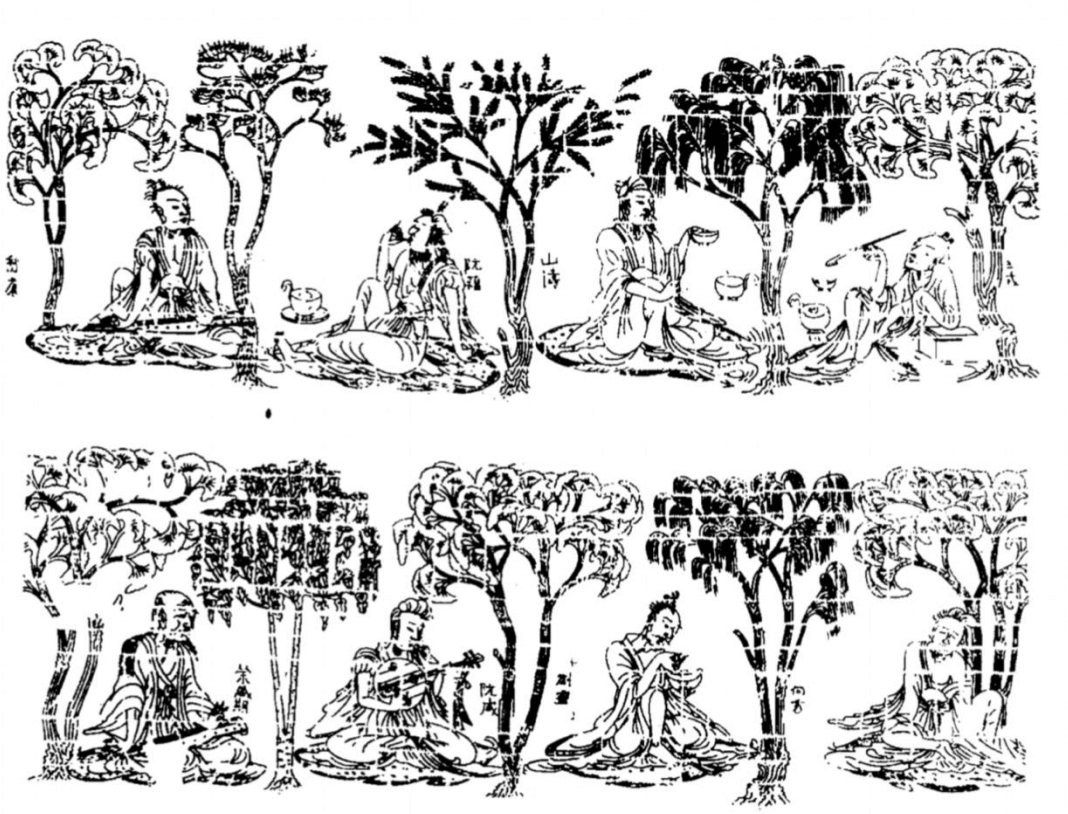

Figure 3.16 The Brick Murals of "Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Groove and Rong Qiqi." Nanjing, Jiangsu. After *Art of The Yellow Springs: Understanding Chinese Tombs*, fig. 170.

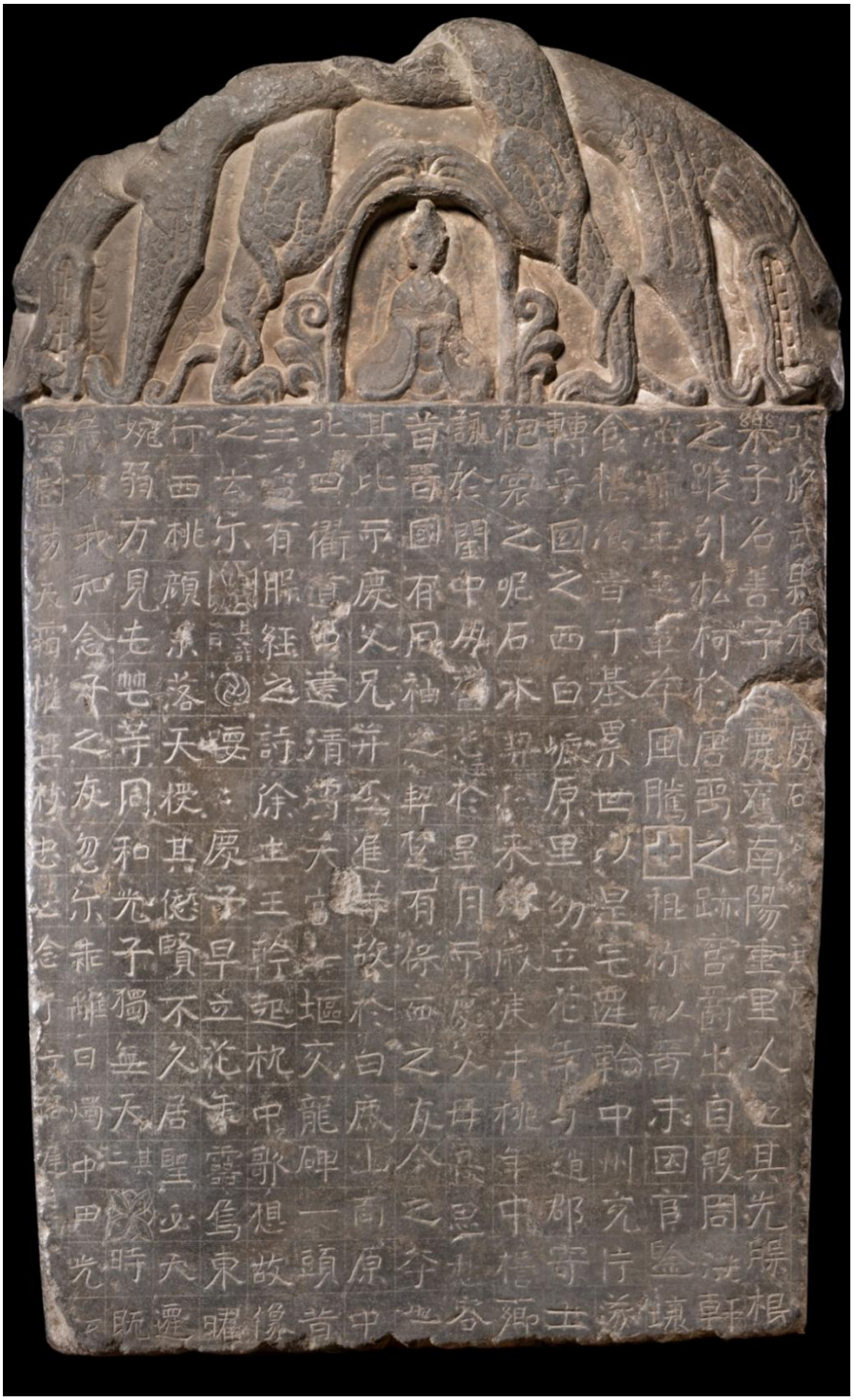

Figure 3.17 The Epitaph Side of the Stele by Li Huijin. 526-556 C.E.. Xiuwu, Henan. Photo Courtesy of Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.

Figure 3.18 Images of Worshiper Figures on A Buddhist Sculpted-Image Stele.Western Wei(535-557). Shanxi. The Collection of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. Accession No. 37-27. Photo by Author.

Figure 3.19 The Canopies Depicted on the Stele Commissioned by Li Zhewang, Yao Langzi, et al.. 528. China. The Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Accession No. 65.29.1.

Figure 3.20 The Incense Burner Depicted on the Stele Commissioned by Li Zhewang, Yao Langzi, et al.. 528. China. The Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Accession No. 65.29.1. Photo Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Figure 3.21 The Small Niched Buddha on the Stele Commissioned by Li Zhewang, Yao Langzi, et al.. 528. China. The Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Accession No. 65.29.1. Photo Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Figure 3.22 A Map of the Xiuwu County, with Mount White Deer(Bailushan). After *Xiuwu xianzhi*, vol. 1, 42. .Circled By Author.

Figure 3.23 Acrobatic Scenes On the Stele for Yue Yanqing. Detail of Figure 1.2.

Figure 4.1 “Shiping gong xiang yiqu” (One Image for The Duke of Shiping), with the Stele. Between 478 and 498, Luoyang, Henan. After *Guyang Cave: Cave 1443 of Longmen Grottoes*, pl. 110.

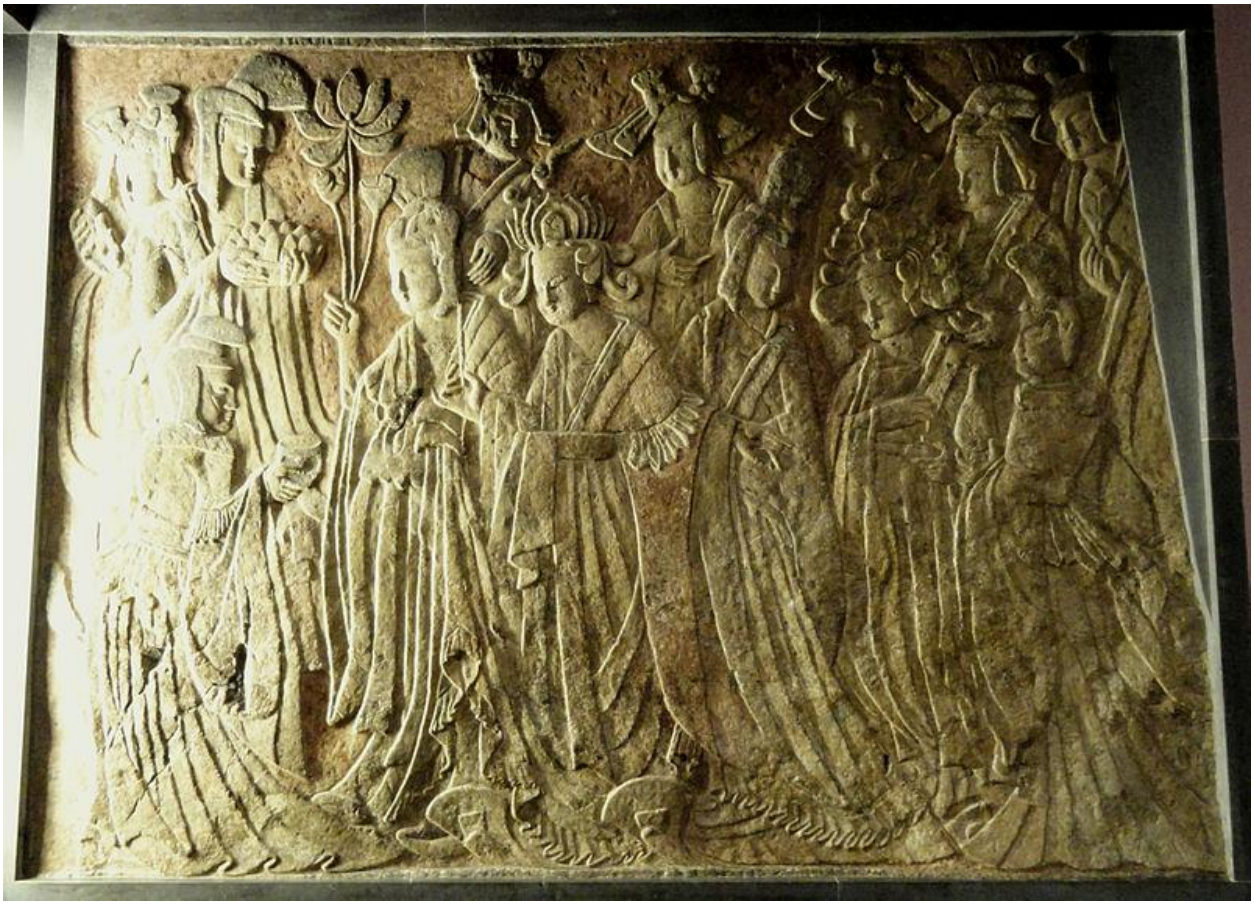

Figure 4.2 The Empress Venerating Buddha. C.a. 522. From Luoyang, Henan. Collection of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. Accession No. 40-38. Photo Courtesy of Ma Boyao.

Figure 4.3 “Yizi Xiang”, with the Stele by Sun Qiusheng et al. Late Fifth Century. Luoyang, Henan. After *Guyang Cave: Cave 1443 of Longmen Grottoes*, pl. 226.

Figure 4.4 “Shijia xiang” and the Stele by Wei Lingzang and Xue Fashao. Late Fifth Century, Luoyang, Henan. After *Guyang Cave: Cave 1443 of Longmen Grottoes*, pl. 101.

Figure 4.5 “Yizi Xiang” and the Stele by Yang Dayan. The End of Fifth Century, Luoyang, Henan. After *Guyang Cave: Cave 1443 of Longmen Grottoes*, pl. 87.

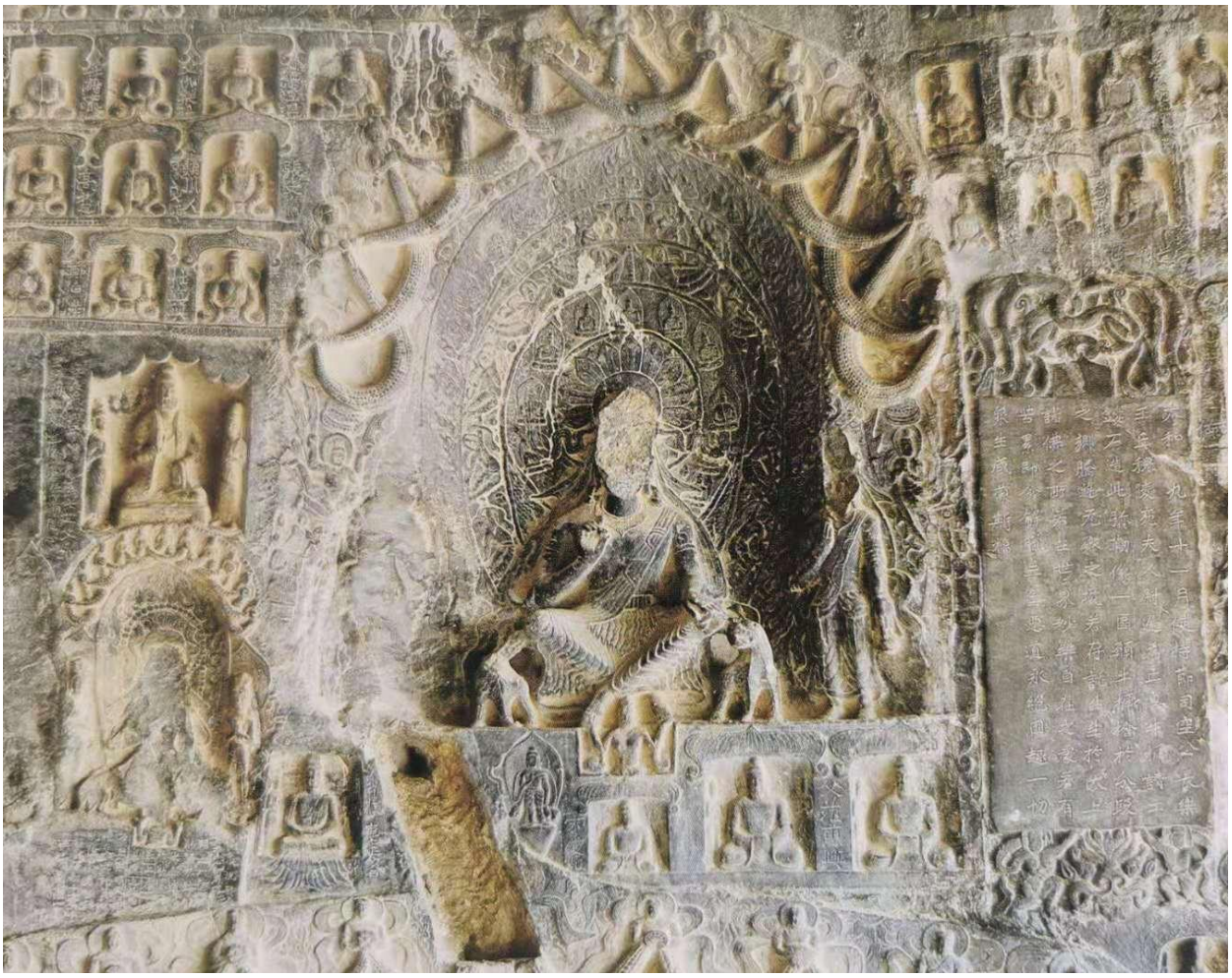

Figure 4.6 Niched Image and Stele by Lady Yuchi. Between 485 and 495, Luoyang, Henan. After *Guyang Cave: Cave 1443 of Longmen Grottoes*, pl. 65.

Figure 4.7 The Base of The Stele by Lady Yuchi. Detail of Figure 4.6.

Figure 4.8 Niched image and Stele by Yuan Xiang. 498. Luoyang, Henan. After *Guyang Cave: Cave 1443 of Longmen Grottoes*, pl. 63.

Figure 4.9 The Procession Scene Under the Niche by Yuan Xiang. Detail of Figure 4.8.

Figure 4.10 Niched Image and Stele by King of Guangchuan's Great Consort, Hou. 502. Luoyang, Henan. After *Guyang Cave: Cave 1443 of Longmen Grottoes*, pl. 312.

Figure 4.11 The Stele by Great Consort Hou. Detail of Figure 4.10.

Figure 4.12 Niched Image and Inscription by King of Guangchuan ’s Great Consort, Hou. 503. Luoyang, Henan. After *Guyang Cave: Cave 1443 of Longmen Grottoes*, pl. 315.

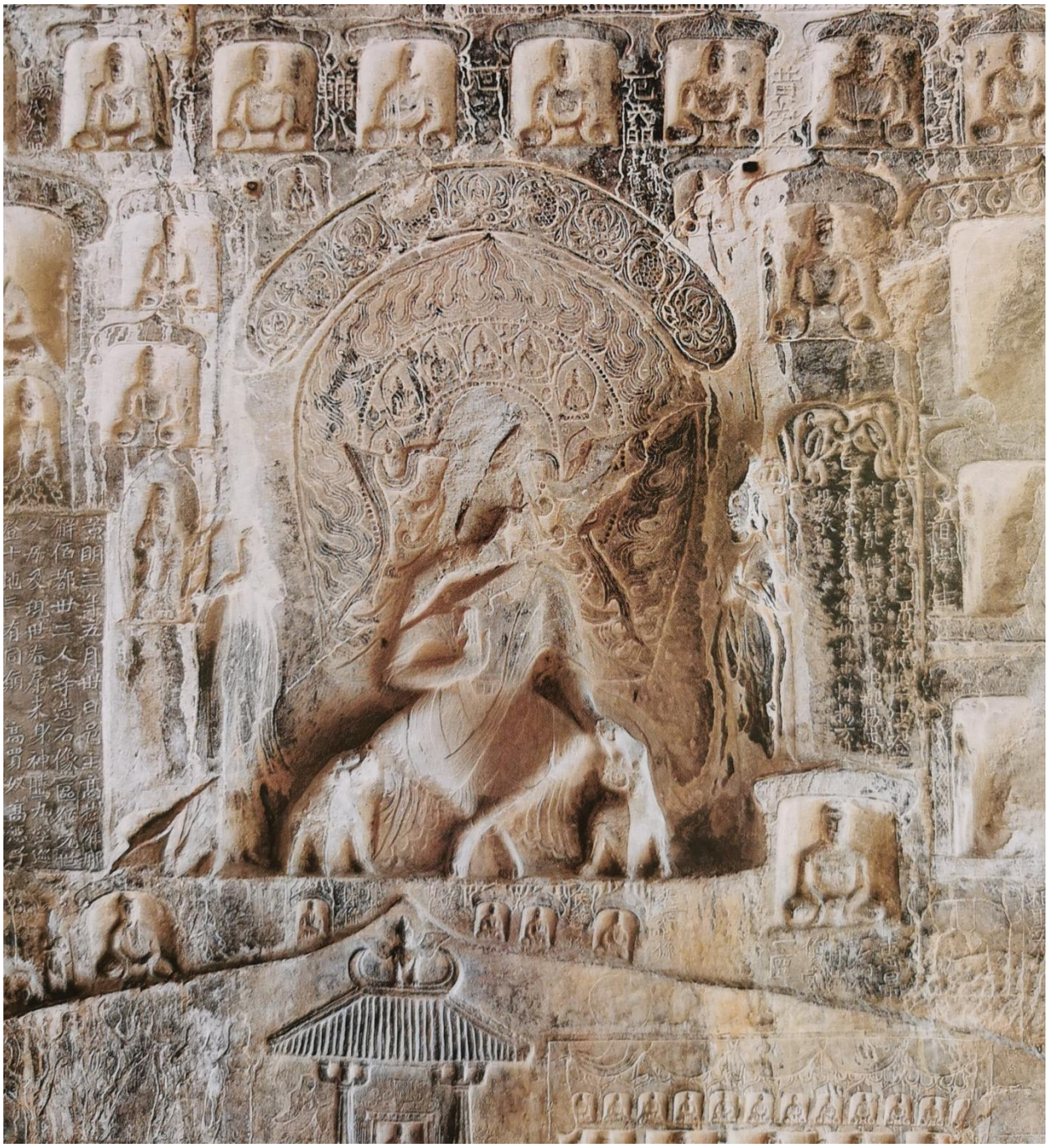

Figure 4.13 “Yizi xiang” and Stele by Wei Taoshu et al. Between Late Fifth and Early Sixth Centuries. Luoyang, Henan. After *Guyang Cave: Cave 1443 of Longmen Grottoes*, pl. 56.

Figure 4.14 Niched Image and Stele by Yin Aijiang et al. Between Late Fifth and Early Sixth Centuries. Luoyang, Henan. After *Guyang Cave: Cave 1443 of Longmen Grottoes*, pl. 313.

Figure 4.15 “Yizi xiang” and Stele by Ma Zhenbai et al. 503. Luoyang, Henan. After *Guyang Cave: Cave 1443 of Longmen Grottoes*, pl. 71.

Figure 4.16 Stele by Monk Huicheng, Titled“Shipinggong xiang yi qu(An Image for the Duke of Shiping)”Detail of Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.17 Stone Epitaph of Yu Jing. 526. Luoyang, Henan. After *Zhongguo shufa shi, Wei Jin Nanbeichao Juan*, fig. 12-4.15.

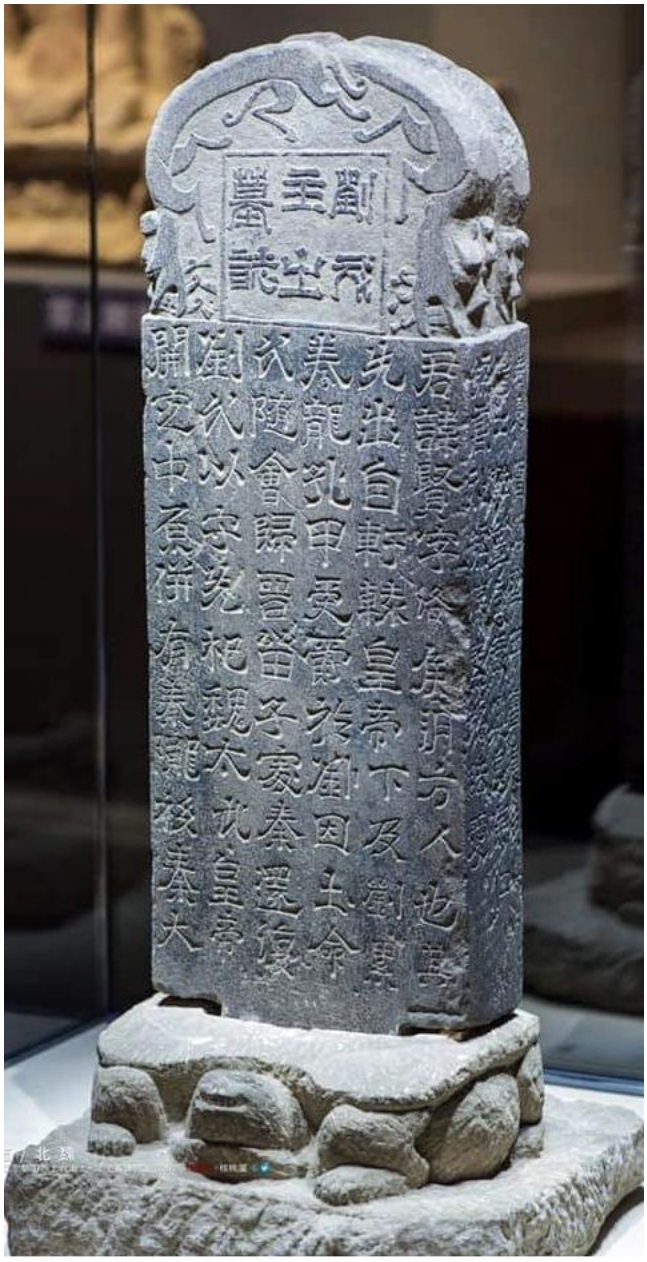

Figure 4.18 Epitaph Stone of Liu Xian. Second Half of the Fifth Century. Chaoyang, Liaoning. The Collection of Liaoning Provincial Museum. Photo by Author.

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