The Calligraphy of the Cliff Sutra Engravings in the Late Northern Dynasties (550-581 CE)

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the origin, functions, and stylistic development of cliff sutra carvings in the late Northern Dynasties (550–581 CE), explaining the progress of calligraphy art in the cultural, political, and religious contexts of the Northern Qi (550–577 CE) and Northern Zhou (557–581 CE). This study also analyses the spread of Buddhism from the Northern Wei dynasty to the Northern Qi dynasty, emphasizing the significance of sutra engravings in promoting Buddhism and shaping the spiritual environment. During the period of political division, constant conflict, and social unrest in the late Northern Dynasties, Buddhism provided spiritual comfort and ideological support for leaders and the general public, which was conducive to the creation of cliff-sutra engravings.

A major focus of this study is the analysis of the calligraphy styles found in Northern Dynasties cliff-sutra engravings, which combine elements from clerical script, seal script, and regular script. Through extensive analysis of these calligraphic features, this dissertation assesses how these engraved sutras served both as sacred texts and as expressions of calligraphic artistry. The dissertation further examines the effects of materiality in the preservation of calligraphy, focusing on rubbings as a medium that provided wider access to calligraphy while adding stylistic variants caused by material disparities. The findings indicate that although rubbings aided in the preservation of calligraphy, they also removed texts from their original geographic and environmental context, particularly for Buddhist sutra engravings. By comparing the perspectives of Song and Qing dynasty scholars on Northern Dynasties stone inscriptions, this research explores how historical and political contexts impacted calligraphic assessments. Therefore, this study will examine the calligraphy of engraved sutras from the Northern Dynasties, employing historical documentary research, comparative analysis of stroke characteristics, and theoretical studies of fundamental calligraphic scripts to categorize the styles of engraved sutra calligraphy.

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Introduction

During the late Northern Dynasties (550–581 CE), a distinctive type of Buddhist art known as cliff-sutra engravings (*moya kejing* 摩崖刻經) emerged, which involved the engraving of Buddhist sutras or the Buddha's name onto exposed areas of cliffs and the surfaces of boulders. The late Northern Dynasties refer to the period between the split of the Northern Wei dynasty (386–535 CE) into the Eastern Wei (534–550 CE) and Western Wei (535–557 CE) to the end of the Northern Zhou dynasty, spanning a total of 48 years from 534 to 581 [Fig. 1]. Sutra engravings of this period were an artistic expression that combines the reverence for Buddhist teachings with traditional Chinese stone-inscription (*shike* 石刻) calligraphy, forming a mixed calligraphy style, which most scholars consider to combine the clerical script (*lishu* 隸書) and regular script (*kaishu* 楷書). Therefore, to explore the characteristics of the calligraphy styles of the cliff-sutra engravings in the late Northern Dynasties, this dissertation focuses on cliff-sutra engravings located in the Hebei 河北 and Shandong 山東 Provinces and attempts to interpret and analyze their calligraphy style. To investigate the motivations for the formation of the calligraphy style of the cliff-sutra engravings, this dissertation will examine the historical and political background of the Northern Dynasties, as well as the social, religious, and cultural environments of the time. This dissertation will also discuss the various interpretations of calligraphy of this period in later Chinese history, focusing on the distinct perspectives of connoisseurs during the Song dynasty (960–1279 CE) and Qing dynasty (1644–1912 CE) to show how Chinese calligraphy classifications and the social and political contexts impacted these interpretations. This study aims to clarify the definitions and characteristics of both clerical script and regular script through the analysis of historical documents, to classify and compare the calligraphy styles of cliff engravings in different regions, and finally to evaluate their artistic characteristics and the effect of different calligraphy materials.

Stone inscriptions are a Chinese art form that involves carving texts or images on different types of stones, such as boulders, cliffs, and stone tablets. The most common types of stone inscriptions can be categorized into two groups: one is inscribed onto artificially prepared stone slabs, usually in the form of tablets or vertical steles which are movable and commonly placed in temples, academic courtyards, and tombs; the other type is engraved on natural rocks, such as exposed cliffs, cave walls, and boulders, which are generally

referred to as cliff engravings (*moya* 摩崖).[1] This kind of stone inscription is typically associated with the surrounding landscape and is most impossible to relocate to other places.[2]

Some of these stone inscriptions are monumental works that commemorate and publicize historical events and achievements, such as the Stone Drum Inscription (*Shigu wen* 石鼓文) which records the hunting activities of a pre-Qin ruler, and the Mount Tai Stele (*Taishan shike* 泰山石刻) which commemorates the political achievements of the first emperor in the Qin dynasty (221-207 BCE) and lists state governance strategies. Some are classical texts engraved for scholarly purposes, such as the Xiping Stone Classics (*Xiping shijing* 熹平石經) from the Eastern Han dynasty (25–220 CE). Some record the life story of the deceased, such as the *Feng Monu muzhi* 封魔奴墓誌 (Epitaph for Feng Monu), carved in the Northern Wei dynasty. These stone inscriptions form an abundant written archive.

Although stone inscriptions may serve different purposes, their primary objective seems to be supporting moral standards of the time period and preserving cultural heritage for future generations. These stone inscriptions represent the belief that the stone has the ability to transmit notable achievements and classical values to future generations because of the stones permanency. A sentence from the *Yishan shike* 嶧山石刻 (Mount Yi stele) states: "Engrave this glorious stone to record the classical literature (刻此樂石，以著經紀)." Another sentence from *Shimen song* 石門頌 (Ode to Stone Gate) mentions: "Engraving stones to admire virtues and showcase contributions (勒石頌德，以明厥勳)." In the *Zheng wengong shibei* 鄭文公石碑 (Zheng Wengong Stele), another sentence also indicates its purpose: "Engraving stone to commemorate the virtues and hope that it will be known forever (刊石銘德，與日永揚)." All of these texts emphasize the enduring properties of stone, as well as its use as a monument to the permanent preservation of classical texts,

[1] Xu Ziqiang 徐自強 and Wu Mengling 吳夢麟, *Gudai shike tonglun* 古代石刻通論 [General introduction to the ancient Chinese stone engravings], *Zhongguo kaogu wenwu tonglun congshu* 中國考古文物通論叢書 [Chinese Archaeological Relics General Theory Series] (Beijing: Zhijincheng Chubanshe, 2003), 22.

[2] Claudia Wenzel, "Imprinting the Living Rock with Buddhist Texts: On the Creation of a Regional Sacred Geography in Shandong in the Second Half of the Sixth Century," *Hualin International Journal of Buddhist Studies* 3, no. 2 (2020): 183.

personal or royal achievements, and other topics. Stone inscriptions use script to transform geological formations into landscapes with literary, intellectual, and religious significance.[3]

During the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420–589 CE) [Fig. 2], Buddhism flourished, particularly amongst Chinese intellectuals and aristocrats who were drawn by its philosophical ideas, spiritual desires, varied iconography, and ritual practices.[4] Specifically, the doctrines of Buddhism shaped the governing principles of nomadic rulers in the northern region, providing them with a unique cultural identity that set them apart from the people of the Central Plains.[5] People also believed that Buddhist monks could perform small miracles. These northern and southern states maintained connections with Buddhist Central Asia, introducing new ideas and sponsoring the translation of Buddhist doctrines into fluent Chinese. Emperors took Bodhisattva vows, built temples and statues, ordained monks, and organized activities such as chanting and preaching sutras, leading Buddhism into an era of major state patronage.[6] The rulers also referred to themselves as the Universal King of Turning the Dharma-Wheel (*Zhuanlun wang* 轉輪王), a title that acknowledged their status as saviors and signified their dedication to Buddhism.[7] This added further grandeur to the already sacred office of emperor. Many nomadic peoples believed that rulers were the incarnations of Buddha and could accumulate spiritual merit for the dynasty and the people through Buddhism, which would help restore imperial power through Buddhist doctrines.[8] Therefore, the worship of Buddha statues and Buddhist sutras, combined with the cultural ideas of traditional stone inscriptions, led to the creation of multiple types of stone inscriptions featuring Buddhist elements in the Northern Dynasties, such as cave statues, votive steles (*zaoxiang bei* 造像碑), stone stupas, and cliff-engraved sutras, amongst other types.

Cliff-sutra engravings reached their peak in the second half of the sixth century, primarily during the Northern Qi dynasty, whose capital was located in Ye 鄴 (now Linzhang 臨

[3] Robert E. Harrist, *The Landscape of Words: Stone Inscriptions from Early and Medieval China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 18.
[4] Dorothy C. Wong, *Chinese Steles: Pre-Buddhist and Buddhist Use of a Symbolic Form* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004), 3.
[5] Dorothy C. Wong, "Ethnicity and Identity: Northern Nomads as Buddhist Art Patrons during the Period of Northern and Southern Dynasties," in *Political Frontiers, Ethnic Boundaries and Human Geographies in Chinese History*, ed. Nicola Di Cosmo and Don J. Wyatt (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005), 103.
[6] Mark Edward Lewis, *China between Empires* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2021), 205–206.
[7] Chen Jinhua, "Buddhism Under the Northern Qi," in *Echoes of the past: the Buddhist Cave Temples of Xiangtangshan*, ed. Katherine R. Tsiang (Chicago: Smart Museum of Art, Chicago: The University of Chicago/Washington: Art M. Sackler Gallery, Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 2010), 101.
[8] Lewis, *China between Empires*, 207.

漳), in what is now the southern Hebei Province [Fig. 3]. The abundance of cliff-sutra engravings made during the Northern Qi dynasty was an activity that did not exist in previous periods, specifically during the Northern Wei dynasty.[9] Sutra engraving activities can be divided into two types: the first combines caves, statues, and sutras, and are mainly found in Hebei near the capital Ye; the second involves only sutras engraved on cliffs which are primarily located in the Shandong area [Fig. 4].[10] Those involved in engraving activities included emperors, academic elites, government officials, Buddhist monks, and common people from various social and economic backgrounds who practiced Buddhism. Most sutras engraved near the capital Ye were sponsored by royal families and notable officials, while those in Shandong Province were mostly sponsored by the monks and local officials.[11]

The first Emperor Wenxuan 文宣帝, Gao Yang 高洋 (r. 550–559 CE) of the Northern Qi, was an important supporter of Buddhist ideology. People depicted Gang Yang as a ruler on a mission to establish a Buddhist kingdom.[12] He believed that constructing cave temples and Buddha statues would bring merit to the country because Buddhist caves could be regarded as pagodas, and Buddhist statues enshrined inside were like the "relics" left by the Buddha.[13] Additionally, as the emperor frequently traveled between Jinyang 晉陽 (present-day Taiyuan in Shanxi) and Ye city, with imperial support several Buddhist grottoes and temples were constructed along the route.[14] Mount Xiangtang Caves (*Xiangtangshan shiku* 響堂山石窟) is recorded as one of the resting places for the royal family at this time period. Another significant Buddhist site along this route is Mount Zhonghuang (*Zhonghuangshan* 中皇山).[15]

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[9] Katherine R. Tsiang, "Monumentalization of Buddhist Texts in the Northern Qi dynasty: The Engraving of Sūtras in Stone at the Xiangtangshan Caves and Other Sites in the Sixth Century," *Artibus Asiae* 56, no. 3/4 (1996): 233.

[10] Zhang Zong and Howard L. Goodman, "Northern Qi Inscribed Sutras and Buddha Images: The Unique Case of the Inscribed-Sutra Cave at Mount Zhonghuang," *Asia Major*, (2010): 288.

[11] Zhang and Goodman, "Northern Qi Inscribed Sutras and Buddha Images," 302.

[12] The statement in Tang Yong's inscription. Original text: 我大齊之君……家傳天地之尊， 世祚輪王之貴。[The Emperor of our Great Qi... inherits the supreme position bestowed by Heaven and Earth, continuing the noble lineage of the Wheel-Turning Sacred Kings across generations.]

[13] Chen, "Buddhism Under the Northern Qi," in *Echoes of the Past*, 101.

[14] Li Fang 李昉 et al, *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 [The Vast Records Made During the Era of the Great Peace], vol. 91 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1961), 601. Original text: 齊神武高歡遷鄴後，以晉陽兵馬之地王業所基，常鎮守並州時來鄴下。[After the esteemed Emperor Gao Huan of the Northern Qi Dynasty relocated the capital to Ye City, he established Jinyang as a significant military stronghold, viewing it as the foundation of imperial authority. He frequently stationed himself in Bingzhou and periodically traveled to Ye.]

[15] Zhang Lintang 張林堂 and Xu Peilan 許培蘭, *Xiangtangshan shiku beike tiji zonglu* 響堂山石窟碑刻題記總録 [Collected Stele Inscriptions at the Xiangtangshan Caves], vol. 2 (Beijing: Waiwen Chubanshe, 2007), 149. Original text: 文宣常自邺诣晋阳，往来山下，故起离宫，以备巡幸，...于此山腰，见数百

Mount Xiangtang Caves consist of two distinct groups: the Northern Xiangtangshan Caves (*Beixiangtangshan shiku* 北響堂山石窟) on Mount Gu 鼓山, and the Southern Xiangtangshan Caves (*Nanxiangtangshan shiku* 南響堂山石刻) on Mount Fu 釜山.[16] Due to inconsistencies in historical records, the specific sponsors of the Northern Xiangtangshan Caves are difficult to determine. According to Chapter 160 of Sima Guang's *Zizhi Tongjian* 資治通鑑 (Complete Mirror for the Illustration of Government), in 547, during the Eastern Wei dynasty, Gao Huan was buried near Mount Gu. He was secretly buried near the Shiku Fo Temple, which may refer to either Northern Xiangtangshan or the temple built beneath the cave site. Based on this record, the assertion is that the Northern Xiangtangshan Caves were sponsored by Gao Huan, and the construction should have preceded the Northern Qi.[17] However, this source is ambiguous as it fails to specify a particular cave as the burial location at Northern Xiangtangshan.[18] An alternative viewpoint posits that the Northern Xiangtangshan Caves were built under the patronage of Emperor Wenxuan. Daoxuan's biography of the monk Min Fen states that Emperor Wenxuan was interred below the principal image of the Great Cave, perhaps the North Cave in Northern Xiangtangshan.[19] Further supporting evidence comes from a stele dating to the Jin dynasty (1115–1234 CE) and preserved at Changle Temple, formerly known as Shiku Fo Temple. The inscription states that Emperor Wenxuan witnessed a procession of monks and subsequently ordered the construction of three caves in Mount Xiangtang.[20] Even though the specific sponsor is difficult to identify, there is no doubt that the Northern Xiangtangshan Caves were built with royal sponsorship. Additionally, according to the inscription of the *Tang Yong xiejing bei* 唐邕寫經碑 (Tang Yong Stele) found in the south cave of Northern Xiangtangshan, the sutra engraving activity here lasted from 568 CE to 572 CE, with the main patron being Tang Yong 唐邕 (?–580 CE), a high-

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圣僧行道，遂开三石室，刻诸尊像。[Emperor Wenxuan often traveled from Ye City to Jinyang, passing through this mountain, where he constructed a detached palace to accommodate his imperial tours. Upon reaching the mountainside, he encountered hundreds of venerable monks practicing their faith, prompting him to carve three stone chambers and inscribe various sacred statues.]

[16] Angela F. Howard, "Buddhist cave sculpture of the Northern Qi dynasty: Shaping a new style, formulating new iconographies," *Archives of Asian art* 49 (1996): 7.

[17] Si Maguang's record on *Zizhi tongjian* (160: 4957) is quoted by Ding Mingyi 丁明夷, in *Gongxian tianlongshan xiangtangshan anyang shiku diaoke* 鞏縣天龍山響堂山安陽石窟雕刻 [Gongxian Mount Tianlong Mount Xiangtang Anyang Cave engravings], ed. Cheng Mingda 陳明達 and Ding Mingyi, (Beijing: Wenwu Chubanshe, 1989), 34.

[18] Howard, "Buddhist cave sculpture of the Northern Qi dynasty," 7.

[19] Dao Xuan, "*Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧轉 [Sequel to the Biographies of Eminent Monks]," in Taishō shinshu daizōkyō, 100 vols, ed. Takakusu Junjirō and Watanabe Kaigyōku, vol. 50, no. 2060, (Tōkyō: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924-1935), 669.

[20] Howard, "Buddhist cave sculpture of the Northern Qi dynasty," 7–8.

ranking official who was honored with the title of Prince of Jinchang in 572 CE.[21] He managed the engraving of four significant Mahayana sutras.

In addition, the patronage and history of the Southern Xiangtang caves are detailed in the in *Fushan shikusi bei* 釜山石窟寺碑 (Stele of the Cave Temple of Mount Fu), situated in the portico of cave 2 and dated to the Sui dynasty (589-618 CE). The construction of the Southern Xiangtangshan Caves began in 565, with the initial sutra carving activities funded by the monk Hui Yi, who realized that the Dharma was threatened with extinction. Gao Anahong 高阿那肱 (?–580 CE), also named King Huaiying 淮陰王, a senior official in Northern Qi, subsequently sponsored the continuation of the cave excavation.[22] According to this account, the sutra engravings in Southern Xiangtangshan likely began around 565 CE and probably ended in 577 CE, when the Northern Qi dynasty fell. No surviving historical sources indicate any sponsors or participants other than Gao Anahong in the construction of the Southern Xiangtangshan Caves. The large scale, thoughtful design, and the high level of craftsmanship of the caves suggest support from individuals of considerable wealth and power, such as high-ranking officials or members of the royal family. Also, Buddhist scholars and monks, with their deep understanding of Buddhist teachings, may have also participated in the project; participants likely included monk Huiyi 慧義 and his fellow monks.[23] Moreover, Mount Zhonghuang is also located near Ye City. No inscriptions have been found at Mount Zhonghuang identifying specific sponsors. However, a stele notes that the mother of Lady Zhao requested that her husband, Tang Yong, donate carved Buddha statues and Buddhist sutras in memory of her deceased daughter.[24] Therefore, it is likely that the sutra engravings here were primarily sponsored by Tang Yong.[25]

Notably, the three major grottoes near Ye, the capital of Northern Qi, were all built with imperial patronage, and the sutra engraving activities around the caves were sponsored by

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[21] Li Baiyao 李百藥 (565–648), *Beiqi shu* 北齊書 [The History of the Northern Qi], juan 40, vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1972), 530–532.
[22] The text of *Fushan shikusi bei* is recorded by Ding Mingyi 丁明夷, in *Gongxian tianlongshan xiangtangshan anyang shiku diaoke*, 35.
[23] Jungmin Ha, "Shaping Religious and Cultural Aspiration: Engraved Sutras in Southwestern Shandong Province from the Northern Qi dynasty (550-577 CE), China," (PhD. diss., Duke University, 2016), 52.
[24] The inscription is located outside the entrance of one of the caves, adjacent to a damaged sculpture. Ma Zhongli 馬中理, "*Yedu jinyi Bei Qi fojiao kejing chutan* 鄴都近邑北齊佛教刻經初探 [Initially Exploring the Buddhist Sutra Engravings in the Northern Qi Capital of Ye]," in *Beichao moya kejing kao* 北朝摩崖刻經考 [Investigate the Cliff-sutra Engravings in the Northern Dynasties], (Shandong: Qilu Shushe, 1991), 177.
[25] Wenzel, "Imprinting the Living Rock with Buddhist Texts," 186.

high-ranking officials and ministers.[26] Tang Yong appears to have been one of the key figures in the engraving activities in the Hebei region, revealing a group of wealthy officials, some of whom had close ties to the court in Ye City. Since most of the sutra engravings in this area were executed in royal Buddhist caves, there were possible specific standards for selecting the calligraphy style. One notable feature is that the engraved sutras at Mount Xiangtang and Mount Zhonghuang were created after the relatively soft limestone cliffs were flattened and polished, with the sutras then engraved in an almost uniform grid [Fig. 5]. The engraved text is evenly distributed, with a small and high-quality script. This writing style may have been modeled after the royal stone inscriptions of Northern Qi.[27]

Moreover, Tang Yong appears to have inspired some sutra engraving activities in the Jizhou 济州 and Yanzhou 兗州 regions of Shandong Province, corresponding to modern-day Taian 泰安 and Jining 濟寧. Although there is no evidence of Tang Yong's direct involvement in the donation of sutra engravings in Shandong Province, a group of women, led by Tang Yong's wife, sponsored the engraved sutras in Mount Jian.[28] In addition, some texts at Mount Jian, Mount Tie, and Mount Hongdong mention Seng'an Daoyi 僧安道一 (?–c. 580 CE) as the calligrapher who wrote the sutras on the cliffs. And the family history of some identified sponsors includes the Kuang 匡 family at Mount Tie, the Wei 韋 family at Mount Jian, and Wang Zichun 王子椿 at Mount Culai. Most of the engraved sutras in Shandong were sponsored by monks and local authorities. The calligraphic style of these engravings is similar, suggesting they were either written by the Seng'an Daoyi or modeled after his calligraphic style.[29] The calligraphy style chosen by patrons in the Shandong region differed from that of the royal patrons in the Hebei region; most scripts here are large and carved into rough, unpolished granite cliffs, and the content consists of excerpts rather than complete texts [Fig. 6].[30]

Since sponsors, commissioners, craftsmen, and other individuals responsible for producing these cliff-sutra engravings came from diverse cultural backgrounds and social statuses, their choices varied regarding the engraving environment, carving methods, and the

[26] Tsiang, "Monumentalization of Buddhist Texts in the Northern Qi Dynasty," 236.
[27] For discussion and analysis of specific calligraphy styles, refer to Chapter 3, section 3.2, pages 131–150.
[28] Wang Yongbo and Tsai Sucy-Ling, *Buddhist stone sutras in China: Shandong Province Volume 3* (Hangzhou: China Academy of Art Press, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2017), 41.
[29] Wang and Tsai, *Buddhist Stone Sutras in China: Shandong Province Volume 3*, 251.
[30] Section 3.1 in Chapter 3 provides a detailed description of the distribution and content of the engraved sutras and calligraphy styles, pages 119–131.

purpose of the engraved sutras. However, whether to gain merit, meditate, or preserve sutras, all chose to engrave sutras on mountains integrated with the natural environment, which are different from the cave sutras of the Northern Wei and the *Fangshan kejing* 房山刻經 (Fangshan Sutra Engravings). From the Sui dynasty (581-681 CE), these carved sutras were found on stone slabs and buried in caves.[31] The sponsors of cliff-sutra engravings in the Northern Qi seemed to have combined Chinese worship of mountains with the tradition of preserving important texts through stone inscriptions and further incorporated the power of copying and reciting sutras to obtain blessings. Cliff-carved sutras transformed the previous visual art dominated by Buddha images into a non-image art characterized by text. These engraved sutras are not only tangible craft products, but also a medium for conveying Buddhist ideas through the fusion of text and calligraphy. Thus, the selection of a particular calligraphy style requires careful consideration.

Although the primary purpose of the cliff-sutra engravings was not to demonstrate calligraphy, their making has been associated with considerable historical and cultural importance. The Northern Dynasties, marked by political turmoil, social unrest, and the widespread dissemination and flourishing of Buddhism in China, resulted in the production of these works. In this historical context, the choice of calligraphy style for the cliff-sutra engravings was likely affected by several factors. These factors included the expression of religious beliefs, the evolution of societal aesthetic preferences, and the integration and development of calligraphy styles. Therefore, the creation of the cliff-sutra engravings' calligraphy style aimed to strike a balance between religious significance and artistic expression. In addition, sponsors from different cultural backgrounds and regions also had different choices of calligraphy styles, and different craftsmen also experienced changes in calligraphy characteristics during the carving process. Hence, the following discussion explores the foundation of cliff sutra engravings in the late Northern Dynasties, focusing on regional characteristics, factors affecting its development, the purpose of the carvings, and relationships with the surrounding environment. Through the classification and analysis of the calligraphy of the cliff-sutra engravings and its characteristics in the late Northern Dynasties, this dissertation attempts to understand and define the calligraphy style of engraved sutras from different cultural backgrounds and political contexts.

[31] Important cave statues in Northern Wei include Yungang and Longmen Grottoes; see Alexander Coburn Soper, "Imperial Cave-Chapels of the Northern Dynasties: Donors, Beneficiaries, Dates," *Artibus Asiae 28*, no. 4 (1966): 241–270. For information on Fangshan sutra engravings, see Sonya S. Lee, "Transmitting Buddhism to a Future Age: The Leiyin Cave at Fangshan and Cave-Temples with Stone Scriptures in Sixth-Century China," *Archives of Asian Art 60* (2010): 43–78.

Sites of Cliff-sutra Engravings and Styles

The large-scale cliff-sutra engravings of the late Northern Dynasties did not attract widespread attention from scholars until the end of the 20th century. Since then, scholars have begun to investigate and study these engravings from a variety of angles. Scholars have visited sutra engraving sites, recorded texts, made rubbings and confirmed the content and dating of the carvings, identified the sponsoring groups and their social relationships, discussed the calligraphic styles found in different locations and attempted to understand the key purposes of the monumental sutra engravings at this certain period. These engravings, the typical Buddhist objects provide material evidence for studying Buddhist practice in the Northern Dynasties, especially meditation. Cliff-sutra engravings are not only examples of written materials from that era, but also a category of Buddhist art. The combination of characters and their original geographical and historical environment helps us understand the production of sutra engravings and the characteristics of their calligraphic styles. Therefore, examining the distribution of cliff-sutra engravings and their connection with the surrounding environment will help to understand the characteristics of engraved sutras found in different regions.

During the Northern Qi and Northern Zhou periods, the earliest monumental cliff-sutra engravings were founded. Most of the locations for sutra engravings are on natural cliffs and boulders. Therefore, the engraved sutras are related to the surrounding environment, and the style of engravings also show regional differences. Some of these sutras are engraved on the inner or outer walls of caves, some are carved on natural cliff walls, and others are engraved on scattered boulders. This shows that engraved sutras in different regions are related to the local natural landscape. For example, the inscription on the Tang Yong Stele mentions that the sutras were engraved on Mount Xiangtang because of the local natural landscape.[32] Thus, the calligraphy style of the sutra engravings could also be related to the scenery of different regions.

[32] Original text in Tang Yong Stele: 澗穀虛靜，邑居閑曠，林疑極妙。草匹文柔，禽繞空中，獸依樹下。水音發而覺道，風響動而悟物。[The ravine is serene and ethereal, the villages exude a tranquil and expansive charm, and the forest presents an exceptionally sublime atmosphere. The vegetation is as soft and intricate as woven fabric, birds circle gracefully in the sky, and wild animals rest beneath the trees. The sound of rushing water inspires reflection on the way, while the echoing wind evokes an awareness of the interconnectedness of all things.]

Liu Tao summarized the geographical distribution and dating of important sutra engravings during the Northern Qi period. As shown in Table 1 and Fig. 4, the locations of sutra engravings are mainly distributed within the Hebei and Shandong Provinces. The arrangement and distribution of sutra engravings in Hebei and Shandong display different structures and geographic organizations that reflect regional variations and cultural practices. Liu Tao also categorized the content of these sutra engravings into five types, including the main content, the names of Buddhas, the names of sponsors, the names of calligraphers, and the date of creation.[33] This dissertation follows this same classification method and refers to these carvings as cliff-sutra engravings, which include not only the sutras but also related Buddha names and inscriptions.

Zhang Zong used general typology methods to compare the cliff-sutra engravings in different regions and classified two areas of sutra engravings by type. One area, the political center around the capital Ye, combined engraved sutras and statues with cave settings, while the other area in the central region of Shandong only featured engraved sutras on natural stone surfaces. He further divided cave sutra engravings into three subtypes: the first includes sutras and statues planned at the begin of cave construction; the second contains sutras added later but related to the existing statues; and the third includes sutras added later as additional content.[34] The contents of sutras vary from the early-period Mind-Only School development in Buddhist teachings to the Ten Stages School.[35] Based on this classification method, Zhang Zong pointed out that from the correlation between Buddha statues and engraved sutras, the cave sutra engravings near Ye were mainly sponsored by the royal family and dignitaries, while the sutra engravings in the Shandong area had local cultural traditions and displayed the pure Central Plains calligraphy style.[36] However, he did not provide a detailed explanation of the Central Plains calligraphy style, nor did he analyze the characteristics of sutra engravings in the Hebei and Shandong regions. According to the analysis of historical development in calligraphy styles, the

[33] Liu Tao 劉濤, *Zhongguo shufa shi: Wei Jin Nanbeichao juan* 中國書法史: 魏晉南北朝卷 [History of Chinese Calligraphy: Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties], vol. 3 (Jiangsu: Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2002), 461–463.
[34] Zhang and Goodman, "Northern Qi Inscribed Sutras and Buddha Images," 288.
[35] The Mind-Only School, also known as the Dharma-Character School, was formally established by the renowned Tang dynasty monk Xuanzang (602/03-664). It was one of eight Mahayana schools during the Sui and Tang Dynasties. In the preceding Southern and Northern periods, scriptures related to Mind-only doctrine were translated by Paramārtha (*zhendi* 真諦), who started the Mahāyāna-saṃgraha School (*Shelun zong*) in the south. Bodhiruci (*puti liuzhi* 菩提流支), who started the Daśabhūmi-vyākhyāna school (the Ten Stages School, or *Dilun zong* 地論宗) in the north. These constituted what is called the early-period Mind-only doctrine 唯識古學. See Zhang and Goodman, "Northern Qi Inscribed Sutras and Buddha Images," 300–301.
[36] Zhang and Goodman, "Northern Qi Inscribed Sutras and Buddha Images," 302.

Central Plains calligraphy style should refer here to the calligraphy style commonly used on steles in the Luoyang area during the Northern Wei dynasty. Liu Tao pointed out that the upper class in Luoyang widely admires this type of script, characterized by slanting horizontal strokes and a tight structure (*xiehua jinjie* 斜畫緊結). A typical example is the *Shiping gong zaoxiangji* 始平公造像記 (Votive Stele Dedicated by Lord Shiping) [Fig. 7].[37]

Table 1. Important cliff-sutra engravings in the late Northern Dynasties

Name	Date	Region (Now)
Mount Bao (寶山) sutra engravings	550–555 CE	Henan 河南, Anyang 安陽
Mount Hongding sutra engravings	564 CE	Shandong, Pingyin 平陰
Mount Southern Xiangtang sutra engravings	565 CE	Hebei, Handan 邯鄲
Mount Northern Xiangtang sutra engravings	568–572 CE	Hebei, Handan
Mount Zhonghuang sutra engravings	Date unknown	Hebei, Shexian 涉縣
Mount Culai (徂徠山) sutra engravings	570 CE	Shandong, Xintai 新泰
Mount Yi (嶧山) sutra engravings	570 CE	Shandong, Zouxian 鄒縣
Mount Jian (尖山) sutra engravings	575 CE	Shandong, Zouxian
Mount Tie (鐵山) sutra engravings	579 CE	Shandong, Zouxian
Mount Ge (葛山) sutra engravings	580 CE	Shandong, Zouxian
Mount Gang (岡山) sutra engravings	580 CE	Shandong, Zouxian
Mount Tai (泰山) sutra engravings	Date unknown	Shandong, Taian 泰安
Mount Shuiniu (水牛山) sutra engravings	Date unknown	Shandong, Fenshang 墳上
Mount Yin (銀山) sutra engravings	Date unknown	Shandong, Dongping 東平

The connection and differences between the engraved sutras in Shandong and Luoyang styles, as well as the stylistic variations between engraved sutras found near the capital, Ye, and those in the Shandong region, reveal distinct regional attributes. The choice of engraving style was also significantly impacted by the sponsoring groups, whose preferences shaped the aesthetic and ideological elements of the sutras. Buddhist carvings have a close connection to the surrounding landscape and are frequently created to engage

[37] Liu Tao, *Zhongguo shufa shi: Wei Jin Nanbeichao juan*, 435.

with and enhance the natural environment. Considering these insights, thorough answers to these enquiries remain elusive. To analyze the calligraphic styles of the engraved sutras from the late Northern Dynasties, we must first investigate their distinctive characteristics in the Hebei and Shandong regions.

Engraved sutras from Hebei

Regarding the sutra engravings found from Hebei Province, Katherine R. Tsiang conducted a comprehensive study of the North and South Xiangtangshan Caves, concentrating on sculptural images, textual engravings, and architecture. She provided a detailed introduction to the architectural structure of the caves, the characteristics and most common kind of significance the Buddha statues and other images, as well as the content, date, and location of the sutra engravings, and also described the group of sponsors for the excavation. Through the study of sixth-century art and the social background of the Northern Qi dynasty, Tsiang discovered that a variety of cultural factors, the visual habits of Buddhism, and the artistic expression of seeking merit through sutras led to the emergence of cliff-sutra engravings on Mount Xiangtang. In addition, she indicated that the engraved sutras represent the existence of the Dharma, and like Buddha statues, they may not be used for specific Buddhist rituals but to convey the stories and ideas found in the sutras.[38] The presence of traditional calligraphy in place of Buddha images makes this calligraphy style particularly representative. Just as the use of Buddha images present different characteristics in different periods, the calligraphy style of the engraved sutras should also follow a specific standard form.

Tsiang stated that various characters could be carved into the cliff, and based on the intaglio technique, suggesting the transition between the clerical script and the regular script.[39] Zhao Lichun also confirmed that the calligraphy style of the sutra engravings on Mount Xiangtang displays characteristics of mixed scripts. He noticed that, in addition to the characters of clerical script and regular script, these engraved sutras also include the brushwork of seal script, combining square and round strokes.[40] Moreover, Zhao Lichun and Lu Heting analyzed the calligraphy styles of the different caves in the Southern Xiangtang Caves. They found that the engraved sutras in the first cave were composed in

[38] Katherine R. Tsiang, "Bodies of Buddhas and princes at the Xiangtangshan caves: Image, text, and stupa in Buddhist art of the Northern Qi dynasty, 550-577." (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1996), 179–180.
[39] Tsiang, "Bodies of Buddhas and princes at the Xiangtangshan caves." (1966), 153–154.
[40] Zhao Lichun 趙立春, "*Xiangrangshan shiku beichao kejing shilun* 響堂山石窟北朝刻經試論 [A Preliminary Study on the Northern Qi Sutra Engravings at Xiangtangshan]," *Hebei: Wenwu Chunqiu Chubanshe*, no. 4 (2003): 39.

clerical script, while the sutras in the second cave were in a clerical script structure using stroke styles from regular script, and the texts in the fourth cave were in eight-point script (*bafen* 八分).[41] However, scholars simply describe the calligraphy style of the Mount Xiangtang sutra engravings as a mixture of styles without explaining the specific characteristics. In the same location, the calligraphy styles of sutras found within different sutras should also be different; however, a general definition of mixed-style calligraphy is insufficient.

Another large group of cliff-sutra engravings in Hebei is located at Mount Zhonghuang in She County 涉縣. Ma Zhongli 馬忠理, Zhang Yuan 張沅, and others clearly described the locations, sequences, and contents of the engraved sutras here, providing basic data for the study. The uniqueness of the sutra engravings found here lies in that there are about 130,000 words carved on the polished cliff walls, which contain the full text of the sutras. This can be regarded as a precedent for large-scale sutra engravings in the late Northern Dynasties. Zhang and Goodman claim that there are three types of calligraphy found in these sutras: clerical script, squat regular script, and regular scrip, which were created by at least three people.[42] The squat regular script here has a flat structure that is a characteristic of clerical script.[43]

The mixed script style in the cliff-sutra engravings at Mount Xiangtang and Mount Zhonghuang combines elements from various calligraphic styles. According to Liu Tao, the calligraphy style of the *Sūtra Spoken by Vimalakīrti* (*Weimojie suoshuo jing* 維摩詰所說經) on Northern Xiangtangshan [Fig. 8], the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* (*Dafang guangfo huayan jing* 大方廣佛華嚴經) on Southern Xiangtangshan [Fig. 9], and the *Visesacinta Brahma Pariprccha Sūtra* (*Siyi fantian suowen jing* 思議梵天所問經) on Mount Zhonghuang [Fig. 10] are all similar to characters in the Xiping Stone Classic. These engraved sutras are characterized by wavy horizontal strokes and squat character structures. In addition, Liu Tao mentioned that some calligraphy styles also have broader strokes that combine the features of regular script, such as the engraved *Sūtra of Immeasurable Meaning* (*Wuliang yijing* 無量義經) in Northern Xiangtangshan [Fig. 11].[44] However, Liu Tao defined these

[41] Zhao Lichun 趙立春 and Lu Hetin 盧合亭, "*Xiangtangshan shiku kejing jiqi shufa yishu* 響堂山石窟刻經及其書法藝術 [Mount Xiangtang Caves Engraved Sturas and Its Calligraphy Styles]," *China Academic Journal Electronic Publishing House*, no. 1 (1992): 38–39.
[42] Zhang and Goodman, "Northern Qi Inscribed Sutras and Buddha Images," 298.
[43] See the terminology discussion, pages 40–43.
[44] Liu Tao 劉濤, "*Beiqi moya kejing de shuti yu lishu dazi de shuke fangfa* 北齊摩崖刻經的書體與隸書大

sutra engravings as a clerical script style, which is distinct from the mixed style that other scholars had previously mentioned. It is precisely because he believed that the clerical script was the main body, but was mixed with several other script styles, that it was still defined as the clerical script. Therefore, the calligraphy styles of the sutra engravings on Mount Xiangtang and Mount Zhonghuang in Hebei show differences in the strokes and character structures differences, and the content of sutra engravings also varied in writing styles. By classifying and comparing engraved sutras by region and content, we can more clearly understand the stylistic characteristics of engraved sutras and their relationship with clerical script and regular script.

Engraved sutras from Shandong

Academic research on the Shandong cliff-sutra engravings began after the large-scale excavation of the Mount Hongding engraved sutras in the 1980s. Since the late eighteenth century, epigraphic documents have recorded most of Shandong's vital sutra engraving sites, such as Mount Tai, Mount Tie, Mount Ge, and Mount Culai. With the development of photographic technology and archaeological research methods, scholars have conducted more comprehensive research on cliff-sutra engravings in Shandong in recent years.

The "Buddhist Stone Sutras in China" project, led by the Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, has recorded twenty-one cliff stone inscription sites in Shandong. This project combines maps, photography, and rubbings to clearly show the distribution, geographical location, and related environment of sutra engravings found in Shandong.[45] Moreover, Lai Fei compiled a book which systematically records the engraved sutras in Shandong.[46] The book precisely documents the geographical distribution, content, and current status of twenty engraved sutras, supplemented by photos. These resources provide valuable references for studying the engraved sutras in Shandong, as well as for understanding the local historical and cultural background and characteristics of calligraphy art. Furthermore, some epigraphers from the Qing dynasty analyzed the

字的書刻方法 [Calligraphy Style of Engraving sutras on Cliff in Northern Qi dynasty and Calligraphy Engraving Method of clerical script]," *Hebei: Wenwu Chunqiu Chubanshe*, no. 5 (2003): 84.

[45] Lothar Ledderose and Wang Yongbo, *Buddhist Stone Sutras in China: Shandong Province Volume 1* (Hangzhou: China Academy of Art Press, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2014); Wang Yongbo and Claudia Wenzel, *Buddhist Stone Sutras in China: Shandong Province Volume 2* (Hangzhou: China Academy of Art Press, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2015); Wang Yongbo and Tsai Sucy-Ling, *Buddhist Stone Sutras in China: Shandong Province Volume 3* (Hangzhou: China Academy of Art Press, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2017).

[46] Lai Fei 賴非, *Shandong beichao fojiao moya kejing diaocha yu yanjiu* 山東北朝佛教摩崖刻經調查與研究 [Investigation and Research on Buddhist Sutra Engravings of the Northern Dynasties in Shandong] (Beijing: Kexue Chubanshe, 2007).

characteristics of engraved sutras from Shandong. For example, Huang Yi 黃易 (1744–1802 CE) conducted an extensive survey of Shandong stone inscriptions, including investigating and collecting rubbings of sutra engravings.[47] However, all these studies did not analyze the calligraphic characteristics of the cliff-sutra engravings in Shandong. Instead, they only indirectly explained the calligraphy style by discussing the calligrapher Seng'an Daoyi who had written these sutras.

Buddha sutra engravings of various sizes often contain multiple texts, including a combination of Buddha names, sutra sections, and historical inscriptions. Evidence at sone sites include votive inscriptions, suggesting the existence of a social network of sponsors and Buddhist monks. In addition, to being part of a social network, the Shandong sutra engravings can be considered a network of sites sharing the same doctrinal and soteriological purpose, as well as a wider network of calligraphy examples producing a uniform style.[48]

The name of Monk Seng'an Daoyi appears on engravings from Mount Jian [Fig. 12], Mount Tie [Fig. 13], and Mount Hongding [Fig. 14], indicating that he is the calligrapher who wrote sutras on cliffs in these sites. The engraved sutra on Mount Tie is accompanied by the Stone Eulogy, which details its location and surroundings, the association of the patrons, and praises the calligraphy of Seng'an Daoyi, describing it as a dragon coiling in the mist and a phoenix leaping in the clouds.[49] This demonstrates that the calligraphy of Seng'an Daoyi was highly regarded during the Northern Qi, indicating that the selection of calligraphy style for sutra engraving was not arbitrary. The choice of calligraphy style for engraving sutras clearly is thorough and distinctive, stemming from a deep reverence for Buddhism. Engraved sutras were not only a product of Buddhist practice but also a representation of the Buddhist calligraphy art of the time. In addition, Wei Yuan 魏源 (1794–1857 CE) also thought the engraved sutras in Mount Tai, Mount Culai, Mount Gang, and Mount Tai were all written by Seng'an Daoyi. He pointed out that the engravings are in clerical script with large characters, and the calligraphy presents a sense of boldness, elegance and simplicity.[50]

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[47] Tsiang, "Monumentalization of Buddhist Texts in the Northern Qi dynasty," 253.
[48] Wenzel, "Imprinting the Living Rock with Buddhist Texts," 6–7.
[49] Original text: 如龍盤霧，似鳳騰霄。[Like a dragon coiled in mist, resembling a phoenix soaring to the heavens.]
[50] Wei Yuan, *Daishan jingshiyu ge* 岱山經石峪歌 [Eulogy on Sutra Stone Valley on Mount Dai], in *Wei Yuan ji* (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju), 732–733. Original text: 泰山經石峪摩崖，隸書金剛般若經，字大於斗，雄逸高古，與徂徠山水牛洞及鄒縣岡山之文殊般若經如出一手，皆北齊僧安道一所書。[The engraved sutras at Jing Shi Valley on Mount Tai, featuring the *Diamond Sūtra* in clerical script, display large

Lai Fei considered the sutra engravings found in Shandong not simply as works executed in a particular style or school but as works left behind by a single person, Seng'an Daoyi. Based on the similarity of calligraphy styles in the Shandong region, he concluded that Seng'an Daoyi was the writer of nearly all of the sutras found at Shandong sites.[51] However, Liu Tao divides the calligraphy styles into two types. The style of the sutra engravings in Mount Gang is unique, with a combination of square and round strokes, and it is more like the regular script. In other regions, the calligraphy style of sutra engravings shows a combination of clerical script and regular script.[52] Kiriya Seiichi claimed that because traces of the Seng'an Daoyi styles were found in almost all of the sutra engraving sites in Hebei, Henan, and Shandong, Seng'an Daoyi actively participated in the carving project of the Tang Yong stele and even wrote the dedication text of the Tang Yong stele himself.[53] However, it is not appropriate to classify all styles in Shandong as being written by Seng'an Daoyi, because only three places clearly record the name Seng'an Daoyi, and it is too simplistic to attribute all of the sutra engravings in other regions to the Seng'an Daoyi.

A comparison of previous research on sutra engravings in Shandong and Hebei reveals a lack of systematic studies of engraved sutras in Hebei, with most research focusing on Buddha statues. Therefore, to comprehensively explore the calligraphic styles of cliff-sutra engravings in these two regions, it is necessary to investigate the relationship between the engraving styles in Shandong and Hebei. The sutra engravings in these two regions have a distinctive feature: the combination of clerical script and regular script styles. There may be several reasons for the emergence of this combinated style. First of all, the transition from clerical script to regular script was a stage in the development of calligraphy during the Northern Dynasties. Wang Shizheng noted that the Northern Dynasties, especially the Northern Wei, saw the writing of stele inscriptions in a standardized style that integrated

characters. The style is majestic and archaic, exuding an air of sublime antiquity. These engravings bear a remarkable resemblance to those found at Ox Cave on Mount Culai and the Manjushri Sutra on Mount Gang in Zou County, all attributed to the Northern Qi Seng'an Daoyi.]

[51] Lai Fei, "*Sen'an kejing kaoshu* 僧安刻經考述 [Research about the Sutra Engravings by Seng'an]," in *Beiqi moya kejing yanjiu (xu)* 北齊摩崖刻經研究(續) [Study on Carving Sutras on Cliffs in Northern Qi dynasty (Continued)], ed. *Shandong shike yishu bowuguan* 山東石刻藝術博物館 [Shandong Stone Inscriptions Museum] (Hong Kong: Tianma Tushu Youxian Gongsi, 2003), 120–131.

[52] Liu Tao, "*Beiqi moya kejing de shuti yu lishu dazi de shuke fangfa*," 84.

[53] Kiriya Selichi 桐谷徵一, "*Beiqi dashamen an daoyi kejing shi* 北齊大沙門安道壹刻經事蹟 [Traces of Sutras Engraved by the Great Renunciant An Daoyi of the Qi dynasty]," in *Beichao moya kejing yanjiu (xu)* 北朝摩崖刻經研究 (續) [Research on the Sutras Engraved on Polished Cliff during Northern Dynasties], ed. *Shandong Sheng Shike yishu bowuguan* (Hong Kong: Tianma Tushu Youxian Gongsi, 2003), 45–91.

elements of clerical script. Therefore, this style may naturally reflect the style of sutra engraving in the late Northern Dynasties.[54] Secondly, calligraphers in the Hebei and Shandong regions may have inherited calligraphy styles from Stone Classic. Tsiang argued that the admiration and protection of the Xiping Stone Classic contributed to the revival of the clerical script in the late Northern Dynasties. In this context, sponsors in various locations choose to combine elements of both clerical and regular script to express their admiration for the engraving of sutras.[55] Moreover, as engraved sutras require carving text on stones, and the combination of clerical and regular script structures and strokes could make the text visually clearer and more accessible on the cliff surface. The combination of clerical script and regular script also improves readability and dissemination while maintaining a solemn and sacred impression.

It can be argued that the calligraphy style of the sutras engraved in the late Northern Dynasties reflected the regime's respect and protection for the Xiping Stone Classic, and the spread and demand for Buddhism. In addition, the widespread reverence for Buddhist sutras and the promotion of translation during the Northern Qi dynasty may have also promoted the activity of sutra engravings to a wider audience. Concern about the decline of Buddhism may also be one of the motivations for engraving sutras.[56] Frequent translation activities further promoted Buddhist culture development, making sutra engraving an important means of preserving and disseminating Buddhist teachings. Political and religious policies, as well as social beliefs and cultural habits, also significantly affected the development of sutra engravings during the late Northern Dynasties.[57] These combined factors determine the calligraphy style of sutras engraved in Hebei and Shandong areas.

Epigraphic Scholarship

To explore the stylistic features of calligraphy on cliff-sutra engravings from the late Northern Dynasties, firstly it is necessary to clarify the definition and features of script styles. The five main types of calligraphy are defined today as: seal script, clerical script, regular script, running script, and cursive script. However, it is difficult to accurately define the style of the all of the cliff-sutra engravings in the late Northern Dynasties as one

[54] Wang Shizheng, "The Evolution and Artistry of Chinese Characters," in *Chinese Calligraphy*, ed. Wang Youfen (London: Yale University Press, 2008), 63.
[55] Tsiang, "Monumentalization of Buddhist Texts in the Northern Qi dynasty," 253.
[56] Zhang and Goodman, "Northern Qi Inscribed Sutras and Buddha Images," 302.
[57] Discussed in detail in Chapter 1, section 1.1, pages 46–59.

of script. The definition of script names also varies across eras; contemporary scholars describe the style of engraved sutras as a combination of clerical script and regular script, assuming that the understanding of calligraphy names and styles during the Northern Dynasties was the same as it is today. However, this method is not accurate enough because the definition of the name of the script styles varies in different Dynasties.[58] To more accurately define the style of the sutra engravings, this dissertation will not only identify the names of the script styles but also explain how connoisseurs in the Song and Qing Dynasties interpreted the Buddhist stone inscriptions from the Northern Dynasties.

In the book *Chinese Calligraphy*, scholars detailed the development and characteristics of calligraphy styles, summarizing the common styles, representative works, and known calligraphers of each dynasty, which provided foundational concepts for analysis of calligraphy styles in this study.[59] However, discussion was based on modern interpretations of known calligraphy styles, overlooking the fact that the development of calligraphy styles does not always follow a chronological order. In addition, Thomas O Höllmann briefly outlines the development of various types of scripts in chronological order by dynasty.[60] Conversely, differences in the naming of calligraphy styles across several periods contribute to variations in their definitions. Most scholars believe that the calligraphy style of cliff-sutra engravings in the late Northern Dynasties mostly reflects a mixture of clerical and regular scripts.[61] Therefore, it is essential to first clarify how clerical and regular scripts were defined during the Northern Dynasties, as it is necessary to understand the standard characteristics of these two script styles when identifying them.

Based on the inconsistencies in historical documentation, various ideas have emerged surrounding the origin of clerical script. Wei Lai divided the origin of clerical script into three possible theories.[62] The initial theory holds that Wang Cizhong, a native of the Qin dynasty, developed clerical script by changing the previous calligraphic style. The second idea suggests that Cheng Miao 程邈 of the Qin dynasty created clerical script to enhance writing efficiency. The third argument states that it is impossible for one person to create

[58] Refer to Chapter 2, section 2.1, pages 67–91.
[59] See Ouyang Zhongshi and Wen C. Fong, *Chinese Calligraphy* (London: Yale University Press, 2008).
[60] Thomas O Höllmann, *Chinese Script: History, Characters, Calligraphy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 18–32.
[61] See Tsiang, "Monumentalization of Buddhist Texts in the Northern Qi dynasty," 233; Zhang and Goodman, "Northern Qi Inscribed Sutras and Buddha Images," 298; Liu, "*Beiqi moya kejing de shuti yu lishu dazi de shuke fangfa*," 84–85.
[62] Wei Lai 魏來, "*Lishu qiyuan sanshuo* 隸書起源三說 [Clerial Script Originated from Three Kinds of Methods]," *Nanchang Daxue Xuebao*, no. 4 (1980): 64–68.

the clerical script. Wei Lai references historical records, attributing the creation of clerical scripts to Wang Cizhong and Cheng Miao. However, Wang Cizhong's association with a specific dynasty remains debated.[63] Furthermore, evidence from excavated cultural relics suggests that the clerical script gradually changed during the development of the seal script, but it was not clearly defined or named at that time. Moreover, scholars Meng Yunfei and Sun Xiuming categorize the characteristics of clerical script into two types: the early Western Han clerical script, often described as a free and casual calligraphy style, and the more mature clerical script of the Eastern Han dynasty.[64] However, this classification is based on existing script nomenclature and is not entirely accurate, and this definition is also limited to clerical script during the Han dynasty.

During the Tang dynasty (618–907 CE), officials employed a refined calligraphy style to define and characterise regular script. However, there is uncertainty about the definition of regular script and the origin of its name, which has progressed over time. Li Haodong noted that regular script is also referred to as real script (*zhenshu* 真書) or standard script (*zhengshu* 正書), but these terms do not associate with the style of regular script in nowadays. He claimed that the Northern and Southern Dynasties did not associate the real script with regular script in the present meaning, nor did they consistently apply the term standard script to indicate regular script.[65] Thus, it is important to examine historical documents to understand the naming system of clerical script, regular script, and their associated calligraphic styles, as new styles frequently emerge ahead of receiving formal names.

In addition, the study of calligraphy in stone inscriptions can be traced back to the Song dynasty. Epigraphers, led by Ouyang Xiu, began exploring this field by collecting the rubbings of stone inscriptions and analyzing their calligraphy styles. Ronald Egan highlighted Ouyang Xiu's 歐陽修 (1007–1072 CE) pioneering contribution in collecting stone rubbings from ancient Chinese temples, mountaintops, and tombs. He mentioned that Ouyang was not impressed by the content of the Buddhist inscriptions in the Northern

[63] For a detailed discussion, see section 2.1, pages 67–91.
[64] Meng Yunfei 孟雲飛 and Sun Xiuming 孫秀明, "*Lishu de fazhan yanbian yu shenmei* 隸書的發展演變與審美 [The Development of Clerical Script and its Aesthetics]," *Yishu Chuanbo Yanjiu*, no. 1 (2020): 54–57.
[65] Li Haodong 李豪東, "*Zhenshu kaishu zhengshu sanzhe hanyi de bianqian* '真書''楷書''正書' 三者涵義的變遷 [The Change of the Meaning of Real Script, Regular Script and Standard Script]," *Journal of Henan University of Technology* 32, no. 5 (2014): 46–48.

Dynasties but was interested in some of their calligraphy.[66] Moreover, Amy McNair noted that because most stone inscriptions from the Northern Dynasties were anonymous, it was difficult to identify the calligraphers, leading to confusion for scholars like Ouyang Xiu when assessing and evaluating the calligraphy styles of the time. According to McNair, Huang Bosi 黃伯思 (1079–1118 CE) argued that nomadic peoples were responsible for the majority of the Northern Dynasties' stone inscriptions, which had a rough script style.[67]

This contradiction was alleviated during the Qing dynasty, when research on the calligraphy of engraved sutras began to be systematically documented during this time. Epigrapher Huang Yi conducted direct investigations of stone inscriptions which included surveys and the collection of rubbing materials in regions like Shandong. He made a comprehensive record and arrangement of Buddhist stone inscriptions in Shandong and compiled relevant literature.[68] Using rubbings and records which had been gathered by Huang Yi, Ruan Yuan 阮元 (1764–1849 CE) compiled the *Shanzuo jinshi zhi* 山左金石志 (Epigraphic Records of Shandong). After its publication, numerous documents emerged which were related to the engraved sutras during the Northern Qi dynasty.[69] In *Guang yizhou shuangji* 廣藝舟雙楫 (Expanding on Two Oars of the Ship of Art), Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927 CE) concentrated on the calligraphy of sutra engravings, which had a significant impact. During the Qing dynasty, scholars offered generalized descriptions of Northern Qi sutra engravings, without conducting any in-depth and systematic research. Their focus was concentrated only on the Shandong region. With the resurgence of epigraphy, scholars began to recognize the unique beauty of the Northern Dynasties' stone inscriptions. Yet, few modern studies have explored the characteristics of Buddhist stone inscription calligraphy from the Northern Dynasties that specifically examine the reasons behind this shift in perception.

Additionally, this dissertation considers rubbings as important research materials to analyze the calligraphy style of cliff-sutras engravings in the late Northern Dynasties.

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[66] Ronald Egan, *The Problem of Beauty: Aesthetic Thought and Pursuits in Northern Song Dynasty China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006), 32–33.

[67] Amy McNair, "Engraved Calligraphy in China: Recension and Reception," *The Art Bulletin* 77, no. 1 (1995): 111–112.

[68] Such as Illustrations and Records of Inscriptions at Dai Lu (*Dai Lu fangbeitu* 岱麓訪碑圖) and Dia Yan Diary of Ancient Visits (*Dai Yan fanggu riji* 岱岩訪古日記)

[69] Such as Steles in Shandong (*Shanzuo beimu* 山左碑目), Record of Visits to Steles (*Huanyu fangbei lu* 寰宇訪碑錄), Refined Collection of Inscriptions on Bronzes and Steles (*Jinshi Cuibian* 金石萃編), Talking Stone (*Yushi* 語石).

When discussing calligraphy style, the effect of rubbings on the style analyzis of the original stone inscriptions should be addressed. Yunchiahn C. Sena claimed that the collections of epigraphers were limited to rubbings, ignoring the physical properties and location of the originals.[70] Harrist showed that scholars studying engraved sites often paid little attention to the relationships between groups of inscriptions or the significance of their landscape contexts.[71] Instead, the main goal of antiquarian tourism was often to make rubbings. He mentioned that epigraphical scholars were not concerned about the separation of rubbings from the source of inscriptions.[72] Unlike engravings on stones, rubbings promote calligraphy research by replicating inscriptions. Rubbings flattened the three-dimensional form of the inscriptions, which may affect the calligraphy styles. The separation of rubbings from their original stone engraving context and their sole use as form of written art prevents a comprehensive understanding of the meaning of Buddhist sutras. From this perspective, Harrist highlights that the focus of the Buddhist stone inscription projects were not on calligraphic beauty but on the ability to impose a significant mark on the landscape. The characters carved at the mountain were aimed at sanctifying the surroundings and enhancing the ritual value.[73] Harrist explains this with an example from Mount Tie, focusing on the sutra engravings and their accompanying colophons. He concludes that the sponsors at Mount Tie augmented the worth of a sutra section by opting for a monumental scale, employing a stele format, and highlighting the aesthetic of the calligraphy.[74] Moreover, discussions of calligraphic expertise and aesthetic evaluation in the colophons further enhanced its significance. Harrist argues that, beyond preserving the teachings of Buddha and accumulating merit for the sponsors, Buddhist sutra passages also served to sanctify Mount Tie as a sacred site.[75] Therefore, it is important to recognize the interconnection between sutra engravings, rubbings and their environmental contexts.

Wu Hung also examines the relationship between stone inscriptions and rubbings. He claims that while stone inscriptions may appear enduring, they ultimately prove to be ephemeral compared to rubbings, which encapsulate a single moment in time. Connoisseurs often seek out early rubbings to obtain a more faithful reproduction of the original stone inscriptions. If the stone inscriptions are destroyed, rubbings can still serve

[70] Yun-chiahn C. Sena, *Bronze and Stone: The Cult of Antiquity in Song dynasty China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019), 27–28.
[71] Harrist, *The Landscape of Words,* 21.
[72] Ibid., 20.
[73] Ibid., 111–112.
[74] Ibdi., 156.
[75] Ibdi., 161–162

as an important substitute for "reality" preserving historical moments in static images.[76] In addition, Amy McNair points out that the importance of rubbings lies not in their content but in their ability to convey the style of the calligrapher. As time progressed, original ink works gradually faded, and stone rubbings became the main medium for preserving the style of ancient masters.[77]

However, engraved sutras sanctify the landscape, making text inseparable from the surroundings. The orientation and texture of the rough stone surface, in turn, had an impact on the calligraphy style of the sutra engravings. Epigraphers tend to focus on more than just the calligraphy of rubbings, which cannot fully capture the styles of the sutra engravings. Thus, to analyze the calligraphy style, it is important to examine the missing elements in the rubbings of cliff-sutra engravings. In order to better understand the connection between rubbings and stone inscriptions, it is necessary to classify and explain the two arrangements of rubbings, namely, stele (*bei* 碑) and model-letters (*tie* 帖).

Rubbings are ink-on-paper reproductions of engraved or cast inscriptions and designs present on cultural items, primarily made of metal, stone, and other solid materials. Placing a dampened sheet of paper on the surface of an engraved stone and smearing it with Bletilla root or glue creates rubbings. Brushes of varying hardness then mold the wet paper into the depressions of the stone surface, highlighting the details of the engraving. A silk pad filled with cotton wool or husks inks the nearly dry paper surface, turning the relief parts black and the intaglio parts white.[78] This process allows the engraved text or pattern to be preserved. One common way to preserve the rubbings is to fold them into bundles or mount them as scrolls or albums.

Rubbings, also known as *beitie* 碑帖, are divided into two categories.[79] As shown in Fig. 15, *bei* 碑 refers to rubbings made from existing stone inscriptions, including steles, epitaphs, cliff engravings, and others.[80] In contrast, *tie* 帖 refers to rubbings which are not

[76] Wu Hung, "On Rubbings: Their Materiality and Historicity," in *Writing and Materiality in China,* ed. Judith T. Zeitlin, Lydia H. Liu, and Ellen Widmer (Cambridge: Harvard-Yenching Institute monograph series 58, 2003), 45–48.
[77] McNair, "Engraved Calligraphy in China: Recension and Reception," 106.
[78] Lia Wei and Michael Long, "Entexted Heritage: Calligraphy and the (Re) Making of a Tradition in Contemporary China," *China Perspectives*, no. 3 (2021): 4.
[79] Elizabeth Brotherton, "In Pursuit of a Lost Southern Song Stele and Its Maker," *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 49, no. 1 (2020): 298.
[80] Shi Xiongbo, "The Embodied Art: An Aesthetics of Chinese Calligraphy," (Ph.D. diss., University of Canterbury, 2017), 20–21.

directly derived from the original stone inscriptions but from copying famous calligraphy works, re-engraving the calligraphy texts on the wood or stone, and then making rubbings and binding them into albums [Fig. 16].[81]

The original purpose of the *bei,* stele was to record important events. The purpose of *tie* was to provide a model for copying calligraphy and to pass on the ancient handwriting to future generations. The content of the *tie* type primarily consists of letters, poems, and articles, presented in various forms, whereas the *bei* follows a relatively fixed style. In addition, the calligraphy styles found on the *bei* type primarily consist of solemn and formal seal scripts, clerical scripts, and regular scripts, all of which are authorized scripts used by various Dynasties. In contrast, the script styles of *tie* are diverse. As long as the texts and calligraphy are worthy of preservation and promotion, the *tie* type may incorporate some cursive scripts or running scripts that are uncommon in *bei*. The majority of *bei* rubbings are from tall vertical steles, whereas *tie* rubbings are primarily from horizontal tablets. Moreover, the paper used for *bei* and *tie* rubbings are also different. Stele usually exists in natural environments; when exposed to wind and rain, the part of stones can fall off, create gaps, or weather into mottled, uneven textures. Thus, thicker paper is required for text on natural stone surfaces to prevent potential damage caused by friction. Thinner paper is needed for *tie*, because it is usually written in small script with fine strokes.[82]

Overall, the Northern Dynasties first engraved a significant number of Buddhist sutras on the cliff walls. The scale, breadth, quantity, and artistry of these works are unprecedented in the history of Chinese calligraphy.[83] Their sudden appearance can be attributed to a variety of religious, social, and political factors. The widespread spread of Buddhism, coupled with the state-sponsored translation of Buddhist scriptures by the Northern Qi government, reflects the political significance of Buddhism in this era.[84] Therefore, the engraved sutra calligraphy of this period is not only an important calligraphy work in the history of Buddhist art, but also a political, social, and cultural monument, and the beginning and peak of engraved sutra calligraphy.

[81] Wu, “On Rubbings,” 31.
[82] For the classification and production of rubbing, please refer to: K. Starr, *Black Tigers: A Grammar of Chinese Rubbings*, China Program book (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008).
[83] Zhan and Goodman, "Northern Qi Inscribed Sutras and Buddha Images," 285–287.
[84] Tsiang, "Monumentalization of Buddhist Texts in the Northern Qi Dynasty," 259.

In addition, the cliff-sutra engravings combined the ancient Chinese worship of mountains with Buddhist scriptures to create a unique engraving calligraphy. During the Northern Qi Dynasty, regular script was the main writing style, and clerical script was basically no longer used in daily writing. Moreover, as early as the Northern Wei Dynasty, most inscriptions and epitaphs were already written in regular script.[85] However, the cliff-sutra engravings in the Northern Qi mainly used mixed script styles, which were mainly based on clerical script. On the other hand, sutra engravings combine Buddhist ideas with ancient Chinese stone inscription culture, using carved calligraphy to express Buddhist ideas. These engravings show styles of writing influenced by Buddhism and reflect how religious ideas affected artistic expression. And cliff-sutra engravings present a creative challenge since they are large-scale, incorporated with the natural landscape, and need engraving processes. All these factors impact calligraphy style choices. But the calligraphy of sutra engravings from the late Northern Dynasties had not been widely studied.

Furthermore, due to the distinct calligraphic characteristics of these cliff-sutra engravings, the anonymity of their creators, and their emergence within a flourishing Buddhist culture, scholars across different periods have interpreted them in different ways. Antiquarians from the Song and Qing Dynasties, offered contrasting evaluations. Because the calligraphy of sutra engravings from this period often defies strict stylistic classifications, leaving possibility for different scholarly interpretations. The style could be praised or criticized, depending on aesthetic and ideological preferences—highlighting the unstable and contested place of Northern Qi calligraphy. Thus, the use of calligraphy styles in these cliff-sutra engravings is a central part of this research.

Style (*fengge* 風格)

The style reflects a calligrapher's aesthetic personality in their work. Sometimes, Chinese calligraphy utilizes terms such as "flesh", "bone", "sinew", "blood", and "veins" to assess the calligraphy styles. These metaphors apply to the visual depiction of written characters and encompass the calligrapher's emotional, psychological, and even physical characteristics. The connection between the Chinese phrase for body (*ti* 體) and the term style (*fengge* 風格) is apparent in their translation.[86] In addition, calligraphy style can be

[85] See Li Yuqun 李裕群, "*Yecheng Diqu Shiku Yu Kejing* 鄴城地區石窟與刻經," *Kaogu Xuebao*, no. 4 (1997): 443–479.

[86] Peter Charles Sturman, *Mi Fu: Style and the Art of Calligraphy in Northern Song China* (London: Yale

regarded as the characteristics and personality presented by the calligrapher in their creation, forming a relatively stable artistic style through their practice. Calligraphy style has three main meanings: firstly, it refers to the demeanor and character of the calligrapher; secondly, it refers to the quality of the calligraphy works; and thirdly, it refers to the overall characteristics of the calligraphy, from content to method. Style in Chinese calligraphy can also be divided into two systems: script style (*ziti* 字體) and calligraphy style (*shuti* 書體). As a writing system, script style refers to the characteristic of the entire writing system. Calligraphy style refers to the personal style of calligraphers and the individual style of calligraphy works.

Huang Jian proposed that script style and calligraphy style are two distinct concepts. He explained that any unified writing system adhering to common structural principles and forms can be termed as a script style, while calligraphy style is defined from the perspective of writing. Any text that exhibits common characteristics or demonstrates a mature artistic style during the writing process can be defined as a calligraphy style; this present study follows this concept.[87] Script style refers to the various forms Chinese characters have taken throughout their historical development. In the early stages, the concepts of script styles and calligraphy styles overlapped, and mainly included seal script, clerical script, regular script, running script, and cursive script [Fig. 17]. However, calligraphy style has a broader meaning, extending to the stylistic field of calligraphic art. For example, the regular script written by Ouyang Xun (557–641 CE) is known as Ou calligraphy style (*outi* 歐體), and Yan calligraphy style (*yanti* 顏體) refers to the regular script by Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿 (709–785 CE). Fig. 18 shows the different calligraphy styles of "*shu* 書" by different calligraphers. For example, Yan Zhenqing's regular script style is characterized by a dignified and rigorous structure, presenting an overall style of stability and authority. Its strokes are horizontal and vertical, with clear variations in line thickness, conveying a sense of strength and rhythm. In contrast, Zhao Mengfu's regular script style exhibits a different calligraphy style, with a greater upward tilt in horizontal strokes, creating a sense of dynamism and flexibility. It can be seen that although they all use regular script, the structure and strokes of the characters written by different calligraphers are different. In this dissertation, script styles refer to the five main styles list

University Press, 1997), 7.

[87] Huang Jian 黃簡, *Zhonguo gudai shufashi de fenqi he tixi* 中國古代書法史的分期和體系 [The Stages and System of Ancient Chinese Calligraphy History] (Shanghai: Shuhua Chubanshe, 1985), 93.

above. Calligraphy styles are the variations with different individual characteristics derived from these five main script styles.

Basic calligraphy styles

During the early history of Chinese writing, a variety of scripts emerged, but the five basic scripts list above dominated and were used in subsequent centuries. This basic categorization is general, grouping characters with specific stroke features and structural traits into a single style. While useful for classification, it may overlook subtle nuances in practice.

Seal script (*zhuanshu* 篆書): Seal script includes both great seal script and small seal script. During the Qin dynasty, the most common script type was the small seal script, which was characterized by horizontal and vertical lines of equivalent thickness and structural features generally in the form of a vertical rectangle. The small seal script typically has more features in the upper half of a character, with more blank space, and fewer lines in the lower half [Fig. 19].

Clerical script (*lishu* 隸書): Clerical script reached its mature stage after the reign of Han Emperor Wudi 漢武帝 (140–87 BCE). The character's width is greater than their height, and features long, wavy horizontal lines. The left and right strokes extend in both directions, with the tip pointing slightly upward at the end. Fig. 20 illustrates an example of written characters from the first century CE, which are squat and have a wavy appearance due to the thick tail and upward sloping end.

Cursive script (*caoshu* 草書): Cursive script became popular during the Eastern Han dynasty as a tool to simplify the writing of clerical script. This is characterized by smooth strokes which simplify the omission of certain strokes and structures, and the occasional connection of adjacent strokes characterize this style [Fig. 21].

Running script (*xingshu* 行書): The prototype of running script first appeared in the late Eastern Han dynasty. Running script is an informal, more quickly paced type of writing in which standard script characters are slightly simplified and brushstrokes within a single character are often linked. This style typically has smoother writing and simpler characters [Fig. 22].

Regular script (*kaishu* 楷書): Regular script was completely mature in the Tang dynasty, and its strokes, points, brushwork, and font structure had strict rules. The characters are square, and the strokes are clear and crisp. Fig. 23 shows an example of a regular script style commonly used in the 7th century. This style features symmetrical, and balanced characters and the horizontal stroke is low on the left side and high on the right side.

Terminology

Eight Methods of the Character Yong (*yong zi bafa* 永字八法)

The Eight Methods of the Character Yong is a basic brushwork rule of Chinese calligraphy, generally attributed to monk Zhiyong 智永 during the Sui dynasty. It explains the writing method of standard script (*zhengkai* 正楷) through the eight strokes of the character *yong* 永, meaning forever. These strokes include *ce* 側 (slanting dot), *le* 勒 (horizontal stroke), *nu* 努 (vertical stroke), *ti* 趯 (hook), *ce* 策 (slightly upward tick), *lüe* 掠 (left-falling stroke), *zhuo* 啄 (left-falling short stroke), and *zhe* 磔 (right-falling stroke). Nowadays, these stokes are referred to as "fundamental strokes" (*jiben bihua* 基本筆畫) and are given the corresponding names: *dian* 點, *heng* 橫, *shu* 豎, *gou* 鉤, *tiao* 挑, *wan* 彎, *pie* 撇, *na* 捺 [Fig. 24].[88]

According to the *Forbidden Classic of the Jade Hall* (*Yutang Jin Jing* 玉堂禁經) in the section on "brushwork technique" (*bifa* 筆法) of the *Collection of the Ink Pond* (*Mochi bian* 墨池邊), the writing methods of the eight strokes are explained. These methods are quoted below:

> 側不得平其筆。
> As for the inclined stroke (*ce* 側) [i.e., dot -stroke], it should not be even.
> 勒不得臥其筆。
> As for the puled stroke (*le* 勒) [i.e., horizontal stroke], it should not be down.
> 弩不得直，直則無力。

[88] Pietro De Laurentis, "Oring, Authorship, and Interpretation of Yong zi ba fa (The Eight Methods of the Character Yong) a set of Technical Precepts for Chinese Calligraphy," *Monumenta Serica* 62, no. 1 (2014): 111–112.

> The drawn stroke (*nu* 努) [i.e., vertical stroke] should not be straight. [If it is] straight, it lacks strength.
> 趯須蹲其鋒，得勢而出。
> For the hop stroke (*ti* 趯) [i.e., hook-stroke] bend the tip [of the brush], [then] drive it out after gaining the configuration [of the stroke].
> 策須背筆，仰而策之。
> For the whip stroke (*ce* 策) [i.e., right-rising stroke] reverse the brush, raise it up and then whip it.
> 掠須筆鋒，左出而利。
> [When] the sweep stroke (*lüe* 掠) [i.e., left-falling stroke] has come down to a sharp point, one leaves leftwards with a pointy end.
> 啄須臥筆疾罨。
> For the peck stroke (*zhuo* 啄) [i.e., short left-falling stroke] the [tip of the] brush should be laid down, but should swiftly cover [the surface].
> 磔須趨筆，戰行右出。
> For the chop stroke (*zhe* 磔) [i.e., right-falling stroke] the brush should be waving, [like soldiers] advancing on the battlefield, and [finally] should leave rightwards.[89]

Brushwork (*bifa* 筆法), character structure (*zifa* 字法) and textual composition (*zhangfa* 章法)

The majority of Chinese characters consist of eight strokes, and calligraphy extends beyond a mere sequence of strokes. Brushwork, character structure, and textual composition are the three main components of calligraphy.

Brushwork refers primarily to creating characters with artistic qualities by applying dots and strokes. The brushwork concept encompasses the fundamentals of holding, moving, and managing the brush and practicing variations in pressure, speed, angle, and curve to present artistic qualities in calligraphy.[90] Holding the brush (*zhibi* 執筆) can affect the strokes' strength and fluidity. Moving the brush (*yunbi* 運筆) means the movement of the

[89] Zhu Changwen 朱長文 (1039-1098), *Mochi bian*, 20 *juan*, 2 vols., (Taibei: Guoli zhongyang tushuguan, 1970), *juan* 2, 137-151. English translation in Pietro De Laurentis, "The Forbidden Classic of the Fade Hall: A Study of an Eleventh-Century Compendium on Calligraphic Technique," *Asia Major*, (2011): 143.
[90] Huang Binghong 黃賓虹, "*Bifa yaozhi* 筆法要旨 [Main Brushwork Technics]," *Zhongguo Shufa*, no. 12 (2003): 6.

brush on paper during writing, including the processes of starting, executing, and finishing the strokes. Applying the brush (*yongbi* 用筆) implicates the details of the strokes, such as pressure, speed, angle, and curvature, which together convey the rhythm and force of a character.[91]

Character structure refers to a Chinese character's arrangement and the combination of strokes. The arrangement, connection, and matching of each character's dots and strokes vary when writing using different script styles. Each character has a specific order and varying position of strokes, which determines the structure of the character. In addition, the connection between the strokes should conform to the writing rules of Chinese characters. The relationship between the dots and strokes, such as density, length, and thickness, should be reasonably matched.[92]

Textual composition refers to the arrangement of Chinese characters and involves arranging the work's primary and secondary relationships, sparse and dense relationships, connection relationships, echo relationships, relative positioning relationships, and the relationships between characters, lines, and correspondences.[93]

Wei-stele style 魏碑體, Northern Liang style 北涼體, sutra writing style 寫經體

Currently, it is widely recognized that these three script styles, based on the regular script, represent the primary writing styles of the Northern Dynasties. Providing a basic definition of these styles facilitates a clearer discussion in the subsequent text.

Wei-stele style refers to a mainstream form of stone calligraphy in the Northern Wei dynasty. This style is exemplified by the royal and noble tombstones excavated around Luoyang. The Qing dynasty epigraphs refer to the Wei-stele, which are the stone inscriptions of the Northern Wei dynasty. However, in a broader sense, the Wei-stele generally refers to the stone inscriptions of the Northern Dynasties, with the Northern Wei dynasty being the most famous examples.

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[91] Hu Ruinian 胡瑞年 and hen Chao 陳超, "*Qianxi shufa zhi bifa zifa zhangfa* 淺析書法之'筆法, 字法, 章法.'[A Brief Analysis of the Brushwork, Character Structure and Textual Composition of Calligraphy]," *Zhishi jingji*, no. 2 (2011): 179–180.

[92] Refer to the character structure for details, See Su Peicheng 蘇培成, "*Xiandai hanzi de gouzifa* 現代漢字的構字法 [The Construction of Modern Chinese Characters]," *Yuyan wenzi yingyong*, no. 4 (1994): 113–117.

[93] Meng Lingqi 孟令琦, "*Qiantan zhuanfa zhangfa daofa jiqi xianghu guanxi* 淺談篆法, 章法, 刀法及其相互關係 [Brief Discussion on Seal Script Method, Textual Composition, Engravings Method and Mutual Relations]," *Shuhua shijie*, no. 5 (2013): 83.

Northern Liang style refers to the style of calligraphy that was popular in Liangzhou and the surrounding western areas in the early fifth century. It is more typical of Northern Liang writings, hence the name "Northern Liang style". This type of calligraphy features square and flat characters, narrow at the top and wide at the bottom, with horizontal strokes that curl upward at the ends. Its style is a mix of clerical script and regular script. Existing cultural relics divide the Northern Liang style into four categories: scripture writing, pagoda inscriptions, Buddhist temple steles, and tomb tablets.[94]

With the introduction of Buddhism, the act of translating and copying sutras flourished, and sutra writing became a profession. Sutra writing is the process of using paper and ink to copy Buddhist texts for propaganda and wider dissemination. Sutra writing encompasses scriptures, notes, phrases, votive texts, invitation texts, confession texts, sacrificial texts, and monk biographies. Early sutra writing followed a standard format, with lines separated and this formed a writing style known as the sutra writing style.[95]

Intention and Organization of the Thesis

The cliff-engraved sutras of the late Northern Dynasties represent a form of Buddhist engraving that combines characters with stones and the surrounding environment. These Buddhist stone inscriptions exist as texts that require participants to move around space to read, appreciate, or perform Buddhist practices. The main body of this dissertation, which is organized into four chapters ranging from Chapter 1 to Chapter 4, concentrates on the investigation of the calligraphic style of these sutra engravings.

Examining sutra engravings predating the Sui dynasty could provide valuable insights into the origins and importance of the later emergence of large-scale cliff-sutra engravings during the late Northern Dynasties. This investigation can also serve as a basis for examining the calligraphy styles used in these engravings. Thus, the initial part of Chapter 1 examines the origin and progression of sutra engravings, spanning from the Han dynasty to the Northern Dynasties. It also examines the development of sutra engravings in China

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[94] The concept of Northern Liang Style was first proposed by Shi Anchang, see Shi Anchang 施安昌, "*Beiliang ti xi - tantao shufa de difang ti* 北涼體析-探討書法的地方體 [Bei Liang Style Analysis - Explore the Local Style of Calligraphy]," in *Shanben beitie lunji* 善本碑帖論集 [A Collection of Inscriptions] (Beijing: Zijincheng Chubanshe, 2022), 242.

[95] Shang Rong 尚榮, "*Fojiao shufa xiejingti yu xiejingsheng* 佛教書法寫經體與寫經生 [Buddhist Calligraphy Sutra Writing Style and Sutra Writing Peoples]," *Minzu Yishu*, no. 3 (2013): 150–153.

during the Northern Wei dynasty, starting with the early practice of ink-writing sutras on stone walls, progressing to sutra engravings on stupas, and continuing with the construction of grottoes and the engraving of sutras on steles. Consequently, a large quantity of sutra engravings were found on natural mountain cliffs and caves during the Northern Qi dynasty. No matter what the reason was for engraving these sutras, like showing devotion to the Buddhist doctrine, gaining merit through Buddhist rituals, or preserving them, the engravings combined text with Buddhist meaning. Exploring the origin and development of engraved sutras and understanding the writing styles of engraved sutras used in different periods play a fundamental role in studying the choice of calligraphy styles for cliff-sutra engravings in the late Northern Dynasties.

In addition, the emergence of a large number of cliff-sutra engravings during the Northern Qi dynasty is closely related to the historical background, social and political structure, culture, and Buddhist practice of the time. The second half of Chapter 1 will examine the impact of the turbulent social environment of the Northern Dynasties and the cultural integration of nomadic peoples with the Central Plains people on the development of Buddhism. Combined with the widespread practices of sutra translation and copying during the Northern Dynasties, sutras were translated into Chinese, then recorded and copied in written form for wider dissemination. Therefore, the handwriting of sutras needed to be relatively neat, and the copying speed was required to be fast. These factors led to a relatively fixed writing style, later known as the sutra writing style. This style represents the refinement of an established calligraphy style during the spread and increasing impact of Buddhism at this time.[96] The transition from writing sutras to engraving them, the support of Buddhism by the Northern Qi emperor and notable officials, and the ideological concepts of the Dharma Ending Age, among other factors, all played a significant role in the emergence of cliff-sutra engravings during the late Northern Dynasties. The development of the early writing style of sutras also affected the choice of calligraphy style for cliff-sutra engravings. Therefore, the first chapter aims to analyze the historical background of the Northern Dynasties to explore the causes of sutra engraving activities, and examine how the historical and religious context impacted the choice of calligraphy style.

[96] Jiang Shoutian 姜壽田, *Wei Jin Nanbeichao Shufashi Gao* 魏晉南北朝書法史稿 [Calligraphy History of Wei, Jin, Southern, and Northern Dynasties] (Shanghai: Shuhua Chubanshe, 2023), 296–298.

Chapter 2 explains how calligraphy was interpreted in the late Northern Dynasties. As the precise definition of the writing style of the cliff-sutra engravings in the late Northern Dynasties is still unclear, most scholars have argued that the calligraphic style of the cliff-sutra engravings is a mixture of both clerical script and regular script. In order to define the style, part 2.1 explores the classification and characterization of calligraphy names and styles during the Northern Dynasties through the analysis of historical documents. This specifically discusses the definitions of clerical script and regular script, along with their respective physical appearances. Section 2.2 examines the perspectives of Song and Qing connoisseurs on Northern Dynasties Buddhist stone inscriptions and attempt to show how the social and political context and the classification of Chinese calligraphy affected their interpretations. It also investigates the criteria which scholars have used to assess the aesthetic and cultural value of the calligraphic styles of Buddhist stone inscriptions from this period, and how these criteria have changed over time. This section also explores how the interpretation of Buddhist stone inscriptions from the Northern Dynasties served as a platform for individuals or larger groups to express their constructed identities.

Based on the definition and analysis of the names of the clerical script and regular script in the Northern Dynasties in Chapter 2, Chapter 3 focuses on the study of the sutra engravings in the North and South Xiangtangshan Caves and Mount Zhonghuang in Hebei Province, as well as the engraved sutras in Mount Hongding, Mount Tai, and Mount Gang in Shandong Province. Section 3.1 first explains the distribution and content of the sutra engravings in these regions, and section 3.2 explains scholars' understanding of the combination of clerical script and regular scripts in cliff-sutra engravings in the Hebei and Shandong regions through specific classification, comparison, and analysis of the structure and calligraphy stroke characteristics. Furthermore, the choice of calligraphy style is also inseparable from the effect of sponsors and craftsmen. This section will also briefly examine how these factors affected the calligraphy style of the cliff-sutra engravings in the late Northern Dynasties.

The research materials used in this dissertation include photographs of the original engraved sutras and their rubbings. The white characters on the rubbings, set against a black background, often reproduce the carved surface more clearly than photographs. For epigraphers, rubbings are easier to collect and better preserve the original features of the calligraphy art. However, rubbings turn the three-dimensional Chinese characters on the stone into a two-dimensional surface, separating the texts from their intended surroundings. Thus, Chapter 4 studies the relationship between ink writings, rubbings, and

stone inscriptions and discusses the changes in calligraphy styles caused by using these different materials. Furthermore, by removing the engraved sutras from their natural locations and possibly changing some aesthetic factors, rubbings reduce the effect of the landscape in the religious context. This chapter also summarizes the characteristics of the cliff-sutra engravings of the late Northern Dynasties by establishing the differences between various materials.

Note

Unless otherwise noted, all English translations of Chinese texts are my own.
For the information on the China Dynasty Timeline, see pages 182–184.

1 Buddhist Scripture Engravings with Calligraphy

During the late Northern Dynasties of the sixth century, the flourishing of cliff-sutra engravings in China was a result of integrating Buddhist practice with social, cultural, and political elements. This text-based Buddhist art form transformed the previously anthropomorphic icon and introduced traditional stone inscription calligraphy into Buddhist practice combined with the landscape to create an aniconic scriptural system of material culture.[97] These engravings focus on Buddhist teachings, aiming to convey its principles and philosophies. Thus, the selected calligraphic style should, to some extent, reflect Buddhism's spiritual essence. To explore this topic in detail, this chapter starts with the origins of cliff-sutra engravings and combined with a discussion of historical, political, cultural, and religious background of the late Northern Dynasties, and explores the reasons for their emergence and their impact on the selection and style of calligraphy on the cliff-sutra engravings.

1.1 The Origins and Development of Engraved Sutras

The practice of engraving Buddhist doctrine onto stone dates back to the time of Ashoka the Great in India (ca. 274–232 BCE).[98] To promote Buddhism and ensure adherence to the law, Ashoka constructed stone pillars and cliff engravings throughout the country, inscribing them with edicts and admonitions known as the "Edicts of Ashoka". Ashoka engraved these edicts to propagate Buddhist doctrines, with the intention of strengthening respect for Buddhism and establishing guidelines for societal morality. The practice of these engraved edicts may have served as the basis for the subsequent dissemination of engraved sutras in China.[99]

During the Eastern Han dynasty, Buddhism was officially introduced to China in 67 CE by merchants from Central and Southeast Asia.[100] It quickly gained favor among the elite and

[97] Ledderose and Wang, *Buddhist Stone Sutras in China: Shandong Province Volume 1*, 30.
[98] John Marshall, *The Buddhist Art of Gandhara: The Story of the Early School; Its Birth, Growth and Decline* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 7.
[99] More than 30 surviving inscriptions and pillars are attributed to Ashoka. See Harry Falk, *Aśokan sites and artefacts: A source-book with bibliography* (Verlag Philipp Von Zabern: Mainz am Rhein, 2006), 57; *Wusheng zhi ge: 2008 yindu chaosheng zhuanji* 無聲之歌: 2008 印度朝聖專輯 [Silent Songs: 2008 Indian Pilgrimage Album] , *Xiangguang Solemn Magazine*, (2009): 125–127.
[100] Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist conquest of China: the spread and adaptation of Buddhism in early medieval China*, vol. 11 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 24.

gradually permeated all levels of society. Buddhist beliefs provided a new vision of humanity's place in the universe and introduced institutions transcending familial, geographical, and political hierarchies. Buddhism fulfilled social, emotional, and intellectual needs that the old cults of the ancestors, gods of soil and grain, and sacrifices to Heaven could not address.[101] Driven by this spirit, numerous sutras were translated and disseminated. The sutras, as the classics that preserve the teachings of the Buddha, are one of the three Jewels of Buddhism, representing the Dharma offering.[102] The Buddha's words are considered to be the embodiment of Buddha's essence which contain sacred meaning, and can be worshipped as sacred objects for spiritual support. As stated in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* (*Daban niepan jing* 大般涅槃經), seeing a Buddhist scripture is equivalent to seeing the Buddha.[103] Therefore, reciting and copying Buddhist sutras is not only a religious practice that helps explain and promote the Buddha's teachings, but is also a way to accumulate merit that can bring blessings to the donor himself or others.

During the Wei, Jin, Southern, and Northern Dynasties, as Buddhist sutras were interpreted and circulated, sutra-writing groups began to form. Within these groups, a person who acted as a pen-taker (*bishou* 筆受), writing down the words of the translators and recording them. The individual serving as a pen-taker needed to have noble character and be capable of self-cultivation, as well as having outstanding literary talent and calligraphy skills, because their calligraphy style often set the standard for the translation team.[104] In addition, the translation of sutras into Chinese remained a primary focus for both Buddhist ministries and their lay supporters. The state frequently played a significant role as a major sponsor of translation efforts. Traditional Buddhist principles underpinned the emphasis on sacred texts and the respect shown for them, and the high regard the Chinese elite held for the written word contributed to the development of a typical calligraphic style.[105] The continuous development of the Buddhist sutra translation group during the Northern Liang period (397–439 CE) led to the formation of a specific writing rules within the sutra copying group, resulting in the development of a relatively fixed calligraphy style, named

[101] Lewis, *China between Empires*, 196.
[102] The Three Jewels of Buddhism: Buddha, dharma (the teaching), and sangha (the monks). See sentence from the Mahāsaṃnipāta Sūtra: 生身供養者即是塔像，法身供養者書寫讀誦十二部經。[Physical offerings refer to stupa and statue worship, while spiritual offerings involve the writing and recitation of the twelve divisions of the Buddhist sutras.] (T0397_.13.0214b10–11).
[103] Original text: 見法者即是見佛。[To see the Dharma is to see the Buddha.] (T0374_.12.0524a29).
[104] Cui Zhonghui 崔中慧, "*Fojia chuqi xiejingfang shezhi lice* 佛教初期寫經坊設置蠡測 [The Setting of Early Buddhist Writing Groups]," *Taiwan Journal of Buddhist Studies*, no. 32 (2016): 102.
[105] Mario Poceski, "Buddhism in Chinese history," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to East and Inner Asian Buddhism*, (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 46.

the sutra writing style.[106] This practice of incorporating Buddhist spirit into Chinese calligraphy ensures that the writing style of Buddhist scriptures is both readable and solemn.[107] As shown in Fig. 25, although different individuals transcribed these ink-writing sutras, their calligraphy style was almost uniform. This writing style reflects the standardization of calligraphy for copying sutras at that time.[108] In this process, calligraphy became not only a medium for conveying words, but also a means of expressing religious virtue and artistic culture.

In addition to spreading Buddhist ideas by copying a large number of sutras, a section of the ink-written *Ajātaśatru-kaukṛtyavinodana Sūtra* (*Weicengyou zhengfa jing* 未曾有正法經) found on the wall of Cave 169 of Bingling Temple in Yongjing County, Gansu Province shows that the spread of Buddhist doctrine not only relied on paper copying, but also on writing upon cave walls to achieve the practice of Buddhism.[109] Compared with paper copying, writing sutras on the walls of caves reflects the integration of Buddhism and the natural environment, making the flat text and the three-dimensional environment complement each other. In the process of assisting the practice of Buddhism, the script style used also carries the spiritual symbols of Buddhism to a certain extent. Many scholars believe that the remains of the ink-written sutras on the walls of Cave 169 may have inspired the later practice of sutra engravings.[110]

The development of sutra engravings before the Sui dynasty can be divided into three stages.[111] First, with the translation of numerous sutras and the introduction of Indian stupas, the demand for Buddhist sutras, statues, and stupas increased, leading to the creation of Buddhist stone stupas during the Northern Liang period in the Sixteen Kingdoms.[112] The fourteen stone pagodas from the Northern Liang period, excavated mainly in the Hexi Corridor and Turpan, Xinjiang [Fig. 26], included seven with the *Ekottarāgama* (*Zengyi ahan jing* 增壹阿含經) which focused on the "Twelve Links of

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[106] For the terminology of sutra writing style refer to Introduction, pages 40–43.
[107] Cui, "*Fojia chuqi xiejingfang shezhi lice*," 110–111.
[108] Shi Pingtin 施萍婷, *Gansu dunhuang wenxian* 甘肅藏敦煌文獻 [Dunhuang Documents in Gansu Province], vol. 1 (Lanzhou: Gansu Renmin Chubanshe, 1999), 271.
[109] Lai Fei, *Shandong Beichao Fojiao Moya Kejing Diaocha Yu Yanjiu*, 215.
[110] For a summary of the contents of Cave 169 in Bingling Temple, see Dong Yuxiang 董玉祥 and Wang Hengtong 王亨通, "*Binglinsi 169 ku gaishu* 炳林寺 169 窟概述 [Binglin Temple 169 Cave Overview]," in *Yongjing Binglinsi shiku yanjiu wenji* 永靖炳林寺石窟研究文集 [Yongjing Binglin Temple Grottoes Research Collection], vol. 2, ed. Zheng Binglin 鄭炳林 and Shi Jingsong 石勁松 (Lanzhou: Gansu Wenhua Chubanshe, 2011), 1233–1241.
[111] Lai Fei, *Shandong beichao fojiao moya kejing diaocha yu yanjiu*, 215.
[112] Chung-hui Tsui, *Chinese Calligraphy and Early Buddhist Manuscripts* (Oxford, North Canterbury, New Zealand: Indica et Buddhica, 2020), 86.

Dependent Origination" engraved on the tower body, with the vows of the individual sponsors carved on the tower base. These seven stone stupas date from 426 to 436.[113] These stone stupas are engraved with both statues and sutras, reflecting the combination of "life-body offering" and "Dharma-body offering". The stupa is a symbol of Tathagata, Nirvana, and Dharma.[114] The seven Buddhas and Maitreya statues on the top of the pagoda represent the image of Buddha. The basic Buddhist doctrines engraved on the body symbolize "Dharma." Sponsors built stupas to accumulate merit, while monks in monasteries used donated stupas for worship offerings and meditation.[115] Beiliang stone stupas combined Buddha images with the text. These stupas not only served as objects for the worship of the Dharma, but they also elevated the role of the engraved sutras from simple objects for viewing and reading to promoting Buddhism and providing spiritual sustenance. Through these written words believers seem to communicate with the Buddha, making the text a symbol of religious belief and a bridge of spiritual connection.[116]

During the Northern Liang era, the transition from writing sutras on paper to engraving sutras on stone maintained a consistent style of calligraphy and writing arrangement. Scholars believe both classifications originated with the same sutra writers and therefore inherited a consistent and unified standard calligraphy style. This suggests that there were sutra-writing organizations in Northern Liang. To meet the demand for engraved sutras and Buddha statues, specialized workshops likely emerged, developing a distinctive calligraphy style known as the Northern Liang style.[117] Strictly speaking, the Northern Liang style does not refer to a type of script style but is a general term for similar calligraphy styles in Liangzhou and the Western Regions, primarily based on Buddhist content.[118] The sutra-writing calligraphy of Northern Liang inherited the characteristics of stone inscriptions from the Han dynasty. Its structure and brushwork are thought to combine the elements of the clerical script and regular script, also known as *likai* script (*likai shu* 隸楷書).[119] This calligraphy style represents the combination of the time period, geographical region, and Buddhist religious aesthetics. The typical features of the

[113] Yin Guangming 殷光明, *Beiliang shita yanjiu* 北涼石塔研究 [The Stone Stupas of the Northern Liang dynasty] (Xinzhu: Chue Feng Buddhist Art & Culture Foundation, 1999), 91.
[114] Gérard Fussman, "Symbolism of the Buddhist Stūpa," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, (1986): 45.
[115] Original text: 修上福者無過造塔。[Among acts of cultivating supreme merit, none surpasses the construction of stupas.] (T1426_.19.0726a27).
[116] Ledderose and Wang, *Buddhist Stone Sutras in China: Shandong Province Volume 1*, 38.
[117] Cui Zhonghui, "*Fojia chuqi xiejingfang shezhi lice*," 124–125. For an explanation of the name of the Northern Liang style, please refer to the terminology section, pages 40–43.
[118] Shi, *Shanben beitie lunji*, 240.
[119] Tsui, *Chinese Calligraphy and Early Buddhist Manuscripts*, 58.

Northern Liang Style include square strokes with visible tips at the beginning and end of horizontal strokes, as well as horizontal and right-falling strokes with an upward curvature, similar to the clerical script.[120] As shown in Fig. 27, the engraved characters feature a square shape with obvious upward curves at both ends of the horizontal strokes, which give the engraved sutras a rougher, steady, and powerful appearance. This style also affected the basic appearance of Northern Wei calligraphy.[121]

The style of sutra engraved on these stupas shows the characteristics of a mixture of clerical script and regular script, which has a certain inspiration in the calligraphy style of the cliff-sutra engravings. In addition, the translation departments or workshops organized by the Northern Liang state were responsible for translating sutras and forming a systematic literary and secretarial system. This officially supported translation and copying activity not only ensured the wider dissemination and preservation of sutras, but also promoted the development of Buddhist calligraphy art and cultivated many monks and literati with outstanding calligraphy skills. These activities had a reflective impact on the development of the sutra engraving culture in the Northern Wei dynasty and later.[122]

The sutra engraving activities expanded to the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River, mainly in Shanxi, Shandong, Henan, and Hebei provinces.[123] Sutra engravings on steles, cliffs and caves gradually replaced the previous method of carving sutras on stupas. In the early sixth century, the government and officials strongly supported Buddhism, and various religious groups were formed, not only to fund the construction of temples and grottoes, but often to donate large amounts of money. Temples and grottoes became important religious and cultural centers, attracting large numbers of followers and increasing the social acceptance of Buddhism. The construction of caves increased in the Northern Wei dynasty, which began with the excavation of the Yungang Grottoes (*Yungang shiku* 雲岡石窟), funded by the royal family during the reign of Emperor Wencheng 文成帝 (r. 452–465 CE). Later, Emperor Xiaowen 孝文帝 (r. 471–499 CE) moved the capital to Luoyang, and the cave sculpture-making activities in the Luoyang area also flourished, with Longmen Grottoes being one of the representatives. A large number of Buddha statues, paintings, and inscriptions were created in these grottoes,

[120] Please refer to the terminology section for stroke names on pages 40–43.
[121] Tsui, *Chinese Calligraphy and Early Buddhist Manuscripts*, 98.
[122] Ibid., 105.
[123] Lai, *Shandong beichao fojiao moya kejing diaocha yu yanjiu*, 218.

reflecting the people's belief in the power of images at that time.[124] In order to seek blessings, people sponsored the creation of Buddha statues and the engraving of sutras. This practice was not only an expression of Buddhist faith but also a means to accumulate merit, while also ensuring the inheritance and promotion of Buddhist sutras.

In 509, a Buddha statue was carved in the center of a cliff on the Qingtian River in Boai County 博愛縣, Henan Province, with text carved on both sides [Fig. 28]. The Buddha's left side bears the earliest discovered dated cliff-sutra engraving; this passage is found at the opening of the 25th chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* (*Miaofa lianhua jing* 妙法蓮華經), known as the *Universal Gate* (*Pumen pin* 普門品).[125] Moreover, researchers discovered an engraved sutra at Huangshi Cliff in Jinan Province. The contents included two verses from the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*.[126] These early cliff-sutra engravings were small in scale, with short texts often accompanied by images. These carvings not only recorded sentences from a sutra but also enhanced the visual and religious atmosphere. These early and small Buddhist stone inscriptions may have also provided some inspiration for later large-scale sutra engraving activities.

Another method is engraving sutras into stone steles. Buddhists applied China's traditional stele form to Buddhism, which changed the original purpose and function of the steles. The main specific purpose of these Buddhist steles is for votive purposes, so-called votive steles. These steles could be categorised based on their shape, which includes rectangular forms decorated with sculpted figures, architectural pillars and lantern shafts, and leaf-shaped mandorlas adorned with sculptures of Buddhist deities. The oldest known Buddhist stele, which has a date and features a sutra, is a votive stele with a mandorla in the shape of a leaf. The Shengguo Temple in Qufu is believed to have carved this stele in 537, as shown in Fig. 29. The stele also has a section of the *Diamond Sūtra* engraved on its back.[127] In terms of function, these statue monuments can be considered successors to the stupas, as both are movable, large-scale vertical monuments.[128] Steles with no or almost no statues soon

[124] Lewis, *China between Empires*, 208–209.
[125] Wang Jingquan 王景荃, ed. *Henan fojiao shike zaoxiang* 河南佛教石刻造像 [Stone Buddhist Statues of Henan] (Zhengzhou: Daxiang Chubanshe, 2008), 39–42.
[126] For the background of sutra engravings in Huangshi Cliff, see Wang and Tsai, *Buddhist Stone Sutras in China: Shandong Province Volume 3*, 164–175.
[127] 田熊信之 and タクマノブユキ, '山東西部における刻経事業について', 學苑 845 (2011): 11. Luo Hongcai 羅宏才, *Zhongguo fodao zaoxiang bei yanjiu: yi guanzhong diqu wei kaocha zhongxin* 中國佛道造像碑研究: 以關中地區為考察中心 [Research on Chinese Buddhist and Taoist Statues and Monuments: Taking Guanzhong Area as the Research Center] (Shanghai: Shanghai Daxue Chubanshe, 2008), 96–103.
[128] Wong, *Chinese Steles: Pre-Buddhist and Buddhist Use of a Symbolic Form*, 129–130.

replaced votive steles, beginning mainly in the Northern Qi dynasty. Examples of this progression include the *Sūtra on the Perceiver of the World's Sounds* (*Guanshiyin jing* 觀世音經) engraved on the front side of the stele from Haitan Monastery in Dongping County, the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra* engraved in the stele from Sishui Monastery in 560, and the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* engraved in the stele from Shifo Monastery in Shandong in 564.[129]

Sutras gradually became separated from images as the number of characters increased over time. These forms of engravings, from the early stone stupas to the later steles and cliff engravings, reflect the gradual integration of Buddhism with the Central Plains culture of stone inscriptions. They also show that people in the Central Plains began to place more emphasis on the sacredness of character. During this period, the reverence for characters appeared to surpass the worship of Buddha statues. Characters not only represented the significance of Buddha statues, but they also conveyed the concept of Buddhist practice at the time.[130] The sponsors of the sutra engravings carefully selected calligraphy styles in order to convey their Buddhist ideals and obtain the inherent potency of talismanic writing. The combination of calligraphy and religious symbols allowed the sutras to have both the characteristics of engraving materials and the medium attributes of sacred aesthetics, giving them both visual and spiritual meaning.[131]

At the same time, Buddhists began to adopt the third form of sutra engraving, which involves engraving a large number of sutras on cliffs. The first large number of cliff-sutra engravings appeared on the walls of Buddhist caves built by the rulers of the Northern Qi dynasty near Ye. The disciples of Monk Sengchou engraved sections of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* and the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* on the outer wall of the Xiaonanhai caves in Anyang, Henan Province, following their master's death in 560. Monk Sengchou was an expert in Buddhist meditation, and these selected engraved sutras also focused on meditation-related content. Therefore, the original cave cliff-sutra engravings primarily served as supporting decorations for places of meditation, enhancing the sanctity of the meditation environment through words. This event marked the beginning of cliff-sutra engravings in the caves.[132] Subsequently, entire sutras were engraved on the cliff walls at Mount Xiangtang and Mount Zhonghuang Caves, and the practice of cliff-sutra engravings

[129] See Lai, *Shandong beichao moya kejing yanjiu yu diaocha*, 156–169.
[130] Ledderose and Wang, *Buddhist stone sutras in China, volume 1,* 40.
[131] Lia Wei, "Epigraphy in the Landscape: Intersections with Contemporary Ink Painting and Land Art," in *Artistic Practices and Archaeological Research,* ed. Dragoş Gheorghiu and Theodor Barth (Oxford: Archaeopress Publishing, 2019), 140.
[132] Tsiang, "Monumentalization of Buddhist Texts in the Northern Qi dynasty," 234–235.

also spread to the Shandong region. From Hebei to Shandong, sutra engravings transitioned from small characters carved in early caves to large characters engraved on exposed cliffs surfaces in later periods. The motivations behind the emergence of sutra engravings seem to have shifted as well. One perspective proposes that these engravings served as a form of Buddhist meditation practice;[133] the alternative viewpoint suggests that they were created in response to concerns about the arrival of the Dharma Ending Age, with the intention of protecting Buddhist sutras.[134] The different purposes and uses of engraving sutras were likely to affect the choice of calligraphy style.

The emergence and purpose of cliff-sutra engravings in the late Northern Dynasties

Buddhism was prevalent from the Northern Wei dynasty to the Northern Qi dynasty, and the widespread popularity of Buddhist sutras and the subsequent development of sutra translations established the foundation for sutra engravings as a practice. By providing funding for the compilation and translation of sutras, the government raised Buddhism's stature in academic circles, produced a prestigious monastic community with close ties to the court, and promoted Buddhism to a valuable role in political discourse.[135] During the Northern Wei dynasty, Emperor Xiaowen was a devout Buddhist. When he moved the capital to Luoyang, the city developed into a major Buddhist center. Historical records indicate that there were more than 1,300 Buddhist temples in Luoyang during Buddhism's peak.[136] In 534, the Northern Wei dynasty split into Eastern Wei and Western Wei, with Eastern Wei relocating its capital from Luoyang to Ye city. A large number of monks and nuns who had been active in promoting Buddhism in Luoyang, including Bodhidharma 菩提流支, Lenamati 勒那摩提, and Huiguang 慧光, also moved to Ye city with the royal court.[137] According to the *Weishu*, by the end of the Eastern Wei, there were over 30,000

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133 Ibid., 247.
134 Ibid., 254.
135 Ibid., 258.
136 Fa Lin 法琳, "*Bian zheng lun* 辯正論 [Treatise on Discussing the Right]," in *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經 [*New Edition of the Buddhist Canon in the Taishō Era*], vol. 52, no. 2110, ed. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaikyoku 渡邊海旭 (Tōkyō:Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai 大正一切經刊行會, 1924–1932), 507. Original text: 右元魏君臨一十七帝，一百七十年。國家大寺四十七所。……其王公貴室五等諸侯寺八百三十九所，百姓造寺三萬餘所。總度僧尼二百萬人，譯經一十九人四十九部。["Under the Northern Wei, which ruled for 170 years through 17 emperors, there were 47 state-sponsored monasteries. Additionally, nobles and aristocrats, including the five ranks of lords, established 839 monasteries, while the common people constructed over 30,000 temples. In total, 2 million monks and nuns were ordained, and 19 translators produced 49 Buddhist sutras.]
137 *Luoyang qielan ji* 洛陽伽藍記. Original text: 暨永熙多難，皇輿遷鄴，諸寺僧尼亦與時徙。[Amidst the turmoil of the Yongxi era, as the imperial court relocated to Ye, the monks and nuns of various monasteries also migrated accordingly.]

temples and two million monks and nuns.[138] When the Northern Qi dynasty overthrew Eastern Wei, Ye City replaced Luoyang as the new center of Buddhism.

In 550, the Gao family came to power and established the Northern Qi dynasty, and played a crucial role in promoting and supporting Buddhism. One of the most powerful rulers of the Northern Qi dynasty was Emperor Wenxuan (Gao Yang 高洋, 526–559 CE), who was a devout Buddhist himself. As mentioned in *Ba guan zhai fa* 八關齋法 (Eight Precepts of Fasting):

> 齊文宣帝。登祚受禪。於僧稠禪師受菩薩戒。畿內禁酒放鷹除網。又斷天下屠宰。年正五九月六齋日。勸民齋戒。公私葷辛悉除滅之。
>
> After Emperor Wenxuan ascended the throne, he received the Bodhisattva precepts from Meditation Master Sengchou, gave up meat and abandoned wine. He released his hunting falcons and did away with nets. He also abolished slaughter in the realm. On the sixth day of the ninth lunar month, he encouraged the people to fast and abstain from meat and spices in public and private.[139]

As a devout Buddhist, Emperor Wenxuan not only respected eminent monks but also built monasteries dedicated to the translation of scripture equipped with scripture translators, and opened a treasury to make donations. He also worshipped the original Sanskrit scriptures and believed that Buddhist scriptures were the foundation of the Three Jewels of Buddhism.[140] Monks from the Western Regions were responsible for translating the original sutras, while monks from the Central Plain were keen on annotating, preaching, and copying sutras.[141] In order to further regulate the management of Buddhism, Zhaoxuan Temple 昭玄寺 was established in Northern Qi, which was responsible for the management of Buddhist affairs in the whole country. The local administrative divisions at

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[138] *Weishu*, 3048. Original text: 略而計之，僧尼大眾二百萬矣，其寺三萬有餘。[In summary, the monastic community comprised approximately two million monks and nuns, with more than thirty thousand temples.]

[139] *Ba guan zhai fa* 八關齋法 (Eight Precepts Fasting) (CBETA 2023.Q1, X60, no. 1130, p. 85c11-13).

[140] *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 续高僧传, vol 2. Original text: 宣帝重法殊異。躬禮梵本顧群臣曰。此乃三寶洪基。故我偏敬。其奉信推誠為如此也。[Emperor Xuan held the Dharma in exceptional esteem, showing extraordinary reverence. Personally, venerating the Sanskrit scriptures, he addressed his ministers, saying, 'This is the grand foundation of the Three Jewels, and thus I hold it in particular respect.' Such was the depth of his faith and the sincerity of his devotion.]

[141] Tang Yongtong 湯用彤, *Han Wei liang Jin Nanbeichao fojiao shi* 漢魏兩晉南北朝佛教史 [Buddhist History of Han, Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties] (Taibei: Taiwan Commercial Press, 1991), 536.

all levels set up corresponding administrative organizations, the *Shamen cao* 沙門曹.[142] This set of monastic officials were independent of the secular bureaucracy and served directly under the authority of the emperor.

After Gao Yang, Gao Yan and Gao Zhan continued to follow Gao Yang's Buddhist policy. In his second year on the throne, Gao Zhan built the Daxing Sheng Temple to accommodate the growing number of Buddhist believers. The young lord Gao Heng was even more lavish in his offerings to Buddhism during his reign, reportedly using ten thousand pots of fuel oil in a single night, which illuminated the palace.[143] In addition, rulers and royals donated large amounts of land and money to monasteries and built temples. Gao Yang even directed the donation of a portion of the state reserves to the temples.

> 因以國儲分三分，一分供國，一分自用，一分供養三寶眾聖，敕送錢絹於寺中，置庫盛之。
>
> For the state reserves were divided into three parts, one for the state, one for their own use, and one to support the Three Jewels and Saints, and edicts were issued to send money and silks to the temple and set up a treasury to hold them.[144]

With the support of the rulers and their policies, Buddhism spread widely in the Northern Qi dynasty, and was not only limited to princes and nobles but also attracted a large number of monks, nuns, and common people to participate. In the past twenty-eight years, the number of temples, monks, and nuns in the Northern Qi dynasty increased significantly.[145] The tax-free policy encouraged people to become monks. At the same

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[142] Wei Zheng 魏徵, *Suishu* 隋書 [History of Sui dynasty], vol. 27 (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1973), 751. Original text: 昭玄寺，掌諸佛教。置大統一人，統一人，都維那三人。並置功曹、主簿員，以管諸州郡縣沙門曹。[At Zhaoxuan Monastery, the administration of Buddhist affairs was centralized. A Grand Administrator was appointed as the chief authority, along with one deputy administrator and three directors. Additionally, positions such as registrar and record keeper were established to oversee the affairs of Buddhist monks in various provinces, prefectures, and counties.]

[143] Li Baiyao, *Beiqi shu*, 113. Original text: 鑿晉陽西山為大佛像，一夜燃油萬盆，光照宮內。又胡昭儀起大慈寺，未成，改穆皇后大寶林寺。窮極工巧，運石填泉，勞資億計，人牛死者不可勝紀。[A colossal Buddha statue was carved into the western mountains of Jinyang, and on one night, ten thousand oil lamps were lit, illuminating the imperial palace. Additionally, Consort Hu initiated the construction of the Great Compassion Monastery, which was later renamed Dabao Lin Monastery by Empress Mu. The project, executed with extraordinary craftsmanship, involved moving stones and filling springs, consuming immense resources and labor. The number of workers and cattle that perished during the process was beyond measure.]

[144] *Shi shi tong jian* 釋氏通鑑, juan 5.

[145] According to the records of "*Wei shu-shi lao zhi* 魏書·釋老志," during the eighth year of Wuding (the first year of Tianbao in the Northern Qi dynasty, 550), the count of monasteries in Eastern Wei

time, many poor people took refuge in temples to escape the cruel exploitation of feudal rulers. These factors jointly contributed to the prosperity of Buddhism in the Northern Qi dynasty.

In addition, the Northern Qi was plagued by frequent wars, political divisions, and unrest. The continuous conflicts led to the separation of people, and both nobles and commoners were in urgent need of spiritual sustenance. In this context, Buddhist ideas gained widespread recognition: humans, like other sentient beings in the six realms, are trapped in suffering and continually reincarnate through life and death. By practicing Buddhism, people can eventually transcend the cycle of birth, aging, sickness and death, end the six realms, and gain ultimate liberation and enter the state of Nirvana.[146] In addition, given this historical context, both the elite and the general public likely regarded the Buddha as a deity capable of prolonging life. By adopting Buddhist ideas, followers developed regional rituals and established Buddhist pilgrimage sites.

Thus, the formation of cliff-sutra engravings in the late Northern Dynasties was related to the turbulent historical environment, complex ethnic relations, and the development of Buddhist practices and translation of sutras at that time. Cliff-sutra engravings were produced by writers, calligraphers, and engravers. Amongst them, writers and calligraphers were often highly educated, while engravers were divided into official carvers and private carvers. According to records, aristocracies, high-ranking officials, monks and nuns often contributed money to engrave sutras, maybe in order to spread the idea of Dharma, preserve the sutra, or pray for the merits of their relatives and to seek happiness in the next life.

The Mahayana sutras served as the primary source for the content of most cliff-sutra engravings created in the late Northern Dynasties. Mahayana sutras emphasize the importance of memorizing, reading, and interpreting these texts, as they hold that without

stood at 30,000. However, as documented in *Guanghong mingji*, the number of temples erected during the Northern Qi dynasty exceeded 40,000. This indicates an approximate increase of 10,000 temples during the Northern Qi dynasty. Also, see: *Xu Gaoseng Zhuan*, T 50.2060: 501b13–15. Original text: 高齊之盛,佛教中興，都下大寺略計四千，見住僧尼僮將八萬，講席相距二百有餘，在眾常聽出過一萬。[During the peak of the Northern Qi, Buddhism experienced a significant revival. The capital alone had approximately 4,000 major monasteries, housing nearly 80,000 monks and nuns. There were over 200 lecture halls, with regular audiences exceeding 10,000 individuals.]

[146] According to Buddhism, beings in the universe have experienced countless rebirths without a discernible beginning across the six realms: gods, demigods, humans, animals, ghosts, and hell beings. Donald Lopez, ed. *Buddhist Scriptures* (London: Penguin UK, 2004), 3.

such transmission, the future Buddha will not appear.[147] In addition, Mahayana Buddhism regards the sutras as embodying work, wisdom, and power that transcend the Dharma. Sutras, as recitable and replicable words, are not distinctly separated from the teachings they express, the transcendent wisdom they aim to cultivate, the Buddha whose words they convey, or his supernatural abilities.[148] Engraving sutras on cliffs serves as an alternate method of reproducing sutras, demonstrating the veneration of believers.

Engravings of sutras in caves located in Hebei includes examples of whole sutras on the polished stone walls, with text size and layout deliberately suited for readability. Such settings seem to provide believers with spaces for chanting and meditation. Caves as places of meditation protect practitioners from outside interference while promoting deep, uninterrupted practice. Caves also restrict visual stimuli, promoting a quiet atmosphere conducive to concentrated meditation.[149] Here, the religious function that the caves probably performed was primarily to aid the believers in meditation, or more precisely, in their imagination. Buddhists may prostrate before the sutras, concentrate on the imparted teachings, and participate in meditation. This practice enableds believers to receive the Buddha's blessings while engaging with Buddhist understanding, ultimately striving to attain remarkable abilities. Consequently, the surviving engraved sutras within caves demonstrate the intimate relationship between the veneration of images, meditation, and the examination of sutras in the religious rituals of that era.[150] Moreover, in Hebei, most sutra engravings blend in with cave images, but the text and the images do not appear to have a direct relationship. Some sutras even replace the concept and intent of Buddhist statues.[151] For example, the engraved sutras in the Northern Xiangtang Caves depict stories such as the Buddha’s life, his past lives, or the meeting between Vimalakīrti and Manjushri. The engraved sutras serve primarily as support for Buddhist rituals or meditation, intended for recitation or chanting to embody the spirit of the Buddha's teachings. These engravings serve as both a visual enhancement to Buddhist practice and a sacred environment where the meaning of the sutras transcends that of a typical Buddhist statue.

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147 Leon Hurvitz, *Scripture of the lotus blossom of the fine dharma (The lotus sūtra), translated from the Chinese of Kumārajīva* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 178–179.
148 Miriam Levering, “Scripture and its reception: a Buddhist case,” in *Rethinking scripture: Essays from a Comparative Perspective*, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), 63.
149 Raoul Birnbaum, “Highland Inscriptions in Buddhist China,” *T’oung Pao* 103, no. 1–3 (2017): 273–274.
150 Tsiang, “Monumentalization of Buddhist Texts in the Northern Qi dynasty,” 247.
151 Ibid., 249.

Moreover, sutra engravings in Shandong also seem to partly represent the function for meditation, such as Sutra on the *Great Perfection of Wisdom Spoken by Mañjusri* in Mount Hongding. As illustrated in Fig. 30, a small platform above the text features a carved miniature Buddha statue. This platform may serve as a tranquil space, providing individuals with an environment conducive to meditative practices. The engraved sutra below is presented in a dignified, larger script. The theme of contemplating the Buddha resonates with the miniature Buddha statue positioned above. As one sits at the Buddhist scriptures and silently recites the Buddha's name, these words seem to offer spiritual solace. The passage elucidates the core principles of prajñāpāramitā and the profound nature of the Buddha.[152] As shown in Fig. 31, this location is ideal for meditation. The rock wall, hosting the sutra engraving on the northern slope, is shielded by natural rock, creating seclusion with stone walls on both the front and back.[153] Therefore, the smaller characters are handwritten to facilitate recitation for meditators.

Therefore, considering the purpose of sutra engravings, the calligraphy style was typically chosen to be formal and simple to read. In addition, the sacredness of the sutra and the environment in which it was placed also caused the calligraphy style to a certain extent. As the material embodiment of Buddhist practice, words are not only tools of expression but they also serve as an aesthetic link to Buddhist thought. Seal script, clerical script, and regular script, as the primary official scripts, are characterized by their balanced structure, making them representatives of orthodox calligraphy. The calligraphy of the cliff-sutra engravings predominantly employs these scripts, demonstrating not only a commitment to traditional calligraphic conventions but also a profound respect and reverence for the Buddhist sutras. In this sense, the effect of Buddhist thought on calligraphy promoted the development of sutra engraving styles in Hebei during the late Northern Dynasties.

The inscription in the South Cave of the Northern Xiangtang Caves also mentions that Buddhist sutras were engraved on stone for permanent preservation.[154] The engraving of sutras on durable stone suggests that another motive for these carvings was the preservation of the Dharma. Furthermore, texts such as the Lotus Sutra, the *Diamond Sūtra* (*Jin gang jing* 金剛經), and the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* predict the possible decline of

[152] Ledderose and Wang, *Buddhist Stone Sutras in China: Shandong Province g Volume 1*, 34.
[153] For the environment of the 98-character prajñāpāramitā sutra engravings on the northern slope, see: Ledderose and Wang, *Buddhist Stone Sutras in China: Shandong Province g Volume 1*, 69–70.
[154] Original text: 縑緗有壞，簡策非久，金牒難求，皮紙易滅。[Silk scrolls can spoil, bamboo documents are short-lived, metal tablets are difficult to preserve, and parchment and paper are easily destroyed.]

Buddhism in the future.[155] Thus, these engraving activities also seem to reflect the concerns of sponsors and Buddhists of the time about the disappearance of the Dharma or the arrival of the End of the Dharma (*mofa* 末法).[156] The term *mofa* came into use in the second half of the sixth century, and was a concept that initially appeared in a work attributed to the monk Nanyue Huisi 南嶽慧思 (515–577 CE), who described three periods following the death of Buddha. According to Huisi's calculations, the End of the Dharma era began in 434 CE, ultimately leading to the obliteration of all sutras.[157] In 446 CE, Emperor Taiwu of the Northern Wei began to implement the policy of destroying Buddha, which lasted for six years until his death in 452 CE. Moreover, in 574 CE, Emperor Wu released a decree to suppress Buddhism. This resulted in the total destruction of all Buddhist icons, the state reclaiming control over temples, and the coercion of monks and nuns to abandon their religious lifestyles and return to secular life.[158] To some extent, early thoughts and actions related to the end of the Dharma impacted the emergence of sutra engravings in the late Northern Dynasties. Also, most sutra engravings in Shandong date to the late Northern Qi and Northern Zhou periods, which may be connected to the suppression of Buddhism under the Northern Zhou dynasty, leading Buddhists to fear the End of Dharma. This concern may explain why the engraved sutras in Shandong aimed to record as many essential parts of the sutras as possible.

In addition, most of the engraved sutras in Shandong are carved in large characters on remote mountain faces, which are difficult to fully appreciate when viewed up close and are best experienced from a certain distance. Buddhist scriptures are engraved across a series of connected mountains, as if constructing a geographical shrine for Buddhism. These mountains support the sutras because these sacred texts link them together.[159] Perhaps as a result of the potential for the End of the Dharma, Buddhists attempted to create a sacred location to preserve the Dharma. They entrusted the mountains with the responsibility of preserving the sutras. In this sense, engraving the sutras offers spiritual support in addition to sanctifying the surroundings.

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[155] See Jan Nattier, *Once upon a future time: studies in a Buddhist prophecy of decline*, vol. 1 (New Delhi: Jain Publishing Company, 1991), 27–64.
[156] Pan Liangzhen 潘良楨, "*Beichao moya kejing yu meifo* 北朝摩崖刻經與滅佛 [Engravings Sutras and ending Buddhas in the Northern Dynasties]," *Fudan Journal: Social Science Edition*, no. 3 (1991): 93–96.
[157] Sofukawa Hiroshi 曽布川寛, "Kyōdōzan sekkutsu ko 響堂山石窟 [Mount Xiangtang Caves]," *The Toho Gakuho: Journal of Oriental Studies, Kyoto* 62 (1990): 202.
[158] Liu Linkui 刘林魁, "*Beizhou meifo qijian fijiaotu de hongfa huodong* 北周滅佛期間佛教徒的弘法活動 [Buddhist Propagation Activities During the Northern Zhou Dynasty]," *Guizhou Shehui Kexue* 1, no. 217 (2008): 127.
[159] Raoul Birnbaum, "Highland Inscriptions in Buddhist China," *T'oung Pao* 103, no. 1–3 (2017): 269–270.

The calligraphy style of sutra engravings in Shandong is noticeably different from that in Hebei. Since the primary purposes are not reading and viewing in Shandong, the large-character engravings display a more unplanned selection of calligraphy style. The smooth strokes extend naturally along the unpolished stone walls, blending the calligraphic style with the surrounding environment and reinforcing the connection between the text and its setting. The use of seal script and clerical script seems to express a reverence for the Buddhist sutras and align with Buddhism's aesthetic ideals.

From the initial stone engravings on stupas to stele, and finally to a large number of cliff-sutra engravings, the choice of calligraphy style also underwent various changes. Many academics agreed that cliff-sutra engravings from the late Northern Dynasties were certainly made in a combination of styles with roots in clerical script, based on their calligraphy.[160] But why did the cliff-sutra engravings primarily utilize clerical script and occasionally even seal script, whereas regular script was the most common type for everyday writing at the time? The tendency of return to antiquity calligraphy in the late Northern Dynasties needs to be examined in order to better understand the characteristics of this calligraphic style.

1.2 The Return to Antiquity Calligraphy Style of the Late Northern Dynasties

The calligraphy style of the Han dynasty was dominated by clerical script, which reached its peak in the stone inscriptions. During the Three Kingdoms period, clerical script maintained its mainstream position in the calligraphic tradition. However, from the Jin dynasty to the Northern Wei dynasty, calligraphy underwent stylistic transformations. By the Northern Wei period, the Wei stele calligraphy style had become the more popular style. Seal script and clerical script were rarely used for everyday writing and only showed up in certain places, like on tombstones and stele headings. The Northern Wei dynasty's calligraphy stands out for its strong emphasis on practicality and standardization, characterized by a vigorous and unembellished style. As the starting point of the transition from Northern Dynasties clerical script to regular script, Northern Wei calligraphy was

[160] See Tsiang, "Monumentalization of Buddhist Texts in the Northern Qi dynasty," 233. Zhang and Goodman, "Northern Qi Inscribed Sutras and Buddha Images," 298. Liu, "*Beiqi moya kejing de shuti yu lishu dazi de shuke fangfa*," 84. Zhao, "*Xiangrangshan shiku beichao kejing shilun*," 39.

affected not only by the development of other calligraphy styles, but also by the political changes and corresponding cultural environment changes at that time.

After Emperor Xiaowen moved the capital to Luoyang in 493, he implemented a series of reforms to consolidate his rule, strengthen the economy, and enhance national power. These reforms also affected daily life and culture, including the ban on traditional Xianbei clothing in favor of Central Plains clothing, the ban on using the Xianbei language in favor of the Central Plains dialect, and encouraging Xianbei people to intermarry with people of the Central Plains.[161] As the Xianbei rulers gradually accepted the culture and political system of the Central Plains, the writing and calligraphy styles also developed, and the Wei-stele style of calligraphy rapidly matured.[162] The Wei-stele style indicated a shift from clerical script to regular script in the development of calligraphy during the Northern Dynasties.[163] With the fall of the Northern Wei dynasty and the subsequent division of the regime into the Eastern Wei and Western Wei, calligraphy styles began to exhibit a combination of seal script, clerical script, or regular script.[164] This stylistic shift signaled the emergence of a return to antiquity trend in calligraphy, marking a key change in the development of calligraphic art during the late Northern Dynasties. During this period, seal script and clerical script—forms that had nearly vanished from daily writing—experienced a reappearance in stone inscriptions.[165]

During the Northern Qi dynasty, the cliff-sutra engravings were also mixed with different calligraphy styles, primarily based on clerical script and regular script. The style of calligraphy shifted from the upward horizontal strokes and compact character structure of the Northern Wei dynasty to the more stable horizontal strokes and wider character structure of the Northern Qi dynasty. Some stone inscriptions and epitaphs from the Northern Qi also incorporate strokes from clerical script or seal script.[166] From the

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[161] Su Hang 蘇航, "*Cong jiazhi tonggou kan beichao de wenhua bianqian he minzu ningju* 從價值同構看北朝的文化變遷和民族凝聚 [Analyzing the Cultural Transformation and Ethnic Cohesion of the Northern Dynasties from the Perspective of Value Homology]," *Chinese Academy of History: Historical Research*, no. 4 (2021): 32–35.

[162] Li Meng et al., "From Cultural Heritage to Image Symbolism: The Weibei Calligraphy in The Inscriptions of Longmen's Twenty Statues," *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice* 30, no. 5 (2024): 532–533.

[163] Li, "From Cultural Heritage to Image Symbolism," 531–532.

[164] Sha Menghai 沙孟海, "*Luelun liangjin nanbeichao suidai de shufa* 略論兩晉南北朝隋代的書法 [A Brief Discussion on Calligraphy in the Two Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties and Sui Dynasties]," in *Sha Menhai Lunyi* (Shanghai: Shuhua Chubanshe, 2010), 113–115.

[165] Lai Fei, *Laifei meishu kaogu wenji* 賴非美術考古文集 [Lai Fei's Art Archaeology Collection] (Shandong: Qilu Chubanshe, 2014), 77.

[166] Lai, *Laifei meishu kaogu wenji* , 76.

perspective of calligraphy style development, the return to antiquity trend in Northern Qi calligraphy contributed to the formation of the calligraphy style in cliff-sutra engravings. This style appears to draw from the mature clerical script of the Han dynasty while inevitably incorporating stylistic elements from the Wei stele style.

After the fall of the Northern Wei dynasty, the regime split into the Eastern Wei and the Western Wei. The Eastern Wei was ruled by Gao Huan, and the Western Wei was ruled by Yuwen Tai 宇文泰 (505–556 CE).[167] Both of them were from the Six Towns of the Northern Wei dynasty.[168] Their political rise originated from the movement against the Northern Wei Tuoba regime. Thus, the reuse of clerical script during this period also reflects the resistance of rulers to Northern Wei culture in terms of calligraphy styles.[169] The decades-long war between Gao Huan and Yuwen Tai further disrupted the development of style, affecting the change from the Northern Wei style that matured during the Northern Wei period, and ultimately leading to a reversal of the mixed style that developed during the later period.

In the late Northern Wei, the Wei-stele style became the official style for stone inscriptions, with most calligraphers and users active in the Luoyang area.[170] However, with the rapid shifts in political power, four regimes—the Eastern Wei, Western Wei, Northern Qi, and Northern Zhou—rose and fell within a span of just 48 years. In these turbulent times, many aristocrats, calligraphers and engravers associated with the Wei-stele style met tragic ends, often killed in conflicts. For instance, Er Zhurong 爾朱榮 (493–530 CE), headman of Qihu 契胡 in the north, gathered officials in Luoyang and slaughtered over 1,300 nobles and ministers.[171] Following this, the Eastern Wei moved its capital to Ye, and the Western Wei established its capital in Chang'an, causing Luoyang to lose its status as a capital city. With the absence of calligraphers and supporters, the Wei-stele style gradually declined, creating conditions for the rise of 'return to antiquity' calligraphy styles (*fugu shufa fengge* 復古書法風格) in stone inscriptions in the late Northern Dynasties. Moreover, in the Western Wei period, Emperor Wen Yuan Baoju 元寶炬

[167] About biography of Gao Huan, see: Li Baiyao 李百藥, *Beiqi shu* 北齊書 [The History of the Northern Qi], vol. 1–23, 1 (Beijing Zhonghua Book Company, 1972), 1–30.
[168] Six Towns: Woye 沃野鎮, Huaishuo 懷朔鎮, Wuchuan 武川鎮, Fuming 柔玄鎮, Rouxuan 撫冥鎮, and Huaihuang 懷荒鎮.
[169] See Lai, *Laifei meishu kaogu wenji*, 78–81.
[170] Zeng Ruiwen 曾瑞雯, "*Nanbeichao shufa fengge tanxi* 南北朝書法風格探析 [An analysis of calligraphy styles in Southern and Northern Dynasties]," *Wenxue Ji*, no. 13 (2006): 32.
[171] See: Wei Shou, *Weishu* 魏書 [History of the Northern Wei], juan 74, biography of Erzhu Rong.

(507–551 CE) advocated the use of clerical script.[172] His support helped clerical script regain official attention, leading to an increase in the use of clerical script.

In addition, the calligraphy style of the Stone Classics provided significant inspiration for the writing styles of the late Northern Dynasties. For instance, *The Biography of Emperor Xiaojing* in the *History of the Northern Wei* mentions the transportation of the Han-Wei Stone Classics from Luoyang to Ye in 546.[173] The *Qielanji of Luoyang* also references these engravings, noting that, although damaged, they remained standing in front of what was then known as the Academy for Gentle and Noble Men. These stone inscriptions were relocated to Ye in 546 CE, marking their continued effect on calligraphic traditions.[174] In addition, Emperor Wenxuan announced in 550 the relocation of the fifty-two stones inscribed with Cai Yong's classics to the Hall of Learning, where they underwent repairs and installation. The move allowed scholars to study these rites and canons inscribed on the stones at the academy.[175] It can be seen that, despite the changes in regime in the late Northern Dynasties, successive governments have always insisted on the orthodox status and respect of the Stone Classics. This continuity allowed many scholars to come into contact with these authoritative writing models, actively studying and imitating the calligraphic styles engraved on stone. As a result, the clerical script style resurfaced in the Stone Classics and gained widespread acceptance. This revival likely affected the adoption of a similar style in the engraved sutras of the Northern Qi dynasty. This integration reflected a historical interest among scholars, shaped by political support and cultural heritage; such backing led to the revival of both clerical and seal scripts.

Moreover, calligraphers in late Northern Dynasties, such as Jiang Shi 江式 (?–523 CE), Wang Yin 王愔, Yan Zhitui 顏之推 (531–? CE) were consistently critical of the Wei-stele calligraphy style, viewing it as a product of wartime conditions. In their view, the Han dynasty clerical script represented authentic calligraphy.[176] However, the widespread adoption of the calligraphic style was a gradual process. At that time, people had become accustomed to the daily writing style of the Northern Wei Dynasty, and it was difficult to change their habits quickly and fully accept the standard clerical script. This change led to

[172] See: Li Baiyao, *Beiqi shu*, biography of Zhao Wenshen.
[173] Wei Shou, *Weishu*, juan 12, 308.
[174] Gao Deng is named as responsible for moving the stone classics, but it seems more likely that this was ordered by his father and then-regent, Gao Huan. See Yang Xuanzhi, *Luoyang Qielanji*, in W.J.F. Jenner, trans., *Memories of Loyang: Yang Hsüan-chih and the Lost Capital (493–534)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 212–213.
[175] Li Baiyao, *Beiqi shu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1972), 53.
[176] Li, *Beiqi shu*, 312.

the phenomenon of a mixture of regular script and clerical script appearing in stone inscriptions in the late Northern Dynasties. Daily writing habits affected calligraphers to pursue traditional styles, resulting in the mixing of multiple styles.

Seal and clerical scripts became more prevalent during the Northern Qi Dynasty. This was especially true in Buddhist cliff-sutra engravings, where the calligraphy often mixed features of clerical and regular scripts.[177] This combination of styles was not only a development in calligraphy but also linked to the ongoing tradition of sutra writing style.[178] The emergence of the sutra writing style reflects the effect of Buddhism on the everyday application of calligraphy, gradually developing into a standardized and recognizable system.[179] The bamboo and wooden slips of the Han dynasty and the regular script of the Northern Wei influenced the sutra writing style. It reduces the curved strokes that are common in Han slips, improves structural regularity, and keeps some features of clerical script.[180] The standard sutra writing style greatly affected the stylistic selection in cliff-sutra engravings. Clerical and regular scripts were used for engraving sutras during the Northern Dynasties, especially in the Northern Qi period. This resulted from their standardization and perceived authority. The calligraphy of these sutra engravings served as a medium for Buddhist teachings, reflecting both religious significance and the requirement for solemnity and formality. Clerical writing was widely used due to its representation of the standardization and authenticity of calligraphy, particularly in expressing the profound mysteries of Buddhism.[181]

Sutra engravings on cliffs emerged as a profound expression of Buddhist devotion, serving as both religious icons and spiritual sanctuaries, seamlessly integrating calligraphy with the surrounding natural landscape. Political support and court patronage, particularly under rulers like Emperor Wenxuan, amplified Buddhism's effect, while the calligraphy style—merging clerical script, seal script, and regular script—provided a visual representation of the Buddhist canon. The stylistic consistency in cliff-sutra calligraphy reflects the enduring impact of return to antiquity calligraphy styles during the late Northern Dynasties. To learn

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177 Chen Si 陳思, "*Shilun beichao houqi zhengzhi wenhua yu fugu shufeng zhi guanlian* 試論北朝後期政治文化與‘復古’書風之關聯 [On the Relationship Between the Political Culture and the 'Return to Antiquity' Style of Writing in the Late Northern Dynasties]," *Yishu Ping*, no. 12 (2015): 98–103.
178 Jiang, *Wei Jin Nanbeichao shufashi gao*, 2023, 315.
179 For an explanation of sutra writing style, see discussion of terminology, pages 40–43.
180 Ran Qianlin 冉前林, "*Dunhuang xiejing shufa shulue* 敦煌寫經書法述略 [Dunhuang sutra writing calligraphy summary]," *Sichou zhilu,* no. 22 (2009): 96–97.
181 Chen Biwu 陳必武, "*Luelun Fojiao Dui Shufa de Yingxiang* 略論佛教對書法的影響 [A Brief Discussion on the Influence of Buddhism on Calligraphy]" *National Taiwan University of Arts*, (2009): 25.

more about the calligraphic style of cliff-sutra engravings from this time, the next chapter looks at what clerical and regular scripts are and how they work. It then looks at how calligraphic styles changed in Northern Dynasties stone inscriptions as understood by scholars from the Song and Qing dynasties.

2 Understanding the Styles from the Past

Most current scholars believe that the calligraphy style used in cliff-sutra engravings of the late Northern Dynasties generally falls between clerical script and regular script, though variations exist. Some lean more towards clerical script, while others lean towards regular script. Certain scholars classify the calligraphic style of these engraved sutras as *likai* script, a script combining elements of both clerical script and regular script, with a stronger emphasis on clerical script features.[182] It is evident that there is no clear definition of *likai* script; it is merely a term for a mixture of clerical and regular script styles. To explore the characteristics of the cliff-sutra engravings, this chapter begins by examining historical documents to classify and define various calligraphic names and styles. It examines the origins of clerical and regular script names, as well as their calligraphic characteristics. The following section examines the perspectives of connoisseurs during the Song and Qing Dynasties, demonstrating how the categorization of Chinese calligraphy and the sociopolitical circumstances of the time affected their interpretations of the stone inscriptions of the Northern Dynasties. This comprehensive analysis lays the groundwork for the subsequent comparative study of the calligraphic art demonstrated in cliff-sutras engravings during the late Northern Dynasties.

2.1 Historical Classifications of Calligraphy Styles

The term calligraphy (*shufa* 書法), literally translating to "the way of writing" (*shu* meaning "writing" and fa meaning "way" or "standard"), signifies the essence of the art, closely linked to Chinese written characters and painting.[183] The graphic features of Chinese characters conveyed by calligraphy style changes with the structure, strokes, and properties of the characters. The method in calligraphy does not aim to accurately represent an object or merely originate from the imagination. Instead, artists strive to produce an abstraction that encapsulates the physical characteristics of the object, enabling the observer to readily comprehend its significance. Calligraphers demonstrate the ability to achieve a balance between functional requirements and aesthetic appeal by incorporating the perceived beauty of objects into the shape and structure of Chinese characters.[184] The

[182] For a scholarly discussion on the calligraphy style of cliff-sutra engraving in the Norther Dynasties, refer to Introduction, pages 22–36.
[183] Li Wendan, *Chinese writing and calligraphy* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2010), 1.
[184] Ouyang Zhongshi, "Introduction," in *Chinese Calligraphy,* ed. Wang Youfen (London: Yale University

artistic representation of text through this approach embodies the artistry of Chinese calligraphy.

The use of imagination and analogy in calligraphy theory may have had an impact on the naming method. Calligraphers use real-life objects in nature to describe brushstroke styles, emphasizing the commonalities between the strokes of characters and natural elements. This method not only allows people to understand calligraphy styles more intuitively, but it also reflects the features of strokes through natural feelings. For example, Cai Yong 蔡邕 (132–192 CE) described the style of seal script in his work *Zhuan shi* 篆勢 (Seal Script Style). He claimed that certain strokes in seal script resembled patterns on a turtle's back, while others are similar to dragon scales, with curving bodies, trailing tails, long wings, and short bodies.[185] Cai Yong used metaphors to liken abstract calligraphic strokes to living entities, imbuing them with vivid aesthetic imagery. Such analogies transform calligraphy style from abstract to tangible representations. In addition, Cai Yong claimed that calligraphy is inspired by nature, where the principles of *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽 are apparent, giving rise to *xing* 形 (form) and *shi* 勢 (force or momentum), which are the foundational elements defining the beauty of calligraphy.[186] This theory gave rise to names for styles based on stroke characteristics such as worm script (*chongshu* 蟲書) and cloud script (*yunshu* 雲書). However, these names do not represent the emergence of new script styles but rather the continuation of the calligraphy styles within the existing set of script styles.

In addition, the continuous development of calligraphy styles has caused the formation and modification of various script names, sometimes leading to overlap and probable confusion in script classification.[187] In addition, it is necessary to acknowledge that the formation of script names and styles is not limited to a single chronological sequence, and the development of multiple calligraphy styles is not mutually independent. That is, the start of a new script does not indicate the end of the old one. Instead, the interconnection of different styles often contributes to the complexity of script style classification, and the

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Press, 2008), 33.

[185] Pan Yungao 潘運告, *Han Wei liuchao shuhua lun* 漢魏六朝書畫論 [Calligraphy and Painting of Han, Wei and Six Dynasties] (Hunan: Meishu Chubanshe, 1997), 39.

[186] Cai Yong 蔡邕, "*Jiu shi* 九勢 [Nine Forces]," in *Lidai shufa lunwenxuan,* 6. Original text: 夫書肇於自然，自然既立，陰陽生矣，陰陽既生，形勢出矣。[Calligraphy originates from nature; once nature is established, the principles of *yin* and *yang* emerge. With the emergence of *yin* and *yang*, forms and structures take shape.]

[187] For the explanation of the terms, calligraphy style, and script style, refer to Introduction, pages 37–40.

variation among scripts was gradual.[188] As already discussed modern scholarship commonly classifies Chinese characters into five main script styles: seal script, clerical script, regular script, running script, and cursive script.[189] Fig. 32 shows the simplest overview of scripts and styles. There are several calligraphic styles and distinct structures associated with each of these script types. The names of script styles might be initially confusing due to the variety of calligraphy styles, which makes classification challenging. Historical records indicate that distinct script names do not necessarily fall into one of these five categories; some correspond more to the definition of names, while others indicate the purpose or calligraphic style. Thus, what were the definitions of the names of the script styles and the characteristics of their calligraphy styles both before and during the Northern Dynasties?

The the classification of Qin dynasty script styles is explained within the work of the Eastern Han philologist Xu Shen 許慎 (ca. 58–147 CE). In his work *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 (Explanations of Characters and Words), Xu Shen emphasized the distinctions between the names of different scripts of the Qin dynasty. He clarified:

> 自爾秦書有八體：一曰大篆，二曰小篆，三曰刻符，四曰蟲書，五曰摹印，六曰署書，七曰殳書，八曰隸書。
>
> Since the Qin dynasty, there have been eight calligraphy styles: the first is known as great seal script, the second as small seal script, the third as carved symbols, the fourth as worm script, the fifth as imitation engraving stamp script, the sixth as banner script, the seventh as weapon script, and the eighth as clerical script.[190]

According to Xu Shen's records, eight calligraphy styles were documented after the Qin dynasty. However, it remains difficult to determine whether these eight calligraphy styles represent distinct script styles. What is certain is that by the Eastern Han dynasty, the names of both seal script and clerical script had been defined and specifically referred to the calligraphy styles of these two scripts during the Qin dynasty. In addition, calligrapher Wei Heng 衛恆 (?–291 CE) from the Western Jin dynasty (266–316 CE) who is

[188] Li, *Chinese Writing and Calligraphy*, 101–102.
[189] The introduction of these five script styles, pages 39–40.
[190] Duan Yucai 段玉裁, *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 說文解字注 [Commentary on the Explanations of Characters and Words], vol.16, juan 15, ed. Wang Yunwu (Shanghai: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1939), 21–22.

referenced in *Siti shushi* 四體書勢 (Propensities of Four Writing Styles) noted that during the Xin dynasty (9–23 CE) under the rule of Wang Mang 王莽, *liushu* 六書 (six categories) were compiled following textual revisions. Wei Heng wrote:

> 王莽時，使司空甄鄂校文字部，改定古文，復有六書：一曰古文，即孔子壁中書也；二曰奇字，即古文而異者也；三曰篆書，即秦篆書也；四曰佐書，即隸書也；五曰繆篆，所以摹印也；六曰鳥書，所以書幡信也。
>
> During the reign of Wang Mang, the Minister of Works, Zhen Feng, was appointed to manage the textual department, and revise the oldest script. Thus, there were six categories: firstly, the oldest script, which refers to the writings found on the walls of Confucius; secondly, the odd characters, which are irregular changes of the oldest script; thirdly, the seal script, which is the seal script used during the Qin dynasty; fourthly, the assistant script, which is the clerical script; fifthly, the mock seal script, which is used in engraved stamps; and sixthly, the bird script, which is used for writing on banners and flags.[191]

The six calligraphy styles mentioned above likely originated after the Wang Mang period, and compared to the earlier eight calligraphy styles, these names do not directly correspond to the earlier names. Therefore, the names of calligraphy styles in the early Han dynasty may not accurately correspond to specific styles. For example, the names 'oldest script (*guwen* 古文)' and 'odd characters (*qizi* 奇字)' are not mentioned among the eight calligraphy styles of the Qin dynasty, though the great seal script is. According to the record of the *liushu*, the oldest script likely refers to calligraphy styles from the Spring and Autumn Period (720–480 BCE), the Warring States Period (475–221 BCE), and earlier. In addition, according to Xu Shen, Grand Recorder Zhou (*Dashi Zhou* 大史籀) compiled the characters used at that time and established a standard style, known as great seal script, for use by official scribes.[192] Thus, Zhou standardized the calligraphy style of the oldest script, which the Han people later named the great seal script style to differentiate it from the seal script of the Qin dynasty. Now, great seal script is a general term used for seal scripts handed down before the Qin dynasty, including oracle bone inscriptions (*jiagu wen*

[191] Wei Heng 衛恆, "*Siti shushi* 四體書勢 [Propensities of Four Writing Styles]," in *Lidai shufa lunwenxuan* 歷代書法論文選 [Selected Calligraphic Texts of the Past Dynasties], ed. Huang Jian 黃簡 (Shanghai: Shuhua Chubanshe, 1979), 14.

[192] Duan Yucai, *Shuowen jie zi zhu*, 16–17. Original text: 大史籀著大篆十五篇與古文或異。[Grand Recorder Zhou compiled fifteen chapters in great seal script, which is like the style of the oldest script.]

甲骨文) [Fig. 33], bronze inscriptions (*jin wen* 金文) [Fig. 34], and stone drum inscriptions [Fig. 35].[193] Moreover, through comparison, it is not difficult to establish that the small seal script refers to the seal script of the Qin dynasty. For clerical script, Wei Heng also mentioned that the assistant script (*zuoshu* 佐書) is another name for the clerical script. The clerical script style here refers to a specific period of calligraphy, potentially encompassing scripts with characteristics of clerical script styles from before and including the early Han dynasty. It may represent a more standardized name for a specific period style of calligraphy rather than a general term.

Moreover, according to the *liushu*, the mock seal script calligraphy style was used in making seals, as shown in Fig. 36. This standard also defines the weapon script as the writing style on weapons [Fig. 37]. Worm script and bird script are calligraphic styles characterized by decorative strokes, imitating shapes such as birds, phoenixes, snakes, and dragons, used for transmitting orders or decorating objects; see for example the decorative characters on a bronze kettle from the Eastern Han dynasty as shown in Fig. 38.[194] Consequently, when viewed in accordance with modern standards of script styles, it seems that before the Han dynasty, the main existing script styles were seal script and clerical script, while the remaining categories were calligraphy styles named as aesthetic attributes according to the medium of the text or decorative strokes. Also, because the official naming of script styles lagged behind the emergence of the calligraphy styles themselves, the names seal script and clerical script formed gradually and became defined by the early Han dynasty.

Following the collapse of the Han Empire, China entered a transformative era known as the Six Dynasties, spanning from 220 CE to 589 CE. During this 400-year period, Chinese civilization experienced changes across various cultural domains.[195] Especially during the Wei, Jin, Southern, and Northern Dynasties, an essential period in the development of Chinese calligraphy emerged. During this time, the types of script styles essentially stabilized. Except for seal script and clerical script, regular script, cursive script, and running script have all reached a level of maturity by this time. Additionally, aristocrats and literati dedicated a significant amount of time and effort to the creation and theoretical

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[193] Li, *Chinese Writing and Calligraphy*, 102.
[194] Zhang Wei 張偉, "*Qin Han niaochong zhuanyin tanxi yu chuangzuo yanjiu* 秦漢鳥蟲篆印探析與創作研究 [Study on the Stamp of Birds and Insects Seal Scripts in Qin and Han Dynasties and Their Creation]," *Shuhua yu Yishu Xuekan*, no. 31 (2021): 150–151.
[195] Wen C. Fong, "Prologue: Chinese Calligraphy as Presenting the Self," in *Chinese Calligraphy*, ed. Wang Youfen (London: Yale University Press, 2008), 5.

study of calligraphy. Not only did numerous outstanding calligraphers emerge, but there were also profound explorations into script styles, brush techniques, and calligraphic principles.[196] For example, research on the calligraphic styles of different scripts included the *Lishu ti* 隸書體 (Structure of Clerical Script) by Cheng Gongsui 成公綏 (231–273 CE), the *Caoshu shi* 草書勢 (Structure of Cursive Script) by Suo Jing 索靖 (239–303 CE), and the *Feibai shushi* 飛白書勢 (Structure of Flying White Script) by Liu Shao 劉邵. These works described handwriting structures by combining shapes found in nature and relating calligraphic styles to natural phenomena. The name of these studies also indicated the existence of the names and stylistic definitions for running script, cursive script, as well as seal script and clerical script.[197]

A comprehension of calligraphic expression and its relationship to nature arose together with an increasing interest in metaphysical studies during the six Dynasties. This led to a diversity in the nomenclature of calligraphic styles. Unlike the categorization of calligraphy into five script styles, there was a more diverse approach to naming calligraphic styles during this period. For example, Yang Xin 羊欣 (370–422 CE) compiled *Cai guren nengshu renming* 採古來能書人名 (Excerpts of the Names of Ancient People Who Were Skilled in Calligraphy), documenting different names of calligraphic styles from the Qin dynasty to the Jin dynasty (266–420 CE).[198] These script names included the eight-point script, which originated in the Later Han dynasty;[199] stone inscription script (*mingshi shu* 銘石書), used for engraving inscriptions on stone; education document script (*zhangcheng shu* 章程書), employed in educational texts; and quick writing script (*xingxia shu* 行狎書), a type of running script.[200] Yang Xin claimed that *xingxia shu* was also referred to as communication script (*xiangwen shu* 相聞書), where *xing* 行 means the smoothness and coherence of brushstrokes, while *xia* 狎 originally referred to signing. The term *xingxia shu* denotes a script style that is less formal

[196] Ouyang Zhongshi, "Introduction," 37.
[197] Ke Jinmu 柯金木, "*Wei Jin xuanxue dui shudao yishu de yingxiang* 魏晉玄學對書道藝術的影響 [The Effect of Metaphysics in Wei and Jin Dynasties on the Art of Calligraphy]," *Zhili Xuebao*, (1995): 140.
[198] Yang Xin 羊欣, "*Cai guren nengshu renming* 採古來能書人名 [Excerpts of the Names of Ancient People Who Were Skilled in Calligraphy]," in *Lidai shufa lunwenxuan*, 44–48.
[199] Yang, "*Cai guren nengshu renming*," 44. Original text: 上谷王次仲，後漢人，做八分楷法。[Wang Cizhong of Shanggu, a figure from the Later Han period, developed the foundation of the eight-point script (*bafen*) as the standard methods.]
[200] Ibid., 46. Original text: 鐘有三體：一曰銘石之書，最妙者也；二曰章程書，傳秘書、教小學者也；三曰行押書，相聞者也。[Calligraphy style of Zhong Yao is classified into three tyoes: the first is the inscription script, considered the most exquisite; the second is document script, used for official documents, secretarial work, and elementary education; the third is quick writing script script, employed for informal communication.]

than standard characters. Furthermore, *gaocao* 藁草 was also identified as *xiangwen shu*, a type of running script.[201] The term *xiangwen* signified the exchange of written communication and the transmission of greetings and information between individuals. These calligraphy names are based on five basic script styles, used in different contexts and with different functions.

In addition, Wang Yin 王愔 recorded thirty-six types of script styles in the *Gujin wenzi zhi mu* 古今文字志目 (Catalogue of Ancient and Characters). He further classified the five basic script styles according to their usage, scenarios, and the pictorial nature of the strokes. For example, he subdivided seal script into specific categories such as engraving seal script (*kefu zhuan* 刻符篆), imitated seal script (*xiangxing zhuan* 象形篆), tadpole seal script (*kedaou zhuan* 蝌蚪篆), and insect seal script (*chongzhuan* 蟲篆). He also introduced some new script names, including some named after animal forms, such as phoenix script (*fengshu* 鳳書), fish script (*yushu* 魚書), dragon script (*longshu* 龍書), unicorn script (*qilin shu* 麒麟書), tortoise script (*guishu* 龜書), and snake script (*sheshu* 蛇書); others were named after the strokes of the characters, such as hanging needle script (*xuanzhen shu* 懸針書) and reclining wave script (*yanbo shu* 偃波書); and some with object names, such as celestial being script (*xianren shu* 仙人書) and cloud script (*yunshu* 雲書).[202] Identifying the exact calligraphy style that matches some of these script names is challenging due to the lack of any tangible resources available. Nonetheless, five basic script styles are the source of most of the function names.

During the later Tang dynasty, there also appeared to be no standardization in the naming of calligraphy styles, leading to significant growth of styles. Wei Xu 韋續 mentioned fifty-six script styles in his compilation *Moshu* 墨藪 (Swamp of Ink).[203] However, Zhu Changwen 朱長文 (1039–1090 CE) in Northern Song dynasty clarified in his work

[201] Ibid. Original text: 覬子瓘，字伯玉，為晉太保。採張芝法，以覬法參之，更為草藁。草藁是相聞書也。瓘子恆，亦善書，博識古文。 [Ji Ziguan, also named Boyu, served as the Grand Protector of Jin. He adopted the techniques of Zhang Zhi and integrated them with his own, creating a refined version of *gaocao*, which became a form of *xiangwen shu*. Guan Ziheng, was also skilled in calligraphy and possessed extensive knowledge of oddest scripts.]

[202] Wang Yin 王愔, "*Gujin wenzi zhi mu* 古今文字志目 [Catalog of Ancient and Characters]," in *Lidai shufa lunwenxuan*, 39–40.

[203] Wei Xu 韋續, *Moshu* 墨藪 [Swamp of Ink], ed. Wang Yunwu (Shanghai: Shangwu Yingshuguan, 1936), 1–5.

Mochi bian 墨池編 (Collection of the Ink Pond) that some of these script styles might not have existed.[204] He indicated:

> 所謂五十六種書者，何其紛紛多說耶？彼皆得於傳聞，因於曲說，或重複，或虛誕，未可盡信也。學者惟工大小篆，八分，楷，草，行草，為法足矣，不必究心於諸體爾。
>
> The so-called fifty-six styles of scripts—why are there so many conflicting names? All these script names stem from hearsay, and their distorted explanations, sometimes duplicated, sometimes fabricated, make them untrustworthy. Scholars should focus only on the script styles of great and small seal script, eight-pointed script, regular script, cursive script, and running script. There is no need to explore the various other styles.[205]

The names of various scripts and calligraphy styles mentioned above are based on decorative strokes and the functional properties of the characters. Generally, most script names are derived from pictographic metaphors, which not only indicate that the characters possess certain graphic properties but also suggest reverence through the addition of metaphoric names, akin to totem worship. This may be rooted in the origin of characters in divination practices. People created characters with strokes resembling natural objects and assigned names to these styles, vividly conveying the intention behind the characters while invoking divine protection.[206] Moreover, the names of certain styles often reflect the shape of strokes in a character. These styles typically involve the strokes to imitate the physical attributes of an object. There seem to be no newly created script styles. It appears that all these styles evolved from the five recognized script types. Among the several scripts, seal script, which includes great and little seal script, clerical script, and regular script, is considered major because they had been officially utilized for official documentation at different periods.

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[204] In 1066, Zhu Changwen completed Collection of the Ink Pond in twenty chapters for a total of 106 texts, the most complete collection of texts on calligraphy to date in his time.

[205] Zhu Changwen 朱長文, *Mochi Bian* 墨池編 [Collection of the Ink Pond] (Taiwan: Guoli Zhongyang Tushuguan, 1970), 57.

[206] As mentioned in *Zhou yi* 周易: 古者包犧之王天下也，仰則觀象於天，俯則觀法於地，觀鳥獸之文，與地之宜，近取諸身，遠取諸物，於是始作八卦，以通神明之德，以類萬物之情。[In ancient times, when Fuxi ruled the world, he observed the celestial phenomena above and the patterns of the earth below. He studied the markings of birds and beasts and the suitability of the land, drawing insights both from his own body and from external objects. Thus, he created the Eight Trigrams to manifest the virtues of divine clarity and to categorize the inherent principles of all things.]

Hence, during the Northern Dynasties and earlier periods, no standard definition existed for the terms clerical script and regular script nor for their calligraphy styles. On the one hand, the assistant script and the eight-point script are related to the clerical script but seem to refer to separate calligraphic styles. Assistant script is often seen as an intermediary style, while eight-point script, includes angular and simplified strokes that link it stylistically to clerical script. On the other hand, the term regular script was not officially established until the Tang dynasty, as the regular script style had reached maturity by then and was characterized by a clear structure, upright strokes, and distinct character shapes. However, the regular script style of calligraphy had already begun to emerge before the Tang dynasty, so its name was not clearly defined earlier. In the Northern Dynasties, the term *kaishu* did not necessarily refer specifically to the mature regular script style. Therefore, to accurately analyze the calligraphy style of the cliff-sutra engravings in the late Northern Dynasties, it is essential to understand how clerical script and regular script were defined and characterized at that time.

Clerical script

According to records from Yang Xing, during the Qin dynasty, Minister Cheng Miao was imprisoned for offending Qin Shihuang. During his ten years in prison, he is said to have created the clerical script.[207] However, the creation of a new script style cannot be attributed to the efforts of a single individual. The development of clerical script, from the emergence of its stroke characteristics to its maturity and standardization, must have been a long and gradual process. Modern scholars generally believe that clerical script matured and became popular during the Han dynasty (ca. 27–395 CE) and was the main script style used at that time. The calligraphy style in Stone Classics is primarily representative of the clerical script of the Eastern Han dynasty, as recognized by scholars today.

The wave line is a prominent characteristic of horizontal strokes in clerical script. Its literal name is "silkworm head and swallow tail" (*cantou yanwei* 蠶頭燕尾). The standard horizontal line in clerical script strengthens both the initial point (the head of the silkworm) and the final point (the tail of the swallow). As illustrated in Fig. 39, when writing, first

[207] Yang, "*Cai guren nengshu renming*." in *Lidai shufa lunwenxuan*, 44. Original text: 秦獄吏程邈，善大篆。得罪始皇，囚於雲陽獄，增減大篆體，去其繁復，始皇善之，出為獄吏，名書曰隸書。 [Cheng Miao, a Qin prison officer skilled in the great seal script, was imprisoned in the Yunyang Prison after offending Emperor Qin Shi Huang. During his imprisonment, he simplified and modified the great seal script, removing its complexity. Emperor Qin Shi Huang approved of his creation, released him, and reinstated him as a prison officer. This new script came to be known as clerical script.]

force is applied at the starting point, then moved to the lower left, paused for a moment, and the shape of a "silkworm head" is drawn when approaching the end of the stroke. The brush then transitions sideways, force is applied to the lower right, and gradually the brush is lifted to draw an open shape similar to a "swallow's tail" to complete the stroke. In addition, in clerical script, the left-falling stroke typically begins as a narrow width and gradually widens. The right-falling stroke ends in a wave line resembling the horizontal stroke. At the end of writing, the brush then turns upward and right, gradually lifting the brush [Fig. 40].[208] The character structure of clerical script typically exhibits a squat, broad, and horizontally oriented appearance. Nowadays, scholars point out that representative examples are the *Liqi bei* 禮器碑 (Stele about Ritual Objects) and the *Zhang Qian bei* 張遷碑 (Epitaph to Zhang Qian). The strokes of the characters in the *Stele about Ritual Objects* are thin and forceful, considered to be the best clerical script work of the Han dynasty [Fig. 41]. By comparison, the *Zhang Qian bei* is a typical inscription from the Han dynasty, with simple and straightforward brushwork. The structure of the characters is compact, and the strokes are strong [Fig. 42].[209]

However, comprehending the calligraphic style developed in the clerical script during the Northern Dynasties and earlier times extends beyond the standard clerical script which was established in Han dynasty stone inscriptions. The meaning of clerical script and the calligraphic styles it reflects differed over different time periods. To differentiate between several calligraphic styles within a single character system, the styles inherited from clerical script were characterized by distinctive characteristics in comparison to the contemporary standard clerical script. Therefore, it is important to investigate the definitions of clerical script throughout various time periods and the calligraphic properties they include to clarify the meaning of distinct names and the artistic styles they represent.

Existing relics show that the clerical script calligraphy style seems to have already emerged during the Warring States Period, and its calligraphy characteristics also differed depending on the writing tools. Considered to be the most representative example, the writing on the *Qingchuan mudu* 青川木牘 (Scripted Wood Slips from Qingchuan), which was discovered in Qingchuan county, Sichuan Province [Fig. 43]. A prominent feature of the wood slip calligraphy style is the reduction of the evenly curved, rounded strokes

[208] Li, *Chinese Writing and Calligraphy,* 120–121.
[209] Wang Jingxian, "An Ancient Art Shines: Calligraphy from the Shang through the Han Dynasties," in *Chinese Calligraphy*, ed. Wang Youfen (London: Yale University Press, 2008), 119–122.

which are typical of seal script, replacing them with more pointed strokes at the beginning and end. Perhaps due to the narrow width of the wooden slips, the overall structure of the characters retained the slender features of seal script. Although the wavy lines of Han dynasty clerical script have not yet appeared in this style of calligraphy, the addition of angular strokes marks a departure from the seal script, highlighting the change in this style of calligraphy. Scholars today call this style of calligraphy archaic clerical script (*gu lishu* 古隸書) to distinguish it from the typical clerical script style, which has standard characteristics.[210] It can be inferred that the calligraphy style of clerical script appeared as early as the Warring States period, but the name of clerical script was determined only after this style gradually matured and possessed certain standardizing characteristics. According to the eight script styles unsed in the Qin dynasty mentioned by Xu Shen, it can be inferred that the calligraphy style of clerical script matured and was commonly used during the Qin dynasty. So, how did the name *lishu* originate?

The earliest existing documentary record about clerical script is the *Hanshu: yiwenzhi* 漢書：藝文志 (History of Han: Records of Arts and Literature) by Eastern Han historian Ban Gu 班固 (32–92 CE). Ban Gu believed that the calligraphy style of clerical script was created during the Qin Shihuang period, and he elaborated:

> 是時始造隸書矣，起於官獄多事，苟趨省易，施之於徒隸也。
>
> At that time, the creation of clerical script began, arising from the numerous official documents in prison, [therefore, the seal script] was simplified for convenience, and this style was used by administrative officials [to record these documents].[211]

Ban Gu explained that the clerical script calligraphy style developed because of the need to record a large number of prison-related documents, facilitating the recording process. Xu Shen also proposed that the development of the clerical script style led to a simplified version of the seal script during the Qin dynasty, which clerks and officials used informally as shorthand due to its speed of writing. Ban Gu further explained:

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[210] Wang, "An Ancient Art Shines," 93.

[211] Ban Gu 班固, *Hanshu yiwenzhi jiangshu* 漢書藝文志講疏 [Explanation of the History of Han: Records of Arts and Literature] (Shanghai: Shangwu Yingshuguan, 1933), 92.

> 是時秦燒滅經書，滌除舊典。大發吏卒，興戍役。官獄職務繁，初有隸書，以趣約易，而古文由此絕矣。
>
> At that time, Emperor Qin [ordered] the burning and destruction of classic texts, and abolished old documents. [He] extensively mobilized officials and laborers, initiating large-scale military service. Due to the complexity and abundance of the administrative prison documents, the clerical script style was originally developed for its simplicity and ease of writing, leading to the extinction of the oldest calligraphy styles.[212]

From this analysis, the name *lishu* originated from the calligraphy style used by low-level officials or clerks in recording documents related to prison affairs in Qin dynasty. Xu Shen explained in the *shuowen jiezi* that the character *li* 隸 also represents a person of low status who was arrested.[213] Thus, the name *lishu* may come from the fact that this style of writing was mainly used for documents relating to people of low status in Qin dynasty. Moreover, Wei Hen clarified that the calligraphy style of this clerical script simplified the complex strokes of seal script, forming a more concise and practical character shape to meet the needs of large-scale writing. He also wrote:

> 秦既用篆，奏事繁多，篆字難成，即令隸人佐書，曰隸字。漢因行之，獨符、印璽、幡信、題署用篆。隸書者，篆之捷也。
>
> In the Qin dynasty, seal script was used, but the numerous official documents made it difficult to use due to its complexity. [As a result] clerks were ordered to assist in writing using what became known as clerical script. The Han dynasty continued this practice, reserving seal script for specific uses such as engraving tallies, seals, writing banners, and inscriptions. Clerical script is a more efficient type of seal script.[214]

The calligraphy style of clerical script mentioned here refers to the style from archaic clerical script as shown in *Qingchuan mudu* to the Qin dynasty, specifically the calligraphy style on wooden slips from this period. Recent discoveries of Qin wooden slips have

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212 Duan, *Shuowen ji zi zhu*, 20.
213 Xu Shen 许慎, *Shuowen jiezi* 说文解字 [Explanations of Characters and Words] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1978), 65.
214 Wei Heng, "*Siti shushi*," in *Lidai shufa lunwenxuan*, 15.

provided clues about the early styles of clerical script. For example, the Qin bamboo slips unearthed from the tomb in Yunmeng County 雲夢縣, Hubei Province, date back to 217 BCE, and their characters and text structures are similar to those of the earlier Qingchuan bamboo slips, although separated by seventy years. Though, the characters in the *Shuihudi qinjian* 睡虎地秦简(*Shuihudi* Qin bamboo) texts show wider and flatter strokes, with more square strokes than round ones [Fig. 44]. This style of clerical script originated from seal script and thus retains some characteristics of seal script in certain strokes. In terms of brushwork, it features angular turns and wave-like strokes, with increased variation in pressure during writing. Structurally, it maintains some of the original formations like the long structure of seal script, but simplifies the convoluted and intricate strokes, adopting a more horizontal orientation.

Moreover, the assistant script, also known as *zuoshu*, is another term for clerical script. "*Zuo*" means assistant or subordinate. This term may indicate that clerical script style in the Qin dynasty was a supplementary script used on informal occasions, distinct from seal script, which was commonly used in official situations. Xu Shen also interpreted the six categories, claiming that the *zuoshu* was another term for clerical script, consistent with statements from the Wang Mang period.[215] The Wang Mang period only mentioned assistant script as a clerical script style, without explicitly identifying it as the clerical script of the Qin period. Xu Shen used the name *zuoshu* to refer specifically to the clerical script style of the Qin dynasty to more accurately distinguish the calligraphy style of the clerical script in the Qin dynasty from that of the Han dynasty. According to the principle that the calligraphy style should appear earlier than the name of the script styles, it can be inferred that the calligraphy style shown in wooden slips had already matured in the Qin dynasty, and the name for the clerical script style, *lishu* or *zuoshu* should have appeared in the early Han dynasty or before to represent the style of this kind of Qin clerical script. Therefore, there are two ways to explain the naming of the clerical script as *lishu* during the Qin dynasty. Firstly, prison documents employed this calligraphic style. Secondly, clerks used this type of script as an auxiliary to seal script for recording purposes. Clerical script was used unofficially during the Qin dynasty.

During the Western Han dynasty (202–8 BCE), the mature Han clerical script calligraphy style had not been fully formed. Manuscripts written in ink also survived from this period; one example is the *Laozi jia ben* 老子家本 (Classic of Way and Virtue), a silk piece from

[215] Duan, *Shuowen ji zi zhu*, 33. About six categories in Wang Mang period, in this dissertation, see page 67.

the Western Han period. It was found in the tomb of a high-ranking official family at Mawangdui in Hunan Province [Fig. 45]. The characters either have a vertical, oblong shape or a horizontal, rectangular shape. The brushwork is distinguished by its fast execution and use of slanting force. The vertical strokes are longer compared to the horizontal strokes. This calligraphy style is similar to that found on Qin dynasty wooden slips.[216] The more powerful execution of the lower right stroke matches the typical characteristics of mature clerical script found in the Han dynasty. It also shows an intermediate style between seal script and clerical script.

The introduction of brushes and the production of paper by Cai Lun (63–121 CE) impacted the development of calligraphy styles during the Eastern Han period. The advent of paper facilitated a more convenient writing medium, hence promoting an increase in writing activities. The enlargement of the writing area may have also impacted the wide, rectangular strokes of clerical script, unlike the narrow, curved strokes of seal script. Clerical script was appropriate for writing and structuring because of its uniformity and simplicity. Thus, the popularity of paper indirectly promoted the mature development of clerical script. Clerical script gradually became the style used for writing imperial edicts, scriptures, and inscriptions on stone tablets. After continuous modification and improvement, clerical script became the main style of calligraphy in the Eastern Han dynasty.[217] Modern scholars often refer to the calligraphic style of clerical script primarily in the context of works from the Eastern Han period, and particularly Eastern Han stone inscriptions. Research indicates that most of the stone inscriptions from this period were official works.

As a result, it is not appropriate to call the clerical script style of the Qin and Han dynasties *lishu*. Although Xu Shen used the name *zuoshu* to refer to the clerical script in the Qin dynasty, this was likely to distinguish it from the clerical script of the Eastern Han period. Existing historical evidence, however, indicates that the calligraphic style of clerical writing during the early Western Han period resembles the assistant script style of the Qin dynasty but is distinct from the mature clerical script style of the Eastern Han period. Naming changes occurred in relation to the calligraphic styles of clerical script across different historical periods, reflecting shifts in style, usage, and standardization over time.

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[216] Wang, "An Ancient Art Shines," in *Chinese Calligraphy*, 113–114.
[217] Chen Binhe 陳彬龢, *Zhongguo wenzi ju shufa* 中國文字與書法 [The Chinese written language and calligraphy] (Shanghai: Shangwu Yingshuguan, 1931), 43.

During the Northern Dynasties, the name *guli* 古隸, meaning ancient clerical script, appeared to indicate the early phases of the clerical script style. The wood slips of the Qin dynasty and the ink writing of the early Western Han dynasty demonstrate this as a transition style from Qin clerical script to the mature Han clerical script. In the record of *Yanshi jiaxun* 顏氏家訓 (Educational ways in Yan Family Instructions) by Yan Zhitui 顏之推 (531–591 CE), he mentioned the ancient script:

> 開皇二年五月，長安民掘得秦時鐵稱權，旁有銅塗，鐫銘二所。……其書兼為古隸。
>
> In May of the second year of the Kaihuang era, a resident of Chang'an unearthed an iron weight from the Qin period, which was coated with bronze and had two inscriptions engraved on it. ... The script used in the inscriptions is the ancient clerical script.[218]

This type of inscribed artifact, known as a Qin edict bronze plate, is a bronze plate used to record the imperial edicts and official documents of the First Emperor of Qin. As shown in Fig. 46, the structure of the characters need correcting is mainly based on the seal script, with fewer rounded strokes and more square strokes. In addition, Li Daoyuan 酈道元 (ca. 466–527 CE) claimed that the ancient clerical script calligraphy style originated in the Qin dynasty and was formed by simplifying the seal script.[219] Additionally, he stated that Cheng Miao created the clerical script while incarcerated. Cheng Miao likely organized and summarized the calligraphy characteristics of this style, even though a single person cannot create a writing style. This style of calligraphy was fully developed during the Qin dynasty. In the Northern Dynasties, to distinguish it from the mature clerical script of that time, scholars introduced the term *guli* to refer to the clerical script style with the characteristics of seal script. According to this characteristic, the clerical script of the Qin dynasty and the early Western Han dynasty which combined features with the seal script

[218] Yan Zhitui 顏之推, *Yanshi jiaxun* 顏氏家訓 [Educational Ways in Yan Family Instructions], ed. Wang Liqi (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2002), 455.

[219] Li Daoyuan 酈道元, *Shuijing zhu* 水經注 [Annotations to the Itineraries of Rivers], vol. 3, ed. Wang Yunwu (Shanghai: Shangwu Yingshuguan, 1929), 79. Original text: 古隸之書起于秦代，而篆字文繁，無會劇務. 故用隸人之省，謂之隸書。或雲即程邈於雲陽增損者，是言隸者，篆捷也。[The ancient script originated during the Qin dynasty when the complexity of seal script became impractical for administrative tasks. Thus, a simplified version was adopted by clerks, giving it the name clerical script. Some attribute its development to Cheng Miao, who modified the script during his imprisonment in Yunyang. The term *lishu* reflects its function as a more efficient alternative to seal script.]

style, can all be called *guli*. Hence, what are the specific differences between the ancient clerical script and the mature clerical script of the Han dynasty? How do the calligraphy styles referred to by these names differ in later records?

Yuan dynasty (1271–1368 CE) calligrapher Zheng Shao 鄭杓, in his calligraphy book *Yanji* 衍極 said:

> 班固謂起於官獄多事，苟趨簡易，而無點畫俯仰之勢，為其徒隸所作，故曰隸書，亦曰佐書。漢建初中，以隸書為楷法，言其字方於八分，有模楷也。
>
> Ban Gu stated that clerical script originated from the numerous prison documents, aiming for simplicity and ease of use, so the dots and strokes lack the wave styles. Clerks created it, leading to its names, *lishu* or *zuoshu*. During the Eastern Han dynasty's first year, clerical script was considered the standard method, indicating that its characters were squarer than the eight-point, and served as a standard model.[220]

According to the previous analysis, the *lishu* and *zuoshu* mentioned here refer to the calligraphy style of ancient clerical script. Zheng Shao clearly points out that this style of calligraphy does not have a wave stroke. This characteristic is distinctly different from the clerical script of the Han dynasty. Comparing the writing found in Fig. 42 and Fig. 44, the Qin clerical script does not have the obvious wavy strokes of the mature clerical script of the Eastern Han dynasty. Zheng Shao further explained that the Eastern Han dynasty adopted the clerical script as the standard, characterized by a square structure with an eight-point script appearance. Moreover, he described the clerical script in more detail:

> 曰古隸，程邈、王次仲作。曰今隸，亦曰正書，出於古隸。鍾繇、衛瓘習之，頗有異體。鍾繇謂之銘石。羲、獻復變新奇，故別為今隸書，謂之楷法，而隸楷分矣。曰八分，王次仲作，蔡邕述之。
>
> The term ancient clerical script refers to the styles created by Cheng Miao and Wang Cizhong. The term modern clerical script, also known as standard script,

[220] Zheng Biao 鄭杓, "*Yanji* 衍極," in *Lidai shufa lunwenxuan*, 406.

> developed from ancient clerical script. Zhong Yao and Wei Guan practiced this style, which had some variations. Zhong Yao referred to it as stone inscription script. Wang Xizhi and Wang Xianzhi further innovated it, leading to the distinction of modern clerical script, which became known as the standard model, marking the division between clerical script and regular script. The term *bafen* was created by Wang Cizhong and elaborated by Cai Yong.[221]

The ancient clerical script was derived from the seal script. Modern clerical script was also the standard calligraphy style in the Eastern Han dynasty, which was the mature clerical script style and a further development of the ancient clerical script. During the Southern and Northern dynasties, calligraphers such as Zhong You further transformed the clerical script of the Eastern Han into a new style of calligraphy known as regular script. Since then, there has been a distinction between clerical script and regular script. However, Zheng Shao also seemed to have difficulty defining the interpretation of the eight-point calligraphy style. He pointed out that the mature clerical script was a transition from the eight-point script, and the eight-point script also referred to the writing style of Wang Cizhong, suggesting that the eight-point script may refer to the clerical script calligraphy style with characteristics of seal script. He also stated that the stone inscriptions from the Cai Yong period were composed in the eight-point script, implying that the eight-point script referred to the standard clerical script. Scholar Wu Qiuyan 吾丘衍 (ca. 1268–1311 CE) concurred with this perspective, asserting that the Stone Classics and numerous steles from the Han dynasty collectively refer to *Hanli* 漢隸, the Han clerical script characterized by wavy strokes, also known as eight-point script.[222] Therefore, before explaining the name and characteristics of regular script, it is necessary to explore the relationship between the name of the eight-point script and its calligraphy style.

Eight-point script

There are generally three theories regarding the script style known as eight-point script. According to the first theory, Wang Cizhong created an eight-point script during the Qin dynasty. The second theory suggests that eight-point script is another name for clerical

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[221] Zheng, "*Yanji*," in *Lidai shufa lunwenxuan*, 415.

[222] Wu Qiuyan 吾丘衍, *Xianju lu* 閒居錄 [Recode about Living in Leisure], in *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 [Complete Writings of the Four Repositories] (Shanghai: Shangwu Yingshuguan, 1982). Original text: 六曰漢隸，蔡邕石經及諸漢碑之字是也，此體最為後出，皆有波法與秦隸同名，其實則異，又謂之八分云。[The sixth is the Han clerical script, exemplified by the characters on Cai Yong's Stone Classics and various Han dynasty steles. This style, the latest to emerge, features the distinctive 'wave-like' strokes. Although it shares the name *lishu* with the Qin clerical script, it is fundamentally different and is also referred to as the eight-point script.]

script in the Han dynasty. The third theory considers eight-point script to be an irregular form of the mature clerical script. Xu Shen's records of the eight script styles do not mention the term *bafen*, indicating that the name *bafen* may not have existed to refer to any calligraphy styles before the Han dynasty. The earliest reference to eight-point script appears in the *Garden of Calligraphy of Ancient and Modern Times* (*Gujin fashu yuan* 古今法書苑), which quotes Cai Wenji:

> 臣父造八分時，割程邈隸八分，取二分；割李斯篆二分，取八分，於是為八分書。
>
> When my father created the eight-point calligraphy style, he gave up the eight-tenths of the clerical script created by Cheng Miao and took two-tenths; cut off two-tenths of the seal script of Li Si, and took eight-tenths, so the eight-point style was created.[223]

Here, the eight-point script represents a mixture of Qin clerical script and small seal script calligraphy styles. From this point of view, eight-point script seems to be a kind of ancient clerical script. In addition, the eighth-century historian of calligraphy Zhang Huaiguan 張懷瓘 (ca. 714–460 CE) quoted texts from Wang Yin 王愔, a scholar from the Northern Dynasties, in his commentary on *Judgements on Calligraphy* (*Shuduan* 書斷). He claimed that Wang Cizhong adopted the square strokes and wide and squat features in ancient script and created the square-style eight-point script based on the standards of clerical script.[224] However, today it is difficult to determine the identity of Wang Cizhong. Some believe that he was from the Qin dynasty, while others believe that he was from the Later Han dynasty.[225] Therefore, it is difficult to determine whether the description of him changing the style of clerical script to write in the eight-point style refers to the ancient clerical script or the mature clerical script.

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[223] Yang Liuqing 楊柳青, "*'Bafen' shifei 'hanli'* "八分" 實非 "漢隸" ['eight-point script' not as 'Han clerical script']," *Zhongguo Shuhua,* no. 6 (2019): 12.

[224] Zhang Huaiguan 張懷瓘, "*Shuduan* 書斷 [Judgements on Calligraphy]," in *Lidai shufa lunwenxuan*, 160.

[225] Zhang, "*Shuduan*," in *Lidai shufa lunwenxuan*, 160. Original text: 案八分者，秦羽人上谷王次仲所作也；靈帝時，王次仲飾隸為八分。[The eight-point script was created by Wang Cizhong of Shanggu, a Qin scholar. During the reign of Emperor Ling, Wang Cizhong refined the clerical script into the eight-point script.] Also see Ge Shouzhi 戈守智, *Hanxi shufa tongjie* 漢谿書法通解 [Hanxi's Comprehensive Explanations on Calligraphy] (Tianjin: Tianjin Guji Shudian, 1984). Original text: 秦时王次仲所造古八分也，在隶之前。[The ancient eight-point script, created by Wang Cizhong during the Qin period, predates the clerical script.]

> 八分已減小篆之半，隸又減八分之半。然可雲子似父，不可雲父似子，故知隸不能生八分矣。
>
> The eight-point style reduced half of the small seal script, the clerical script further reduced half of eight-point script. However, while it can be said that the son resembles the father, it cannot be said that the father resembles the son. Thus, it is understood that clerical script could not have created from eight-point script.[226]

As a basis, it is further explained that eight-point script is a style of calligraphy between small seal script and clerical script. Eight-point script led to the creation of the standard clerical script of the Han dynasty. The late Eastern Han dynasty gave rise to the name *bafen*. Based on the delay in the naming, *bafen* may be used to distinguish the calligraphy styles of Qin clerical script and early Han clerical script. For example, as shown in Fig. 47, the characters on the bamboo slips from the *Mawangdui* 馬王堆 during the Western Han period retain some of the rounded strokes of seal script. However, the overall shape of the characters has become flatter, and the strokes have begun to display the wave-stroke characteristics found in clerical script, though not as obviously as in the fully developed clerical script.

Zhang Huaiguan also claimed that the *Shouzhan bei* 受禪碑 (Stele of Acceptance of Zen) is the most representative work which uses the eight-point script calligraphy style. As shown in Fig. 48, the character structure of this inscription is longer than that of the standard clerical script, much like the seal script, which has smooth strokes and a round, well-proportioned structure. The horizontal strokes end with a forceful downward-pressing pause, creating a thick, rounded stroke with a more pronounced twist, which is a feature of the mature clerical script style. In more detail, as shown in Fig. 49, the character *di* 帝 in the Eastern Han clerical script [Fig. 49b] shows a squat structure with an almost straight downward stroke at the bottom part. In the *Shoushan bei*, the strokes on both sides of the lower part of di spread out in different directions [Fig. 49a]. This feature is similar to the way of writing in seal script [Fig. 49c]. As another example, compare this 口 part in the *Shoushan bei* and the *Zhang Qian bei*, it is evident that this part in eight-point style is

[226] Zhang, "*Shuduan*," 160–161.

spread out like a character *ba* 八 on either side [Fig. 50]. Perhaps it is because of this stroke feature that this style of calligraphy is named *bafen*. Comparing the writing found in both Fig. 47 and Fig. 48, the calligraphy in Fig. 48 is closer to the standard clerical script. This may indicate that in the late Han dynasty, when the name *bafen* first appeared, it referred to the early Han dynasty writing style that was more similar to seal script. However, during the Tang dynasty, the calligraphy style that eight-point script was referring to undergo a change. It seems that the standard clerical script gradually changed into the Tang regular script.

As scholar Wu Qiuyan clearly pointed out in *Xuegu bian* 學古編 (Studies in antiquity), eight-point style is a kind of Han clerical script without obvious wavy strokes. He wrote:

> 五曰八分，八分者，漢隸之未有挑法者，比秦隸則易識，比漢隸則微似篆，若用篆筆作漢隸字即得之矣。八分與隸人多不分，故言其法。六曰漢隸，漢隸者，蔡邕《石經》及漢人諸碑上字，皆有挑法，與秦隸同名，其實則異又謂之八分。
>
> Fifth is eight-point, eight-point style is the form of Han clerical script that does not yet feature the upward wave stroke technique. Compared to Qin clerical script, it is easier to recognize; compared to Han clerical script, it resembles seal script slightly. If one uses seal script strokes to write Han clerical script, one gets eight-point script. Many people do not distinguish between eight-point script and clerical script, hence the need to explain its method. Sixth is Han clerical script. Han clerical script includes the characters found in Stone Classics written by Cai Yong and the calligraphy style in different Han dynasty steles, all of which feature the upward wave stroke technique. Although it shares the same name as Qin clerical script, it is different in style and is also referred to as eight-point script.[227]

It can be seen that the calligraphy style referred to by eight-point has no firm standard rules. It appears that eight-point script is not a certain script style, but rather a mixed calligraphy style. Guo Zhongshu 郭忠恕 of the Song dynasty explained that there are two

[227] Wu Qiuyan 吾丘衍, *Xuegubian* 學古編. The *Xuegubian* is included in the series *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書, *Baoyantang miji* 寶顏堂秘笈, *Tang-Song congshu* 唐宋叢書, *Guang baichuan xuehai* 廣百川學海, *Shuyuan* 書苑, *Xuejin taoyuan* 學津討源 and *Yimen guangdu* 夷門廣牘.

interpretations of eight-point script; this type of calligraphy is a mixture of seal script and clerical script, which is closer to seal script, and the other is that the calligraphy style resembles the shape of character *ba* 八. However, he believed that both statements are incorrect. Eight-point only refers to a writing method called *bafen*. Kang Youwei, a Qing dynasty scholar, elaborated on this view in more detail. He said:

> 西漢人變秦隸書體為扁體，亦得秦篆之八分。東漢又變西漢而增挑法，且極扁，又得西漢之八分。正書變東漢隸體而為方形圓筆，又得東漢之八分。八分以度言，本是活稱，伸縮無施不可。
>
> In the Western Han period, people transformed the Qin clerical script into a flattened style, which is an eight-point style derived from the Qin seal script. The Eastern Han period further modified this style by adding the upward wave stroke technique, making it even more flattened and thus considered the eight-point style as derived from the Western Han script. The regular script evolved from the Eastern Han clerical script into a squarer shape with rounded strokes, also considered an eight-point script derived from the Eastern Han script. The term *bafen* refers to a flexible theory that can be applied to various transformations and extensions between two script styles.

Taking eight-point script as a writing method rather than a script style seems to explain the difference in the definition of the term *bafen* in different periods. It can also explain why the writing style in Stone Classics can also be considered a kind of eight-point style.[228] Moreover, Qi Gong 啓功 (1912–2005 CE) clarified that in the Qin dynasty, the assistant script style was considered clerical script. During the Han dynasty, the standard authorized style was referred to as clerical script. After the Wei and Jin periods, the regular script style was named *lishu* because the name *kaishu* had not yet been produced to refer to regular script. To distinguish between regular script and clerical script at that time, the term *bafen* was used to refer to the clerical script style, and the term *lishu* was used to refer to regular script. For example, Song dynasty scholar Zhao Mingcheng 趙明誠 (1081–1129 CE)

[228] *Tang liudian* 唐六典 [Six Statutes of the Tang Dynasty]. Original text: 四曰八分，謂石經碑碣所用。[The fourth is the eight-point script, which refers to the style used in the Stone Classics, steles, and inscriptions.]

recorded that the inscription of Dajue Temple Stele of the Eastern Wei dynasty used *lishu* style, which today means the regular script style.[229]

Since the naming of calligraphy styles often lags behind their emergence, the regular script style was not yet clearly defined during the Northern Dynasties, and the term *lishu* was sometimes used to refer to the earlier phases of regular script style that had emerged by then. However, in the Northern Dynasties, clerical script styles had established definitions and corresponding names. Although the term for regular script had not yet been formalized, the style itself already existed. What, then, are the differences between the Northern Dynasties' definitions and names for this style and those used in earlier periods?

Regular script

The term *kai* 楷 in *kaishu* 楷书 means a model or standard. *Kaishu*, in a broad sense, refers to a script style that has established rules and can serve as a model. Qing dynasty scholar Liu Xizai 劉熙載 (1813–1811 CE) declared in the *Yigai* 藝概 (Precis of Calligraphy) that there is no fixed name for *kai*; not only regular script can be called *kaishu*. He also demonstrated that the term *kaishu* does not only refer to regular script, but also encompasses other script styles like seal script, clerical script, and cursive script, all of which can be considered standard styles.[230] However, nowadays, *kaishu* specifically refers to the regular script style, especially writings in the Tang dynasty.

The name *kaishu* first appeared in the *Cai guren neng shu renming*. Yang Xin mentioned that Wei Dan 韋誕 (179–253 CE), a native of Jingzhao (now Xi'an, Shaanxi Province), had outstanding skill in regular script.[231] Due to the lack of surviving physical materials, it is difficult to determine the exact style of script referred to as *kaishu* in this context.

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[229] Qi Gong 啓功, *Qi Gong quanji* 啓功全集 [Complete Works of Qi Gong], vol. 2 (Beijing: Beijing Shifan Daxue Chubanshe, 2008), 61–63. Original text: 右大觉寺碑，阴题银青光禄大夫臣韩毅隶书，盖今楷字也。[The stele of the Great Awakening Monastery (*Da jue si*) has an inscription on the reverse side, attributed to Minister Han Yi, a Silver and Azure Grand Master of the Court. Written in clerical script, it represents what is now recognized as the regular script.]

[230] Liu Xizai 劉熙載, *Yigai* 藝概 [Precise of Calligraphy], *in Lidai shufa lunwenxuan*, 685. Original text: 楷無定名，不獨正書當之。漢北海敬王睦善史書，世以為楷，是大篆可謂楷也。衛恆《書勢》言'王次仲始作楷法'，是八分為楷也。又言'伯英下筆必為楷'則是草為楷也。[The term *kai* has no fixed definition and is not exclusively limited to regular script. During the Han dynasty, King Mu of Beihai admired historical writings, which were regarded as *kai*—suggesting that Great Seal Script could also be considered *kai*. Wei Heng's Shu Shi states that 'Wang Cizhong first developed the kai method,' implying that the eight-pointed script was considered kai. Furthermore, the text notes that 'Bo Ying's every stroke was *kai*,' indicating that cursive script could also be regarded as *kai*.]

[231] Yang Xin, "*Cai guren nengshu renming*," in *Lidai shufa lunwenxuan*, 45. Original text: 韋誕字仲將，京兆人，善楷書。[Wei Dan, Zhongjiang, a native of Jingzhao, was renowned for his mastery of regular script.]

However, Zhang Zhi 張芝 (?–193 CE) and Handan Chun 邯鄲淳 (132–221 CE) both incorporated and were inspired by the calligraphy style of Wei Dan.[232] In addition, Wei Dan was particularly skilled in writing on official objects. The inscriptions on precious artefacts during the Wei state period (220–266 CE) were all written by him. The *kaishu* here likely refers to the official, standardized calligraphic style commonly found in stone inscriptions. As illustrated in Fig. 48, this style served as a standard and depicts a stone stele from the Wei state, commonly known as the *Shoushan bei.* The inscription details how Cao Pi accepted the throne and this stele exemplifies the official stone inscription style of that time, characterized by strong, structured strokes. The inscription also shows signs of transitioning from clerical script to a more standardized script. Therefore, the *kaishu* mentioned here likely resembles the style found in the stele inscriptions, representing a transitional form between standard clerical script and regular script, which is also referred to as eight-point script style in previous texts.

Furthermore, before the Tang dynasty, the term *kaishu* did not have a clear definition and most scholars used the term *lishu* to refer to the calligraphic style now known as regular script. It was likely at that time that regular script retained many of the brush techniques from the clerical script during its development. Moreover, during the Southern and Northern Dynasties, another term *kaili* 楷隸 emerged. According to surviving records, Yao Yuanbiao 姚元標, from the Northern Qi dynasty was skilled in this script style.[233] The *Ximengbao citang bei* 西門豹祠堂碑 (Stele of the Ximenbao Shrine), erected in 554 CE, was written by Yao Yuanbiao [Fig. 51]. Qing dynasty scholar Yang Shoujing 楊守敬 (1839–1915 CE) commented on the calligraphy style of this stele:

> 書法變古勁為豐腴，波磔亦不用折刀頭之法，竟與正書相去不遠。北齊一代分書多如此類，雖不及元魏之峭拔，亦無寒儉之氣。
>
> The calligraphy style [of this stele] transitioned from an ancient, robust style to a more rounded style, and the wave strokes no longer employed sharp angular turns. Thus, it became quite similar to regular script. Much of the Northern Qi

[232] Zhang, "*Shuduan*," 184. Original text: 服膺於張芝，兼邯鄲淳之法，諸書並善，尤精題署。[He adhered to the methods of Zhang Zhi and incorporated the techniques of Handan Chun. Skilled in various scripts, he excelled particularly in inscriptions and formal titles.]

[233] Yan Zhitui, *Yanshi jiaxun*, (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2002), 575. Original text: 唯有姚元標工於楷隸，留心小學，後生師之者眾。[Only Yao Yuanbiao excelled in both regular script and clerical script. He was deeply devoted to philology, and many later generations regarded him as their teacher.]

> period's *fenshu* style displayed these characteristics. Although it did not achieve the sharp style of the Northern Wei period, it also lacked an austere quality.[234]

The calligraphy style in this stele can be seen as a hybrid script that combines features of both clerical script and regular script. Although the term standard script (*zhengshu* 正書) here does not refer to the mature regular script style of the Tang dynasty. This indicates that, during the Northern Dynasties, while the regular script style had not yet fully developed, the final structure of the regular script had already begun to appear. At that time, the term *kaishu* was used to refer to the script style normally used in official documents. Furthermore, Tang dynasty scholar Xu Hao 徐浩 mentioned that Zhong Yao 钟繇 excelled in *zhenshu* 真書, or real script. As shown in Fig. 52, the stele inscriptions written by Zhong Yao are characterized by flattened characters that still preserve certain features of clerical script. However, the essential structure of the characters closely resembles that of regular script. The reason why there were so many different names for regular script lies in the varying interpretations of the meanings of the characters *kai* 楷, *zheng* 正, and *zhen* 真. *Kai* implies rules and models, while *zheng* and *zhen* also convey the meanings of standards and norms, conforming to principles and regulations. Seal script, clerical script, and regular script all undoubtedly possess ordered and upright stylistic characteristics. Therefore, *zhengshu*, or *zhenshu* should have a broader scope than *kaishu*, encompassing seal script, clerical script, and regular script.

Overall, during the Northern Dynasties and earlier periods, clerical script already had a relatively standard definition and corresponding names. However, during the Northern Dynasties, the term *kaishu* did not refer to the regular script style we understand today. Instead, it represented the widespread authorized calligraphic style of that time. Thus, the so-called *kaishu* of the Northern Dynasties was a calligraphy style leading towards the regular script of the Tang dynasty, embodying a hybrid calligraphic style. Based on this, modern scholars generally believe that the calligraphy style of the cliff-sutra engravings in the late Northern Dynasties is a mixed style between clerical script and regular script. With a preliminary understanding of the definitions and names of clerical and regular script in the Northern Dynasties, further clarity on the calligraphy style of cliff-sutra engravings can be achieved by examining the evaluations of Northern Dynasties stone inscriptions by

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[234] Yang Shoujing 楊守敬, *Jisu feiqingge ping beiji* 激素飛清閣平碑記 [Hormone Feiqing Court Flat Tablet], in *Shike shiliao xinbian* 石刻史料新編 [New compilation of historical materials inscriptions in stone], vol. 1 (Taibei: Xinwenti Chubanshe, 2006), 195.

Song and Qing dynasty scholars, who were prominent in the study of stele inscriptions. This approach will help illuminate the calligraphy style of sutra engravings in the Northern Dynasties.

2.2 Early Medieval Calligraphy in Late Chinese History

Since the Song dynasty, scholars have recognized the equal significance of both antiquities and calligraphy, particularly stone inscriptions, as reflections of historical and cultural heritage.[235] Proponents of antiquarian study emphasize that exploring ancient cultural relics allows for communication with the original creators. These relics serve not only as remnants of historical artifacts, but also reveal ancient spiritual culture, preserve historical truths, and showcase aesthetic achievements.[236] Over centuries, Chinese antiquity connoisseurs have held divergent perspectives concerning the calligraphy styles used in stone inscriptions during the Northern Dynasties. Both traditional and contemporary Chinese scholars have devoted their efforts to establishing criteria for evaluating the calligraphy style of Northern Dynasties stone carvings.[237] The assessment of calligraphy styles in stone inscriptions from the Northern Dynasties varies across different eras of antiquarian scholarship.[238]

The acceptance of stone inscriptions from the Northern Dynasties among Song scholars was limited, likely due to their perception of these dynasties as being ruled by nomadic peoples. Thus, scholars considered the calligraphy of the stone inscriptions of the Northern Dynasties to lack standards and exhibit irregular strokes. One possible reason for this judgment could be the Song dynasty's continued military confrontations with formidable adversaries, including those from regions outside the Central Plains, ultimately resulting in territorial losses on the northern frontiers.[239] In contrast, epigraphers during the Qing dynasty regarded the stone inscriptions of the Northern Dynasties with distinctive aesthetic significance. They praised these stone inscriptions for preserving and developing the brushwork and style of their ancestors, and integrating elements of the clerical script of the Han dynasty and creating the regular script of the Tang and Song Dynasties. Thus, the

[235] Robert E. Harrist, "The Artist as Antiquarian: Li Gonglin and His Study of Early Chinese Art," *Artibus Asiae* 55, no. 3/4 (1995): 272.
[236] Sena, *Bronze and Stone*, 120–123.
[237] Guo Hui, "Canonization in Early Twentieth-Century Chinese Art History," *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 10 (2014): 15–16.
[238] For the introduction of stone inscriptions on Wei-jin Nanbeichao, see: Zhao Chao and Victor Xiong, "Stone Inscriptions of the Wei-Jin Nanbeichao Period," *Early Medieval China*, no. 1 (1994): 84–96.
[239] Ari Daniel Levine, "Walls and Gates, Windows and Mirrors: Urban Defences, Cultural Memory, and Security Theatre in Song Kaifeng," *East Asian Science, Technology, and Medicine* 39, no. 1 (2014): 55–58.

combination style of clerical script and regular script appeared.[240] The inscriptions on steles were highly appreciated by Qing dynasty epigraphers, embodying the aesthetic trend of returning to the original style (*fanpu guizhen* 返璞归真).[241] Therefore, studying epigraphy from the Song dynasty to the Qing dynasty could help to understand the stylistic development of calligraphy of stone inscriptions in the Northern Dynasties. This section investigates the diverse perspectives of Song and Qing connoisseurs regarding Northern Dynasties stone inscriptions, demonstrating how the social and political environment affected their interpretations for the appreciation of calligraphy.

Models in the Song Antiquarian Writings

During the Song dynasty, China witnessed a significant resurgence of interest in antiquarianism. While reverence for the past has long played a role in historical and cultural awareness in China, this era saw a heightened passion among scholars and the imperial court for collecting and meticulously examining antiquities.[242] Consequently, ancient artifacts attained an elevated status as esteemed works of art, emblematic of refined taste. They came to symbolize not only political missions but also cultural identity.[243] Antiquarianism gradually evolved into an independent field of professional study known as Bronze and Stone Study (*jinshi xue* 金石學).

Among the most significant collections of antiquities from the Song dynasty are various rubbings of stone steles and ancient bronze vessels assembled by the well-known essayist, historian, poet, calligrapher, politician, and epigrapher Ouyang Xiu. His collection sparked a renewed interest in historical inscriptions and calligraphy, inspiring other collectors to focus on different types of artwork and antiques, particularly stone inscriptions.[244] Ouyang Xiu collected a large number of rubbings from stone inscriptions found in temples, shrines, hilltops, and caverns.[245] He conducted extensive commentary on his collection of rubbings, focusing on both their content and aesthetic value. This work is known as *Jigulu bawei* 集古錄跋尾 (Colophons of the Records of Collecting Antiquity) [Fig. 53]. His son,

[240] Li Ziyao, "The Charm of the Complexity of Innovation of Zhao Zhiqian's Official Script," *Proceedings* 81, no. 1:34 (2022): 1.
[241] Qian Zhuzhong and Fang Desheng, "Towards Chinese Calligraphy," *Macalester International* 18, no. 12 (2007): 116. Details of the "return to the original 返璞歸真" are explained in Xiang Shiling, "A Study on the Theory of "Returning to the Original" and "Recovering Nature" in Chinese Philosophy," *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 3, no. 4 (2008): 502–519.
[242] Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *Accumulating Culture: The Collections of Emperor Huizong*, Book, Whole (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 4–5.
[243] Sena, *Bronze and Stone*, 3.
[244] Egan, *The Problem of Beauty*, 7.
[245] Ibid., 2.

Ouyang Fei 棐 (1047–1113 CE), rearranged Ouyang Xiu's collection of colophons chronologically, titling it *Jigulu mu* 集古錄目 (Bibliography on the Records of Collecting Antiquity), which has been regarded as the pioneer and model of Chinese antiquarianism studies.[246] Moreover, Ouyang not only accumulated a substantial collection of established rubbings from stone inscriptions, but also personally searched for unknown stone inscriptions that remained in the natural landscape. For instance, he mentioned *Xueshengmeng bei* 学生冢碑 (Stele for the Students' Graveyard) in a colophon:

> 余為乾德令時, 嘗以公事過谷城, 見數荒冢在草間, 傍有古碑傾側, 半埋土中, 問其村人為何人冢, 皆不能道, 而碑文磨滅, 不暇讀而去。
>
> When I was prefect of Qiande, I once passed through Gucheng on official business. I saw several unkempt graves in a weeded area. To the side was a toppled ancient stele, half buried in the ground. I asked the villagers whose graves these were, but no one could tell me, and the text of the stele was damaged. I had to leave before I could decipher it.[247]

The scattered stone stele and its calligraphy amidst the weeds captivated Ouyang Xiu, who lamented the erosion of the inscriptions. Therefore, in order to preserve the stone inscription and its textual content, and to realize his vision of reconstructing the art of past writing, Ouyang Xiu began collecting rubbings of the stone inscriptions.[248] In the *Jigulu bawei*, Ouyang Xiu commented on approximately four hundred items but only a few of these inscriptions, including those from the Northern Qi period that feature Buddhist scriptures, are described in detail.

According to Ouyang Xiu, one of the reasons he did not collect and record many stone inscriptions from the Northern Dynasties is that most of the stone inscriptions were anonymous, making it difficult to determine their provenance. From his perspective, the purpose of calligraphy connoisseurship is to enable the connoisseur to communicate with the character of the calligrapher by attempting to deduce the calligrapher's personality from his handwriting. Therefore, outstanding calligraphy works also demonstrate the moral

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[246] Ibid., 9.
[247] Ouyang Xiu 欧阳修, *Ouyang Xiu quanji* 歐陽修全集 [Complete works of Ouyang Xiu], ed. Li Yi'an (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2001), 2155.
[248] Bogna Lakomska, "Ouyang Xiu (1007–1072) and His Collection of Stone Inscriptions," *Art of the Orient* 2 (2013): 28.

personalities of calligraphers. For example, in a colophon about the calligraphy of Yan Zhenqin [Fig. 23], he wrote:

> 斯人忠義出於天性, 故其字畫剛勁獨立, 不襲前跡, 挺然奇偉, 有似其為人。
>
> This person's loyalty and righteousness emanated from his heaven-sent nature. Thus, his brushstrokes are forceful and distinctive, not following previous styles. It stood out as remarkable and majestic, much like his personality.[249]

Connoisseurs usually believe that calligraphy works and styles can reflect the personality and character of the calligrapher. Calligraphy theorist Sun Guoting 孫過庭 (646–691 CE) explicitly stated in his work *Shupu* 書譜 (Treatise on Calligraphy) that only virtuous and insightful individuals can achieve great mastery in calligraphy.[250] When connoisseurs appreciate a piece of calligraphy, they always incorporate their own understanding of the artist into their interpretation of the work. However, when the writer of a calligraphy work is anonymous, connoisseurs can find it challenging to assess the stylistic characteristics through knowledge of the calligrapher. Consequently, they can only express their views on the artistic style through personal analysis of the calligraphy work and making hypothetical assumptions about the writer, which becomes an act of imagination. Thus, connoisseurs will inevitably incorporate what they assume about the artist in order to explain this imaginary achievement. This will broaden the scope of their criticism and evaluation of anonymous calligraphy works, exposing ideological beliefs and cultural prejudices of critics.[251] Furthermore, because connoisseurs generally hold the belief that only calligraphers with high moral character can produce excellent calligraphy works, they tend to assume that individuals of a similar social standing, rather than those from lower social classes, created these works. Without this connection, the quality of the calligraphy might seem questionable.

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[249] Ouyang Xiu, *Ouyang Xiu quanji*, 2261.

[250] Sun Guoting 孫過庭, *Shupu* 書譜 [Treatise on Calligraphy] (Shanghai: Shangwu Yingshuguan, 1936), 2. Original text: 好異尚奇之士；玩體勢之多方；窮微測妙之夫，得推移之奧賾。著述者假其糟粕，藻鑒者挹其菁華，固義理之會歸，信賢達之兼善者矣。[Those who delight in the unusual and admire the extraordinary, who explore the diverse forms of script and delve into the subtleties of its elegance, gain insight into the profound mysteries of its evolution. Writers may adopt its remnants, while connoisseurs draw from its essence. This reflects the ultimate convergence of principles and the comprehensive mastery of the virtuous and the wise.]

[251] Amy McNair, "Looking at Chinese Calligraphy: The Anxiety of Anonymity and Calligraphy from the Periphery," in *Looking at Asian Art, ed. Katherie R. Tsiang and Martin J. Powers* (Chicago: The Center for the Art of East Asia, Department of Art History, University of Chicago, 2012), 53–55.

Due to the anonymity of many Northern Dynasties stone inscriptions, Ouyang Xiu found it difficult to ascertain the social status of these calligraphers, which led to feelings of anxiety and confusion when evaluating these works. For instance, Ouyang Xiu conveyed this by evaluating one anonymous stone inscription, the *Wei Jiujitaxiang ming* 魏九級塔像銘 (Inscription of the Nine-Level Pagoda Illustration). He wrote:

> 右魏《九級塔像銘》，不見書撰人名氏，蓋北齊時人所作也 … 碑文淺陋，蓋鄙俚之人所為，惟其字畫多異，往往奇怪，故錄之以備廣覽。
>
> In the *Inscription of the Nine-level Pagoda Illustration* on the Wei, this does not include the name of the calligrapher and editor. It is probably done by the people of the Northern Qi period…The texts on the stele are shallow and crude; it was probably written by vulgar people, but most of its strokes of characters are unusual, often strange. So, I record it in preparation for broadening the view.[252]

Ouyang Xiu believed that the calligraphy in this stone inscription was strange and superficial, possibly because it was difficult to determine the identity of the writer. Additionally, since many people from the Northern Dynasties were of nomadic origin, which did not align with his status as an orthodox scholarly official, his assessment of these works became even more complex and confusing. Furthermore, Ouyang Xiu consistently asserted that the calligraphers and editors of stone inscriptions during the Northern Dynasties period were anonymous, and he frequently made disparaging remarks about the calligraphy in these inscriptions.[253] As a result, he frequently emphasized that the inclusion of these stone carvings was only intended to broaden the scope of the collection. This may explain Ouyang Xiu's anxiety in evaluating the stone inscriptions of the Northern Dynasties, as the anonymity made it difficult for him to verify their calligraphic merit.

The crudeness of the stone inscriptions in the Northern Dynasties was another reason Ouyang Xiu did not record many of them.[254] He claimed that many stone inscriptions at that time contained inappropriate language and miswritten characters, which diminished

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[252] Ouyang Xiu, *Ouyang Xiu quanji*, 2170.
[253] For more evidence, see *Ouyang Xiu quanji*, 2170–2178.
[254] McNair, "Engraved Calligraphy in China," 111.

their prestige among Song scholars. For example, he wrote about the Inscription on the *Houwei Shengui Zaobeixiang ji* 後魏神龜造碑像記 (Inscription on the Illustration of the Shen'gui Era of the Later Wei):

> 右《神龜造碑像記》，魏神龜三年立。余所集錄自隋以前碑誌，皆未嘗輒棄者，以其時有所取於其間也。然患其文辭鄙淺，又多言浮屠，然獨其字畫往往工妙。惟後魏、北齊差劣，而又字法多異，不知其何從而得之，遂與諸家相戾。亦意其夷狄昧於學問，而所傳訛繆爾，然錄之以資廣覽也。此碑字畫時時遒勁，尤可佳也。
>
> The *Inscription on the Illustration of the Shen'gui Era* was erected in the third year of *shengui* in the Wei dynasty.[255] The inscriptions I have collected from before the Sui dynasty have never been discarded, as there is always something of value to be found in them. Because such pieces usually contain something worthwhile. The prose may be crude and shallow and speak a lot of Buddhism, but the strokes in characters are attractive, and that alone, is frequently skillful and marvelous. Only the [calligraphy of stone inscriptions] in the later Wei and Northern Qi was inferior, and the formation of most Chinese characters were different. [I] do not know where they derived this [calligraphy] style, which is contrary to other schools. Probably their barbarian heritage kept them ignorant of learning, and consequently their teachings were full of error and untruth. Still, I record these inscriptions to let more people see it and expand the range of examples preserved for posterity. The [calligraphy] of this inscription is particularly powerful, rendering it especially attractive.[256]

Ouyang Xiu's evaluation of the inscriptions on the stele is quite contradictory. On the one hand, he criticized the content as vulgar and shallow, assuming that nomadic people had written about Buddhism, a subject he considered vastly different from orthodox literature. Although he had reservations about the content and origin of the stone carving, he was still fascinated by its calligraphy style. He thought the strokes of the inscription were vigorous and beautiful, demonstrating artistry and skill, which impressed him. Although he could

[255] *Shengui* 神龜 (February 518–July 520) was the second era name of Emperor Xiaoming of the Northern Wei dynasty, which lasted around two years.
[256] Ouyang Xiu, *Ouyang Xiu quanji*, 2173. Translation benefited from the Ronald Egan, *The Problem of Beauty*, 32.

not accept the content of the text, he could not resist collecting the rubbing of the inscription because of its calligraphic characteristics.[257]

In addition, most of the inscriptions in the Northern Dynasties were either records of worship to Buddhist sculptures and temples or engraved sutras on stone. Ouyang Xiu, a scholar in the orthodox Confucian tradition, was anti-Buddhist.[258] He disagreed with their Buddhist content and believed that these stone engravings were propagating a contemptible foreign religion. For example, in a colophon about the *Beiqi shifutu ji* 北齊石浮圖記 (Inscription on the Stone Pagoda of the Northern Qi), he wrote:

> 右齊《造石浮圖記》，雲"河清二年，歲在癸未"。河清，北齊高湛年號也。碑文鄙俚而鐫刻訛繆，時時字有完者，筆畫清婉可喜，故錄之。
>
> The *Inscription on the Stone Pagoda of the Northern Qi*, which states "the second year of Heqing, the year of Guiwei." Heqing is the era name of Gao Zhan of the Northern Qi. Although the inscription is crude and the carving erroneous, some characters remain intact, and their strokes are clear and graceful, making them pleasing to record.[259]

In another example, he commented about the *Lu Kongzimiao bei* 魯孔子廟碑 (Lu Confucius Temple Stele) [Fig. 54]:

> 後魏、北齊時書多若此，筆畫不甚佳，然亦不俗，而往往相類。疑其一時所尚，帷綱當自有法。又共疏畫多異，故錄之以備廣覽。
>
> In the later Wei and Northern Qi periods, many inscriptions were like this one, with brushstrokes that were not particularly elegant, yet not vulgar either, and often quite similar to each other. It is suspected that this style was prevalent at the time, with its own established methods. Due to their diverse and distinct characteristics, I have recorded them to provide a broader reference for study.[260]

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[257] Lakomska, "Oyang Xiu (1007–1072) and His Collection of Stone Inscriptions," 28.
[258] Xiang Shiling, "A Study on the Theory of 'Returning to the Original' and 'Recovering Nature' in Chinese Philosophy," *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 3, no. 4 (2008): 511.
[259] Ouyang Xiu, *Ouyang Xiu quanji*, 2177.
[260] Ibid., 2174.

Ouyang Xiu emphasized that the content of these Buddhist texts was unacceptable and absurd, lacking value. However, because the calligraphy of the stone inscriptions created during Northern Dynasties possessed a unique artistic attraction, he could not entirely exclude these inscriptions from his collection of rubbings. To address this issue, he limited the number of items in his collection from the Northern Dynasties, ultimately gathering approximately a dozen rubbings of Buddhist scripture inscriptions. [261] In a letter to his friend Cai Xiang 蔡襄 (1012–1067 CE), Ouyang Xiu acknowledged the cultural contradictions that made him reluctant to collect the Northern Dynasties stone rubbings. Although Confucianists typically reject the teachings of Buddha and Laozi, Ouyang Xiu elaborated that when he occasionally possessed a rubbing from a Buddhist or Daoist inscription, he could not bear to throw it away because of the distinctive skill in the characters' strokes. Therefore, even though the contents of these stone inscriptions are considered secondary pursuits for scholars, they still contribute to the transmission of calligraphy styles. Collecting their rubbings would be valuable if we were to discard the doctrines of Buddhism and Daoism in these stone inscriptions, preserving only the calligraphy style.[262]

This attitude regarding the Northern Dynasties stone inscriptions was not unique to Ouyang Xiu. Another antiquarian in the Song dynasty, Huang Bosi, was a philologist and calligrapher of the Northern Song dynasty. He was an expert in classics and archaeology, specializing in researching ancient manuscripts and bronze or stone characters. He produced about two hundred texts for the study of bronze and stone, in which he either distinguished falsehoods, expounded them, or provided prefaces and postscripts, known as the *Dongguan yulun* 東觀余論 (Remaining Discussion on Imperial Repository). Like Ouyang Xiu, he regarded the handwriting in stone inscriptions of the Northern Dynasties as vulgar due to their creation by nomadic people. He expressed himself as follows:

> 後魏北齊人書，洛陽故城多有遺刻，雖差近古，然終不脫氈裘氣。文物自永嘉來，自北而南，故妙書皆在江左。
>
> At the ancient site of Luoyang are many extant traces of the calligraphy of the men of Later Wei and Northern Qi. Though not very different from other works of their age, ultimately, they cannot shed their air of felt and fur [i.e., clothing of

[261] McNair, "Engraved Calligraphy in China: Recension and Reception," 111–112.
[262] Ouyang Xiu, *Ouyang Xiu quanji*, 1022.

> nomadic non-Chinese]. Following the Yongjia era, when the Chinese court of Western Jin fled to the south], culture moved from the north to the south. As a result, the south is where all the marvelous calligraphy is found.[263]

It is apparent that Huang Bosi considered the calligraphy of the Northern Dynasties crude and mediocre. Therefore, the calligraphy art of the Northern Dynasties received almost no critique in the *Dongguan yulun*. Only in *Ruzhou xinjuan zhutie* 汝州新镌诸帖 (New Rubbings of Ruzhou) did he simply state that most of the Northern Qi dynasty steles were written by Wen Zisheng 温子升 (495–547 CE), who was an erudite scholar in the Northern Dynasties.[264]

Another notable epigraphist, Zhao Mingcheng 趙明誠 (1081–1129 CE), made important academic contributions with his work *Jinshi lu* 金石錄 (Bronze and Stone Documents), which recorded approximately two thousand ancient inscriptions. Ouyang Xiu's *Jigulu* served as the model for the format of *Jinshi lu*, which used a catalogue and postscript format. Zhao Mingcheng asserted unequivocally that the calligraphy of most Northern Qi inscriptions lacked quality. Zhao Mingcheng made the following observations on the records of *Beiqi zaoxiangji* 北齊造像記 (Buddhist statues in the Northern Dynasties) [Fig. 55]:

> 右北齊造像記，雲天保四年，歲次己酉。案齊文宣以東魏武定八年受禪，改元天保，是歲庚午，至四年當為癸。而此記誤書癸為己，爾其字畫不工。特以甲子差誤，恐後來疑焉，因録於此。

> The *Buddhist statues in the Northern Dynasties* dated the fourth year of the Tianbao era, in the year Jiyou. According to historical records, Emperor Wenxuan of Qi ascended the throne in the eighth year of the Wuding era of Eastern Wei, changing the era name to Tianbao, which began in the year Gengwu. Therefore, the fourth year should be the year Gui. However, this inscription mistakenly writes Gui as Ji, indicating that the calligraphy is not well-

[263] McNair, "Engraved Calligraphy in China," 111.

[264] Huang Bosi, "*Dongguan yulun* 東觀馀論 [Remaining Discussion on Imperial Repository of Books]," in *Lidai shufa lunwen xuan xubian* 歷代書法論文選續編 [Continuation of the Selected Treatises on Calligraphy of Successive Dynasties], ed. Cui Erping 崔爾平 (Shanghai: Shuhua Chubanshe, 1993), 82–90. Original text: 北齊碑便目為溫子升 ,後魏碑便目為沈法會。[Stele inscriptions from the Northern Qi are often associated with Wen Zisheng, while those from the Later Wei are linked to Shen Fahui.]

> executed. Due to the error in the cyclical characters, I record it here to prevent future confusion.[265]

Furthermore, Zhao Mingcheng asserted several times that the majority of inscription records about the Northern Qi were inaccurate. For example, he declared that the history of the Northern and Southern Dynasties was "ridiculous" in the colophon about *Beiqi linhuaiwangxiang bei* 北齊臨淮王像碑 (Stele Illustrating the King of Linhuai in the Northern Qi) [Fig. 56].

Overall, most connoisseurs in the Song dynasty believed that the stone inscriptions in the Northern Dynasties were crude in craftsmanship and inferior in content. For Song connoisseurs, these stone inscriptions were anonymous. Connoisseurs generally believe that all external manifestations, including appearance, manners, and handwriting, reflect a person's inner character. One of the purposes of appreciating calligraphy is to allow the viewer to communicate with the personality of the calligrapher. However, it is difficult to determine the identity of the calligrapher of the Northern Dynasties stone inscriptions, and these stone inscriptions were the products of nomadic peoples, representing low-class citizens to Song dynasty scholars. This caused an identity conflict among Song connoisseurs because they believed that calligraphers must have a high status as official scholars, like themselves, rather than the lower social status of the craftsman classes. Consequently, the social status of calligraphers in the past raised some concerns. One of the reasons why Song dynasty connoisseurs could not completely abandon the Northern Dynasties stone inscriptions was that their contents had historical value. Although Song dynasty antiquarians did not consider these stone carvings to be good examples of calligraphy, they showed an interest in the development of the style of the writing. These inscriptions provided information for studying and understanding the development of calligraphy at that time. Although the content of these stone inscriptions was not satisfactory to those scholars, their calligraphy style still attracted the attention of Song dynasty connoisseurs and became the object of their collection and research.[266] In addition, many of the inscriptions have poor grammar and miswritten characters, which reduced the status in the eyes of Song dynasty connoisseurs. The contents of the stone inscriptions in Northern Dynasties are mostly related to Buddhism, which conflicts with the literati who mainly followed Confucianism in the Song period. These scholars adhered

[265] Zhao Mingcheng 趙明誠, "*Jinshi lu* 金石錄 [List of Metal and Stone]," in *Shike shiliao xinbian*, vol. 12, (Taibei: Xinwenfeng Chubanshe, 1977), 8784.
[266] McNair, "Engraved Calligraphy in China," 111.

to Confucian standards and considered Buddhist thought to be inferior. This cultural and ideological conflict put Song connoisseurs in a dilemma when evaluating Northern Dynasties inscriptions.

After the prosperity of the Han dynasty, Confucianism faced challenges from the rise of Buddhism and Taoism during the Wei, Jin, Southern, and Northern Dynasties, especially during the Sui and Tang Dynasties. Confucianism was no longer the only dominant ideology, but it stood alongside Buddhism and Taoism and was sometimes even overshadowed by them.[267] During the Song dynasty, they began to advocate for the revival of Confucianism and oppose Buddhism. A group of scholars, led by Ouyang Xiu, praised Han Yu and Mencius for embodying Confucius's teachings and emphasized the importance of practicing rituals, music, and benevolence.[268] They believed that being familiar with the classics and ancients was noble; saving the time and practicing the way was virtuous; and accepting advice was loyal.[269] These scholars advocated restoring and maintaining social ethics and political order through the revival of Confucianism, resisting the impact of Buddhism and Taoism on social customs.

Additionally, Song dynasty Confucian scholars criticized Buddhism from multiple angles. On a moral value level, Buddhism advocates severing ties with the secular world and abandoning human relationships, promoting an otherworldly life perspective. In this regard, Confucianism and Buddhism have significant differences. Confucianism promotes a worldly life perspective, asserting that realizing life's value must be based on various human relationships formed between individuals. Only by adopting an active, worldly mindset and living and acting within the basic framework of the "Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues" (*sangang wuchang* 三綱五常) can the meaning of life and the realm of the spirit be maximized and self-sufficient. Secondly, the core Buddhist doctrines of deities and reincarnation are in fundamental conflict with Confucianism's firm defense of Confucian orthodoxy. Thus, Confucian scholars believe that these Buddhist doctrines

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[267] Ren Jiyu 任継愈, *Han Tang fojiao sixiang lunji* 漢唐佛教思想論集 [Collections of Buddhist Thought in Han and Tang Dynasties] (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 1998), 295.
[268] Lin Xi 林曦 and Wu Zaiqing 吳在慶, "*Beisong shiqi dui Han Yu de jieshou* 北宋時期對韓愈的接受 [The Acceptance of Han Yu in the Northern Song Dynasty]," *Xiamen Daxue Xuebao* 61, no. 5 (2011): 91.
[269] Su Shi 蘇軾, "*Liuyi jushi jixu* 六一居士集敘," in *Dongpo quanji Qinding siku quanshu*, juan 34 (Kanripo, 漢籍リポジトリ), KR4d0076. Original text: 自歐陽子出，天下爭自濯磨，以通經學古為高，以救時行道為賢，以犯顏納諫為忠。[Since the emergence of Ouyang Xiu, scholars across the land have strived to refine themselves. They regard mastery of the classics and reverence for antiquity as noble, advancing moral conduct to address contemporary issues as virtuous, and offering candid remonstrance as a mark of loyalty.]

undermine the ethical order and moral foundation of society.[270] Therefore, Confucian connoisseurs in the Song dynasty often had mixed feelings when examining the Northern Dynasties stone inscriptions. On the one hand, they recognized the value of these stone inscriptions in calligraphy art; on the other hand, they were repulsed by the Buddhist ideas conveyed in the stone inscriptions. This contradiction reflects the cultural and ideological conflicts in the Confucian revival movement during the Song dynasty.

Moreover, nomadic tribes frequently invaded the regions of the Song dynasty, causing the Song dynasty to lose substantial territory. Consequently, scholars harbored skepticism and disdain toward the 'rulers of foreign origin' of the Northern Dynasties and their stone inscriptions, reflecting the political stance of the official scholar class. This perspective not only demonstrates their dissatisfaction with stone inscriptions created by nomadic people, but also shows their rejection of nomadic customs and their focus on the primacy of their own culture. Thus, in order to justify the collecting of Northern Dynasties rubbings of stone inscriptions, connoisseurs proposed to focus only on the artistry of calligraphy without considering the content of the inscriptions. This approach allowed them to avoid political and cultural controversies while continuing to appreciate and study the calligraphic art of Northern Dynasties inscriptions. However, this critical perspective did not continue in later periods, particularly during the Qing dynasty, when the study of epigraphy was also prevalent. Qing dynasty scholars, when examining the stone inscriptions in Northern Dynasties, focused more on their historical and artistic value than the political and cultural context behind them.

Models in the Mid-Qing Antiquarian Writings

After the Northern Song dynasty's capital fell in 1127, the study of epigraphy gradually declined due to restricted access to traditional stone inscription materials in Jin dynasty-controlled territory (1115–1234 CE). With the decrease in rubbings being made, scholars lost interest in empirical philology, archaeology, and epigraphy. Researchers found only a few bronzes or stone implements with inscriptions.[271] During the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368), a limited number of bronzes or stone implements with inscriptions were discovered by excavators, and the field of epigraphy was represented by only four published

[270] Zhang Shiliang 張世亮, "*Cong <Jin si lu> kan songru dui folap zhixue de pipan* 從《近思錄》 看宋儒對佛老之學的批判 [The Criticism of Song Confucianists on the Study of Buddhism from the Recent Thought Records]," *Dongfang luntan*, no. 6 (2011): 29–31.
[271] McNair, "Engraved Calligraphy in China," 112.

authors.[272] There was no obvious motivation for the development of epigraphy during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). Instead, this period saw a second huge wave of popularity for model-letter compendia (*tie* 帖). The emphasis on producing these model-letter and studying the classical tradition reduced any potential revival of epigraphy. Most Ming dynasty epigraphic documents repeat the content of those from the Song dynasty, but they are often abridged. This abridgement often means omitting inscriptions from non-Chinese dynasties.[273]

The widespread interest in recovering lost historical documents during the mid-Qing dynasty, particularly during the reign of the Qianlong Emperor (r. 1735–1796 CE), led to the excavation of numerous buried steles. Scholars turned to stone inscriptions from the Han, Northern, and Southern Dynasties, studying their content and focusing on orthography and the information they provided about the development of various script types. Scholars also promoted these inscriptions as sources of calligraphic styles. During this period of excavation and rediscovery, the engraved inscriptions from the Northern Dynasties became an important source for the Wei-stele (Weibei 魏碑) of calligraphy. The Wei-stele calligraphy is the general name of the writing found in stone inscriptions in the Southern and Northern Dynasties in China, and the works of the Northern Wei dynasty are the most representative examples.

In addition, the calligraphy style of Northern Dynasties also prompted changes in the aesthetic taste of the stone inscriptions among literati in the Qing dynasty. The recognition and reproduction of the early stone inscriptions calligraphy style by Qing dynasty literati prompted a trend of advocating stele calligraphy. This led directly to the establishment of epigraphic thought and the formation of the epigraphic school style.[274] For example, Zhao Zhiqian 趙之謙 (1829–1884 CE) copied and interpreted the clerical script of the Northern Dynasties. He refined the Wei-stele calligraphy style, such as through the study of the Longmen stele, and tried to express the simple and ancient spirit in his own calligraphy works. As shown in Fig. 57, he tried to capture the wedge-shaped dots and thick, sharp strokes of the *Shiping gong zaoxiangji*. This pursuit of strong and solemn qualities in calligraphy has become one of the most important aesthetic preferences of calligraphy in the Qing dynasty.

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[272] Zhu Jianxin 朱劍心, *Jinshi xue* 金石學 [Bronze and Stone Study] (Beijing: Wenwu Chubanshe, 1940), 29.
[273] Zhu, *Jinshi xue*, 32.
[274] Li Meng et al, "From Cultural Heritage to Image Symbolism," 532.

In the late Qing dynasty (1840–1912 CE), the excavation of a large number of Northern Dynasties stone inscriptions became important materials for epigraphy research. Ruan Yuan introduced the broad concept of stele calligraphy from the Northern Dynasties; Bao Shichen 包世臣 (1775–1855 CE) further promoted it; and Kang Youwei finally strengthened it.[275] Ruan Yuan, a historian, politician, and calligrapher during the Qing dynasty, claimed that the study of the *Chunhua mige fatie* 淳化秘閣法帖 (Model Letters in the Imperial Archives in the Chunhua Period), also named *getie* 閣帖, prevailed in the Song dynasty, causing the research of stone inscriptions in the Central Plains to be neglected.[276] Ruan Yuan claimed:

> 趙宋《閣帖》盛行, 不重中原碑版, 於是北碑愈微。
>
> The *getie* prevailed in the Song dynasty, and the inscriptions on steles in the central Plains did not receive much attention, so the study of Northern Dynasties steles reduced.[277]

One reason for the lack of widespread attention to the Northern Dynasties stone inscriptions during the Song dynasty was that later scholars primarily concentrated on calligraphy and paid less attention to stone engravings. Ruan Yuan further explained the significance of Northern Dynasties stone inscriptions, arguing that these carvings affected the calligraphy styles that emerged after the Northern Dynasties. He mentioned that the calligraphy style in the Tang dynasty originated from the Sui period, while the calligraphy style in the Sui dynasty mainly came from the Northern Wei and Northern Qi. Therefore, to understand the development of calligraphy styles, one cannot ignore the stone inscriptions of the Northern Dynasties. He wrote:

> 唐人書法, 多出於隋; 隋人書法, 多出於北魏、北齊。不觀魏、齊碑石, 不見歐、褚之所從來。

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[275] Yue Hongji 岳紅記, "*Changan shuti de chengyin, tezheng ji yingciang* '長安書體' 的成因, 特徵及影響 [The Cause, Characteristic and Effect of 'Chang 'an Calligraphy Style']," *Changan Daxue Xuebao* 16, no. 2 (2014): 7–13.

[276] *Getie* was published by Emperor Taizong of the Song dynasty in the third year of Chunhua (992). See Amy McNair, "The Engraved Model-Letters Compendia of the Song dynasty." 209–225.

[277] Ruan Yuan 阮元, "*Nanbei shupai lun* 南北書派論 [On the Southern and Northern Schools of Calligraphy]," in *Lidai shufa lunwen xuan*, 630.

> The calligraphy of the Tang people mostly came from the Sui dynasty; the calligraphy of the Sui people mostly came from the Northern Wei dynasty and the Northern Qi dynasty. If you do not look at the Wei and Qi stone inscriptions, you cannot understand the [calligraphy style] origins of Ouyang Xun and Chu Suiliang.[278]

Ruan Yuan praised the calligraphy of the Northern Dynasties and believed that many later calligraphers inherited the style of the Northern Dynasties, thus confirming its important position in the history of Chinese calligraphy. He emphasized that Northern Dynasties stone inscriptions are not only important historical documents but also key to the development of calligraphic art. Ruan Yuan suggested the concept of tracing the origins of calligraphy and reverting to old methods, with a specific focus on the relevance of clerical script. He stated that the transformation from clerical script to regular script, running script, and cursive script took place during the period between the late Han dynasty and the Wei and Jin Dynasties.[279] Ruan Yuan further emphasized the significance of clerical script by examining the development of characters. He maintained a view that calligraphers should adhere to the traditional techniques, such as those found in the calligraphy of Han steles and consider them as standards to replicate. In addition, Ruan Yuan maintained that the calligraphy style in the Northern Dynasties used an ancient method that was inherited directly from clerical scripts in the Han period. For example, he mentioned:

> 隸字書丹於石最難。北魏、周、齊、隋、唐，變隸為真，漸失其本。而其書碑也，必有波磔雜以隸意，古人遺法猶多存者，重隸故也。…… 宮殿之榜亦宜篆隸。是以北朝書家，史傳稱之，每曰長於碑榜。

> Writing and engraving clerical script on stone is the most challenging task. During the Northern Wei, Zhou, Qi, Sui, and Tang dynasties, the transformation of clerical script into regular script gradually led to the loss of its original form. However, in their inscriptions on steles, there must be strokes mixed with the essence of clerical script, preserving many ancient techniques, thus emphasizing

[278] Ruan Yuan 阮元, *Bojing shi shaji* 揅經室三集 [Collections in Big Classic Room], juan 1, vol. 8 (Shanghai: Shangwu Yingshuguan, 1936), 559.
[279] Ruan Yuan, "*Nanbei shuupai lun*," 629–630. Original text: 書法遷變，流派混淆，非溯其源，曷返於古？蓋由隸字變為正書、行草，其轉移皆在漢末、魏、晉之間。 [The evolution of calligraphy and the blending of styles make it essential to trace its origins to return to antiquity. The transition from clerical script to regular script, semi-cursive, and cursive script occurred primarily between the late Han, Wei, and Jin dynasties.]

> the importance of clerical script. ... The plaques in palaces were also often engraved with seal script and clerical script. Therefore, calligraphers of the Northern Dynasties, as recorded in historical texts, were often praised for their proficiency in stone inscriptions and plaques, being frequently described as excelling in these areas.[280]

Based on the established orthodox status of Han dynasty inscriptions, Ruan Yuan turned his attention to Northern Dynasties stone inscriptions. He considered that the calligraphy style of the Northern Dynasties had the beauty of "square 方" and "vigorous 勁" characters. This style inherits the ancient Han dynasty clerical script method. Ruan Yuan gave an example to illustrate that the style of stone inscriptions in the Sui dynasty originated from the Northern Qi and Northern Zhou and retained the form of clerical script. He described the characters on an iron kettle from the Sui [Fig. 58], pointing out that although these characters did not fully reflect the mature clerical script style of the Han, they retained some characteristics of clerical script. He believed that this style originated in the Northern dynasties. He further pointed out that most characters in Sui and Tang continued this script style. Therefore, he believed that the stone inscriptions in the Northern Qi and Northern Zhou dynasties were transitional, between clerical script and regular script.[281]

Ruan Yuan pointed out that the calligraphy of the "Two Wangs" (Wang Xizhi and Wang Xianzhi), which were passed down through the ages, are all copies that have been traced and reproduced multiple times, thus becoming distorted and deviating from their original form.[282] In contrast, the Northern steles are original stone engravings. Through these analyses, Ruan Yuan emphasized the antiquity and purity of Northern Dynasties stone inscriptions. Compared to the repeatedly copied and carved Southern model books, the Northern steles more truly preserved the calligraphy style. He believed that the calligraphy style of Northern Dynasties stone inscriptions was simple and unadorned, reflecting the original aesthetic beauty of calligraphy art.

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[280] Ruan Yuan, "*Beibei nantie lun* 北碑南帖論 [North steles and south ink-writing discussion]," in *Lidai shufa lunwen xuan*, 635–636.

[281] Ruan Yuan, *Bojing shi sanji*, vol. 8, 564. Original text: 非摹古隸者也，而筆法半出于隸，全是北周北齊遺法，可知隋唐之間字體通行皆肖乎此。 [It is not an imitation of ancient clerical script, yet its brush techniques are partially derived from *lishu* and fully inherit the traditions of the Northern Zhou and Northern Qi. This suggests that the script styles widely used during the Sui and Tang periods closely resembled this form.]

[282] Ibid., 562. Original text: 全將唐人雙鉤鸞拓之本，一改為渾圓模稜之形，筆法從此更衰矣。 [The Tang practice of double-outline rubbings was entirely transformed into rounded and ambiguous forms, leading to a significant decline in the quality of brush techniques thereafter.]

Another epigrapher, Bao Shichen, was proficient in military strategy, economics, calligraphy, and history. He supported Ruan Yuan's theory and emphasized the significance of Northern Dynasties calligraphy. Bao Shichen's work *Yizhou shuangji* 藝舟雙楫 (Two Oars for the Boat of Art) played a significant role in advancing the field of epigraphy during the Qing dynasty and fostering appreciation for inscriptions from the Northern Dynasties. Bao Shichen analyzed the origins of calligraphy styles from the Han dynasty and praised the calligraphy style of the stone inscriptions in the Northern Dynasties. Its calligraphy style retains the traditional beauty of clerical script while showing the power and structure of regular script, laying the foundation for Northern Dynasties epigraphy as an important part of Chinese calligraphy history. He expounded on the calligraphy style of the Northern Dynasties:

> 北朝隸書，雖率導源分篆，然皆極意波發，力求跌宕。
>
> The clerical script of the Northern Dynasties, though generally derived from seal script, was characterized by its dynamic and expressive strokes, striving for a sense of movement and freedom.[283]

In addition, he also mentioned that:

> 北朝人書，落筆峻而結體莊和，行墨澀而取勢排宕。萬豪齊力故能峻，五指齊力故能澀。分隸相通之故。
>
> The calligraphy of the people of the Northern Dynasties, the strokes are steep, and the structure is solemn and peaceful, the ink color of the strokes is hard, and the strokes are unrestrained. Ten thousand pens working together can make the font structure steep, and five fingers working together can make the ink hard. This is the reason why the regular script and the clerical script are connected.[284]

Bao Shichen declared that the calligraphy of the Northern Dynasties inherited the style and characteristics of the Han and Wei Dynasties. The stone inscriptions' strokes are rough and

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[283] Bao Shichen 包世臣, "*Yizhou shuangji* 藝舟雙楫 [Two Oars for the Boat of Art]," in *Lidai shufa lunwen xuan*, 651.
[284] Bao, "*Yizhou shuangji*," in *Lidai shufa lunwen xian*, 653.

primitive, retaining elements of clerical script. For example, Bao Shichen studied the *Junxiuluo bei* 雋修羅碑 (Junxiuluo Stele) [Fig. 59], which was unearthed during the Qianlong period of Qing dynasty. He elaborated on this object:

> 齊雋修羅碑，措畫結體，極意經營，雖以險峻取勝，而波發仍歸蘊藉。北朝書承漢魏，勢率尚扁，此易為長，漸趨姿媚，已為率更開山。
>
> The Junxiuluo Stele from the Qi dynasty exemplifies careful composition and structure, crafted with great intentionality. Although the brushstrokes are sharp and rough to achieves a striking effect, the wave-like strokes still return to a sense of subtle grace. Northern Dynasties calligraphy inherits from the Han and Wei periods, with a general tendency towards a flattened form, which easily extends into longer strokes. This trend gradually leads to a more elegant style, setting a precedent for further development.[285]

According to Bao Shichen, the brushwork in the stone inscriptions of the Northern Dynasties was robust, with a simple and unadorned style. The strokes are firm and decisive, often flicking upward at the end of a horizontal line. The combination of engraving techniques and brush techniques makes the characters appear particularly strong, square, and three-dimensional, with a majestic momentum. He observed that the brushwork of Northern Dynasties calligraphy was unique and varied, striving to be well-proportioned and dynamic. He provided another example, as shown in Fig. 60, of the *Zhujunshan bei* 朱君山碑 (Zhu Junshan Stele). He described the characters on the stele as square and upright, with strokes that varied and fluctuated. He derived the characteristics of its writing style from the seal script of the Qin dynasty. He mentioned:

> 朱君山碑，用筆尤宕逸，字勢正方，整齊而具變態，其行畫特多偏曲，骨血峻秀，蓋得於秦篆。
>
> The Zhu Junshan Stele demonstrates especially free and unrestrained brushwork, with characters that are square and upright, orderly yet varied. The strokes often exhibit a distinct curvature, with a sharp and elegant structure. This style is derived from the seal script of the Qin dynasty.[286]

[285] Bao, "*Yizhou shuangji*," 652.
[286] Ibid., 652.

Bao Shichen also evaluated the *Banruo bei* 般若碑 (Prajna Stele) from the Northern Qi period, considering its calligraphic style to be harmonious, serene, and simple [Fig. 61]. He noted that it employed the same brushwork techniques as the Han dynasty's *Fuge song* 郙阁颂 [Fig. 62] and was close in style to clerical script, mixing strokes from cursive script, similar to the Cai Yong calligraphy style.[287] This further confirms that the calligraphy of the Northern Dynasties inherited the stylistic characteristics of the Han dynasty's clerical script. The Fuge Song Stele is a stele from the Han dynasty, known for its refined and elegant calligraphy. Ancient Chinese calligraphy is frequently referenced in discussions because of its exemplary use of clerical script. The connection between the *Fuge song* and the Northern Qi Prajna Stele demonstrates how later periods continued and developed the brushwork techniques and stylistic elements of Han dynasty stone inscriptions.

Additionally, Bao Shichen used analogies to describe Northern Dynasties stone inscriptions, such as the *Diamond Sūtra* engraved on the cliffs of Taishan, which he said possessed the characteristics of "the state of the cloud crane and seagull 雲鶴海鷗之態". He considered that these inscriptions preserved both the antique elegance of clerical writing and the lively spirit of calligraphy throughout the Northern Dynasties, combing with the natural surroundings to create an energetic style. Bao Shichen also discussed the calligraphic technique employed in the *Shiping gong zaoxiangji* from the Northern Wei era. He described it as having the "rules of dragon power and tiger shock 龍威虎震之規". This style not only demonstrated the strength and majesty of calligraphy, but also conveyed a grand visual effect, making the viewer feel the powerful vitality embedded within the calligraphic work.[288]

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[287] Ibid., 651. Original text: 而般若碑渾穆簡靜，自在滿足，與《郙閣頌》《析裹橋》同法，用意逼近章草，當是西晉人專精蔡體之書，無一筆闌入山陰。[The *Banruo bei* exhibits a serene and unadorned elegance, embodying a sense of ease and completeness. Its style aligns with works such as the Fuge song and *Xili qiao*, closely approaching early cursive script in intent. It is likely the work of a Western Jin calligrapher deeply dedicated to the Cai Yong tradition, with not a single stroke influenced by the style of Wang Xizhi.]

[288] Ibid., 652. Original text: 北魏書，經石峪大字，雲峰山五言，鄭文公碑，刁惠公志為一種，皆出乙瑛，有雲鶴海鷗之態。張公清頌，賈使君，魏靈藏，楊大眼，始平公各造像為一種，皆出孔羡，具龍威虎震之規。[Calligraphy of the Northern Wei can be categorized into two distinct styles. The first includes works such as the large characters of Jing Shi Yu, the Five-Character Inscription of Yunfeng Mountain, the Stele of Zheng Wengong, and the Epitaph of Diao Huigong. These all derive from the style of Yi Ying, characterized by the elegance and grace of clouds and soaring seabirds. The second comprises inscriptions like the Zhang Gongqing Eulogy, Jia Shijun Inscription, Wei Lingzang Inscription, Yang Dayan Inscription, and the Sculpture Inscription of the Shiping. These works trace their origins to Kong Xian's tradition, marked by the imposing and majestic qualities of dragons and tigers.]

In 1891, Kang Youwei, building on *Yizhou shuangji*, compiled *Guang yizhou shuangji*. Kang's work further advanced epigraphic theories, with the aim of supporting the study of stele. Their promotion of epigraphy was part of a broader intellectual movement that arose in the late Ming and early Qing periods, which opposed model-letter study. Kang Youwei systematically compiled and studied stone inscriptions from various dynasties, emphasizing the significant role of stele calligraphy. He supported the study and development of epigraphy as a method to revive and improve previous calligraphy styles, in contrast to the excessive emphasis on form and technique in model-letter research.[289] He had the belief that by reverting to the genuine and vigorous styles observed in stone inscriptions in the Han, Southern and Northern Dynasties, people could conserve and rejuvenate the classic elegance of Chinese calligraphy because there were many types of stone inscription calligraphy styles during the Southern and Northern Dynasties, and various calligraphy styles were already available. The Southern and Northern Dynasties periods featured a wide variety of stone inscription script styles, each with its own distinct characteristics. This period saw the development and maturation of various calligraphic styles, providing a rich and diverse foundation for later scholars to study and draw inspiration from. Kang Youwei claimed:

> 書有南、北朝，隸、楷、行、草。體變各極，奇偉婉麗，意態斯備。至矣，觀斯止矣！
>
> During the Southern and Northern Dynasties, there were numerous script styles, including clerical script, regular script, running script, and cursive script. Each style exhibited extreme variations, displaying a range of magnificent and graceful methods, achieving complete artistic expression. Such perfection. Truly remarkable.[290]

He elaborated further：

> 南、北朝之碑，無體不備，唐人名家，皆從此出。

[289] Su Quanyou 蘇全有 and Lu Shixin 陸世莘, "*Dui qingdai beitiexue yanjiu de hugu yu fansi* 對清代碑帖學研究的回顧與反思 [Review and Reflection on the Study of Steles in Qing Dynasty]," *Shijiazhuang Tiedao Daxue Xuebao* 6, no. 3 (2012): 82.

[290] Kang Youwei 康有為, "*Guang yizhou Shuangji* 廣藝舟雙楫 [Expanding on Two Oars of the Ship of Art]," in *Lidai shufa lunwen xuan*, 812.

> The steles of the Southern and Northern Dynasties have every sort of script. Famous calligraphers in the Tang dynasty all find their origins here.[291]

Kang Youwei considered that during the Northern and Southern Dynasties, various script styles had developed to maturity, each with its own distinct characteristics. He determined that the calligraphy style of renowned calligraphers in later periods originated from the style of stone inscriptions from the Northern and Southern Dynasties. Furthermore, he identified ten distinctive aesthetic qualities of stone inscriptions from this period. He stated:

> 古今之中，唯南碑與魏為可宗。可宗為何？曰：有十美：一曰魄力雄強，二曰氣象渾穆，三曰筆法跳越，四曰點畫峻厚，五曰意態奇逸，六曰精神飛動，七曰興趣酣足，八曰骨法洞達，九曰結構天成，十曰血肉豐美。是十美者，唯魏碑、南碑有之。齊碑惟有瘦硬，隋碑惟有明爽，自《雋修羅》《朱君山》《龍藏寺》《曹子建》外，未有備美者也。故曰魏碑、南碑可宗也。魏碑無不佳者，雖窮鄉兒女造像，而骨血峻宕，拙厚中皆有異態，構字亦緊密非常，豈與晉世皆當書之會邪？何其工也！是十美者，唯魏碑、南碑有之。
>
> From ancient to modern times, only southern steles and Wei [steles] are worthy of reverence. What is worthy of reverence? There are ten kinds of beauty. The first is powerful energy, the second is simple style, the third is agile brushwork, the fourth is bold strokes, the fifth is unique appearance, the sixth is the soaring spirit, the seventh is satisfying charm, the eighth is the penetrating vigor, the ninth is natural structure. The tenth is full bodied writing. Only Northern Wei-stele and Southern steles have these ten kinds of beauty. Qi steles only have thin and hard [characters], Sui steles only have clear and neat [characters]. Except for *Jun xiu luo*, *Zhujun shan*, *Long cang si*, *Cao zi jian*, no steles have beauty. Therefore, it can be said that Wei-stele and Southern steles are worthy of reverence. There are no bad Wei-stele, even on statuary steles made by people of isolated townships, the body of the characters are strong and unrestrained, they all have a distinct feel in their crudity and thickness, and the composition of the characters is tight and remarkable. How can it be regarded as the evil calligraphy

[291] Kang, "*Guang yizhou Shuangji*," in *Lidai shufa lunwen xuan*, 758.

> in the Jin dynasty? What skill! Only the Wei-stele and the Southern steles have the ten beauties.[292]

This evaluation reflects Kang Youwei's preference for the epigraphic calligraphy of the Northern and Southern Dynasties, highlighting the vigorous and bold aesthetic characteristics of this style. He pointed out that Wei-stele calligraphy combines the simplicity and primitiveness of clerical script with the dignity and elegance of regular script, forming a vigorous and beautiful style. He expressed himself as follows:

> 北碑當魏世，隸、楷錯變，無體不有。綜其大致，體莊茂而宕以逸氣，力沉著而出以澀筆，要以茂密為宗。
>
> The stone steles of the Northern Dynasties are undoubtedly the best in the Northern Wei period. Clerical script and regular script are interlaced, with all types of script. To sum up, the strokes of the characters are bold and ups and downs used to express spirit, the strength is calm, and the strokes show a dry brushstroke with density as its main aim for maximum density.[293]

Kang Youwei considered that some Northern Dynasties stone inscriptions were a mixture of clerical script and regular script and gave examples to illustrate that this style had existed from the beginning. For example, Kang Youwei pointed out in his evaluation of the title that the *Gefujun bei* 葛府君碑 (Gefujun Stele) is not only considered the oldest among the regular script inscriptions, but its calligraphy style is also thick and simple, beyond the regular style. It is the ancestor style of clerical script mixed with regular script [Fig. 63].[294] Additionally, Kang Youwei highly praised the steles from the Northern Wei period. He cited examples such as the *Zhongyue songgao lingmiao bei* 中嶽嵩高靈廟碑 (Zhongyue Songgao Lingmiao Stele), *Wei xiaowendi diao bigan wenbei* 魏孝文帝吊比乾文碑 (Stele of Emperor Xiaowen of Wei's Eulogy for Bi Gan), *Juyanyun muzhi* 鞠彥雲墓誌 (Epitaph of Ju Yanyun), and *Huigan zaoxiangji* 惠感造像記 (Huigan Statue Inscription) , noting that their calligraphic styles lie between clerical script and regular script. He believed that this style emerged due to the transitional process of clerical script

[292] Ibid., 826.
[293] Ibid., 776.
[294] Ibid., 781.

evolving into regular script.[295] This shows that Kang Youwei admired the inscriptions of Northern Wei-stele and considered that the stone inscriptions from this period contained the clerical script style.

Moreover, Kang Youwei admired the calligraphy art of large-character sutra engravings in Shandong from the Northern Qi dynasty. He believed that the sutra engravings on Mount Tai pioneered large-character stone inscriptions. [296] Kang Youwei also claimed that the engraved sutras on the Four Mounts exhibit characteristics of both clerical and regular script, with brushwork that combines a square momentum with a rounded quality.[297] Yang Shoujing, in his work *Xueshu eryan* 學書邇言 (Discourse on Learning Calligraphy), praises these engravings, asserting that they pioneered the use of large characters, representing the ultimate achievement.[298] It can be seen that these scholars appreciated the calligraphy style of the sutra engravings in the Northern Qi.

Qing dynasty scholars revered stone inscriptions from the Northern Dynasties, particularly those from the Northern Wei period. They generally believed that the calligraphic style of Northern Dynasties inscriptions inherited the clerical script of the Han dynasty and, over time, incorporated elements of regular script, giving the calligraphy a unique, ancient simplicity. Ruan Yuan established the status of Han steles' and promoted the calligraphy style of Northern Dynasties stone inscriptions. Bao Shichen proposed measures to improve the declining state of the model-letter tradition, providing a clear and practical path for calligraphic reform in terms of brush techniques, exemplars, and learning targets. Kang Youwei further advanced Bao Shichen's epigraphic theories in his writings, with the main goal of establishing a stele study to counter the model-letter study.

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[295] Original text: 北魏之灵庙碑，吊比干文，鞠彦云志，惠感，郑长猷，灵藏造像，皆在隶楷之间。[The Northern Wei inscriptions, such as the *Stele of the Ancestral Temple*, the *Elegy for Bi Gan*, the *Epitaph of Ju Yanyun*, the *Epitaph of Hui Gan*, the *Inscription for Zheng Changyou*, and the *Lingzang Statue Inscription*, all exhibit a style that transitions between clerical script (*lishu*) and regular script (*kaishu*)]

[296] Kang, "*Guang yizhou shuangji*," in *Lidai shufa lunwen xuan*, 854.

[297] Ibid., 857. Original text: 《四山摩崖》通隶、楷，备方、圆，高浑简穆，为壁窠之极轨也。[The *Sishan Cliff Inscriptions* seamlessly blend clerical and regular scripts, incorporating both angular and rounded forms. With their grand, simple, and solemn style, they represent the pinnacle of cliff inscription artistry.]

[298] Yang Shoujing 楊守敬, "*Xueshu eryan* 學書邇言 [Discourse on Learning Calligraphy]," in *Lidai shufa lunwen xuan xubian,* 716. Original texts: 北齊泰山石經峪，以徑尺之大書如作小楷，紆徐容與，絕無劍拔弩張之跡，擘窠大書此為極則。[The Northern Qi *Tai Shan Stone Classics* at Jing Shi Yu features characters nearly a foot in size yet executed with the precision and elegance of small regular script. The strokes flow smoothly and leisurely, entirely devoid of aggressive or tense qualities. This represents the highest standard of monumental, large-character calligraphy.]

In the Qing, the Northern Dynasties stone inscriptions were admired for their calligraphy, which is characterized by vigor, heavy brushwork, sharp edges, and smooth rhythm. The powerful, strong, and beautiful calligraphy style, along with its fast and restrained brushwork, garnered the praise of literati. This technique traces its origins to stone inscriptions, where the brush is typically lifted gradually at pivotal moments to create a rounded and thick look. The character structure has changed from the elegant and beautiful style of the Jin and Tang Dynasties. It is characterized by long strokes and long vertical strokes, giving people a sense of openness and rich historical charm. Moreover, calligraphers proposed the concept of "better ugly than charming 寧醜毋媚", emphasizing that calligraphy should pursue simplicity and naturalness rather than thoughtful beauty.[299] At that time, people viewed "rudeness and solidity" as forms of beauty. As a result, stone inscription calligraphy from the Northern Dynasties regained attention in the Qing dynasty. The revival of this calligraphic style represented a reevaluation of traditional aesthetics and a pursuit of new artistic ideals. Moreover, the Manchus established the Qing dynasty, which was more likely to accept and identify with the culture and art of the nomadic peoples of the Northern Dynasties. In contrast, the scholars of the Song dynasty were less receptive to the stone calligraphy of the Northern Dynasties because of their cultural rejection of its authors.

After the Qing dynasty, scholars maintained a strong passion for epigraphy, believing that inscribed artifacts were essential for preserving and disseminating the important written history of Chinese culture. They saw these artifacts as bearing the responsibility of connecting the past and the present.[300] However, scholars following the late Qing dynasty mostly focused on the steles of the Northern Wei. There is currently little research on stone inscription from the Northern Qi and Northern Zhou Dynasties. Post-Qing scholars such as Wang Guowei 王國維 (1877–1927 CE), Ma Heng 馬衡 (1881–1955 CE), Yu Youren 於右任 (1879–1964 CE), and Liu Xianxin 劉咸炘 (1896–1923 CE) all appreciated the calligraphy of the steles of the Northern Wei dynasty.

Wang Guowei, a master of Chinese aesthetic studies at the time, contributed significantly to ancient history, epigraphy, philology, vernacular literature, and literary theory. He used

[299] Zhang Bin 張斌, "*Fushan 'ningzhuowuqiao' de shufa shenmei biaozhun tanjiu* 傅山「寧拙毋巧」的書法審美標準探究 [A study on Fu Shan's Aesthetic Standard of Calligraphy]," *Dali Wenhua*, no. 6 (2007): 61–63.
[300] Yun-Chiahn C. Sena, "The Song-Ming Connection in the Ming Study of Ancient Inscriptions," *Ming Studies* 2014, no. 70 (2015): 30.

the *Ganlingxiang bei* 甘陵相碑 (Stele of the Prime Minister of Ganling County) to demonstrate the calligraphy style of stele inscriptions in the Northern Dynasties [Fig. 64]. He commented:

> 隸法健拔恣肆，已開北碑風氣，不似黃初諸碑，尚有東京承平氣象也。
>
> The way of clerical script is strong and unrestrained, having already started the style of northern steles. It is unlike the steles of the Huangchu reign period,[301] and still retains the peaceful bearing of the eastern capital.[302]

He mentioned that the calligraphy style of the steles in Han dynasty pioneered the style of Northern Dynasties stone inscriptions. He also claimed that calligraphers Wu Rangzhi 吳讓之 (1799–1870 CE) and Zhao Bian 趙悲庵 (1886–1945 CE) both adopted the Northern Dynasties regular script style when writing clerical script, eventually forming a style similar to the *Ganlingxiang bei*.[303] Furthermore, he believed that the inscription blended both clerical and regular script, a feature that affected the calligraphy style of the Northern Dynasties stone inscriptions. In addition, the historian, philologist, and calligrapher Liu Xianxin 劉咸炘 (1897–1932 CE) demonstrated the differences between northern and southern calligraphy in his book *Nonghan yushen* 弄翰余沈 (I Control the Brush). He wrote:

> 蓋南方二王一派，其筆圓裹而直，勢狹斂而長，乃出於篆。北魏書筆方鋪而曲，勢橫宕而廣，乃出於分。
>
> For the style of the southern Two Wangs style, the brushwork is encompassing roundly and direct, and the form is together narrow and long, so it originates from seal script.[304] For the Northern Wei calligraphy, the brushwork is roundly

[301] Huang Chu (220–226) was the reign title of emperor Wei Wendi, Cao pi, during the Three Kingdoms period.
[302] Wang Guowei 王國維, "*Ganlin xiang be ba* 甘陵相碑跋 [Postscript of the Stele of the Prime Minister of *Ganling* County]." in *Guantang Jilin* 觀堂集林 [Guantang Collections], ed. Peng Lin (Hebei: Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2001), 661.
[303] Ibid. Original text: 吳讓之、趙悲庵以北朝楷法入隸，所得乃與此碑同。 [Wu Rangzhi and Zhao Beian incorporated the regular script techniques of the Northern Dynasties into clerical script, achieving a style akin to that of this stele]
[304] Wang Xizhi, and his song Wang Xiezhi, the famous calligraphers of the Eastern Jin dynasty, are called Two Wangs by later generations.

> encompassing and direct, and its form is unrestrained horizontally and broad, so it originates from clerical script.[305]

Liu Xianxin classified the style of the Two Wangs as the Southern School of Calligraphy, believing that this style originated from the seal script. In contrast, the Northern Dynasties style of calligraphy originated from the clerical script, characterized by wavy strokes. Specifically, the Southern School of Calligraphy emphasizes the roundness and smoothness of the strokes, soft lines, and rigorous structure, presenting an elegant and delicate beauty. The Northern Dynasties style of calligraphy, derived from the clerical script, features thick and powerful strokes, obvious twists and turns, and a square structure.[306]

Since the characters in inscriptions of the Northern Dynasties are hard to define in terms of style as they do not fit neatly into any accepted category, there are varying assessments of their value. As a result, the opinions of scholars can vary according to context. It is perhaps too easy to look to the political contexts of the Song and Qing dynasties as key factors in the appraisal of calligraphy of the Northern dynasties. But it was in partly these political contexts that drove scholars of these dynasties to look to the past in uncertain times. As a result, the same style of calligraphy can be praised or condemned for its so-called irregularities. They could also be condemned alongside the irregularity that was Buddhism under the Song or used by Qing scholars as they sought to highlight their own cultural inheritance and created their own unique styles.

In summation, the calligraphy of Northern Dynasties stone inscriptions, especially the cliff-sutra engravings, seems to originate from a mixture of writing styles. The absence of certain definitions for script names, particularly clerical and regular scripts, throughout the Northern Dynasties may have caused subsequent researchers to overlook the relevance of these definitions in their assessment of calligraphic styles. Furthermore, analyzing the perspectives of Song and Qing dynasty scholars, on the calligraphy style of Northern Dynasties stone inscriptions, when epigraphy was flourishing, helps to reveal the effect of political culture on previous judgements of calligraphy styles. Therefore, to analyze the characteristics of cliff-sutra engravings more comprehensively, the calligraphic features of

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[305] Liu Xianxin 劉咸炘, "*Nonghan yusheng* 弄翰余沈," in *Lidai shufa lunwenxuan xubian*, 922.
[306] Zhao Changrui 趙長瑞, "*Liu Xianxin nanbei fenpai shuxue sixiang yanjiu* 劉咸炘南北分派書學思想研究 [Liu Xianxin's Thought Research on the Calligraphy of the North and South Schools]," *Meiyu Shidai*, no. 11 (2021): 117–118.

sutras engraved in different regions in the late Northern Dynasties will be discussed by category in the following chapter.

3 Sutra Engravings in the Late Northern Dynasties

During the Northern Qi period, the act of engraving sutras on cliffs was primarily divided into two regions. One region included the sutras engraved on Mount Xiangtang and Mount Zhonghuang, near the capital city of Ye. The other region comprised sutras engraved in Shandong province, including Mount Hongding, Mount Culai, Mount Tai, Mount Yi, Mount Jian, Mount Gang, Mount Ge, and Mount Tie.[307] This chapter analyses the calligraphy styles of the engraved sutras at Mount Xiangtang, Mount Zhonghuang, Mount Hongding, Mount Tai, and Mount Gang. The engraved sutras of Mount Xiangtang and Mount Zhonghuang were selected for the purposes of this study as representatives of the Hebei region primarily because the engravings at Mount Xiangtang are well-known and have received significant attention from the academic community.[308] Secondly, the style of sutra engravings at Mount Zhonghuang differs from that of Mount Xiangtang. Additionally, the engravings from these two sites were closely associated with royal patronage, which impacted the choice of calligraphy style.[309] The cliffs in these areas are mostly engraved with complete sutras in small, easy-to-read scripts, which are representative of early sutra engraving activities.

The sutra engravings in Shandong possess distinct attributes compared to those found in Hebei. The cliffs in Shandong are tough and uneven, posing a challenge to surface polishing. Craftsmen in the area frequently engraved sutras directly onto naturally exposed stone surfaces, using larger characters to match the roughness of the rock. This change may have resulted in a transition from engraving complete sutras to concentrating on segments. The engraved sutras at Mount Hongding are the largest examples in scale and exhibit the greatest variety among these sites.[310] Further, the sutra engravings on Mount Tai are also remarkable for their considerable dimensions, and the appreciation of the passages is tightly connected to the surrounding environment. Due to the sacredness of Mount Tai, these engravings may enhance the site's Buddhist sanctity. Unlike Mount Hongding and Mount Tai, Mount Gang spreads its sutra engravings over several large stones instead of limiting them to a single surface. This dispersion allows for a greater integration of the engravings with the surrounding natural environment. Therefore, this chapter initially

[307] Lai, "*Beichao moya kejing de fengbu*", 50.
[308] Tsiang, "Monumentalization of Buddhist Texts in the Northern Qi Dynasty," 233.
[309] The discussion of the sponsors is referred to in Introduction, pages 16–21.
[310] Ledderose and Wang, *Buddhist Stone Sutras in China: Volume 1*, 19.

examines the sutra engravings in different locations and their geographical distribution to facilitate a comprehensive analysis of calligraphy styles. Building upon this foundation, a proposed system of classification subsequently examines the calligraphic features of cliff-sutra engravings.

3.1 Contents and Geographic Distribution of the Engravings

Sutra engravings in Hebei

Mount Xiangtang, located in the Fengfeng Mining District of Handan Municipality in southern Hebei province near the Henan border, comprises two distinct sections: Northern Xiangtangshan and Southern Xiangtangshan, both of which belong to the eastern offshoots of the Taihang Mountains [Fig. 65]. The Mount Xiangtang Caves currently consist of over thirty large and small caves, containing more than 4,300 statues. Northern Xiangtangshan has twenty-two caves, while Southern Xiangtangshan has nine.[311] Most of the sutras were engraved on the inner and outer walls of the South Cave of Northern Xiangtangshan, as well as on the inner walls of the first, second, and fourth caves of Southern Xiangtangshan.

The Northern Xiangtang Caves, situated halfway up the western slope of Mount Gu, are closely linked to the Northern Qi royal family. As shown in Fig. 66, Northern Xiangtangshan consists of three main caves: the North Cave, Middle Cave, and South Cave. The South Cave is, known as the Sutra Engraving Cave (Kejing dong 刻經洞). The walls of the South Cave are smoothly finished and engraved with sutras, both inside and outside of the porch, and on the left side of the domed roof. These include the *Sūtra Spoken by Vimalakīrti*, which covers the interior walls of the narrow, enclosed porch in front of the cave. The *Sūtra Spoken by the Buddha on Maitreya's Rebirth Below and Accomplishing Buddhahood* (*Foshuo mile xiasheng chengfo jing* 佛說彌勒下生成佛經), the *Śrīmālādevīsiṃhanāda Sūtra* (*Shengman shizihou yicheng da fangbian fangguang jing* 勝鬘師子吼一乘大方便方廣經), and the *Sūtra Spoken by Buddha on Bo* (*Foshuo bojing* 佛說孛經) are engraved on the exterior wall of the porch, extending northward to the northern part of the courtyard wall.

[311] Zhao Lichun 趙立春, "*Xiangtangshan shiku de bianhao shuoming ji neirong jianlu* 響堂山石窟的編號說明及內容簡錄 [Description of Numbers and Contents of Mount Xiangtang Caves]," *Wenwu Chunqiu*, no. 5 (2000): 62–68.

Furthermore, the *Sūtra of Immeasurable Meaning* was engraved on either side of the arched gate on the front wall of the rear chamber inside the Sutra Engraving Cave. This sutra, which is not referenced in the Tang Yong stele, displays a different calligraphy style compared to the four previously mentioned sutras.[312] Moreover, on the left corner pillar of the front porch of the cave, there is an engraving of Buddha names from the *Sūtra Spoken by Buddha on the Names of Buddhas* (*Foshuo foming jing* 佛說佛名經). On the left wall outside the cave, the *Treatise on the Sutra of Limitless Life* (*Wuliangshoujing youbotishe yuanshengjie* 無量壽經優波提舍願生偈) is carved. The names of twelve sutras from Volume One of the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra* (*Mohe boruo boluomi jing* 摩訶般若波羅密經) are also engraved at the upper part of the South Cave. The upper part of these twelve sutra names includes the names of Maitreya Buddha (*mile fo* 彌勒佛), Lion Buddha (*shizi fo* 獅子佛), and Mingyan Buddha (*mingyan fo* 明炎佛) from the *Sūtra of Present of the Thousand Buddhas of the Bhadra Kalpa* (*Xianzai xianjie qianfoming jing* 現在賢劫千佛名經), along with the Ten Great Saints (*Dasheng shihao* 大聖十號). In addition to the more complete sutra engravings mentioned above, Northern Xiangtang also preserves some shorter passages of sutras, as detailed in Table 2.

Southern Xiangtangshan is located on the north bank of Fuyang River, about 15 kilometers away from Northern Xiangtang. Compared with the North Group, the caves in the South Group are smaller in scale but more complex in design. The Southern Group engravings arrange seven caves across two levels. Caves 1 and 2 on the lower level are directly beneath Caves 3, 4, 5, and 6 on the upper level. On the upper level, Cave 7 also sits slightly offset from the others. While Caves 1 and 2 feature a central pillar design, the remaining caves are characterized by three walls and three niches, typical of Buddhist temple caves [Fig.67].[313] The sutra engravings mainly occupy the interiors of the first, second, and fourth caves. These sutras are from the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*, *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, *Mahāvaipulya-Mahāsaṃnipāta Sūtra* (*Dafangdeng daji jing* 大方等大集經), *Lotus Sutra*, and *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*.

[312] Scholars Mizuno and Nagahiro clarified that the Sutra of Immeasurable Significance was engraved prior to the sutras sponsored by Tang Yong. See Mizuno Seiichi 水野清一 and Nagahiro Toshiro 長廣敏雄, *Kyōdō-San Sekkuisu* [The Buddhist Cave-Temples of Hsiang-t'ang-Ssu on the Frontier of Honan and Hopei] (Kyōtō: Tōhō bunka gakuin Kyoto kenkyujo, 1937), 61.
[313] Tsiang, "Bodies of Buddhas and Princes at the Xiangtangshan Caves," 45.

Table 2. Engraved sutras at Northern Xiangtang Caves

Contents	Location	Reference
Sutra of Immeasurable Significance: Virtue Section (*Wu liang yi jing: dexing pin* 無量義經: 德行品)	On both sides of the arched gate on the front wall of the rear chamber inside the South Cave.	T09n0384
Sutra Spoken by Vimalakīrti (*Weimojie suoshuo jing* 維摩詰所説維摩詰經)	Inner front porch in the South Cave.	T14n475
Śrīmālādevīsiṃhanāda-sūtra (*Shengman shizihou yicheng da fangbian fangguang jing* 勝鬘師子吼一乘大方便方廣經)	The exterior wall on the right outside the South Cave.	T12n0353
Sutra Spoken by Buddha on Bo (*Foshuo Bo jing* 佛說孛經)	The exterior wall on the right outside the South Cave.	T17n0790
Sutra Spoken by the Buddha on Maitreya's Rebirth Below and Accomplishing Buddhahood (*Foshuo Mile xiasheng chengfo jing* 佛說彌勒下生成佛經)	The exterior wall on the right outside the South Cave.	T14n0454
Sutra Spoken by Buddha on the Names of Buddhas (*Foshuo foming jing* 佛說佛名經): twenty-five buddhas (*Ershiwu fo* 二十五佛)	On the left corner pillar of the front porch of the South Cave.	T14n0440
Treatise on the Sutra of Limitless Life (*Wuliangshoujing youbotishe yuanshengjie* 無量壽經優波提舍願生偈)	On the left exterior wall outside the South Cave.	T26n1524
Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra (*Mohe banruo boluomi jing* 摩訶般若波羅密經): names of twelve sutras (*Shierbu jingming* 十二部經名)	Upper part of the South Cave.	T08n0223
Sutra of Present of the Thousand Buddhas of the Bhadra kalpa names (*Xianzai xianjie qianfoming jing* 現在賢劫千佛名經): Maitreya Buddha (*mile fo* 彌勒佛), Lion Buddha (*shizi fo* 獅子佛), and Mingyan Buddha (*mingyan fo* 明炎佛)	Upper part of the twelve sutra names.	T14n0447
Ten Great Saints (*Dasheng shihao* 大聖十號)	Upper part of the twelve sutra names.	T14n0447
Light Buddha (*Baoguang fo* 寶光佛)	Above the South Cave	
King Buddha of Great Emptiness (*Da kong wang fo* 大空王佛)	Above the South Cave	
Pure Buddha (*Wugou fo* 無垢佛)	Above the South Cave	
The Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra (*Daban niepan jing* 大般涅槃經)	Halfway up Northern Xiangtang Mountain.	T12n074

Cave 1 is located at the west end of the lower level. The cave is designed as a central pillar style, divided into a front room and a back room. The back room is the main hall, with a square shaped layout, a square pillar in the center, and niches on three sides. The back wall of the cave connects to the upper part of the rear wall, while the lower part creates a low corridor for easy passage during worship. Starting from the right end of the right wall, there are engravings from the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*, specifically the end of the fourth chapter, the Four Truths (*Sidi pin* 四諦品), and the fifth chapter, the Luminous Enlightenment (*Guangmingjue pin* 光明覺品). Similarly, on the left side of the cave entrance on the front wall, there are engravings of the sixth chapter, the Bodhisattva Clarifies Problems (*Pusa mingnan pin* 菩薩明難品). On the right side of the cave entrance on the front wall, there are engravings from the seventh chapter, Purifying Action (*Jingxing pin* 淨行品) [Fig. 68].

Cave 2, sharing the same layout as Cave 1, is situated to the east of Cave 1. The engraved sutras are arranged on the left side of the entrance wall and in the passageway on the rear wall [Fig. 69]. On the left side of the entrance wall, the first seven lines are extracted from the second chapter of the *Sūtra of Mahā-Prajñā-Pāramitā Pronounced by Mañjuśrī* (*Wenshu shili shuo dabanru boluomi jing* 文殊師利說大般若波羅蜜經), while the last three lines are from the Bodhisattva Sees Wisdom (*Haihui pusa pin* 海會菩薩品), of the *Mahāvaipulya-Mahāsaṃnipāta Sūtra*. This passage describes a conversation between Mañjuśrī and the Buddha regarding the significance of perfect wisdom. On the rear wall of the corridor, the twenty-seventh chapter of the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra* is engraved.

Additionally, the names of sixteen Buddhas were carved on the columns between the rows of niches, which are from Parable of the Conjured City (*Hua cheng yu* 化城喻) of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra.* Cave 4 is located above Cave 2 and is designed as a three-walled altar-style Buddha cave. The sutra engravings start on the right wall and continue around to the left wall through the front wall, containing the twenty-fifth chapter, Universal Gate (*Pumen pin* 普門品) of the Lotus Sutra [Fig. 70]. The eaves of the fourth, fifth, and sixth caves also feature sutra engravings, albeit with signs of weathering. For a summarizing of the engraved content, refer to Table 3.

Table 3. Engraved sutras at Southern Xiangtang Caves

Contents	Location	Reference
Avataṃsaka Sūtra (*Da fang guang fo huayan jing* 大方廣佛華嚴經): the Four Truths (*Si di pin* 四諦品), the Luminous Enlightenment (*Guangming jue pin* 光明覺品), the Bodhisattva Clarify Problems (*Pusa ming nan pin* 菩薩明難品), the Purifying Action (*Jing xing pin* 淨行品).	Cave One, starting from the right end of the right wall to the front wall.	T09n0420-0432
Sūtra of Mahā-Prajñā-Pāramitā Pronounced by Mañjuśrī (*Wenshu shili suoshou mohe banruo boluomi jing* 文殊師利所說摩訶般若波羅蜜經)	Cave Two, on the left side of the entrance wall (first seven lines).	T08n0738
Mahāvaipulya-Mahāsaṃnipāta Sūtra (*Da fang deng da ji jing* 大方等大集經): Bodhisattva See Wisdom (*Haihui puda pin* 海會菩薩品)	Cave Two, on the left side of the entrance wall (last three lines).	T13n0050
Sūtra of Mahā-Prajñā-Pāramitā: Dharmôttarīya (*Fashang pin* 法尚品)	Cave Two, on the rear wall of the corridor	T08n0421-0423
Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra (*Miaofa lianhua jing* 妙法蓮華經): Parable of the conjured city (*Hua cheng yu* 化城喻)	Cave Two, the names of sixteen Buddhas were carved on the columns between the rows of niches.	T09n0022-0027
Lotus Sutra: Universal Gate (*Pu men pin* 普門品)	Cave Four, starting from the right wall and continuing around to the left wall through the front wall.	T09n0056-0058
Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra (*Da ban niepan jing* 大般涅槃經)	On the eaves of sixth cave.	T12n0450-0451
King Buddha of Great Emptiness	The hillside on the east side outside Southern Xiangtangshan	

Another significant site of the sutra engravings in Hebei is the Daoist temple known as the Palace of Empress Nüwa (*Wahuang gong* 媧皇宮), situated on Mount Zhonghuang in Shexian County. According to records in the *Shexian zhi* 涉縣志 (Shexian County Chronicles), the sutra engravings at this site began during the reign of Emperor Wenxuan. Although no specific dates appear on the engravings, they are thought to have been carved

during the Northern Qi period.[314] Six sutra engravings are arranged from south to north, including the *Visesacinta Brahma Paripṛcchā Sūtra*, the *Sūtra of the Ten Grounds* (*Shidi jing* 十地經), the *Sūtra of the Doctrine Bequeathed by the Buddha* (*Fochui ban niepan lüeshuo jiajie jing* 佛垂般涅槃略說教誡經), the *Ullambana Sūtra* (*Yulanpen jing* 盂蘭盆經), the *Saṃdhinirmocana Sūtra* (*Jie shenmi jing* 解深密經), and the *Lotus Sutra* [Fig. 71].

The *Visesacinta Brahma Paripṛcchā Sūtra*, located in the northern part of the Wahuang Palace, was partially obscured by a stone stairway constructed during the Qing dynasty. There are 348 lines of surviving text, with each line containing approximately 120 characters. The sutra was engraved from line 1 to line 120, with a character height of roughly 2.5 cm. Beginning from line 121, the engraving transitions to regular script, with some characters displaying a combination of clerical and running script strokes. Additionally, the character height slightly increases at this point. The *Visesacinta Brahma Paripṛcchā Sūtra* discovered here is divided into four chapters. The stone stairs, which likely represent the middle and end of this segment, conceal the initial lines, 1-82, which are believed to belong to the first chapter. The subsequent text is sourced from the *Wuer pin* 無二品, with the chapter name inscribed at the top of line 83. This portion spans 57 lines (lines 83–139), with lines 83–120 rendered in clerical script and the remaining 19 lines in regular script [Fig. 72]. Another chapter originates from the *Tanlun pin* 談論品, comprising 79 lines (lines 140–218) carved in regular script, with the chapter name positioned at the top of line 140. Finally, the top of line 291 carries the title of an additional chapter, which spans 90 lines (lines 291-380) [Fig. 73]. The carvings here encompass the entire sutra.

The *Sūtra of the Ten Grounds* was engraved in three distinct locations. Initially, it was carved on the cliff wall at Wanghuang Palace immediately following the end of the *Visesacintã Brahma Paripṛcchā Sūtra*. Subsequently, the engraving was extended to Cave 1, where it covered all three walls. Then, the engraving process moved to Cave 2, where

[314] Qi Xuebiao 戚學標, *Shexian zhi* 涉縣誌, (Beijing: Zhongguo Chubanshe, 1998). Original text: 山下舊有北齊時離宮，傳載文宣帝高洋，自鄴詣晉陽，往來山下，起離宮以備巡幸，於此山腰見數百僧行過， 遂開三石窟，刻諸尊像，及天保末，又使人往竹林寺取經函，勒之岩壁。[At the foot of the mountain once stood a Northern Qi-era imperial villa. It is recorded that Emperor Wenxuan, Gao Yang, traveled between Ye and Jinyang, passing by this mountain. During his visits, he constructed the villa to accommodate his imperial tours. While at the mountainside, he encountered several hundred monks passing through and subsequently ordered the excavation of three stone caves, where statues of various deities were carved. Towards the end of the Tianbao era, he further dispatched envoys to Bamboo Grove Monastery to obtain scripture caskets, which were then inscribed onto the cliff face.]

the texts spanned more than two walls. The first chapter of the Sūtra of the Ten Grounds, with its name inscribed at the top of line 309, comprises a total of 40 lines (lines 309–348). This engraving, which is characterized by only vertical lines, displays inconsistencies in horizontal lines and textual sizes. Initially, work on the rock face was not completed, leading to its transfer to Cave 1 for further completion. There are 77 lines of scriptures engraved on the south wall of Cave 1, 18 of which are currently blocked by brick walls. There are 99 lines on the east wall and 80 lines on the north wall, 18 of which are obscured by the wall. The remaining chapters, from two to seven, were etched here. In total, six and a half chapters of scripture were engraved on the walls of Cave 1, amounting to 265 lines with 28,000 characters in regular script.

In Cave 2, the front brick wall obscures 31 of the 89 lines of scripture on the south wall. The east wall has 94 lines, and the north wall has 48 lines, 21 of which are hidden by the brick wall. This cave contains the inscriptions of chapters eight to ten of the Sutra of the Ten Grounds. The north wall of Cave 2 also features carvings of the *Ullambana Sūtra* and the *Sūtra of the Doctrine Bequeathed by the Buddha*. Furthermore, the *Saṃdhinirmocana Sūtra* was carved onto two separate cliff walls. They etched a total of 94 lines, comprising over 7,000 characters, covering chapters one through seven, outside Cave Two. Moreover, chapters eight through eleven were inscribed, totaling 192 lines and 29,400 characters, on the northeast side of the Drum Tower, which underwent reconstruction during the Ming dynasty. Furthermore, the Lotus Sutra was engraved on the south wall of the mountain beam, situated between the seventh and eighth chapters of the *Saṃdhinirmocana Sūtra*. Here, 46 lines of text remain. However, the engraving of this sutra lacks consistency. For an overview of Mount Zhonghuang sutra engravings, refer to Table 4.[315]

The three sutras engraving areas in the Hebei region are all linked to caves and surrounded by statues. These sutras, engraved on smooth, polished cliffs, typically contain complete texts. The characters are relatively uniform in size and are arranged within pre-drawn frames. At Mount Xiangtang, there is minimal repetition of sutra content, with a significant emphasis on engravings reflecting Huayan thought.[316] The engraved sutras on Mount Zhonghuang range from early mind-only developments in Buddhist teachings to effects

[315] For the distribution of scriptures carved in Zhonghuang Mountain, refer to Ma Zhongli (1995): 66–76; Tsiang, Katherine R. (1996): 239; Zong, Zhang, and Howard L Goodman (2010): 295–398.
[316] Cui Zhonghui 崔中慧, "*Beichao huayanjing xiejing yu kejing chubu kaocha* 北朝《華嚴經》寫經與刻經初步考察 [A Preliminary Investigation into the Writing and Engraving of Avataṃsaka Sūtra in the Northern Dynasties]," in *Huayan zhuanzong guoji xueshi yantaohun lunwenji xiace* 華嚴專宗國際學術研討會論文集下冊 [Proceedings of the International Conference on Huayan Studies, Volume II] (2017), 401.

from the Dilun School.[317] The integration of sutra engravings and caves also reflects Buddhist meditation practices. Buddhism has long emphasized one-practice absorption, or Ekavyuha Samadhi. This concept, viewing the one form of the Dharmadhatu as inherently empty and formless, is illustrated in the *Sūtra of Mahā-Prajñā-Pāramitā*. Wall contemplation and seated meditation practices are grounded in Prajñā thought, which emphasizes emptiness and formlessness. Thus, visualizing the splendor of the Pure Land (Sukhāvati-vyûha) and chanting the name of Amitabha Buddha enable practitioners to rapidly attain correct enlightenment (anuttarā-samyak-saṃbodhi). These cave sutra engravings embody the Pure Land principles of Buddhism, with an emphasis on emptiness.[318]

Table 4. Engraved sutras at Southern Xiangtang Caves

Contents	Location	Reference
Visesacinta Brahma Paripṛcchā Sūtra (*Siyi fantian suowen jing* 思益梵天所問經)	On the cliff behind the dressing room.	T15n0033-0062
Sutra of the Ten Grounds (*Shidi jing* 十地經)	On the cliff behind the dressing room; Cave One; the south wall and middle wall of Cave Two.	T26n0123-0203
Sutra of the Doctrine Bequeathed by the Buddha (*Fochui ban niepan lüeshuo jia jie jing* 佛垂般涅槃略說教誡經)	North wall of Cave Two.	T12n1110-1112
Ullambana Sutra (Yulanpen jing 盂蘭盆經)	North wall of Cave Two.	T16n0779
Saṃdhinirmocana Sūtra (*Jie shenmi jing* 解深密經)	The wall on the right side outside the second cave and the wall on the north side of the Drum Tower.	T16n0665-0688
Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra (*Miaofa lianhua jing* 妙法蓮華經)	The cliff on the north side of the cave Two.	T09n0056-0058

The engraved Buddhist scriptures in Shandong

In Shandong Province, sutra engravings can be seen everywhere on cliffs and boulders as the natural surface was used to directly carve these engraved sutras, which contain Buddhist scriptures and names. Mount Hongding is situated to the east of Dongping Lake

[317] Zhang and Goodman, "Northern Qi Inscribed Sutras and Buddha Images," 305.
[318] Jingshang 井上, Shangshi 尚實, and Li Heming 李賀敏, "*Beiqu chan yu jingtu-Nanxiangtangshan dierku suojian yixingsanmei de liangzhong jieshi* 北齊禪與淨土—南響堂山第二窟所見一行三昧的二種解釋 [Northern Qi Zen and Pure Land: Two Interpretations of Ekavyuha Samadhi Observed in the Second Grotto of Nanxiangtangshan]," *Foxue Yanjiu* 1 (2019): 177.

in Dongping County. The sutra engravings discovered at Hongding Mountain are the oldest extant Buddhist engravings in Shandong Province, dating back to between 553 and 564. There are twenty-three carvings on the mountain, including seventeen on the north slope and six on the south slope [Fig. 74, Fig. 75]. The engravings can be classified into three categories: sutras, names of Buddhas, and historical inscriptions.[319]

From west to east, the carvings on the northern cliffs sequentially include the following: the *Sūtra of Mahā-Prajñā-Pāramitā Pronounced by Mañjuśrī* is situated at the westernmost end of the northern slope; the Seng'an Daoyi Inscription, consisting of six lines with twelve characters per line, is adjacent to it on the right. Next to it is the *Mahāsaṃnipāta Sūtra*—Chapter of Bodhisattva Haihui, comprising 7 lines with 8 characters per line. Nearby is another Seng'an Daoyi Inscription, with 6 lines of 12 characters each. Adjacent to this is the Seng'an Daoyi Title Inscription, which consists of one line with four characters. Further eastward is the *Mahāvyutpatti Sūtra*, featuring 6 lines with 12 characters per line. The chapter seven of the *Mañjuśrīparipṛcchā Sūtra*, is situated in the middle section of the northern cliff of Hongding Mountain, comprising 7 lines with 10 characters per line. The middle section of the northern cliff also contains the Great Empty King Buddha Inscription. The Thirteen Buddha Names are adjacent to the Great Empty King Buddha, starting from the eastern segment of the northern cliff, consisting of 17 lines with 2 to 7 characters per line The Great Mountain Rock Buddha Inscription is located above the Thirteen Buddha Names. The Tall Mountain Buddha Inscription is adjacent to the Great Mountain Rock Buddha. The Peaceful King Buddha Inscription is adjacent to the Tall Mountain Buddha and the Great Mountain Rock Buddha [Fig. 76]. The northern slope's entrance houses the Medicine Master Buddha Inscription, which is at the wind gate entrance. The inscription of Duke An is found at the entrance of the Net Gate. The inscription header in seal script reads "Inscription of Duke An" followed by eight lines with 12 characters per line. One of the *Mañjuśrīprajñāpāramitā Sūtra* is situated at the entrance of the Wind Gate, featuring 10 lines with 10 characters per line. The Seng'an Daoyi Title Inscription is to the right of the Mañjuśrīprajñāpāramitā Sūtra.

On the southern cliff wall, the Inscription of Dharmakirti is in the middle section. It consists of nine lines, with 16 characters per line. To the right of the Inscription of Dharmakirti, is the Inscription of Great Empty King Buddha (the second one). Similarly,

[319] For the distribution of Mount Hongding engraved sutras, see Ledderose and Wang, *Buddhist Stone Sutras in China: Shandong Province Volume 1*, 82–93.

the middle section also houses the Inscription of the Great Empty King Buddha (the third one). Moving to the western section of the southern cliff, the Inscription of Great Empty King Buddha (the fourth one) is located there. Additionally, the *Mañjuśrīprajñāpāramitā Sūtra* (the second one) is situated in the western section, with 7 lines of scripture and 1 line for the title, containing 14 characters per line. The content is identical to the selected passages on the northern cliff wall. Furthermore, a re-engraving of the Inscription of Great Empty King Buddha (the fifth one) is found in the western section of the southern cliff wall, positioned to the right of the *Mañjuśrīprajñāpāramitā Sūtra*. For an overview of Mount Hongding sutra engravings, refer to Table 5.

Additionally, the Stone Engraving of the *Diamond Sūtra* in Mount Tai's Shiyu Valley is etched on the granite bed of a stream. The sutra engravings are approximately 56 meters long from north to south and 36 meters wide from east to west, covering an area of over 2,000 square meters, making them the largest extant work of Chinese character engraving. The scripture engraved on the stone is the *Diamond Sūtra*, encompassing the first to sixteenth sections, totaling 3,017 characters. However, due to time and stream erosion, only over a thousand characters across forty lines remain visible today. The characters have diameters ranging between 50 and 60 millimeters.[320]

The Mount Gang Stone Engravings, situated in the Yinsanyu Valley (commonly known as Langgou) of Zoucheng City, Shandong Province, consist of 24 sites featuring over 400 characters. Scattered along the sides of the Langgou Valley, these engravings center around a rock locally known as the Chicken Beak Rock. As shown in Fig. 77, the engravings can be divided into three parts: six Buddha names (GS D1-D4), three sutra passages (GS A1-A5, GS B1-B31.2, GS C1-C2), and one historical inscription (GS E). The historical inscription is located on the north side of the Chicken Beak Stone, comprising 8 lines totaling 49 characters, with diameters ranging from 10 to 19 centimeters. To the east, a small stone Buddha statue is engraved with the words “Stone Scripture” (石徑) on its right side. The inscriptions below the Buddha include the names of three Buddhas and the date. The eastern and southern sides of the Chicken Beak Rock base carve the *Sūtra on the Contemplation of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life*. The east-facing side contains 10 lines of text, while the south-facing side has 5 lines, totaling 177 characters with a diameter of 15 centimeters. The arrangement of the characters is neat and proportionate.

[320] Qiu Ming 邱茗, "*Taishan jingshiyu jingang jing shufa tezheng fengxi* 泰山經石峪金剛經書法特徵分析 [Analysis of the Calligraphy Characteristics of the Taishan Sutra and the Shiyu *Diamond Sūtra*]," *Wenxue jiaoyu*, no. 10 (2015): 143.

Table 5. Engraved sutras at Mount Hongding

Contents	Location	Reference
Passage of 54 Characters from the Sutra on the Great Perfection of Wisdom Spoken by Mañjusri	HDS 1	T08n0728
Passage from the Great Compilation Sutra on the Six Perfections	HDS 2	T13n0050
Encomium to Seng'an Daoyi	HDS 3	
Seng'an Daoyi	HDS 4	
"Mahayana Sutra" Stele with a Passage on Eighteen Aspects of Emptiness	HDS 5	T08n0250
Passage from the Sutra Spoken by the Buddha on the Perfection of Wisdom of Humane Kings	HDS 6	T08n0832
Colophon to "Buddha King of Great Emptiness"	HDS 7	
Buddha King of Great Emptiness	HDS 8	
Buddha Names	HDS 9.1-9.15	
Donor Fahong 主法鴻	HDS 9.15	
Buddha Lofty Mountain 高山佛	HDS 10	
Buddha King of Serenity 安王佛	HDS 11	
Buddha Great Mountain Cliff 大山巖佛	HDS 12	
Buddha Medicine Master of Beryline Radiance 藥師琉璃光佛	HDS 13	
Stele of Wind Entrance 風門口碑	HDS 14	
Stele of Sire An Serenity 安公之碑	HDS 15	
Seng'an Daoyi	HDS 16.1	
Passage of 98 Characters from the Sutra on the Great Perfection of Wisdom Spoken by Mañjusri on the Northern Slope	HDS 16.2	T08n0738
[Buddha King of] Great [Emptiness]	HDS 17	
Encomium to Fahong 法洪銘讚	HDS 18	
Buddha King of Great Emptiness	HDS 19	
Buddha King of Great Emptiness	HDS 20	
Buddha King of Great Emptiness	HDS 21.1	
Votive Inscription by Fahong	HDS 21.2	
Passage of 98 Characters from the Sutra on the Great Perfection of Wisdom Spoken by Mañjust on the Southern Slope	HDS 22	T08n0738
Buddha King of Great Emptiness	HDS 25.1	
Votive Inscription by Fahong	HDS 25.2	

In addition, about 40 meters south of Chicken Beak Rock, there are small characters engraved on the cliff wall, which is divided into two sections. The first section has four lines with thirteen characters per line; the second section has seven lines with eight characters per line, totaling 108 characters, with a diameter of 20 cm. The large characters from the opening passage of the *Sūtra of Arrival in Lankā* are carved on rocks or cliff walls at 32 different locations from the foot of the mountain to the top. The texts are orderly with clear boundaries between characters, with a diameter generally around 40 centimeters. For an overview of Mount Gang sutra engravings, refer to Table 6.

Table 6. Engraved sutras at Mount Gang

Contents	Location	Reference
GS A: The Small Character Version A of the Opening Passage from the Sūtra of Arrival in Lankā 崗山 A 號: 《入楞伽經》經首序文小字本	GS A1-A5	T16n0514
GS B: The Large Character Version Bof the Opening Passage from the Sūtra of Arrival in Lankā 崗山 B 號: 《入楞伽經》經首序文大字本	GS B1-B31.2	T16n0514
GS C: Opening Passage from the Sutra on the Contemplation of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life 崗山 C 號: 《觀無量壽佛經》經首序文	GS C1-C2	T12n0340 -0341
Buddha Names 佛名: Buddha Sakyamuni 釋迦文佛, Buddha Honored Maitreya 弥勒尊佛, Buddha Amitābha 阿弥陀佛, Buddha King of Great Emptiness, Buddha Amitābha 阿弥陀佛, Great (...) 大, All Buddhas 一切佛	GS D1-D4	
GS E: Colophon on Chicken Beak Rock 崗山 E 號:雞嘴石題記	GS E	

In the cliff-sutra engravings of the Northern Qi dynasty in Shandong, the diameter of each character is about 20 centimeters, with some reaching over 40 centimeters, all engraved on natural stone surfaces. The large characters of the engraved sutras in Shandong not only stand out due to their size but also convey a sacred charm, enhancing the spiritual quality of the calligraphy style. This may reflect the increasing importance of calligraphy as a means of religious expression within the distribution of Buddhist practices at this time. After examining the distribution and content of the sutra engravings in Hebei and Shandong, it is clear that the calligraphy styles of these engravings vary based on their

location. The following section will specifically classify and compare the calligraphy styles in the sutra engravings of Shandong and Hebei.

3.2 Analysis of Calligraphy Stylistic Features

This section attempts to clarify the calligraphy style of sutra engravings from the late Northern Dynasties by establishing a classification and conducting comparative analysis of calligraphic styles from different places. Additionally, this part discusses the impact of the identities of calligraphers, engravers, and sponsors of the engraving activities upon the development of calligraphy styles during this period.

Hebei Province (Mount Xiangtang and Mount Zhonghuang)

The clerical script is the predominant calligraphic style used for sutra engravings at Mount Xiangtang. Nevertheless, the *Sūtra of Immeasurable Meaning* constitutes an exception to this dominant stylistic trend, which uses the regular script. The Northern Xiangtangshan has this sutra engraved on both sides of the wall of the front arch of the back room [Fig. 11]. In addition, the Buddha King of Emptiness, positioned at the center of the Buddhist shrine on the southeast slope of the Southern Xiangtangshan, also uses regular script. The *Sūtra of Immeasurable Meaning* is mainly engraved in regular script. The text exhibits stability and clarity in its overall structure, and its organized character distribution ensures readability and clarity. However, in certain character strokes, the calligraphy style of these engraved sutras incorporates elements from clerical script, characterized by a flattened structure in characters. This kind of brushwork uses an accurate and controlled technique, producing characters of relatively uniform size arranged in a grid matrix.

It is worth noting that in certain characters, the brushwork ends in a square at the corner of the stroke, forming the general geometric rule of writing. This calligraphic feature of sharp-angled strokes is most obvious at the termini and junctures of the character *kou* 口 (mouth), as illustrated in Fig. 78. The emergence of these angular strokes may be attributable to the engravers' specific techniques or a conscious emulation of the exemplar calligraphy. This feature is similar to the regular script widely used in the Northern Wei dynasty, although the engraving of the *Sūtra of Immeasurable Meaning* weakens the typical ruggedness of the regular script found on Wei-stele. For engraving methods, there are two primary techniques for stone carving: *shudan* 书丹 and *mole* 摹勒. The *shudan* method involves using a brush dipped in cinnabar ink to write directly on the surface of stone objects. The process typically includes the following steps: firstly, the stone is

prepared and polished, followed by the application of an ink layer. Following, the characters are counted to determine the number of rows, and a grid is drawn accordingly. The calligrapher then uses a cinnabar-dipped brush to write the text within the grid, after which the carving process begins. *Mole*, on the other hand, is a tracing and copying technique. In this method, transparent paper is placed over the original text, and the outer contours of the characters are outlined with a fine brush (a process also known as "double outlining"). The outlined design is then transferred onto the stone tablet, making the text clearly visible.[321] Due to the differences between the soft brush and the sharp carving knife, the resulting brushstrokes of the characters inevitably differ in appearance.

The application of this brushwork endows the text with a unique sense of seriousness and masculinity. Although the overall structure of the characters is in the style of regular script, the content of the brushwork adheres to clerical script. Qing dynasty scholars noted that calligraphy in the Northern Dynasties often mixed styles with clerical script. Collector Chen Jieqi 陳介祺 (1813–1884 CE) specifically pointed out that the calligraphy of the regular script of the Six Dynasties mostly took brushstrokes from clerical scripts. He wrote:

> 六朝佳書，取其有篆隸筆法耳，非取貌奇，以怪樣欺世。求楷之筆，其法莫多於隸。
>
> The finest calligraphy of the Six Dynasties era is valued for incorporating the techniques of seal script and clerical script, rather than for its unusual appearance or eccentric styles meant to deceive the world. When seeking the brush techniques of regular script, there is no method more abundant than that found in clerical script.[322]

Also, in the *Sūtra of Immeasurable Meaning*, the calligraphic strokes are mostly square but have a roundness and fullness to them. This is different from the stiff and sharply angular strokes that are typical of Wei-stele. When compared with the regular script of the Tang

[321] Cui Xinshe 崔新社 and Den Haiyan 鄭海燕, "*Qiantan beike taying fangfa yu jiqiao* 淺談碑刻拓印方法與技巧 [Talking about the Methods and Techniques of Stone Engravings]," *Zhongguo Wenwu Kexue Yanjiuyuan*, no. 3 (2010): 60–62.
[322] Chen Jieqi 陳介祺, "*Xizi jue* 習字訣 [Learn the calligraphy formula]," in *Shulun jiyao* 书论辑要 [A Collection of Calligraphic Discourses], ed. Zhang Chao 張超 (Beijing: Jiaoyu Kexue Chubanshe, 1988).

dynasty, the calligraphic style of this sutra occupies a transitional space, reflecting a stylistic shift from the regular script of the Northern Wei dynasty to the established calligraphic conventions of the Tang era. For instance, the characters *bu* 不 and *you* 有 appear with a squatness that diverges from the elongated forms typical of Tang regular script, yet they simultaneously present a roundness and equilibrium not found in the more angular calligraphy of the Northern Wei style, as depicted in Fig. 79. In addition, this engraved sutra incorporates elements of clerical script, such as horizontal strokes, right-falling strokes, and hook strokes. For example, the horizontal stroke of the character *shan* 善 embodies the traditional style characteristics of the clerical script of "silkworm head and swallow tail." This is further reflected in the right-falling stroke in the character *bei* 悲, which ends with a wavy downward stroke. The hook stroke in the character *jing* 靜 ends with an obvious leftward bold stroke [Fig. 80].[323] The integration of clerical script brushwork with regular script in the engraved sutras of the late Northern Qi dynasty represents a distinct phase in Chinese calligraphy. Kang Youwei claimed that the stylistic foundations of the eminent Tang calligraphy masters can be traced back to these earlier traditions.[324]

The calligraphy style of the Buddha King of Emptiness is written in regular script, although it differs from the style used to engrave the *Sūtra of Immeasurable Meaning*. The square and compact form of the Buddha's name distinguishes the calligraphy style, with each stroke thoughtfully arranged to achieve a harmonious balance throughout the characters. Fig. 81 exemplifies the widespread regular script technique of the Northern Wei dynasty, which is further defined by the script's distinct sharp edges and rigid strokes. As explained by Kang Youwei in the chapter *Zunbei* 尊碑 (In Praise of Steles), the inscriptions from the Northern Dynasties typically feature extended strokes, with the corner strokes being robust and pronounced.[325]

At Mount Xiangtang, there are approximately twenty-two engraved sutras, primarily using clerical script. These can be categorically divided into four distinct types. The first category is based on the clerical script found at Mount Xiangtang, which displays an

[323] For the characteristics of the wave line in clerical script see chapter 2, pages 75–88. Also see Li Wendan, *Chinese Writing and Calligraphy*, 120–121.
[324] Kang, "*Guang yizhou shuangji,*" in *Lidai shufa lunwen xuan,*758. Original text: 南、北朝之碑，無體不備，唐人名家，皆從此出。[The steles of the Southern and Northern Dynasties encompass a complete range of styles, serving as the foundation from which all renowned Tang calligraphers emerged.]
[325] Kang, "*Guang yizhou shuangji,*" 756. Original text: 筆法舒長刻入，雄奇角出。[The brushwork is elongated and deeply engraved, exuding a bold and striking angularity.]

official calligraphy style similar to that in ancient Stone Classics inscriptions [Fig. 82].[326] The *Sūtra Spoken by Vimalakīrti* [Fig. 8], the *Śrīmālādevīsiṃhanāda Sūtra* [Fig. 83], the *Sūtra Spoken by Buddha on Bo* [Fig. 84], and the *Sūtra Spoken by the Buddha on Maitreya's Rebirth Below and Accomplishing Buddhahood* [Fig. 85] fundamentally retain the attributes of the clerical script prevalent during the Han dynasty. This style of calligraphy, often referred to as the eight-point script, lacks the variation in stroke thickness which was typically characteristic of the standard clerical script in official Han dynasty steles. As exemplified in Fig. 80 (right side), the style demonstrates a harmonious arrangement of characters within a grid framework, where the sizes of each character are comparably uniform. The characters are appropriately sized, with varying thickness and density of strokes. The text is neatly organized, considering the general framework, and exudes a sense of simplicity and timelessness. Calligraphers strokes are written neatly in a square style, resulting in sharp starting and ending points.[327]

Furthermore, the engraved sutras in the Southern Xiangtangshan region also bear resemblance to the clerical script used in the official steles of the Eastern Han dynasty, such as the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* [Fig. 9] and the Lotus Sutra [Fig. 86]. In contrast to the engraved sutras in Northern Xiangtangshan, the spacing of characters and lines is wider, and the strokes exhibit a more austere and thinner aspect. Usually, these types of sutras are written in clerical script, occasionally incorporating inadvertent strokes from regular script. The Twelve Sutra Names, located on the left side of the Double Buddha Cave at Northern Xiangtangshan, also incorporate this style of calligraphy. The characters complete their strokes with uniform flatness, maintaining a square structure. These engravings show a combination of certain strokes which are characteristic of the regular script. For instance, Fig. 87 illustrates the shaping of the hook strokes using the same technique as regular script. The solemnity of the calligraphy in these engraved sutras stems from the strong structure of the official clerical script of the Han dynasty, despite the small number of strokes which are mixed with regular script.[328]

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[326] Liu, "*Beiqi moya kejing de shuti yu dazi de shuke fangfa*," 85.

[327] Wu Qiuyan, *Xianju lu*. Original text: 六曰漢隸，蔡邕石經及諸漢碑之字是也，此體最為後出，皆有波法與秦隸同名，其實則異，又謂之八分云。[The sixth is the Han clerical script, exemplified by the characters on Cai Yong's Stone Classics and various Han dynasty steles. This style, the latest to emerge, features the distinctive 'wave-like' strokes. Although it shares the name *lishu* with the Qin clerical script, it is fundamentally different and is also referred to as the eight-point script.]

[328] Bao, "*Yizhou shuangji*," 653.

Contrasting with the first clerical style, the second clerical script features more pronounced rounded strokes and a clear differentiation between the thick and thin strokes within each character.[329] A typical exemplar of this style is the *Sūtra of Mahā-Prajñā-Pāramitā Pronounced by Mañjuśrī*, which is carved in the second cave of Southern Xiangtangshan [Fig. 88]. This sutra engraving exhibits a distinctive elongated form. Its most remarkable feature, however, is the application of pressure to the brush, which thickens certain strokes. This technique is particularly evident in strokes that descend towards the right, and its strokes are all distinctive and varied, striving to be uneven.[330] In Fig. 89, this is visible for the characters *bo* 波, *bu* 不, *chu* 處, and ban 般, where more pressure has strategically been placed on the brush for finishing the right-falling strokes, which makes the line thicker. This intentional use of stroke thickness fills the characters with a sense of strength, and such brushwork not only diversifies the visual texture but also injects energy into the script.

The third category is characterized by a mixture of clerical script and regular script brushstrokes. This stylistic combination is particularly evident in the Tang Yong stele, located in northern Xiangtangshan, where strokes characteristic of the regular script are more prevalent. Specific left-falling strokes, such as those found in the character tian 天, are in the regular script style. In addition, certain characters are entirely written with the regular script, despite their structural resemblance to the clerical script. Examples of this can be seen in characters like *chu* 出, *zhi* 之, and *ling* 令 [Fig. 90]. In general, this style of clerical script serves as an example of the integration of clerical and regular script writing styles. This style further incorporates elements of the regular script, characterized by characters that are mostly broad, flat, and extend horizontally. For instance, the engraved sutras at the back of Cave Two in Southern Xiangtangshan use strokes which are more characteristic of the regular script than the clerical script [Fig. 91]. Certain horizontal strokes show an upward inclination, reflecting the tendencies of regular styles and avoiding the wavy strokes typically associated with clerical script. In addition, this engraving juxtaposes a squat script structure with a loose, open structure, achieved by contrasting compressed vertical strokes with extended horizontal and diagonal lines. In the case of the character *xu* 虛, the lengthy horizontal strokes and squat structure are evident. Although

[329] Liu Tao divides the official books here into four types, and this article refers to this classification. Liu, "*Beiqi moya kejingde shuti yu lishu dazi de shuke fangfa*," 84–85.
[330] Original text: 皆極意波發，力求跌宕。[Every stroke is executed with deliberate flair, striving to achieve a dynamic and unrestrained effect.]

the structure remains in the clerical script style, most of the brushwork is written in the regular script [Fig. 92].

The primary use of the fourth clerical script was for engraving the names of the Buddha. As shown in Fig. 93, the character construction is compact despite their larger dimensions. A typical feature of this style is the exaggerated final stroke, as exemplified by the character for Buddha (*fo* 佛) in the Buddha King of Emptiness at Southern Xiangtangshan, in which the final stroke is elongated to twice the length of the character itself. This calligraphy style also incorporates elements of clerical script and regular script, such as the beginning of the left-falling stroke in the character *huo* 火, the end of the horizontal stroke in *wu* 無, and the uniformly arranged structure of *gou* 垢. These characteristics led to the emergence of a mixture of clerical script and regular script, which not only retained the structure of clerical script but also integrated the characteristics of regular script.

To sum up, the calligraphy styles discussed above can be divided into two categories: one based on regular script and the other on clerical script. The first category is characterized by rounded and powerful brushstrokes, reflecting the transitional stage of calligraphy from the style of Wei-stele inscriptions to a smoother, more rounded form. The second category is distinguished by a mixed script style established in clerical script structures. The first sub-style in this second category is based on the clerical script, displaying a calligraphy style similar to that found in ancient Stone Classics inscriptions. The second sub-style features more pronouncedly rounded strokes and a clear differentiation between thick and thin strokes within each character, with most characters being broad, flat, and extending horizontally. This style uses brushstrokes resembling clerical script rather than regular script, resulting in a natural and expansive structure. The characteristic of the third sub-style in second category is its squat construction, despite its use of regular script for writing. This style demonstrates the amalgamation of various script styles within a single character. The fourth sub-style, employed for engraving the names of the Buddha, is distinguished by compressed characters of larger size and is a combination of clerical and regular script.

The sutra engravings on Mount Zhonghuang primarily use regular script, in contrast to those on Xiangtang Mountain. However, the first 120 lines of the engraved *Visesacinta Brahma Pariprccha Sūtra* at the back of the dressing floor [Fig. 71] stand out as an obvious exception, showcasing characteristics of clerical script [Fig. 10]. Furthermore, it is

worth noting that in this section of the engraved sutras, the strokes extending to both sides are more noticeable. This is particularly evident in the dispersion of *ba* 八, which closely resembles the eight-point script as described by Zhang Huaiguan.[331] The characters in this calligraphic style exhibit a compact and squat appearance. Elements of the clerical script style combine with the foundational regular script, creating an intriguing mixture. For example, in Fig. 94, the character *yan* 言 demonstrates this mixture. Its horizontal stroke adopts a wavy pattern, a characteristic feature of clerical script. Furthermore, many strokes, including vertical hooks, follow the clerical script style. They begin with a hidden tip at the turning point, then proceed downward to the right under moderate pressure, and then curve upward and to the right while gradually lifting the brush. This stylistic impact of clerical script is evident in the final strokes of the characters *se* 色, *guang* 光, and *tian* 天, as illustrated in Fig. 95.

Moreover, Fig. 96 illustrates the uniqueness of this section of the engraving, where the horizontal stroke, dot stroke, left-falling stroke, and right-falling stroke all thin out at the end to form a pointed head. This characteristic is also frequently present in the Stele about Prime Minister Yi Ying (*Yiying bei* 乙瑛碑) from the Eastern Han dynasty and the Xiping Stone Classics. Although this feature was emphasized in the engraved *Visesacinta Brahma Pariprccha Sūtra* in Mount Zhonghuang, the construction of the *lao* 耂, as observed in the engraved sutra, bears a resemblance to its depiction in the Stele of Prime Minister Yi Ying. For example, the character *zhe* 者 reflects the structural design of the same character found on the Stele about Prime Minister Yi Ying [Fig. 97].

The calligraphy of this sutra also demonstrates two distinctive characteristics. Firstly, as shown in Fig. 98, the sutra engravings employ an outward-folding hook, a unique stylistic element. Writing in this style is similar to writing in regular script, which involves turning the brush outward. For instance, the stroke in the character *fo* is similar to the outwardly folded stroke in regular script, as illustrated in Fig. 99. The second feature is the presence of two spikes, one ascending and the other descending, on a single side of the *ren* 亻 stroke, as shown in Fig. 100. Other inscriptions rarely display this characteristic, indicating that the calligrapher may have intentionally chosen it as a stylistic choice or as a result of the carving process. Regarding the functional and aesthetic requirements of sutra

[331] Zhang, "s*huduan*," 161. Original text: 漸若八字分散，又名之為八分。[he strokes gradually spread out like the character *ba* 八, hence the script is also called *bafen*.]

engravings in the Northern Qi dynasty, there was a preference for calligraphy that was orderly, weighty, and ornamental. However, from a practical standpoint regarding the engraving process and the motivation for efficiency, there were inevitable alterations to the original form of the script. This engraving uses a large number of regular script characters in addition to the features mentioned above. It is noteworthy that these characters display a flattened shape, as can be observed in characters such as *gu* 故 and *ren* 人, as depicted in Fig. 101.

Apart from the first half of the *Visesacinta Brahma Pariprccha Sūtra*, which exhibits a style derived from clerical script, the remaining sutra engravings on Mount Zhonghuang mainly feature regular script. First, consider the second half of the engraved version of the *Vishesasintha Brahma Sūtra* (lines 121 to 308), which mainly uses regular script, much like Tang dynasty stone carvings. The character structure is balanced, and the script size remains consistent. The overall character structure has a square, flattened, and vertical shape that conveys a sense of gravity and serenity. The use of square strokes in the corners, combined with circular strokes, adds to the aesthetic appeal [Fig. 73]. In addition, this part of the engraved calligraphy is remarkable for having a visibly thicker right-falling stroke, such as in the characters *wen* 文, *ren* 人, and *zhi* 之 [Fig. 102]. The right-falling stroke in the final character bears a resemblance to the same stroke utilized in the clerical script. In addition, some characters found in engravings have the characteristics of the running script. For example, the upper strokes of the characters *da* 荅 and *wu* 無 employ connected strokes, which is a characteristic frequently observed in the running script. Similarly, the radical character *de* 得 is illustrated in the running writing style [Fig. 103]. Another notable feature of these engraved sutras is the use of the *kou* 口 pattern in many characters. Fig. 104 illustrates that the second stroke of the *kou* structure is a wave stroke.

The *Sūtra of the Ten Grounds* is engraved in three locations. The initial segment (lines 309 to 348) lacks a systematic arrangement, with characters arranged in vertical rows rather than horizontally, resulting in uneven character sizes [Fig. 105]. The script also exhibits elongation, a distinctive upward inclination in the horizontal strokes, and a rounded overall structure, with strokes displaying increased thickness. In addition, this engraved sutra displays the application of running script techniques, indicating an increased writing speed and a general sense of informality in contrast to the typical regular script. It is important to note that characters such as *nai* 乃, *jie* 界, and *neng* 能 exhibit smoother strokes [Fig. 106].

Subsequently, the continuation of the engraved *Sūtra of the Ten Grounds* transitions into Cave 1, fully covering the south wall [Fig. 107], east wall [Fig. 108], and north wall [Fig. 109] of this cave. Upon comparing the carvings on these three walls, it becomes evident that both the south wall and the east wall continue to be mostly characterized by square strokes. Although the characters on the south wall maintain a relatively square shape, those on the east wall appear more flattened. Additionally, the east wall engravings exhibit a greater number of smooth strokes. The characters show a looser upper part and a more compact lower part, with many strokes concluding in lifted brushwork, forming sharp strokes. For example, characters such as *shi* 時, *zhong* 眾, *deng* 等, and *xiang* 相 display vertical strokes with sharp endings [Fig. 110]. This was done during the Northern and Southern Dynasties. Naito observed that the sutra writing style represents a transitional phase between the old clerical script and the regular script. Despite retaining traces of the clerical style in the brushstrokes, it is, in fact, written in the regular script. Nevertheless, the sutra engravings on the north wall also display a flatter appearance, accompanied by markedly thicker strokes. The turning points of the characters experience a reduction in the number of strokes, transforming square strokes into smoother, rounded ones.

In addition, the *Sūtra of the Ten Grounds* engravings within Cave 2 demonstrate a generally consistent style, characterized by a relatively standard regular script [Fig. 111]. They have a distinctive charm reminiscent of the small, regular script from the Tang dynasty. Apart from the characters' relatively flat shapes, there is no obvious impact of clerical script writing style. Subsequently, the *Saṃdhinirmocana Sūtra* was engraved on two cliffs—one located on the north cliff outside the North Cave and the other on a small ridge cliff, which was engraved following the *Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra* [Fig. 112]. In general, the calligraphy style employed in these inscriptions is consistent with the regular script carvings found behind the dressing floor. These characteristics include the rounded corners, as seen in characters such as *tong* 同, *yuan* 緣, and *wei* 謂 [Fig. 113]. This characteristic is also prevalent in Dunhuang scriptures, such as the *Buddha Teach the Scriptures* (*Foshuosheng jing* 佛說生經) [Fig. 114].

In general, the sutra engravings on Mount Zhonghuang exhibit mixed calligraphic styles, primarily characterized by regular script but also integrating elements of clerical and running scripts. Unique stylistic elements include thicker right-falling strokes and the frequent use of connected strokes within the *kou* structure. In addition, Mount Zhong

Huang shows a notable fusion of styles, using a mixture of regular script and clerical script. The Buddhist scripture carvings also have notable features, such as the hooks that fold outwards and two spikes on the side of any stroke. These features can be explained by either deliberate artistic choices by the calligrapher or the result of carving techniques.

Shandong Province (Mount Hongding, Mount Tai, and Mount Gang)

The cliff-sutra engravings on Mount Hongding present a relatively consistent calligraphic style, with smooth strokes and broad structures that convey a balanced and expansive appearance. The brushstrokes of characters are rounded and full, showing no apparent variations in pressure or lifting at the beginning, end, or at turning points. For a more detailed analysis of the calligraphic style of the engraved sutras on Mount Hongding, representative examples have been selected, including engraved Buddha names, and the *Sūtra of Mahā-Prajñā-Pāramitā Pronounced by Mañjuśrī*.

A prominent feature of the sutra engravings on Mount Hongding is the magnificent characters used to carve the names of Buddha. As illustrated in Fig. 115, the engraved name of the Buddha King of Great Emptiness occupies a central position on the northern slope of Mount Hongding, forming the largest and most visible characters. One feature is the extended design or emphasis of certain strokes. For instance, the ending vertical stroke of the character *fo* 佛 (Buddha) is extended, and the right-falling stroke in the character *da* 大 (large) and the vertical stroke in the character *wang* 王 (king) are emphasized. The enlarged brushstrokes enhance the importance of the Buddha's name, possibly illustrating the preeminent status of Buddhism through stretched strokes and amplifying the importance of the inscriptions.[332] Another feature of this inscription is the use of decorative strokes. As depicted in Fig. 116, the strokes highlighted within the red circle show the addition of a hook-shaped stroke at the starting point. This feature can also be observed in the engraved name of the Buddha Great Mountain Cliff (*Da shan yan fo* 大山巖佛) [Fig. 117]. Additionally, it is apparent that the initial portion of the longest vertical stroke in *fo* 佛 and the last part of the right-falling stroke in *yan* 巖 contain multiple brushstrokes. This suggests that the calligrapher may have used several brushes

[332] Refer to the effect of Buddhism on the calligraphy style of sutra engravings in Shandong Provience, see Yihe 丁一鶴, "*Xingzou de Da kong wang fo* 行走的 「大空王佛」 [Walking the Buddha King of Great Emptiness]," *Zhongguo Shufa*, no. 14 (2017): 4–29. Zhong Mingshan 钟明善 and Wang Jin 王劲, "*Beichao wangqi fojiao moya kejing shufa yishu yanjiu* 北朝晚期佛教摩崖刻經書法藝術研究 [Study on the Calligraphy Art of Buddhist Cliff Inscriptions in the Late Northern Dynasties]," *Yishu Baijia,* 30, no. 2 (2014): 149–152.

tied together for writing. This characteristic is especially evident also in the right-falling stroke of the character *san* 散 in the Mahayana Sutra engraving [Fig.118]. These two engraved Buddha names also incorporate the smooth strokes which are characteristic of seal script. The spacing between the strokes is evenly distributed, and the bending of the character *fo* is handled in a fluid routine. The vertical strokes in the character *shan* end with a semicircle, clearly displaying traits of seal script.

In addition to the individually carved Buddha names, there are thirteen Buddha names carved in relatively small script [Fig. 119]. In terms of calligraphic style, this group of engravings is characterized by an abundance of rounded brushstrokes, clear variations in stroke thickness, and the incorporation of round strokes at turning points, with some strokes that are broad and elongated. For example, the horizontal stroke in the character *an* 安, the right-falling stroke in the character *zu* 足, and the vertical hook stroke in the character *shi* 式 are all extended. For these Buddha names, the overall structure of the characters is squat, and the size of each character varies. The distribution of the text bears some resemblance to the sutra carvings on the rear wall of the second cave at Southern Xiangtangshan [Fig. 88].

In a certain sense, these engraved Buddha names, serving as objects of worship and functioning similarly to Buddhist statues, represent a written system imbued with religious meaning. They embody the union of Buddhist visual and material cultures. More than sacred carvings, these Buddha names serve as direct substitutes for images, transforming the written words on the rocks into representations of the Buddha.[333] The exaggerated brushwork and structure of the sutra engravings perhaps express reverence and admiration for the Buddha, while the slender decorative brushwork also conveys the Buddha's majesty. These names are carved in the peaceful valley, giving the Buddha's name a sense of emptiness and embodying the Buddhist concept of "no form". Such as, the meaning of the Buddha King of Great Emptiness represents the concept of emptiness.[334] It can be seen

[333] Ledderose and Wang, *Buddhist Stone Sutras in China: Shandong Province Volume 1*, 30.
[334] Kiriya Seichi 桐谷征一, "Hokusei Magai Kokukyō No Seiritsu to Daruma No Hekikan 北斉摩崖刻経の成立とダルマの壁観 [The Formation of Sūtras Engraved on Polished Cliffs in the Northern Qi and Bodhidharma's Wall Meditation]," in *Taga Ryūgen Hakushi Koki Kinen Ronshū—Bukkyō Shisō Bukkyōshi Ronshū* 田賀龍彦博士古稀記念論集—仏教思想仏教史論集 [Collected on the Occasion of Dr. Taga Ryūgen's 70th Birthday—Essays on Buddhist Thought and Buddhist History], ed. Taga Ryūgen hakushi koki kinen ronshū kankōkai 田賀龍彦博士古稀紀念論集刊行会, (Tōkyō: Sankibō busshorin 山喜房仏書林, 2001), 138.

that the writing style of these names were not chosen at random, but the artistic essence of Buddhism was integrated into the text.

There is also an engraving of the Buddha King of Great Emptiness on the southern slope of Mount Hongding, with only the edge of the text carved [Fig. 120]. This intentionally blank engraving technique may symbolize the Buddhist concepts of "impermanence" and "emptiness".[335] The edge engravings may suggest that the writing was created using a double-outline method, differing from the previously discussed technique of decorative strokes made with multiple brushes.[336] In either case, this blank-outline method further imbues the text with Buddhist principles. Furthermore, the carved Buddha's name here avoids excessively elongated strokes, and its relatively square and regular character structure resembles the calligraphy style of Wei-stele characters. As described by Kang Youwei, the text on Wei-stele displays strength and an unrestrained quality as the brushstrokes possess a distinct thickness, with tightly composed and remarkable structures.[337]

Additionally, as mentioned in section 3.1, there are three engravings from the same sutra, the *Sūtra on the Great Perfection of Wisdom Spoken by Mañjuśrī*.[338] These include a passage of fifty-four characters on the west side of the northern slope [Fig. 121], a passage of ninety-eight characters on the east side of the northern slope [Fig. 122], and another passage of ninety-eight characters on the southern slope [Fig. 123]. While these three stone engravings originate from the same sutra, there are discernible differences in their calligraphy styles. The northern slope west-side passage exhibits an overall structure that is more squared and orderly, with distinct corners and strokes at the each of the starting, ending, and turning points. For example, in Fig. 124, the four corners of the outer frame of the character *zi* 自 form nearly 90-degree angles. This uniform and stable structure contributes to its sense of solemnity. In addition, certain characters show a combination of regular script strokes; in the character *fei* 非, the vertical strokes are written in regular script [Fig. 125]. Similarly, in the character *shi* 實, all horizontal strokes are inclined

[335] Kiriya Selichi, "*Beiqi dashamen An Daoyi kejing shiji*," 71–72.
[336] About the double-outline method, see Michael J. Hatch, "Outline, Brushwork, and the Epigraphic Aesthetic in Huang Yi's Engraved Texts of the Lesser Penglai Pavilion (1800)," *Archives of Asian Art* 70, no. 1 (2020): 25.
[337] Kang, "*Guang yizhou shuangji*," 826. Original text: 魏碑无不佳者，虽窮鄉儿女造像，而骨血峻宕，拙厚中皆有异态，构字亦紧密非常。[There is no inferior work among the Wei steles. Even the statues carved by rustic artisans possess bold and dynamic vitality. Within their simplicity and robustness lies distinctive charm, and the composition of the characters is exceptionally compact and cohesive.]
[338] See section 3.1, pages 119–131.

upwards, aligning with a key characteristic of the regular script style [Fig. 126]. Although the engraving of this text mainly follows the structure of clerical script, it is clear that the text deviates from the typical clerical script characteristics, resulting in an overall squarer appearance similar to regular script.

However, the calligraphic style demonstrated in the northern slope east-side passages differs from the aforementioned. While square strokes continue to define the turning points, there is a noticeable variation in stroke thickness within the characters, and the strokes themselves take on a more rounded quality. For example, in the character *cheng* 乘, the vertical strokes in the center are noticeably thicker, and in the character *bo* 波, the final right-falling stroke is also significantly thicker than the other strokes [Fig. 127]. This change in thickness within the characters not only introduces an energetic quality but also contributes to a more rounded aesthetic. Moreover, the character structure adopts the technique of being larger on top and tighter on the bottom, which enhances the complexity of the overall style. As demonstrated in the character *mo* 摩, the top of the character is wide and expanded, while the bottom is contracted [Fig. 128]. This technique adds visual complexity to the engravings.

Furthermore, the pronounced bold strokes are even more evident in the engraving on the southern slope. Compared to those on the northern slope, there is a significantly greater use of the clerical script style in this engraving, with horizontal strokes displaying the silkworm head and swallow tail brushwork. Additionally, the right-falling strokes use the downward wave style, which is common in clerical script. The horizontal stroke of the character *wu* 無 and the right-falling stroke of the character *chu* 處 also show this [Fig. 129]. In addition, when compared to the engraving of the *Sūtra on the Great Perfection of Wisdom Spoken by Mañjuśrī* in Cave Two of Southern Xiangtangshan, the styles of the two are remarkably similar, although the carvings at Southern Xiangtangshan display greater detail. It is possible that the engravings on Hongding Mountain represent an earlier work by the calligrapher. In addition, the *Sūtra on the Great Perfection of Wisdom Spoken by Mañjuśrī* is classified within the prajñāpāramitā group of Mahayana sutras. This sutra advocates for attaining ultimate enlightenment through the realization of voidness (śūnyatā), with a strong emphasis on the Perfection of Wisdom.[339] It places distinctive emphasis on a meditative technique known as one-practice absorption (*yixing sanmei* 一行

[339] Kiriya Seichi, “Hokusei Magai Kokukyō No Seiritsu to Daruma No Hekikan,” 133.

三昧, ekavyūha-samādhi), involving the repeated and single-minded evocation of a Buddha's name.[340] Therefore, the engraving of different Buddha names on Mount Hongding might be associated with this specific practice.[341]

In summation, the calligraphic style of the sutra engravings on Mount Hongding demonstrates uniformity in style within its overall properties, featuring a fluid and wide structure, an orderly appearance, and rounded, robust strokes. The character structure is predominantly flat. Although there are fewer wavy strokes than are typical of clerical script, the lower right-falling stroke displays clerical script characteristics when the characters are more thickly formed. Overall, the strokes are relatively uniform and exhibit the qualities of clerical script, with some strokes blended with regular script and even seal script. Another distinctive feature of Mount Hongding is the large, engraved Buddhist names, which are emphasized by the extended or decoration strokes, thereby underscoring the solemnity and significance of the Buddha's name.

Another important cliff-sutra engraving in Shandong is the *Diamond Sūtra,* located in the Sutra Stone Valley on Mount Tai. One obvious feature is that some of the characters on Mount Tai remain unfinished, as shown in Fig. 130, as despite carving the character outline, the interior is unfinished. These unfinished and fully carved characters are combined with hollow text echoing solid text to create a decorative effect.[342] From the perspective of calligraphic art analysis, the entire script exudes a magnificent presence, widely recognized as the epitome of large-character calligraphy. In addition, the writing structure of this sutra appears to have an elegant and calm nature, as claimed by Bao Shichen, who claimed that the writing is steady, and the charm is melodious.[343] Bao Shichen also provided detailed analysis of the large characters in the sutra engraving on Mount Tai, emphasizing their resemblance to the Inscription for the *Yi he ming* 瘞鶴銘 (Burying of a Crane Stele). He pointed out that the calligraphy style of the sutra engraving in Mount Tai is the same as that of the Inscription for the Burying of a Crane, with a sense of antiquity and solemnity.[344] Bao Shichen further explained that the calligraphy style of the *Diamond Sūtra* in Sutra Stone Valley was affected by the *Yi he ming* [Fig. 131]. This

[340] For the meditation practices one-practice absorption, see Daniel B Stevenson, "The Four Kinds of Samadhi in Early T'ien-t'ai Buddhism," *Traditions of Meditation in Chinese Buddhism*, (1986): 54.
[341] Ledderose and Wang, *Buddhist Stone Sutras in China: Shandong Province Volume 1*, 88.
[342] Ibid., 197.
[343] Bao, "*Yizhou shuangji*," in *Lidai shufa lunwen xuan*, 652. Original text: 經石峪之頓挫安詳，斯足當之。[The poised and deliberate rhythm of the *Jing Shi Yu* inscription is more than sufficient to exemplify this quality.]
[344] Ibid., 652.

suggests that the calligraphy style of the sutra engravings on Mount Tai should be mainly written in the clerical script.[345] In addition, Kang Youwei praised this sutra engravings as the epitome of large-scale calligraphy, pointing out that the calligraphy of this engraving maintains a well-balanced and spacious structure.[346] He also observed that the calligraphy style of these engravings combines features from seal script, cursive script, and other styles. He stated:

> 經石峪圓筆也…其筆意略同鄭文公，草情篆韻，無所不備。
>
> The brushwork of the Sutra Stone Valley is rounded... Its style is somewhat similar to that of Zheng Wengong, embodying the fluidity of cursive script and the charm of seal script, and all other scripts.[347]

Therefore, this sutra engraving is remarkable for its combination of structural elements from various script styles. A distinctive feature of this engraving is the absence of lifting and pressing strokes, instead utilizing a central-point brushstroke technique (*zhongfeng* 中鋒) to maintain consistent stroke thickness. The lines are smooth, and the turns are rounded, with the fluent characteristics of seal script.[348] For example, as exemplified in Fig. 132, the left sides of the characters *ming* 明 and *yi* 以 show characteristics of the seal script. In addition, the spacing between horizontal strokes within a single character and between vertical strokes is relatively uniform, which is a typical characteristic of seal script. In the character *suo* 所, for instance, the distances between strokes are nearly identical [Fig. 133]; this consistent spacing imparts a sense of evenness and dignity.

The second point to note is that the characters in this sutra engraving possess a broad and flat structure, adhering to the horizontally expansive style which is characteristic of clerical script. While there are no distinct wavy horizontal strokes are evident in these engravings, many vertical hooks and right-falling strokes adopt the style of clerical script, as seen in the characters *jian* 見 and *ren* 人 [Fig. 134]. In addition to the rounded strokes of seal script and the squat structure of clerical script, this sutra engraving also incorporates

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345 Ibid., 652.
346 Original text: 試觀經石峪，正是寬綽有餘耳; 經石峪為榜書之宗。[Observe the *Jing Shi Yu* inscription closely—it exemplifies a spacious and effortless elegance, serving as the foundational model for monumental script (*bangshu*).]
347 Kang, "*Guang yizhou shuangji*," in *Lidai shufa lunwen xuan*, 855.
348 Sun, "*Shupu*," 126. Original text: 篆尚婉而通。[Seal script is valued for its elegance and fluidity.]

elements of regular script. For instance, the left and right-falling strokes in characters such as *ling* 令 and *ru* 入 resemble the stretched appearance found in regular script [Fig. 135]. Furthermore, in some characters, the turning points within the *kou* 口 structure abandon the rounded strokes, folding inward in a way what is more similar to regular scriptxamples include the characters *fu* 福 and *zhong* 眾 [Fig. 136].

The *Diamond Sūtra* further transformed the inherent sacredness of Mount Tai, playing a role in redefining Mount Tai as a famous Buddhist mountain and enhancing the its sacredness. Buddhist sutras are carved directly into the rough, untreated stone surface, seamlessly blending the text with existing natural features. When encountered face to face, the texts provide a setting for spiritual contemplation that resonates with the religious ceremonies once performed at the site. This explains from another perspective why mixed styles were chosen to depict Buddhist scriptures. To summarize, the combination of the wide and flat structure of clerical script and the strokes of seal script and regular script are the characteristic of the calligraphy style of the Mount Tai engravings. It is worth noting that there is no lifting or pressing of the strokes, the lines of the characters are smooth, and the turns are rounded, which reflects the features of seal script. Character size and spacing are uniform, creating a balanced composition. In addition, regular script elements such as stretched strokes and inward turning points are incorporated. Scholars such as Kang Youwei and Bao Shichen praised the profound ancient charm of this sutra engraving and considered it a model of large-character calligraphy.

Mount Gang is distinctive among locations in Shandong, as it contains three sutra sections carved on individual stones, boulders, and cliffs along a trail leading up the mountain. The calligraphy styles used in the sutra engravings here resemble the regular script. The *Sūtra of Arrival in Lankā*, written in large characters, may have been written by one person, while smaller characters used for the Contemplation of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life, and the colophon may have been written by others.[349] Regarding the calligraphy style of the sutra engravings on Mount Gang, scholar Huang Yi recorded his impressions of visiting these engravings. He mentioned that on his way to Mount Gang, he saw the *Sūtra of Arrival in Lankā* engraved in small characters using an eight-point script style, as shown in Fig. 137.[350] However, he also noted that the inscriptions on Chicken Beak Rock [Fig.

[349] Wang and Wenzel, *Buddhist Stone Sutras in China: Shandong Province Volume 2*, 255.
[350] Pang Yuanji 龐元濟, "*xuzhai Minghua Lu* 虛齋名畫路 [A Catalog of Famous Paintings Compiled by Xuzhai]," 4 vols, in *Yishu shangjian xuanzhen* 藝術賞鑒選珍 3, (Taibei: *Hanhua wenhua*, 1971), 2076.

138] included characters "*daxiang ernian* 大象二年" and "*biqiu huiyi* 比丘惠暉" which are rendered in a large regular script style.

In addition, the scholar Wu Shifen 吳式芬 (1796–1856 CE) confirmed the existence of engraved sutras and colophons on Mount Gang, utilizing both the eight-point script and regular script.[351] He specifically highlighted an inscription, shown in Fig. 139, which begins with the sentence "along with a great bhikṣu-sangha (*yu dabiqiu* 與大比丘)" written in regular script. Moreover, he identified another inscription, illustrated in Fig. 140, which starts with the sentence "light of the sun and moon (*riyue guanghui* 日月光輝)", also etched in regular script.[352] Scholars generally agree that these engraved sutras are either in the eight-point script style or regular script. Overall, the script structure of these two engraved sutras mentioned by Wu Shifen is square with even strokes that reflect the style of regular script. Some strokes also display characteristics of clerical script; for instance, the right-falling stroke of the character *bu* 不 is broader than other strokes and exhibits slight twists and turns. However, the few slightly uneven and wavy strokes do not alter the overall calligraphy style, which maintains a distinct regular script appearance. This style closely resembles the mature regular script of the Tang dynasty, except that the character structure is slightly wider and flatter than the typical Tang regular script.

In the large-character version of the *Sūtra of Arrival in Lankā*, the calligraphy styles of the sutra engravings on different stones display distinct calligraphy styles. Duan Songling clarified that two incomplete sutra engravings in the Mount Gang area exhibit a mixed calligraphy style. One begins with "supernatural power (*shengtong zhi li* 神通之力)" [Fig. 141], while another starts with "reflected off golden mountains (*yao jin shan* 曜金山)" [Fig. 142].[353] For example, in the character *li* 力 [Fig. 143], the initial and final strokes display a relatively square shape, with corners formed by lifting strokes at the turning points. Wei-stele frequently exhibits this characteristic. The character *zhi* 之 employs the continuous strokes which are typical of running script [Fig. 144]. Remarkably, the *ri* 日 component on the left side of the upper half of the character *zhao* 照 employs seal script

[351] Original text: 岡山摩崖佛經題名二十四種。八分書、正書。 [The rock inscriptions of Mount Gang include the titles of 24 Buddhist sutras, written in *bafen* and *zhengshu*.]
[352] Wu Shifen, "*Jinshi huimu fenbian* 金石彙目分編 [Categorized Edition of an Assembled Catalog of Epigraphic]," in *Shike shiliao xinbian,* vol. 27-28, 21153.
[353] Duan Songling 段松苓, "*Shanzuo beimu* 山左碑目 [List of Stele in Shandong]," in *Shike shiliao xingbian*, vol. 20, 14844a. Original text: 北周岡山磨崖殘字二段， '神通之力'一段， '曜金山'一段, 字大尺許，兼別體。

brushwork, while the *zhao* 召 component on the right utilizes regular script brushwork. The four dots in the character exhibit characteristics of clerical script [Fig. 145]. Scholar Ruan Yuan clearly pointed out that the inscription is a mixture of official script, regular script, and seal script.[354] The large-character version of the Sutra of Arrival in Laṅkā integrates various brushwork styles, resulting in a distinctive and intriguing character structure.

Moreover, Dong Chun 董純 and Ma Xingyi 馬星翼 asserted that the calligraphy style of an engraving reading "Two Kinds of No-Self (erzhong wuwo 二種無我)" employed clerical script with thick strokes shown in Fig. 146.[355] The style of this sutra engraving appears relatively flat, with the beginnings and ends of the strokes forming small points that create a decorative effect. The dotting is round, especially in the second horizontal stroke of the character *wu* 無, which displays a sharper stroke that is reminiscent of characteristics found in traditional sutra writing. Moreover, as shown in Fig. 147 and Fig. 148, the engravings are arranged in a neat structure, positioned squarely within the grid. The characters appear squat, and the brushstrokes employ a regular script style as classified by scholar Wu Shixiong.[356]

Additionally, it is suggested that some other sections of the engraved sutras also employ the calligraphy style of the clerical script, including passages in Fig. 149 and Fig. 150, with certain characters such as *zhong* 種 that are clear examples [Fig. 151].[357] Overall, the initial and final strokes in these large-character sutra engravings are primarily square. The characters are structured in a square or elongated form, with a sparse arrangement at the top and denser strokes at the bottom. Additionally, this section of the engraved sutras features double borders and external decorations, with occasional floral patterns outside the borders. The strokes are relatively clear and refined, reflecting characteristics of clerical script. The dotting is generally rounded, occasionally ending in a sharp point at the beginning and end of the strokes. Generally speaking, most of the large-character engravings of the *Sūtra of Arrival in Lankā* here exhibit a combination of various calligraphy styles. Some characters are based on regular script, others primarily use the

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354 Ruan, "*Shanzuo jinshi zhi* 山左金石志 [Epigraphic Records of Shandong]," in *Shike shiliao xinbian*, vo.l, 19, 14486a. Original text: 一刻'曜金千日照炎如百'八字，分三行，書兼篆隸。

355 Dong Chun 董純 and Ma Xingyi 馬星翼, "*Zouxianzhi gao* 鄒縣志稿," in *Lidai zouxian zhi shi Zhong*, 469b. Original text: 一刻 '二種無我竟通達'… 隸體，肥甚。

356 Original text: 他方佛土云云六行，正書…現皆是古昔諸仙賢聖三行，正書。

357 Lu Zengxiang 陸增祥, "*Baqiong shi jinshi buzheng* 八瓊室金石補正 [Supplementary Corrigenda to the Epigraphic of Eight Gems Studio]," in *Shike shiliao xinbian*, vol. 6-8, 4365.

structure of clerical script, and certain engravings show strokes that incorporate elements of seal script and running script.

In addition to the *Sūtra of Arrival in Laṅkā*, Mount Gang also features another Buddhist text called the *Sūtra on the Contemplation of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life*. Duan Songling declared that this sutra engraving combines regular script with elements of clerical script.[358] However, Wu Shifen and Lu Zengxiang pointed out the calligraphy style used in carving this sutra is the eight-point script.[359] Hu Xinli also observed that the style on the east side is primarily regular script with some clerical script strokes, while on the south side, it alternates between regular and clerical script.[360] As depicted in Fig. 152, the engraving is predominantly square, and the character sizes are relatively consistent, reflecting the structure of clerical script and the writing style of regular script. On the other hand, the engravings on the south side are less organized and have longer characters. There is also more clerical script brushwork, especially in the right-falling strokes, which use typical clerical script techniques [Fig. 153].

The calligraphy styles of the sutra engravings on the distributed stones of Mount Gang are notably varied. While many stone surfaces primarily feature clerical script, some employ regular script, and others incorporate a mixture of calligraphy styles such as clerical script and regular script. This variety may have been the result of the unique engraving environment of Mount Gang. Scholars generally associate the small-character versions of texts with standard or eight-point script, noting an interplay between clerical and regular script styles. The large-character version exhibits stylistic diversity across different stones, with distinct features. The passage from the *Sūtra of Arrival in Laṅkā* highlights the mountain's significance, suggesting it as a fitting site for the Buddha to deliver sacred teachings. The diverse calligraphy styles of the engravings enhance Mount Gang's mysterious atmosphere, providing visitors with a distinctive visual experience along their route.

In summary, most sutra engravings from the late Northern Dynasties showcase a combination of calligraphic styles, considerately adapted to the geographical, material, and environments of Hebei and Shandong. In Hebei, particularly on Mount Xiangtang and

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[358] Duan, *Shanzuo beimu*, 14844a. Original text: 大象二年，正書含隸意，字徑五寸。
[359] Wu, "*Jinshi huimu fenbian*," in *Shike shiliao xinbian,* 21153a.
[360] Hu Xinli 胡新. "*ZouXian 'SiShan' Beichao moya kejing* 鄒縣'四山'北胡摩崖刻經 [The Sutras Engraved on Polished Cliffs of the Northern Dynasties on the 'Four Mountains' in Zou County]." *Shufa*, 65. no. 2 (1989): 45–46.

Mount Zhonghuang, the engravings mainly employ clerical script and regular script, typically resulting in neat, legible structures. This calligraphy reflects royal patronage and a preference for well-organized, readable forms that support Buddhism's ritualistic and meditative practices. Meanwhile, Shandong engravings—most notably at Mount Hongding, Mount Tai, and Mount Gang—exhibit dynamic calligraphy with large-scale characters blending clerical, regular, and seal scripts. The sutra engravings on Mount Tai, in particular, exude grandeur through a unique combination of seal script smooth characters, clerical script structure, and cursive script fluidity, creating an aesthetic that complements the sacred landscape. Shandong's approach of integrating mixed scripts and large, prominent characters, enhances both the religious sanctity of the cliffs and the viewer's engagement with the text as a manifestation of Buddhist ideals. This comparative analysis demonstrates that the calligraphy of cliff-sutra engravings in the late Northern Dynasties functioned not only as an art form but also as a powerful medium for spiritual expression, reflecting regional, aesthetic, and doctrinal distinctions. In addition, since rubbings and stone inscriptions are utilized to analyze calligraphy styles, it is essential to further investigate the relationship between these two mediums and the impact of rubbings on calligraphy styles.

4 Recreating the Lost Art from Rubbings

Ink writing is an art form that effectively captures the constant shifts of time and space. The calligrapher skillfully controls the brush to produce the appearance of text on paper. They employ hand movements and apply force to regulate the movement of brush and ink. Calligraphers adhere to specific stylistic conventions when writing, which encompass the arrangement of the writing structure, the sequence of strokes and line spacing. On the other hand, stone inscriptions and rubbings require several steps that specifically aim to reproduce and reinterpret ink-written works. People occasionally inscribed ink-written texts onto stone surfaces, also using these stone inscriptions as templates for calligraphy collections or study. Calligraphic works are typically circulated in the form of rubbings.[361] The importance of writing as an art form and the general reverence for the written word in Chinese culture contributed to the extensive use of rubbings for reproduction.[362]

Stone inscription procedures typically involved a minimum of two essential stages. The simplest and oldest method, known as *shudan* 書丹, involves the calligrapher directly brushing characters onto the stone with red pigment.[363] Subsequently, the engraver completes the inscription by skillfully transforming the brushstrokes into chiseled cuts.[364] Rubbings are composed of paper and ink that regenerates the surface texture of an engraved object but does not replicate its entire physical features. In addition, rubbings accurately capture the textual content, stylistic writing, and overall condition of the inscription due to their direct interaction with the stone surface.[365] Accordingly, Chinese calligraphy has been safeguarded through a series of iterative reorganizations, wherein the characters have commonly migrated from the mediums of silk or paper onto stone and wood engravings. These engravings have further been perpetuated through rubbings, thus enabling the extensive study and widespread dissemination of engraved calligraphic styles.[366]

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[361] Marek Piszczek, "Book on the Inscription for Burying a Crane and the Art of Chinese Calligraphy," Review of *Eulogy for Burying a Crane and the Art of Chinese Calligraphy*, by Lei Xue, *Roczniki Humanistyczne* 69, no. 9 (2021): 189.
[362] Laurence Sickman, "Notes on Chinese Rubbings," *Parnassus* 9, no. 1 (1937): 9.
[363] For basic stone carving methods, please refer to Chapter 3, pages 131–132.
[364] Harrist, *The Landscape of Word*, 25.
[365] K. Starr, *Black Tigers*, (2008), 33.
[366] Lia and Long, "Entexted Heritage," (2021): 41.

Various unavoidable elements contribute to the alteration of the original ink writing style when generating stone inscriptions and rubbings. Certain variations arise from the skill and expertise of the craftsmen, whose carving skills have an impact on the visual aspects of certain strokes during the carving process.[367] The calligraphy style of the stone inscriptions may differ depending on the technique utilized by the person who made the rubbing.[368] Rubbings are easily carried, enabling people to look at them at their convenience and transport them. Rubbings also serve as replicas of the original, obtained through direct contact between the paper and the stone inscription, ensuring accurate reproduction. On the other hand, typically stone inscriptions are carved within the natural landscape, necessitating that viewers comprehend and interact with them within their distinct context.[369] However, although rubbings effectively eliminate geographical limitations, they cannot entirely capture the positioning of carved inscriptions or their interconnectedness with other engravings, architectural elements, or the natural landscape.[370] Because of this, even though the text and calligraphic form are the same in ink-written works, stone inscriptions, and rubbings, there are still differences in time, place, and material which lead to different forms of calligraphy.

Therefore, this chapter offers an alternative perspective on materiality by investigating the dynamic relationship between calligraphic works, rubbings, and engraved stone inscriptions. The main goal is to examine the distinct variations in calligraphy styles that result from the use of different materials. This section draws on the engraved sutras of the late Northern Qi dynasty to illustrate how rubbings endow the art of Buddhist stone calligraphy with its inherent artistic essence. However, it must be acknowledged that rubbings may also disconnect the stele engraving from its original environmental context, potentially weakening the intended impact of the landscape.

Relationship between ink-written calligraphy, stone inscriptions, and rubbings

The early development of calligraphy, from oracle bone inscriptions and bronze inscriptions to later stone carvings, is all related to carving techniques, technology, and production processes, laying the foundation for the development of writing from

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[367] For discussions on the effect of artisan technology on calligraphy art, see: Sha Menghai 沙孟海, "*Mantan beitie keshou wenti* 漫談碑帖刻手問題 [Discussions on the Issue of Engraving Techniques for Calligraphy Rubbings]," in *Sha Menghai lun yi* 沙孟海論藝 [Sha Menghai Discourse on Art], ed. Zhu Guantian 朱關田 (Shanghai: Shuhua Chubanshe, 2010), 137–140.
[368] Weitian Yan, "Collecting the Pei Cen Stele in Qing China," *Ming Qing Yanjiu* 24, no. 2 (2020): 256.
[369] Hatch, "Outline, Brushwork, and the Epigraphic Aesthetic in Huang Yi's Engraved Texts of the Lesser Penglai Pavilion (1800)," 31.
[370] Harrist, *The Landscape of Words*, 21.

practicality to artistry.[371] Furthermore, the technical progress of rubbings played an important part in supporting the wider dissemination of stone inscriptions as a type of calligraphic art. The widespread availability of rubbings has considerably simplified evidence-based research for scholars and allowed artists to reproduce and apply the calligraphy styles found in stone inscriptions.[372]

In addition, despite the emergence of woodblock printing, rubbings have continued to be used for reproducing calligraphic models. The growing scarcity of historical ink works, and early reproductions has raised the importance of rubbings as an essential way of preserving artistic styles from the past.[373] Therefore, in the pursuit of collecting calligraphy from stone inscriptions, antiquarians engage in taking rubbings from cliffs, walls, and relics. These rubbings capture decontextualized texts that are subsequently compiled into book-like forms for preservation and appreciation. As calligraphers reproduce past script styles, they rely on rubbings as primary materials. Through the practice of calligraphy rubbings, calligraphers participate in replicating script styles that were initially carved into stone.[374] Moreover, while stone inscriptions safeguard the original ink calligraphy, rubbings serve to disseminate the calligraphy style of stone inscriptions more widely, because stone surface also can be damaged. This process enhances the stature of stone inscriptions as notable monuments and ritual objects and ensures the continuation of their distinctive artistic styles.

Subsequent generations of calligraphers, motivated by rubbings, undertook the study and development of ink calligraphy, including developing their own distinctive styles. In this regard, rubbings transcended their role as mere preservers of the material existence of ancient calligraphic works; instead, they embodied a dynamic cycle of calligraphy styles. For example, the *Lanting xu* 蘭亭序 (Preface to the Poems Composed at the Orchid Pavilion) was created by the calligrapher Wang Xizhi 王羲之, earning acclaim as "the first running script" (*tianxia diyi xingshu* 天下第一行書). Acknowledged for its artistic and literary significance, the Orchid Pavilion became the possession of Emperor Tang Taizong 唐太宗 (598–649), who held a great appreciation for its value. Consequently,

[371] The emergence of Oracle Bone Inscriptions marked the true formation of the art of calligraphy. Furthermore, the history of chiseling predates that of writing script by a significant margin. For the evolution of the development of Chinese writing, see: Ge Chengyong 葛承雍, *Shufa yu wenhua shi jiang* 書法與文化十講 [Ten Lectures on Calligraphy and Culture] (Beijing: Zhonghu Shuju, 2019), 43–80.
[372] Ebrey, *Accumulating Culture*, 76.
[373] McNair, "Engraved Calligraphy in China," 106.
[374] Lia, "Epigraphy in the Landscape," 143–145.

Emperor Taizong assigned renowned calligraphers such as Yu Shinan 虞世南 (598–649), Chu Suiliang 褚遂良 (596–658), Feng Chengsu 馮承素 (617–672), and Ouyang Xun, amongst others, the task of duplicating the Orchid Pavilion and engraving their works onto stones.[375] Among these skilled calligraphers, Ouyang Xun stood out as a significant contributor. He undertook the responsibility of reproducing Wang Xizhi's original masterpiece, capturing its original morphology and preserving all morphological errors, deliberate modifications, and erasures in the ink-written piece, as illustrated in Fig. 154. This recreated version was diligently engraved in stone, with rubbings subsequently distributed to ministers for wider study and appreciation.[376]Hence, when visitors see these copies, they are like returning to the original written work. During this interaction, individuals have the opportunity to recall both the literary substance and artistic style of the original.

On the other hand, new stone inscriptions can also emerge through ancient rubbings. As depicted in Fig. 155, drawing from the preserved calligraphic styles transmitted through rubbings, the Kangxi Emperor personally replicated the Orchid Pavilion calligraphy, engraving it onto a stele. In this process, the typography was modified, rectifying mistakes and scribbles that were present. Moreover, other individuals also utilized rubbings from this stele to document the calligraphic style of Kangxi. Thus, the significance of rubbings extended beyond preserving the original characteristics of calligraphic art; they also served as a basis for creating new stone inscriptions. In particular, the practice of copying calligraphic writing onto stone and creating rubbings also aims to preserve a specific stylistic or ideological tradition. Through this replication method, a new stele perpetuates the physical existence of ancient ink calligraphy, acting as a catalyst for its regeneration and innovation. The process of reproducing calligraphy through rubbings causes the creation of inscribed monuments, highlighting the cyclical nature inherent in the calligraphic tradition.

Overall, rubbings serve as a medium of communication that actively involves calligraphers in the re-creation of earlier texts and facilitates the recording of such re-creations on stone by earlier craftsmen. This process involves a unique intertwining of the art of calligraphy and the materials employed, including paper and stone. Consequently, a cyclical pattern emerges, fostering the emergence and development of novel styles within the domain of

[375] Wang Bo 王溥, *Tang hui yao* 唐會要, vol. 64 (Shanghai: Shijie Shuju, 1963), 1115.
[376] McNair, “The Engraved Model-Letters Compendia of the Song Dynasty,” 209–210.

calligraphic art, so the original ink calligraphy finds preservation through stone inscriptions, while rubbings function as a means of transmitting the calligraphic art embodied in these inscriptions. These rubbings also enhanced the reputation of stone inscriptions as significant monuments and ceremonial objects, and carried their artistic style. Because of ancient rubbings, a new art of calligraphy was recreated, and calligraphers were indirectly involved in re-creating stone carving art. Thus, rubbings allowed access to ancient inscriptions and acted as a medium for their transfer.[377]

Buddhist stone inscriptions with Rubbings

The reproducibility and portability of rubbings have promoted extensive discussion of the calligraphy of the engraved stone inscriptions.[378] However, rubbings do not convey the original location or their relationship with the environment. Thus, misleading representations can emerge, particularly for Buddhist sutra engravings within landscapes. It is essential to recognize that the main purpose of sutra engravings may not have been the appreciation of the calligraphy. The sutras are sacred, sanctifying the locations where they are engraved. Engraving sutras into cliffs not only honors, disseminates, and conserves the scriptures but also imbues the surroundings with a sense of sacredness by transmitting the blessings of the Buddha's teachings.[379] The early visitors to these engraved sutras were not chiefly focused on the aesthetic qualities of calligraphy, but their focus was on recognizing the sacred religious importance of combining the sutras with the environment. Although rubbings enhance the calligraphic attributes of sutra engravings, they may not accurately reflect the original context and meaning of the works. The change in presentation could also misrepresent the connection between Buddhism and its natural environment.

Rubbings sometimes reduce the complicated meanings of sutra engravings, particularly those associated with mountains. The engraved sutras on Mount Gang re-established it as a sacred Buddhist place, so increasing its sanctity as a landscape. The engraved sutras on Mount Gang illustrate the beautiful landscape of Mount Malaya (Moluoye Shan 摩羅耶山), where the Buddha once delivered his teachings. The intended combination of textual and environmental elements inspires Mount Gang with a sense of Mount Malaya, showing the concept of translatio loci, in which the spirit of one place is transferred to another. As

[377] Wu Hong cited the Huashan temple stele as an illustrative example, emphasizing that new steles were generated through rubbings. He posited that what a new stele perpetuated was not solely the physical presence of the old stele but also the cycles of its inception, demise, and resurgence. This characteristic of a stele's objecthood is further exemplified by the Stele of Mount Hua. See: Wu, "On Rubbings," 40–45.
[378] Sena, *Bronze and Stone*, 157.
[379] Tsiang, "Monumentalization of Buddhist Texts in the Northern Qi Dynasty," 257.

readers travel the surroundings, following a planned pathway from one stone to another, they engaged with the engraved sutras, directly witnessing their creation of a sacred geography.[380] This combination of text and environment serves to transform Mount Gang into one of the key Buddhist sites.[381] Rubbings provide valuable insights into the visual aspects of these engravings, and their distribution far from the original stone inscriptions facilitated broader appreciation among scholars and artists, particularly regarding the quality of the calligraphy. It appears that these rubbings expanded the prestige and impact of both Chinese calligraphy and Buddhism. However, this widespread use also resulted in a weakening of the connection between the environment and the engraved sutras, ultimately diminishing the significance attributed to both the religion and the natural surroundings.

Furthermore, engraved sutras in the Shandong area were engraved onto a rough and untreated stone surface, integrating the textual form with the pre-existing natural appearances of the stones. The script adeptly follows the contours of the stone, either avoiding or embracing folds and cracks, thereby imparting a sense of vitality that harmonizes with the surrounding environment. In addition, the uneven surface of the stone also distorts the strokes and structure of the characters [Fig. 156].[382] Contact with these sutras could result in spiritual experiences or meditation, building a connection to the original ceremonies performed at these sites.[383] However, when the text is removed from its original location and reproduced as a rubbing, both the complete text and the sanctity of experiencing it in its original environment are lost. The religious significance of sutra engravings is recognized but reduced to examples of calligraphic art valued only for aesthetic appreciation rather than their original spiritual purpose.

In addition, the distribution and arrangement of engraved sutras must not be ignored. Fig. 76 indicates that on the highest cliff of Mount Hongding, the carved Buddha names show variations in height, location, and accessibility, indicating possible disparities in their perceived significance. For believers, the names of Buddhas hold deep significance. Many supporters believe that reciting, worshipping, or repenting the Buddha's name can lead to the achievement of various merits.[384] The name Buddha Great Mountain Cliff and

[380] Wang and Wenzel, *Buddhist Stone Sutras in China: Shandong Province Volume 2*, 239–240.
[381] Ibdi., 242–243.
[382] Wei, "Epigraphy in the Landscape," 129.
[383] Tsiang, "Monumentalization of Buddhist Texts in the Northern Qi Dynasty," 250.
[384] Wang Juan 汪娟, "*Foming Jingdian He Fojiao Lichan de Guanxi* 佛名經典和佛教禮懺的關係 [The Relationship between Buddha-Name Sūtras and Buddhist Repentance Rituals]," *Dharma Drum Journal of Buddhist Studies*, no. No.1 (2007): 37.

Buddha Lofty Mountain (*Gao shan fo* 高山佛), carved on a high cliff at the eastern part of the northern slope, exemplify the reverence for mountains within Buddhist belief. These names ascribe the presence of the Buddha to the inherent nature of the mountains, demonstrating the close connection between the Buddha and the natural environment. The placement of the name Buddha King of Serenity (*Anwang fo* 安王佛) above other Buddha names on Mount Hongding also has symbolic importance. From this raised position, the name is perceived to connect to the ten directions, symbolizing the Buddha's omnipresence and encompassing the past, present, and future of the Buddhist universe. In addition, the designation King of Serenity once again suggests a parallel to the monk-calligrapher Seng'an Daoyi; this may also highlight the significance of the calligraphy style of Seng'an Daoyi at the site.[385]However, rubbings fail to explain the original placement of engraved sutras or their connections to other engravings within the natural landscape. Hence, removing the text from the original location might result in confusion, since the contextual links within the engraved sutras become broken without their physical surroundings.[386]

Rubbings also diminish the three-dimensional qualities of carved characters to two-dimensional images, resulting in a reduction of the interplay between light and shadow present in the original carved characters.[387] For example, the engraving of the Buddha King of Great Emptiness occupies the widest surface on the main cliff of the Mount Hongding. In addition to its scale, this engraving takes advantage of the interaction of shadows on the rock surface. The characters for *da* 大 and kong 空 are engraved with shallower traces, while *fo* 佛 is carved more deeply. This variance in engraving depth probably indicates the importance attributed to the representation of the Buddha. Also, the upper section of the cliff has a nearly vertical slope, but the lower section slopes at an estimated angle of 45°. At times, the outlines of the carvings may seem unclear, attaining clarity only during certain times of the day. Direct, vertical sunlight has the tendency to "erase" the text, while low-angled, indirect sunlight reveals it more precisely [Fig. 115].[388] This phenomenon may reflect the belief in the successive presence and disappearance of Buddhas over time, as evidenced by the periodic visibility of the Buddha names. In addition, this engraving technique intricately combines the Buddhist perspectives of emptiness (*kong* 空) and non-being (*wu* 無) with those of suchness (*ru* 如) and being (*you* 有).

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385 Wang and Wenzel, *Buddhist Stone Sutras in China: Shandong Province Volume 2*, 86.
386 Harrist, *The Landscape of Words*, 21.
387 Ibid., 20.
388 Wei, "Epigraphy in the Landscape," 131.

Ink writing, stone inscriptions, and rubbings have considerably contributed to the preservation and transmission of calligraphic art. Stone inscriptions and rubbings provide long-term reliability but can affect the original style of ink writing. Rubbings, by capturing and recreating stone inscriptions, help in the preservation of these works; yet, they also simply detach from the contextual connections to the original environment, especially regarding sutra engravings. Although rubbings enhance academic examination of the calligraphic style of stone inscriptions and promote artistic appreciation, they simultaneously decrease the Buddhist impact and natural effects of the sutra engravings. When examining the relationship between calligraphic works, rubbings, and engraved stone inscriptions, variations in calligraphy styles can sometimes be observed due to the impact of using different materials. In analyzing the calligraphy style of the late Northern Dynasties, this dissertation includes reference photographs of the original stone inscriptions (most of which were taken by the author) and rubbings. Moreover, whether in the Song or Qing Dynasties, scholars' analyses of the calligraphy of Northern Dynasties stone inscriptions were primarily based on rubbings, detached from their original environment, rather than on direct visits to the inscriptions sites. As a result, their evaluations of calligraphic style may be skewed by the differences between the rubbings and the original stone inscriptions. What, then, are the specific differences in calligraphy styles between the rubbings and the original stone inscriptions?

In analyzing the impact of the rubbing process on the aesthetic attributes of calligraphy, an important factor is its effect on the strokes themselves. Although rubbings attempt to replicate the visual representation of stone inscriptions, they can unavoidably change all the complex character strokes of the originals. The potential irregular distribution of ink during the rubbing process results in the thickening of character lines, due to the paper's absorbent properties and possible over-saturation of ink on the stone's surface. This impacts the brushstrokes, producing a bolder and less detailed visual impression than the original stone inscriptions. As shown in Fig. 157, the strokes of characters in sutra engravings are generally thinner and exhibit clearer direction compared to those in rubbings. In rubbings, the strokes of characters are typically thicker and more rounded while the edges and corners of turning strokes in engravings are distinct, but they become smoother in rubbings. The characters in the sutra engravings typically resemble regular script, however those in rubbings have features of clerical script because of the thickened strokes and softer curves. In rubbings, the accentuation of right-falling strokes and the

amplification of their wavy characteristics can make them more comparable to the clerical script style.

Moreover, the procedure of producing rubbings requires the exertion of pressure to guarantee that the paper captures the carved text from the stone surface. The pressure is not equally distributed across the entire surface, resulting in variations in the thickness and shape of character strokes. The variations in applied pressure may also cause certain parts of a character to be bolder, while other parts may seem distorted or curved. This establishes a complex relationship between the original engraved strokes and the actual application of rubbing techniques, occasionally resulting in unintended additional strokes. As shown in Fig. 158, beyond the obvious thickening of the character strokes in the rubbing, some unintended areas have been added due to the unevenness of the stone surface. For example, below the character *zhu* 囑, a small area is obscured by the stone texture, making it difficult to discern the direction and style of the strokes. In addition, when natural lines on the stone coincide with the strokes of the engraved characters, the stylistic characteristics of the strokes are altered. As shown in Fig. 159, the right part of the character *ci* 次 displays a bent stroke and a left-falling stroke in the sutra engravings, which are not connected, resembling the strokes in running script. However, in the rubbing, the two parts of the strokes are connected, resulting in a stronger appearance that more closely resembles the rounded and slower stroke movement style of seal script. In the rubbing, the bent strokes in the lower half of the character *di* 第 are thickened at the ends with an added twist compared to the strokes in the sutra engravings. This change makes the rounded strokes in the original stone inscriptions appear more angular than they are resembling the folded strokes characteristic of clerical script.

The creation of a rubbing requires accuracy, as even minor unexpected movements of the paper can affect the accuracy of the produced characters, changing the appearance of the stroke style and the structure. This movement changes the specific combination of strokes regarding thickness, direction, and curves, therefore affecting the appearance of the original calligraphic style. As shown in Fig. 160, the last stroke of the character *wu* 無 displays an obvious square fold stroke in the stone carving: when written, the brush was first lifted at the corner of the fold and then pressure was applied, resulting in a thinner stroke at the end. However, this apparent change in stroke movement disappears completely in the rubbing, with the strokes becoming uniform and rounded. To a certain

extent, this alteration introduces stylistic characteristics of seal script, which may lead to misunderstandings in the judgment of the calligraphy style of the cliff-sutra engraving.

Additionally, the creation of rubbings from cliff engravings frequently results in the flattening of three-dimensional characters, affecting their style properties. When sutras are carved onto the irregular, varied surfaces of cliffs, the original characters are produced in accordance with the natural rock surface. This adaptation allows the characters to connect with their surroundings, establishing a link between the text and the environment. This spatial relationship enhances the visual significance of the cliff-sutra engravings. As shown in Fig. 161, the upper section of the character *luo* 羅 is carved to follow the natural cracks in the stone, creating a three-dimensional result. However, in the rubbing, this part is flattened, making the upper section of the character appear large and elongated, resulting in a style where the character is wider at the top and narrower at the bottom. The consequent shift affects the viewer's perception of the calligraphy, as rubbings lose the inherent sense of place-specific connection present in cliff-sutra engravings. The characters in the rubbing are no longer impacted by their environment, and the flattening effect gives a more static and fixed feel to the calligraphy presented in rubbings.

The geographical translation of the cliff-sutra engravings into rubbings, combined with the sloped surface of the cliff wall, clearly affects the original calligraphic style. Cliffs used for engraving usually have sloped surfaces, requiring calligraphers to adjust each character according to these natural slopes. When viewed from different directions, the strokes of the characters take on varied appearances; some strokes appear elongated, shortened, or otherwise altered depending on the viewing angle and light. For example, when the character *fo* 佛 is viewed from a certain angle, the vertical stroke appears longer, whereas in the rubbing, this feature becomes less apparent [Fig. 162]. As a result, rubbings reduce the variability inherent in viewing the cliff-sutra engravings in person.

Conclusion

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the definition of calligraphy styles of the cliff-sutra engravings in the late Northern Dynasties. The study regards these cliff-sutra engravings as the written products of religion and calligraphy, and examines the effect of Buddhist doctrine, political changes, and the development of calligraphy styles on the formation of the style of cliff-sutra engravings. This study found that the calligraphy style of cliff-sutra engravings in the late Northern Dynasties integrated a variety of script styles, mainly using clerical script and regular script. In an effort to clarify whether the uncertainty surrounding the naming of calligraphy had an impact on this mixture calligraphy style, this paper further explores the definition and naming of clerical script and regular script in the Northern Dynasties and in earlier periods. Based on the research records of scholars from Song and Qing dynasties on Northern Dynasties stone inscriptions, this dissertation attempts to analyze the viewpoints of scholars from different periods to examines the cliff-sutra engraving calligraphy styles. This study takes the engravings of Mount Xiangtang, Mount Zhonghuang (Hebei), Mount Hongding, Mount Tai, and Mount Gang (Shandong) as the main research materials, and analyzes the impact of the regional environment and other factors on the calligraphy style. In addition, this study explores the impact of rubbings as a medium for the preservation of engraved sutras on the style of calligraphy and highlights the limitations of rubbings in conveying the inscriptions, the original environment, and the spiritual background of Buddhism. Through a comprehensive analysis of history, style, and materials, this dissertation seeks to fully understand the style of cliff-sutra engraving calligraphy and the reasons for its formation.

This study found that the emergence of cliff-sutra engravings and the development of their calligraphic style resulted from a combination of religious belief, political support, and cultural transformation. These cliff-sutra engravings evolved into a means of venerating, preserving, and disseminating Buddhist doctrines as Buddhism rose to prominence from the Northern Wei to the Northern Qi. The state and ruling elite provided substantial support for the promotion of Buddhism, which amplified Buddhism’s social impact and led to the establishment of numerous monasteries. Official support for the collection and translation of Buddhist sutras fostered a group of monks closely associated with the imperial court, securing sponsorship for large-scale sutra engravings. The imitation of Confucian Stone Classics engravings also affected the formation of sutra engravings and

their distinctive calligraphic style, which to a certain extent reflects the form of return to antiquity calligraphy. As a product of Buddhism, these engraved sutras integrate religious texts with natural landscapes, sacralizing the mountain as a site for meditation or as a monument for preserving Buddhist teachings.

The calligraphy of cliff-sutra engravings demonstrates a mixture of multiple script styles, combining the character structure and brushwork of clerical script and regular script, with occasional elements of seal script. This combination arose from both a preference for orthodox calligraphy styles and the lack of standardized definitions for clerical script and regular script styles at the time. Regarding the development of calligraphy in the stone inscriptions of the Northern Dynasties, scholars in the Song dynasty were initially doubtful of these inscriptions, viewing them as lacking standardization. In contrast, scholars in the Qing dynasty regarded them as an important examples of cultural heritage and appreciated their artistic value. This shift in perspective reflects the profound effect of political background and cultural movements on the interpretation of the value of the calligraphy style.

The cliff-sutra engravings function as both cult objects and spiritual monuments, injecting the natural landscape with sacred meaning. The carvings sanctify the mountain, enabling Buddhist supporters to connect with Buddhist doctrines at a chosen site. The combined effect of text and landscape highlights the function of cliff-sutra engravings as a non-iconic symbol for Buddhist concepts, employing the natural surroundings as a means for spiritual expression. In addition, this study analyzes the art of calligraphy through rubbings and photographs, making it essential to examine the effect of different materials on the style of calligraphy. Rubbings have played an important role in the preservation and study of sutra engraving calligraphy, making these texts accessible to scholars of different eras. However, the flattening effect of rubbings detaches the sutras from their three-dimensional, site-specific properties, transforming them into objects that can be collected and viewed independently of their original context. This separation reduces the impact of the Buddhist environment on the assessment of calligraphic style.

In analyzing the calligraphy style of sutra engravings, this dissertation incorporates field investigation to collect essential research materials and examines the stylistic characteristics of cliff-sutra engraving calligraphy through historical document analysis and material classification. This study provides significant insights into the relationship between calligraphy, religious expression, and environmental connection within Chinese

culture. Emphasizing the importance of understanding how Buddhist teachings and artistic expression are integrated in cliff-sutra engravings, this study considers the broader cultural and physical context of these calligraphic works. This comprehensive approach underscores the value of these engravings as both aesthetic achievements and sacred visual representations, enriching the understanding of religious art as an interactive, location-specific experience that extends beyond mere visual appreciation. Future research can investigate the artistic characteristics of cliff-sutra engravings as examples of material culture, the Buddhist rituals associated with engraving sites, and the impact of different stone materials on calligraphy styles across various regions.

Glossary

Sutras

Sūtra Spoken by Vimalakīrti (*Weimojie suoshuo jing* 維摩詰所説經)

Avataṃsaka Sūtra (*Da fang guang fo huayan jing* 大方廣佛華嚴經)

Visesacinta Brahma Pariprccha Sūtra (*Siyi fantian suowen jing* 思議梵天所問經)

Sūtra of Immeasurable Meaning (*Wu liang yi jing* 無量義經)

Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra (*Daban niepan jing* 大般涅槃經)

Mahāvaipulya-dhāraṇī Sūtra (*Da fangdeng tuoluoni jing* 大方等陀羅尼經)

Ajātaśatru-kaukṛtyavinodana Sūtra (*Weicengyou zhengfa jing* 未曾有正法經)

Ekottarāgama (*Zengyi ahan jing* 增壹阿含經)

Lotus Sūtra (*Miaofa lianhua jing* 妙法蓮華經)

Sūtra on the Perceiver of the World's Sounds (Guanshiyin jing 觀世音經)

Sūtra Spoken by the Buddha on Maitreya's Rebirth Below and Accomplishing Buddhahood (*Foshuo mile xiasheng chengfo jing* 佛說彌勒下生成佛經)

Śrīmālādevīsiṃhanāda Sūtra (*Shengman shizihou yicheng da fangbian fangguang jing* 勝鬘師子吼一乘大方便方廣經)

Sūtra Spoken by Buddha on Bo (*Foshuo bojing* 佛說孛經)

Sūtra Spoken by Buddha on the Names of Buddhas (*Fo shuo foming jing* 佛說佛名經)

Treatise on the Sūtra of Limitless Life (*Wuliangshoujing youbotishe yuanshengjie* 無量壽經優波提舍願生偈)

Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra (*Mohe boruo boluomi jing* 摩訶般若波羅密經)

Sūtra of Present of the Thousand Buddhas of the Bhadra kalpa names (*Xianzai xianjie qianfoming jing* 現在賢劫千佛名經)

Mahāvaipulya-Mahāsaṃnipāta Sūtra (Dafangdeng daji jing 大方等大集經)

Sūtra of Mahā-Prajñā-Pāramitā Pronounced by Mañjuśrī (*Wenshu shili shuo dabanru boluomi jing* 文殊師利說大般若波羅蜜經)

Sūtra of the Ten Grounds (*Shidi jing* 十地經)

Sūtra of the Doctrine Bequeathed by the Buddha (Fochui ban niepan lüeshuo jia jie jing 佛垂般涅槃略說教誡經)

Ullambana Sūtra (Yulanpen jing 盂蘭盆經)

Saṃdhinirmocana Sūtra (*Jie shenmi jing* 解深密經)

Sūtra on Upasaka Precepts (You po sai jie jing 優婆塞戒經)

Buddha Teaches the Scriptures (Fo shuo sheng jing 佛說生經)

Four Truths (*Sidi pin* 四諦品)

Luminous Enlightenment (*Guangmingjue pin* 光明覺品)

Bodhisattva Clarify Problems (*Pusa mingnan pin* 菩薩明難品)

Purifying Action (*Jingxing pin* 淨行品)

Bodhisattva See Wisdom (*Haihui pusa pin* 海會菩薩品)

parable of the conjured city (*Hua cheng yu* 化城喻)

Universal Gate (*Pu men pin* 普門品)

Wuer pin (無二品)

Tanlun pin (談論品)

Maitreya Buddha (*mile fo* 彌勒佛)

Lion Buddha (*shizi fo* 獅子佛)

Mingyan Buddha (*ming yan fo* 明炎佛)

Ten Great Saints (*Dasheng shihao* 大聖十號)

Script names

Oldest calligraphy (*guwen* 古文)

Irregular script (*qizi* 奇字)

Great seal script (*dazhuan* 大篆)

Small seal script (*xiaozhuan* 小篆)

Carved symbols (*kefu* 刻符)

Worm script (*chongshu* 蟲書)

Imitation seal script (*moying* 摹印)

Signature script (*shushu* 署書)

Weapon script (*shushu* 殳書)

Clerical script (*lishu* 隸書)

Assistant script (*zuoshu* 佐書)

Mock seal script (*miuzhuan* 繆篆)

Bird script (*niaoshu* 鳥書)

Eight-point script (*bafen* 八分)

Inscription script (*mingshi shu* 銘石書)

Engraving seal script (*kefu zhuan* 刻符篆)

Imitated seal script (xiangxing zhuan 象形篆)

Tadpole seal script (kedaou zhuan 蝌蚪篆)

Insect seal script (chongzhuan 蟲篆)

Phoenix script (fengshu 鳳書)

Fish script (yushu 魚書)

Zhangcheng shu 章程書

Xingxia shu 行狎書

Xiangwen shu 相聞書

Dragon script (longshu 龍書)

Unicorn script (qilin shu 麒麟書)

Tortoise script (guishu 龜書)

Snake script (sheshu 蛇書)

Hanging needle script (xuanzhen shu 懸針書)

Reclining wave script (yanbo shu 偃波書)

Immortal script (xianren shu 仙人書)

Cloud script (yunshu 雲書).

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China Dynasty Timeline

Dynasty		Start and Ending Time	Capital	Current Location	The First Emperor of a New Era
Xia Dynasty		2070–1600 BCE	1. Anyi, 2. Yangcheng	1. Xia County, Shanxi, 2. Dengfeng, Henan	Yu (the legendary founder of the Hsia Dynasty)
Shang Dynasty		1600–1046 BCE	1. Hao, 2. Yin	1. Shangqiu,Henan, 2. Anyang,Henan	Tang
Zhou Dynasty	Western Zhou Dynasty	1046–771 BCE	Haojing	Xi'an, Shanxi	King Wen of Zhou Ji Fa
	Eastern Zhou Dynasty	770–256 BCE	Luoyi	Luoyang, Henan	Ji Yi Jiu
	Spring and Autumn period	771-476 BCE	Luoyi	Luoyang, Henan	
	Warring States period	476-221 BCE	Luoyi	Luoyang, Henan	
Qin Dynasty		221–206 BCE	Xianyang	Xianyang, Shanxi	The Emperor Ying Zheng
Han Dynasty	Western Han Dynasty	206 BC– 23 CE	Chang'an	Xi'an, Shanxi	The Han Emperor Liu Bang
	Eastern Han Dynasty	25-220 CE	Luoyang	Luoyang, Henan	Emperor Liu Xiu
Three Kingdoms	Wei	220-265 CE	Luoyang	Luoyang, Henan	Cao Pi
	Shu	221-263 CE	Cheng Du	Chengdu, Sichuan	Liu Bei

	Wu	222-280 CE	Jiangye	Nanjing, Jiangsu	Sun Quan
Western Jin Dynasty		265-316 CE	Luoyang	Luoyang, Henan	Si Ma Yan
Eastern Jin Dynasty and Sixteen Kingdoms	Eastern Jin Dynasty	317-420 CE	Jiankang	Nanjing, Jiangsu	Si Ma Rui
	Sixteen Kingdoms	304-439 CE	-	-	
Southern and Northern Dynasties	Song	420-479 CE	Jiankang	Nanjing, Jiangsu	Liu Yu
	Qi	479-502 CE	Jiankang	Nanjing, Jiangsu	Xiao Dao Cheng
	Liang	502-557 CE	Jiankang	Nanjing, Jiangsu	Xiao Yan
	Chen	557-589 CE	Jiankang	Nanjing, Jiangsu	Chen Ba Xian
	Bei Wei	386-534 CE	1. Pingcheng, 2. Luoyang	1.Datong, Shanxi, 2. Luoyang, Henan	Tuo Ba Gui
	Dong Wei	534-550 CE	Ye	Linzhang,Hebei	Yuan Shan Jian
	Bei Qi	550-577 CE	Ye	Linzhang,Hebei	Gao Yang
	Xi Wei	535-556 CE	Chang'an	Xi'an, Shanxi	Yuan Bao Ju
	Bei Zhou	557-581 CE	Chang'an	Xi'an, Shanxi	Yu Wen Jue
Sui Dynasty		581-618 CE	Daxing	Xi'an, Shanxi	Yang Jian
Tang Dynasty		618-907 CE	Chang'an	Xi'an, Shanxi	Li Yuan
Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms	Liang	907-923 CE	Bian	Kaifeng, Henan	Zhu Huang
	Tang	923-936 CE	Luoyang	Luoyang, Henan	Li Cun Xu
	Jin	936-946 CE	Bian	Kaifeng, Henan	Shi Jing Tang

	Han	947-950 CE	Bian	Kaifeng, Henan	Liu Gao
	Zhou	951-960 CE	Bian	Kaifeng, Henan	Guo Wei
	Ten Kindoms	902-979 CE	-	-	
Northern Song Dynasty		960-1127 CE	Kaifeng	Kaifeng, Henan	Zhao Kuang Yin
Southern Song Dynasty		1127-1279 CE	Linan	Hangzhou, Zhejiang	Zhao Guo
Liao Dynasty		916-1125 CE	Huangdu	Bairin Right Banner	Ye Lv A Bao Ji
Western Xia		1038-1227 CE	Xing Qing Fu	Yinchuan, Ningxia	
Jin Dynasty		1115-1234 CE	1. Huining, 2. Zhongdu, 3. Kaifeng	1. A'cheng, Heilongjiang, 2. Beijing, 3. Kaifeng, Henan	1. Wan Yan A Gu Da
Yuan Dynasty		1271-1368 CE	Dadu	Beijing	Kublai Khan
Ming Dynasty		1368-1644 CE	Beijing	Beijing	Zhu Yuan Zhang
Qing Dynasty		1644-1912 CE	Beijing	Beijing	Huang Taiji