



**HAL**  
open science

## **Epigraphy in the Landscape: Intersections with Contemporary Ink Painting & Land Art**

Lia Wei

► **To cite this version:**

Lia Wei. Epigraphy in the Landscape: Intersections with Contemporary Ink Painting & Land Art. *Artistic Practices and Archaeological Research*, Archaeopress Publishing Ltd, pp.125-144, 2019, 9781789691405. <10.2307/j.ctvndv7pg.13>. <hal-03409867>

**HAL Id: hal-03409867**

**<https://hal.science/hal-03409867v1>**

Submitted on 31 Mar 2025

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire HAL, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



HAL Authorization

# Contents

<b>Contents</b> .....	i
<b>Introduction: Exposition and Transposition. Seeking an Ontologic Sensoriality in Contingencies</b> .....	1
Theodor Barth	
<b>Convergences: Archaeology and Art</b> .....	13
Giulio Calegari	
<b>Art as Entangled Material Practices. The Case of Late Iron Age Scandinavian Gold Foil Figures in the Making</b> .....	21
Ing-Marie Back Danielsson	
<b>The Mediality of Rock and Metal. Exploring Formal Analyses of Rock Art through Graffiti</b> .....	31
Fredrik Fahlander	
<b>The Diverse Sense of Frontality of Prehistoric Pottery: At the Time of Production, Deposition, and Publication/Exhibition</b> .....	41
Makoto Tomii	
<b>Art or Creativity? From Archaeological Photo-Ethnography to Art: Approaches to Two Contemporary Sites</b> .....	59
José Ant. Mármol Martínez	
<b>Heidegger at Work. An Archaeological Employment of a Theory of Truth in Art</b> .....	76
Ylva Sjöstrand	
<b>Art and Thought</b> .....	89
Marcel Otte and Hans Lemmen	
<b>Experimenting the Art of Origins: Animating Images by Blowing Colours and Sounds</b> .....	93
Dragoş Gheorghiu	
<b>'Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?' Art, Archaeology and Forensic Anthropology</b> .....	98
Theodor Barth and Ane Thon Knutsen	
<b>Epigraphy in the Landscape: Intersections with Contemporary Ink Painting and Land Art</b> .....	125
Lia Wei	
<b>Magnetic Boulders. Unfolding Stone with Gestures and Light</b> .....	145
Geir Harald Samuelsen	
<b>PORØS: A Model of Resistance as Material Communication</b> .....	152
Neil Forrest and Theodor Barth	
<b>Virtual Art in Teaching and Learning Archaeology: An Intermedia to Augment the Content of Virtual Spaces and the Quality of Immersion</b> .....	166
Dragoş Gheorghiu and Livia Ştefan	
<b>Contributors</b> .....	184

# Epigraphy in the Landscape: Intersections with Contemporary Ink Painting and Land Art

By Lia Wei

## Abstract

An archaeological and art historical research project by Lia Wei and Zhang Qiang is here reported in parallel to an artistic collaboration by the same authors. Questioning the potential contribution of creative practice to archaeology, this collaboration revisited existing, culture-specific bridges between the study of the Past and the development of a calligraphic tradition in East Asia.

Between the years 2009-2013, while investigating the monk and calligrapher Seng An Daoyi (active 562-580 CE), who engraved monumental sūtras in the mountains of Shandong, China, the collaborative duo developed a form of interactive writing. The writing sessions ('Biface Graphy') resulted in large-scale installations ('Open Scroll'), which were then contextualized in heritage sites. The medieval monk's epigraphy brought unprecedented innovations in visualization practices, the ritual function of Chinese script, and its relation to the natural landscape, but left no trace in History. Biface Graphy, an experiment in contemporary calligraphy, split between the studio and open-air architectures and landscapes, similarly revisits the very roots of ideographic communication, its somatic underpinning and its potential contribution to the genealogy of place making.

This chapter delivers cross-fertilized results of the experiment, between ancient epigraphy and contemporary ink painting, thereby confronting modern Archaeology with the pre-modern Chinese discipline of Metal and Stone Studies, a form of Antiquarianism.

**Keywords:** contemporary ink painting, installation art, epigraphy, landscape, textuality, authorship.

## Contents

- INTRODUCTION: a Dialogue between cultural outsiders ..... 2**
- PART I: Medieval Epigraphy ..... 3**
  - Site and Body .....4
  - Stele and Stroke ..... 10
  - Authorship ..... 16
- PART II : Biface Graphy ..... 19**
  - Writing sessions .....20
  - Open Scroll ..... 24
- CONCLUSION ..... 28**
- Bibliography ..... 30**

Nous cherchons donc à distinguer un régime de signes despotiques, signifiant et paranoïaque, et un régime de signes autoritaire, post-signifiant, subjectif ou passionnel. (...) Qu'est-ce qui se passe dans ce second régime, par rapport au régime signifiant préalablement défini? En premier lieu, *un signe ou un paquet de signes se détache du réseau circulaire irradiant*, se met à travailler pour son compte, à filer sur la ligne droite, comme s'il s'engouffrait dans une mince voie ouverte.

Deleuze and Guattari 1980,152.

## **INTRODUCTION: a Dialogue between cultural outsiders**

Archaeological material unfurls the linear thread of history into a net of possibilities. Often do several interpretations coexist until the last stage of archaeological research, so that competing configurations of time and space are generously allowed to endure. As both time and space are cultural productions, ruptures and niches in biographies and landscapes can be found in cultural fringes or situations of culture contact.

In this chapter, two simultaneous quests by the collaborative duo Lia Wei and Zhang Qiang 張強 led between the years 2009-2017 intermingle: a study on the 6th century CE monk and epigrapher Seng An Daoyi 僧安道一, and a contemporary calligraphic artwork, the 'Biface Graphy' project (*Shuangmian shufa* 雙面書法). The two projects are entangled on many levels, and they both happen at the fringes of culture and history.

The figure of Seng An Daoyi (active 562-580 CE) is not mentioned in historical sources. His epigraphic production was not understood as a corpus before 1996, and has not entered the history of calligraphy. The structure of Seng An's characters, the calligraphic strokes and their technical execution in stone, as well as the monumental dimensions of the inscriptions are all elements which find no comparison in contemporaneous calligraphic production, under the Northern Qi Dynasty (550-577 CE). The content of his epigraphy does not match contemporaneous mainstream religious texts or imagery. The sites that Seng An marked are located in a peripheral area with respects to the imperial capital city of the time, Ye 鄴, in mountainous fringes neighbouring important pre-existing sacred sites such as Mount Tai 泰山.

The Biface Graphy project stands aside in the panorama of contemporary art. Today, calligraphy struggles to reconcile its traditional roots with the diversity of contemporary media. Challenges were posed to ink art since the early twentieth century. By a paradoxical loop, it served as an inspiration for Abstract Expressionism, but had to negotiate its entry into modernity with often too linear art historical discourses. This is especially the case in Mainland China, whose late opening to modernity created a hiatus of about 30 years that shortcuts the study of direct influences and linear developments. Born as a dialogue between

a Belgian and a Chinese artist, the sessions of simultaneous writing that form the core of the Biface Graphy project are an attempt to by-pass the question of immediate cultural inheritance by looking into the deep past for potential ancestry. Along the years, the performative part of this contemporary ink art project was followed by a series of installations entitled 'Open Scroll', which confronted the calligraphic stroke to architectural structures and the landscape.

By retracing the epigraphic activity of Seng An Daoyi and the development of the Biface Graphy project, this chapter looks for conjunctions between the two. Such conjunctions were discovered, pursued and often intently reinforced by the collaborative duo over several years, as they allowed the physical time and space required for survey and artistic practice to unfold. A concrete example is given here of how archaeological survey has impacted the creation of a contemporary artwork. At the same time, the artwork roots archaeological survey in current cultural challenges, feeding debates surrounding the contemporary developments of calligraphic art.

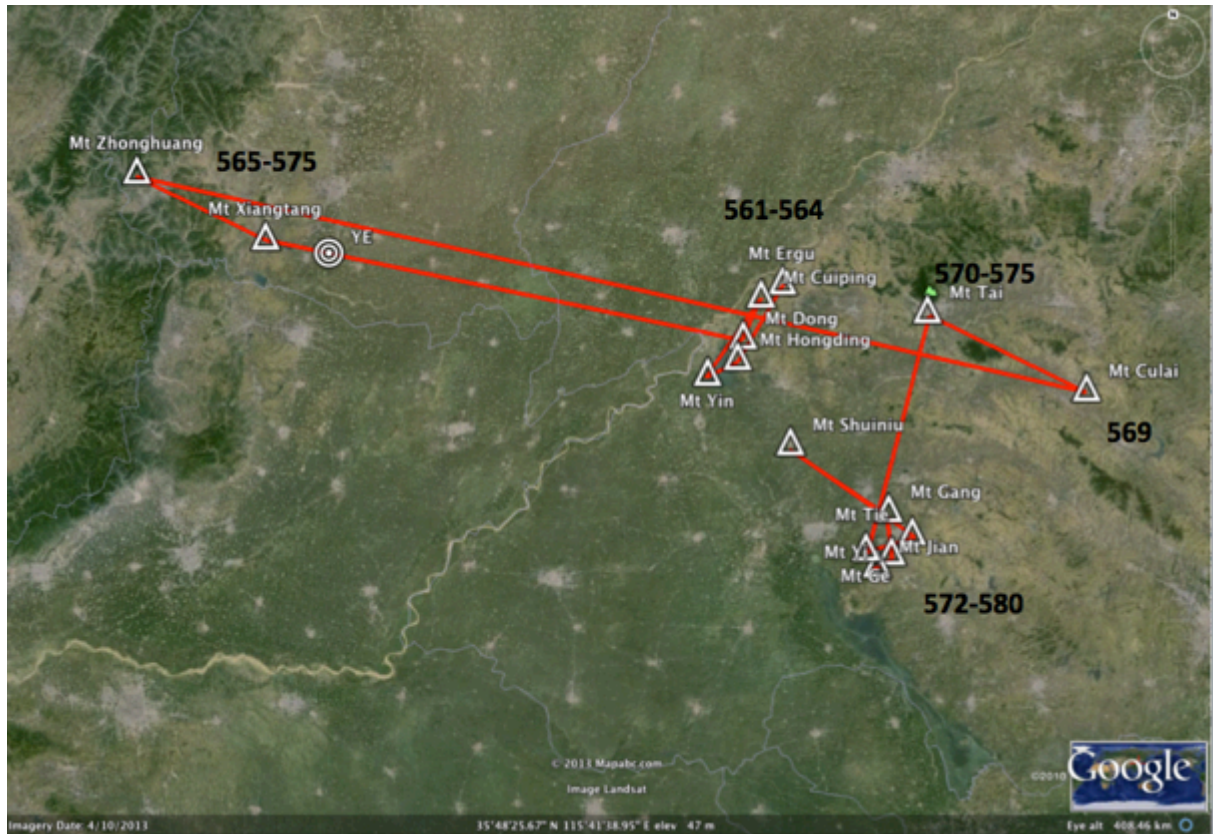
The chapter is divided in two parts:

- The first part summarizes the innovative aspects of the spectacular transcription of Buddhist texts into engraved Chinese calligraphy by the Northern Qi dynasty monk and calligrapher Seng An Daoyi (active 562-580 CE), in the mountains of Shandong province, Northeast China.
- The second part presents the Biface Graphy project, focusing on the aspects of the writing sessions and installations that relate to the work of Seng An in terms of textuality, space and authorship.

## **PART I: Medieval Epigraphy**

Between 562 and 580 CE, Seng An Daoyi engraved monumental sūtras in the mountains of Shandong province, in Northeast China. Three main stages with some overlap can be distinguished in his activity, based on the date and location of the inscriptions (**Fig.1**):

- 561-564 CE: Seng An's early years of activity are centred in the surroundings of lake Dongping, in present day Dongping county, Shandong province.
- 565-575 CE: During a decade, Seng An acts closer to political and religious centres of the time. He participates to cave-making projects such as in Mount Xiangtang 响堂山, sponsored by the ruling elite in the vicinity of the Northern Qi imperial capital, Ye, and carves a sūtra at the scale of a whole valley in a major sacred site, Mount Tai.
- 569-580 CE: Seng An's mature and late work focuses on another group of mountains in present day Zoucheng municipality, Shandong province. Some of the works are controversially attributed to followers of the monk.



1. Major epigraphic sites in Shandong province, Northeast China. Add scale. Source: Google Earth.

An often-invoked motivation for the carving of sūtras in remote places is the belief in a 'Decline of the Law' (mofa shidai 末法時代), a predicted time for the extinction of Buddhism. The concept appears in scriptures and corresponds to a political reality of the time, as three anti-Buddhist prosecutions were led under the Northern Wei (444 CE), Northern Zhou (574 CE) and Tang (842 CE) dynasties. Religious unrest led to sūtra carving projects in isolated mountain sites, as a mean of diffusion and protection. These sites possibly hosted rituals of initiation, salvation and purification for the elected few to survive troubled times. However, the belief in a 'Decline of the Law' was pushed forward only in 558 CE by the monk Nanyue Huisi (南嶽慧思 515-577 CE), did not reach the North before the defeat of the Northern Qi dynasty by the Northern Zhou in 577 CE (Tsiang 1996, 254). As rightly pointed out by Tsiang, the will behind Seng An Daoyi's project is more of exalting the texts, than of hiding them for a future audience, as will be the case in later large-scale sūtra carving projects.

### *Site and Body*

Seng An set his epigraphy in limestone and granite formations. Mount Ergu's inscription for example, was carved on a flat limestone pavement, where the stone slabs are juxtaposed very closely (**Fig.2:** All photographs for which no source is given were taken by the author of this study). In Mount Yuncui, instead, the inscription is located on an upright limestone peak. The best frontal view of the peak is obtained by its opposing summit, along the same

mountain crest. While the peak is visible from a great distance, the inscription is invisible from afar. Different circulatory paths are possible within the inscribed sites, and it can happen that the path is as significant as the destination. In Mount Culai, the inscribed stone on top of the mountain is challenging to find, lost as it is among a great quantity of similar granite boulders. In Mount Gang, instead, the destination is blurred, since inscribed stones are scattered, and possible paths multiplied (**Fig.3**).

Unlike any known early epigrapher, Seng An carved directly on the raw, undressed stone surface, merging the shape of the text with the pre-existing shapes of nature. In fact, as can be seen from the ‘Stone Sutra Valley’ (*Jingshiyu* 經石峪) site in Mount Tai, where the Diamond sūtra is carved in a granite riverbed, he specifically chose complex surfaces to set his texts in (**Fig.4**). The characters follow or avoid folds and cracks, and they are animated by the movement of the water.

Let us pay closer attention to one of the monk’s earliest interventions, in 564 CE, in Mount Hongding. The valley in forms a U-shaped circus around the site of a former monastery. The carvings cover both slopes of the valley, leaving an enclosed space within the mountain slopes, and in-between the main carved cliffs. Narrow ridges and cross-valley views both contribute to make this ‘lithified circulatory field’ readable. A series of Buddha names was carved on the northern side of the valley (**Fig.5**).



2. Limestone pavement in Mount Ergu. 562 CE. Source: author.



The biggest freestanding 'Great Emptiness King Buddha' name (*Da Kong Wang Fo* 大空王佛) occupies the widest continuous surface on the main cliff (930 x 410 cm). The size of this inscription has no precedent in the history of Chinese calligraphy: it represents a first specimen of monumental carved writing. Apart from scale, Seng An also plays with depth, taking advantage from the game of shadows on the rock surface. In Hongding's inscription, the two top characters are in relief, while the last bottom one is more deeply engraved. The top of the cliff is almost vertical, while its bottom tends to a 45° angle. In some cases, the carvings' dim outline would sharpen only at certain times of the day. Direct, perpendicular sunrays 'erase' the text, while low-angled, oblique sunrays reveal it. The inclusion of a larger time scale, or a periodic apparition of the Buddha-names, could also suit the idea of alternation of the successive Buddhas in time.

'Great Emptiness King Buddha' is carved immediately under a natural cavity, towered by the round flat peak included in the cliff main body (**Fig.6**). The cavity is a horizontal crack, which remains inaccessible, and which bottom is never reached by sunlight. The hole creates a dark cleft on the main cliff's surface, visible from afar. Under heavy rainfall conditions, the rainwater pours out of the deep horizontal fold onto the four huge characters. The monumental characters can be climbed because of the smooth angle of its slope. The left radical of the lowest character (*Fo* 佛) is inviting in this regard, because of the deep eroded cavity that was included in its first stroke. The slope then gradually increases until it reaches the crack, which seems to mark a limit and signal a 'beyond'.

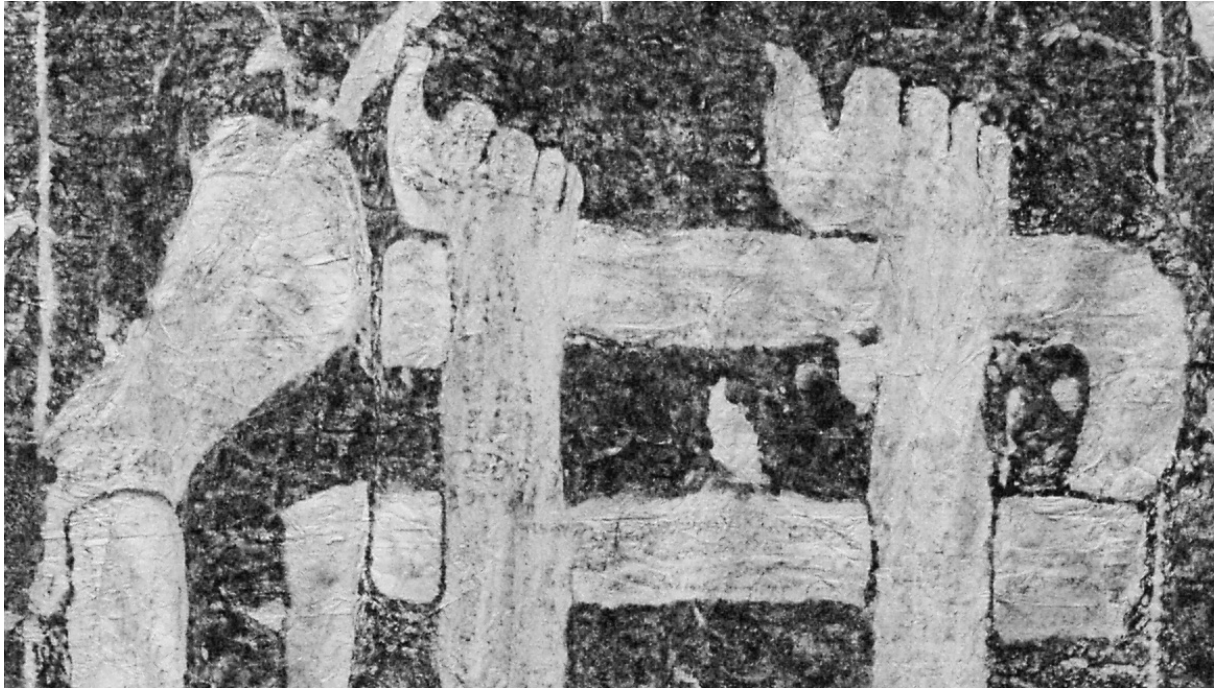


5. Main cliff with eighteen Buddha names in Mount Hongding.



6. 'Great Emptiness King Buddha' (Da Kong Wang Fo 大空王佛) in Mount Hongding. 564 CE. 920 x 340 cm.

Anthropomorphic elements are added to the monumental *Fo* 佛 character in Hongding Valley, where the top finials of the character resemble a pair of raised fists (**Fig.7A**). Interestingly, the excrescences on the monumental *Fo* character in Hongding Valley are foreshadowed by similar calligraphic finials in Mount Ergu, carved two years earlier (**Fig.7B**). The name on Mount Ergu has been carved on a horizontal plane, allowing the viewer to walk –or lie down– on the characters. This slightly earlier version of the Buddha Name also shows unusual finials on top of a the *Fo* character, but they have been attributed to a calligraphic brush-like effect. We could imagine that the later fist-like finials in Hongding Valley were a personal readjustment of those in Mount Ergu. We may even suggest that this reinterpretation was a feedback result from the audience itself, who saw in this man-sized *Fo* character lying on the floor, an occasion of direct interaction. This would be an interesting case of anthropomorphized calligraphy resulting from the interaction between monumental characters and their audience.



7. A. Rubbing of 'Great Emptiness King Buddha' (Da Kong Wang Fo 大空王佛) in Mount Hongding. 564 CE. width 340 cm. Ink on paper. ---- B. Rubbing of 'Great Emptiness King Buddha' (Da Kong Wang Fo 大空王佛) in Mount Ergu. 562 CE. width 183 cm. Ink on paper.

A list of fourteen Buddha-names is written in small format (circa 1 meter high), on the lowest border of a wide walkable cornice along the whole length of the cliff. This group of fourteen names is crowned by a freestanding peak. Follow two Buddha names in increasing dimensions and visual vividness. The 'High Mountain Buddha' name (*Gao Shan Fo* 高山佛) is carved immediately under the platform, on the basis of the peak (103 x 63 cm). The second freestanding name 'Great Mountain Cliff Buddha' (*Da Shan Yan Fo* 大山巖佛). It is located on the main cliff, immediately on the left of the peak. It is written in a larger format (363 x 196 cm) and carved on an almost vertical slope. The last large-sized name, 'An King Buddha' (*An Wang Fo* 安王佛), is carved on the body of the freestanding peak. From that

location, it dominates a small platform wide enough only for one person to sit on. The surface where this name is carved is turned slightly towards the centre of the main cliff. All three middle-sized names, including the two mountain Buddhas and 'An King Buddha' can be read from the main cliff's cornice, but they can only be reached through a hidden, private passage, which marks a neat separation between the stages of seeing/reading distance and touching distance. Each Buddha name is distinct in location, visibility, accessibility and calligraphic style. There is a gradual increase in the Buddha Names dimensions, but also an increase of abnormal features in their calligraphic interpretation with longer strokes, cinematic effects of repeated chiselling, brush-like stripes and inclusion of pictorial or anthropomorphic elements.

The narrow passage gives access to a small platform dominating the cornice. The body of a person standing there should nearly occupy the entire surface of the 'An King Buddha' name. In the reader's view, this name is located above the fourteen small sized 'orthodox' Buddha-names, and between 'High Mountain Buddha' and 'Great Mountain Cliff Buddha'. Finally, the relation between 'An King Buddha' and 'Great Emptiness King Buddha' suggests a face-to-face between Seng An and Great Emptiness. While the other names respectively refer to Buddhist literature, the mountain environment and the central Buddhist concept of Emptiness, his is to be considered as a living Buddha. The living Buddha, 'An King Buddha', is literally 'queuing', integrated amongst greater and smaller Buddha-names. Only him has a detectable spatial dispositive that allows him to act as an 'appearance' coming out of the cliff, after a passage in the narrow backstage corridor, or even an apparent circumambulation around the freestanding pillar.

In the last section of the narrow passage, Seng An carved a text entitled the 'Stele of Master An' (*Angong zhi bei* 安公之碑), to which we will come back to below. The corridor then ends abruptly into two steps carved in the rock, with an inscription that reads 'Wind Hole Mouth stele' (*Fengmenkou bei* 风门口碑). The title probably refers to the freestanding peak itself, or to the opening of the narrow corridor on the valley, as a strong breeze squeezes through the cleft.

### *Stele and Stroke*

An example of how single characters are repeated by Seng An to create a patterned text is the 'Eighteen Emptiness Stele' (*Shiba kong bei* 十八空碑) which content obsessively repeats the word 'emptiness' (*kong* 空) (**Fig.10A**). In the approximate translation below, the character for Emptiness/Void (空) is replaced by an X :



- There can be A without B
- There can be A both with and without B
- There can be A neither with nor without B.

The pairing of concepts and their mutual annihilation is illustrated by the notion of 'codependent origination' (*pratītya-samutpāda*), according to which things must be understood as arising in dependence upon each other. Things appear and disappear in mutual dependence. It is this double bind upon which Nāgārjuna's linguistic weapon is founded. Each of his treatise's chapter attacks one pair of related terms. Nāgārjuna plays with a few elements and simple operations (Robinson 1972, 325), using logic as a tool for mystic salvation. However, logical strategies remain within language, engaging the adept into contradictory behaviour. Nāgārjuna never admits the reification of words, because his is still a linguistic strategy. Language, transformed into a repetitive succession of paired negated terms, becomes a tool for mental shortcut aimed at awakening (Betty 1983).

In the 'Stele of Master An', Seng An translates Nāgārjuna's tetralemma into a visual game of ideographs (**Fig.9**). The characters *an* 安 (serenity) and *yi* 一 (one) of his name serve as the two paired concepts, and form the basis for a text of his own invention, which mimics the logical processes of Nāgārjuna's tetrad. Instead of the linear, chain-like procession followed by Nāgārjuna however, we have here a patterned text structured upon relations, recurrences and configurations of signs (Billeter 2010, 20). Recurrences, at first hand that of the more deeply carved *yi* 一 character (17 units), then that of the equally obsessively repeated *an* 安 character (17 units), are visually striking, especially the deep carved horizontal stroke of the *yi* 一. The characters 不, 所, 能, 其, 于, 故 (respectively 12, 8, 6, 2, 2, 2 occurrences) grouped by pairs, form the logical backbone of the text. The text reads as 'An not an thus an, an thus cannot an, yi thus yi not yi, yi thus cannot yi, not an thus an, (...)'. A voluntary blurring of the separation between phrases, which are marked by no diacritic mark and do not correspond to the break in alignment, leaves the reader hesitating on how to relate concepts and linking words. The great amount of neighbouring identical characters enhances the mirror effect, pushing the eye towards a horizontal alignment. In fact, departing from this grid, the reader would be able to produce his own text. The whole 'stele' acts as a magnified signature for Seng An, multiplying the characters of his own name.

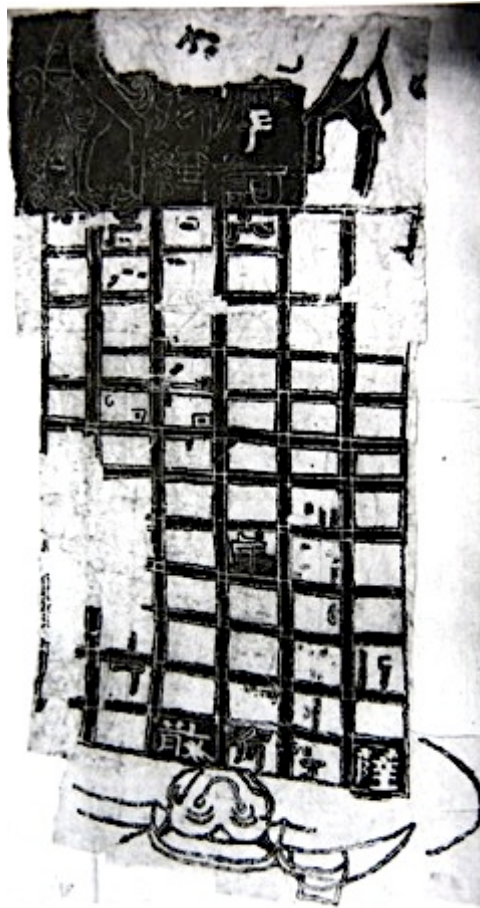


9. Rubbing of the 'Stele of Master An' in Mount Hongding. 564 CE. Ink on paper. source: Fig.5 in Dongping 2006:82.

Seng An, to translate Nāgārjuna's linguistic strategy, adapted it to the Chinese language, script and context. Interestingly, to achieve his goal, Seng An used 'paralinguistic' techniques. He exploited the non-phonetic syntactic possibilities of Chinese writing: as a morphosyllabic system, it is more resistant to experiments on the organization of the textual space (Studevent-Hickman). This characteristic allowed Seng An to play on the disposition of the characters in space, to impact on the reader's understanding, without affecting the text readability, but by complementing its meaning. He goes beyond the text, offering a salvation of sorts through visual expression.

The use of sūtras as tools for salvation, indeed, was not restricted to the linguistic sphere: the texts were collected, preserved, displayed worshipped etc... anything but read or discussed. Campamy stresses that while the Buddhist sūtras find themselves 'at the very centre of religious practice, they seem most empty of intrinsic value' (Campamy 1991, 54). Extreme examples of non verbal responses to literary or spiritual questions are recurrent in *gong'an* (公案), such as blows, slaps, animal noises, shouts, silence, overturning objects, and leaving the scene (Garrett 1997, 196-201). A non-verbal message has its own internal logic, and it can act as a crucial generator of change while negotiating its relation to other categories of meaning (Fletcher 1989, 33-39). In this case, it is epigraphy that acts as an embodiment of writing, lying somewhere in between verbal and non-verbal meaning, and this is where Seng An focused his experiments.

Another version of the The 'Eighteen Emptiness Stele' was carved with only four readable characters out of 72, of which only two are completely hollowed out (**Fig.10B**). In the present instance, the finish may have been unnecessary for the engraved sūtra to perform its function. Apart from the four readable characters, 20 other characters are partly represented. A reader who knows the sūtra passage would be able to reconstruct the content of the stele. The incomplete stele may have functioned as a mnemonic puzzle to be filled in by the practitioner, or simply as a metonymic evocation of the sūtra passage. The fact that absent, incomplete and complete characters coexist in the grid calls for a closer attention to the structure of the characters, and to the stroke itself.



10. Rubbing of the 'Eighteen Emptiness Stele' in Mount Hongding. 564 CE. Ink on paper. Source: Lai Fei 2003.

The intentionality lying behind the use of unfinished shapes has fostered numerous debates among art historians. From Michelangelo's *Prigioni*, to the unfinished works of Rodin, controverted examples calling for the sculptor's limits in front of time and matter, attracting attention on the experience of making, and promoting pure form and matter against the classical rules of composition (Williams 1970, 105). These examples certainly make the carving process more readable, and the carver's 'signature' more visible. Some strokes are obviously being insisted upon, by emphasizing the tool traces. As stated by Parker, 'tool marks accentuate the status of the object as a product of human fabrication' (Parker 2001, 67), thus the human agency which executes any divine vision. The constant struggle between the form and the formless is a major topic in the study of religious art (Scholem

2001, 12-19). In Indian sculpture, religious iconography is structured in interlinked stages from the transcendental undifferentiated to full materiality (Srinivasan 1990). When looking at East Asian art, Hay considers the hesitation between several dimensions of representation to betray the quest for a junction between mind and body (Hay 1994, 147).

Carvings left in an unfinished state reveal their making/writing process, they stand at the interface between brush and chisel, and between two-dimensional and three-dimensional representation. The coexistence of several stages of finish animates the characters and gives the impression of movement. In Seng An's 'Eighteen Emptiness Stele' shown above, one of the few readable characters has been insisted upon *beyond* the 'normal' level of finishing. In the *san* 散 character for 'dispersion', the last stroke has been repeated thrice, a situation that we recurrently find in the monk's calligraphy (**Fig.11**). Together with other animating devices exploited by the monk to enliven his calligraphy, the unfinished aspect of this stele might reveal his will to maintain the sacred space 'dynamic and expanding' (Parker 2001, 71).



11. *San* 散 character in Mount Hongding. 564 CE. width 15 cm.

As the carving sequence is made apparent, so is the stroke order that led to the characters (**Fig.12**). This aspect is central to the practice and reception of Chinese calligraphy, where

'... the process of creation in all its consecutive phases is visible in the object. A proper viewer follows with his eyes the brush movements through each of the characters and the sequence of the lines. He thus re-creates for himself the moments of actual creation' (Ledderose 1979, 29).

Core aesthetic concerns to the discipline of calligraphy are secularized aspects of religious doctrinal elements. For example, the distinct processes of tracing a character from outline to filling recalls the figure of Tao Hongjing (陶弘景 456-536 CE) when stating that Taoist talismans 'should always be outlined and then filled in' (*goutian* 勾填) (Eichman 2000, 37-38). A Taoist adept was supposed to be able to visualize and reconstruct the bearer of revelation's act of writing. From the quality of the brushwork, the adept could assess the authenticity of the mystic experience. Seng An's explicit use of the outline and filling

technique points at issues of revelation, transmission and copying. These activities relate to the notion of authorship and the function of sacred texts.



12. 'Great' (*da* 大) character in Mount Hongding. 564 CE. width 100 cm.

### *Authorship*

Studies on the indigenous reception of Indic thought show strong influence of Buddhism in Taoist faith. Reciprocally, elements of Taoist ritual were adopted in Buddhist communities. Zürcher suggests that the basis of the two religious systems was a less differentiated lay religion, an indistinct mass of popular beliefs and practices (Zürcher 1980, 146). Hybridizations between Buddhist and Taoist practice were both the fact of direct loans, and of shared conceptual preference. In Seng An's time, the free rhythm of the regular, running and cursive scripts encouraged beliefs in the magical property of calligraphy (Nylan 1999, 53). By picking calligraphy as his main tool of expression, instead of sculpture, architecture or painting, which had been the media most favoured to the foreign faith up until then, Seng An decided to take advantage from underlying forces which had been only partly adapted to the foreign faith of Buddhism, and which we find at work in the tradition of talismanic writing.

Taoist talismans are unrelated to the spoken word: they are primarily a visual phenomenon, a somatic literature that records experience, instead of discourse (Harrison 1989, 113). Mostly frontal, symmetric, repetitive, their shape keeps the visual qualities of writing, often

borrowing recognizable elements of characters, isolated radicals or archaistic elements. The play on the oscillation between figure and ground, maintaining a visual ambiguity, is thought to be advantageous in picturing the indefinite 'breath' (*qi* 氣). Charts are described as following: 'These characters of marvellous energy are the configuration of the mountain. It is strange in outward appearance and its contours are unusual. (...). By mystery-penetrating visualizations, you can see it when you close your eyes' (Lagerwey 1987, 162). Although non-figurative and undecipherable, talismans cannot be categorized as aniconic. In fact, they are not devoid of iconic power: like icons, these are 'devotional objects closely tied to religious gaze, visualization, and worship' (Huang Shih-shan 2012, 344). In tracing the equivalent to Buddhist relics worship in medieval Taoism, Bokenkamp suggests that celestial writing played a similar role in materializing the divine (Bokenkamp 2010). Mythical narratives referring to celestial script follow schemes of derivation than of evolution: a meta-text that subsequently diversified into human and sacred scripts (Bokenkamp 2010, 24-25). Talismans conserve aspects of early textuality, combining them with derivations from standard to esoteric script, a kind of secondary evolution. Therefore, it is both about the revival and the re-invention of writing. Talismans form a sublanguage of sorts, aside from mainstream literacy. Ethnological enquiries on the ritual use of written texts confirm that 'people who cannot read and write nevertheless participate in complex literacy practices' (Reder 1994, 46). This re-invention of writing focuses on materiality and gesture and keeps an intentional distance from phonetics, and the logic of language. The repetition of strokes or fragments of a character, for example, can lead to a lack of linguistic understanding, opening the script into a multipurpose form. Although the talisman loses some semantic content, free association is encouraged, endorsing it with nonverbal complexity. The text may even conserve part of what is usually omitted in the discursive recording of ritual: 'gesture can be copied, but it can be recorded only by visual memory (sometimes by the tactile)' (Goody 2000, 109). Indeed, while spoken words disappear as they are pronounced, writing restructures consciousness by privileging the sensory world of vision (McMahan 2002, 96). Since celestial writing does not symbolize 'breath', but is made out of it, the process should be seen as one of embodiment rather than signification. We read that 'cosmic energies animating (the ritual master's) body become a kind of condensed writing, which he projects outside' (Chenivresse 1996, 72). Gestures involved in the tracing of talismans are thus as important as their scriptural result.

Seng An's position of re-inventing a language, or transposing a tradition into a new language, has an almost innate tendency at going back to this language's origins. At some historical crossroads of etymology or style, the calligrapher will look for another possible evolution of the script, some hypothetical cousin to the conventions of his time. What Seng An's epigraphy also provides is evidence concerning the process of writing and the succession order of strokes. Apart from the adoption of archaisms and talismanic techniques such as repetition, recombination, Seng An made an effort at monumentalizing characters and anchoring them into stone. In linking of calligraphic choices with spatial design, the carver's interpretation of the character's formative process plays a decisive role. So, we could look at Seng An both as a prophet in his own land and as a skillful translator, who managed the transition between a religious ideology and its physical trace.

Only Buddhist relic worship gives us a degree of physical interaction comparable to the bodily dimension of writing in Taoism. Buddhist sūtras, known as ‘body of the law’, beyond their textual content, are also as a relic associated with the speech of the Buddha and as such they are the object of ritual praxis (Sharf 1999, 75-99). Shorter, indestructible groups of syllables known as *dharani* often form the core of a sūtra, standing along written comments or indication for their manipulation (Copp 2008, 493-508). Merit making acts as a motivation for printing and multiplying sacred scripture and Buddha images. In this transitory phase, during the displacement and translation process, texts are subject to loss or diminution, and often what ended up in China was ‘a summary of a summary’. Moreover, their rearrangement can lead to change and invention of new religious forms. They can help syncretize Buddhist thought to indigenous religious forms, integrating local divinities into a greater system (Orzech 1996, 304). Orzech describes this process an ‘esoterization’ of the text, the total teaching of which could now only be attained through initiation, or as a ‘mandalization’ of the text, a stripping of it down to its esoteric essence. Esoteric teachings cannot easily be expressed in writing, but they can be completely captured and revealed in mandalas, the simple sight of which can bring one to Buddhahood.

Similarly, Seng An extracted meaning from the sūtras, in the form of fragmentary passages, names and isolated sounds, creating his own esoteric dictionary. We also find complete inventions such as the mountain Buddha names, personal statements, and liberties taken in translation and in transcription. In a movement ‘from text to language’, Seng An extracted meaning from chosen sections of the sūtras, repeating this selection of fragmentary passages from one site to another, and mimicking the logical structure of sūtras in word games of his own. Bridging text to the mountain, Seng An builds up a chain of transformations, where, through the stele format, language is revisited, transcended, deconstructed and re-assembled. Going further into the language, and taking advantage of a supplementary level of language offered by the Chinese script, Seng An uses the format of names and the obvious anthropomorphic aspects of identification to bring calligraphy beyond the very structure of Chinese characters.

Lastly, Seng An manages to territorialize texts and names in a physical environment of his own choice and a specific material, stone. While increasing the size and depth of characters, he reduced the length of the inscriptions. Seng An embodies these creations in Buddha-like mountain peaks and cliffs. As we have seen, stylistic factors manipulated by the monk included cast shadows according to the time of the day, slope, depth of relief, smoothness or roughness of the rocky surface, etc. The relation between the writer/reader’s body and the topographic dimension of writing is obvious in talismanic charts and maps. Fourth century Taoist adepts of the Lingbao tradition achieved identification with the mountain peaks with the help of diagrams and charts (Baryosher-Chemouny 1996, 129). The adept’s body is correlated to the mountain, via the written medium. A similar kind of connection is exploited by Seng An to create his mountain-like buddhas. Anthropomorphic characters in Andaoyi’s calligraphy, composed out of disarticulated trunks, hands or legs, could similarly bridge the audience’s body to the mountain. Alternatively, the anthropomorphic elements added to the Buddha names draw an analogy between the Buddha’s body and the mountain peaks. The most repeated cluster of characters assembled by Seng An is the four-character name ‘Great Emptiness King Buddha’. The name functions as the seal of a ‘King Buddha’, it also

stands as a metonym for the king's territory, cumulating pictorial elements in a trophy-like addition. Seng An thus acts on three spatial scales: on a micro scale, by exploiting the texture, rhythm, shape of natural rocky conformations, on a meso scale, by creating intervisible connections between inscribed locations, and on a macro scale, by re-shaping the sacred landscape of the mountainous region as a whole.

The French Anthropology of Writing and Literacy Studies in the Anglo-Saxon world are helpful to further explore the concept of 'writing act' (Barton and Papen 2010, 13). This enables us to 'theorize linguistic, graphic and situational aspects as a totality' (Fraenkel 2010, 42). Beyond the tracing gesture, writing practices involve a series of 'literacy events' constituting their context of enunciation: these include producing, disseminating, consuming, reproducing and transforming texts. By seeing the text as much as the catalyser of a situation than as its expression, their views are strikingly close to the cosmogenetic role of writing in Taoist religion (Bokenkamp 2010, 21), and they recall the assumption that the divinatory 'oracle bone inscriptions are still thinking *in* myth or ritual rather than *about* it' (Allan 1991, 16.). Bell considers the textual medium itself as an actor, with its specific format and its conditions of production and distribution as a necessary complement of any textual analysis (Bell 1988, 368). As we have seen above, unavoidable effects of meaning are induced by the material form of texts, and the function of sacred script generally seems to be less about reading or decoding than about appropriating and manipulating text.

Having focused so far on a theory of practice, the need was felt to engage in a writing act ourselves. The artistic project developed in Part II takes over where archaeological and art historical enquiries remain at the hypothetical level.

## **PART II : Biface Graphy**

A collaborative project entitled 'Biface Graphy' was led between the years 2009 and 2015 by the same duo of authors who investigated the epigraphy of Seng An Daoyi (Zhang and Wei 2017). The project involved the construction of a calligraphic language based on interactive writing and large-scale outdoor installations (Zhang and Wei 2010 and 2011). The collaborative duo looked into the unwritten Past to shape the potential *devenirs* of calligraphy. The two projects fed into each other, seeking to strengthened bonds between sign and matter, and looking for a key to create a language of one's own.

The intimate relationship between academic and artistic practice is common in Chinese Antiquarian practices. Such practices, also known as the 'Study of Metal and Stone' (*Jinshi xue* 金石學), focus on inscribed objects, and the reproduction of past gestures (Falkenhausen 2015). Antiquarian practices included the habit of collecting inscriptions, rubbing them off cliffs, walls and artefacts, often struggling with scale. The de-contextualized inscriptions would be compiled into the shape of books, and weave an intertextual network of references, without any direct contact left with the stone. Another activity is the addition of commentaries directly on landscapes, rubbings and paintings. A calligrapher naturally engages into the reproduction of past forms of script, previously recorded by the craftsman

into stone. The ancient calligraphic models are only accessible through rubbings: imprints of stone carvings on inked paper. The separation between the art of writing, and its material sources, mainly epigraphy on stone, has gradually drawn a strict cultural boundary drawn between the carver and the calligrapher, in the Chinese conception of 'Fine Arts'. By looking at the cultural strategies of the group to transform matter into sign, we can understand how crucial it is for the literati to constantly revive the bond between paper and stone. A figure such as Seng An Daoyi, with his experiments in combining calligraphic and sculptural shapes and techniques, appeared as the ideal hybrid between a literati and a craftsman. Moreover, the fact that his work could only be grasped by a physical experience of the site and the stone surface pushes any study further beyond the limits of Antiquarian practices.

As literati would traditionally not engage in the physically demanding exercise of carving characters in stone themselves, but specialized craftsman transferred calligraphy from silk and paper to stone and metal. Experiments in Modern Calligraphy did not really question this divide between arts of the brush and craft. Instead, located somewhere between the deconstruction of characters and abstract expressionism, calligraphy suffers from the de-materializing and de-contextualizing effect of the Modernist white box. The Biface Graphy project departed from the idea that calligraphy, if it is to be transformed, needs to re-negotiate its relationship with painting, but also with epigraphy, rubbing, seal carving, etc. These practices bridge the ink line with its material or contextual counterpart.

“Discrimination towards the artisan is a fundamental feature of Chinese literati culture: re-establishing the priority of gesture is our way to denounce how literati art has declined in maintaining its refusal of such a primary relationship.” (Wei 2012)

Modern calligraphy also remains stuck in a highly individual conception of the artist. The embedding of literati practice into epistolary relationships or festive gatherings needs to be addressed beyond the individual author, his studio practice and the public display of artistic production. Biface Graphy wished to replace the figure of the calligrapher by a twin author. This intersubjective dimension pushes one step further Seng An dialogue with the divine (vision, revelation), the mountain (physical environment, natural shapes and hardness of the material) and the viewers of his epigraphy (disciples, followers, participants to rituals). The aim here is to go beyond individual enunciation, or even subjective enunciation, and to look for the necessary social content of enunciation (Deleuze and Guattari 1980, 101).

### *Writing sessions*

In September 2009, we decided upon one formula, which we coined ' Biface Graphy', where a scroll hung in-between us two, vertically, the brushes thus not having to compete for a same surface, each one being able to freely occupy a whole side of the paper. The script is realized with calligraphic brushes and ink; it is not readable, but constructed through the interaction of the two brushes writing simultaneously, conscious of each other's movement. Beyond language, but based on a binary principle, it calls for comparison with Seng An's playful visual rendering of logical terms (**Fig.13**).

'The pen follows its own mechanism, until the other's stroke appears: attraction, unexpected reaction, sudden distance, an infinite scale of variation and possible combinations is left half-opened to us. The result of this relation on paper is essentially out of control. Directing our attention on the meeting brushes, rather than on the appearing strokes, lead us to a more fluent rhythm, out of preconceived patterns.' (Wei and Zhang 2009)



13. Biface Graphy writing session in Huangjueping art district, Chongqing municipality, China. (2009-9-11)

The 'Biface Graphy' studio gradually became more structured. The scroll was suspended in space on a permanent standing man-sized frame (**Fig.14**). The writers are facing each other, standing on platforms under which the translucent scroll can run 'endlessly', without preventing their movement and the running script. The writing surface is sensitive to movement; brushes are thus not acting on a flat surface. The flexible surface reminded us of the monk's anthropomorphic and 'animated' calligraphy interacting with the natural shapes of the rock surface. It is here the interaction between the writers that provides the "uneven rock

surface” to which Seng An adapted his script. Indeed, the frame did not prevent the scroll, be it the industrial *xuan* paper we started with or the hand made silk we ended up using more often, to be sensitive to pressure on both sides and convey the strength and darker spots of encounter as well as the depth of one-sided gestures. The wooden structure where Biface Graphy was produced was meant as an abstract machine producing its own intrinsic language. Here, content and shape are not opposed, but the trace produced is beyond expression, beyond signs. Rather, it takes shape directly from the hand-and-tool polarity (Deleuze and Guattari 1980, 101). The scroll’s structure allows our writing process to rely on uninterrupted gesture, letting hands lead our minds. By choosing translucent silk, we wanted to suspend the strokes and allow them to conquer space.

“As strokes cut, they frame and structure our mineralized atmosphere; we then avenge and cut the stroke itself. We make it swell. Nostalgic of colour and space, we inject them into the calligraphic stroke. As is done for vegetal hybrids, we cut its head and roots. Its plain trunk spins trough many meters of scroll.” (Wei 2012)



14. Outdoor 'Writing Machine' in Yangebo, Hebei province. 2017.

At first, Biface Graphy appeared to us as a way to register directly a sensible experience, avoiding expression and its bias. The hand is here prolonged into the brush, which itself is in continuous movement, and produces traces which can themselves serve as tools. In Deleuze and Guattari’s words, the hand should not be considered as a simple organ, but as a code, a dynamic structure (Deleuze and Guattari 1980, 79).

‘To connect oneself directly totally on the brush, to forget both the self and the brush. What is the ultimate purpose of a perfect tool such as the calligraphic brush? It was not conceived as a source of successful aesthetic products, but as an access to virtuosity. The brush is hybrid to our flesh, along with the scent of ink, and the silken membrane. They form ‘treasures’, precious appendixes, or immortal organs.’ (Wei 2012)

In the long term, as the project extends over several years, the interaction between the two calligraphers gained in depth and finesse and a common language was approached, in an asymptotic fashion (**Fig.15**). This secret language proceeded by a constant and formed its own sub-system (Deleuze and Guattari 1980, 123), fed by the existing system of variation provided by calligraphic shapes. An essential difference between Biface Graphy and traditional calligraphy is of course the unreadable quality of the script. Chinese calligraphers make up a mental image of the graph to come and its position in the pictorial space before the act of writing, while Biface Graphy relies on a prior contract between two authors. Such contract is closer to exercises of spirit writing, divination or forms of talismanic writing, than to historically contingent ideographic writing. In the divination process, there is a question, an answer, and a third part that is played by nature’s entropic processes. To our eyes, the braid-like structure of Biface Graphy was eminently recognizable. But at first sight, without being backed up by an apparent writing process, the scrolls risked to appear as any abstract ink painting.



15. Evolution of Biface Graphy between the years 2009 and 2013.

Seeking for ways to tie together Seng An’s epigraphy and Biface Graphy, we widened our collaborative duo to include anthropologist Françoise Lauwaert and photographer and filmmaker Marie-Francoise Plissart. Plissart, known for her architecture and landscape photography, had started with the roman-photo format, building up or rather deconstructing narratives between figures and locations (Derrida and Plissart 1985). When faced with our work, she immediately proposed to film it, and the movie, which started with just the single writing session, extended to our fieldwork in the mountains of Shandong, on the tracks of

Seng An. Archaeological fieldwork was an essential trigger in bringing our project outdoors, but the intervention of a photographer/film maker further required us to animate the scrolls. A further step was needed to bridge the writing performance to the scrolls, and Biface Graphy to the work of Seng An Daoyi.

### *Open Scroll*

A second step taken by the collaborative duo was to spatialize the resulting scrolls in their full scale. Through a series of installations which we called 'Open Scroll', Biface Graphy exit the literati's studio enclosed universe and invaded man-made architectures and open air landscapes. Hundreds of meters of soft silken scrolls were displayed outdoors, far from the two-dimensional surface of traditional calligraphy.

The first Open Scroll installation was set in Xijiang, the 'thousand families Miao village' (*Qianhu Miaozhai* 千戶苗寨) (**Fig.16**). The village is a model ethnic minority village where more than a thousand wooden houses are nested in a concave valley, densely fitted in between the river on the bottom and the mountain summit on top. The local authorities have enclosed the complex and built a few squares with sculptures evoking local beliefs. We negotiated with the Miao builder and pater familias of a wooden house to replace by our scrolls the 20 meters long propitiatory writing usually hung from the roof when placing of the main beam. The installation also coincided with the *Chiguzang* (吃鼓藏, literally: eat-drum-concealed/interior), a sacrifice celebrated every cycle of 12 years. *Chiguzang* is a Miao lineage's most important religious feast. The totemic animal of the lineage is celebrated every twelve years of the zodiacal cycle. Every family is expected to sacrifice one ox per capita, which means a few thousand victims for a whole village. The habit has been restored in the eighties, after the Cultural Revolution years, but ox have been replaced by pigs. Our installation had to be dismantled after a couple of hours, as the visual effect of the long white scrolls was not planned in the programme of officially allowed rituals on the occasion of *Chiguzang*.

The second Open Scroll was set in Bishan, in a Qing dynasty temple of Confucius (*wenmiao* 文廟, lit. 'Temple of Literature'), which has been transformed into a teahouse after the Cultural Revolution (**Fig.17**). The impressive architecture, entirely made of wood, has roof openings that allow wind and natural light inside the building: its beams and columns used to be covered in huge wooden panels with carved calligraphy. We used the original nails were the panels once stood to hang our scrolls. We discussed with the local opera group to be allowed to display the scrolls during one of their weekly shows. The poker players, who paid little attention to the on-going theatre play, also completely ignored our monumental scrolls.

These two sites both preserved integral traditional architectures despite their reconversion into public spaces or touristic attractions. Facing 'ruins of rituals', we felt encouraged to participate in them and restore their connection to monumental writing.

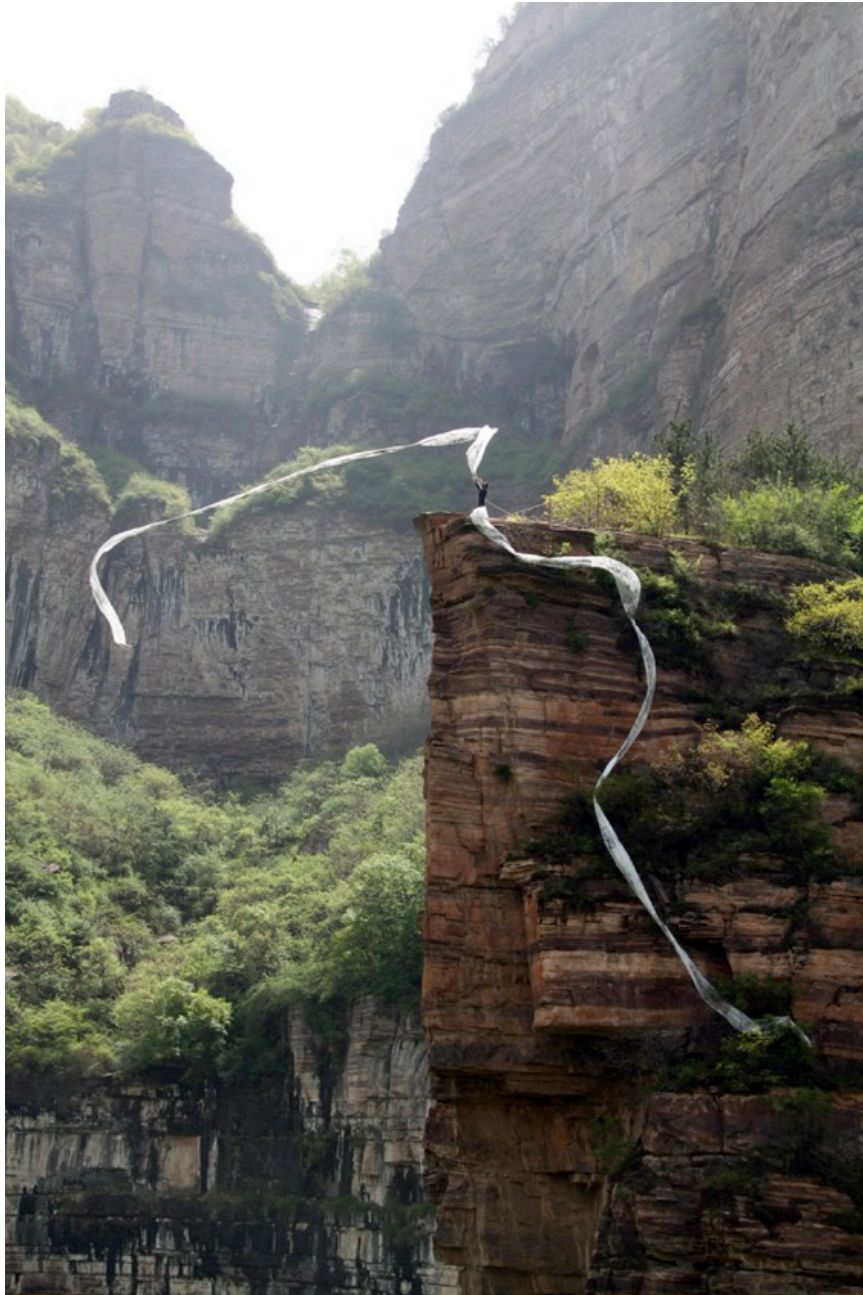


**16. Open Scroll in Xijiang town, Guizhou province. 2011.**



**17. Open Scroll in Bishan town, Chongqing municipality. 2011.**

The following Open Scrolls were located in landscapes that we felt were deeply connected with the tradition of ink painting. In Yangshuo, Guangxi province (2012), the scrolls were opened in a famous karstic landscape on the banks of the Li River interpreted by generations of painters. In the Taihang mountains, among the cliffs were the 'texture stroke' brushwork technique was first invented by the recluse Jing Hao (荆浩 855-915 CE), we took advantage of an ascending air current to open our scrolls vertically (**Fig.18**). The texture stroke technique uses the side rather than the tip of the calligraphic brush to express the shapes of nature. The cliffs of Linzhou are told to have inspired the technique with their black-coloured vertical stripes produced by water infiltration in the rock. In its full length, the hand-held scroll confronted a tiny silhouette to the previously invisible air stream.



18. Open scroll in Linzhou county, Henan province. 2012.

In Jinshanling, we were offered to work on a 2 km section of the Great Wall. To match these gigantic proportions, where even our 100 meters scrolls seemed derisory. Our strategy was to occupy a watchtower, which have deep holes where banners or flags used to be fixed in. The installation had to be torn down after an hour as Chinese visitors complained that the white banners evoked a gigantic funeral, white colour being traditionally associated with mourning in Chinese culture. On the second day, we chose a spot where the Wall diverged into a Y-shaped crossroads, connecting the diverging sections of the Wall by extending our scrolls horizontally (**Fig.19**).



**19. Open Scroll in Jinshanling, Hebei province. 2013.**

Open Scroll also took over urban margins (Yiweijing, Chongqing city), industrial spaces (Chengdu Biennale 2012) and historical buildings outside China such as the Arsenale and the Gran Viale in Lido Island in Venice, Italy (Laguna Price 2012).

As detailed above, the Biface Graphy project acted on three scales:

- The brushes and strokes, perceived as extensions of our hand.
- The scroll itself, framed by the size of our bodies and endlessly multiplied by the 'writing machine'.
- Space and the landscape, which animated the strokes and scrolls through light and wind and sometimes, an audience.

The Biface Graphy project unfolded the writing act in shared authorship, in several dimensions and at several scales. The results were a gradual construction of an intersubjective language, and of a corpus of scrolls, which refer to one another and draw intertextual relations between sites.

## CONCLUSION

Calligraphy holds together a spectrum of activities that correspond to the literati habitus. To re-gain this holistic vision in Contemporary Ink Art, our collaborative artistic projects aimed at solving the divorce between matter and sign, and at re-creating an intersubjective notion of authorship. The figure of Seng An Daoyi appeared as the perfect hybrid between literati and craftsman, blending the best of each domain. Looking at his work felt as though technical constraints and the shapes of nature opened the way to textual experiments, and as though spiritual issues pushed the monk beyond the sculptural production of his time. Moreover, each of the monk's projects had a different relation to the social and political structures of his time. Some were probably discussed with other donators (Mount Ergu) or part of a bigger scale demand (Northern Mount Xiangtang, Mount Zhonghuang), and others relied essentially on his personal choices (Mount Hongding). These different levels of contingency were an incentive to open the bifaced scrolls, from the studio to architectural spaces, urban margins, and outdoor cliffs.

The contribution of the monk's figure into the artistic project is evident, but how did the latter contribute to our understanding of Seng An Daoyi? In a way, Biface Graphy recruited the monk as a potential Past to refer to, and the opportunity to give an original definition of a tradition. The art of calligraphy relies on the interpretation of transmitted models, a subtle game with conventions, but Seng An provided us with an abrupt break where contemporary practice could burst in. In turn, our study was committed to point at the singularity of the monk and his epigraphic work. Existing studies on the work of Seng An consider important aspects of his writing and provide accurate documentation about the cliffs and the texts (Lu and Jung 2006, Harrist 2008, Wenzel 2011, Tsai 2012, Ledderose 2013, Wang and Ledderose 2014). But it is the radical aspect of his work, his very absence from art historical debate until the late 90s, and his paradoxical position as a writer being excluded from written history that appealed to us. In a way, Seng An's work is of as a destabilizing power. It deconstructs logical thought itself, produces an aesthetic unacceptable by his time's standards, operates its own translation of Buddhist concepts into a visual language, invents names for Buddhist divinities and above all, pushes forward his own exceptionally strong individual identity. Such a character shows that idealistic attempts have always existed along the mainstream tradition. Not only is his work at the fringes of history, but it is also located in a movement of intense intercultural exchange, of which the spread of Buddhism is only one aspect, happening in the Northern Dynasties.

The artistic project had its impact on research methodology, survey and research outputs. Biface Graphy expanded across various artistic disciplines: ink painting, performance, installation and land art. The cross-disciplinary in the ink art project responded to the holistic aspect of the monk's work, but it also diversified our approach to the sources, methods and theoretical frameworks used in academic research. The study combined the use of rubbings, field survey and textual interpretation, and drew theoretical threads from different horizon, from Palaeolithic parietal art to Taoist talismanic writing. In turn, the long life of the artistic project was given a rhythm by the deadlines and calendar of academic research. Culturally specific ways to build bridges between archaeology and art were explored by identifying

ourselves with the monk, rubbing and replicating past gestures and reviving a lost tradition. This attitude relates strongly to Chinese antiquarian ideals and what could be called the affective dimension of archaeology (Wei and Griffiths 2018, Griffiths and Wei 2018).

Rubbing is one example of antiquarian technique that brought us closer to the site. The technique of rubbing consists in applying a sheet of paper with longer and more resisting fibers to the rocky surface of a cliff, stele or even small seal stone, to then ink the sheet, and take a life-size copy of the rubbed surface, intaglio lines becoming white, and relief parts, black. Obviously, while deep intaglio is totally white and high relief, black, there is a whole realm of in-betweenness where the middle grounds, low relief and smooth concavities can only be expressed in shades of grey. Rubbing is thus extremely interpretative, although it carries a 'superstition of accuracy' (Segalen 1917, 11). Rubbing also pushes the antiquarian to dwell in the space he is visiting, to retrace the gestures of past carvers by inking the paper with similar rhythms and amplitudes, to look after the sensitive and fragile membrane of paper, to judge from the relative humidity of air, and to react when necessary and readily detach the paper from the rocky surface. It is a true haptic exercise, where one blindly focuses on texture, depth of relief, sharpness of incisions, and where the intensity of rubbing gestures is scaled on the size and roughness of the carving underneath.

When looking at the monk's 20 years of activity in a walkable landscape, the opportunistic aesthetic he maintained, adaptable to every new site and audience, we felt that a human scale was reintroduced in the landscape, the scale of sensorial experience and intentionality.

## Bibliography

- Allan, Sarah. 1991. *The Shape of the Turtle: Myth, Art, and Cosmos in Early China*. State University of New York Press.
- Barton D. and Uta Papen. 2010. 'What is the Anthropology of Writing?'. In Uta Papen (Ed.). *The Anthropology of Writing: Understanding Textually Mediated Worlds*. Continuum: 3-32.
- Baryosher-Chemouny Muriel. 1996. *La Quête de l'Immortalité en Chine. Alchimie et Paysage Intérieur sous Les Song*. Editions Dervy.
- Bell, Catherine. 1988. 'Ritualization of Texts and Textualization of Ritual in the Codification of Taoist Liturgy'. *History of Religions* 27(4): 366-392.
- Betty, L. Stafford. 1983. 'Nāgārjuna's Masterpiece: Logical, Mystical, Both, or Neither?'. *Philosophy East and West* 33 (2): 123–138.
- Billeter, Jean François. 1990. *The Chinese Art of Writing*. Skira.
- Bokenkamp, Stephen R. (2008) 2010. 'Word as Relic in Medieval Daoism'. In Steven R. Bokenkamp, E. A. Robertson, and J. Jahner (Eds.). *From the Buddha's Belly to St. Brigit's Head: sacred and devotional objects East/West*. Palgrave Macmillan: 21-36.
- Campany, Robert Ford. 1991. 'Notes on the Devotional Uses and Symbolic Functions of Sūtra Texts as Depicted in Early Chinese Buddhist Miracle Tales and Hagiographies'. *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 14: 28-72.
- Chenivresse, Sandrine. 1996. 'Écrit Démonifuge et Territorialité de la Mort en Chine: Étude Anthropologique du Lien'. *L'Homme*: 61-86.
- Copp, Paul. 2008. 'Notes on the Term 'Dhāranī' in Medieval Chinese Buddhist Thought'. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 71(3): 493-508.
- Deleuze and Guattari. 1980. *Mille Plateaux: Capitalisme et Schizophrénie 2*. Editions de Minuit.
- Derrida, Jacques, and Marie-Françoise Plissart. 1985. *Droit de Regards*. Éditions de Minuit.
- Dongping 2006. Shandong sheng shikeyishu bowuguan, Deguo haidebao xueshuyuan (Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften), Zhongguo shehuikexueyuan shijiezongjiao yanjiusuo 山东省石刻艺术博物馆, 德国海德堡学术院, 中国社会科学院世界宗教研究所. Shangdong Dongping Hongdingshan moyakejing kao 山东东平洪顶山摩崖刻经考. *Wenwu* 文物(12): 89.
- Eichman, Shawn. 2000. 'The Art of Taoist Scriptures'. *Orientalia* 31(10): 36-44.
- Falkenhausen, Lothar Von 2015. 'Antiquarianism in China and Europe: Reflections on Momigliano'. In Qian Suoqiao (Ed.) *Cross-cultural Studies: China and the World. A Festschrift in Honor of Professor Zhang Longxi*. Brill: 125-151 .
- Fletcher, Roland. 1989. 'The Messages of Material Behaviour: a Preliminary Discussion of Non-Verbal Meaning'. In Ian Hodder (Ed.). *The Meanings of Things: Material Culture and Symbolic Expression*. Unwin Hyman.

- Fraenkel, B. 2010. 'Writing Acts: When Writing is Doing'. In Uta Papen (Ed.). *The Anthropology of Writing: Understanding Textually Mediated Worlds*. Continuum: 33-46.
- Frank, Bernard (1986)1988. 'Vacuité Et Corps Actualisé: Le Problème de la Présence des "Personages Vénérés" dans leurs Images selon la Tradition du Bouddhisme Japonais'. *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 11(2): 53-86.
- Garrett, Mary M. 1997. 'Chinese Buddhist Religious Disputation'. *Argumentation* 11(2): 195-209.
- Goody, Jack. 2000. *The Power of the Written Tradition*. Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Griffiths, Rupert and Lia Wei. 2018 (in press). 'Tunnelling between Landscape and Artefact: An Itinerary of Points and Vectors'. In Krystallia Kamvasinou and Ben Stringer, Ben (Eds.). *Reimagining Rurality*. ORO Editions.
- Harrison, Randall P. 1989. 'Nonverbal Communication'. In Sarah Sanderson King (Ed.). *Human Communication as a Field of Studies : Selected Contemporary Views*. State University of New York Press: 113-150.
- Harrist Jr, Robert E. 2008. *The Landscape of Words: Stone Inscriptions from Early and Medieval China*. University of Washington Press.
- Hay, Jonh 1994. 'Boundaries and Surfaces of Self and Desire'. In John Hay (Ed.). *Boundaries in China*. Reaktion Books: 124-170.
- Huang, Shih-shan (Susan). 2012. *Picturing the True Form: Daoist Visual Culture in Traditional China*. Harvard University Press.
- Lagerwey, John. 1987. *Taoist Ritual in Chinese Society and History*. MacMillian.
- Lai Fei 赖非. 2003. *Seng An kejing kaoshu 僧安刻经考述*. Beichao moya kejing yanjiu 北朝摩崖刻经研究 Vol.2. Qilu shushe 齐鲁书社.
- Ledderose, Lothar. 1979. *Mi Fu and the Classical Tradition of Chinese Calligraphy*. Princeton University Press.
- Ledderose, Lothar. 2013. 'Scaling the Cliffs'. *Orientalia* 44 (1): 51–58.
- Lu Dadong and Lis Jung Lu. 2006. 'Da Kong Wang Fo yu feibaishu 大空王佛與飛白書'. In *Beichao moya kejing yanjiu 北朝摩崖刻经研究*. Vol 3:192-220.
- Mc Mahan, D.L. 2002. *Empty Vision: Metaphor and Visionary Imagery in Mahayana Buddhism*. Routledge Curzon.
- Nāgārjuna 2002. *Stances Du Milieu Par excellence (Madhyamaka-Kārikās)*. Translated by Guy Bugault. Gallimard.
- Nylan Michael. 1999. 'Calligraphy, the Sacred Text and Test of Culture'. In Cary Y Liu, Dora C.Y. Ching and Judith G. Smith (Eds.). *Character and Context in Chinese Calligraphy*. The Art Museum, Princeton University: 16-77.
- Orzech, Charles D. 1996. 'Maṇḍalas on the Move: Reflections from Chinese Esoteric Buddhism Circa 800 CE'. *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 19(2): 209-44.
- Parker, Samuel K. 2001. 'Unfinished Work at Mamallapuram or, What is an Indian Art Object?' *Artibus Asiae* 61(1): 53–75.
- Powell, Kenneth James. 2002. 'Toward a Mādhyamaka Historiography: Buddhist non-Essentialism and the Study of Religion'. *Contemporary Buddhism* 3(1): 81-92.

- Reder, Stephen. 1994. 'Practice Engagement Theory: A Sociocultural Approach to Literacy across Languages and Cultures'. In Arnulfo G. Ramirez, Bernardo M. Ferdman (Eds.) *Literacy across Languages and Cultures*: 33-74.
- Ren Ping and Fang Ailong 任平, 方爱龙. 2000. Zhongguo shufa quanji 中国書法全集 40. Rongbaozhai 榮寶齋.
- Robinson, Richard H. 1972. 'Did Nāgārjuna Really Refute All Philosophical Views?'. *Philosophy East and West* 22(3): 325-331.
- Scholem, Gershom (1960) 2001. Translated by Anna Solmi. *La Kabbalah e il suo Simbolismo*. Giulio Einaudi.
- Segalen, Victor, Gilbert des Voisins et Jean Lartigue. 1917. Mission Archéologique en Chine (1914). L'Art Funéraire à l'époque des Han. Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner.
- Sharf, Robert H. 1999. 'On the Allure of Buddhist Relics'. *Representations* 66: 75–99.
- Srinivasan, Doris Meth. 1990. 'From Transcendancy to Materiality: Para Śiva, Sadāśiva, and Maheśa in Indian Art'. *Artibus Asiae* 50 (1/2): 108-42.
- Studevent-Hickman. 'Directionality and Alignment in the Cuneiform and Chinese Scripts' (draft). The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.
- Tsai Sueyling. 2012. 'A Cosmology of Buddha Names on Mount Hongding, Dongping, Shandong'. In Burglind Jungmann, Adele Schlombs and Melanie Trede (Eds.). *Shifting Paradigms in East Asian Visual Culture: A Festschrift in Honour of Lothar Ledderose*. Dietrich Reimer Verlag.
- Tsiang, Katherine R. 1996. '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 (3/4): 233-261.
- Wang Yongbo and Lothar Ledderose (Eds). 2014. Buddhist Stone Sutras in China. Shandong 1. Harrassowitz Verlag.
- Wei, Lia. 2012. Biface Graphy Records. Discourse at the occasion of the Chengdu Biennale.
- Wei, Lia and Zhang Qiang 張強 2009, Biface Graphy Manifesto. Written at the occasion of the Europalia China Exhibit in Brussels.
- Wei, Lia and Rupert Griffiths. 2018 (in press). 'Reverse Archaeology: Experiments in Carving and Casting Space'. *Journal of Contemporary Archaeology*.
- Wenzel, Claudia. 2011. 'The Image of the Buddha: Buddha Icons and Aniconic Traditions in India and China'. *Transcultural Studies* (1): 263-305. <http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/ojs/index.php/transcultural/article/view/1938/2964> (accessed on 2013-09-23).
- Williams, Joanna. 1970. An Unfinished Chaitya Hall: Junnar, Manmodi 39. *Ars Orientalis* 7(1): 185-190.
- Zhang Qiang 張強 and Lia Wei. 2010. Biface Graphy I. 雙面書法：水墨如何被抽象. *Chongqing chubanshe* 重慶出版社.
- Zhang Qiang 張強 and Lia Wei. 2011. Biface Graphy II. 雙面書法：水墨如何被抽象. *Chongqing chubanshe* 重慶出版社.
- Zhang Qiang 張強 and Lia Wei. 2011(A). '大空王佛—書法史邏輯語境之中的僧安道壹 (Replacing Seng An Daoyi in the History of Calligraphy)'. *Zhongguo yishu* 中國藝術 (2): 16-23.

- Zhang Qiang 張強 and Lia Wei. 2011(B). '安公之碑—一个佛教大沙門的文本分析 (The Stele Inscription of Master An)'. *Taishan xueyuan xuebao* 泰山學院學報 33(4): 7-15.
- Zhang Qiang 張強 and Lia Wei. 2011(C). '文本之外—僧安道壹佛名书刊方式及其意图探讨 (Beyond Text : Carving Technique and Iconography in the Buddha Names Carved by Seng An Daoyi)'. *Zhongguo yishu* 中國藝術 (3): 110-115.
- Zhang Qiang 張強 and Lia Wei. 2017. 大空王佛—僧安道一与北朝視覺文化 (Great Emptiness King Buddha: Seng An and the Visual Culture of the Northern Dynasties). *Wenwu chubanshe* 文物出版社.
- Zürcher, Erik. 1980. 'Buddhist Influence on Early Taoism: A Survey of Scriptural Evidence'. *T'oung Pao* 66(1/3): 84-147.