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SINOGRAPHIC FORAYS INTO THE EPIVERSE

Lia Wei, Manuel Sassmann

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CONFERENCE REPORT:

SINOGRAPHIC FORAYS INTO THE EPIVERSE

ARPENTER UN PAYSAGE INSCRIT

游槃 · 石刻 · 文字 · 山水

OCTOBER 15–16, 2024

INSTITUT NATIONAL DES LANGUES ET CIVILISATIONS ORIENTALES, PARIS

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Lia Wei and Manuel Sassmann

Abstract

The “Sinographic Forays into the Epiverse” conference, held at INALCO Paris in October 2024, brought together scholars of epigraphic cultures in East Asia from different branches of the social sciences and humanities. The event aimed to foster collaboration and define new research paths on stone inscriptions and inscribed landscapes. Ultimately, the goal was to improve understanding of these artifacts and their historical and cultural significance and to share methodological reflections across the diverse disciplines the invited scholars represented.

The notion of the Epiverse conveys the idea of an interdisciplinary research field aimed at a holistic study of the epigraphic fact. As a systematic tool, it aligns with an ontology based on the act of inscribing and the relations it weaves among objects, places, persons, and time. Inscribed landscapes, for example, are part of the Epiverse, where specific physical contexts and writing supports, along with various forms of writing and modes of reproduction and circulation, challenge the limits of existing approaches to Chinese epigraphy.

The conference was set against the backdrop of the ALTERGRAPHY project’s research on medieval inscribed landscapes in Shandong province. Framing the conference, an exhibition showcased the first fieldwork campaign of the project. It offered a tangible representation of the project’s research on inscribed landscapes. Complementing the theme, Sakata Genshō delivered the keynote lecture, reflecting on his lifelong dedication to the inscriptions on the four mountains. He shared his experiences visiting the sites in the early 1980s. He discussed the changes he has witnessed over time, emphasizing the importance of fieldwork and the enduring allure of these inscriptions.

Eight roundtables explored diverse facets of epigraphic research, from the use of digital tools and collaborative platforms to the challenges of describing calligraphic variation and style, the relationship between inscriptions and space, the dissemination and changing access to epigraphic knowledge over time, the transformation of mountains in China, the role of epigraphy in shaping individual and collective identities, the challenges of preserving epigraphic heritage, and the need for new methodologies to study the sensorial aspects of stone inscriptions and their reproductions.

This report summarizes the conference to facilitate further reflections on its key themes.

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INTRODUCTION

Concluding the first year of the project “ALTERGRAPHY — When Writing Becomes Calligraphy: An Alternative History of Chinese Script Based on Medieval Inscribed Landscapes and their Modern Reception” (2023–2027)¹, the project’s PI Lia Wei and her team of students from the Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales (INALCO) in Paris organized the “Sinographic Forays into the Epiverse”² conference together with Manuel Sassmann from the “Buddhist Stone Sutras in China” project (Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften), which was held from October 15 to 16, 2024, at INALCO. It featured eight roundtable discussions that explored the rich cultural history of epigraphy in East Asia, aiming to facilitate collaborations and define research paths on stone inscriptions and inscribed landscapes. Framed by an exhibition and a keynote lecture, the experimental format encouraged dialogue among scholars from diverse disciplinary backgrounds.

The **exhibition** “Sculpter les nuages, la montagne enlacée”³ on view from October 9 to 30, was based on the experiences and results of the first fieldwork campaign of the ALTERGRAPHY project in September 2024 in the four mountains in Shandong Province in north-east China inscribed by Zheng Daozhao 鄭道昭 (455–516) between 511 and 516 CE, which form a significant part of the corpus analyzed in the project. Lia Wei and her team of students designed and mounted the exhibition in the gallery adjacent to the conference venue and the accompanying website⁴. It invited the public to discover the project, its corpus, and the research stages using various sources: original prints, archive photographs, and study models of mountains made of cardboard and paper-mâché. The tour begins with the biography of Zheng Daozhao and visits his four inscribed landscapes one by one. The public was invited to observe these inscriptions in mountainous environments through the eyes of their producers in the 6th century and successive visitors–travelers, religious figures, and antique dealers–at different times in the reception. The itinerary ended with a “Manifesto for the Death of the Calligrapher” questioning the construction of Zheng Daozhao as an eminent calligrapher in the Chinese antiquarian tradition. The project members were also seen in action during fieldwork in the first footage screening of a movie project, *Arpenter un paysage inscrit*, by the filmmaker Marie-Françoise Plissart, who accompanied them during their preparations and in the field in China⁵.

¹ For more information on the project, see the project blog <https://altergraphy.hypotheses.org/>.

² The French and the Chinese parallel titles, “Arpenter un paysage inscrit” (Surveying and ascending an inscribed landscape) and “游槃石刻·文字山水” (Roaming around carved stones in a landscape of words), highlight the focus on experiencing inscriptions in their spatial context. We thank for Prof. Zhang Qiang for his help with the Chinese throughout the conference.

³ The Chinese title of the exhibition, “觸石吐雲” (From the friction of rocks spring out clouds), is an excerpt from the first lines of the Inscription of Tianzhushan 天柱山銘 (TSZ5) by Zheng Shuzu 鄭述祖.

⁴ The students are marked in the list of participants below with an asterisk (*). The website <https://altergraphy.hypotheses.org/1213> links a series of English language posts provide a detailed online version of the exhibition, which only displays French language texts and adopts different genres of creative writing. For the French announcement of the conference, see <https://www.inalco.fr/evenements/sculpter-les-nuages-la-montagne-enlacee>.

⁵ For an introduction to the film project and the film maker, see <https://altergraphy.hypotheses.org/2467>. A second post details the on-going process of logging and cutting successive “episodes” of the film, see <https://altergraphy.hypotheses.org/4138>.

Sakata Genshō 坂田玄翔 delivered the **keynote lecture**, a reminiscence of his lifelong dedication to the inscriptions on the four mountains and the basic research questions that have been driving him. He is one of its foremost experts and the author of the first comprehensive monograph about the four mountains inscribed by Zheng Daozhao. As a pioneer, he was among the first to visit the sites in the early 1980s. Over the years, he has gathered a valuable corpus of contextual photographs. They document how the sites changed over time, with the addition of paths and pavilions and the occasional displacement or loss of an inscription. The ALTERGRAPHY project will inherit this legacy and host a broad selection of digitized images from his archive⁶.

The conference and the exhibition aimed to showcase how inscriptions can open up a world far beyond their chisel marks on the stone surface. In eight roundtables, scholars with diverse disciplinary backgrounds from China, Korea, Japan, France, Germany, and Italy attempted together to chart the Epiverse by striding out the multiple dimensions of epigraphy from the sinographic sphere in time and space, both physical and imaginary. Attendees prepared their answers to the eight themes and questions so that each session functions like a roundtable rather than a series of conventional speeches. In each session, two scholars presented a few slides of their material as related to the themes (10 to 15 mins), and one or two discussants commented on the presentations and submitted answers to the sessions' questions (15 min), followed by an open roundtable where all participants can join the conversation (30 min). With the experimental format of this conference, the organizers aimed to facilitate present and future collaborations in the field and define common research paths on stone inscriptions and inscribed landscapes.

The following participants were present at the conference (in alphabetical order): *Ashikari Kento 芦刈健人 (Kyōto University), Estelle Bauer (Inalco/IFRAE and Musée Guimet), *Francesca Berdin 白鳳榮 (Inalco), Michela Bussotti (EFEO/CCJ), *Killian Cahier 耿良 (Inalco), Hilde De Weerd 魏希德 (KU Leuven), Yolaine Escande 幽蘭 (CNRS/CRAL/EHESS), Thomas Hahn 韓濤 (UC Berkeley), Michael Hatch 何彦暉 (Trinity College), Shao-Lan Hertel 何小蘭 (Cologne East Asian Art Museum), *Anna Le Menach 林紫溪 (Inalco), Lee Sunkyū 李善圭 (KU Leuven), Lei Yang 雷楊 (Inalco/IFRAE/CRCAO) Li Ziyi 李子怡 (China Academy of Art), Jonathan Pettit 裴玄錚 (University of Hawaii), Marie-Françoise Plissart, Sakata Genshō 坂田玄翔, Shi Tianyu 施天宇 (Hamburg University), Shin Jeongsoo 申正秀 - 신정수 (Academy of Korean Studies), *Paula Suméra 蘇美若 (Inalco/IFRAE), *Tchou-Tchou Tophoven 饒楚楚 (Inalco), Yan Weitian 閻緯天 (Indiana University), Aida Yuen Wong 阮圓 (Brandeis University), Xue Lei 薛磊 (Oregon State University), Zhang Qiang 張強 (Sichuan Fine Arts Institute), Zhang Rui 張蕊 (Inalco/IFRAE). For short biographical notes, see Appendix 2.

⁶ In the first step of construction of the archive, M. Sakata has provided scans of 1125 photographs taken between 1981 and 1994. Several interviews conducted by Ashikari Kento (March to September 2024) and Lia Wei (October 2024) are in the process of being transcribed.

1 KEYNOTE BY SAKATA GENSHŌ ON “ZHENG DAOZHAO AND THE FOUR MOUNTAINS”

Consecutive translation by Kento Ashikari and a discussion moderated by Estelle Bauer

Mr. Sakata started his lecture with a personal note on how he became interested in China and cliff carvings. After his uncle's graduation trip journal sparked his curiosity, he wanted to visit China in 1966. Still, he could not go there because the Cultural Revolution had just started, and it was impossible to get a tourist visa. He was among the few allowed to go directly after China encouraged foreign tourism in 1972 [in the wake of Nixon's visit to China early this year], when he visited for 30 days, during which he mainly investigated steles and cliff carvings. Later in his talk, he shared anecdotes about meeting the two Japanese scholars Nakamura Sodō 中村素堂 and Michibata Ryoshu 道端良秀 in the 1990s, who visited the Four Mountains before their opening, recounting their surprise at him having returned safely from Shandong, believing it to be a dangerous place for Japanese people.

Sakata's motivation to see the objects stemmed mainly from his dissatisfaction with rubbings that lack the three-dimensional aspect of stone carvings. He also doubted the accuracy of antiquarian reports. His motto was to believe only in what he has seen with his own eyes. He noticed a lacuna in research literature explaining in detail the relation of Zheng Daozhao to the inscriptions on the Four Mountains and their unique placement in the landscape.

Researching historical information about Zheng Daozhao and his place in the Northern Wei aristocracy, he noted the few instances of historical records and epitaphs compendia, as well as the primarily negative image describing the Zheng family as corrupt and stingy. To understand the motivations behind why Zheng decided to create cliff carvings, he sketched his role in court politics. After Zheng had requested in vain three times to restore the Imperial Academy during the reign of Emperor Xuanwu (500–515), he must have been disappointed. He might have turned to Daoism to distance himself from Xuanwu's inclinations toward Buddhism. Fearing official persecution, he probably chose not to produce conventional steles but turned to cliff inscriptions instead, possibly to deny responsibility when held responsible. Sakata speculated that Zheng, as a local official, did good things for the people under his jurisdiction; otherwise, those inscriptions would have been destroyed afterward.

Despite being cliff inscriptions, Sakata noted the terminology of Zheng's inscriptions for his father, named “Upper Stele” 上碑 and “Lower Stele” 下碑, and the layout following a conventional stele with head, body, and base. The conventions of the text were close to epitaphs or memorial steles (Ch. merit and virtue steles 功德碑; Jp. virtue-extolling steles 彰德碑 and achievement-commemorating steles 顯彰碑). He further noted the different ways of writing the father's courtesy name, explaining it as the use of family taboo characters 家諱. From the absence of a signature here, it is inferred that they were probably not written by Zheng Daozhao himself.

Sakata recounted how he has first presented on the topic of who were the authors and calligraphers of the cliff inscriptions at the first conference on the subject in 1984, organized by the Chinese scholars from the Shandong Stone Carving Art Museum, Wang Sili and Lai Fei. Besides the taboo characters, the lack of a signature, and the fact that it

was unusual for a son to write the text for a virtue-extolling stele for his father, Sakata turned to the question of how an analysis of calligraphy could contribute to the problem of Zheng Daozhao's authorship. He pointed to the inconsistencies in writing the character 榮, suggested comparing distinct ways of writing 雲, particular stylistic traits of different inscriptions, and the variations of the arrangement of strokes in the signature of his name. With these arguments, Sakata could question the credibility of the writings of Qing Dynasty epigraphers who almost unequivocally named Zheng Daozhao as the calligrapher and praised his style.

The next topic was how cliff carvings were treated in the Japanese calligraphy world. He began with Yang Shoujing's visit to Japan in the 1980s and his collection of thousands of rubbings that circulated in Japan after he traded them. He noted the influence on figures like Kusakabe Meikaku 日下部鳴鶴 and the development of the Stele Calligraphy School in Japan. He criticized that scholars in Japan, including textbook accounts, still cling to attributing the inscriptions to the big name of Zheng Daozhao, despite the compelling arguments against this view.

The last part of the lecture concluded with a discussion on managing the sites and how they transformed them. During the late Qing and Republican era, making rubbing was a lucrative business, with one rubbing costing about 5% of the average monthly salary. He compared the sloppy execution of early commercial rubbings to the high-quality rubbings made by the Stone Carving Art Museum researchers in the late 1980s. He noted the changes to the sites, such as pavilions for protection and cement for reinforcement, that altered the sites' appearances, which he could witness and document during his many visits.

Sakata ended by sharing his enduring fascination with the Four Mountains, emphasizing the need for further research, which he hopes will be carried out by younger scholars.

2 WELCOME ADDRESS

The first day commenced with Lia Wei's **launching** of the conference by thanking the French National Research Agency (ANR) for the generous financial support of the project that made the conference possible, the laboratory of The French Research Institute on East Asia (IFRAE) as an intellectual home for the ALTERGRAPHY project, and INALCO for making its premises available for the conference and the exhibition, again, having already hosted an exhibition and a study on the practices of rubbings in China in March 2023⁷. After highlighting the experimental format of the event, she thanked participants for engaging with a broad range of themes and preparing their material in advance to facilitate the flow of ideas and experiences. She left the word to the co-organizer Manuel Sassmann, with whom she has been collaborating since the application phase of the ALTERGRAPHY project, sharing the common approach to epigraphic culture

⁷ For the exhibition "Pratique de l'estampage en Chine : images et objets inscrits" was on display from March 6 to 30, 2023, with links to related material, see <https://www.inalco.fr/actualites/exposition-pratique-de-lestampage-en-chine-images-et-objets-inscrits-du-6-au-30-mars>. For the program of the study day "Pratique de l'estampage en Chine: matérialité, transmission, réception", organized by Michael Bussotti and Lia Wei held on March 29, see <https://ifrae.cnrs.fr/pratique-de-lestampage-en-chine-materialite-transmission-reception/>.

by paying attention to both the inscriptions in their original context as well as the reception history.

In his **welcome address**, Manuel Sassmann began by emphasizing the collaborative spirit uniting scholars across generations and disciplines in exploring East Asian inscriptional culture. He retraced the path leading to this conference from the roundtable “Documenting Inscriptions in China: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives” at the AAS-in-Asia 2023 (June 24 to 27, Kyungpook National University, Daegu, South Korea) and the “2023 International Conference of Epigraphic Culture in East Asia / 2023 東亞石刻文化國際研討會 (June 28 and 29 at the Center for Cross-cultural Studies, Academy of Korean Studies 韓國學中央研究院, and the Institute for Sinographic Literatures and Philology, Korea University 漢字漢文研究所, Seoul, South Korea), where participants of the present conference (Hatch, Sassmann, Shin, Wei, Xue, Yan) agreed on continuing the fruitful exchange of ideas in future events. Encounters at the AAS 2024 (March 14 to 17, Seattle)⁸, which Sassmann and Wei both attended, brought new participants into the discussion, which are represented in the roundtables designed for this Parisian event, and also for the following planned workshops in November and December 2024, themed on late imperial epigraphic sources⁹ and Daoist epigraphy¹⁰. This evolution underscored the conference’s central goal: to transcend the traditional limits of epigraphic studies and explore inscriptions’ reception and research history, enriching our understanding of their enduring cultural significance.

The organizers paid special attention to including a broad spectrum of participants, from experienced scholars and emerging academics to student interns present at the event, aiming to develop a vibrant intellectual community. In his talk, Sassmann acknowledged the presence of the senior scholars Mr. Sakata, a lifelong enthusiast of early medieval Daoist inscriptions, and Thomas Hahn, a pioneer in fieldwork focused on Daoist mountains, recognizing their significant contributions to the field based on visits to the inscription sites since the early 1980s.

The address championed the role of fieldwork, not merely as a dry academic pursuit but as an immersive experience that resonated with the passions of epigraphers throughout history. Sassmann invoked the evocative image of travelers approaching sacred mountains, imbued with a sense of anticipation and reverence, as a powerful metaphor for the conference itself. He framed it as a journey of discovery guided by the “monumental feelings” that inscriptions evoke, echoing the sentiments of scholars and travelers across centuries who were captivated by these tangible links to the past. The speaker referred to the fieldwork of the ALTERGRAPHY project as a prime example, describing the joy and challenges of documenting inscriptions in the landscape. Their efforts, culminating in the accompanying exhibition, served as a testament to the enduring allure of these inscriptions.

⁸ Lia Wei (March 25, 2024). Encounters at AAS Seattle (14-17 March 2024). *ALTERGRAPHY*. Retrieved January 22, 2025 from <https://doi.org/10.58079/12enm>

⁹ Lia Wei and Manuel Sassmann (November 23, 2024). Altergraphy at “The Epigraphic Habit”, KULeuven, 21-23 November 2024. *ALTERGRAPHY*. Retrieved January 22, 2025 from <https://doi.org/10.58079/12ycx>

¹⁰ Lia Wei and Manuel Sassmann (December 19, 2024). Altergraphy at “Daoism in Cliffs, Caves, and Inscriptions”, Arizona State University December 6-8, 2024. *ALTERGRAPHY*. Retrieved January 22, 2025 from <https://doi.org/10.58079/12yoz>

In the second part, Sassmann aimed to preview the general themes of the event based on the proposed topics and questions of the organizers and the pre-circulated responses and presentation abstracts of the participants. He acknowledged the diverse research interests and disciplinary backgrounds of the scholars present at the conference and the organizers' ideas on how this could contribute to the notion of the Epiverse. He highlighted the significance of mountains in the study of cliff inscriptions, referencing the work of scholars like Zhang Qiang, a key collaborator in the Altergraphy project. Sassmann drew attention to Xue Lei's book, which explored the reception of a single inscription over centuries and praised Robert Harrist's contribution to introducing medieval cliff inscriptions to the English-speaking world. He also mentioned Li Ziyi's work on Mount Wu inscriptions, Thomas Hahn's presentation on Mount Yangdang, and Yolaine Escande's research on a Sichuan example, emphasizing the immovability of cliff inscriptions and their connection to specific locations. Cliff inscriptions are part of a broader continuum of inscriptions, all raising questions of space and place, as illustrated by Jonathan Pettit's analysis of a stele by Tao Hongjing, who metaphorically "opened a mountain" to justify future construction.

Sassmann went on to discuss the work of Hilde De Weerd and Lee Sunkyu, who presented examples of public inscriptions on infrastructures, highlighting the inscriptions' presence in everyday life. Shi Tianyu's research on spirit way steles introduced the concept of different levels of viewing and reading inscriptions, depending on their accessibility. He also mentioned Yolaine Escande's observation that some inscriptions could belong to multiple overlapping spaces (religious, political, aesthetic).

He then addressed the recurring theme of reconstructing the "historical experience" of encountering inscriptions. He challenged the notion of inscriptions as personal expressions of a single individual, advocating instead for viewing them as choices made within social conventions to communicate with a specific audience. He stressed the importance of aesthetic considerations, using the example of the form of steles and their evolution from the Han dynasty into adaptations on cliffs in the medieval period to illustrate how the choice of form could carry meaning and connect to tradition.

He cited Yolaine Escande's observations on how stories of mythical figures resonated in inscriptions to indicate how these are connected to broader narratives. He suggested that figures like Zheng Daozhao presented in the conference, closely associated with monumental cliff inscriptions in the antiquarian tradition, could be considered part of a similar storytelling tradition. He argued that even if these figures were not solely responsible for the inscriptions, the intended experience and the hagiographic narratives surrounding them were still relevant to understanding the history of calligraphy. He recounted an anecdote mentioned by Yan Weitian on Mi Fu about Yan Zhenqing not recognizing his own calligraphy due to the carvers' interpretation, highlighting the potential for inscriptions to be received in ways beyond the makers' intentions. Sassmann discussed the changing meanings of inscriptions over time and Li Ziyi's remark on different modes of perception, from simply viewing an inscription within a landscape to the close reading practiced by scholars. He then turned to the aesthetic appreciation of calligraphy, noting that while it involved viewing an inscription without necessarily reading its content, it differed from simply contemplating "ancient traces". Once an inscription's calligraphy was understood and dated, it entered the historical flow of calligraphy and could be compared with other pieces based on stylistic proximity rather than spatial distance.

Sassmann identified rubbings as the primary traditional medium for understanding calligraphy. He explained how rubbings decontextualized steles, reducing

them to their calligraphic form for stylistic judgment. He also mentioned Yolaine Escande's point about the need to consider calligraphic style in relation to the rules and concepts of calligraphy. Shaolan Hertel's argument that stylistic innovation could be understood as deformation that set new standards was also presented. He acknowledged the role of rubbings in allowing calligraphy to travel, referencing the upcoming panel on "traveling legacy". Shin Jeongsoo's research on Korean envoys and Japanese scholars and dealers and Aida Wong's work on Kang Youwei's influence in Korea were mentioned as examples. Sassmann also noted the practice of Japanese avant-garde calligraphers like Hidai Tenrai, who exhibited their works alongside rubbings. The enduring importance of rubbings, even in the age of 3D models and photographs, was then addressed. Sassmann cited their ease of reading and reproduction as key factors, along with the recent revival of *jinshixue* 金石學 with its emphasis on the aesthetic dimension. Michael Hatch's argument about the epistemic shift from "tactile thinking" to "visual thinking" was also discussed in relation to rubbings.¹¹

In closing, Sassmann clarified his concept of the "Epiverse," emphasizing that it referred not, or at least not primarily, to the physical locations of inscriptions but also to the symbolic universe they inhabit. He stressed the active role of the mind and imagination in perceiving and interpreting inscriptions, highlighting the conference's goal of appreciating the diverse cultural perspectives embedded in these historical artifacts. He concluded by pointing to the first roundtable on digital technologies, urging the attendees to keep the challenges and opportunities of digital tools in mind throughout their explorations of the Epiverse due to the long-term goal of creating a digital collaborative research environment for epigraphic culture in East Asia.

3 ROUNDTABLES

After the opening remarks, the central part of the conference began with eight **roundtables**. While sessions on the first day placed current and traditional scholarship on epigraphy in dialogue, the second day focused on the medieval production and modern reception of inscriptions. What follows is a report of each roundtable with the pre-circulated questions, a summary of two kick-off presentations, and a digest of the participants' answers and the subsequent discussion.¹²

3.1 DIGITAL SYNERGIES 數字文人

Which digital tools do you use and how do they impact the perception of your material and the structure of your analysis if so? How can we create synergies across projects beyond technical advice? What are the challenges in building shared ontologies for inscribed landscapes/epigraphy/rubbings?

Presentations: Hilde De Weerd and Manuel Sassmann

Discussant: Lia Wei **Co-discussant:** Francesca Berdin

¹¹ Michael J. Hatch. *Networks of Touch. A Tactile History of Chinese Art, 1790–1840*. (Perspectives on Sensory History). University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2024.

¹² The authors would like to acknowledge the work of the Altergraphy project students present at the event, who provided their conference notes that served as a basis for parts of the report.

The first session on **Digital Synergies** began with two presentations by Hilde De Weerdt and Manuel Sassmann, who elaborated on the digital tools developed in their respective projects. The tools and websites mentioned in the following are summarized in Appendix 1.

De Weerdt's research explores various questions spanning the fields of intellectual, social, and political history, both within an East Asian context and within a comparative or global historical framework. She presented her work and tools used in two of her current projects based at the KU Leuven and the International Institute of Social History (IISH), Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, that explore *The Lives and Afterlives of Material Infrastructures in Chinese History* from multiple perspectives.¹³ Her approach involves a variety of sources beyond traditional dynastic histories. She emphasized the importance of local gazetteers and inscriptions on steles for the history of infrastructure. She offered a more localized and nuanced perspective, moving away from grand narratives and highlighting the significance of local contexts. De Weerdt introduced an "event-based" concept to analyze infrastructure history, focusing on inscriptions documenting the building and subsequent renovations of bridges, roads, and other infrastructure elements. This concept challenges traditional views of infrastructure as static and emphasizes its continuous evolution through repairs, renovations, and adaptations over time. By examining these events, De Weerdt revealed how infrastructure adapts to changing needs and circumstances, reflecting broader social and political developments. In her presentation in session three, Transforming Spaces, Infrastructure Lives project member Lee Sunkyu gave specific examples from the work of the project, which are summarized below.

Digital tools play a crucial role in De Weerdt's research. Her projects utilize custom-designed tools and services, which include ontology builders, the text annotation tool MARKUS, the image annotation tool IMMARKUS, and the contextual annotation tool COMARKUS, which help to analyze text, events, images, and their contexts.¹⁴ To understand the data, they use existing data analysis and visualization tools like ArcGIS and Google Colab, and some like DOCUSKY or DOCUGIS adapted to the needs of the projects. Text comparison tools such as PARALLELS and COMPARATIVUS allow for side-by-side analysis of similar texts, including textual variants and omissions. They also utilize AI services like CHAT-GPT and GEMINI.

De Weerdt emphasized that tools are *methods* and must be designed with specific research questions and source materials in mind. Critical evaluation of tools and data is essential to understand their strengths and weaknesses. She repeatedly emphasized the question of scale. In her projects, their approach begins not with statistical analysis on a large scale but with close reading and modelling of sources, using custom ontologies for entity, event, and image annotation. This allows them to consider the relationships between their sources, research questions, and the possibilities and limitations of their methods. Once these methodological questions are addressed and the information of

¹³ The website www.infrastructurelives.eu provides further information on the two projects, "Regionalizing Infrastructures in Chinese History (RegInfra)" (Horizon 2020, ERC Advanced Grant No. 101019509) and "The Lives and Afterlives of Imperial Material Infrastructure in Southeastern China (InfraLives)" (Dutch Research Council; NWO, Open, No. 406.20.HW.006).

¹⁴ Hilde De Weerdt. "Creating, Linking, and Analyzing Chinese and Korean Datasets: Digital Text Annotation in MARKUS and COMPARATIVUS," *Journal of Chinese History* 4.2 (2020), 519-527 <https://doi.org/10.1017/jch.2020.23>

many individual cases is fed into a larger information ecosystem, the data can serve as a reliable foundation to address large-scale questions. The final results allow moving up or down between different scales, such as zooming in on a map and going back all the way from annotated events to the original texts and images. However, the final result is not a database that can be readily used by other researchers but conventional academic publications such as papers and monographs by project members that present the methodologies, tools, and results of specific questions to the data and published annotated datasets in repositories that can be reused by those who are willing to engage with the projects' methodologies.

In the second presentation, Manuel Sassmann introduced the past and future of the *Buddhist Stone Sutras in China* project at the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities (HAdW), which is dedicated to documenting, interpreting, and publishing Buddhist sutras inscribed on stone across China. From its inception in 2004, the project embraced digital methods as integral to its mission, envisioning both print and web publications. Contrary to De Weerd's approach that considers digital tools primarily as methodologies, the digital tools developed in the Stone Sutras project aim at providing a framework for the sustainable publication of a database with a web atlas of Chinese Buddhist stone inscriptions and research that is first published in a bilingual printed book series with the Harrassowitz publishing house and the China Academy of Arts Press.¹⁵ Both the cross-publishing approach and the early beginnings of the project during the infancy of Chinese digital humanities have had an impact on the project until the present day, with lessons to be learned for other projects concerning the sustainability of web interfaces.

The project's development unfolded in distinct phases. The first phase concentrated on data collection and the initial website's creation. A conceptual model was developed to represent the various levels of analysis, from the inscription itself to its broader geographical and historical context. This led to the integration of WebGIS for mapping locations and 3D models for visualizing complex sites. A character database was also established, allowing for detailed analysis of individual characters across different inscriptions. Early on, the team recognized the need for a structured approach to data collection and cataloging. A core principle was adopting the single data format to consistently manage diverse data, from the physical characteristics of the inscriptions, alongside their textual content and surrounding context, to the management of images and bibliographic records. This data was then encoded using XML, specifically adhering to the TEI standard for text encoding texts. This choice was significantly influenced by a digital humanities expert involved in developing exist-db, a native XML database. Using XML allowed the project to generate print publications and the initial website from the same underlying data, streamlining the workflow and ensuring consistency. Around 2014, the project entered its second phase. This period focused on two key challenges. First, the team sought to improve the print publication process, automating the creation of fully formatted bilingual publications directly from the XML data. Second, the original website had become technologically outdated, requiring a significant overhaul. This spurred the development of a sustainable web publication platform, leveraging standardized description languages for XML transformations, known as TEI Publisher. This platform

¹⁵ The website stonesutras.org is under continuous development, adding new features and improvements to accommodate content from the print publications that is continuously added after the publication. More information on the project is available on the institutional website of the HAdW <https://www.hadw-bw.de/en/research/research-center/buddhist-stone-inscriptions-northern-china/>

solved the project's immediate needs and proved valuable to other digital humanities initiatives, leading to the formation of the e-editions non-profit organization, which supports and promotes sustainable digital scholarly editions. Looking ahead, the project's third phase centers on ensuring long-term data preservation and fostering greater collaboration. Plans are in place to archive the project's data at Heidelberg University Library and secure the future accessibility of the database through a TEI Publisher website after the end of the project in 2028. Furthermore, the project aims to strengthen ties with related projects, such as CBETA, the digital Buddhist canon, or to integrate the project's character database with other scholarly resources, notably in the Database of Medieval Chinese Texts (DMCT) hosted in Ghent.

In line with the idea of the conference to foster collaborative approaches to the study of Chinese epigraphic culture, Sassmann presented his idea of using the technology of the project to develop a digital research environment for the collaborative study of Chinese epigraphy. While the Stone Sutras project focuses only on a small sub-corpus of the abundant and diverse epigraphic material in China, it nevertheless offers examples of different types of writing supports, or types of "objects," such as steles, pillars, cave walls, cliff inscriptions, and so on. It thus can offer examples of most forms that are common in all Chinese epigraphic culture to address the main challenge of a collaborative research environment: building data model and a framework with templates for all these types to ensure the uniform handling of the corpus in a single database instead of building customized websites for each type. With the conceptual map of the project, he presented a way of zooming in at different scales from sites (mountains, temples, ...) to objects (steles, pillars), inscription(s), and single characters. The outline includes reproductions (rubblings, photographs), the research history, and further relations for the reception and research history. All these elements can relate to international names, places, and times that are linked to international authority files for disambiguation and to facilitate connections to the larger semantic web. Finally, Sassmann offered a survey of the current databases available for Chinese epigraphy and concluded that the field currently has only Chinese commercial inscription databases or repositories of institutional holdings of rubblings but no federation of academic projects as in the European tradition. He suggested following their path and creating an authority file for inscriptions to simplify linking the data. The cross-referencing of corpora between the ALTERGRAPHY and Stone Sutras project is intended to serve as a first test case for such a long-term endeavor.

In the subsequent discussion and answers on pre-circulated questions, the participants emphasized the importance of collaboration among researchers and projects. Regular meetings and feedback sessions were seen as crucial for facilitating synergies and ensuring that tools and methodologies could be effectively shared and reused across different contexts. They highlighted the need for user-centric design, advocating for interfaces created together with scholars and designers that incorporate user feedback to meet the diverse needs of the research community. Site layout and integrating corpora with storytelling elements were also crucial to creating tools that support researchers' ways of thinking and enable meaningful data exploration. Furthermore, the participants stressed the link between digital representations and their material context, recognizing that archaeological and historical context provides invaluable insights. To facilitate comprehensive analysis, they recommended using shared ontologies and identifiers to connect different types of annotations on text, images, and 3D models. This interconnectedness allows researchers to explore the data more holistically and address the challenge of interoperability between different ontologies. The participants acknowledged that publishing data is important but emphasized the need to develop and

share methodologies, ensuring that stored data remains dynamic and usable. Hilde De Weerdt raised the problem of custom and shared ontologies and how to publish them.

Lia Wei referred to initial efforts to employ OpenTheso, a multilingual and multi-hierarchical thesaurus manager, in their project.¹⁶ Possible previous work that can be taken into account are the CIDOC Conceptual Reference Model (CRM)¹⁷ or the Getty Art & Architecture Thesaurus® Online¹⁸. Wei further referred to the ongoing efforts in the Altergraphy project—from the launching day in dialogue with similar projects to the last “conceptual’ meetings in date—thinking about how to structure an epigraphic corpus, looking at classical approaches and current collective initiatives. The team ended up dividing the questions into several sub questions, both redacting hierarchized lists of concepts and trying to agree on definitions for landmarks/writing supports (epigraphy in mountainous environments); dimensions of the inscriptions themselves; characteristics of the written form/characters (the question of graphic variation); descriptive standard for rubbings.¹⁹

Besides De Weerdt, Wei, and Sassman, Pettit presented his own OSAGE project of mapping religious sites in East Asia. The other participants declared interest in personal and collaborative projects but mentioned the lack of technological expertise and time as the major obstacles to realizing them. For a list of selected resources and tools, see the Appendix below.

3.2 CALLIGRAPHIC VARIATION 書刊風格

How do we define and describe (calli)graphic variation and style? How does the visual analysis of calligraphy today rely on descriptive vocabularies developed since the medieval period? What can we still learn from calligraphic practice, and what would a practice-derived descriptive vocabulary look like? How could such a vocabulary apply to epigraphy?

Presentations: Yolaine Escande and Shao-Lan Hertel

Discussant: Yan Weitian

Co-discussant: Lia Wei

Yolaine Escande’s presentation addressed the complexities of describing and analyzing variation and style in calligraphy. She began by highlighting the inherent limitations of traditional descriptive vocabularies, which often struggled to capture nuances and subtleties. Escande then turned her attention to the attempts to apply Western gestalt psychology to the analysis of Chinese calligraphy, a trend that emerged in the 20th century. This approach, frequently employed in authentication studies, sought to bring a scientific lens to the art by measuring the physical attributes of brushstrokes, such as angle, thickness, and dryness, to determine their visual impact and potentially even identify the artist.

¹⁶ <https://opentheso.huma-num.fr/>

¹⁷ <https://cidoc-crm.org/>

¹⁸ <https://www.getty.edu/research/tools/vocabularies/aat/>

¹⁹ “Launching Day,” <https://altergraphy.hypotheses.org/815>; “Last Conceptual Meeting,” <https://altergraphy.hypotheses.org/882>; “Characteristics of the written form/characters,” <https://altergraphy.hypotheses.org/2225>; “Descriptive standard for rubbings,” <https://altergraphy.hypotheses.org/1554>.

However, Escande argued that this method, despite its initial promise, had been largely unsuccessful in achieving its goals. She explained that it struggled to generalize principles, meaning that while analyses might have applied to the work of individual artists, they failed to establish universal principles of brushstroke aesthetics that could be applied broadly. Furthermore, she noted that this quantitative approach didn't advance beyond the knowledge already embedded within traditional Chinese approaches. In fact, the insights gained through measurement often merely confirmed principles that were already established in ancient Chinese treatises on calligraphy.

Escande emphasized that traditional Chinese theory, exemplified by the eleventh-century calligrapher Su Shi's 蘇軾 (1037–1101) five elements of calligraphy (“spirit 神, energy 氣, bone 骨, blood 血, and flesh 肉”), acknowledged the crucial presence of intangible aspects like “spirit” and “energy” which defied objective measurement. She pointed to the fact that even modern attempts to quantify these elements or find a “golden number” for calligraphy, a pursuit even undertaken by the renowned calligrapher Qi Gong 啟功 (1912–2005), had mainly proven futile.

While acknowledging the limitations of purely quantitative analysis, Escande conceded that such approaches could still offer a new vocabulary and framework for appreciating calligraphy, particularly for those unfamiliar with traditional practices and theories. She suggested that the “mystery of creation” in calligraphy remained elusive, resisting simple quantification and highlighting the enduring importance of subjective experience and traditional knowledge for understanding this complex art form.

Shaolan Hertel's talk explored how the idea of variation is related to tradition, individual expression, and cultural context. She emphasized the importance of considering historical and contemporary perspectives, as well as the physical and conceptual aspects of calligraphic practice. She began by highlighting the inherent paradox of calligraphy: it is based on existing forms, yet its artistic merit lies in how these forms are incorporated and varied. This raises questions about where copying ends and variation begins and how we define “originality” within this tradition. She suggested that we must consider context, motivations, and intended audience to understand calligraphic variation.

Hertel used the Tang Dynasty monk calligrapher Huaisu 怀素 (737–799) as an example. His “wild cursive” style, though seen as “eccentric” during his time, was rooted in classical tradition. The term “deformation” used by Adele Schlombs to describe Huai Su's style highlighted the tension between adhering to a tradition and individual expression, a key factor in defining calligraphic variation. Hertel then explored the Ming and Qing dynasties, where “deformation” became an aesthetic concept, shaped by ideas of the strange, rustic, and fragmented, which was influenced by epigraphic studies of ancient inscriptions and manifested in standardized “eccentric” styles, as seen in the works of the Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou 揚州八怪. The post-Mao era saw a revival of epigraphic studies and a push for modernization in Chinese calligraphy. Hertel examined the works of Gu Gan 古干 (1942–2020) and his teacher Huang Miaozi 黄苗子 (1913–2012), who incorporated elements of ancient scripts, Western art, and abstract design into their “deformative calligraphy style.” Their works often featured topographical elements, reflecting a broader artistic exploration of Chinese landscapes and cultural identity.

Hertel questioned the distinction between “deformation” and “variation” and whether “deformation” carries negative connotations. She suggested that “deformation”

could be seen as a “practice-derived descriptive vocabulary”, potentially encompassing the physical limitations and adaptations of calligraphers as a source of stylistic variation.

The **discussion** of both presentations began with observations on the body’s role in calligraphy, both in terms of physical practice and as a source of descriptive terminology. Participants noted the continued use of body analogies in modern times to describe calligraphic aesthetics and movement, suggesting the enduring relevance of this approach. The idea of the body being “controlled” to achieve a particular style was linked to the concept of “deformation,” where deviations from the “normal” – such as left-handedness – could produce unique stylistic variations. The idea of incorporating observations on the calligrapher’s body into the analysis was extended to compare it with other forms of artistic expression, likening calligraphy to dance, emphasizing movement as a key element. Participants noted the use of animal metaphors in traditional texts to describe the dynamism of brushstrokes, envisioning their movement or posture.

The comments then touched upon tactile versus visual thinking in relation to epigraphy, suggesting that different media like crumbling paper or wood could create textures that alter the characters and overall calligraphic style. Such “non-human aspects” of the material challenged seeing calligraphy as the ultimate form of self-expression of an individual. The collaborative nature of epigraphic production raised questions about how certain stylistic traits can be considered as individual marks of the calligrapher. The purpose and potential gains of defining variation were also discussed, with the suggestion to take into account that different ideological agendas might shape stylistic choices.

The participants’ **answers** illustrated the complexities of defining and describing calligraphic variation and style. They addressed different challenges of developing a precise and comprehensive vocabulary with etic and emic terms, considering the influence of historical context, individual practice, and broader cultural trends.

Michael Hatch suggested incorporating language from stone and seal cutting into the discussion, particularly given the revival of older script styles in the 19th and 20th centuries. He raised the question of anachronism when applying terminology not used by the original creators and highlighted the importance of considering the role of both calligraphers and artisans in the creation of inscribed stones.

Yan Weitian shared his discovery of Qing-dynasty descriptive terms for clerical-script inscriptions, such as Zhu Yizun’s (1629–1709) categories of “fluid and elegant” 流麗, “square and regular” 方正, and “marvelous and archaic 奇古”. He questioned the usefulness of these terms in contemporary study and the validity of analogies used in early calligraphy criticism. Yan also pointed to Qiu Zhenzhong’s 邱振中 attempts in the 1980s and 1990s to develop a “practice-derived” descriptive vocabulary using modern language drawn from various disciplines.

Hilde De Weerdts briefly raised the question of how genre, networks, and local identity might influence calligraphic decisions, while Xue Lei suggested revisiting the appropriation of Tang and Northern Song literati discourses in 19th-century writings and examining the relationship between Ruan Yuan’s calligraphy and historiographic views.

Manuel Sassmann discussed archaizing tendencies in Northern Dynasty calligraphy, particularly in the Mount Tai *Diamond Sutra*. He noted the use of clerical script and elements of seal script despite the development of regular script, suggesting a conscious choice to connect with earlier periods. Sassmann connected this to broader trends of “restoring antiquity” 復古 in Chinese art and the concept of “antiquarian

behavior,” emphasizing the intentional choices in style and content of historical figures in engaging with the past through artistic expressions.

3.3 TRANSFORMING SPACES 空間變異

In what different kinds of spaces (religious, political, social, etc.) are inscriptions embedded and what places do they create? How do spaces/places coexist and interact? How are they navigated, imagined, visualized, and represented? In what ways are they transformed and or transformative?

Presentations: Lee Sunkyu and Shi Tianyu

Discussant: Hilde De Weerd **Co-discussant:** Paula Suméra

In her talk on *Infrastructure, Epigraphy, and Space/Place-Making*, Lee Sunkyu presented concrete examples of the methodologies and the use of digital tools developed for the project on Material Infrastructures in Chinese History that Hilde De Weerd introduced in the first session of the present conference. Lee began by raising questions about the types of spaces where inscriptions are found, the social purposes they serve, and the identities of those who create them. She emphasized the role of inscriptions in constructing space, place, power, and identity and how they can be used to access the social history of infrastructure. To demonstrate the relationship between inscriptions and infrastructure, and how inscriptions can shape and re-shape the identity and meaning of physical spaces, Lee selected three examples of inscriptions on different types of infrastructural buildings.

In the first part, Lee presented the example of the General’s Pillar 將軍柱, a 5.8 meters tall iron pillar, dated 1376, and its transformation from a bridge pillar of the Zhenyuan Bridge 鎮遠橋 (among other names also known as Lanzhou floating bridge 蘭州浮橋; present Zhongshan Bridge 中山橋) to a commemorative inscription. She traced the bridge’s history through its various names, accounts in local gazetteers, and its depiction in historical maps, highlighting its significance as a gateway to the “West of the River” 通河西 region. She discussed a bridge repair inscription from the High-Qing era and the eventual replacement of the floating bridge with an iron bridge in the early 20th century. The pillar inscribed with “Hongwu era of the Great Ming” 大明洪武 that originally served as a construction element anchoring the floating bridge at the riverbank became a monument to remember the former engineering marvel of late imperial China, further emphasizing the changing nature of infrastructure and its representation.

The second part discussed inscription records on the repairs of the Gaoping 高平 City Wall in 1599 and their implications for writing a social history of infrastructures. Comparing two inscriptions on the same event, Lee showed the different voices that were represented or silenced in each inscription, and how the authors defined their relationships to the infrastructure and their place. Only one was placed directly on the city wall, only one mentions official titles, and one is significantly longer than the other. The comparison helped her to highlight the distinct social purposes of each inscription, their intended audiences, as well as the implicit power dynamics and embedded social relationships of the different groups of persons mentioned, hinting at questions of local pride and the construction of social identities.

As a last example, Lee presented an inscription by local village leaders, “Record on Repairing (Daoist deity Xuantian) Road” 修路碑記, dated 1601. She juxtaposed the rubbing of the cliff inscription in form of a stele with a photograph of the stone, on which another inscription with the name of the road, Road of the Deity Xuantian 玄天神路, is visible. She compared this inscription with the larger Song dynasty cliff stele inscription of the “Record of the New Repair of Baishui Road” 新修白水路記, both roads part of the Qingni Ancient Road 青泥古道. The two roadside inscriptions show how local communities interacted with and shaped the meanings attached to infrastructures.

With these case studies, Lee illustrated how inscriptions can transform mere spaces into meaningful places. She stressed the importance of understanding who creates these inscriptions and their intended purposes, as well as how they can help to provide a more nuanced perspective on the social and cultural dynamics for writing a history of infrastructures.

Shi Tianyu reflected on his approach to inscriptions in precirculated remarks in which he argued that inscriptions do not simply exist in a space, but actively shape and are shaped by it. This creates a dynamic relationship where a “virtual space” emerges from the inscription, influencing the function and meaning of the “physical space.” Historical records often overlook this spatial context, but it is crucial to understand how inscriptions were read and perceived. For example, political inscriptions in government buildings might reinforce the authority of that space, while non-religious inscriptions in a temple could alter its sacred nature. The physical location also plays a role, influencing accessibility and interpretation. The impact of any inscription depends on its audience that must read and understand it. This highlights the complex interplay between inscription, space, and audience in shaping meaning and function in both historical and contemporary settings. He highlighted the special case of epitaphs. During a funeral, an epitaph shapes the mourners’ understanding of the deceased. Once buried, it loses that immediate connection, but if later excavated, the epitaph can once again influence how people perceive both the space and the person commemorated.

In his presentation, Shi elaborated on his ideas in *Two Cases of Reading Epitaphs*. The first case study investigated the epitaph of Zhang Yi 张奕 1010-1066, tracing its journey through different stages of production, reproduction, and reception. When Zhang Yi died in 1066, his son commissioned the inscription and asked Su Song’s 蘇頌 son, Su Xie 蘇攜, to compose and write it. The text was then included in Su Song’s 蘇頌 collected works, compiled by Su Xie in 1139 and published by Shi Yuanzhi 施元之 in 1171. Subsequently, it was recorded in the *History of the Song* 宋史 compiled in the early Yuan dynasty (1260-1370), and an edition was published in the middle Ming dynasty (1368-1644). In 1781, Bao Yuangong sent his collected copy to the court for the compilation of the Complete Library of the Four Treasuries. Other records on Zhang Yi are found in local gazetteers of Wuxi 無錫 county from the Ming and Qing dynasties. Finally, the epitaph was excavated on January 17, 1894, and was preserved in the Minglun Hall 明倫堂 of a local academy, now the Wuxi Exhibition Hall of Stone Steles 無錫碑刻陳列館. From then on, it was circulated also in the form of rubbings, and the stele became a tourist attraction. This case study emphasized how the information about Zhang Yi was preserved and modified over time, depending on the medium and the purpose of the record. For instance, the rubbing trading market primarily focused on the aesthetic features of the inscription rather than the content.

The second case study examined the *Cuan Longyan* 爨龍顏 Stele. It discussed the stele's rediscovery, the production of rubbing copies, and the scholarly interest in its calligraphy style. In 1828, Ruan Fu 阮福 recorded the complete transcription of the Cuan Longyan Stele in the *Record of Ancient Bronzes and Stones from Yunnan* 滇南古金石錄 (1828) another version was included in the *Draft of the Yunnan Gazetteer from the Daoguang Era* 道光雲南通志稿 compiled by Ruan Yuan 阮元. Ruan Fu copied the title to showcase the script, included three commentaries by Ruan Yuan, himself, and earlier scholars. He also engraved the postscript on the original stone, produced rubbings to disseminate among friends, and set up a pavilion to protect the stele. Ruan Yuan used calligraphy to support his arguments on a distinctive north-south division in the history of calligraphy, which he had laid out in two controversial treatises of 1811. He argued that the script of the Cuan Longyan Stele fell between the clerical script and the regular script and was representative of the Northern tradition. He emphasized its rarity and the need for preservation.

Shi concluded the cases by reflecting on the evolving function of epigraphy, contrasting the “reader’s understanding” with the “producer’s intention,” recognizing that the primary focus of the inscription shifts from the content of the text to the calligraphy style. He argued that while such inscriptions may appear distant from everyday life and lack a real function, the act of reading and engaging with them gives them new purpose and meaning.

The presentation ended with his anthropological observations in the field on how local residents and out-of-town tourists interact with stone steles, revealing different levels of appreciation for their cultural and historical value. He also referred to his forthcoming article on the “Epigraphy of Imperial China” co-authored with Barend ter Haar for the *Handbook of Epigraphical Cultures*.

In her **discussion** of the talks, Hilde De Weerdt emphasized the importance of context in understanding inscriptions, the need to model the mobility of sources and the spaces they inhabit. She suggested that maps depicting steles can be considered part of the infrastructure. The implications of calligraphic styles as well as the physical form of the writing supports can further enrich our understanding of the perspectives of different social worlds on infrastructures.

With the cliff inscription imitating the form of a stele, her discussion also touched upon the concept of *moya* and the need for a clear definition of terms like *moya keshi* 摩崖刻石 and *moya bei* 摩崖碑. The question was raised whether inscriptions can sometimes be considered without context, particularly when they seem to have no apparent relationship with their surroundings.

Other participants discussed several aspects related to space in their answers to the precirculated questions. Besides the examples given by Lee and Shi, who highlighted the challenges of interpreting inscriptions that had been removed from their original context, also Michael Hatch raised awareness of the problem when steles, as physical objects, became fragmented and displaced over time, existing in both physical (stone, rubbings, photos) and imagined forms. This displacement further complicated the interpretation of inscriptions and their relationship to space.

Yolaine Escande introduced the distinction between “place” and “space.” She argued that a place is a concrete location, while a space is an abstract entity associated with that location. The same place can contain multiple overlapping spaces with different

functions—political, religious, poetic, etc.—coexisting and intertwined. Escande illustrated this with the example of the Cliff of a Thousand Buddhas 千佛岩 in Sichuan. This site, originally associated with Daoist beliefs, was later adopted by Buddhists. It also features Han dynasty cliff tombs, indicating a quest for immortality. The cliff bears a large inscription from a later period, marking the site with a strategic and political name – “Southern crossroads of the ancient Jing” 古涇口. Over time, the cliff accumulated layers of meaning and function, becoming a place where religious, political, and poetic spaces intertwined.²⁰ Li Ziyi also described how inscriptions, especially in natural landscapes, in her case at Mount Wu in Hangzhou, became integrated with their surroundings, merging religious, political, and historical functions. These inscriptions contributed to the evolving nature of cultural landscapes, reflecting the beliefs and activities of people across time.²¹ Yan Weitian noted that in the case of famous gardens and temples in southern China (Suzhou, Wuxi, and Guangzhou), their Ming and Qing dynasty inscriptions were not well-documented. These inscriptions, including placards, stele records, and model-letter compendia, had been moved and re-purposed multiple times throughout history, which are indicative of how these spaces transformed. Sassmann pointed out the transformation of spaces inscribed with Buddhist cliff inscriptions from religious sites to tourist destinations and cultural heritage assets. Xue Lei declared an interest in how a ritual space (such as Tang imperial mausoleums in Shaanxi) was transformed into historical sites by newly added steles in the Northern Song.

3.4 TRAVELING LEGACY 傳統轉換

How did visual and textual epigraphic knowledge circulate and impact artistic practices—including avant-garde and modern experiments—across time and space? What similarities and differences in the handling of this legacy can we identify between late imperial and early modern East Asian elites?

Presentations: Shin Jeongsoo and Aida Wong

Discussant: Michael Hatch **Co-discussants:** Killian Cahier and Kento Ashikari

Shin Jeongsoo presented on *Kim Chŏnghŭi and his Refashioning of the Wufeng Stone Inscription*, focusing on the antiquarian calligraphy of Kim Chŏnghŭi 金正喜 (1786-1856), specifically his copy of two Chinese inscriptions. Kim precisely replicated the *Wufeng Inscription* 五鳳刻石, a prime example of Western Han clerical script 隸書, and added a four-character phrase from the Eastern Han *Gentleman Jing Stele* 景君碑. This unusual combination reflected Kim’s perspective on the importance of the Western Han inscription in calligraphy, as it represented an early form of clerical script that retained elements of seal script, demonstrating a unique hybrid style. Kim’s work displayed a hierarchy, with the Western Han inscription placed prominently at the top of the scroll, underscoring its historical significance and rarity. His arrangement of characters, spacing, and divisions conveyed his artistic and scholarly goals. For instance, he elongated the layout of the Wufeng Inscription and adjusted the spacing between characters, enhancing the regulated format and balance and reflecting a literati taste. In

²⁰ See also her monograph on landscapes in Chinese culture: Escande, Yolaine. *Montagnes et eaux: La culture du shanshui*. Paris: Hermann, 2005.

²¹ See also the summary of her presentation below, session 7.

contrast, he magnified the characters from the Gentleman Jing Stele and split them into two sections to fit the scroll size, demonstrating a significant deviation from the original stele's format.

The presentation discussed the stylistic traits of the Wufeng Inscription, including its seal-script 篆書 influences and Kim's observations on its unique characters. Shin explained how certain characters in the inscription, like *wu* 五 and *lu* 魯, distinctly exhibited characteristics of seal script in their form and composition. He pointed out that Kim, in his own copy, further emphasized the seal script influence in the character *lu* by reducing the "fire" element to one line and two dots, similar to bronze script. Shin described Kim's unique approach to copying, which he termed "invention" *zao* 造, allowing for artistic freedom and the creation of a new style. This concept illuminated Kim's reworking of the Gentleman Jing Stele excerpt, where he reimagined the characters using his own style, which involved incorporating pictographic elements, varied brushwork, and irregular stroke widths. For example, Shin discussed how Kim manipulated the tree element *mu* 木 in the characters *gen* 根 and *he* 核, using contrasting brushstrokes to create a visual distinction between the "root of a tree" and the "root of grass", thereby alluding to the idea that the Dao is fundamental and the arts are secondary. This creative reimagining, Shin argued, stemmed from Kim's belief that calligraphy is derived from the Dao.

Shin highlighted the importance of Kim's notes in the copy. These notes, written in Kim's distinctive "Ch'usa style" 秋史體, named after his pen name, served not only as functional supplements to the Chinese sources but also as integral components of the overall composition. They provided Kim with a platform to express his own calligraphic identity while acknowledging the influence of archaic scripts. Kim Chōnghūi was more than just a copier; he was a creative editor who used ancient inscriptions as inspiration for his own artistic innovations.

In her presentation on ***Kang Youwei's East Asian Network Centered on Epigraphic Culture***, Aida Yuen Wong explored the multifaceted contributions of Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927) beyond his well-known roles as a political and social reformer. She continued a line of inquiry of her monograph, in which she already fleshed out Kang's impact as a calligrapher, art activist, and aesthetic reformer on the making of modern China.²²

A key point of the presentation was Kang's study of epigraphic calligraphy, prompted by the advice of Shen Zengzhi 沈曾植 (1850–1922) in 1888. This shift in focus led Kang to produce *Extended Paired Oars for the Boat of Art* 廣藝舟雙楫 (1891), a significant work on the history of calligraphy. The presentation highlighted Kang's deep engagement with epigraphy, emphasizing his admiration for works like *Shimensong* 石門頌 (148), *Shimenming* 石門銘 (509), *Cuan Longyan bei* 爨龍顏碑 (458), and *Diamond Sutra* at Mount Tai 泰山金剛經 (late 6th c.) The presentation also traced Kang's journey after the failed Hundred Days' Reform in 1898, marking his 16-year exile and eventual return to China. It underscored his dedication to cultural reform through establishing the Confucian Religious Society 孔教會 (1912–1918) and his emphasis on Confucian philosophy, universalism, and calligraphy.

²² Aida Yuen Wong. *The Other Kang Youwei: Calligrapher, Art Activist, and Aesthetic Reformer in Modern China*. Leiden: Brill, 2016.

Wong explored Kang's influence on prominent figures in Japan and Korea, including the painter, calligrapher, and collector Nakamura Fusetsu 中村不折 (1866–1943), the poet and calligrapher Kawahigashi Hekigoto 河東碧梧桐 (1873–1937). In her presentation she concentrated on Kang's hitherto under researched connections to the Korean scholars and politicians Park Eunsik 朴殷植 (1859–1925) and Lee Byeong-heon 李炳憲 (1870–1940). She highlighted Lee's works on Confucianism, his five visits to Kang Youwei in China before 1925, and his (or possibly their joint) journey to Qufu and Mount Tai. Lee was the founder of the Baesan Confucian Academy 培山書院 (1918) that was instrumental in reviving Confucianism in Korea. Lee showcased Kang's calligraphy inspired by the *Diamond Sutra* at Mount Tai at the academy's lecture hall with a plaque in Kang's calligraphy. Kang also authored a commemorative narrative within the building, further attesting to his enduring impact. This Korean example further enriched the picture of Kang's role in disseminating Chinese epigraphy and shaping epigraphic culture in the Sinosphere beyond his well-known influence in Japan.

In his **discussion**, Hatch addressed the question about the circulation of rubbings and their journey across time by asking how the separation of rubbings from the inscription's original context fostered a reinterpretation of materiality and style across different periods. Hatch suggested that this detachment allowed for a breakdown and subsequent reinvention of materiality, which furnishes a different perspective on rubbings. Wong responded by highlighting the crucial role of epigraphy in the development of modern calligraphic styles. She emphasized that the modern period witnessed a return to the deep past, with the circulation of epigraphic materials between Japan, Korea, and China playing a significant role in forming a shared understanding of modernity and cultural heritage. This exchange raised questions about the formation of common or shared traits of East Asian cultures and the impact of dislocating monuments from their original settings. Hatch continued the discussion by saying that while separating rubbings from their original locations might seem negative, it can also be helpful because it allows us to see them in a new light. He agreed that the idea of "Looking backward in order to look forward" played a significant role in the appropriation of ancient epigraphy, but wondered why this particular method of studying these inscriptions became popular when it did. He pointed out that it gained popularity after World War I, and suggested that possibly people who advocated Confucianism thought that focusing too much on materialistic matters had contributed to the war. They felt it was time to build a better world based on different values. In Japan, while leaders felt that China wasn't modern enough and looked down on it, others believed that China's past still held valuable lessons that could help them create a better future, which partly explains the turn to epigraphy.

In their **answers** to the pre-circulated questions, the conference participants offered different perspectives on how knowledge about ancient inscriptions has been shared, understood, used, and appreciated throughout history.

Yolaine Escande explained how circulation and access to epigraphic knowledge have evolved over time. In imperial China, knowledge was limited because it depended on rubbings and printed books, which were not always easy to find and were often only available to wealthy and educated people. However, the development of photography in the early 1900s transformed this situation. It became much easier to share images of inscriptions, which led to more people learning about them and even inspired new artistic ideas, especially in Japan. Xue Lei noted that different media have been used to make copies of inscriptions, including rubbings, prints, and photographs, each circulating in

different ways. Yan Weitian explained how the study of inscriptions, once mainly limited to scholars, became something that was shared and appreciated more widely due to increased interactions between countries and cultures.

Michael Hatch discussed shifting approaches to studying inscriptions as he observed a change in how people physically interacted with inscriptions. He pointed out that people used to touch and trace the inscriptions to understand them better. But as Western ways of thinking became more influential, people began to look at inscriptions from a distance instead of touching them. This change in how people physically interacted with inscriptions also reflected a deeper change in how they thought about them and why they studied them.

Another key theme was the preservation and public engagement with inscriptions. Lia Wei highlighted a growing focus on making inscriptions accessible to the public. She explained how inscriptions used to be kept in private collections, but gradually there was a shift towards preserving them in public spaces like stele forests, where everyone could see and appreciate them. Lee Sunkyu added to this by showing how inscriptions have been included in public places like bridges, where they can tell stories about history and politics to anyone who sees them.

Evolving artistic and scholarly practices surrounding inscriptions were also mentioned. Li Ziyi, for example, explained how modern scholars are not just interested in the inscriptions themselves but also in understanding the historical and cultural context in which they were created. Michael Hatch pointed at how inscriptions have been used in art, mentioning the artist Xu Lei 徐累, who used rubbings of cracks in the pavement to explore ideas about place and decay.

DAY 2

Morning

3.5 THINKING MATTERS 關山策略

What are the motivations and modes of appropriation of mountains, stones, and other matters? By which strategies do states, communities, individuals – as well as divine or non-human agents – “develop” mountains? How do these strategies translate into physical markers and textual/verbal discourse?

Presentations: Jonathan Pettit and Thomas Hahn

Discussant: Xue Lei **Co-discussants:** Lei Yang and Tchou-Tchou Rao-Tophoven

The presentation *Reading the Xu Mi Stele* of Jonathan Pettit began by relating the topic of his talk to his earlier publications on medieval Daoism.²³ He then offered reflections on the difference between epigraphic sources and religious discourse in manuscripts, focusing on the mechanisms of translation between these materials and the challenges posed by multiple readers and writers. He emphasized that inscriptions contain important additional information on dates, engravers, and calligraphers, and, being closely related to the places where they were erected, potentially to specific local religious practices. However, as open-air documents, being exposed to the forces of

²³ J. E. E. Pettit. “Diverging Conceptions of Apotheosis in Fourth-Century CE Upper Purity Daoism,” *Early Medieval China*, 2023:29, 47-63; and Pettit, J. E. E., and Chao-jan Chang. *A Library of Clouds: The Scripture of the Immaculate Numen and the Rewriting of Daoist Texts*. (New Daoist Studies). University of Hawai’i Press, 2020.

nature, they pose certain challenges for the reader. He also mentioned the new kinds of methodological problems that arise when using epigraphic sources, referencing “Le jet des Dragons,” a posthumous article by Edouard Chavannes and a formative study of Daoist epigraphy that Pettit is currently editing and translating into English. He gave an example of inscriptions at Mount Yaowang 藥王山 with stones that are anonymous and mostly written in a classical style here. During his presentation, Pettit pointed out that if we try to understand religious matters solely through inscriptions, our understanding would be incomplete. He thus suggested comparing epigraphic materials with other texts to gain a clearer view of ritual life and understand the reasons behind the existence of specific inscriptions.

As a case in point, Pettit presented the “Stele for the Altar at the Old Lodge of Senior Administrator Xu” (*Xu changshi jiuguan tan bei* 許長史舊館壇碑; referred to as the Xu Mi Stele) erected in 519 CE to commemorate the building of the Vermilion Solarity Lodge (Zhuyang guan 朱陽館) in 518 CE. The presentation explored the motivations behind erecting this monument and the strategies used to justify developing religious sites. The inscription on the stele consists of a poem about the history of the site, and a text praising the patron and the engraver. Pettit showed how the text described the emperor’s vow to act as suzerain of the place and foster relations with all its divine residents, how he led others to Practice, and enlightened the common folk, fulfilling his destiny to reveal the teachings. The emperor relied on the hidden recluse, Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456–536), to gather the scriptures and revelations of the Three Perfected. The text continues to describe the exceptional location of the place of Xu Mi’s 許謐 (303–373) residence. Pettit juxtaposed the verses praising the place with a similar inscription by Zheng Daozhao 鄭道昭 on Mount Tianzhu, pointing out similarities between the two. Such similarities are also to be found in many other texts of this genre, which makes it necessary to use other sources, like “Zhou’s Record of his Communications with the Unseen” 周氏冥通記, among others, to get a clearer picture of the motivations behind erecting this monument, the strategies used to justify developing religious sites, and how these strategies translate into physical markers and textual discourse.

In contrast to other presentations at the conference that talked about the past, **Thomas Hahn** began his presentation, “**Planning a Mountain**”, emphasizing his concern with the future. He presented ongoing efforts of the Chinese government to transform sacred mountains in China into modern geoparks with a time horizon for successful completion in the year 2035, analyzing the developments as an interplay between geology, geography, religious studies, and urban planning. Hahn emphasized the geological and geographical significance of mountains, and how “geological time” and the specifics of place can shed light on human interactions with these landscapes. He discussed the importance of religious studies in understanding the beliefs and practices associated with mountains, highlighting the potential of Daoist traditions for ecological restoration.

The presentation then turned to the role of urban planning and regional development in integrating mountains into contemporary economic masterplans. Hahn argues that these plans, often guided by policies from UNESCO or the Chinese government, lead to the “shrink-wrapping” of landscapes considered as geo-cultural assets in time and space, impacting the development of contemporary religious practices. This process involves the development of infrastructure, branding, and aggressive marketing strategies, ultimately transforming sacred mountains into commercialized park systems.

Hahn used the example of Yandangshan 雁荡山, a mountain in southeastern China (present in Zhejiang 浙江 province), to illustrate this transformation. Yandangshan, renowned for its unique volcanic landscape and rich ecosystem, has a long history of attracting poets, painters, and religious practitioners. However, recent masterplans have led to the development of infrastructure and the commercialization of the mountain, turning it into a UNESCO Global Geopark. He pointed out that Tao Hongjing, who appeared in Pettit's inscription, was also mentioned in the masterplan, leveraged as a cultural asset of the site.

This transformation, Hahn argued, could be phrased as “closing the mountain” 關(閉)山, a reversal of the historical notion of “opening the mountain” 開山. While the latter often involved making the mountain accessible for spiritual or cultural purposes, “closing the mountain” involves restricting access, commercializing the landscape, and prioritizing geological features over cultural and religious practices.

Hahn concluded by reflecting on the implications of this transformation, questioning the balance between economic development, cultural preservation, and ecological integrity in the planning of sacred mountains like Yandangshan. He emphasized the need to consider the multifaceted values and legacies of these landscapes, including their geological significance, cultural heritage, and ecological importance, in order to ensure their sustainable future.

Lei Yang, whose research focuses on sounds in early modern urban spaces in Beijing, opened the **discussion** by asking Hahn about the rigid boundaries imposed on sacred mountains when they are transformed into geoparks. He contrasted this with the more fluid boundaries of soundscapes and pointed out the inconsistencies in resource management, where exploitation might occur just outside the protected zones. In response, Hahn explained that geoparks undergo recertification every five years. This process, he noted, can lead to discontinuous protection, where the boundaries of the protected area might shift or become fragmented over time. He cited the example of the Qinling Mountains, where this recertification process has resulted in the creation of “islands” of protection, with areas of exploitation existing in close proximity to the protected zones.

Lei Yang also reminded Pettit of the changing readership of inscriptions and how their interpretation might have changed, particularly in the case of commemorative steles.

Other participants had questions on different details of the presentations.

Alexis Lycas, historian of geography of medieval China at the EPHE, Paris, pointed out the importance of Thomas Hahn's approach, based on planning and future. Not only does it offer new insights into contemporary planning in the process of heritagization of mountainous sites, but it also gives historians a valuable lesson by putting them in perspective. While the role of maps is mostly linked with planning and carries a prospective outlook, historians tend to see these documents as representations of the past—depictions of places that once existed. Ancient maps are mostly pictures of what these places were supposed to be. Lycas also cited the example of local gazetteers, which, at least since Late Imperial China and continuing in the present, provided detailed catalogues of medicinal plants. These technical lists, far from being motivated by a mere lust for knowing, were driven by economic interests in a given place. They were also prospective and continue to influence the planning and the preservation of biodiversity in certain sites, which is consequently determined by the “usefulness” of the specimens.

Aida Wong inquired about the process of inscribing and reinscribing sites, as well as the penalties for altering them. Hahn clarified the role of ICOMOS (International

Council on Monuments and Sites) in evaluating sites for UNESCO inscription and emphasized the strict regulations imposed to maintain the status quo of inscribed sites. He stressed that any unauthorized alterations or development could have severe consequences.

Lee Sunkyu asked about the dynamics between state and non-state actors in managing mountain sites, asking about the personal relationships that individuals might have with these spaces and how that could affect access. Hahn acknowledged the complex interplay of various communities in these areas, noting that local party offices often hold significant knowledge and influence. He also highlighted the concept of public-private partnerships in managing these sites. Pettit added that sometimes, protection measures are used as a pretext to displace local communities.

Lia Wei proposed that the concept of “opening the mountain” (*kaishan*) might have always been intertwined with “closing the mountain” (*guanshan*), referencing the example of Zhang Daoling and his potential desire to limit interactions with local communities. She also noted the presence of graffiti on mountains associated with Zhang Daoling, questioning the strictness of their protection.

Michael Hatch asked Hahn about the potential conflict between Western landscape imagery and geological time, prompting a discussion on the history of geological observation in China. Hahn responded by discussing how even in the past, people made observations about landforms and geological processes, as evidenced by travelogues and other historical texts.

Zack Chasseriaud raised the issue of environmental considerations in landscape construction. Pettit responded that the primary concerns were often theological and topographical, focusing on the relationship between the visible and invisible worlds. Hahn added that landscapes are also visually constructed, with “view corridors” designed to highlight specific features and create desired aesthetic experiences.

In their **answers**, participants discussed the transformation of natural formations through different cultural means.

Li Ziyi examined the motivations behind different types of cliff carvings, showing how they transform landscapes into cultural landmarks and reflect the desires of those who created them. She explained how political groups used inscriptions to assert their authority, religious groups to compete for control over sacred spaces, and individuals to seek a form of “immortality.” Li also highlighted the connection between religious carvings and state rituals, noting that ancient people believed mountains were sentient and could be influenced through prayer and rituals. She pointed out that many inscriptions related to rituals are found in prominent spots, such as mountain summits or caves seen as “caverns of heaven” 洞天 in Daoism.

Michael Hatch discussed the imposition of cultural values onto the natural world. He raised the examples of Ruan Yuan’s collection of “stone paintings” 石畫 selected based on their resemblance to canonical painting styles. He cited Whiteman’s work with the example of emperor Kangxi’s summer retreat and how preexisting cultural beliefs about auspicious topography shaped the perception of landscape (Stephen Whiteman. *Where Dragons Dwell: The Kangxi Emperor’s Mountain Estate* (University of Hawai’i Press, 2002).

Yan Weitian suggested expanding the concept of “mountains” to encompass various stone materials and terrains, emphasizing the interplay between human and natural resources. He referred to drew Dorothy Ko’s *The Social Life of Inkstones* (University of Washington Press, 2010) and Anthony Barbieri-Low’s *Artisans in Early*

Imperial China (University of Washington Press, 2007) to highlight embodied knowledge and skills of artisans involved in the production.

Yolaine Escande explored the reciprocal relationship between humans and nature in Chinese culture, where mountains and rivers are seen as sources of power and legitimacy, and inscriptions on natural features connect them to historical and spiritual narratives. Referring to Marcel Granet's work, *La Religion des Chinois* (Albin Michel, 1998), she emphasized the reciprocal exchange between humans and the divine forces inhabiting mountains and rivers. She cited examples from texts like the *Book of Documents* (*Shujing* 書經) and legends surrounding figures like Yu the Great 大禹 and Fuxi 伏羲 to illustrate how inscriptions on natural features mark significant sites and connect them to historical and spiritual narratives, and thereby contribute to the construction of cultural landscapes and perpetuate the cultural memory associated with these sites.

Manuel Sassmann focused on the enduring connection between inscriptions and the preservation of cultural memory. He highlighted the use of stone as a durable medium for transmitting information across generations, drawing on historical examples like the *Stone Hymn* and the inscription of the *Diamond Sutra* on Mount Tai.

De Weerdt hinted at the connection between inscriptions, travel, and commemoration, highlighting how inscriptions mark and preserve memories of past experiences. Xue Lei raised a question about ownership and authority in relation to natural landscapes, asking how individuals or groups claim control over these spaces in political, economic, or spiritual terms.

3.6 CONCEIVING IDENTITY 身份確證

How do poetry, religion, and calligraphy shape identity? How do epitaphs and steles, with their specific literary genres and calligraphic styles, allow us to reconstruct networks of historical figures? Beyond the monolithic notion of a person as "author", how can we deconstruct identity into its interrelated facets?

Presentations: Xue Lei and Zhang Qiang

Discussant: Jonathan Pettit **Co-discussants:** Zhang Rui and Francesca Berdin

In his presentation, **Xue Lei** compared the anonymous sixth century "Eulogy on Burying a Crane" *moya* inscriptions at Jiaoshan, which he already devoted a monograph to, with Zheng Daozhao's "Inscription for the Stone Chamber" at the East Ridge at Tianzhushan.

The most apparent difference is the location of the inscription within the landscape. To reach the Jiaoshan inscription you had to be originally in the Yangzi River, touching the rock in the water to perceive it, before it was moved in the 20th century from the foot of the mountain in the Yangzi to the temple in the middle of the mountain. The Tianzhushan inscription is still in its original location at the top of the mountain which allows us to understand how the inscription is placed in the landscape. The placement of the inscriptions further influences the reader's experience. For this purpose, Xue went to the sites and tried to envision the original situation of how the inscription was intended to be not only read but experienced in its natural context. While sitting in the Stone Chamber looking at the landscape that is described in the inscription, one has the inscription on the left-hand side, and the uninscribed wall behind at the back. He envisioned the immortals coming through the cliff wall, and while not reading the inscription but reciting the text, the visitor was looking at the view. He thus argued that

the Tianzhushan inscription, embedded in the landscape, invites a more immersive engagement, while the Jiaoshan inscription, located within a temple complex, offers a more contemplative setting.

Furthermore, the Tianzhushan inscription, situated in a newly integrated territory between the Northern Wei and Southern Qi, was strategically placed on a cliff wall, asserting cultural and political authority. In contrast, the Jiaoshan inscription, located in a well-established Daoist landscape, held a more religious and philosophical significance.

While the Tianzhushan inscription adheres to a formal style and official tone, reflecting its connection to state power, the Jiaoshan inscription, though traditionally attributed to Tao Hongjing, may have been a collaborative effort by the Daoist community, suggesting a more personal and spiritual dimension.

The calligraphic styles of the two inscriptions, while sharing a common aesthetic sensibility, may also reveal regional variations in writing practices.

Zhang Qiang is one of the main collaborators of the Altergraphy project and has published extensively about the inscriptions on the four mountains during the last decade together with Lia Wei. During the conference, the participants already had the chance to explore Zheng Daozhao's life and work in the exhibition and learn about it in Mr. Sakata's keynote lecture. Zhang's presentation, *The sister of Zheng Daozhao, "Saint of Northern Calligraphy" 北方书圣" 郑道昭 (455-516) 之妹* added new details to the picture, elaborating on the implications of the recent discovery of the Epitaph of Zheng Muji 鄭穆姬, the younger sister of Zheng Daozhao. Recounting Zheng Muji's life, from her marriage to Emperor Xiaowen 孝文帝 to becoming a prominent Buddhist figure, eventually establishing a temple with support from the emperor and her family, the finding provides new insights into the Zheng family that challenge the accuracy of existing historical records. This discovery adds a new dimension to our understanding of the Zheng family, contrasting Zheng Muji's Buddhist devotion with the Confucian and Daoist leanings of her brother Zheng Daozhao. The inscription on the lid of the epitaph, titled "Epitaph Inscription of the Late Nun and Imperial Concubine" 故比丘尼鄭太妃墓誌銘, provides a detailed account of her family relations, listing her ancestors and siblings, including her renowned brother Zheng Daozhao. It also mentions her five sisters and their husbands, offering a glimpse into the prominent families with which the Zheng clan was connected through marriage. This information helps to reconstruct the social network and influence of the Zheng family within the Northern Wei dynasty.

Based on the content of the inscription, the presentation showed how the family's history of serving the imperial court since the Zhou dynasty and their prominent status within the Northern Wei bureaucracy sheds light on the social and political context of Zheng Muji's life. The inscription recounts the birth of her son, who was deeply cherished by the emperor but sadly died at a young age. This personal tragedy marked a turning point in Zheng Muji's life, leading her to a deeper engagement with Buddhism. Later, she left the palace and, with the support of Emperor Xuanwu 宣武帝 (r. 500-550) and her family, established a Buddhist monastery. This demonstrates her growing devotion to Buddhism and her influence within both the imperial family and her own clan. In accord with the conventions of epitaph texts, the inscription includes a eulogy that reflects on her life, virtues, and spiritual journey, emphasizing her devotion to Buddhism, her compassion, and her pursuit of enlightenment. Zhang highlighted the fact that she assumed a "Buddhist" identity, which contrasted with Zheng Daozhao's "Daoist" writings.

Zhang then went on to analyze the anonymous inscription's unique calligraphic

style. The balanced composition of the calligraphy is typical for the Northern Wei style, noting “feminine” quality, and blend of “naivety” and literati refinement. He discussed the presence of graphic variants and a “Southern style” influence, adding to the complexity of understanding the calligraphy. Comparing the calligraphic style of Zheng Muji's epitaph with those from the Eastern Jin dynasty, Zhang noted similarities in the elongated shape of the characters and the use of space. He then elaborated on the differences to Eastern Jin style, the inscription's look, where the strokes appear to be carved with a knife rather than written with a brush, and the balanced interplay between “square” and “round” elements in the characters. These features contribute to a more refined and elegant feel. So does balanced composition with even spacing, creating a visually harmonious effect. Zhang described the quality of the strokes as having a “feminine” or “yin” quality, which distinguishes the style from the more rigid and standardized styles of later periods. The characters, while varying in size, maintain a vertical orientation, creating a sense of childlike innocence and unpretentiousness. This style is distinct from both the Eastern Jin and Tang dynasty styles. It retains the “brutality” and “naivety” of the Northern Wei style while incorporating literati elegance.

In conclusion, the inscription provides insights into Zheng Muji's life with her conversion to Buddhism, and her relationship with the imperial family, challenging existing historical narratives. Furthermore, it broadens our perspective on the Northern Wei calligraphic style. Its anonymity forces us to think about the relationship between the personal style, or the calligrapher's hand, and influences of specific groups and broader cultural phenomena that cannot be understood as forms of individual expressions.

The **discussion** of Zhang Qiang's presentation opened by Zhang Rui focused on the form and content of the text and how both relate to questions of identity of the epitaph's maker and Zhang Muji.

Zhang Rui asked whether it was possible that a member of Zheng Muji's family had written the calligraphy of the epitaph. Furthermore, she suggested that, given the sensitivity of Zheng's ominous name, his family might have avoided directly mentioning him. Muji's death, according to Zhang Rui, could have provided a pretext for discreetly restoring his father's honor. She pointed out that the absence of official titles in the inscription and the emphasis on the woman's family connections might support this interpretation, as it suggests an attempt to navigate a potentially delicate situation.

Zhang Qiang responded that it is problematic to ask who really wrote the epitaph given the evolutions and changes in the writing style in the epigraphy of that period. Concerning the question on family relationships, he suggested that the primary purpose of the inscription was not to provide a comprehensive family history but to assert the woman's social standing her as a member of a respected family and her social connections to dispel any notion that she was an outsider without significant social ties. The absence of official titles further supports this interpretation. In response to a follow-up question that asked why, if the family was so important, the inscription doesn't feature a standard genealogical pattern including her descendants. The response is that besides she left the household and entered the Buddhist community the focus is on the woman's contemporaries, especially given the death of her only son. However, the discovery of another nun's stele suggests that this lack of focus on future generations might be more widespread during periods of political instability in the epitaphs of nuns.

In her pre-circulated deliberations on the questions, the discussant Zhang Rui posited that while inscriptions could be used to assert one's identity, they could also reflect a desire for self-dissolution and union with something larger than oneself like the landscape. She presented a twofold distinction regarding the question of identity formation. On one hand, the collective construction of identity, and on the other, the conception of identity by the original author, whose "definition" of identity may paradoxically be marked by the dissolution of the individual "self" into a larger whole, where man is no longer distinct from nature or cosmos but merges with it. To illustrate her points, Zhang Rui examined three distinct cases. She argued that Zheng Daozhao engraved the "Inscription of the Heavenly Pillar Mountain" 天柱山銘 not to name the mountain but, as the poem says, to "display" 標 the virtues of his ancestors. With this gesture Zheng Daozhao inscribed the identity ancestors in a historical and symbolic continuum and positioned himself in the ancestral line. The mountain becomes akin to a commemorative stele for the maker and future generations. In the second example, Zhang Rui presented the case of Zheng Daozhao's "Poem about the Chamber of the Flying Immortal" 詠飛仙室. She argued that with the inscribed poem, describing Zheng Daozhao's spiritual quest, the author merges with the cosmic landscape of the stone chamber, paradoxically defining his personal identity as transcending or dissolving into the vastness of nature. In a further step, when the inscription is read by a certain audience, this identity can become collective again. As emblematic for this process, Zhang Rui presented the case of the hermit poet Hanshan 寒山 (fl. 7th-8th cent.). By adopting the name of his dwelling place, Cold Mountain, and writing his poems on natural elements, Hanshan exemplified the complete surrender of personal identity to the natural world. Ironically, throughout the centuries, Hanshan himself became collectively defined and appropriated figure, illustrating how the collective can reclaim and reshape even those identities that sought to disappear.

In her discussion of the presentation, Zhang Rui drew upon these ideas and questioned how to make assumptions about the identity, particularly given the uncertainty surrounding its authorship. She argued that instead of focusing on a single author, it might be more fruitful to consider how the inscription invites the reader to become one with the landscape. This perspective drew parallels to the high Tang poet Hanshan, who veiled his identity to become part of the mountain. Zhang asked if the Jiaoshan inscription should be understood in connection with the identity of scholars. Xue Lei replied that we need to take into account Daoist texts and other material that are part of a tradition writing this genre of texts, and raised the problem of how to further connect it to contemporaneous social and political events.

Zhang Rui further highlighted that authorship cannot be fruitfully discussed disconnected to agency, referring to the **answers** by the participants, who questioned the concept of personal authorship and self-expression in different ways.

Michael Hatch, moving beyond ideas about individual authorship, pointed out that inscriptions have a kind of agency. Furthermore, unlike calligraphy on paper or silk, inscriptions are inherently public and invite ongoing reinterpretation and re-authorship. This happens through rubbings, reproductions, and additions like poems or colophons. He brought up Jonathan Hay's concept of "networked subjectivity," which emphasizes how our sense of self is shaped through social interactions. He suggested that inscriptions exist within a network of relationships and interpretations, making them dynamic objects that engage viewers and potentially influence their identities and creative expressions. He wondered if inscriptions might even be designed with this potential for future

reinterpretation in mind, inviting viewers to use them as tools for self-reflection and creative exploration.

Yan Weitian also emphasized the collaborative nature of creating inscriptions and steles, moving beyond the traditional focus on a single author. He used Mi Fu's 米芾 (1051–1107) anecdote of Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿 (709–785), who could not recognize his own handwriting after the inscription with his calligraphy was carved to illustrate how the final product was often the result of a complex interplay between calligrapher, artisan, and other intermediaries. He suggested exploring alternative approaches to authorship that acknowledge this collaborative process. Yan also discussed the role of calligraphy in constructing public identities during the Qing Dynasty for groups like merchants, officials, and scholars. He stressed the importance of considering the context of display of calligraphic works, including where they were shown, how people viewed them, and who the intended audience was. He also asked when and why these works were removed from display, suggesting that this could reveal further insights into their social and cultural significance.

Yolaine Escande took a philosophical approach, questioning the adequacy of the concept of personal identity, authorship, and self-expression in Chinese culture, suggesting that it differs from modern Western understandings. She highlighted how Confucian and Daoist texts emphasize relationality and interconnectedness and thereby considering individuals not separated from their relationships and the world around them. This challenges the idea of a pre-existing, independent “self” and complicates the notion of an individual “author” in the Western sense. Escande pointed to Ronald Egan's study of Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072) as an early attempt to reconstruct networks of historical figures through inscriptions, acknowledging the importance of social and relational connections. She also cautioned against applying Western notions of authorship and authenticity to Chinese contexts, highlighting the complexities of issues like forgery and the value placed on tradition and lineage.

Hilde De Weerdts raised the question of how we can examine identity through inscriptions. She suggested investigating the location of the inscription, the object or event it commemorated, and the roles and relationships of the people mentioned in the text. She also emphasized the importance of the inscription's layout to understand how it might reflect the social status of different individuals or groups. She also inquired about the significance of the inscription's transcription history and asked how the ways in which an inscription was copied and reproduced over time might help to trace changing communal and individual identities.

Li Ziyi used the example of Cui Hao's 崔顥 (died 754) poem “Yellow Crane Tower” 黃鶴樓 and its subsequent appropriations and inscriptions to illustrate how poetry, faith, and calligraphy shape identity and collective memory. She argued that the ongoing tradition of inscribing poems on the Yellow Crane Tower, despite its repeated destruction and rebuilding, demonstrates how these inscriptions, rather than the physical structure itself, maintain the historical memory of the site. Li emphasized that cliff carvings, like poetic inscriptions, are not just textual but also artistic expressions involving collaboration between patrons, calligraphers, and engravers with aesthetic considerations and information not found in printed texts.

3.7 MANAGING MONUMENTS 遺產悖論

How have inscribed landscapes been managed between antiquarianism and heritagization? How has the challenge of preserving the environment and rock surface been met when inscriptions are traditionally valued in the shape of rubbings? Who is the audience for the heritagized inscriptions?

Presentations: Li Ziyi and Lia Wei

Discussants: Manuel Sassmann **Co-discussant:** Anna Le Menach

Li Ziyi delivered a presentation titled *Reading and Preservation of Stone Inscriptions: An Analysis Focused on Mount Wu 吳山 in Hangzhou 杭州*. She began by introducing Mount Wu, a significant historical site located south of West Lake 西湖 in Hangzhou. During the Southern Song Dynasty, it had been part of the imperial city and was surrounded by official residences, temples, and shrines. The mountain features a total of 102 cliff carvings, primarily inscriptions, dating from the Tang Dynasty 唐 in 840 CE up to the modern era. These inscriptions, she explained, were created by a diverse group, including Buddhists, Daoists, literati, and commoners. Over time, the audience for these inscriptions had evolved, encompassing tourists, collectors, calligraphy enthusiasts, epigraphers, and modern-day researchers.

Li then discussed the shift in attitude towards these inscriptions, from antiquarian interest to a modern understanding of cultural heritage preservation. She described how Hangzhou's scenic protection zones now employed advanced technology like satellite remote sensing and drones to monitor the condition of the relics on Mount Wu. Despite these efforts, the preservation of the inscriptions remained a concern due to the limestone composition of the mountain, which was highly susceptible to water erosion. She showed examples of inscriptions severely damaged by natural processes, highlighting the fragility of these historical records. She specifically mentioned the severe erosion of the square inscriptions at the entrance of Green Garment Cave 青衣洞, where only fragments remain legible, and a nearly illegible Ming Dynasty inscription.

The third part of her talk focused on the crucial role of rubbing in assessing damage and aiding preservation. She emphasized that early rubbings were invaluable for capturing the original state of the inscriptions before they further degraded. By comparing rubbings from different time periods, she demonstrated how it is possible to date undated rubbings and even reconstruct parts of inscriptions that were now illegible on the stone itself. As an example, she showed three rubbings of the "Preface of the Sacred Teaching with Collated Characters of Wang Xizhi" 集王圣教序, ranging from the Northern Song to the Southern Song dynasties, demonstrating how the progression of damage can be used for relative dating. A specific example she used was the "Zhuge Jianyuan" 諸葛澗源 inscription, which, due to its location on the inner wall of Green Garment Cave, had suffered significant water damage. Through the analysis of various rubbings, scholars have been able to determine the correct reading of previously debated characters.

Li concluded by underscoring the multidisciplinary nature of stone inscription preservation. She argued that the study of these inscriptions was not just about the text but also about understanding the broader context, the inscribed landscape, and the intersection of natural and human forces over time. While acknowledging the challenges of preserving these artifacts in the face of natural weathering, she also pointed out that the marks of time on the stones themselves held historical value and contributed to their

aesthetic appeal. The study of these inscriptions offered a unique window into the past, revealing the thoughts and beliefs of those who came there before.

After having already introduced Zheng Daozhao in guided tours of the exhibition, **Lia Wei** took the opportunity to show more aspects of the material, elaborating on *The Reception (Audience) of Medieval Inscribed Landscapes on the Four Mountains Again*. The presentation distinguished different periods from the sixth century to the present, questioning his image as the Northern Sage of Calligraphy 北方書聖 that has been cultivated in antiquarian circles and academia since the late Qing dynasty.

She began by presenting the geographical location of the four mountains close to the cities Laizhou (Mts Daji, Yunfeng, Tianzhu) and Qingzhou (Mt Linglong), where Zheng served as a prefect. With no trace of how the four mountains were visited by his contemporaries, she raised the question of whether the making of the inscription was potentially failure, having no audience at all. Only his son, Zheng Shuzu (485–565), continued his work, inscribing the base of the “Epitaph” dedicated to his grandfather and adding another inscription at the foot of the mountain. Later inscriptions impose other visions on the mountain that are largely unrelated to the original content, like the ones of Song dynasty literati who travelled there together with friends to drink and write poetry.

Wei then jumped to the nineteenth and twentieth century antiquarian reception and heritagization of the sites. She presented two inscriptions on Mount Daji of 1899 on the repair of a surrounding wall, prohibiting damage to the site under threat of fines in case of violation. At about the same time, we have evidence of Qing dynasty officials going to the sites but not finding a particular inscription because it is outside the present administrative borders that differ from the ones of the sixth century. Unlike the “Eulogy of Burying a Crane” presented by Xue Lei in the previous roundtable, the location was out of reach for quick visits and thus the construction of Zheng Daozhao as a “calligrapher sage” was mainly based on rubbings of the inscriptions that circulated widely among antiquarians, which were produced by local rubbing makers and then sold on the market.

Rubbings had also been the main source for studying his calligraphy in China and Japan during most of the twentieth century; a situation that changed only after the end of the Cultural Revolution. Among the earliest visitors who systematically documented the sites was Mr. Sakata, whose photographs document the sites since the early 1980s, before the modern heritagization with the addition of architectural elements such as paved paths and “protecting” architecture that often completely changed their appearance and atmosphere. Only the later inscriptions, less valued in the antiquarian tradition and under the current heritage, remained largely untouched. In some cases, where inscriptions have been destroyed or overwritten, the old photographs are the only visual document of the inscriptions. The problem that the documentation of graffiti by scholars after the 1980s was rather random, a problem which the Altergraphy team addressed in their fieldwork campaigns by documenting them systematically. Wei then discussed the recent policies and a law of 2020 that prohibits the production of rubbings, except for some scholarly purposes. In many cases the prohibition propelled the production of “fake” rubbings made from recuts of the inscriptions into stone or wood, a practice that is attested earlier at other sites.

Finally, Wei presented the team’s findings of the Japanese reception. In particular the hitherto undocumented modern Japanese stele forest of the late 20th century with inscriptions commissioned by Japanese calligraphy enthusiasts. Their fascination was catalyzed by contemporary avantgarde calligraphers like Hidai Nankoku, who creatively adopted the practice of writing large calligraphy.

In his **discussion**, Sassmann pointed to the common phases of heritagization that the two presenters spelled out in the case studies by Li and Wei that could be observed in many other cases like the Mount Tai *Diamond Sutra* as well. After the initial production, the first period in the Song dynasty was characterized by literati visits, which extended to wide-spread tourist activity during the Ming, including the construction of pavilions and a flurry of colophons in stone. The epigraphers of the Qianlong era developed a serious interest in the inscriptions as such, which was accompanied by a broad interest in stele calligraphy. In the late 19th and early 20th century, scholars and officials started to pay attention to the sites, trying to protect the sites, and regulate the production of rubbings by managing access to the inscriptions. During the early PRC, the earlier efforts were institutionalized. Modern historical research began in China only after the Cultural Revolution in the 1980s.

He also highlighted the variety of sources and new methods of documentation, following the advancing technological progress, including not only rubbings, but also woodblock printings, paintings, photography, and 3D scans, all providing different perspectives on the material

On the question of what constitutes successful heritagization, the preservation of the landscape and the inscription, the role of the epigrapher was problematized. Lia Wei argued that it was best not to touch an inscription. Cleaning off the patina of the surface may cause more harm than benefit to the condition of rock surfaces. The application of chemicals may have detrimental effects in the long run. Li Ziyi pointed out that securing the text of the inscription is a major part of heritage work that not only focusses on the rock itself.

Both presenters highlighted the different interests in managing the inscriptions and the levels of governance, from the national over the provincial down to the local level. Special features of the environments, like the position of the inscriptions at remote places or military facilities may have further impact on the accessibility of the sites.

The **answers** to the questions both reported general observations as well as additional case studies based on the participants' interests.

Hilde De Weerdt identified key issues connected to heritagization as physical access, restoration, digital access to objects and transcriptions, permissions. She reiterated the need for an integrated platform for stele and rubbing images, metadata, and transcribed texts, to facilitate access for the scholarly community.

Yan Weitian noted that while antiquarianism involved hands-on study and in situ examination, "heritagization" had made these experiences more difficult. He felt that UNESCO sites and stele inscriptions preserved by institutions were better protected but harder to access, and he wondered if there was a way to use ink rubbings to show and analyze the process of historical preservation.

Michael Hatch recounted his recent visits to local museums and inscription sites in Shandong, noting the disrepair and wanting condition of sites that are not highly valued by administrators unless they generated revenue.

Yolaine Escande reviewed the history of engaging with inscribed landscapes since the Song. Rubbings, easily transported and exchanged, were especially important as a means to "preserve" inscriptions prone to deterioration. She argued that there was no "management" of the sites and little awareness that the landscape and the stones needed protection before the twentieth century. She observed the different audience of sites after the opening up in the 1980s. She distinguished between popular destinations, like the

Seven Stars Crag 七星岩 in Guangdong, and sites mainly visited by specialist scholars, like the Lake Where the Fish are Called 喚魚池 in Sichuan.

Xue Lei mentioned the active interaction of historical and living Daoist communities with sites without claiming ownership of it.

Sassmann reported the proliferation of recent studies on heritagization. Recent studies on heritagization of sites: For the transformations of modern cultural heritage sites, including its scholarly exploration, Wang Dong 王棟 presented the example of Longmen Cave Chapels 龍門石窟 in Henan province.²⁴ Sonya S. Lee's 李琛妍 monograph of stone carvings in Sichuan province shows the environmental dimensions of Buddhist cliff temples through centuries, the continuity in the idea of heritage before the modern era, and what we can learn from that for our present interaction with nature in the long run.²⁵ In different case studies, Zhu Yujie 朱煜杰 has recently investigated the diversity of responses and transformations that cultural heritage sites in China exhibit today by focusing on three case studies. They are appended to a broader genealogy of the concept of cultural heritage and its adaptation in China. Through that combination, he aimed to extract larger patterns of changes and local peculiarities in cultural heritage practices in a *longue durée* perspective.²⁶

3.8 ANTIQUARIAN PRACTICES 試驗金石

What are the specific antiquarian modes of handling monuments and surrogates? What dimensions of objects do sensorial interactions reveal that are lost in both modern armchair scholarship and archaeology?

Presentations: Yan Weitian and Michael Hatch

Discussant: Aida Wong **Co-discussants:** Anna Le Menach and Manuel Sassmann

The last roundtable featured a combined presentation of **Yan Weitian** and **Michael Hatch**, who directly engaged with the questions. To address rubbings and their surrogates, they drew on their expertise as art historians, widening the focus by including aesthetic problems also pertaining to painting production in the 19th and early 20th centuries. They asked about why there was the fascination with epigraphy in the first place and how epigraphers and painters began to create a synergy of interests.

For the on the specific antiquarian modes of handling monuments and surrogates they brought up the example of the Fan Shi Stele 范式碑, dated 235, now at the Jining Municipal Museum to illustrate the fragmentation of monuments in smaller parts as one characteristic. Juxtaposing a photograph of the stele with an 18th century rubbing, the first observed that the rubbing was not in one piece, but the calligraphy of the stele head and the body were rubbed separately. In a next step, they showed a rare 13th century rubbing, which its owner Huang Yi 黄易 (1744–1802) had cut into pieces to reassemble and remount them in an album. Huang then used this album to make a copy tracing only the outlines of the characters, leaving only its empty form, which could be easily

²⁴ Wang Dong. *Longmen's Stone Buddhas and Cultural Heritage: When Antiquity Met Modernity in China*. (Asia/Pacific/Perspectives). Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020.

²⁵ Lee, Sonya S. 李琛妍. *Temples in the Cliffside: Buddhist Art in Sichuan*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2021.

²⁶ Zhu Yujie 朱煜杰. *China's Heritage through History: Reconfigured Pasts*. Oxon: Routledge, 2024.

reproduced in woodblock prints. The results were published among other inscriptions with commentaries in his *Engraved Texts of the Lesser Penglai Pavilion* 小蓬萊閣金石文字 (1800). Such collections eventually had a scholarly purpose. An example of what Yan described as performance of epigraphic knowledge, a collaborative mode, where scholars contribute their own knowledge, is the reconstruction of lost or damaged inscriptions. He illustrated it with a reconstruction of the *Stele of Mt Hua* 華山廟碑 for which Weng Fanggang 翁方綱 (1733–1818) combined the reproduction of three ink rubbings that he had copied with the double outline technique, eventually filling the characters with ink, and preserving their damaged parts. Once the copy was completed more than 30 scholars came to see this particular copy. As on rubbings, scholars inscribed it with their names and comments on the inscription or this particular copy. Hatch emphasized that such social networking was characteristic for the scholars in the early modern period or even their primary goal, who reshaped the inscriptions into perceptual sensory stuff and transformed them into new media.

As presented in more detail in Hatch's recent monograph, the engagement with artifacts, particularly during the period discussed, was a deeply sensory experience, extending far beyond mere visual observation, engaging touch, smell, and sound to connect to the past.

Liuzhou's 六舟 (1791–1858) renowned "full form" or "composite" rubbings 全形拓, for instance, exemplified the tactile nature of this connection. Ruan Yuan 阮元 (1764–1849), who had personally held the original in his hands, could confirm the accuracy of these rubbings, further highlighting the importance of physical interaction. Inkstones allowed individuals to hold miniature, symbolic representations of landscapes or even celestial bodies in their hands. The Qing dynasty anonymous "Following the Stars" inkstone with its imagery of wind and rain-associated stars and pillars representing stars in the sky, illustrates this concept. As scholars used the inkstone, grinding the ink and preparing to write, they simultaneously read its inscriptions, creating a multi-sensory experience that transcended the purely visual. Similarly, seals, like those crafted by Xu Sangeng 徐三庚 (1826–1890), required the physical act of stamping to bring their designs to life, emphasizing the dynamic interplay between the object and the body. Authenticity and connection to antiquity were often established through touch. Huang Yi's colophon on his album leaf "Finding a stele at Liangcheng Mountain" recounts how tactile examination was crucial in verifying the age and authenticity of ancient artifacts.

Beyond touch, the scent of the past was significant for scholars. "Fragrance of Antiquity" 古香 was a term used to describe the smell of ink, encapsulating the olfactory dimension of interacting with historical artifacts. This raises questions about the specific type of ink used in places like Guangzhou during this period and the broader reasons why Chinese scholars so frequently engaged with the past, seeking connection through tangible and intangible means.

Sound also played a role in creating a sensory link to history. "The Eight Tone Stream" 八音澗, a late 19th-century inscription in the Jichang Garden 寄暢園 in Wuxi 無錫, was designed as a response to the sounds of nature, particularly water. This "sonic illusion of waterspace" engaged visitors in a literary imagination of sounds, guided by rocks and a stream that dropped and turned. Similarly, a colophon at Sutra Stone Valley at Mount Tai inscribed on the rock face, and the natural stream flowing above, highlighted the interplay between water and epigraphy, where the presence or absence of (the sound of) water became a significant element of the inscription's meaning and experience.

The **discussant** Aida Wong emphasized the need for art historians to develop innovative methodologies for studying objects like stone carvings and cliff inscriptions, given their unique characteristics of non-finality, vulnerability, and replicability. The approaches of the presenters Yan and Hatch demonstrated the important role of the sensory and experiential dimensions of art for these works and their reproductions. They provided fresh perspectives that showed that objects cannot be isolated from their physical contexts without impoverishing our understanding of them. She then introduced the conceptual difference of “sensory senses” and “cognitive senses”. The first refers to direct, biological experiences like feeling the wind or the ground beneath one’s feet, or scaling a mountain and touching the inscribed stones. The second is related to evoking feelings in the absence of the actual object by culturally constructed associations learned through literature and other forms of cultural expression, such as the topos of the sweet smell of ink.

Wong posed two key questions. First, about effective pedagogical strategies for conveying these sensory experiences to students in a classroom setting when the actual objects are not physically present. Second, she questioned whether art historians could benefit from adopting further methodologies from other disciplines to enhance their understanding of art objects.

In response to the first question, Hatch stressed the value of incorporating real objects, or even reproductions, into the classroom to enhance students’ experience and understanding. Yan Weitian suggested several strategies, including the use of videos demonstrating the use of ink stones and training the students’ perception with “slow looking” exercises, making them stand in front of objects for a longer period of time and protocolling their experiences.

Regarding the second question, Hatch pointed to the moral dimensions of sensory experiences. Drawing upon the work of Michael Nylan, who showed the moral dimensions of pleasure in early Chinese texts, he argued that in early Chinese thought, the senses were considered crucial for understanding the world, also in a moral sense, and that touch, in particular, was considered a holistic bodily experience. He further suggested that art historians should move beyond a focus on the “medium” and consider a broader perspective on a multiplicity of “media,” acknowledging the diverse forms that art can take. Yan emphasized two methodological aspects. On the one hand, turning from Eurocentric methodology and terminology to the language employed in Chinese sources. On the other hand, he suggested borrowing terminology from other disciplines for academic writing in English, such as the discourse on the perception and production of stone art in Western contexts, to enrich the vocabulary of art history, and link it to the Chinese terms.

In the **answers** to the pre-circulated questions, participants highlighted the different modes of engaging with inscriptions and their surrogates.

Hilde De Weerdts emphasized the experiences of the materiality of inscription. This included the act of touching them, and enhancing their visibility through various ways like creating rubbings or applying powder to the text. She emphasized the need to reconstruct “historical experiences” as documented in travelogues and records of visits to steles and other antiquities.

Li Ziyi pointed to the immobility of cliff inscriptions, and how the efforts of antiquarians (rubbings, correspondence, and epigraphic studies), contributed to the creation of landmarks. Li argued that unlike other mediums, textual relics required not only viewing but also reading, which involved analyzing individual characters and strokes. This detailed examination was often not feasible on-site and relied on the

comparison of rubbings. Li highlighted the “primordially” of rubbings, their authority as handcrafted replicas embodying the original work. As copies or substitutes for landmarks, rubbings allowed people to engage with landscapes beyond historical contemplation and literary imagination. The act of reading the landscape enhanced the cultural significance of landmarks and deepened the humanistic aspect of the natural surroundings.

Xue Lei expressed interest in the question of out how the tactile experience of 扪碑 (*menbei*), which involved physically touching and feeling the strokes of the inscription, developed since the Song Dynasty and pointed to the spatial and bodily experience of traversing the landscape to create or visit inscriptions. Xue also asked whether these experiences could be identified in pictorial representations or other visual mediums.

3.9 SCREENING AND Q&A

On the second and last day of our conference, a screening of two film excerpts - shot during the ten days of fieldwork in the four mountains inscribed by Zheng Daozhao in Shandong province—and a 3D model of Mount Tianzhu built by Gao Chao based on drone videos, was also organized with the participation of Marie-Françoise-Plissart, Lia Wei and Tchou-Tchou Rao Tophoven.

The conference participants and audience were invited to follow us into the mountains through three attempts at visually narrating the sites, with the inclusion of subtitles (information regarding the fieldwork, transcription and translation of the inscriptions) and sounds (reading of an inscription, dialogues, ambient sounds).

The three short films were a good way to look at some of the conference themes from the point of view of practice, especially with regards to the eight and last roundtable, which brought up the question of how to convey experiential information or the sensorial perception of inscribed objects or sites. Heritage-related issues were also addressed, such as access (through or despite of man-made paths, pavilions or cages), degrees of interaction with the inscriptions (through measuring, scanning, photographing and of course rubbing) and the understanding of the mountain as a "site" (with physiographic, visual or material marks delimiting its area).

The reactions and questions raised by the audience were encouraging, mostly prompting us to delve deeper into the narrative exercise, by multiplying the "episodes" around specific angles on the sites and inscriptions, and based on diverse narrative devices (integrating archival photographs or videos, subtitling or adding text in the frames, exploiting sound and voices such as interviews as a way to reactivate the inscriptions).

The films' intended audience is still an important question: while short episodes and screen captures of selected shots can function like as many "tunnels" into the corpus upon publication, either online or in paper form, the perspective of constructing a full-fledged movie is still remote from the current stage of work.

While most of the basic data was collected or verified on the field in September, a second field trip oriented towards the collection of a wider spectrum of data will be organized in the spring of 2025. Thereby, the films have become yet another incentive to travel to the inscribed landscapes and unfold their layered meanings.

4 APPENDIX 1: LIST OF SELECTED DIGITAL RESOURCES

4.1 TOOLS

IMMARKUS - An online tool for image annotation.

<https://immarkus.xmarkus.org/>

COMARKUS - A tool for annotating and analyzing text within its context.

<https://comarkus.xmarkus.org/>

COMPARATIVUS - A tool for comparing textual passages.

<https://dh.chinese-empires.eu/comparativus/>

PARALLELLS - A tool designed for comparing and aligning parallel texts.

<https://dh.chinese-empires.eu/parallells/>

DOCUSKY - A platform for collaborative document annotation and analysis.

<https://docusky.org.tw/>

TEI Publisher - A web-based platform for publishing and presenting digital scholarly editions encoded in TEI (Text Encoding Initiative)

<https://teipublisher.com/>

TACL - basic text analysis on a corpus of texts. It can, with minor modifications, be used for any texts, though it is designed specifically for the texts available from the Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association (CBETA)

<https://tacl.readthedocs.io/en/latest/>

4.2 CHINESE EPIGRAPHY – OPEN ACCESS RESOURCES

Chinese National Library, Beijing, collection of digitized rubbings 中国国家图书馆碑帖菁华 (ca. 25000 pcs.)

<http://read.nlc.cn/allSearch/searchList?searchType=34>

National Central Library, Taipei, digital collection including rubbings 台灣國家圖書館

<https://rbook.ncl.edu.tw/NCLSearch/Search/Index/5>

Academia Sinica, Taipei, databases and collections 台灣中央研究院

<https://museum.sinica.edu.tw/en/collection/5>

Rubbing from the Five Dynasties to Song 五代及宋拓片

https://ihparchive.ihp.sinica.edu.tw/ihpkmc/ihpkm_op?!FUNC240

Buddhist Rubbings 佛教石刻造像拓本

<https://rub.ihp.sinica.edu.tw/~buddhism/>

Rubbings from the Liao to Yuan 遼金元拓片

<http://rub.ihp.sinica.edu.tw/lcyrub/>

Kyoto University Collection digitized collection of rubbings. 京都大学人文科学研究所所藏石刻拓本資料

http://kanji.zinbun.kyoto-u.ac.jp/db-machine/imgsrv/takuhon/t_menu.html

Tokyo University Collection digitized collection of rubbings 東京大学史料編纂所金石文拓本史料データベース

http://kanji.zinbun.kyoto-u.ac.jp/db-machine/imgsrv/takuhon/t_menu.html

Shukutoku University Archive 淑徳大学中国石刻拓本デジタルアーカイブズ

<https://www.shukutoku.ac.jp/university/facilities/syogaku/takuhon/>

Seoul National Museum of Korea 首爾國立中央博物館 (mostly Korean material)

<https://www.museum.go.kr/site/eng/relic/search/list>

Field Museum Chicago, Chinese Rubbing Collection

<https://www.fieldmuseum.org/collection/chinese-rubbings-collection>

Harvard University Library and Harvard-Yenching Library, Chinese Rubbing Collection

<https://curiosity.lib.harvard.edu/chinese-rubbings-collection>

Berkeley University Library, Digital collection including rubbings

<https://digicoll.lib.berkeley.edu/>

EFEQ Database of Rubbings in European Collections <https://www.efeo.fr/estampages/>

(Paris: Institut des Hautes études chinoises du Collège de France, Société asiatique, Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient, Musée national des arts asiatiques Guimet; Oxford: Bodleian Library, London: British Library; Zürich: Rietberg Museum)

Daoist Steles of the Northern Dynasties collection, Dartmouth College

<https://www.jstor.org/site/dartmouthcollege/daoiststeles/>

FROGBEAR Database of Religious Sites in East Asia housed at the UBC Library Open Collections, including photographs of epigraphic material

<https://frogbear.org/app/>

4.3 CHINESE COMMERCIAL EPIGRAPHY DATABASES

China Stone Inscriptions Database 中華石刻數據庫 (China Publishing House 中華書局)

<https://inscription.ancientbooks.cn>

Compilation of Rubbings of Stone Carvings from Past Dynasties 历代石刻拓片汇编 (20.000)

Database of Song Dynasty Epitaphs 宋代墓志铭数据库 (10.738)

Complete Collection of Stone Carvings from Shanxi 三晋石刻大全 (17.242)

Database of Han, Wei, and Six Dynasties Stone Inscriptions 汉魏六朝碑刻数据库 (2.463)

Database of Tang Dynasty Epitaphs 唐代墓志铭数据库 (12.500)

Complete Records of Chinese Epigraphy 中國金石總錄 (50.000)

http://www.ch5000.com.cn/jsk_sy.aspx

Hanqing Epigraphic Sources Database 汗青金石资料库 (plans a total of 200.000 pcs.)
<http://www.hanqing-book.com/>

4.4 DATABASES MAINTAINED BY CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS

Buddhist Stone Sutras in China
www.stonesutras.org

Online Spiritual Atlas of Global East (OSAGE)
<https://www.globaleast.org/osage/>

4.5 CHINESE CHARACTER RESOURCES

Zdic (汉典) - A comprehensive online dictionary for Chinese characters.
<https://www.zdic.net/>

Sf.zdic (书法字典) - This specialized dictionary focuses on the calligraphic styles of Chinese characters.
<http://sf.zdic.net/>

Dictionary of Chinese Character Variants, Taiwan Ministry of Education 教育部異體字字典 - This database catalogues various forms and variants of Chinese characters.
<https://dict.variants.moe.edu.tw/>

Zi.tools - An online platform offering a variety of tools for studying Chinese characters.
<https://zi.tools/>

CHISE (CHARacter Information Service Environment) 文字情報サービス環境 - extensive information on Chinese character and encoding of variants
<https://www.chise.org/>

Variant Character Database of Medieval Chinese Texts (DMCT) - A database focused on variant Chinese characters found in medieval manuscripts.
<https://www.database-of-medieval-chinese-texts.be/views/variant/>

Mojiportal - A search aggregator for character snippets from several resources
<https://mojiportal.nabunken.go.jp/>

4.6 INFORMATION ON DIGITAL RESOURCES IN EAST ASIAN STUDIES

Online Guide East Asia (OGEA), Berlin State Library - Access to electronic resources on East Asian. Keyword search and filter according to further criteria, such as subject groups, regional reference, language, etc.

<https://crossasia.org/ressourcen/online-guide-east-asia/>

Electronic Resources Guide, Princeton University Library

<https://libguides.princeton.edu/c.php?g=513803&p=3510673>

Table of Digital Resources and Projects on East Asia compiled by Paula R. Curtis

<https://prcurtis.com/DH/resources/>

The Digital Orientalist - This online magazine by a team of scholars, librarians, and students to share our experience using digital tools in the Humanities

<https://digitalorientalist.com/>

5 APPENDIX 2: SHORT BIOGRAPHIES OF PARTICIPANTS

Ashikari Kento 芦刈健人 (Kyoto University) — Ashikari Kento is completing his master's degree in history at the University of Kyoto, with a thesis on Tubo history. He has joined Altergraphy during his exchange year at Inalco, and has since been embarked in a series of interviews with Mr. Sakata and other Japanese epigraphists or calligraphers of that generation. He is also investigating the earlier stage of reception of Zheng Daozhao's oeuvre in Japan starting with the diffusion and reproduction of rubbings, in terms of social networks and publications.

Bauer, Estelle (IFRAE/Inalco and Musée Guimet) is Professor of Japanese art history at Inalco and joined the Musée national d'art asiatique Guimet this year as curator of the Japanese collections. Her research interests include narrative painting and more recently, East Asian diplomatic gifts in European collections.

Berdin, Francesca 白鳳榮 — Francesca Berdin holds a master's degree in Chinese studies from Inalco, with a thesis on Northern dynasties epigraphy. While working on a PhD proposal around stone working traditions in medieval and early modern Southwest China, she is completing her training with a second degree in archaeology at Sorbonne University. She is a research assistant at Altergraphy, with a focus on calligraphic variation and stone carving techniques.

Cahier, Killian 耿良 (Inalco) — Killian Cahier holds a master's degree from the School of Fine Arts in Bordeaux. He has completed a second master's degree in Chinese studies at Inalco, with a thesis on calligraphy modernization in East Asia with a focus on "misunderstandings". At Altergraphy, Killian has built our tables to structure and host data in, and he has taken part in photographing inscriptions and rubbings, also assuming editing tasks.

Escande, Yolaine 幽蘭 (CNRS/CRAL) — Yolaine Escande is directrice de recherches at the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) and researcher at the Centre de recherches sur les arts et le langage (CRAL). She has translated major treatises on Chinese painting and calligraphy, and published extensively on Chinese art history, including on the culture of landscape or 'mountains and water'. Beyond her interest in inscribed landscapes, she is our interlocutor for the analysis of discourses and terminology related to the reception of medieval epigraphy in theoretical treatises on calligraphy.

Hahn, Thomas H. 韓濤 (UC Berkeley) — Thomas Hahn is particularly interested in historical and modern religious geography and urbanization. While researching Daoism and sacred mountains on extensive field trips to China since the early 1980s, he has created a [visual archive](#) to capture and preserve times past and present, in which he also collects historical photographs of China (from the 1860s up to the 1960s).

Michael J. Hatch 何彦晖 (Trinity College) — Michael J. Hatch is an associate professor of art history at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut (USA). His scholarship covers Chinese art from the 18th to the 21st century, with particular interests in materiality and sensory history. His first book, *Networks of Touch: A Tactile History of Chinese Art, 1790-*

1840 (Penn State University Press, 2024), describes the early nineteenth-century obsession with epigraphy in China, and how it led to a form of tactile thinking that impacted all of elite visual and material culture. Upcoming projects include a co-edited volume about the exchange of antiquarian knowledge and craft across early modern East Asia, a book about the effects of linearity on the brushwork of modern Chinese painting, and a digital database of inscriptions on Chinese artworks in US museums. He also writes occasional exhibition reviews for the Wall Street Journal.

Hertel, Shao-Lan 何小蘭 (Museum für Ostasiatische Kunst, Cologne) — Shao-Lan Hertel is Director of the Museum of East Asian Art, Cologne. She studied East Asian Art History and Sinology at Freie Universität Berlin (FUB) and China Academy of Art (Hangzhou), and obtained her doctorate in East Asian Art History from FUB in 2017 with a dissertation on the calligraphic oeuvre of the modern Chinese brush-and-ink artist Huang Binhong (1865–1955). She served as Assistant Professor (2012–18) and Interim Chair (2021) of East Asian Art History at FUB as well as Postdoctoral Researcher and Assistant Curator at Tsinghua University Art Museum (TAM) (2018–22), respectively, Tsinghua University Academy of Arts and Design (2018–2020), Beijing. In 2020/21, she held a J. S. Lee Memorial Fellowship of the Bei Shan Tang Foundation, to undertake an inventory of and research on the Chinese calligraphy collection held at TAM. Her research focuses on Chinese calligraphy and ink art of the late-imperial, modern, and contemporary periods. Forthcoming publications include contributions to the edited volumes *Handbuch Soziologie der Künste* (Springer 2024) and *Lost and Found in Translation: Citation and Early Modern Architecture* (De Gruyter 2024).

Lei Yang 雷阳 (Inalco/CRCAO/IFRAE) — Lei Yang's approach is located in-between the history of religion and the history of sensibilities, with a peculiar interest to the senses: his thesis analyzed the soundscape of bells in late imperial Beijing. Active since 2013 in the EFEO project “[Épigraphie et mémoire orale des temples de Pékin](#)” (Bujard 2011–2020), Lei Yang has developed a strong set of skills in the study of religious landscapes through epigraphy. Beyond his specialism in late imperial epigraphy, Yang is active in mapping the source material of French field sinology in the early 20th c., which forms the first bulk of rubbings to enter Parisian collections.

Pettit, Jonathan 裴玄錚 (University of Hawaii) — Jonathan Pettit researches medieval Daoist literature and geography. He has a particular interest in stele monuments that were erected and dedicated at sacred sites. He is currently finishing a book project on early sixth century stele with an emphasis on how epigraphic sources cast light on how Daoist worldviews were remembered, transmitted, and imagined. He is also finishing a project on translating *Le jet des dragons*, a book published posthumously in 1919 by Édouard Chavannes on medieval Daoist epigraphy.

Shi Tianyu 施天宇 (Hamburg University) — Shi Tianyu is a doctoral candidate at the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures at the University of Hamburg. His research focuses on the process by which public memory is constructed through the circulation of funeral texts for non-official literati in the 10th to 13th centuries. He earned his bachelor's and master's degrees from Soochow University and National Taiwan University in. His research has consistently sought to liberate epigraphs from being merely materials for

social history research, focusing instead on their production, reading, dissemination, and collection processes.

Lee Sunkyū 李善圭 (KU Leuven) — Lee Sunkyū is a social and cultural historian of early modern China and East Asia, working as a postdoctoral researcher on the project 'Regionalizing Infrastructures in Chinese History' at KU Leuven. She received a Ph.D. in History (2021) from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), and worked as a lecturer at UCLA and Loyola Marymount University before joining the project team. Her dissertation, "The Cartographic Construction of Borders in Ming China, 1368-1644," investigates the role of maps in facilitating a new vision of frontier spaces that were demarcated by clear boundaries between Ming and the outside world. Comparing two geographically different frontier spaces—northern steppe and southern maritime frontiers, her research elucidates how the cartographic transformation was closely intertwined with political and intellectual endeavors to create new territorial and cultural identities in the age of increasing transregional contacts. Sunkyū has a great interest in applying digital scholarship methods to historical research. Her current research project, titled 'Steppe, Forest, and River: Wall Histories in East Asia between the fifteenth- and seventeenth-centuries' investigates how wall-building emerged as a dominant strategy across multiple, geographically disparate frontiers of early modern East Asia. Using digital technologies, her project aims to visualize cross-regional patterns of boundary-making practices. At the same time, she is interested in illustrating how local ecology and technological knowledge interacted with material outcomes.

Le Menach, Anna 林紫溪 (Inalco) — Anna Le Menach is engaged in a professional master level training at Inalco, aiming at becoming a restorer of works on xuan paper. While traveling from one internship to another (Centre Pompidou, Atelier Camille Schmitt, Fondation Baur and soon Nanjing University of the Arts), she was able to compare private and institutional ways of preserving East Asian works of art in European collections. At Altergraphy, she takes part among other tasks in thinking an ontology for cataloging and describing rubbings.

Plissart, Marie-Françoise (photographer and filmmaker) — Marie-Françoise Plissart has followed her inclination for visual narratives since her very first roman photo (Droit de regards 1985), through her many collaborations with anthropologists and art historians around various themes with a peculiar sensibility for architecture and the environment – to cite only but a few: [Michelangelo's quarries](#), the [renovation of Atomium](#), her [collaboration with Sophie Bruneau about Cézanne and the Sainte-Victoire mountain](#), her [seas and trees series](#), etc -. She has travelled to China extensively since the 1970s, with a special interest for writing and landscapes.

Rao Tophoven, Tchou-Tchou 饶楚楚 — Tchou-Tchou Rao Tophoven is pursuing her master degree at Inalco with a professional orientation in filmmaking. She has a special interest in talismanic writing, seal carving and the visual analysis of calligraphy. At Altergraphy, she is working on a film project with photographer and filmmaker Marie-Françoise Plissart, narrating and annotating inscribed landscapes.

Sassmann, Manuel 王平國 (Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities) — Manuel Sassmann acts as a consultant for this project, drawing on his experience as a member of

the Buddhist Stone Sutras in China project, to which he contributes at all levels (research, programming, fieldwork, photography, and image editing). He is particularly interested in research history and the reception of medieval epigraphy. He advises us on adapting international standards of encoding the data produced in this project to facilitate its integrability with data produced by other projects. His current line of research is to investigate how conventional epigraphic research and a historical perspective can be enriched by digital methods.

Shin Jeongsoo (Academy of Korean Studies) — Shin Jeongsoo is Associate Professor of Korean Cultural Studies at the Academy of Korean Studies and is currently a visiting scholar at Harvard-Yenching Institute. He works on a book manuscript tentatively titled “Nineteenth-century Sino-Korean Antiquarianism and its Legacy in Colonial Korea,” dealing with appropriations of calligraphic works in East Asia. One article on this topic is “Kim Chŏnghŭi and His Epigraphic Studies: Two Silla Steles and Their Rubbings” (2022).

Suméra, Paula 苏美若 (震瀟湘) (Inalco/IFRAE) — Paula Suméra holds a degree in geography and a master degree in history from EHESS. After a second master degree in Chinese studies at Inalco, she is starting her research on the tusi system in the Wuling mountain range, Hubei province. At Altergraphy, Paula builds mental maps, designs relationships between different categories of data, and adds the data collected during survey - precise locations and reconstructions of the mountainscapes - into our GIS.

De Weerdt, Hilde (KU Leuven) — Hilde De Weerdt is Professor of Chinese and Early Modern Global History at KU Leuven. Professor De Weerdt is broadly interested in intellectual, social, and political history, both within an East Asian context, and within a comparative or global historical framework. She has published six books on Chinese political culture, including *The Arts of Governance* forthcoming from Hawai'i University Press. In 2021 she received funding from the European Research Council and the Dutch Research Council (NWO) to extend her earlier work on Chinese state infrastructures into a large-scale collaborative project on the social and regional histories of material infrastructures (roads, bridges, city walls) (1000-1800) in which stelae and rubbings figure prominently. She maintains an active interest in designing and developing digital research methods for East Asian and other languages. With Brent Ho she co-designed the text annotation and reading services ENT-MARKUS and CO-MARKUS, with Mees Gelein two text comparison modules COMPARATIVUS and PARALLELLS, and with Rainer Simon the semantic image annotation service IMMARKUS.

Wei, Lia 魏離雅 (Inalco/IFRAE) — Lia Wei is Maître de conférences in Chinese art history at the Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales (INALCO) and researcher at the Institut français de recherche sur l'Asie de l'Est (IFRAE). She was trained in art history and archaeology at Université Libre de Bruxelles and the School of Oriental and African Studies, and taught at SOAS and at the archaeology department in Renmin University of China, Beijing. Her own practice of seal carving, landscape painting, calligraphy and rubbing techniques motivated her interest in epigraphy and funerary or religious art. She is particularly interested in the creative tension between brush and chisel, from medieval inscribed landscapes to the practice of inscribing objects in late imperial China.

Wong, Aida Yuen 阮圓 (Brandeis University) — Aida Yuen Wong is a scholar of Asian art history who has written extensively on transcultural modernism. Among her major publications are *Parting the Mists: Discovering Japan and the Rise of National-Style Painting in Modern China* (University of Hawaii Press, 2006) (Chinese Translation from Taipei: Rock Publishing, 2019) and the edited volume *Visualizing Beauty: Gender and Ideology in Modern East Asia* (Hong Kong University Press, 2012). She is the author of the chapter on Chinese modernism in the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, 2nd ed. (2014). Another book, *The Other Kang Youwei: Calligrapher, Art Activist, and Aesthetic Reformer in Modern China* (Brill, 2016), explores the art theory and legacy of the late Qing-early Republican reformer whose paradigmatic thinking about painting and calligraphy cast a long shadow on modern/contemporary Chinese art discourses. She is the co-editor of the volume, *Fashion, Identity, and Power in Modern Asia* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), which deals with dress reforms in China, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Korea between the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. In addition, she has begun research on 20th-century ink painting in Taiwan that intersects with gouache and oil painting. Her areas of interest include painting, calligraphy, institutional history, and historiography.

Xue Lei 薛磊 (Oregon State University) — Specialist of pre-modern Chinese calligraphy and painting, Xue Lei authored a monograph on the *Yihe ming 瘞鶴銘* (Eulogy for Burying a Crane), a southern inscribed landscape contemporaneous of the 6th century inscriptions investigated by Altergraphy. Xue Lei took part in our September 2024 survey and provided valuable advice and expertise in the understanding of the sites, the inscriptions and their context of production. Further relevant points of comparison with his corpus include the later reception and diffusion of the *moya* inscriptions through the re-inscription of the sites and the circulation of rubbings.

Yan Weitian 閻緯天 (Indiana University) — Yan Weitian is an assistant professor at the Department of Art History, Indiana University, Bloomington. His research centers on calligraphy and antiquarian culture of the Qing empire, with a special attention to the lived experience of scholar-artists in the regions of Guangdong, Fujian, and Beijing. His works explore the effect of textual medium, especially how different inscriptions – engraved texts on material objects, living rocks, and built environment – interact with their material support. Yan's ongoing book project, *Fragrance of Antiquity: Yi Bingshou and the Senses of the Past in Qing China*, examines how the scholar-official Yi Bingshou (1754–1815) used ancient inscriptions to narrate contemporary concerns.

Zhang Qiang 张强 (Sichuan Fine Arts Academy) — Art historian and avant-garde calligrapher Zhang Qiang contributes to the project the results of joint survey conducted with Lia Wei since 2009. Professor Zhang Qiang is known for his works on the history of Chinese painting and calligraphy. He played a seminal role in the theorization of modern and contemporary calligraphy since the 1990s. In parallel to his research and teaching, Zhang Qiang has created long-term projects in contemporary ink art combining performance art and installation.

Zhang Rui 張蕊 (ENS de Lyon & Inalco/IFRAE) — Zhang Rui is currently a Temporary Teaching and Research Fellow (ATER) in Chinese language and civilization at the École normale supérieure de Lyon (ENS Lyon). She holds a PhD in medieval Chinese literature,

with her research primarily focusing on classical poetry and the literati culture of the medieval period. She will soon lead a seminar on the poetry and poetics of landscape in ancient China. Previously, she was a postdoctoral fellow at the Collège de France and the Bibliothèque nationale de France, where she conducted research on the Curtis collections and refined her expertise in the visual arts of the late imperial period (Ming and Qing dynasties). In recent months, she has led the Altergraphy team in translating several inscriptions by Zheng Daozhao and his son, Zheng Shuzu. Her interests lie particularly in exploring how the literati crafted their identities through a range of practices—literary, artistic, philosophical, and behavioral—as well as their conception of identity within spatial contexts.