



# Ritual and Representation in Chinese Buddhism: Visualizing Enlightenment at Baodingshan from the 12th to 21st Centuries

By Karil J. Kucera

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Includes 159 color images. Baodingshan consists of a monastic complex and two rock-carved areas, Little Buddha Bend and Great Buddha Bend, located in Dazu in western China and dates from the Southern Song period. The complex is fundamentally different from earlier Buddhist rock-carved sites in China in its construction and layout. Foregoing traditional niche-based iconography for large, deeply cut reliefs reaching dimensions as great as eight meters high by twenty meters wide, within Baodingshan's Great Buddha Bend, the carved works flow from one tableau into another. The site contains both texts and images related to the main schools of Buddhist thought. This book presents an integrated analysis of all of the components of Great Buddha Bend within the greater Baodingshan site, something that was lacking in earlier studies. Written to provide guidance to the site for a wide spectrum of readers-specialists and non-specialists alike-it provides a clear explanation of the major iconographic features of the imagery as well as translations of the numerous accompanying carved Buddhist texts. It also presents the basic tenets of Pure Land, Chan [Zen], Huayan and Esoteric Buddhism in order to explain the features of these sects as seen represented in visual as well as textual form at the site. Lastly, with its focus on ritual use and audience reception from the 12th to the 21st century, this study provides a new model for the discussion and evaluation of other religious sites as entities that organically evolve over time. This study also includes new translations of both the inscribed Buddhist texts and secular inscriptions carved at the site dating from the twelfth through the twenty-first centuries-inscriptions left by educated elite, soldiers, and government officials, highlighting regional issues related to continuity and change made visible at Baodingshan.

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#### **Review**

"This is so far the most comprehensive study of the sculptural groups at Baodingshan and their scriptural backgrounds. Karil Kucera's comprehensive knowledge of the Buddhist art of this site makes it come to life in a new and engaging way. This book is a must for anyone interested in Chinese Buddhist art."-- *Henrik H. Sørensen, Director, Seminar for Buddhist Studies, Copenhagen, Denmark*

"Baodingshan is a unique site from many perspectives. It is also a site that is difficult to study because of the dearth of inscriptional materials and historical documents that are contemporaneous with the time when the site was created. The strength of this book is how existing textual materials, both in the form of inscribed religious texts and stele inscriptions, have been used to try to piece together the larger relationships of the components of the site. The study is organized well and in an interesting way, one which ties into the important notions of time as embodied in Buddhist notions of cause and effect that is a key message of the site's sculptural program and corresponding texts. With its detailed analysis that goes beyond some of the limitations of other previous works, this book will contribute to the scholarship of this particular unique site and the general discourse on Buddhism in China. It is a work of scholarship that is valuable to researchers and yet accessible to general readers." - *Tom Suchan, Professor of Art History, Eastern Michigan University*

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