



Public lecture and book presentation

Following the Footprints of Calligrapher-Monk Seng'an Daoyi (act. ca. 562–580)

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Thursday, 28th March 2019, 17:00-18:00

Rämistrasse 59, 8001 Zurich (RAA-G-15)

The lecture will be held in English and is open to the public. For questions, please contact the Section for East Asian Art History: kgoa@khist.uzh.ch



Abstract

The calligrapher-monk Seng'an Daoyi is a somewhat mysterious figure. He had close relationships to powerful members of the political elite of the Northern Qi dynasty (550–577), but he is not recorded in any historical sources. Propagating his Buddhist teachings by means of calligraphy inscribed and carved onto cliff walls and big rocks, thus transforming the natural mountain scenery into eternal sacred places, Seng'an Daoyi left behind the most extensive remaining work of a known early calligrapher. His contemporaries credited him with extraordinary aesthetic achievement and even judged his calligraphic skills as surpassing those of the four towering masters of the Han, Wei, and Eastern Jin periods: Wei Dan, Zhang Zhi, Zhong You, and Wang Xizhi, and yet we do not find his name in the history of calligraphy. If we want to get to know him, we have to travel to the remote mountains of present-day western Shandong and southern Hebei province, where inscribed colophons accompanying Buddhist *moya* (polished-cliff) inscriptions give proof of his existence. They testify that for twenty years he played a prominent role—as a calligrapher, designer, organizer, and donor—in the context of sutra carving activities performed from the 560s on.

This lecture starts with an introduction to the large writing project associated with the calligrapher-monk Seng'an Daoyi. Using the visual evidence remaining today, the lecture aims to trace the process of its actual making, discussing the chiseling of the inscriptions as well as their size and the issue of duplication. Chinese stone inscriptions are traditionally studied by means of rubbings. However, although a rubbing and the stone-carved characters from which it is made represent an identical piece of calligraphy, the rubbing possesses a different materiality, appearance, and aesthetic quality. What are the aesthetic consequences of the transformation that takes place when transferring a carved calligraphy onto another medium? It will be shown that there exist intriguing relationships between the various “states of being” of a calligraphic text in its various forms as brush-written manuscript, stone-carved characters, ink rubbing on paper, and the textual image in art-historical discourse. The lecture closes with the description of an event of actual “mountain writing” on a monumental scale.

Elisabeth A. Jung Lu is an independent scholar and calligrapher based in Hangzhou, China. She studied calligraphy and seal-carving for ten years at the China Academy of Art (CAA) in Hangzhou (M.A. in 2002) and completed her dissertation in 2015 at the University of Zurich under the supervision of Hans Bjarne Thomsen and Robert E. Harrist Jr. of Columbia University. She has acted as an interpreter in the fields of East Asian art history and media arts (Museum Rietberg Zurich, China Academy of Art), led calligraphy workshops (Museum Rietberg Zurich), and curated the solo calligraphy exhibition of works by Lu Dadong in Waldshut (Culturescapes China 2010). She also participated in the large-scale exhibitions of contemporary calligraphy, Shu fei shu, hosted by the China Academy of Art (2010, 2015). Her dissertation “When Confucian Spirit Meets Southern Elegance: The Origins and Transmission of Calligraphic Traditions Carved in Stone During the Northern Qi Dynasty (550–577)” was recently published by Zhejiang People’s Fine Art Publishing in Hangzhou in 2 volume-book and will be presented to public during the lecture.