

Cluster 2.1 2019 Field Visit Report

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(Photos by Cluster 2.1 members)

In 1-6 June 2019, as part of the “From the Ground Up: Buddhism and East Asian Religion” project, the field team of Cluster 2.1 “Authenticity and Authority” conducted a field visit on Beizhen Temple 北鎮廟 (Temple of Northern Stronghold), Mount Yiwulü 醫巫閭山, and several other religious sites located in Beizhen City 北鎮市 and nearby areas, Liaoning Province, China.

The field team consisted of 15 scholars and students from various institutions, including The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Princeton University, Columbia University, University of British Columbia, Southeast University, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, Renmin University of China, and Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts.



Photo1: Team member's group photo in front of the gate of Mount Yiwulü

The field visits of Cluster 2.1 have been focusing on the historical sites of the traditional Chinese state sacrificial system dedicated to spirits of major mountains and waters, including Five Marchmounts 五嶽, Five Strongholds 五鎮, Four Seas 四海, and Four Waterways 四瀆. This sacrificial system formed a part of the most

authoritative religious institutions in imperial China. Teams of Cluster 2.1 visited the Jidu Temple 濟瀆廟 (Temple of Ji River, one of the four waterways) and Mount Wangwu 王屋山 in 2017 and the Dongzhen Temple 東鎮廟 (Temple of Eastern Stronghold), Mount Yi 沂山, and nearby religious sites in 2018. The 2019 team's main target is Beizhen Temple, where the sacrifice to the spirit of Mount Yiwulü, the Northern Stronghold, had been held.

In Kaihuang 14 of Emperor Wen of Sui dynasty (594), Beizhen Temple was first established. Since then, the temple had been expanded and rebuilt numerous times, and the state sacrifice to the spirit of Mount Yiwulü had been continued until the end of the Qing dynasty. In the 20th century, the temple went through many natural and social disasters and was declined. However, fortunately the temple's central building complex constructed during the Ming-Qing period has stood the disasters and remained intact, which is the only remaining miracle among the temples of the five strongholds. Since the 1980s, local government has been making great efforts to renew and protect this old temple.



Photo 2: Group photo in front of Beizhen Temple

On June 1, through networking in advance, team members smoothly arrived at Beizhen City by groups. The team was immediately welcomed by local government with a warm dinner. In the next morning, a workshop was held. It began by inviting three local experts to introduce the religious culture and historical background of Mount

Yiwulü and Dongzhen Temple. Then, five team members offered topic speeches. Professor Stephen Teiser of Princeton University delivered a fascinating speech titled “Literary Style and Ritual Structure of the Transfer of Merit.” Professor Wang Xiaoyang 汪小洋 of Southeast University talked about his grand project of “Systematic Study on Chinese Religious Fine Arts.” Professor Lu Guobin 陸國斌 from Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts introduced Fengguo Monastery 奉國寺 and Stone Cave of Wanfo Hall 萬佛堂石窟 in Yi District 義縣. Professor Li Lin 李林 of the same academy gave a general survey of Tibetan Buddhist cliff statues in Mount Haitang 海棠山. Professor Jia Jinhua of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University described the historical development of Beizhen sacrifice and current scholarship on it. Finally, Miss Tian Menglu 田夢璐 from University of British Columbia introduced Frogbear’s requirements for field visits and template for metadata inputting.



Photo3: A local expert speaks at the Workshop



Photo4: Professor Stephen Teiser delivers the speech



Photo5: Professor Wang Xiaoyang gives the speech



Photo 6: Professor Lu Guobin introduces Fengguo Monastery and Wanfo Hall



Photo 7: Prof. Li Lin introduces Tibetan Buddhist cliff statues in Mt. Haitang



Photo 8: Professor Jia Jinhua discusses the history of the Beizhen Sacrifice

From the afternoon of June 2 to the morning of June 5, the team completed a thorough investigation on Beizheng Temple, and also visited Mount Yiwulü, Fengguo Monastery, Wanfo Hall, Mount Haitang, Baolin Building 寶林樓, and Two Pagodas of Liao dynasty. The team was divided into one temple filming group and two stele photographing groups, and each member was assigned a role as group leader, photographer, recorder, or log keeper. All team members worked harmoniously to

photograph and record 67 steles preserved in Beizhen Temple, as well as to videotape and photograph Beizhen Temple, Fengguo Monastery, stone caves of Wanfo Hall, and cliff statues of Mount Haitang.



Photo 9: Temple filming group in work



Photo 10: Stele group 1 in work



Photo 11: Stele group 2 in work



Photo 12: Dr. Huang Chenxi (Renmin U.) and PhD student Kelly Carlton (Princeton U.) are filming Beizhen Temple



Photo 13: Prof. Bai Zhaojie (Shanghai Academy of Social Science) and Master Student He Shuyue (Columbia U.) are examining a stele



Photo14: Professor Yang Zhaohua (Columbia U.) works on recording



Photo15: PhD student Wu Sijia (Southeast U.) takes photos



Photo16: Undergraduate student Tian Menglu is reading a stele inscription



Photo17: MA student Yuan Xiaoli (Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts) works on log keeping



Photo 18: Prof. Teiser and Prof. Li Jing (City U. of Macau) examine a stele



Photo 19: Visiting a Liao-dynasty pagoda

From the afternoon to evening on June 5, all team members worked hard to input the collected data into the metadata template of UBC Library and roughly completed 71 records. After the field visit, several members have continued to help finalize these records, edit a video of Beizhen Temple, and write, translate, and narrate captions for the video.



Photo 20: Team members are inputting metadata

This field visit was well organized and successfully conducted. We collected some

related sources and sent them to team members prior to the visit, in order to give everyone a clear idea of what we were going to work on. Professor Lu Guobin, a native of Beizhen area, contacted local government in advance and gained full support from them. As a result, all the religious sites were open for us, temple entrance fees were exempted, and hotel, meal, and bus costs were reduced. The workshop on the first day provided to team members a lot of information and knowledge concerning the targets of the visit. During the site visit, because of the division of groups, all scholars and students harmoniously worked together, and everyone played their roles efficiently. Senior scholars such as Professors Stephen Teiser, Wang Xiaoyang, Jia Jinhua, and Lu Guobin offered instructions and guidance; young scholars and students gained invaluable on-site experience.

Like the cluster's previous field visits, the 2019 visit provided a unique experience for members to understand issues such as when, where, and who has defined authoritative and authentic religion in China, how the "authoritative" religion has interacted and integrated with "sub-authoritative" and "non-authoritative" traditions, and how to realign the narrative of the history of Chinese religions such as Buddhism, Daoism, and popular beliefs with traditional Chinese state religion.

Among the collected data, the 67 stele inscriptions are especially important. Previously there have been 56 steles preserved at Beizhen Temple, and recently 11 more from nearby sites have been moved into the temple. The inscriptions engraved on these steles contain invaluable information concerning state sacrificial events and rituals through ages, the emperors' visits to the temple and mountain, the construction and reconstruction of the temple, and the relationship between the state sacrifice and Daoism, Buddhism, and local beliefs. However, these inscriptions have mostly been overlooked by academics except some local experts. We hope our data collection will provide useful sources for further research and contribute to the field.