Sonya S. Lee's book *Temples in the Cliffside: Buddhist Art in Sichuan* is an ambitious and intriguing book for its *longue durée* perspective on the transformation of Buddhist cave temples in southwestern China from ancient pilgrimage sites to modern cultural heritage sites. Moving beyond the traditional discipline of art history, this book attempts to mobilize many approaches from numerous fields, such as art history, ecocriticism, environmental humanities, and material culture, to answer two basic questions: how did the natural setting shape the design of cave temples and how did the cave temples shape the ways local stakeholders interacted with the cultural and natural settings? Lee also remarkably addresses contemporary global climate change and environmental crisis concerns. In highlighting the ecological significance of Buddhist art in Sichuan, this book is theoretically grounded in the study of ecological art history and the material turn in art history, with a strong awareness of postcolonial critiques against anthropocentrism and Eurocentrism. Since she covers the history of cave temples for more than one millennium, Lee masterfully analyzes a wide range of sources, including conventional textual and visual sources, local gazetteers, government documents and local archives, travelogues, archaeological reports, stone inscriptions, and field notes from interviews. However, the local newspapers and magazines from the modern and contemporary eras seem not to be sufficiently used.

Although Lee's book deals with the evolution of cave temples in Sichuan from the sixth century to the twentieth century, its main bulk is well organized around five case studies in two parts, besides the introduction and postscript. In the first part, two chapters deal with the role of the natural setting in the founding and design of the Great Buddha of Leshan and Baodingshan in Dazu, mainly in premodern times. The second part includes three chapters dealing with several cave temples' transformations into protected cultural heritage sites and tourist destinations in modern and contemporary times. The author focuses on the actions and thinking of the three most crucial
stakeholder groups (managers, visitors, and restorers) in embodying the concept of environmental sustainability.

Chapter 1 traces the construction history of the seated Buddha statue at Lingyun Mountain (the Great Buddha of Leshan) by focusing on anthropogenic activities. It analyzes the interrelationships "within a local culture that at once involves artistic practices, social relationships, politics, religious beliefs, and technological development" (p. 29). In particular, this chapter discusses the roles of local religious and political leaders, such as Haitong, Zhangqiu, and Wei Gao, in the eighth to ninth centuries. Lee argues that this giant Buddha is a product of religious fervor, artistic creativity, and technical knowledge for controlling wild nature. She connects the construction of this site with the water control system in Sichuan and offers a detailed account on the technological aspect. As a crucial figure in Sichuan, Gao's contribution to local Buddhism appears in Wendi Adamek's work (The Mystique of Transmission: On an Early Chan History and Its Contexts [2006]) and, more recently, my own book (In the Land of Tigers and Snakes: Living with Animals in Medieval Chinese Religions [2023], chapter 6 in particular).

Chapter 2 examines the ecological aspect and environmental implications of the Ten Austeries and other related pictorial motifs centered on the cult of Liu Benzun in Anyue (Piludong) and Dazu (Baodingshan) in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Through a close reading of textual sources and meticulous analysis of motifs in the carvings of these sites, this chapter attempts to link the self-sacrifice and cultic worship themes in these motifs to diseases and nonhuman wild animals in the local climate change and environmental degeneration context. Therefore, this chapter suggests that Baodingshan was a therapeutic devotional ground.

Chapter 3 discusses how cave temples in Dazu transformed from active religious spaces into protected heritage properties and tourist destinations in the twentieth century, with an emphasis on sustainable development. The first section of this chapter heavily focuses on analyzing the cave temples as both religious institutions and landed estates by reading inscriptions from the late imperial era. Then it quickly turns to discussing how these cave temples became heritage sites. Surprisingly, the chapter introduces the active roles of foreign visitors in modern Chinese heritage conservation policy by discussing Longmen and Yun-gang caves but not Dunhuang caves. It should be noted that Wang Dong also offers a monograph-length study on the modern transformation of Longmen caves from an ancient religious site into a cultural heritage site (Longmen's Stone Buddhas and Cultural Heritage: When Antiquity Met Modernity in China [2020]). The second half of this chapter is devoted to analyzing the three modes of sustainability of the heritage site: heritage conservation, management, and tourism. Nevertheless, I would suggest that institutionally speaking, there are also three government bureaus representing their respective interest groups in a contemporary Chinese context: the Bureau of Cultural Heritage (Wenwuju), the Bureau of Religious Affairs (Zongjiaoju, if there are active religious practitioners on site); and the Bureau of Tourism Management (Lüyouju). How they negotiate with each other regarding government tax, revenue, expenses, and budget systems needs more study.

Chapter 4 investigates how the cave site in Nankan redefined how visitors think about and interact with the local ecosystem. Lee suggests that the Nankan site remained a source of solace, resilience, and rejuvenation for visitors by analyzing some elite historical figures' visits and restoration projects of the site. She concludes with a discussion of the tourist revival of this area through the contemporary promotion of red tourism. It might be interesting to address the issue of how different local interest groups (such as villagers, local cadres, and artists) benefit from further restoration and revival projects at local and national
levels. The discussion in this chapter reminds me that E. Elena Songster explores how local residents who traditionally lived by different professions in the deep mountains responded to establishing the Wolong Nature Reserve to protect giant pandas (*Panda Nation: The Construction and Conservation of China's Modern Icon* [2018]).

The last chapter addresses the more recent development of restoring the rock carvings in Dazu and other places by paying particular attention to the implications of technology and methods of restoration in terms of sustainability. It touches on the critical issue about “the restorers' sensitivity to the local climatic conditions and geological properties in developing their approach to preserving the material artifacts within this setting” (p. 181). Lee argues that technologies for restoration (such as building wooden-frame front structures) “have been reworked to respond to the challenges posed by humidity, rainfall, and groundwater in the mountain setting” (p. 208).

Although some discussions in individual chapters could be improved, Lee’s book is a very inspiring contribution to our understanding of ecological art history from the perspective of Asian art. It should be read by anyone who is interested in the interrelationships among Buddhist studies, art history, and environmental humanities.

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