

# Non-fiction

## Group 1

### Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

*Discovery Mind Primary School, Wright, Daniel - 8*

The story that I am about to tell you is about my journey in discovering the Mogao Grottoes. I come from the town near the edge of the Gobi Desert, where we were paving the path to the caves by hand. The sizes of the caves are varied with the big ones looking robust, while the small icons are exquisite and delicate. The art is so profound and imagination so rich that I was tongue-tied when I first saw them.

During this time, I found the world's largest collection of Buddhist art. I noticed the cave walls were decorated and so were the ceilings with elaborate paintings showing stories of Buddha. The most amazing one of all was the 100 foot tall sculpture, which was the largest.

I found this exciting because it was a melting pot of cultures even though it was a Buddhist site. Art and objects found at Mogao reflect the meeting of different countries along the Silk Road. One of the maps I read told me that China, Central Asia and Europe were trade routes. I saw many manuscripts written in many languages such as Chinese, Sanskrit, Tibetan, ancient Turkish and even Hebrew.

I heard that a Daoist monk named Wang Yuan Lu looked after the caves and he discovered a great collection of documents in history. I was so intrigued. I wanted to know more about the library cave and heard that ancient documents, silk banners and embroidery were found there. The fresco-contents were quite rich, most of them connecting with Buddhism, for example, the life story of Sakyamuni and his good deeds to others by sacrificing what was of his own. The other special thing about the library cave were pictures of life and Medieval China, medical texts, dictionaries, descriptions of music, dance and games.

The best part of my trip to the caves was finding the Diamond Sutra, which was the world's earliest printed book. The date it was printed was 868. The book was printed onto strips of paper and then pasted together to form a scroll!

During my walk around the caves, I could feel a sense of enlightenment. I knew at that moment that Buddha himself must have meditated in the caves before he attained Nirvana. The Mogao caves are the largest caves and it is good to see people coming together to preserve the caves for the future. Though they've been exposed to weathering winds and sandstorms for over a thousand years, the colours of the murals are still bright with clear curved lines.

The Mogao caves can teach us so much about art and the creativeness of the artists in Ancient China.

I would definitely recommend going to the Mogao Grottoes and having a look at it yourself. I hope you discover the beauty of ancient China in the caves just as I did.

# In the Eye of the Beholder

*St. Paul's Co-educational College Primary School, Lee, Madeleine Sofia - 7*

Out in the edge of the desert in the farthest roads of north-western China lay a small town that stood in the crossroads of Eastern and Western Asia. It was the last stop where travellers would be able to find some shelter and refuge from the sand dunes that would go as far as the eye could see in every direction. This small town served as a physical and commercial crossroad, but more importantly was the portal through which Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and Buddhism would enter China.

A man of small stature, Wang Yuanlu, endured famine in his younger years and had also served as a soldier. He turned to Taoism as his life purpose to make sense of his suffering. He encountered the Mogao Grottoes in the middle of the desert that had been painted with a myriad of Buddhas and appointed himself as guardian to them. One day, while repairing the walls, he found a crack in a door that led to a secret chamber. Inside, were thousands of white cloth bags and in each bag were scrolls of manuscripts, fabrics, and silk flags. Having never been educated, Abbott Wang was unable to read the manuscripts; however, sensing their importance, he retrieved a few and sent them to local Chinese governors in an effort to raise money for his restoration work.

News of these manuscripts traveled word of mouth, and soon two explorers of European heritage made their way to Dunhuang to try and acquire these secret treasures. Frenchman, Paul Pelliot, befriended the Abbott and was given access to the secret chamber. For three weeks, Pelliot worked tirelessly and with breakneck speed. Crouched in the little hole in the wall, under the small flicker of a candle, he peered into thousands of scrolls. His fluency in Mongolian, Arabic, Persian, Tibetan, Sanskrit, and Chinese quickly came to use and as he had a photographic memory, he was able to comprehend the scrolls, categorize them in his mind, and pick the ones that had the greatest historical value. After much negotiation and haggling with Abbot Wang, Pelliot secured his lot of scrolls for 500 taels and traveled by horseback for two years to Peking before bringing them back to Paris to showcase them for the world to see.

In a moment in time, a poor local man survived the desert by selling what he beheld were illegible scrolls to facilitate his mission of serving his temple gods. An educated foreign man pursuing his passion of Asian language, culture, history, and art made the discovery of his lifetime seizing what he beheld were treasures beyond belief. These two men, in spite of pursuing their own self-interests, ended up contributing to humanity by preserving these treasures for the world to see.

# Non-fiction

Group 2



# All about the Legendary Mogao Caves

*Diocesan Preparatory School, Tang, Chun Yin - 10*

I am sure that once you hear the name of the Mogao Caves, you will immediately think of the caves in Gansu that was once part of China's history ---- the Silk Road. And that's absolutely correct! Yet do you know any of its great history or its uses in the past for the people? If you are craving to know, then you have come to the right place. For this episode, I will bring in the Mogao Caves to you today. Let's zoom in!

The Mogao Grottoes, also known as the Mogao Caves or the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas, is situated just after a strategic city in the most famous Silk Road ---- Dunhuang City, which is now in Gansu Province. This famous grotto is along the three most famous grottoes with the Longmen Grottoes and the Yungang Grottoes. Now it is a UNESCO World Heritage Site due to its precious manuscripts and its enormous value for archaeologists to study the Silk Road's past.

The history of the Mogao Grottoes dates back to the 4th century CE, which one book from the Tang Dynasty states that one monk known as Yuezun went across the original site, when the grottoes weren't built at that era, when the monk instantly had a vision of which there were a thousand buddhas bathed in blinding golden light. After days, another monk called Faliang joined him and starting digging caves. After them, more monks started to swarm in and dig more grottoes, and the site grew a lot by time. By the time of the Sixteen Kingdoms, there was already a small community of monks thriving at the site already. While in the era of the Tang Dynasty, there were as much as a thousand caves.

At the era of the Sui and Tang Dynasties, the Mogao Grottoes were so famous that the site became a place for worshipping and pilgrimage. The caves also began to have Buddhist paintings and architecture as representations for the quest of enlightenment and teaching tools for Buddhist beliefs. For the caves, the major caves, which were the most important or large ones, were funded by people which had a very high status in China, such as the local administrators, noble families and even the emperor for some time. The minor caves might have been funded by people with a much lower rank, for instance, merchants and local residents.

Regrettably, right after the Tang Dynasty, the Mogao Caves were almost forgotten due to that the once bustling Silk Road started to lost its former uses and became much less popular for merchants and travellers to pass, since the road's environment wasn't like the roads we have today—there were harsh places to go. For example the deserts in Central Asia and the icy mountains in northwest China, which made people very difficult to pass through and get to their destinations. As well, the routes to China from the western world started to be dominated and welcomed by the via sea routes. At that time, taking the sea routes were much longer and had to take up more time, but people thought it was better due to the fact that it was less dangerous and they would take up less risk in the process. After the domination of sea routes, the once principal city Dunhuang's population started to decline quickly and soon the city was nothing more than a little town. At the same time, the Silk Road was unpopular within travellers and vanished with the Mogao Grottoes, leaving these two once crucial routes and architectures not more than a past memory to the people.

Hundreds of years went by, and in the start of the 19th century, the archaeologists of Western European countries such as France and Britain got interested in the ancient Silk Road and many of them had begun to travel to China to get their hands on the precious information of the past to research for. Alas, they did not get any information on the Silk Road or the Mogao Caves, and went back with nothing.

Time passed, and one year, a Chinese Taoist named Wang Yuanlu went by the site and found some caves which were filled with sand by time. He decided to revive those caves and see what absorbing things there were inside. After he shovelled away the sand, there was actually nothing! Then, he saw something like a wall inside, he felt very curious and walked inside. It was an ancient Chinese styled door! So, he opened the door, and guessed what did he see? He saw loads of historic paper manuscripts, and some medium-sized Buddha statues made of porcelain. He took some rolls of the manuscript, and ran to the county administrator's place and showed them to him. The administrator was fascinated at the sight of it, but thought of the expense needed to transport the ancient manuscripts, and told Wang to reseal the caves instead. On the contrary, some scientists and archaeologists heard all about Wang's incident and immediately went to the site to take scripts to study.

Some people noticed that there could be some scripts lost, so they started to do actions to protect these precious scripts from being taken, since there were rumours that some of the manuscripts were stolen or copied. After many scenes of foreigners and armies destroying many of the precious scripts, finally in the year 1987, this place was justified as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and has been widely promoted and visited by lots of people from the world ever since.

I sincerely hope that you all like this introduction of the past and well known Mogao Grottoes. Thank you very much!

# The Entrance To Pure Land Paradise—Facts About The Mogao Caves

ESF Glenealy School, Li, Tan - 8

## Introduction

The Mogao Caves(also known as the Mogao grottoes)are one of the world’s most significant Buddhist sites ever made, the first caves were built around the 4th century and the last ones were built around the 14th century. Over the millennium many things have been discovered, many have been taken and many have been built.

## Where are the Mogao Caves located?

The Mogao Caves are just 15 miles southeast to a town called Dunhuang, which is located in a droughty desert crossroad on the silk road with a population of 140,000 in 2021. Dunhuang used to be a very popular place to stay for worn-out travellers along the 4000 mile long Silk Road which connects the East and the West by a network of trade routes. At Dunhuang, the weary travellers would thank gods that they had survived the journey, bring back goods to their families and rest.

## Why were the Mogao Caves built?

The Mogao Caves were built to honour the popular **Buddhism** religion. Here is the story of how people believed the Mogao Caves were built: One day, a devoted Buddhist monk had a **prodigious** vision, in the vision thousands of colossal buddhas were bathing in golden light on the site of the 1st cave. After the vision ended, he was determined to build what he envisaged. Over the years, the Buddhist monk encouraged many more monks to excavate many more caves and the number surged to over 400 eventually.

## Discovery, dispersal and revival

Years passed, traders chose new routes, causing the Mogao Caves to become a dusty legend. It was until 1900, the Mogao caves were rediscovered by local and international scholars and explorers. Four hundred and ninety two caves were discovered but the Library Cave (cave 17) is arguably the most influential because the cave was filled with over 50,000 **relic** items dated from the 4th to the 11th centuries. These scarce relics include paintings on silk, linen and paper, woodblock prints, Buddhist texts and social documents. The Library Cave was secretly sealed off by a sandy wall for half a **millennium** and was accidentally discovered by a Daoist priest, Wang Yuanlu, in 1900, who unofficially named himself the guardian of the Library Cave. The fortunate discovery of Library Cave, however, also marked the unfortunate beginning of the dispersal of the Dunhuang relics.

Many foreign explorers, including Aurel Stein, a British Hungarian descent; Paul Pelliot, a French sinologist; Zuicho Tachibana and Yoshikawa Koichiro, members of Japanese **expedition** team and Langdon Warner who was known to take murals using plastering tape

and glue, came to Dunhuang and purchased a great amount of treasured arts and documents for an extremely low price. It was until then, Chinese scholars (now known as Dunhuang Academy) decided that it was time to send all the relics to Beijing to keep them safe. Unfortunately only 8,000 of the 10,000 relic items made it to Beijing, the remaining were either stolen or lost.

## A thousand years of art

Between the 4th and 14th centuries, plenty of artists have illustrated in full colour many magnificent wall paintings showing what they believed. Buddhist imagery predominates, yet many other subjects were reflected as well, such as central Asian, Indian and Tibetan. The murals of Mogao are considered as one of the world’s most significant **heritage** sites.

## Dunhuang Today

The Mogao Caves are facing many challenges, which include: extreme weather like sand storms and man-made damage such as tourism and pollution. Scientists are manufacturing many ways of helping to keep the caves secure. Here is one of them: Digital caves are one of the most innovative solutions to preserve the Mogao Caves. Arts and documents are available in digital forms, i.e photos, holograms and google earth. It is possible to visit the Mogao Caves at any time and anywhere on your fingertips (except for when your phone is not charged).

## Conclusion

Over the years, the Mogao caves have been a major sight of Buddhist arts, but still ahead of us lies many more decades of **conservation** until the Mogao Caves will be finally safe.

## Timeline of the Mogao Caves:

**366 AD:** First cave built by Buddhist monk.

**581 AD - 907:** More caves constructed (Tang and Sui Dynasty).

**1900:** The Library Cave was accidentally discovered by Daoist Wang Yuanlu.

**1907 - 1925:** Aurel Stein and others came to Dunhuang several times.

**1930 - 1940:** Chinese scholars inspected the Mogao Caves.

**1944:** National Dunhuang Art Institution established.

**1950 - 1984:** Professionals started rebuilding the Mogao Caves.

**1987:** Became world heritage site.

**Now:** Scientific conservation

## Author’s Note

T. Li lives in Hong Kong and was born in 2013 in Southwest London, England. He enjoys reading and writing. Favourite author is David Wallams who is also an English comedian who swam across the English Channel. Tan also enjoys playing sports such as Ping Pong, Football, Tennis and Swimming. Tan has a younger sister named Fearn, and lives with his mother and father on Robinson Road.

**Glossary: definition comes from Dictionary.com****Buddhism:** [boo-diz-uhm] a religion, originated in India by Buddha.**Prodigious:** [pruh-dij-uhs] wonderful or marvelous**Millennium:** [mi-len-ee-uhm] a period of 1,000 years.**Relic:** [rel-ik] a surviving memorial of something past.**Expedition:** [ek-spi-dish-uhn] an excursion, journey, or voyage made for some specific purpose, as of war or exploration.**Heritage:** [her-i-tij] something that is handed down from the past, as a tradition.**Conservation:** [kon-ser-vey-shuhn] the act of conserving; prevention of injury, decay, waste, or loss.

## What are the cultural impacts of the Mogao Grottoes' discovery within and outside of China?

*Stewards Pooi Kei Primary School, Wang, Alice - 11*

French sinologist and orientalist, Paul Eugene Pelliot once remarked in a letter about the Mogao Grottoes, 'During the first days, I attacked nearly a thousand scrolls a day.' The Mogao Grottoes, located in Dunhuang, China, contain nearly 500 temples and the finest Buddhist artwork in the world. Daoist, Wang Yuanlu first discovered the library cave which contains the majority of the artifacts in 1900 when he was cleaning. However, at that time, not just Wang, no one knew or understood the value of the relics, except a Chinese academic - Ye Changzhi. He suggested transporting all the antiquities to Lanzhou but was refused, since there was no funding. Ironically, one government official even thought that his own writings were of better quality than the historical texts found in the grottoes. Eventually, the dismissal of the documents' importance caused the valuable contents to be raided by foreign archeologists. As of now, a large portion of the sacred pieces have been transported to overseas museums, such as ones in Paris, London and Berlin. It is widely agreed that the valuable pieces in the grottoes had been 'stolen', which is not the truth. The real reason behind the loss of these pieces is because no one realized the value of them. They did not comprehend how precious the documents in the caves were. No one could have known that the grottoes would one day become a discovery that stuns the world with its substantial influence within and outside of China, even in the realm of pop culture. This particularly rings true for the historians studying Chinese heritage and culture.

The Mogao Grottoes are a window into China's past. They give an insight into historical China and the socio-economic characteristics of the dynasties during that particular time. There are many ancient and current manuscripts relating to philosophy, history, mathematics, art, poetry, religion (Buddhism, Judaism, Nestorianism), and even medicine. This treasure trove of information is useful for the modern-day person to understand the religion and lifestyle of the ancient people, which further encourages appreciation for the study of Chinese history, and even the history of Chinese music. Many are stunned to learn that there are notable exchanges and crossovers in Asian and Western music. Interestingly enough, the documents about Buddhism have deepened people's knowledge about its history and origins, sparking an interest in many. This shows that despite many people considering this as an overall loss of priceless heritage, the Chinese have still gained in the bigger picture. On that note, it should be clarified that the pieces which now reside overseas were in fact not a disrespectful or unjust trade. That being said, it is understandable for the modern-day person to consider foreign archeologists' actions as unjust and deceitful, as they concealed the true value and importance of the relics at the time. However, is it not evidence of China's generosity and passion in spreading its culture too?

Dunhuang, where the Mogao Grottoes are located, was a giant cultural mixing pot. In the early ages, it allowed people to peacefully come together. During the peak prosperity of the Silk Road, Chinese and Western cultures were able to meet at the grottoes. Different

faces from all over the world were blended together through wall paintings, and some pieces have even absorbed the strengths of ancient art from Iran, India and Greece, amongst other places. It is proof that cultures have been historically mixed and embedded everywhere. This was the start of alleviating racism, xenophobia and the removal of racial boundaries. Hence, the benefits and significance of Chinese heritage crossing international borders by far outweigh any type of loss. Ultimately, it has contributed immensely to decreasing discrimination and increasing foreigners' understanding and knowledge of Chinese culture.

Being the biggest and the most perfect grottoes in the world, the impact of the Mogao grottoes' discovery is vast - its influence in pop culture is still evident. It has changed the image of many religions in people's minds. For example, some consider religion as insignificant, however, the influences of the grottoes have made them speechless. Whereas, in modern art it has provided inspiration for artists and musicians, even changing their styles. On top of that, there is a specialized subject in universities called 'Dunhuang Studies', allowing people to be educated on the antiquities found in the grottoes specifically. To deepen the public's understanding of this magnificent site, virtual reality exhibitions have been created which explore new storytelling techniques. These killed two birds with one stone, as they minimized carbon dioxide exposure and humidity at the real site. They were a significant step in blending ancient history and modern technology, creating new mediums for storytelling. As a whole, it is evident that the famed grottoes will continue to inspire creations and various art forms. Hopefully, there will be similar exhibitions in the future.

Overall, the Mogao Grottoes are a crucial discovery in history, ancient art, and commerce. Their impact can be witnessed everywhere, even in foreign countries and modern-day culture. They give insight into Chinese heritage, customs and religion. The most essential part is that they open the door of Chinese history to people in China and all over the world. Therefore, as one of mankind's precious treasures, the Mogao Grottoes should have a chance to be repaired and most importantly, they should be closed off to the public. Even though some will consider it a regrettable choice, it is imperative to ensure the preservation of the priceless artifacts. Lastly, it would be a great endeavor and honor for archeologists to continue discovering additional caves and spread Chinese culture even further to other nations.

# Non-fiction

Group 3





# Mogao Caves: Rethinking the Lost Legacy of China's Cultural Relics

*French International School, Fung, Sum Yi Emily - 13*

The year was 1907. Wang Yuanlu, a Daoist monk, stooped inside one of the remote Mogao Caves at the edge of Gobi Desert, and struck a bargain that would leave China reeling for more than a century. His sale to British archaeologist Aurel Stein of some 10,000 scrolls, paintings and manuscripts, which the caves had faithfully protected since medieval times, sent pieces of China's historical soul into exile in distant lands. Yet, in doing so, he may have unwittingly saved the relics from possible destruction decades later.

The Mogao Caves, 25 kilometers from Dunhuang, in Gansu province, consists of 492 caves carved into a cliff. Over the course of centuries, and far removed from human eyes, the grottoes became sanctuaries for vast and rare collections of medieval Buddhist art. Commanding more than 45,000 square meters of murals and 2,000 painted sculptures, produced between the Three Kingdoms Period (AD 220-280) and the Song Dynasty (AD 960-1279), amounts to the world's largest repository of Buddhist art. That distinction earned the caves a place on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1987.

Their remote, desert location made the caves a landmark along the Silk Road, an ancient network of trade routes linking eastern and western Asia with India and the Mediterranean. During its heyday, the junction was popular with peripatetic monks who sought shelter during pilgrimages and travelers who looked for water and supplies. Ancient Mogao relics bear witness to the civilizations of the Sui, Tang, Song and Yuan dynasties, and the evolution of Chinese culture and philosophy.

Wang Yuanlu became a Daoist priest in 1900 following his military discharge. His subsequent perambulations led him to the Mogao Caves. Sand dunes and ridges serve as windbreaks, allowing trees to grow and rivers to flow in a desiccated landscape. Inspired by the caves' mystical air, Wang took up residence, appointing himself as guardian of the grottoes.

While sweeping sand in one cave, Wang knocked down a plaster wall, which sealed a hidden chamber, later known as the Library Cave. A deeper dive into this inner sanctum revealed a cache of more than 50,000 manuscripts, books, and silk paintings, all dating prior to 1004.

The find served as tangible evidence that the site was an early crossroads of once-vibrant, now long-vanished civilizations. Greek, Roman, Persian, Indian, and Chinese cultures mixed and melded in Dunhuang during a span of a thousand years, making it the focal point of an early form of globalism, and a marketplace for goods and ideas. The documents included those written in Chinese and other Silk Road languages such as Tibetan, Sogdian, Uyghur, Sanskrit and Hebrew. Among those carrying outsized weight were the Diamond Sutra (the oldest printed book), the Book of Heaven (the earliest musical score) and the Dunhuang Star Chart (the first graphical star map). The Library Cave also housed works on religion and philosophy, suggesting how different schools of thought had merged to shape today's "Three Teachings," which carry elements of Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism.

Daoist Wang's pleas to the Qing government to fund the caves' restoration were met with aloofness. The notion of selling the caves' contents to fund restoration first struck Wang during his 1907 encounter with Aurel Stein. The monk eventually sold Stein 29 crates of

manuscripts, paintings and artworks for 130 British pounds, equivalent to 16,000 British pounds today. During the ensuing years, Wang sold tens of thousands of manuscripts and artifacts to foreign explorers. By the time he stopped in 1924, the Library Cave's contents were half-depleted.

The lessons from the Mogao Caves' history are complex and nuanced. Wang's discovery of the Library Cave has enhanced our understanding of medieval Chinese culture, the Silk Road and many other fields. It also offers us a deeper glimpse into human nature, especially when personal and social interests collide. The behaviors of Daoist Wang, European archaeologists and Qing dynasty officials reflected greed in a myriad of forms.

Nationalists painted Wang as the scoundrel of modern China. Yet, did they use the proper lens when judging one man's decisions and actions from more than a century ago? Many have accused Wang of being a greedy simpleton, but that characterization ignores the broader complexities. It is a misguided perspective to judge Wang too harshly.

Being illiterate, Wang Yuanlu was probably oblivious to the value of his discovery. His decision to sell the relics to fund restoration work was fueled by three unsuccessful attempts to secure government funding. Without public support, how could Wang possibly have carried out his work for the remaining hundreds of caves? Wang, brushed aside by officialdom, turned to selling artifacts, which seems to be his only viable option in the context of his day. He sought not fame, nor to sell his days for gold, but rather to safeguard and protect a national resource that failed to resonate with public leaders.

Committing his life to restoration and religious study until his death in 1931, Wang had stayed at the Mogao Caves for 31 years. His time in the grottoes, in an impoverished stretch of northwestern China, may have better served his pursuit of physical restoration and spiritual nourishment rather than a quest for treasure. If Wang had intended to profit personally from the relics and artifacts, he would have emptied the caves, and fled years earlier.

Did foreign archaeologists and explorers pay a fair price for the artifacts? Certainly not. The Chinese cultural conscience still flinches at the plunder of priceless patrimony, even after the passing of so many years. The early 20<sup>th</sup> century was marked by the "Great Game," a diplomatic brinkmanship between the European powers and the Russian Empire for supremacy in central Asia. Their struggle extended to archaeological exploits to fill their museums. An examination of interactions of British archaeologist Aurel Stein and many others during their negotiations with Wang sheds more light on how greed shapes human behavior. Through coercion, deception and corruption, these western explorers had successfully convinced Wang to sell them the Mogao cultural treasures for a paltry amount. They may have acted in their native countries' best interest, but not in Wang's, nor in China's and certainly not in the best interest of the artifacts. Their actions were emblematic of a broader pattern of European imperialism then. For years, voices calling for the artifacts' repatriation to China have rightly grown louder.

Local Qing officials, however, aren't blameless. Bureaucratic corruption, inept leadership and ethnic discrimination stoked economic weakness, political instability and foreign invasions, including the Boxer Uprising and the Eight-Nation Alliance. The Qing empire, hanging by a thread, and leaving Wang hanging in his push for Mogao restoration, fell short of its moral responsibility to him, to the caves, and to the Chinese people.

If anyone is to be accused of putting personal interest ahead of national culture, Zhang Daqian, the prolific 20th century Chinese traditional painter, might fit the bill. In 1941, Zhang and his entourage of artists ventured to the Mogao caves, spending more than two years copying Buddhist murals. Zhang's artwork won acclaim as part of the UNESCO global contemporary

art exhibition in 1945, yet a dark side to his technique would cast a pall on his distinction. His method included peeling off the outer layers of the murals, irrevocably damaging many. These techniques were later strictly forbidden by the National Research Institute on Dunhuang Art in 1945. They also exposed Zhang's self-serving, fame-seeking motives.

Public perceptions of the Mogao legend have rested on a misunderstanding of motive in human behavior and action. While Daoist Wang, European explorers and Qing officials shoulder blame for the appropriation of China's finest historical artifacts, Zhang's moral turpitude, wrongly praised as contribution, deserves censure. A misinterpretation of history would not only do injustice to Wang but distort the moral prism for future generations.

The Mogao relics, safely harbored in overseas museums, have survived the 20th century upheavals that destroyed much of China's artistic heritage. The Diamond Sutra and the Dunhuang Star Chart found refuge in the British Museum. The Sutra of the Great Virtue of Wisdom and the Book of Heaven are safeguarded in the National Library of France. In hindsight, their sale may have been essential to their survival.

Perhaps the time has come for a new approach to managing these tangible ties to China's past and the symbols of its cultural heritage. The International Dunhuang Project is among those committed to restoring and digitizing Dunhuang culture and art. Doing so would not only make the relics available to experts and researchers worldwide, but also preserve them for future generations.

Mogao art's real value lies in its accessibility, not squirreled away in some tycoon's private collection. Where the artifacts are housed matters less than how easily curious eyes can access them. It's through direct contemplation of the relics of the past that the voices of our forebears break their eternal silence to share their stories, and in doing so, teach us more about ourselves.

## Mogao Grottoes: Traces of a Long-forgotten Past

*Harrow International School Hong Kong, Hu, Catherine - 13*

The past is often misunderstood and enshrouded in mystery. We, as a human race, often ponder our history. We puzzle over ancient relics lost by our ancestors, contemplate the clues left behind and speculate events that we cannot, and will never be, sure about. So infrequently does a near-perfect piece of the past emerge from the waves of time, yet the Mogao Grottoes are just that: a precious time capsule left by our ancestors long ago. With 492 unique and astonishing caves, 2,000 skillfully carved sculptures and 45,000 square metres of murals, these caves are considered the epitome of oriental history and culture.

The Mogao Grottoes go by many names: the Thousand Buddha Caves, the Dunhuang caves, the list goes on. Located in Dunhuang, in the Chinese province of Gansu, the area has evidence of human habitation from as early as 200 BC and is one of the most historically significant places in China, documenting its times as a garrison town and a main stop on the silk road. The area also has many natural sights, such as the Crescent Lake, and the Singing Sand Mountains with its haunting singing and drumming emerging from seemingly nowhere.

They may just be caves, but they carry many millennia of history and the obscure stories of the past. The Grottoes provide us with information crucial to understanding ancient Chinese life, such as vivid depictions of clothing, culture, ancient politics and lifestyle, such as Cave 156 dating back to the Tang dynasty, which depicts the day of workers in a field.

It is said that long ago a monk had a vision of a thousand buddhas bathed in a radiant golden light, which pushed him on to carve these caves into the cliff as a place of worship. Books and records claim he was then joined by a second monk, and then another as the caves grew in both size and status. Though this story is questionable to some, it is noted that the beginning of the use and occupation of the caves was recorded in 111 BCE, when Han dynasty Emperor Wudi and his army used it as a military frontier in the garrison town of Dunhuang to defend from nomads from the Eurasian Steppe, the Xiongnu.

By the late Tang dynasty, the Grottoes were at their peak. Spurred by Empress Wu Zetian's iron-fisted rule from 690 to 705 AD, it became the bustling main hub of the Silk Road (as depicted by cave 302 of the Sui dynasty). Under the Empress's guide, hundreds of caves were dug, colossal statues erected and more murals brought to life, marking the most rapid growth and development during the Grottoes' history. The Grottoes created a link between the East and the West, blending cultures from far and wide, its cultural value is unmatched. It was also known as a site of pilgrimage, with travellers making the gruelling journey through deserts on foot or camels to behold the sight of the murals and shrines. Today, it's one of the few UNESCO world heritage sites that meet all six of the specific criteria because of this diverse history.

Yet glory is fleeting, and so the caves slowly were lost to time. As the Silk Road fell into an unused state during the 1400s, so did the caves. By the start of the Yuan dynasty, no work or construction was continued. The site at Dunhuang became smothered by the Gobi desert, its memory fading from people's minds. Alas, the once vibrant centre of commerce fell into a dormant rest, concealed from the outside world.

However, the story does not end here.

In the early 20th century, Taoist monk Wang Yuanlu made a big discovery. Wang had arrived in the Dunhuang area during the 1890s from his hometown of Shanxi and became the unofficial guardian of the caves. With a goal to restore statues to their former glory, he started raising money via tours, marking the beginning of the excavation and repair of the neglected grottoes.

It was the notable discovery of the Library Cave that sparked modern interest in rediscovery and excavation of the caves. The cave was, surprisingly, discovered by accident, when Wang noticed his cigarette smoke drifting to the back of the wall in a shrine. He knocked down the walls and discovered piles of ancient manuscripts, textiles, and Buddhist paraphernalia. However, when Wang brought the documents forward to local authorities, they dismissed him, occupied with the Boxer Rebellion. Though the authorities refused to acknowledge them at first, what was even more important was the interest of renowned Indologist and explorer Aurel Stein in the caves. News of the caves spread throughout the world, historians everywhere all wanting to acquire some of the documents. When the Chinese government finally decided to transfer the documents to Beijing, only a fifth remained. Today, many of them reside in museums outside of China, such as in London, Paris, Tokyo and St. Petersburg. People's interest in the caves has not subsided even today, and currently, there are multiple organizations from across the globe that work to learn more.

The Library Cave, also known as Cave 17, was originally a memorial for a monk and its original librarian, Hongbian, evident from the statue and inscriptions inside the cave. The library was used by Hongbian as a retreat during his lifetime, many of the documents and scrolls being marked with his seal.

There was an estimated amount of 1100 scrolls and 15000 paper books originally found in the caves, along with Buddhist statues. The documents date from the Western Jin dynasty to the Northern Song dynasty, with the earliest written in 406AD and the latest written 1002AD, when the caves were sealed shortly after, some speculating to protect the documents from invaders, such as Xian Xia in 1035. The library contains the earliest printed book, the Diamond Sutra, which was originally written in Sanskrit. The subject of the caves' manuscripts covers religions such as Taoism, Buddhism, Judaism and Nestorianism, as well as ancient language, politics, philosophy and art, again showing how significant the Grottoes are to understanding the past.

But it's not only the thrilling tale of Chinese history that the grottoes tell. The caves also have great religious value. The Mogao Caves are also the largest collection of Buddhist paintings, with over 500,000 square feet of art, all carved and painted by hand so many years ago. Each brushstroke in a mural, each mark painstakingly carved weaves together the elaborate web showing the progression of Buddhist art, with each individual cave to allow you to travel through the ages. The caves have a unique art style, a blend of traditional Han Chinese art, but also that of different cultures acquired from its time as a stop along the Silk Road, such as integrations of the art from Indian, Turkish and Tibetan culture.

These paintings also provide us with information about the development of Buddhism when it entered China, such as how the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara became Guanyin, an important figure in Chinese Taoism and Buddhism. Each cave has religious symbols that are strongly valued throughout time. One such cave is Cave 254 from the Northern Wei dynasty, one of the oldest caves in the grottoes, showing depictions of deities, yakshas, mythical creatures and scenes of religious worship.

Culture, history and global connections: these are what make the Grottoes so remarkable. All these important aspects of the Grottoes can allow us to understand people of the past

more, answering our questions and helping us recognize the thoughts and beliefs of those from long ago. They are truly a remarkable place that has stood the test of time.

The Mogao Grottoes are a place where you can step into the past, a time capsule to be passed on. It is a direct link to our roots, something that we should commemorate. Future generations should preserve these precious relics. Though we are now living in a different era, one completely different to the original famed period of the Grottoes, it is still crucial for us to appreciate and celebrate our ancestors and heritage, for humans from all time periods have always shared one thing in common: the curiosity for knowledge, the need to understand what came before.

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# Non-fiction

## Group 4

### The Mogao Grotto

*Chinese International School, Choi, Danny - 16*

“It is like a tunnel into a lost world in the past”. The Mogao Grottoes serves as a time capsule that unravels the way of life and transcends one’s understanding of the past. Mogao Grotto, built-in 366 CE, is situated on the silk road in the Gansu province, China. It became a prominent location for Buddhists due to its popularity in the Tang dynasty which resulted in the emergence of an intricate system of temples constructed within the caves. However, during the Ming dynasty, the caves began shutting themselves out from the world and became seemingly lost in time. Miraculously, a Chinese monk discovered the cave in the 1900s and the rest is history. Spanning a millennium since the Grotto’s inception, monks were able to form a system of 492 temples and showcase the finest examples of religious art. Within the caves, the statues and collections of Buddhist art were very influential in determining the expression of art in the era – a style still permeating in much of modern artwork. Furthermore, the Grotto also serves as a prevalent sanctuary for religious beliefs and contains integral documents for religions such as Buddhism and Taoism. Thus, the Mogao Grottoes play a pivotal part in shaping the religion of Buddhism, providing insight into the past and teaching values among its audience.

As legends would have it, Le Zun, a Buddhist monk was making his treacherous journey to the West in 366 CE. As he crossed the Gobi desert, he stumbled upon the Sanwei Mountain; There he found a special spring containing sweet water which quenches his thirst. Perhaps it was the scorching heat or the desolate desert but as Le Zun sat down to rest, the dull dusk sky began to glow. Its radiant brightness shone through the desert and an image of a Maitreya Buddha began to float in the sky. The sky continues to transcend into a thousand beams as more Buddhas emerge, they are surrounded by servants and other mythical creatures. The ephemeral sight of these deified Buddhas deeply inspired Le Zun and decided to stay to pursue the recreation of the visions he had just witnessed. His masterful skills in painting and sculpting allowed him to recreate the divine Buddhas with different mediums of art and dig out the first cave. Not long after, another Buddhist monk named Fa Liang arrived at the same mountain and had a similar epiphany. He promptly dug a second cave, engraving them with detailed paintings and statues. Later development and expansion of the caves were fueled by the Buddhist monk’s values in austerity and their desire for enlightenment. They would seek to retreat in remote caves to accomplish such goals. Nevertheless, it is during the Tang Dynasty that the Mogao Grottoes swiftly established themselves as a prominent pilgrimage site for Buddhists and artists alike. It became a sanctuary for the expression of religion and art in the countless scriptures and murals. Buddhist monks living in Dunhuang would collect scripture from the west while other monks would paint and create murals inside the caves. Furthermore, these murals not only served as an oasis for religious practices but also as visual representations of religious events to enlighten and teach illiterate Chinese about religion. The 7-8th centuries served as a creative boom for the cave due to the booming silk road and the rising popularity of Buddhism. These factors elevated the quality and quantity of art produced in these caves; cave painters were encouraged to display the prevalent Chinese style at the time and embellish walls with detailed carvings of sacred events. Buddhist narratives and scenes were depicted by these sculptures through the incorporation of colour,

movement and detail with finesse. However, the rising popularity of Mogao Grottoes came to an abrupt stop during the middle Kingdom and started to shut itself off. This led to a steady decline in visits and innovation of the caves, resulting in the Mogao Grottoes dissolving into time. Thus, the stories that remain in the re-discovery of the caves are timeless.

As one enters inside the Mogao Grotto, it is as if the world metamorphosed into a different dimension. Thousands of pathways twist and weave like vines and within this intricate system of caves are relics and murals scattered around through the cave walls. These artefacts provide an insight into the integral historic events that shape much of China. In the dazzling Mogao cave 323, a painting delineates the origins of Chinese Buddhism. The painting was commissioned and completed between 140–187 CE and references a legend where Emperor Wu worshipped two metal statues after his victory in war. After edging out in a war against the Xiongnu, Emperor Wu wanted to inquire more about the values the statues signified. Thus, he summoned Zhang Qian to the western region to investigate and discover the stories behind the statues. Zhang Qian returned to the Emperor and explained the religion of Buddha and the significance of the statues. Therefore, this legend is often credited for the origins of Buddhism within ancient China. Another pivotal artwork that provided insight into the way of life and the importance of Buddhism to China was also found in Mogao cave 323 constructed in 326 CE. However, a portion of the mural was removed by American explorer Langdon Warner in 1924 and is currently displayed in Harvard's Art Museum. The mural portrays the moving of a discovered bronze Buddha statue in Yangzhou, the Buddha statue was constructed by the fourth daughter of the Indian king, Asoka. The painting provides a depiction of the way of life, methods of transportation and also the significance of religion to the locals. In the painting, eight men traversed through the river via a wooden boat that docked upon the shores. Ox carts were arranged to move the bronze Buddha to the town centre. The technology the ancient Chinese had access to were fairly primitive and utilized methods such as boats and ox carts to transport heavier objects. Furthermore, the large amount of manpower mobilized to move the heavy bronze statue elucidates the dedication to Buddhism the locals possessed. Thus, this artwork was able to give a glimpse of the way of life in the past. Another piece of artwork that gave a glimpse into the past lies in Mogao cave 17 of a statue of an influential monk named Hong Bian. The statue depicts him to be peacefully meditating, the craftsmanship displayed is exquisite with precious carvings that transcend its realism. Hong Bian was a crucial figure in the formation of early Buddhism and was the chief of monks in the Hexi area. Moreover, he was highly influential politically and was known to be the highest-ranked religious official in the region. The collections of artworks and relics found in the Mogao Grotto not only acts as a time capsule for stories and legends but also shed light upon lessons and values enshrined into the daily life of Buddhists.

The immersive world in Mogao Grottoes is an escape from reality where stories and legends dominate the narrative through murals and paintings. One of the famous tales depicted on the walls of Mogao Grottoes is a Jakata tale portraying Prince Mahasattva. This masterpiece was constructed in Cave 428 in the year 557–581 and teaches the values of selflessness. The story begins with the King and Queen sending their three sons off into the woods. The terrain was uneven but the surrounding environment was lush with greenery. As they rest at the base of the mountains, the brothers spot a troop of tigers. The mother was frail, and her skin contoured around her feeble bones. She stares at her lion cubs with her mouth wide open, salivating at the thought of eating her children. The brothers immediately came and intervened with the mother, promising to bring her food in exchange for the

sparing of the tiger cubs. The youngest, Prince Mahasattva, ordered the other two brothers to gather food while he stayed to look after the tiger. The brothers agreed and went their separate ways to gather food. However, Prince Mahasattva knew that there was no food available for the tigress in the nearby vicinity. After the departure of the two brothers, the Prince took off his clothes and offered himself to the tigress. He wanted the tigress to take his life instead of the lives of her children. To his surprise, the tigress refused and rejected the goodwill from the prince. The prince was in disbelief but his desire to save tigers overwhelmed him. Driven by determination, the prince climbed to the edge of a nearby mountain and took his own life. As his body slumped onto the cold and uneven ground, blood bled profusely from his head. The tigress and her cubs had no choice but to accept the sacrifice made by the prince. When the brothers returned, they were in great shock and knew what had happened. They carried his remains and traversed the cruel forest terrain, they were in deep grief and anguish at the death of their brother. To commemorate his death and recognise his sacrifice, the family built a stupa in his honour. Another legend that is depicted in the murals again discusses the values of selflessness. One day, King Sivi comes across a helpless dove trying to manoeuvre its way from a falcon. To save the dove, King Sivi struck a deal with the falcon to save its life. The falcon demanded that it will only let the dove go if it can receive the same mass of flesh from the King as that of the dove. The King agreed without hesitation and had a butcher slice off the flesh from his legs to offer the falcon. After slicing more and more flesh from his legs, the weight was still not equal to the weight of the dove. Finally, King Sivi offered himself to the falcon in exchange for the sparing of the dove. These timeless stories are entangled with positive values and lessons for people to learn from. Therefore, the caves of Mogao Grottoes are filled with legends and stories that not only inform but inspire and teach crucial values and lessons.

Built in 366 CE and protected with care till today, the Tang dynasty birthed one of the most prestigious safe havens for religions, the expression of art and literature alike. The impact of the re-discovery of Mogao Grotto is immense as the collections of artwork and statues became synonymous with Buddhism and its doctrines became widely adopted. The Mogao Grotto is truly a masterpiece constructed by man due to the exceptional role in Buddhism the cave played, provided insight into the past through a variety of different mediums and offers values to be adopted by the visitors.

# Beyond the Beauty of the Mogao Grottoes

*Diocesan Girls' School, Chung, Mong Joo Nicole - 17*

Slowly, she enters the Mogao Cave. At once, she is spellbound. With the use of chiaroscuro on the stenciled buddhas and apsarasas, she can almost feel the presence of the celestial beings. Rays of sunlight are seeping through the temple, making them glimmer like gold, enhancing their ethereal quality.

What a site of quintessential Buddhist art and culture.

The Mogao Grottoes is a World Heritage site located in Dunhuang, Gansu province, China. The name 'Mogao' literally means 'peerless' in Chinese, which highlights the unparalleled grandeur of the caves. According to UNESCO, the Mogao Grottoes are situated at a 'strategic point along the Silk Road', which is the crossroads of trade, in addition to religious, cultural and intellectual influences. Dug in the fourth century by monks, thousands of pilgrims visited the site to dig more caves and deck them with art over the centuries until the Yuan dynasty of the Mongols. Today, the Mogao Grottoes with rock-cut architecture form a system of more than a thousand caves and five hundred temples. The cave temples have blossomed into one of the Silk Road's great Mecca's of Buddhist art. The interiors are honeycombed with over 2400 brightly painted sculptures of the Buddha and 45,000 square meters of murals, the styles of which span across dynasties and cultures. The 'Library Cave', one of the caves of Mogao, once contained a cache of long-hidden ancient documents, which have now been dispersed around the world.<sup>1</sup> Mogao has been a place for meditation, pilgrimage, trading, mingling between peoples, and simply admiration throughout the years.

The nickname for the Mogao Grottoes, 'Caves of the Thousand Buddhas', literally lives up to its name. Legends say that Yuezun, a monk, traveled to Dunhuang in 366 A.D. During sunset, he wandered to the foot of a mountain and gazed at the breathtaking scenery. As the sunray descended to the peak of the mountain, he saw what seemed to be a thousand golden buddhas blazing on the cliff. Inspired by their grandeur, Yuezun began to chisel a small meditation cell in the rocks, marking the very first carving of the Mogao Grottoes.<sup>2</sup> A seemingly meagre alteration to the mountain would soon turn into the excavation of more than a thousand caves, making them one of the most noteworthy scenic spots today. From the 4th to the 14th century, monastic communities started to carve out larger caverns for public acts of devotion, embellishing the shrines with paintings and sculptures of buddhas.

The tortuous history of the Mogao Grottoes displays persistence through the test of time. With the astonishing cave temples and decorative art, countless people would visit the Mogao Grottoes for various purposes. Besides serving as a site for religious practice and the worshiping of the gods by believers, the Mogao Grottoes was also a place where traders along the Silk Road would stop by to restore supplies, admiring the astonishing caves at the same time. During the rule of Tibet from 781 to 847 AD, Dunhuang was conquered by competing dynasties, local aristocrats, and foreign powers. Despite the frequent discord that surrounded Dunhuang, the creative enterprise of the Mogao Grottoes persisted. Successive rulers financed the carving of new caves and emblazoned them with their own pious images.<sup>2</sup> This displays the extraordinary persistence of the people who made the Mogao Grottoes

for what they are today. Unfortunately, Dunhuang was left desolate when the Silk Road was abandoned in the Ming Dynasty, rendering the Mogao Grottoes to be forgotten. In the 1890s, a Daoist monk named Wang Yuanlu appointed himself the guardian of the caves. Miraculously, he discovered a cache of manuscripts that was concealed in one of the Mogao caves, which is now known as the Library Caves. Unbeknownst to the world at the time, the site contained up to fifty thousand ancient documents that included sutras, contracts, poems, prayer sheets and official documents.<sup>3</sup> The preservation of the old documents juxtaposes the fates of other Chinese historical records, most of which had been lost in warfare, fire and material deterioration. The rediscovery of the treasures of the Mogao Grottoes brought about widespread attention and the popularity of the site surged once again. The history of how the carvings and decorations of the Mogao Grottoes were able to persist during turbulent times and how it still flourishes in modern day make the Mogao Grottoes all the more impressive.

If you ever visit the Mogao Grottoes, you will be in awe the instant you step into one of the caves. After hours in the desolate Dunhuang desert, you will be enveloped in the exquisitely painted version of paradise. The polychrome, elaborate sculptures of buddhas will immediately captivate you. As you look around, you can see apsarasas floating across the walls. The ceiling is adorned by heavenly figures, so vividly drawn that they seem to be tangible. The beauty of the Mogao Grottoes is absolutely breathtaking, but what makes the site particularly unique? What lies beyond the beauty of the Mogao Grottoes?

The sculptures and murals are an impressive site. Their external qualities themselves are memorable enough to be ingrained in your memory at first glance. However, it is their ability to display the artists' dedication; reflect ancient lifestyles and values; convey Buddhist tales and morals; signify the convergence between the East and the West that makes it transcend across ages and nations.

The hand-moulded clay sculptures of gods and saints are an attestation of decades-long dedication from artists. Most of the clay sculptures were constructed on the hillside. The tedious process of paddling the wooden frame with reed, then modelling it with clay stucco, and beautifying it with paint whilst capturing every facial expression, every crease, every geometric pattern shows how devoted the artists were in creating the sculptures. On top of that, artisans were able to add unique values to the figures that they have moulded. The variations between the sculptures in the Mogao Grottoes allows the efforts of the artists to shine through even more. For example, a figure of Maitreya Buddha in Cave 275 from Northern Liang shows influence from Kushan art.<sup>1</sup> The Buddha, who is wearing a turquoise three-disk crown, is shown to be cross-legged. Contrastingly, the Nirvana Cave features a large reclining Buddha that spans the entire hall. There are also figures of mourners depicted along the length of the hall behind the Buddha. The iconographic theme in Buddhist art represents the historical Buddha during his last illness, when he was about to enter parinirvana, a nirvana-after-death. This sculpture exhibits properties of Gandhara, a Greco-Buddhist art.<sup>4</sup> Through the display of an array of artistic influence and visual characteristics, we can witness how each sculpture has its own distinctiveness, as if each of the sculpturers was interpreting Buddhist art in his own way. Instead of mimicking previous artwork, numerous sculptors have collectively exercised their creative imagination and artful execution, making the 2400 sculptures in the Mogao Grottoes as dynamic as they are today. This is a testament to the dedication from artists across dynasties.

The murals of the Mogao Grottoes are not solely for aesthetic appreciation, they reflect the lifestyles and values of people in ancient society as well. In Mogao Cave 23 (High Tang, 705-791 AD), the murals depict the famous Parable of the Herbal Medicine Chapter from

'The Farmers Working in Heavy Rain'. The painting shows the dim sky and hard rain. One farmer is whipping the cow to plow while another is carrying the harvest on his shoulders. The farmers' backs are slightly hunched over, depicting the physical hardships of farmwork. Despite the tricky weather, the farmers are still able to grind through and continue to manage their crops. The persistent hard work of the villagers are shone through in this illustration, showing the hard and honest living of rural people during the High Tang Dynasty. At the lower left corner of the mural, children appear to be playing music and dancing, indicative of joviality and celebration. This reflects the carefree lifestyle of the country.<sup>5</sup> In Mogao Cave 148 (Tang, A.D. 705–781), a mural depicts a funeral procession that is on the way to the Buddha's cremation. The Bodhisattvas, priests and kings are carrying banners and offerings solemnly. There is a corridor which has the illustration of the Sutra of Requiring Blessing Received in Chinese writing, which emphasizes filial piety, an important Confucian teaching.<sup>2</sup> This suggests the adherence of traditional Chinese values and filial practices among people during the Tang Dynasty. As a result, the murals of the Mogao Grottoes reveal the lifestyles and values of people in the olden days.

Buddhism values can be conveyed through the intricately-crafted murals of the Mogao Caves. Every stroke, every delineation, every colour tone contributes to the unfolding of compelling tales. The Jataka Tale of King Sivi in Mogao Cave 428 flawlessly brings out the theme of self-sacrifice.<sup>2</sup> The mural, which was painted between 557–581 C.E, tells a Jataka tale about Prince Mahasattva. Along the Eastern Wall of the Mogao Cave, the famous tale is beautifully displayed in three registers. The mural begins with three young men bidding their parents farewell as they prepare to hunt. The horses carrying the men have muscular bodies and lengthy strides, superbly capturing their elegant gait as they swiftly pass through the forest. On the second register, the three men are surrounded by the polychrome mountains. At the centre of the mural, seven baby cubs fearfully await the devourer – their own mother. The mural then shows how Prince Mahasattva strips off his clothes and lies down in front of the ravenous tigress. The third register shows how Mahasattva's attempt of self-sacrifice was futile, for the tigress still appears to stand by him indifferently. As the mural develops, we can see how Prince Mahasattva fearlessly climbs to the edge of a cliff, cuts open his neck and throws himself on the ledge. This time, his body is devoured by the tigers. This story portrays how Prince Mahasattva not only has a kind heart, but he would go as far as sacrificing his own life twice to prevent the sufferings of the cubs. This highlights his immense bravery and selflessness, attributes that coincide with the core values of Buddhism. The Jataka tale of Prince Mahasattva's experience is only one of the many stories that our forefathers intended to tell us. Along the walls of the Mogao Grottoes, there are a multitude of murals that teach us invaluable life lessons, inspiring believers to put the Buddhism values into practice and emulate Mahasattva's noteworthy deeds.

The murals of the Mogao Grottoes also reflect the convergence between the East and West. In a broader artistic sense, the murals display different artistic styles. According to experts, the 'unique artistic style of Dunhuang art in the Mogao Grottoes derives not only from the amalgamation of Han Chinese traditions and ancient Indian and Gandharan customs, but also from the integration of Turkish and ancient Tibetan art'.<sup>6</sup> Since Mogao is situated between Mongolia and Tibet, Dunhuang was a vital juncture on the Silk Road. The existence of an array of artistic techniques is a testament of the merging between the East and West.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the cultural exchanges along the Silk Road during the Sui Dynasty are thoroughly depicted in the murals in the Mogao Grottoes. For instance, Mogao Cave 302 contains illustrative scenes of the interplay between the Western and Eastern cultures.

Illustrations of camels pulling carts signify the high mobility and frequent trading between East and West along the Silk Road at the time. There are numerous paintings of black horses with stretching legs, vividly depicting their leaps and gallops as they dash through mountains and dirt roads to reach their destination. This reinforces the rapid exchange of goods between the cultures as they modernise. Therefore, the murals reflect the convergence between Eastern and Western cultures, vibrantly showcasing the process of modernisation and assimilation of different countries.

Invaluable lessons derived from the Mogao Grottoes add on to the extraordinary beauty of the site. Sadly, it is under the threat of deterioration due to climate change. As the climate in Northwest China gets warmer and more humid, the murals, statues and the caves' exterior become increasingly susceptible to degradation. Hence, preservation is crucial to ensure that the site can continue to thrive and touch people in the future. It is a blessing that the Dunhuang Academy was established in 1944 with the aim of safeguarding the treasures in the Mogao Grottoes. Mogao Cave 85 has been comprehensively studied and preserved by archeologists, scientists and structural engineers to maximise the effectiveness of preservation of this ancient diary of Dunhuang. Remedial treatments, such as grouting for structural reinforcement, stabilisation of detached plaster with an earth-based grout and the fixing of flaking paint, have been carried out to preserve the site. Moreover, a condition monitoring program has been developed for long-term preservation of the cave after stabilization interventions. This way, the deterioration of the calcium carbonate and paint can be eliminated.<sup>8</sup> That being said, we play a pivotal role in mitigating the negative impacts of climate change on the Mogao Grottoes. Realising how our seemingly meagre wasteful actions in our daily lives can contribute to the acceleration of climate change, and subsequently the degradation of the Mogao Grottoes is not a stretch. It is reality. Thus, exercising our environmental-friendly practices is paramount to protecting the Mogao Grottoes.

Undoubtedly, the Mogao Grottoes offer visitors an astonishing view to savour upon. But it is far beyond that. It is a glimpse into the tumultuous history of Dunhuang; a montage of masterpieces of countless dedicated artists; a tunnel to ancient society; a collection of religious tales; a showcase of the mingling of cultures. This paradise is an inspiration.

With her lingering gait, she exited the cave. As she lifted her gaze, she, too, saw a thousand radiating Buddhas looking upon her.

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## Mogao Grottoes— The Hidden Treasure of China

*Immaculate Heart of Mary College, Chou, Cheuk Yan Ambrose - 16*

The ancient Mogao Grottoes, the splendid ancient world,  
A visit to the Mogao Grottoes, a change of our my life journey,  
Following the light of Buddha, the light to the true wisdom and peace.

Reading a book of Chinese History about Mogao Grottoes has led me to a surprising journey of this awesome and fabulous place recently. With the surging of the virus, many are forced to give up their plans of traveling but for me, I enjoy immersing myself into the wonders and history of the ancient world through reading. A book about Mogao Grottoes has opened the windows for me to see, to admire and to appreciate the magnificent world of Buddhist artwork and scriptures.

The Mogao Caves, also known as the Thousand Buddha Grottoes or Caves of the Thousand Buddha statues, forming a system of 500 temples in the center of Dunhuang. It is an invaluable oasis located at a religious and cultural crossroads on the Silk Road, in Gansu province, China. The caves are also known as the Dunhuang Caves; however, this term is also used to include other Buddhist cave sites in and around the Dunhuang area, such as the Western Thousand Buddha Caves, Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves, Yulin Caves, and Five Temple Caves. The caves contain some of the finest examples of Buddhist art spanning a period of 1,000 years. The first caves were dug in AD 366 as places of Buddhists' meditation and worship. The Mogao Caves are also best known of the Chinese Buddhist grottoes and, along with Longmen Grottoes and Yungang Grottoes, they are indeed one of the three famous ancient Buddhist sculptural sites of China.

The caves are usually referred to the Thousand Buddha Caves, a name that, some scholars thought that was from the legend about a monk, Yuezun, who had a vision of a thousand Buddhas at the site. However, the place could be also named for its tremendous number of Buddha figures at the site. The miniature figures painted on the walls of these caves are part of the wonder, "Thousand Buddhas" as well. In the past, Mogao Cave was a Cave where people stayed for prayers as well as meditation, an oasis for refreshing the body and mind.

Someone may wonder about the purpose of building such a fantastic site. The very first idea was from a Buddhist monk called Lè Zūn, who believed that he had a vision of a thousand Buddhas bathed in golden light at the site in 366 AD. Though the vision might not last for a long time, he was inspired by the vision, believing it was the call from Buddha for him to stay there to pray. Therefore, he started to dig a cave for having his spiritual formation there. However, this is not the only saying of the origin. Some said Lè Zūn was inspired to build the grottoes because of inscriptions on a stele in the cave in 332 AD. An earlier date of 353 AD however could be found in another document, Shazhou Tujing. Therefore, the exact building time of Mogao Cave remained a mystery. He was later joined by a second monk Faliang, and the site gradually grew, by the time of the Northern Liang, a small community of monks had formed at the site. The caves initially served only as a place of meditation for hermit monks but then unexpectedly developed for serving the monasteries that grew nearby. To show their respect to Buddha, members of the ruling family of Northern Wei and



Northern Zhou continued to construct many caves here, and it flourished in the short-lived Sui Dynasty. Now, as we all know, during the Tang Dynasty, the number of caves increased enormously and even reached over a thousand.

By the time of Sui and Tang dynasties, Mogao Caves had become a place for worship and a place for pilgrimage. Many faithful donated money or savings to elaborate and paint the caves. The emperor even donated a huge amount of money to help to build the caves. It had also become one of the most important commercial centers of the Silk Road. The two large Buddha statues at the site were also built at that time, and it was the glorious time of Mogao Caves definitely.

However, the Mogao Caves then started to decline. In 845 AD, the city where the Mogao Caves are located, Dunhuang, was occupied by Tibetan. The city then acted as a frontier town to China. Since then, Dunhuang was occupied by various tribes that were not Han Chinese for a long time. After the Tang Dynasty, the site went into a gradual decline, and construction of new caves even ceased entirely after the Yuan Dynasty.

Moreover, as Islam conquered much of Central Asia and the development of sea-route trading in China, the importance of the Silk Road also declined. Therefore, less and less number of people visited this holy place, Mogao Caves. During the Ming Dynasty, the Silk Road was also officially abandoned. As a result, Dunhuang slowly became depopulated and largely forgotten by the outside world. Most of the Mogao caves, the precious oasis for mind and spirit, were abandoned though some still went there for prayers. However, due to the lack of budget, the fading glory of Mogao Caves was even lost until the early 20th century.

The beauty of Dunhuang was totally forgotten by the outside world for a few decades until the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. No one would have imagined that the Western explorers were the ones who were so much interested in the ancient Silk Road and the lost cities of Central Asia.

Those explorers who passed through Dunhuang noted the murals, sculptures, and artifacts such as the Stele of Sulaiman at Mogao. The biggest discovery came from a Chinese Taoist named Wang Yuanlu who considered himself as the guardian of some of these temples around the turn of the century, and thus he tried to raise funds to repair the statues. He discovered rooms that were blocked by sand due to wearing. In those rooms, there are a lot of gorgeous paintings and sculptures, which were also extremely valuable. However, among all these ancient treasures, an enormous hoard of manuscripts was the most precious one. At that time, Wang wrote letters to the governor of Gansu about the treasure. However, they could not see the amazing value. Instead, they treated them as ruins and refused to protect these cultural treasures. Soon, they had to pay for their wrong decision.

The remark of Wang's discovery drew the attention of a joint British-Indian group led by the Hungarian-born British archeologist, Aurel Stein, who was on an archeological expedition in that area in 1907.

Stein negotiated with Wang to allow him to remove a significant number of manuscripts as well as the finest paintings and textiles in exchange for a donation to Wang's restoration effort. He was followed by a French expedition under Paul Pelliot who acquired many thousands of items in 1908, and then by a Japanese expedition led by Otani Kozui in 1911 and a Russian expedition of Sergei F. Oldenburg in 1914.

A well-known scholar Luo, Zhenyu, edited some of the manuscripts Pelliot which was then compiled into a book which was then published in 1909 as "Manuscripts of the Dunhuang Caves". After such a great loss, scholars in Peking(now named Beijing) finally acknowledged the value of the 'ruin'. Having worries that the remaining manuscripts might

be lost again, the central government decided to start recovering the rest of the manuscripts for sending them back to Peking. However, not all the remaining manuscripts were taken to Peking, and of those retrieved, some were then stolen by treasure hunters. Rumors of caches of documents taken by local people had continued for some time, and a cache of documents hidden by Wang from the authorities was later found in the 1940s. However, this was only the start of the loss.

Later, more bad news came up. The central government discovered that some of the caves were damaged and vandalized by White Russian soldiers when they were used by the local authority in 1921 to house Russian soldiers fleeing the civil war following the Russian Revolution. Also, in 1924, American explorer Langdon Warner removed a few murals as well as a statue from some of the caves. In 1939, Kuomintang soldiers stationed at Dunhuang caused some damage to the murals and statues at the site.

Fortunately, the central government was very much concerned about the loss, and they told the painter Zhang Daqian to go to the caves with a small team of assistants and stay for two and a half years to repair and copy the murals. He exhibited and published the copies of the murals, which helped to publicize and give much prominence to the art of Dunhuang within China. Later, the Research Institute of Dunhuang Art (which later became the Dunhuang Academy), established at Mogao in 1944 to look after the site and its contents. In 1956, the first Premier of the People's Republic of China, Zhou Enlai, took a personal interest in the caves and sanctioned a grant to repair and protect the site; and in 1961, the Mogao Caves were declared to be a protected historical monument by the State Council, and large-scale renovation work at Mogao began soon afterwards. Today, efforts are put into conserving and doing research on the site and its content. The wonder of Mogao Caves became one of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 1987. From 1988 to 1995, 248 caves were discovered to the North of the 487 caves known since the early 1900s. Also, the Chinese government now restricted the number of tourists to the caves to protect it. Also, they improved their recovering and protecting technology to prevent the caves from any severe damages. Therefore, although there are some inevitable damages causing some caves to collapse, most of the remaining caves are preserved without serious defects.

Among all the Mogao Caves, the most famous one is The Library Cave. This special cave was discovered by Wang Yuanlu, and it is located off the entrance leading to cave 16 and was originally used as a memorial cave for a local monk, Hongbian, when he died in 862. Hongbian was from the wealthy Wu family which was responsible for the construction of cave 16, and the Library Cave was used for his retreat in his lifetime. The cave originally contained his statue which was moved to another cave when it was used to keep manuscripts and some of which bear Hongbian's seal. Many documents dating from 406 to 1002 were found in the cave and heaped up in closely packed layers of bundles of scrolls. In addition to the 1,100 bundles of scrolls, there were also over 15,000 paper books and shorter texts, including a Hebrew penitential prayer. The Library Cave also contained various sorts of textiles such as banners, numerous damaged figurines of Buddhas, and other Buddhist paraphernalia.

Apart from its renowned history, one of the most important aspects of the Mogao Caves is to enjoy its beauty in order to identify its preciousity. The art of Dunhuang covers more than ten major genres, including architecture, stucco sculpture, wall paintings, silk paintings, calligraphy, woodblock printing, embroidery, literature, music and dance, and popular entertainment. From the perspective of architecture, it is an example of rock-cut architecture, but unlike Longmen Grottoes and Yungang Grottoes, the local rock is a rather soft gravel conglomerate that is not suitable for either sculpture or elaborate architectural details, so it

is indeed very rare but precious in China. Many of the caves originally had wooden porches or fore-temples built out from the cliff, but most of these have decayed or been lost in other ways, with only five remaining, the two earliest of which are rare surviving examples of Song dynasty wooden architecture. For the most prominent wooden building at the site, we must mention the first one built during the Tang dynasty. The compound houses the Great Buddha and was originally four storeys high, but it was repaired for at least five times, so it is no longer in its original structure. For further development, a storey was added between 874–885, and it was repaired in the Guiyijun period. In 1898, two further storeys were added during a restoration. With two further restorations carried out in the 20th century, the stunning 9-storey structure is the building we can see today .

For the murals, they date from a period of over a thousand years, from the 5th to the 14th century, and many earlier ones were repainted at later points within the period. The murals are extensive, covering an area of 490,000 square feet (46,000 square metres). The most fully painted caves have paintings all over the walls and ceilings, with geometrical or plant decoration filling the spaces not taken by figurative images, which are above all the Buddha. Sculpture is also brightly painted.

The murals are valued for the scale and richness of content as well as their artistry. Buddhist subjects are most common; however some have traditional mythical subjects and portraits of patrons. These murals reveal various drawing styles of Buddhist art in China for nearly a thousand years. The artistry of the murals reached its apogee during the Tang period. Unfortunately, the quality of the work seemed to decline after the tenth century. A common motif in many caves are the areas entirely covered by rows of small seated Buddha figures, and they were then named as “Thousand Buddha Caves”.

These small Buddhas were drawn in a very delicate way, using stencils so that identical figures may be replicated. Flying apsaras, or celestial beings may be depicted in the ceiling or above the Buddhas, and figures of donors may be shown along the bottom of the walls. The paintings often depict jataka tales which are stories of the life of Buddha, or avadana which are parables of the doctrine of karma. While Buddhist art is stylistically distinct from secular art, the style of paintings in the caves often reflects that of contemporary secular painting (insofar as we know of this), especially those depicting secular scenes. Surprisingly, donor figures are generally depicted in secular style and may include secular events associated with them. Now, many of the figures have darkened due to oxidation of the lead-based pigments from exposure to air and light. Though some artwork does look a bit odd, they manifested the peak of the glorious period of the caves.

For sculptures, there are around 2,400 surviving clay sculptures at Mogao. These were first constructed on a wooden frame, padded with reed, then modelled in clay stucco, and finished with paint. The giant statues however have a stone core. The Buddha is generally shown as the central statue, often attended by bodhisattvas, heavenly kings, devas, and other mythical creatures.

Before the discovery in the Library Cave, original paintings on silk and paper from the Tang dynasty, an influential period in Chinese art, were indeed very rare. However, as the Library Cave was revealed, over a thousand paintings on silk, banners, and embroideries were found, which contributes more clues for historians to learn more about the lifestyle of ancient people. Though most of the paintings are anonymous, they are of high quality, especially from the Tang dynasty. Most are sutra paintings, images of Buddha, and narrative paintings. The paintings show the features of the contemporary Chinese style of the capital Chang’an, but many also reflect Indian, Tibetan and Uighur painting styles.

Mogao Caves is a magnificent wonder which is well-known for its enormous amount of precious artwork and unique architectural structures. It is also where Chinese culture meets other cultures as it was occupied by several tribes and countries in the past. However, what is disappointing is that this exhibition of art is not a complete one as some parts of the treasure are still missing.

Now, the British Museum keeps most of the treasures with a staggering number of 13.7 thousand historical relics from Mogao Caves. For years, enormous efforts were put into negotiation to bring back all these historical relics to China. Sadly, no substantive actions have been done. Also, some treasures were kept by India and France by different incidents, while some were lost. Besides, there are rumors saying that the lost ones were sold to Japan.

The loss of some treasures of Mogao Caves is, of course, something we dearly miss. However, we may also see how popular the place was in the past, and its glory and spectacular structure and treasures are still with us, telling us the stories in the past while guiding us to the light, the light of walking in peace and harmony.

We should remember the Mogao Caves are the gifts from our ancestors. We, as the descendants, should do our best to protect it and to appreciate all the stunning artworks. Though we can sometimes find pieces of Mogao Caves in different countries, may the fragments of this wonderful place shine in every country, strengthening us through the times of adversities as well as refreshing our mind and soul to encounter and endure the hardships in life.

# The Only Remaining Civilized Cave System in China?

*Pui Kiu College, Kwan, Cheuk Long - 15*

Ancient China, an undoubtedly important period of time for us to learn and research, remains a mystery for many of the professional archaeologists and historians throughout the globe. However, with the new discovery of the Mogao Caves located right beside the city of Dunhuang in the province of Gansu in China, the research progress has had its breakthrough since then. The cave itself has been renovated into a tourist center for visitors to enjoy their stay there and have a better understanding of the history of China and its culture.

I will first be introducing the significance of the Silk Road on the formation of the Mogao Caves.

With the cave system located right on the Silk Road, a vital trade route to maintain China's economic development since the Han dynasty, as well as the achievement for China in contacting the west for the first time. It is extremely difficult to have discovered the relics from our ancestors, as the Silk Road itself is measured to be a formidable length of around 4000 miles, which is just over 1.5 times of the length between the northernmost and southernmost point of world's longest nation, Chile. In numbers, that is around 1347 miles apart. The Silk Road itself spans across the European continent, Arab world, Central Asia and Eastern Asia, which passes through uninhabited deserts, highlands, mountains and other extreme terrain. It directly links China to Europe and allows cultural exchange to take place in between the East and the West, influencing the Eastern nations and introducing them to the cultures across the continent of Europe, for example Catholicism and the Sunni faith. It is without a doubt that the Silk Road was a significant part of China's history, its importance could be further proven when the Ottoman Empire decided to block the Silk Road and raise the taxes for merchants passing through Constantinople along the Silk Road. In such an atmosphere, cultural and economic exchange between countries has been greatly facilitated and a center of such an action is needed to help the accommodation for the followers of the different religions. Therefore, it has urged the formation of the Mogao Grottoes in Gansu, China.

Being in the intersection point of two tributaries of the Silk Road, the Mogao Cave system was the core of cultural exchange and trading. Bartering between natives and Europeans as well as Chinese merchants mainly took place here with its convenient location. The caves were an economic powerhouse during the time with not only its tax income from the travelers along the Silk Road, but also the trade power in that corresponding trade node. It was however abandoned after the Tang dynasty due to the main reason of the Silk Road also being abandoned, with the Tibetans controlling the province and sea trade being conducted more frequently. However, during its apex, the caves have seen its better days during the Tang and Sui dynasties, with the most constructed caves within a year, along with the largest one built that homed to the 3rd largest Buddha statue which still remains nowadays. The caves were an architectural wonder, many historians have referred to the cave that the 3rd largest Buddha was located in where practically almost impossible with the technology developed back then.

With the caves being a hub for the exchange in cultures, many different traditions have been brought to the place and introduced to the Hans. At first, the neighbors of China,

Indians, arrived at the caves and influenced it with their own culture. Buddhism has gained its popularity throughout China with the assistance of the Mogao Grottoes. Buddha statues were built in the caves for worshipping, caves were opened to the public to help publicize the religion. To an extent, the Chinese were greatly impacted by the influx of such a culture, ruling families in China have had their rulers believed in Buddhism, and has ranked from a culture that was unknown throughout China to a dominant religion in the Eastern Asia region. The Mogao Caves were painted with Indian and Central Asian painting techniques. The mural of "Guanyin" was drawn on the walls in cave 57, which means the 57th cave that was discovered in chronological order. Others such as the portraits of the rulers during that time or other religious figures are also found on the walls of the caves. These have all marked an important milestone for the ancient Chinese for their acknowledgement and communication with the other cultures neighboring them, urging cultural integration at the early ages, and showing ancient Hans being ahead of time with their foresights on what must be done in order to have a smooth legacy.

While for trading, it is not hard to imagine why it would contain such a high up in its value.

Next up, I will be introducing the location of such a historically significant cave system.

The Mogao Caves system is built on a hill, where it is just south east of the existing city, Dunhuang. The Mingsha Mountain was a preferable location for the caves to be built. As I have just said, the Silk Road was an essential economic trading node that was significant to the development of the Chinese and the exchange in culture and trade. With the population and trade value in the Silk Road being skyrocketed, the cave system is built in the best location in order to facilitate the nearby citizens and the Westerners to bargain and sell their own religions to the others.

The cave system has been revitalized into a visitor center that has contributed one of the many major boosts in tourism in China, with the remaining being the major cities and the national parks in mainland China. The Mogao Caves have played an important role since its initial construction. Its historical value could be further proved by the name given to the cave, along with the Longmen Grottoes and Yungang Grottoes, they are referred to as China's Three Grottoes in the present days. English-language tours run at 9 am, noon and 2:30 pm every day, to access this tour, buying the A ticket with ¥258 would also buy you an admission to two different 30-minute films, usually about the history and present of the Mogao Caves. The ticket could only be bought in advance either online at the official website or in the Mogao Grottoes Reservation and Ticket Center, which is located in the nearby city of Dunhuang and includes a free two-way transport to and from the caves. It should be noted that A tickets are limited to 6000 tickets per day. B tickets could also be purchased for ¥100 for Chinese-language tours, where tickets are limited to only 12000 a day. For people buying the B tickets to visit the caves, you are free to explore and adventure inside the gorgeous and well-maintained caves. However, visitors must have a good understanding in Chinese in order to understand the introduction from the tour guide.

For ticket A owners, only eight caves would be visited, one of the most famous caves, the Library Cave, which I will introduce later, as well as Cave 96 and Cave 148. Others will be rotated regularly and are random every time. In Cave 96, we can see the 35.5 tall Buddha, which I have explained in the previous section. While inside Cave 148, a smaller but still enormous Buddha statue with a height of 26m would be closely observed and appreciated by the visitors there. For ticket B owners, the tour is much shorter but grants you more freedom to view around the caves, yet only 4 caves will be available for visitors to enjoy. Overall, ticket A will be more useful and enjoyable for tourists to purchase and ticket B would be for those

who are in a rush and have a great understanding of the Chinese language. Please be noted that photography is prohibited inside the caves, poor weather conditions such as rain, snow, sand storm or hail would cause the caves to close in order to protect the environment and the caves.

With the present situation being sorted, let's move on to talk about the most well-known caves among the 492 caves, the Library Cave. The discovery of the cave is a surprise and was not predicted by any archeologists. The cave itself was walled off against the other cave in the same system, where the purpose of such an action is debated by many. Some have suggested that the people in the past didn't have a way to dispose of their waste or old and outdated books, throwing them inside the cave the sealing it off is a way to solve the problem for a short period of time, therefore leading to the cave containing a wide variety of ancient scripts and books. While others insisted that the hiding of the invasion from Xi Xia during the 1030s may be one of the overlooked reasons. As the aggressors looked forward to unifying the central plain, one of their policies was to unify the Chinese's writing system and culture. The keeping and storing of such books would be considered to be a crime and potentially get the cave owners to be executed. For this reason, the Library Cave has been isolated from the other caves and some other hidden caves may be found inside the Mogao Grotto system in the future.

Inside the cave, some of the oldest and most ancient manuscripts and books have been discovered and stored. Documents are written in various languages and ideologies. They vary from Tibetan, Uighur and Sanskrit, to the less known language of Khotanese. They are spoken mainly in the Central and Northern areas in Asia, this further proves the Mogao Grottoes is a hub of most Europe's and Asia's cultural exchange and directly implied how necessary the caves were. Not to mention, religion is also widely spread in the area, traces of the Catholic and Confucian works could be found inside the cave and was an important center of religious exchange when the cave was at its peak. Some of the most widely spread scrolls would be the Diamond Sutra, the oldest extant printed book with a date in history. The Dunhuang Go Manual, the oldest known strategic guide to the board game Go. The Dunhuang Star Chart, the oldest known Chinese pictorial guide to the stars. The Tibetan Annals, the earliest written history of Tibet. As well as The Painting of a Nestorian Christian figure, a silk painting that has been interpreted as an early representation of Jesus Christ. These all marked deeply into the history of the Chinese as the unstable society and the constant decline and fall of dynasties during that time all paved the way to the creation of such scrolls and helped us in maintaining a correct and right way to view back on Chinese history.

With this being said, the historical value of the Mogao Grottoes should not be overseen and ignored. Being one of the many outstanding ancient ruins that China owns, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization have always considered such wonders from mankind in the past to be one of their most valuable and favoured sites for researching and investigating. The Mogao Caves is therefore categorized in the field of world heritage and hundred and millions of money is used in protecting and maintaining it in its best state. This brings up a question, why are the Mogao Caves worth much of our and the world's attention?

To answer this, we can view this question in many ways, one of the being the historical value behind the build. The cave system is estimated to be built during the dynasty of Sui, around the time of the 4th century AD. It is surprising how the caves have kept their appearance with almost a thousand years of abandon, as well as their contents. UNESCO has always considered the long lasting history of the grottoes and decided to make them some of the most impressive world heritage in the world.

While the cultural value of the site have also acted a decisive role in distinguishing whether the building is really a state of the art site or just a plain unimpressive build after all.

However, the wide variety of arts and books inside the cave have proven the statement of the latter to be invalid. Artwork from the period as early as the 3rd century to as late as the 14th century could be found, from the category of sculpture, to paintings and textiles. Buddha statues were built and paintings on the daily lives of people are drawn on silk and paper, while some are carved on the walls and floors of the Mogao Caves. The numerous temples and altars inside the caves also showed that the caves are a major hub for worshipping and cultural exchange, directly increasing the cultural value of the caves. Not mentioning that the printing method that the Chinese invented played an important role in their history, or even the world's history. The innovative ideas of printing press have been introduced in China and widely used, the monks inside the Library Cave being one of the largest users of the newly developed technology, the printing press at that time. With this, the origin of the printing press may actually be around the area of Dunhuang and therefore the caves, and it is without a doubt that the cave system has brought humankind a huge step forward. With this, the cultural value of the Mogao Grottoes is definitely one of the highest among the world heritages, while it also played a decisive role in the world's development and improvement.

Finally, I would like to share my ideas and thoughts on the place. For such a valuable place that contained some of China's history to be maintained, it is not an easy task. Many jobs are present in the place owing to the exorbitant amount of information and value that the world has yet to discover. The Mogao Caves contained the daily lives of the Hans, the Mongols and much more throughout history. As one has said, "History repeats itself, first as tragedy, second as farce." It should be noted that learning history could avoid us repeating the same mistakes other people have made, and also to enhance our knowledge. The world heritage site of Mogao Caves contains a plethora of information and knowledge we can grasp and absorb, but not all can do so and not all will. Some may even overlook the importance of the upkeep and maintenance of these heritage sites, contaminating them or destroying them. I believe that this would only bring bad but not the goods, we would lose our chance in learning extra knowledge and know more about history, we may also make the same mistakes our ancestors did. In my opinion, this is extremely hurtful to see and the less and less attention of the topic from the public would really become a great obstacle for these heritage sites to continue to be preserved for the next generation. Not to mention, constant wars close by the world heritage sites would also affect the preservation of these heritage sites. Therefore, it is all up to us to help bring the public to learn more and discuss more on such a topic and to bring the public's attention back to it. This way, we can truly learn from the past and avoid further mistakes that are not beneficial to the improvement and evolution of mankind.