



Non-Fiction

Group 3

Hidden Caves, Common Ground: Lessons from Mogao

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The year is 1900. It is the rising of a new century in human history. In the northern territories of China, a Daoist monk by the name of Wang Yuanlu is exploring the recently uncovered Mogao Caves at Dunhuang. Hundreds of fresco paintings of Buddha and other religious figures have already been noted to cover the walls of the caves there, provoking interest from around the world. That interest, however, is about to be multiplied one hundredfold, almost overnight. Because Wang Yuanlu is about to discover the “library cave,” a hidden chamber in the rock alcove known only as “Cave 17,” a treasure chest of a room that houses over fifty thousand precious documents, paintings, clothing and other historical artifacts. A window into the past is opened, and it will shed light on Chinese history for the next one hundred years, weaving a trail from the ancient into the modern 21st century¹.

The Mogao caves are located at the edge of the Gobi Desert, about 25km south of Dunhuang. Known as one of the world’s most plentiful sources of ancient art and artifacts, the caves are filled with wall paintings (frescoes), sculptures, and statues. To help keep track of the many caves, archeologists have assigned them numbers; each cave reveals a different moment in time, or even a different sense of place. So if you want to take a look at the Tang Dynasty, you can explore Cave 23 and Cave 156, where you’ll find paintings of warriors lining up for battle and workers tilling their fields in planting season. Cave 254 offers traditional Chinese dresses whose woven silk has withstood years of decay, along with decorative motifs from the Sasanian Empire. Cave 302, one of the oldest, contains a broad fresco showing many of the interactions between travelers that were common along the massive trade route between Asia and the Mediterranean known today as the “Silk Road.” A later cave, like Cave 61, might include depictions of landscapes that represent early Chinese cartography, revealing the cultural practice of combining important information with beautiful artistic expression². Yet while the subjects of these artworks thus clearly vary quite a bit, one theme is predominant: revering the holy Buddha.

The Mogao grottoes are home to many Buddhas. The spiritual leader appears in his various incarnations hundreds of times across paintings, etchings, sculptures, and scrolls. But before we can understand the significance of the way Buddhism is represented in these ancient caves, we need to be aware of some Buddhist beliefs and religious traditions. Of course, Buddhists worship Buddha, believing him to be the first person to achieve nirvana, or enlightenment, by separating himself from human appetites and suffering. In the Mogao caves, many paintings illustrate jatakas, or detailed stories about the past lives of Buddhas. It is believed that retelling these stories is itself a holy act, and that studying them can give important lessons about how to lead a life of fulfillment, discipline and peace. Cave 275 is full of elaborate jatakas. One describes King Sivi, who offered his body to save a dove from an attacking hawk, while another tells the legend of King Candraprabha, who gave his own head a thousand times during his thousand past lives. When we consider such examples, we can see how these cave paintings testify to one of the enduring themes of Buddhism which is still relevant today, whatever religion we practice in our own lives: that attaining enlightenment (or any other worthy goal) often requires personal sacrifice. The entrance to Cave 275 is marked by a towering Bodhisattva statue called Maitreya, or the Future Buddha. Three crown jewels adorn his head, signifying his holiness, but also something more: the influence of cultural practices and symbols from Central Asia, likely brought to Mogao’s location through social interactions facilitated by the Silk Road².

Reaching its peak activity level in the 13th and 14th centuries, the Silk Road was a caravan route that for centuries represented the main link between “East” and “West,” traveling from seaports along the Mediterranean all the way into mainland China, where it followed the Great Wall for miles. Because travelers came from so many distant lands as they traded spices for silk or precious metals for tea and paper, commerce was not their only achievement: an unavoidable byproduct of the exchange of goods was the exchange of cultural knowledge. The Mogao caves contain a Buddhist pilgrim’s records of his encounters with Christian monks in the tenth century, a Hebrew book of prayers, a book of omens written in Old Turkic, and a Tibetan sutra with commentary written in Chinese characters. Buddhism itself was shaped by such exchanges, and evidence of its changing customs and ideology can be seen in the frescoes and sculptures scattered throughout the grottoes, such as the “flying apsaras” that appear in many caves. Originally Indian depictions of Hindu gods and goddesses, these figures were translated into Buddhist imagery which reimagined the apsaras as more visibly Chinese and more symbolic of Buddhist thought. The caves of Mogao therefore speak to us from across the eons as not only messengers of Chinese history,

¹ Khan Academy, “The Mogao Caves at Dunhuang.” Retrieved 1/13/22 from <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-asia/imperial-china/tang-dynasty/a/mogao-caves-at-dunhuang>.

² Facts And Details, “Mogao Caves: Its History and Cave Art.” Retrieved 1/14/22 from <https://factsanddetails.com/china/cat15/sub103/entry-6521.html>.

The Treasures We Seek

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The Mogao Grottoes, located in North–Western China in the province of Gansu and the county of Dunhuang, the Mogao Grottoes are considered one of the Earth’s historical treasures. The caves hold the largest collection of Buddhist Art in the world. It signifies a huge cultural and historical value to China and without it we would never have had the insight on the evolution of Buddhist art and the stories these very caves could tell.

The Mogao Grottoes, also known as the Thousand Buddha Caves are a system of 492 unique caves and temples. These caves hold a rare collection of some of the best Buddhist art from a period of over a thousand years. First constructed in 366 A.D the caves came into existence after the Buddhist Monk Yuezun had a vision of a thousand buddhas filled with golden light on a cliff face, which inspired him to build the grottoes, the caves were carved into the cliffs above the Dachuan river. The caves were unearthed in the late nineteenth century, though separate caves have been found by travelers and explorers journeying along the silk roads, but one man, Abbot Wang Yuanlu, became the self appointed guardian of the very temples. Certain caves were blocked by sand and Wang tried to raise funds in restoring the caves, he even attempted a full restoration of the site. To this day we are still trying to restore the Mogao Grottoes and learn as much as we can from these caves. In 1987 it was named one of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

Many unique and valued items have been found in the Mogao Grottoes, with them ranging from Murals and Manuscripts to Statues at the size of 35 meters tall! In the Caves there are nearly 2400 clay sculptures that are still intact, each varying in size and depicting different people, some representing Buddha and other sculptures representing Bodhisattvas, or people on the path to Buddhahood. Rather than being an item, one of the caves, numbered Cave 17 later known as the Library Cave, was found by Wang Yuanlu. This cave was used as a memorial cave for the Monk HongBian after he died in the year 862. It is called the Library Cave due to it holding around 1,100 bundles of scrolls along with 15,000 paper books and texts! The Library Cave was walled off sometime in the 11th Century. The Manuscripts from the Library Cave were in an immense quantity, with historians saying up to 50,000 manuscripts could have been kept there. These manuscripts were not only in Chinese but were also found to be in other languages such as Tibetan, Sogdian(A language spoken in Central Asia), Uyghur (A version of old Turkic), Khotanese (An Eastern Iranian Language) and even Hebrew! The Murals in the Caves date back up to over a thousand years. The murals are so large that they cover 45,000 square meters all together. Many of the earlier murals were found to have a style found from Central Asia and India. The reason there has been so much influence from other cultures is because of the placement of the Mogao Grottoes. The caves were situated on the silk roads, allowing cultural influence from the different cultures near the area.

The artifacts and cultural treasures found in these caves are found to vary in size and form, yet they all are a form of art. Everyone has a different level of creativity, some people may be able to easily create giant statues or murals, and some people may take their creativity in a different way with texts and books. The Mogao Grottoes might be a symbol of Buddhism but the grottoes hold the very essence of imagination. Imagination was what made the caves, whether from the way it was built to the pieces of art inside. We sometimes regard our lives as monotonous and boring, yet we are at times too afraid to bring creativity and imagination into our lives.

No matter your skill or talent, creativity and life can be put into everything, because the creativity you fear to use holds the treasure you seek.

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

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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 20th 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

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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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The Mogao Grottoes: A Reservoir of Culture and Heritage

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Over the centuries, the talents of our ancestors have never failed to amaze us as they put together fragments of our history. In China, an oasis city named Dunhuang was one of the cultural centres in China due to its history as a frontier garrison during the time of the Silk Road. In the wide and plain deserts there, southeast to its centre, a magnificent collection of seven hundred ancient Buddhist caves and nearly five hundred temples lie along the Daquan River, standing out from its fellows with its uniquely attractive paintings and sculptures. Named ‘the Mogao Grottoes’ after an ancient district and meaning ‘none higher’, these caves have an unmatched value to the study of ancient culture and Chinese heritage. As we delve deep into the heart of the caves, what invaluable knowledge can we find concealed beyond the sand?

The Mogao Grottoes are a magnificent collection of Buddhist caves with a total decorated surface area of more than 500,000 square feet. Consisting of four major Buddhist Caves: namely the Western and Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves, Five Temple Caves, and the Yulin Caves, the Mogao Grottoes have invaluable information about Chinese culture, like life in Buddhist monasteries, stored in manuscripts, clay sculptures, textiles, murals, and ornamental designs. Stories of the Buddha and related figures can be found in these exquisite artworks which span between the Sixteen Kingdoms period and the Yuan Dynasty. It reflects the change in Buddhist cultures and is proudly the world's largest collection of Buddhist art; such a feature has even crowned it the ‘Oriental Louvre’.

The Mogao Grottoes carry Buddhist stories from more than 1,600 years ago, recorded with ten centuries worth of ancient art. They began construction in about the 4th century and the cave temples were carved by hand. The oldest 7 caves are from the Northern Liang dynasty during the Sixteen Kingdoms period, which is alarmingly far from now. Since then, they have acted as a sanctuary housing manuscripts and relics. Legend says that a Buddhist monk had a vision of a thousand buddhas inside the caves thirty–three centuries later, in 366 A.D. and was first inspired to excavate the caves. Some believe that this gave the caves their other name ‘The Thousand Buddha Caves’.

Carved into the cliffs, the caves are a place of isolation and offer a tranquil environment for monks or Buddhists. They were then used for Buddhist activities like pilgrimage, worship, and meditation; patrons like emperors, important social groups or figures and the military funded the construction of caves in the Mogao Grottoes, beautifully painted and organized in elaborate detail. During the Tang dynasty, there were over a thousand of these cave temples and in the Middle Tang dynasty, 80 caves were built. An astounding number of caves were also completed in the Sui and Western Xia dynasties.

As a cultural centre, trade, commerce, and cultural exchanges occurred frequently in Dunhuang, especially during the era of the Silk Road which encouraged further exchange of culture between China and other countries. During this period, the development of the Mogao Grottoes was at its peak and pilgrims, monks, nobles, and scholars settled in the Grottoes to meditate or carry out translations. A humongous number of caves were built, including two enormous Buddha statues. In addition, the Grottoes are home to the world's third–largest Buddha. Yet, the Mogao Grottoes was abandoned and forgotten for a long time when the golden age of the Silk Road had passed. Fortunately, they were rediscovered many years later by a Taoist named Wang Yuanlu.

Among the 735 caves of the Mogao Grottoes, there are more than 400 preserved caves coming from a different period, full of their own significance. Yet, the most remarkable one is probably Cave Number 17, or the Library Cave. It used to be a memorial cave for a local monk from a wealthy family, and features a hoard of nearly 50,000 ancient manuscripts, silk banners and paintings, fine silk works and other textiles dating back to before the 11th century. Some said that the variety of works there was what could not be fitted in the rest of the cave shrines. It was sealed sometime after 1002 A.D. and has remained unopened until discovered by a priest. We can still picture life during ancient times through the records in these works, which is a priceless addition to the treasures of Chinese heritage.

What must be mentioned is the gem of all these books, the Chinese *Diamond Sutra*, also the earliest complete and dated printed book which came from the year 868 in the Tang Dynasty. It features stories of the Buddha, which was exceptional from the typical Buddhist manuscripts during that period due to its creative nature. Woodblock printing is shown in this manuscript as well, and the *Sutra* is the earliest dated version that uses such type of printing.

Other than that, many interesting ancient skills are shown in the Mogao Grottoes. Artists had to paint in the caves with scaffolding under dim light. The sculptures are constructed with a wooden frame, padded with reed, modelled with clay, and finally, painted. Some of the larger ones even have stone for a core. More than 2,000 of these brightly painted sculptures are present in the Grottoes, where there sits a 100–feet tall Buddha statue. Different Buddhist figures are seen in various postures, and they developed from being heavily influenced by Indian cultures to being more characterized by local Chinese styles. Rock–cut architecture is also portrayed in the cave temples, which features soft gravel with square central columns. Moreover,

the textiles feature a humble patchwork of different scraps of cloth. The paper and ink used in manuscripts are made of hemp and other materials, reflecting the changes in the development of Chinese paper-making. Furthermore, due to the rough surfaces of the cave temples, soil and other materials were used to cover them and valuable mineral or natural pigments were used to paint the murals, portraying colourful stories or portraits.

The Mogao Grottoes are also of great importance to our understanding of the evolution of Chinese art and culture: from having a trace of Indian styles and emphasizing spiritual elements, to integrating art from different Chinese cultures, and finally identifying Western or Tibetan influences through the dynasties. In terms of Western influence, it was shown in wall paintings in the caves, which featured some stories from the West like that of the nine-coloured deer. Moreover, the documents are astonishingly written in at least 20 languages and feature Taoist or even Judaist ideas, which prove the prosperity of China's development in terms of trade and cultural exchange with other regions, especially during the time of the Silk Road. The art styles shown also integrate with arts from Central Asian regions like the Turks. In addition, the art from different dynasties can be seen in these cave shrines, like Cave 45 which depicts representative murals and sculptures from the Tang Dynasty.

However, even after narrowly escaping destruction when foreign religion was banned, and when countless Buddhist works and architecture were destroyed during the reign of Tang emperor Wuzong, the Mogao Grottoes are facing new threats. Apart from natural disasters like the inevitable sandstorms and damages caused by inconsiderate tourists, wall paintings suffer from flaking of paint and the plaster may also be detached, damaging the original work. Despite the challenges to preserve this valuable historical site, archeologists have utilised innovative methods to exhibit these precious historic treasures to the world. Virtual Reality is one of the ways adopted to make digital copies of these caves, for instance. In the Hong Kong Heritage Museum, one of these exhibitions was once held with the aid of projectors, headsets, interactive screens, video games and audio guides. What is more, a Digital Exhibition Center covering an area of 100,000 square metres, can be found near the Grottoes, which aims to preserve some of the exquisite art featuring Dunhuang culture and history, making use of multimedia tools. Technology, therefore, has been proven to be a desirable tool to preserve history and as a bonus, create interesting ways for the public to learn about this ancient knowledge, integrating the new and the old. The mash-up of technology and history might even bring us unexpectedly creative insights in the future!

Finally, the Mogao Grottoes is a cultural centre that can take us through a tunnel back in time to witness the amazing works of our ancestors and the blossoms of Chinese culture. This Buddhist palace has provided us with a mine of knowledge and crucial reminders of our cultures to explore in the future. What more secrets will this elegantly mysterious maiden reveal to us in the centuries to come?

New Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

Immaculate Heart of Mary College, Li, Yin Ting – 13

In the North–West of China, there is a road called The Silk Road. In The Silk Road, there are many large and small grottoes along the road. Among the numerous grottoes, there is a world famous grottoe called 'Mogao Grottoe'.

When I first heard of the Mogao Grottoes, I was 12. I participated in an exhibition that was held by the Hong Kong Heritage Museum. I was attracted by the magnificent architectures, sculptures and murals. It's a pity that the hour is not long, so I didn't know much about Dunhuang and the Mogao Grottoe. As I am curious to look into deeper of the Mogao Grottoe, I've searched a lot about it.

As for its name, at first it was called "Mogao Caves", Mo means "desert" and also "no". If it is no, the Mogao Caves refers to "the caves in high place of the desert". Also, according to the Buddhism term, "Mo" should mean "no", and "Mogao Caves" means that there is no higher and better caves than the peerless ones.

The Mogao Caves was first excavated in the second year of Jianyuan in the pre Qin period, namely, 366 AD. The caves endured more than 1,000 years ever since for ten dynasties, including the Dynasties of Beiwei (386 AD – 534 AD), Beizhou (557 AD – 581 AD), Sui (581 AD – 618 AD), Tang (618 AD – 907 AD), Song (960 AD – 1279 AD), Xixia (1038 AD – 1227 AD), Yuan (1271 AD – 1368 AD), etc.

I know you are now curious about who built the Mogao Grottoes. After more than 1,000 years' construction, there are nearly 600 existing Grottoes in the Mogao Caves. There are many disputes about the builder of the Mogao grottoes. But the cave builders are mainly three forces: the cave owner, the benefactor and the craftsman. The cave owner is the owner of the cave. The benefactor is the one who donated money and helped the cave owner to build the cave. The craftsman is the specific operator of the cave construction. According to the actual needs, they can be divided by their competency, the sculptor, the painter, the carpenter, etc.

However, only the cave owner and benefactor are recorded in the cave. The relationship between the benefactor and the craftsman is a kind of servitude and employment, and the caves generally do not record the craftsmen. In the caves, you can find the answer in lots of mural paintings of the benefactors and cave owners, including the great clans, eminent monks of Dunhuang, as well as the common people from all walks of life.

The Mogao Caves of Dunhuang are not used for living for the normal residents, but for monks to cultivate themselves according to a religious doctrine. As recorded in the ancient inscriptions, the very first monk who started when he had traveled to Dunhuang in 366 AD. During the sunset, he went to the foot of a mountain, and the sunray came down to the top of the mountain, which seemed to show the image of a thousands of Buddhas. So the monk decided to dig a Buddha grotto on the cliff opposite the mountain, which became the first cave in Dunhuang. Later, with the development of Buddhist activities, the number of caves increased day by day, and the caves making was booming and lasted for more than 1000 years. In addition to the scenery coincidence, during the Buddhism's eastward spreading period, there were many Buddhists who preached Dharma among the merchants of the western regions who traveled along the silk road.

The Buddhist monks from the West stopped here to spread Buddhism, translated Buddhist scriptures, set up temples. Therefore, Dunhuang had become a place where Buddhism was flourishing, which contributed to the construction and development of Mogao grottoes.

Then you may think, why Was the Mogao Caves Built on the Cliff?

The grotto temple is a place for Buddhism activities, which is not much different from other temples. According to Buddhism, monasteries and temples need a clean environment, free from the interference of secular life as much as possible. Therefore, the mountain and forest have always been the sites selection for Buddhist temples and grottoes. Many famous mountains have temples. Compared with normal monasteries, Grottoes have specific requirements, that is, at least there should be cliffs to be dug. The Mogao Caves is located on the cliffs of Mingsha mountain formed by river erosion in the west. It is not only far away from secular life, but also because of the existence of Daquan River, which forms a quiet natural scenery. The dryness is more suitable for the preservation of sculptures and murals in the grottoes, and the sedimentary rock is also suitable for excavation.

In the Ming and Qing Dynasties, because of the historical changes, the Mogao Cave were gradually forgotten and left untouched.

In 1900 A.D., a Taoist named Wang Yuanlu had come to the Mogao Caves and settled down for years. When cleaning the grottoes, he found a grotto with many ancient books and scriptures buried inside. He reported his discovery to the local governors. However nobody really realized their value until the news was known by a British explorer Stein who came to the Mogao Grottoes and bought a large number of these priceless scriptures, which created quite a stir in the archaeology field, and also attracted archaeologists and explorers from France, the United States, Japan and Russia to come here with bringing a large number of scriptures and murals to their home countries. The Mogao Caves is popped out from the desert land and known by the other side of the world and become more and more popular since then.

The Mogao Caves is known for a wondrous Archaeological find of ancient architectures, sculptures and murals. Due to their different functions, the caves were built in different shapes and sizes; the sculptures are the highlights of Mogao Grottoes, which were placed in a prominent position in the grottoes; murals are full of the walls of the grottoes, which vividly represent the Buddhist thought and philosophy with plenty of colors and rich details. The Mogao Grottoes are beyond "treasure troves". Since the excavation of Mogao Grottoes in 366 A.D., it didn't stop until the Yuan Dynasty (1271 AD – 1368 AD). Enduring so many dynasties, the grottoes had been fully dug out, so that later generations would even cover the original murals in the previous grottoes and redraw them. The mural we see now is actually a chronicle of millennial art. Different styles, shapes and cultures come together. It's no exaggeration to say that the Mogao Caves is the only place in the world that artists who have lived in different periods in over one thousand years can compete with each other at a same site. Such a magical thing can only happen in Mogao Grottoes. In addition to architecture, colored sculptures and murals, a large number of scriptures discovered here are scattered around the world, recording the history, culture, religion of different nationalities along the silk road. It is a profound find for archaeological research, and thus formed the studies of Dunhuang.

After I had got more informations about the Mogao Grottos, I was amazed by those magnificent architectures, sculptures and murals, also admire the spread of its long History and culture. I hope I can witness its true face one day!

Mogao Grottoes, a place of treasures

Inmaculate Heart of Mary College, Tang, Nok Yi – 12

In one boring afternoon, I came across with a film about George Hogg, a man who stayed in China during war time, helping a lot of homeless orphans. Therefore, I looked up something interesting about this story, and it was so amazing to know that the renowned Mogao Grottoes was the stunning background of some of the scenes in the movie.

The Mogao Grottoes are also called Thousand Buddha Grottoes and Caves of the Thousand Buddha. It is a system of 500 temples 25km (15mi) located southeast of the Center of Dunhuang. This oasis was founded at a religious and cultural crossroads on the Silk Road, in Gansu province, China. This holy place is also called Dunhuang Caves. This term includes other Buddhist sites, such as the Western Thousand Buddhist cave, Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves, Yulin Caves and Five Temple Caves, etc.

These caves have some of the finest examples of Buddhist art which is spanning a period of 1000 years. The first caves were dug in AD 366 as places for Buddhists' meditation and worship. The Mogao Grottoes are undoubtedly the best known among the Chinese Buddhist grottoes. The Mogao Grottoes and Longmen Grottoes and Youngang Grottoes are the three famous ancient Buddhist sculptural sites in China.

The Mogao Grottoes and the Thousand Buddha Grottoes are the most precious treasures, unveiling Buddhism art to the world. In 1987, they were enlisted in a world cultural heritage site, being the most invaluable sculptural discovery in the 20th century. The caves cut into a side of the cliff which is 2 kilometers long. There were numerous amazing murals, sculptures and other objects in the Mogao Grottoes. These artworks were depicting various aspects of medieval world including politics, economics, culture, arts, religion, ethnic relations and daily life in western China. These also provide an abundance of vivid materials us, the descendants, to study.

Mogao Grottoes was named for its particular features. Mogao means 'desert'. The fact is Mogao Grottoes are really 'the Caves in high place of the desert'. According to the Buddhist term, 'Mo' means 'no'. Therefore, there is no cave which is higher than Mogao Grottoes.

Many people came to the Mogao Grottoes for seeing the ancient and precious colourful sculptures. There are 735 caves facing the direction of Sanwie mountain at the branch of Qilian Mountain in the East which is on the cliffs of Dangquan River and Mingsha mountain in the East. There are also have 2415 coloured sculptures and Sutra Caves were discovered in modern times. The Mogao Grottoes at Dunhuang are also called 'Caves of the Thousand Buddhas' It is a compound which consists of almost 750 caves, 492 of which contain over 45000 square metres of mural paintings and 2000 painted sculptures.

Mogao Grottoes have many statues and wall paintings which show the glory of 1000 years of Buddhist art. Carved into cliffs above the Dachuan River, the Mogao Grottoes south-east of the Dunhuang oasis, Gansu Province, it is indeed a hidden treasure. Mogao Grottoes was believed to have constructed in 336AD. From which, we can learn more about the great achievements of Buddhist art from the 4th to the 14th century. There are 492 caves presently preserved, housing about 45000 square meters of murals and more than 2000 painted sculptures.

Moreover, Caves 302 of the Siu dynasty contains one of the oldest and most vivid scenes of cultural exchanges along the Silk Road. In the past, the art work of Buddhist artworks were also under the spotlight of the world. The Buddhist art in the northwest region of China, the Mogao Grottoes are of unmatched historical value. These works exhibit vivid materials, showing various aspects of medieval politics, economics, culture, arts and beliefs in western China. The unique artistic style of Dunhuang art is not only the dazzling display of Han Chinese artistic tradition and styles assimilated from ancient Indian and Gandharan customs, but also a fusion of the arts of the Turks, ancient Tibetans and other Chinese ethnic minorities. Many of these masterpieces are actually the lost beauty in the ancient world.

In 1900 A.D., a Taoist named Wang Yuanlu came to the Mogao Grottoes and settled there for years. When cleaning the grottoes, he found a grotto with loads of hidden treasures, many ancient books and scriptures. He reported his discovery to the local governors. However, nobody really realized their value until the news was known by a British explorer Stein who came to the Mogao Grottoes and bought a large number of these priceless scriptures, which created quite a stir in the archaeology field, and also attracted archaeologists and explorers from France, the United States, Japan and Russia to come here with

bringing a large number of scriptures and murals to their home countries. The Mogao Grottoes is hidden in the desert land and known by the other side of the world.

However, when we traveled this place so much, there was some bad news about this place. On June 25, 1900, a crack in the ceiling of a desert cave led Wang Yuanlu to look more carefully at the plastered corridor. Exploring further, Wang found an opening that led to one of the greatest discoveries: a cave containing some 50,000 manuscripts, sealed and unseen for as long as 900 years. The discovery would revolutionize our understanding of medieval China, the Silk Roads, Buddhism, and other fields besides. And it would lead generations of Chinese nationalists to paint Wang Yuanlu as one of the great villains of modern China.

Although Wang Yuanlu found Mogao Grottoes, people still think that he is not a good person. Firstly, he reported to the government, but no one cared about it because the government's interests at the time were in vogue, and the place was remote. No one looked at him. Seeing no one was paying attention to him, he decided to work on his own. The news was likely to go abroad. In 1907, one came from the United Kingdom. Of explorers heard that the Mogao Grottoes had discovered the sutra cave not far away, and they came to the Tibetan Mogao Grottoes not far away. They bought 24 boxes of sutra books and various cultural relics for 500 taels of silver and shipped them back to the United Kingdom. When home came to Mogao Grottoes, they all returned with a rewarding experience.

Until 1910 that the Qing government noticed its value and returned the remaining documents and cultural relics to Beijing, so that the devastation of the Mogao Grottoes was not complete, and many foreign explorers finally took the walls of the Mogao Grottoes directly away and try to removed the entire Mogao Grottoes.

With the government's ignorance, and the world understanding of this place was so limited, and a large number of precious cultural relics lost outside the country, Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes alone have a rare piece of the book, Buddha statues, experience, and other cultural relics fell into the United Kingdom, France, Japan, Russia and The hand of the United States, now many foreign natural objects are hidden from the Mogao Grotto treasures, the United Kingdom have the many cultural relics, but it is well-preserved. However, the cultural relics are not for us. This king's greed caused us a historical and cultural holocaust.

Wang Yuanlu was an unlikely figure to change the fate of the Mogao caves. In his recent book, *The Compensations of Plunder: How China lost Its treasures*. Justin Jacobs describes Wang as an "itinerant Daoist priest who took up residence in a derelict temple and appointed himself protector of the Mogao Caves. Valere Hansen adds that Wang was a former soldier who had turned to Daoism later in life. In any case, Wang took it upon himself to restore and maintain the caves. With no training and few resources, his efforts were slow and ad hoc.

With the effort many put into protecting such a great and holy place, we do have to respect this place and only if we cherish what we have, we would appreciate the hard work done in the past and the glory of the ancient world. Though we may not have the chance to contribute to the restoration of the place, we can, as students, study more about this place and introduce it to others, bearing in mind that it is a holy place which can lead us to the spiritual world which transcends all our desires in our material world, guiding us to have a more meaningful life as well.

The Mogao Grottoes, the holy place

Immaculate Heart of Mary College, Zhao, Kangru – 12

Ancient and legendary, enormous and wide,

The epitome of devotion, the way to a new life.

Some may call it a library, some may call it an exhibition, but some will call it home. Push away the doors of mystery, may only deep secrets roam.” The Mogao Grottoes, mystical and atavistic, famous for its stories, legends, is a well-known place of interest and relic in China. I read about it and its brief introduction inside an old history book in primary 4 with my mum. It specifically drew my attention abruptly when I read the story of the monk, who got strongly inspired after seeing a vision on top of a mountain and started excavating the caves. Since I have always been deeply invested in historical buildings ever since I was very young, I was curious and puzzled on the more abstruse historical facts and legends behind the Mogao Grottoes. To add up, my mum beside me kept giving me insistent encouragement on searching. With eagerness, I rushed to grab my laptop, then immediately searched up “Mogao Grottoes' ” on the search bar. After some quick browsing, I ended up on the UNESCO World Heritage Site for more precise information about the majestic and spectacular Mogao Grottoes, which started my journey of research.

The Mogao Grottoes, also known as the Thousand Buddha Grottoes or Caves of the Thousand Buddha, is quite a complex system including an enormous number of 500 temples, famous for their statues and wall paintings, showing the beauty of glory, which has up to 1,000 years of Buddhist art. It's 35.5 m high, located 25 km southeast of the centre of Dunhuang, an oasis located at a religious and ethnic crossroad on the Silk Road, in Gansu province, China. Besides, it is also considered as one of the most important antiques in the Buddhist economy. The ancient Mogao Grottoes was first excavated in the second year of Jianyuan in the pre Qin period, namely, 366 AD. The caves had indeed endured more than 1,000 years, including the Dynasties of Beiwei (386 AD – 534 AD), Beizhou (557 AD – 581 AD), Sui (581 AD – 618 AD), Song (960 AD – 1279 AD), Xixia (1038 AD – 1227 AD), Yuan (1271 AD – 1368 AD), etc. Moreover, it was first constructed by Northern Wei and Northern Zhou, who were the members of the ruling family at the time. As it reached the peak of the Tang Dynasty(618 to 906 AD), the number of caves rose from 500 to over a thousand, and it was then burgeoned during the short period of Sui Dynasty(581 to 618 AD). Ever since the Sui Dynasty and Tang Dynasty, the Mogao Grottoes had become a place for the people to pursue the inner piece of the material world.

Almost most tourists were impressed or had their breath taken away when they had seen the extravagant scenery of the Mogao Grottoes. On the cliffs of Dangquan River and Mingsha mountain in the East, there are 735 caves facing the direction of Sanwei mountain, the branch of Qilian Mountain in the East. Also, there are 2,415 coloured sculptures and 45,000 square meter's murals in the cave. During the past decades, more than 50,000 ancient scriptures and documents in the Sutra cave were discovered and unveiled to the world. From some documents, we learn that the Mogao Grottoes were not used for living for the ordinary residents, for monks it is the ideal place to meditate, not just on the Buddhist structure, but to connect and completely immerse themselves, hoping to find a way to meditate on the scriptures and prayers.

There was a story about a monk named Yunzen, who was one of the most well-known and prominent stories among every Chinese family. The monk travelled to Dunhuang in 366 AD. As the sun was setting, he went to the foot of a mountain, and was absolutely struck by the sunray which came down to the top of the mountain, and in that vision, he saw a vision of a thousand Buddhas. The monk was then inspired and decided to dig a Buddha grotto on the cliff opposite the mountain, which became the first cave in Dunhuang. Later, with the development of Buddhist activities, the number of caves increased day by day, and the caves boomed and lasted for over 1,000 years. In addition to the scenery coincidence, during Buddhism's eastward spreading period, there were many Buddhists who preached Dharma among the merchants of the western regions who travelled along the Silk Road. The Buddhist monks from the West stopped here to spread Buddhism, translate Buddhist scriptures and build the temples. Therefore, Dunhuang had become a place where Buddhism was flourishing, which contributed to the construction and development of the ongrowing Mogao Grottoes.

However, time flies like the blink of an eye, and more than 1000 years later, travellers and tourists started to take other routes and lost their interest in Mogao Caves. Therefore, the Mogao Caves located in the Dunhuang district of Gansu province were totally forgotten as a lost legend. Later, during the 1900s, luckily, local and international school-explorers rediscovered the caves, finally unlocking its breathtaking and the hidden secrets – there were hundreds of caverns, storing up some of the world's finest paintings, sculpture work, and literature – including the oldest ones in the world.

“It was like a tunnel to a lost world in the past,” said some of the scholars who visited there. In coincidence, around that time, a Taoist, named Wang Yanlu, also made a huge discovery – as he was clearing the sand of the Mogao Grottoes, he accidentally found a hoard of manuscripts in the main cave. This discovery attracted the attention of many archeologists like Aurel Stein and his group, bringing back the attention that Mogao Grottoes deserved. Later, a well-known scholar named Lou Zhengyu edited some of the manuscripts and was then published in 1909 as “Manuscripts of the Dunhuang Caves”.

After reading all of the information I have found, I definitely think that I have learned a lot from the Mogao Grottoes’ admirable background stories and facts. Sadly, due to the Coronavirus outbreak, I don’t think that we would get a chance to experience what the Mogao Grottoes has offered us. However, we should always have faith and hope as the ancient glory did not fade, and the holy place, Mogao Grottoes, is always a holy place for us. Nowadays, we truly need a place, a sanctuary for refreshing our mind and strengthening ourselves to deal with future uncertainties.

Tales Hidden in the Mogao Caves

Ling Liang Church E Wun Secondary School, Alvi, Huda – 13

History is like a labyrinth; both are tangled webs humans love to unravel. So many secrets lie hidden, just waiting to be unveiled. Yet with its similarity to the perplexing coils of a labyrinth, history can mislead us with all the lies said long ago and the truths which were left unspoken. It is difficult to find proof of things buried centuries before or trace thoughts of people who have been taken to their graves. It is nearly impossible to find a person who has practically been erased from existence.

However, the truth does find its way out if someone persistently follows it. No matter the absurdity of the task, someone will leave no stone unturned to unveil the camouflaged truth.

Every king or emperor known to the world wanted his reign to be filled with success and prosperity. They instated promising individuals to handle valuable posts, all in the name of having a bright future filled with luxuries. They hoped shining gold and twinkling jewels would gleam in their auspicious treasuries that ultimately earned them more respect and glory. Sometimes they would forget to reward the efforts others made to achieve their dreams. At times they callously took credit for others' work.

The Tang Dynasty was an imperial dynasty of China that ruled from 618 to 907. It was the golden age of Chinese art, culture, and traditions. Poetry was also an important part of Chinese heritage. Poems written by the famous Li Bai and Du Fu are still taught and memorized by many. Emperor Xuanzong of Tang had raised his empire's wealth and brought ease into the lives of his people though the peace was not long-lasting. There was success in the earlier years of his rule but with success, there always comes failure, which is not often a blessing in disguise.

All the books, texts, and scriptures I have read from libraries all over China affirm that with the growing affluence of the Tang Dynasty, the emperor began to leave his royal duties to advisers and spent his time on personal leisure. He abandoned schemes to expand his territories and to protect his empire, claiming to have done too much work in his prime. His negligent and dismissive behavior had led some historians to believe he was just a puppet king to a mightier emperor and that all those accomplishments were never truly his. They proposed the idea that someone close to him had been in control the entire time. Up until the rise of the An Lushan Rebellion.

Standing in front of what seemed to be the entrance of the Mogao Caves, located in west-central China in the Dunhuang district of Gansu Province, I readied myself to meet with history. Surrounded by the endless waves of dunes, the crispy scent of grit was ubiquitous. This awe-inspiring forgotten legend was rediscovered in the past couple of months and 43 out of many more caves are being explored by both local and international researchers. Other teams have unearthed sculptures made by the Buddhist monks and carefully dusted interiors of several caves to see paintings dating back to 406 AD.

When I first arrived, as part of a local exploring group, to witness the revival of this historical monument, I was amazed by the sheer height of Mogao Grottoes and shocked by how a place with such high significance could be forgotten by the thousands who had made pilgrimage to this location. I could feel the heat of the blazing desert sun slowly cool down the more I ventured deeper into the Mogao Caves. Although this place had been deserted for thousands of years, it still had the sense of peace previous monks must have felt. It also seemed like a safe place for asylum seekers who might have had the emperor chasing them.

In this specific cave I am in charge of, there are dozens of handcrafted statues of the Buddha, mythical creatures are also drawn. The most common are paintings of dragons ranging in all colors of the rainbow with a few red-crowned cranes circling the walls. I can also see some portraits of spirits soaring on gusts of winds which were mostly painted in white to complement with the various hues of blues. Even the ceiling of this Mogao Cave was decorated with The Three Hares motifs that originated from the Sui Dynasty.

There are also rolls and rolls of scriptures scattered on the ground written in languages such as traditional Chinese and Tibetan. I picked a few frail sheets of paper and skimmed through the sentences. They are mostly ancient manuscripts about religion, philosophy, and poetry written to demonstrate how the Mogao Grottoes mountain was created as a sacred Buddhist space.

After I was done reading the papers in my hands, I placed them in a container against the wall to take back to my research camp. I moved some more books around but one in particular caught my eye. It was a worn leather-bound book filled with

sketches on yellow-aged paper. Cracks and creases had long formed in this book yet the captions written in black ink were still legible. The calligraphic words were recorded in precise strokes of the Chinese characters. In a way, it gave off a sense of elegant feminine handwriting.

On the very first page, a map of China during the High Tang Dynasty was drawn in surprisingly accurate detail. Fires burned in certain parts of the empire and a wall of flames engulfed the Emperor's residence. The illustrator was creating the rage that helped fuel the An Lushan Rebellion. The next few pages were covered in sketches of horses. It started with a silhouette of a slender woman riding a mighty horse fit for royalty. Its mane was braided and adorned with priceless pearls. The last horse was a timid-looking one. It was standing outside the Mogao Grottoes with its head hanging low. The rider's shadow was drawn facing the mouth of the caves. Wisps of hair had escaped the rider's hairdo and were flowing in the direction of the wind.

On the right side, there were three vertical lines of words noted in precise strokes of a fine calligraphy brush. The meaning roughly translated to: *There I am not, but the heat of flames embraces me, as it runs its course to incinerate those deserving.* The last row was scrawled on sharp and viciously as if the writer was writing with a blade instead. I assumed the riots against the Tang Dynasty are referred to as the flames and its course must mean the An Lushan Rebellion since its track was drawn a couple of pages back. However, I didn't understand the meaning behind the words *the heat of flames embraces me*.

I flipped through a few more pages in hopes of finding an explanation. There were multiple portraits of monks dressed in Zhiduos. Their names were written next to the sketches and how the owner of the book was grateful for the haven they provided her with. I turned over a couple more pages until I saw the drawings change to passages. *Brother, it said, you still haven't found me. Then again, you wouldn't know how to. I wondered why Father wasted his love on you. You were only ever a disappointment. You couldn't handle being an Emperor, all you did was pay people to bear the responsibility. How is it working out for you? Your entire empire is now on the brink of collapse.* The word *your* was scratched out to write *my*.

It was then that I realized the owner of this book was the sister of Emperor Xuanzong of Tang. The person who was also keeping an entire dynasty afloat until she decided to leave her kingdom, her home, and the An Lushan Rebellion in the hands of her incompetent brother. All because she wasn't given credits for her achievements. After that page, there were only reports she had written taking claim of all the things *she* had accomplished by herself that her brother took credit for.

On the last page, there was a statement that said: *There will always be someone out there who will search for every truth and my existence will be known, no matter how hard you try to erase me from history.* And as she had said, someone had indeed found her. However, her name wasn't written anywhere. I stretched the spine back gently and shook it softly. A slip of paper fell out and my boots made a squeaky sound against the sandy ground as I bent to pick it up. I could make out the faded words Tang Huifen. It was her name that meant intelligent, just like how she will soon be recognized as.

I brought back my discovery to the team director who ordered that cave to be prioritized first. To search for more proof of the presence of Tang Huifen. And to expose the lies of the Great Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang Dynasty.

Heritage

Marymount Secondary School, Kwok, Hin Tung Hilari – 14

Mogao Caves are very valuable historical relics that bring us a view of what the art of sculptures and carvings looked like in the China past. It is fascinating to me in terms of its historical value and its artistic value. The Mogao Caves are first found in AD 366 and can be found today on the Silk Road in China.

The Mogao Caves have a long history dating back to the Tang dynasty, I appreciate how it can be preserved throughout the years allowing us to explore its artistic value and the history behind it. Being a construction of Buddhism, many monks build more and more caves, accumulating to over a thousand of them that we can find nowadays. The caves also depict many social affairs and the culture of those ancient times, I believe that this helps historians figure out more about the situations back then. The long history of the Mogao caves also enables them to portray the evolution of Buddhism beliefs.

Its artistic value makes it fascinating for me. I think that the artistic value of the Mogao Caves is worth exploring. It is known that there are around two thousand sculptures there and many paintings as well, they mark the significance of artworks throughout different dynasties. The cave paintings are also drawn with the unique Chinese art style and show the art history's evolution as well. It is irreplaceable and can't be replicated easily nowadays.

Being a heritage, the Mogao Caves' long history allowed it to excel in its job to bring us historical information and also artistic value, making it fascinating for us to explore its significance and value.

A Factsheet for any Traveller

Marymount Secondary School, Yau, Yau Long Anna – 14

A total of 492 Buddha Grottoes and caves are located in the city called Dunhuang in China, attracting tourists from different countries to visit. These caves were carved by hand by Buddhist monks starting from 1700 years ago, under the sponsorship of local officials and wealthy families, who wished to build karmic merit and to perform an act of veneration.

An interesting fact about these caves is that they were disused for hundreds of years until they were found in the early 1900s. The silk road was disused from from the early 1400s and these Mogao caves were soon to be forgotten, luckily during 1890 a Daoist monk names Wang Yuanlu appointed himself as guardian to these caves, which soon led to the earliest discovery of the world's earliest printed dated book, the Diamond Sutra. The earliest book that was completed and printed with an attest date of 868, is among the most notable book in the library cave, and this discovery has helped us discover how people used to carve on wooden blocks and books were printed on strips of paper and past together to form a scroll, and these scrolls are now kept in the british library.

In the Mogao caves there are different statues and famous paintings hidden in the caves and to this day artists and creators are still trying to reciprocate and study the art that is found in the caves from different dynasties to continue to produce this kind of art.

Overall the Mogao caves are very fascinating and it is a great location for people to go visit and learn more about them.

Journey Along the Silk Road

Shanghai American School – Pudong, Lin, Gina – 13

I sit on my couch, stare out the window, a book in one hand and a computer on my lap. We were all in lockdown during the pandemic, away from the rest of the world. We weren't able to travel, indulge in nature, and what hit me the most was how we couldn't see our family and friends. So, when Covid restrictions relaxed and my parents started planning a road trip, I was overjoyed. Living in China, we wanted to explore its beautiful scenery, rich culture, and delicacies. That is why we decided to go on a road trip to experience every aspect of this country. Our grand plan was a driving from Shanghai all the way to different parts of the Silk Road in China. The main city we stayed at was Dun-Huang. We wanted to explore more of this city because it had unique landforms, religious and historic sites, and modern shows.

On our way to Dun-Huang, we passed by Jing De Zhen, Nan Chang, Xi'an, and Qing Hai. Each town had its unique styles and exciting sites to visit. Finally, after 3,100 km and 35 hours of driving, we reached Dun-Huang. In the three days we have stayed in Dun Huang, we have visited multiple sites, such as Ya Dan (a fascinating park filled with historical stones), Yue Ya Quan (a well-known dessert location), the night market, and their famous Dun Huang show. Our final location was the Mogao Grottoes.

In the Mogao Grottoes, there are over 750 separate caves that use to be available mostly to practice Buddhism. Luckily, we got to visit eight caves and learned about their history. Even though pictures were prohibited, we were able to see their unique styles of art and how they changed throughout the dynasties. The art in each cave portrayed the fascinating stories of Buddhism and lead us into the past. The dim lighting casted shadows on the great statues looming over us. From each piece of artwork, I could see all the texture in their clothing, their distinct expressions, and their shiny eyes, which helped the stories come to life. The evolution of the art throughout the dynasties which was also very interesting to see because of the change in style and color of the murals and statues. Next to the ancient Buddhas were flying apsaras, floating creatures that brought joy with their lively music and dances. The final cave we visited was filled with priceless artifacts. It was the library cave. Even though it was just a miniature sized cave, it was filled with priceless ancient Buddhist scriptures, paintings, and many paper scrolls.

When we left the site, my head was still swarming with all the history I just experienced, like the flying apsaras. In the Mogao Grottoes, the Buddhist stories came to life which taught us so much more about Chinese history and the development of this religion. In 2 weeks, we have experienced the most thrilling road trip. We drove through a flood, saw a sandstorm, trekked the desert, and experienced Chinese history. This experience is definitely one of the most memorable trips I have been to and taught me so much about my cultural roots.

Story of the Mogao Grottoes

Singapore International School, Lim, Jie Xun Lucas – 12

Much more than a 1000 years ago,

A monk walked along the dusty silk road, shoes kicking up small plumes of sand. I'm nearly there, keep on walking, I can see the palm trees! The relentless sun beat down on him as the glare overpowered him as his eyes squinted to see the nearby oasis and cliff. He stumbled into the oasis and made a beeline for the water, and squatted down to drink the cool water gratefully. No water seemed sweeter than this to him. When he had drunk his fill, he looked up at the cliff face and suddenly, a bright flash of light blinded him. When he came to, an image of the Buddha stared down at him from the cliff, casting a radiant aura while the statue itself seemed to be made of pure gold. He gasped in shock, jaw hanging open. This was definitely a vision, sent to him by the Buddha himself. Just as quickly as it appeared, it disappeared. The monk shook his head, clearing it, and looked at the cliff face with a new wonder. He thought to himself, this is a sacred place, but how can I let others know too? He wondered.

Looking in his small bag, he found several digging tools, food, and some harvesting tools. He saw plenty of edible vegetation around the oasis, and a thought formed in his head. Since this was a popular stop in the commonly frequented silk road, why don't I build a shrine here? And since Buddha appeared in the mountain, I should carve a cave! A shrine to Buddha, and a statue while I'm at it! He immediately took out his shovel and tools and started to work, slowly chipping away at the cliff, limestone chunks flying out from a small hole dug into the side of the cliff. The hole got larger as the day went by, and many a curious traveler wondered at what he was doing or chipped in a bit themselves, helping speed along the process of digging. The shovel made quick work of the small hole, and the monk curled up inside, tucking his woolen robe around his body and covering himself with a few palm leaves for blankets and warmth. He spent the night sleeping in his hole, mind filled with determination to complete his task.

The next morning, dawn was breaking out over the oasis, and some animals came to the lake to drink. They paid the monk no heed, as they had seen many others cross the silk road in large groups. He went back to his work, redoing his steps from yesterday. He dug a hole continuously, tirelessly, but at least he had the shade of his previous hole. Occasionally, the monk stepped out from his work and took some gulps of water, before resuming his arduous work. Finally, he had completed a small cave in which he rested. Monks that passed the silk road saw his work, and questioned him about his intentions. He responded by recounting his vision of Buddha and explaining his work here. Several monks were excited and decided to help, while others went on their way, promising to inform everyone of their plight and bring assistance as soon as possible. Soon, many others of monks and interested people heard of their doing across the land, and in a short span of time, there were hundreds of workers, toiling at the cave that was slowly but surely taking shape. This was all sponsored by the richer people looking to do some good and earn some favour among the monks.

After almost a decade, the mogao grottoes were finally completed with beautiful statues, paintings, holy scripts and a library room. The monk added the final touches to the cave, placing the diamond sutra (the world's oldest book) in the library cave. The temples of Dunhuang were completed and open. The next few years were the temples busiest, with hundreds of monks and people who frequented the silk road stopping by at the oasis to have a break or pay their respects. The Buddha that perched on the cliff face stared regally down at the visitors, while the shrine within had several nirvana statues lying down serenely. The trade was roaring, with spices, cotton, wool, fur, ceramics, embroidery, medicine, tools and many more. The mogao grottoes were at its height. Then, in 1006, the monks that lived in the mogao grottoes heard of the distant conquest of the buddhist kingdom by the islamic conquerors from kashgar. They were worried that the islamic warriors would conquer and take over the grottoes. Reluctantly, they started to seal up the cave, saying their goodbyes to the ancient temple and hiding their manuscripts in small cubbyholes. They finally evacuated and sealed the cave tightly, worried about their fountain of knowledge here being breached and sabotaged. They started leaving in droves, scared of the looming threat of invaders. They packed their camels, and departed for safer areas of the country, fleeing the islams. The monks fled the country, seeking a safe haven for themselves. The islams did not find the mogao grottoes, letting it live to see another day.

The mogao grottoes soon became just a dusty old legend in the desert, abandoned and forgotten. However, in the 1900's monk Wang Yuanlu led an expedition to rediscover the mogao grottoes from the ancient legends. They went to the same cliff and found the seal, disguised cleverly with plants and rocks, excavated it carefully using precise tools, so as not to damage anything inside, and... a musty, old cave, with very dry, dusty air, and not a single trace of life. The explorers ventured into the cave, one by one stepped into it while holding out torches and exploring the cavern slowly, the cave rooms starting to

branch out into different sections and the explorers searching for relics. Monk Wang entered into a cave, filled top to bottom with scrolls, some large, some small, some in cubbyholes, some scattered on the floor. But the one that caught his eye was a book on a lectern, but the thing that made him most surprised was the print. It was in ink! Was it possible that there was a printed book? If it was, this cave was well over a century old, if it was printed, this book would be the oldest printed book in the world! He walked over to the book and translated the words into the 'diamond sutra'. he picked it up, and started to examine it. He took up the book, dusted it off, and delicately flipped the pages. The paper seemed as thin as rice, the paper clinged onto the surface and I peeled it off slowly, and blew the accumulated dust. The diamond sutra unfurled in his hands, crackling softly. He rolled it back up and handed it to another person, saying sternly: "take care of this properly." The person nodded solemnly and strode out of the cave. They continued to explore, until they reached the end. They lit torches to cast bright rays of light upon the newly found nirvana statues. The people gasped in awe at the newfound historic discoveries. The explorers also found meditation rooms, more statues, and of course, the library cave. After they discovered the grottoes, word spread, and from over the world came hundreds of archaeologists, historians and the like traveled here to examine, decipher and study the newfound mogao grottoes. The grottoes were soon open, and by 1930, monks had flocked to this hotspot of ancient buddhist culture to pray and live. Soon, the mogao grottoes were opened to tourists, and in 1987, UNESCO declared it a world heritage site. Among the artefacts, it concentrated on Buddhist art and even had many manuscripts from different countries. Wang Yuanku, delighted at his discovery, felt proud of himself for making this ground-breaking discovery, especially for monks.

Children's laughter danced in the air as another bus arrived, spilling out dozens of school kids on a field trip, filling the air with a buzz of excited conversation. The flustered looking teachers ushered the children in, waving frantically, while the large Buddha, still intact after more than a millennia, gazed regally down at them from it's perch high on the cliff, and several signboards indicated the various historical relics, the history of the place, and also a handy map. Tourists jumbled into the entrance, excited to go in. The school group hustled quickly inside the grottoes while the long-suffering teacher asked them to be quiet. The Diamond Sutra sat majestically on a velvet cushion inside a glass display case. Ogling tourists surrounded it reverently, while reading the fact filled placard. People walked silently past the meditation cave, explored every inch of the library caves, marveled at the perfectly preserved paintings, and gazed at the well carved and designed statues, which a sign said the grottoes contained hundreds of rooms and more than a thousand Buddha statues in various different poses and places.

After a long, exhausting, but fun-filled and educational day, the tour group and many other tourists wrapped up and left on the jam-packed bus, brains filled with new knowledge about one of the most famous Buddhist spots in China. From the single monk that dug the cave by himself in the 4th century, the mogao grottoes has expanded and became an extremely important historical site, home to a melting pot of cultures, for Christian, Sikh and even Hebrew texts were found there. And the world's oldest printed book, the diamond sutra, lay in the desert until now, rediscovered and open to society. This place will always have a special place in a lot of people's hearts, especially monks with their new place, happy to have a newfound haven for their culture.

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Mogao Grottoes— a place to explore

St. Joseph's College, Au, Yik Chun – 13

The tale of the Mogao Grottoes started way back in the 4th century in the year 366. The caves were places of worship and meditation for Buddhists, and gained traffic with manuscripts and murals spanning over 1000 years. And then, it disappeared. Gone. It was not until the late 19th century when people rediscovered the caves. At least, this is what I know about it.

When I received an invitation to write about the Caves, I have had a few questions on my head. Why was it made and then abandoned for so long? What have people done following its reappearance? Are the things people have done good for its legacy? These are what I hope to answer in this composition, not just to the readers, but also myself.

The Mogao Grottoes were built by Buddhist monk Yuezun in Dunhuang, after the monk had a vision at the site. There are multiple sources from different authors which depict the exact same scene, so this tale is rather believable. From this, we can know that the Caves were well known at the time. The major caves were even sponsored by foreign dignitaries and Chinese emperors.

Another reason for the Mogao Grottoes' success was its location. It was the main hub of commerce of the Silk Road, which attracted merchants in addition to Buddhists. The caves had even become a place of worship and pilgrimage for the public during the Sui and Tang dynasties. With sea-routes replacing the Silk Road, it was not surprising the Mogao Grottoes would lose appeal. The site went into gradual decline after the Tang dynasty and was completely abandoned during the Ming Dynasty.

During the late 19th to early 20th century, western explorers were interested in the old Silk Road and the cities of Central Asia that were lost in time. Some explorers travelled through Dunhuang, where they were greeted by exquisite murals, sculptures and artifacts such as the Stele of Sulaiman, a stele that was erected in 1348 to commemorate the donors to a Buddhist temple at the Caves. The stele suggesting that more was to be found in the area, explorers estimated there to be half a million square feet of religious murals within the caves.

With Dunhuang and its caves gaining attention, a Taoist monk with the name of Wang Yuanlu appointed himself as the guardian of some temples in Dunhuang and raised funds to repair statues. On 25 June 1900, by a stroke of luck, he found a trail of smoke coming from a cigarette. Following the trail led him to a walled up area where a small cave containing a massive hoard of manuscripts was found. He brought some manuscripts to interested officials, then re-sealed the caves following the order by the government of Gansu who was concerned about transporting these documents.

Wang's discovery drew the attention of archaeologist Aurel Stein and his group, who were on an expedition there in 1907. He took many manuscripts along with the finest paintings and textiles. He was followed by Paul Pelliot, Otani Kozui and Sergei F. Oldenburg, others who held expeditions to the Mogao Grottoes during the next few years.

From Aurel Stein and Paul Pelliot's adventures, the West became much more interested in the Mogao Grottoes. Scholars in Beijing saw the documents in Pelliot's possessions. Luo Zhenyue, a well-known scholar edited some of the manuscripts Pelliot had acquired into a volume called "Manuscripts of the Dunhuang Caves" which was then published in 1909. Zhenyue and others also persuaded the Ministry of Education to recover the rest of the manuscripts to send to Beijing.

However, there were many issues. Not all the remaining manuscripts were taken to Peking, and of those retrieved, some were then stolen. There were rumours of caches of documents taken by local people, and Wang hid a cache of documents from the authorities was found only in the 1940s. In 1921, the caves were used by the local authority to house Russian soldiers who were fleeing the Russian Civil War, which left the caves damaged and vandalised. American explorer Langdon Warner removed a number of murals as well as a statue from some of the caves in 1924 and in 1939, Kuomintang soldiers stationed at Dunhuang caused some damage to the murals and statues at the site. These numerous events surely raise the question of how much effort was truly put into the preservation of the caves.

At last, the situation of Dunhuang and its many artifacts started to improve in 1941. Painter Zhang Daqian and a small team of assistants stayed for two and a half years to repair the murals. The copies were then exhibited and published in 1943, making the art of Dunhuang more prominent and well-known. Over these 70 years, a lot of effort has been made. The Mogao Grottoes has been declared a specially protected historical monument by the State Council in 1961, and one of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 1987. 248 caves have been discovered since then.

Now, efforts are continuing to conserve and research the Mogao Grottoes and all that it holds. Its largest collections of contents in the caves are found in Beijing, Berlin, Paris and London. The caves themselves are also popular tourist attractions with some open for visiting.

The Mogao Grottoes was made for Buddhist beliefs and practices, but is now a tourist attraction for visitors, some who do not even believe in this religion. Furthermore, many of its contents were damaged or taken for showcase in museums. Are the Caves of today still the same as what its creator, the Buddhist monk, had intended for it to be, or has the preservation work done too much harm to it? You decide.

My Next Destination— Mogao Grottoes

St. Joseph's College, Li, Ho Kiu Coleman – 12

I have never been to mainland China, so when my mother told me to look up where I want to go during summer vacation, I started searching for magnificent historical landmarks in China. That was when I came across the Mogao Grottoes. What an unfamiliar name! When I first saw the pictures of it, I couldn't take my eyes off the wonderful architecture. Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang, China consists of many caves that contain a variety of priceless artifacts from olden China 17 centuries ago. The most fascinating feature about these caves is that even if they were founded by a Buddhist monk, evidence and artifacts there prove that Daoists and Christians worshiped there too. It seems that the Mogao Grottoes is the perfect example of a melting pot of different cultures and religions. Another thought—provoking question is the methods of construction. Without the technology we have nowadays, how could they construct so many caves that must have taken years or even decades to build? Let's join me to find out some answers to these intriguing questions.

Inside the Mogao Grottoes are different genres of art, such as stucco sculptures, wall paintings, silk paintings, calligraphy, woodblock printing, embroidery, literature, and music. So you see, tons of treasures are hidden inside the Mogao Grottoes. These wonderful artworks depict people or deities in the past. Some of them show old emperors; some of them portray animals serving humans, while some portray the lifestyle of olden China. One piece of art I really like depicts the Buddha sitting on a throne surrounded by hundreds of his followers, including servants and royal officials. They all press their palms together in front of their hearts, as if they are praying to their lord the Buddha. I find the painting very grand and spiritual. It shows people's respect for the Buddha and how religions were important to ancient people in their daily lives. It is a truly wonderful and spectacular scene.

There are sculptures and paintings of the Buddha hidden in some of these dens, and different generations of people have worshipped here on these holy lands. Today, 735 caves still remain. There are different types of caves in the Mogao Grottoes, such as the Wei caves, Zhou caves, Sui caves, Tang caves, and the post—Tang caves. All of these caves have a different history. Living for about a thousand years, they have survived earthquakes, floods, sandstorms and other various natural disasters and are still standing today. It is actually quite impressive that some of these caves can persevere that long without crumbling and breaking down.

If you think these temples only have Buddhist art in it, well, you're mistaken. Christian and Daoist texts were found in these caves as well. These discoveries show that followers of other religions have prayed and worshipped in these caves, reflecting the meeting of cultures from India, China, and Tibet. It is just fascinating to see how a landmark can allow people with different religions to coexist in peace. These historical caves are valuable for how they have made such a huge contribution to our knowledge about religions and lifestyle centuries ago.

Professional conservators nowadays are trying to conserve the mural art in these caves. Different companies had collaborations and projects together just so they could know more about these interesting yet mysterious grottoes. How do conservators conserve these thousand year old caves? Complicated steps are taken to preserve these magnificent pieces of religious art, such as using salt to preserve the artifacts.

Even professional archaeologists struggle to uncover the mystery of the Mogao Grottoes as much evidence has been destroyed since these caves were first created. These caves are proof of the ancient civilisation 17 centuries ago, and the artworks, the artifacts, the manuscripts are all part of people who lived in China a long time ago.

The conservation of the Mogao Grottoes faced numerous challenges and difficulties along the way. It is hard to do research in caves which are huge tourist attractions. Mogao Grottoes is a place where many fragile objects and paintings lie. These artifacts are so fragile even the wrong humidity may harm them as they were painted on mud and grass! The staff there has many rules for the tourists such as not letting them take photos as the flash may damage the frescoes of the paintings. One of the other ways to protect the artifacts is to measure the environmental data of the caves by installing sensors in the caves to measure the temperature, humidity, and the carbon dioxide levels to know more about the caves' basic information so they can conserve those artworks and artifacts more easily.

However, the most serious difficulties that most conservators face are people—vicious people like tomb raiders. They took thousands of priceless artworks and ripped dozens of paintings off the wall. These people just did not know how to appreciate

art and what they did is truly wrong. Sand is also one of the conservators' biggest and also worst enemies. Its abrasiveness can endanger the integrity of the paintings.

Fortunately, the conservators are trying their best to recover the damaged items and came up with a solution for preventing sand from interfering with their massive project. They put up sand-resistant fences, so sand wouldn't easily get into the caves. A problem like this wouldn't put out the conservators' determination to uncover the truths about the Mogao Grottoes.

These caves are one of the most famous landmarks in China. According to research, about 1.4 million people visit here every year. This exemplifies how much love, respect and interest people have for this historical monument. Can you believe it? People have been having arguments, fights or even wars because of cultural and religious differences, and this landmark can change it all! Imagine all people with different nationalities and religious beliefs getting together and learning about other people's cultures and religions. This is essentially world peace! You may think historical events have already passed, so there is no need to keep knowing more about it. That is absolutely wrong! History allows us to know more about our culture and gives us a sense of identity. The Mogao Grottoes are marks of what happened in early Chinese history and a valuable place that we shall preserve and respect. We should be glad to even know that there are many historical treasures in the world like the Mogao Grottoes, and there are a lot more that we do not even know of! Conservators and explorers have much more to research about this place as these mysterious caves have infinite secrets that we have yet to discover.

After researching more about these caves, I really want to pay a visit there soon. I hope one day the hard-working archeologists and researchers will uncover all the secrets hidden in the Mogao Grottoes. Maybe one day, because of this historical landmark, nationalities and religious beliefs will not affect humans' relationships.

Cave Library– DunHuang Manuscript

St. Joseph's College, Siu, Chung Yeung Aston – 12

When I first sat down at my desk, I recalled the times that I went to mainland China. The first memory I recollected was a modernized city with futuristic skyscrapers and a quickly–developing society. I never thought about the old and lost site of the ancient civilization. Thus, when I first looked at the title I did not help fussing over the theme. As much as I like history, the title did not exactly grip my attention. I thus interviewed people and researched the grottoes' past in order to complete the assignment. Nevertheless, the findings were beyond my imagination. Join me today through the time machine, where we now go back to AD 366, to explore the new tales of the Mogao Grottoes.

Before we start, let's try to paint a picture in our minds. Picture a temple, 5 stories high, with red outer walls. Got it? Good. Now, just keep that in mind, and multiply it by 500! Yes! There are about 500 of these temples currently sitting in the Guangdong Province, China. Got the image? Good. We're just getting started. After doing some research, I now learned to appreciate the culture and history behind the caves. I am going to talk about the rise and fall of the temples, and how it was discovered back in the 1900s. This is the story of the ancient civilization of Buddhism in China, and a new era for us young people to understand and explore our country's past.

First of all, I'm going to explore the location and the importance of the grottoes themselves. The temples and the caves were located in a crucial part of the silk road, the main commerce route back in the Tang Dynasty. It was known that all of the traders and merchants come in and out of China by this road. It was the backbone of the ancient Chinese economy and also a place where monks and pilgrims arrived to pass the knowledge of Buddhism from India. As time passed, monks and Buddhists settled down at the place now known as the Mogao Grottoes.

Standing for more than a millennium, towering over the Gansu Province (甘肃省), the Mogao Grottoes are one of the oldest Buddhist artifacts found in China. In 1987, the grottoes was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site, showing its importance and culture. When you stand in front of the temple itself, you'll find it surprisingly strange. The temples are carved into the caves and mountains, where half of the architecture seems to be submerged into the rock–hard mountains. The Mogao Grottoes certainly cover a large area, but today, we're going to dive deeper into the Buddha statue, and the legendary Cave Library– the DunHuang Manuscript.

Now I know what you're thinking. "What is so special about a statue and a library?" Honestly, I thought about that too. During my research, I tend to find more interesting and story–like traits of the grottoes, and believe it or not, I started to understand what the "library" actually contains. Instead of boring facts, the manuscripts, paintings, banners, and essays actually carried thousands and thousands of years of our ancient Chinese Buddhism culture.

During the Han Dynasty, the Emperor wanted a passage that could connect them to the outer world and what better way to do that than to build a road connecting over 2 continents? Until today, the Silk Road is still one of the most important cultural and economic sites in the world, even the modern Chinese government decided to create a new project based on the silk road, which was called the "Belt and Road Initiative". Slowly, a cultural establishment rose. Visitors and religious people from all over the world left their traces in the dirt, and it stills stands now.

Apart from the library's long history and profound culture, there are a couple of things about the Grottoes that are just amazing beyond what words can express. I'm going to share with you some interesting things about the astonishing cavern that I think will absolutely impress you.

Now, back to the library, the first thing you'll need to do before you decide to pay a visit to the gorgeous architecture, pay close attention to a little detail. "Cave" library. Yes, it's literally in a cave, in fact, the Dunhuang Cave Library is the first library known to be built inside a natural cave or naturally generated site, and to think that the people in the 11th century was able to create a perfect arch that lasted for more than a millennium! Think about it! Until today, architects and designers rely on high–technology measuring systems and machinery to help them design and create architecture, but during that time, there were no drills or electronic tools. The entire infrastructure that we see today was made solely by hand. Personally, that just blows my mind.

Secondly, when I did my research, I saw exquisite pieces of painting that immediately caught my eye, some unique, one of a kind, others were abstract, and only the painter themselves would know what it means. The artworks in the Cave Library is very special, some are about the daily lives of farmers, some are sculptures about ancient Chinese Gods, some are about religious rites or ceremonies that embedded thousands and thousands years of history inside, each containing a special story.

Speaking of paintings, we've all heard of the famous painters: Van Gogh, Picasso, Leonardo da Vinci... but surprisingly, these people all thrived during the renaissance or the 19th century, which is when art became a trend. Most western paintings were painted by professional artists, whereas ancient Chinese paintings were usually made by monks or theorists. This is also another big difference between both the western and the eastern culture.

A recent discovery has shown that archeologists and historians have recovered replicas of murals, sculptures and paintings using Augmented Reality (AR) technology. To put it another way, we are slowly merging our present technology with the past, and this goes to show that humans using technology to create and preserve our past is now not a fantasy but a reality. AR technology helps us to have a better understanding of the beauty of these artworks, and teaches the next generation more about the lives and culture of the ancient Chinese.

Lastly, a library definitely can't miss books, and to the monks and Buddhists, the library is like the bible in Christianity. It carried secrets and stories about the narrative of the Buddha, and what is considered the tales and principals of the religion. In the long-lasting river of our history, the Buddhism religion attracted over 500 million people,, and carried the legacy onward throughout generations forward.

From my time expedition to the Mogao Grottoes to my virtual tour inside the Cave Library, there were countless wonders and excitement for me to experience. It deeply changed my perspective of the Buddhism religion and enhanced my appreciation of the world and its sophistication. I now truly understand and appreciate the value of the historical site. Stretching over 25 kilometers and over 500 temples, the Mogao caves are one of the biggest architectural infrastructure I've ever seen. It is a perfect for both Eastern and Western travel lovers, and is the described as 'eye-candy'. As the saying goes "Those who cannot study history are doomed to repeat it". The Mogao Grottoes have set a great example illustrating how our society has developed, and they have also revealed the secrets and theories of how it should continue. Its unique customs and religious significance has immensely enriched our connection to the past, as well as our relationship towards a better future.

The Secrets of the Mystical Mystery – The Mogao Grottoes

St. Paul's Convent School (Secondary Section), Chan, Wing Yan Dorothy – 14

In the vast, endless plain of desolated desert, there stands the preservation of culture, the sanctuary of generations, the representation of ancient civilisation – the Mogao Grottoes. This aesthetic work of art is nothing but breath-taking. Nothing can compare to its beauty.

Last summer vacation, I paid a visit to the Mogao Grottoes to witness the true splendour with my very own eyes. The Mogao Grottoes, also known as the 'Caves of the Thousand Buddhas', are a majestic treasure trove of art filled with religious overtones. Located in the southeast of the oasis city Dunhuang in Gangsu Province, it once was a flourishing intersection point of the Silk Road where businessmen, traders, pilgrims and travellers gather for intellectual exchange and pray for a safe and sound journey ahead.

In the seemingly insipid land, there lay countless hidden gems awaiting to be unveiled. In the early eleventh century, an unprecedented archive was concealed in a chamber, with up to 5,000 documents, hundreds of murals, artefacts, textile, and painted clay figures. It was first discovered by a Daoist, Wang Yuanlu, in 1900, then encountered by Western expeditions yearning to learn about the significance of the Caves. Marc Aurel Stein was one of the firsts. As an archaeologist, he was fascinated by the new discovery and bought thousands of manuscripts, fragments, paintings, embroideries and other artefacts from Wang. Other explorers even commented it as 'a tunnel to a lost world, a passage to a forgotten realm'. With such uncovered scriptures flowing around the world, global cultural integration was cultivated, with extraordinary cultural and religious cross-fertilization.

Once the Mogao Grottoes were in sight, I could immediately sense the artistic aura of the rich repository of Buddhist art. Approximately 492 cave-temples, over 700 man-made caves with more than two thousand statues lined the rock face, stretching far and wide to the extent of 1600 metres, all facing east. This is yet another silent but visually striking testimony of the complex geological location and architectural perfection. The walls are delicately ornamented with paintings of rich colours. Though they are from different dynasties, they seem to be conceived as a conceptual whole with sheer harmony of colour tones and recurring themes. The fundamental materials of the cave walls include mud, straw and reeds covered in lime paste; while statues are constructed with wooden armature, straw, reeds and plaster; whereas colours are embellished with mineral pigments with occasional gold and silver leaf, creating a vibrant atmosphere.

Entering each cave, the progression in design, painting style, and overall impression also signifies the changes in religious beliefs over history. Authentic characteristics of various societies in different times are unveiled through the description of its social appearance, prevailing religious rituals, sermons and ceremonies. In earlier-built caves, the origins of Historical Buddhists are depicted with unique influences from India and the West. Till the Sui Dynasty, the heyday of cave construction, depictions of the earliest signs of Silk Road Exchange could be seen: a camel, an earlier means of transportation, pulling a trading cart. Proceeding to the Tang Dynasty, Buddhism grew and prospered. Here, the ideology of Pure Land Paradise in contrast with terrors of hell, an essential role of Buddhism eschatology, thrived. It states that there is more to life than meets the eye and that they may eventually enjoy rebirth upon repentance and purification. This acts as a source of light and hope for the people suffering from wars, conflicts and natural disasters. Hence, it is regarded as the 'entrance to the Pure Land paradise', attracting many zealous followers of Buddhism to make a pilgrimage to pay their utmost respect, homage and devotion. They aim to cultivate a relationship with their internal being and spiritual self in a surrounding of tranquillity and simplicity with peace of mind, free from interference of temptations of the materialistic lifestyle.

Although the Mogao Grottoes have gradually been forgotten by the outside world as the passion for Buddhism dwindles to a trickle and the decline of the Silk Road, it remains as a world-renowned tourist attraction.

Inside a Mogao cave, there is an unconventional pattern: the centre figure is always a Buddha, surrounded by deities and attendants. I was overwhelmed by the grand, statuesque solemnity of the clay figure of Maitreya Buddha. Standing over 100 feet tall, it is known for being one of the tallest found across the globe! Enthralled by its gorgeous state, my thoughts drifted to the unparalleled history of how the first cave was founded. According to legend, in 366 AD, a monk named Yuezun sought for spiritual enlightenment on his religious path. During his prayer and meditation, he received inspiration and saw a golden bright light, so bright as if showcasing the glory of all Buddhas. He had a vision! A vision of a thousand radiant Buddhas. He then decided to create a shrine to pay tribute to Buddha, naming it 'Mogao', with an implication of peerless. This was how the Mogao Grottoes came about. Another divergent view of the origin of the Mogao Grottoes records that another Buddhist monk Le Zun was on his arduous journey to the Western Paradise. He made a stop by Sanwei Mountains, near Dunhuang when crossing the Gobi desert. Having quenched his thirst with sweet waters from a special spring, he sat to admire the sunset. It was dusk. All of a sudden, the mountains started to glow. An extraordinary phenomenon revealed in front of his

eyes! As he raised his head, a superficial image of a glorious golden Maitreya floating in the sky was shown. Then, a thousand beaming Buddhas appeared alongside with flying fairies surrounding them with heavenly music. As a zealot, Le Zun was deeply touched and instantaneously decided to stay and celebrate his ethereal experience. Applying his past painting and sculpturing skills, he recreated his vision in the form of a Mogao Cave. To explain the abundance of the caves, as years passed, another Buddhist monk named Fa Liang experienced the identical vision at the same location, thus inspired to decorate a second cave with paintings and statues to visually depict the divine scene.

It is the most richly adorned monument I have ever seen! Now, it is not only the spiritual sanctuary of millions, but also a pinnacle of Chinese traditions and culture. It provides insights into various aspects of people from all walks of life, for instance, medieval politics, social conditions and ethnic relations in western China. The Mogao Grottoes are of unmatched cultural, religious and historical values, with abundant manuscripts and relics of rare languages, such as ancient Tibetan and Sanskrit, serving as exceptional reference in studying the ancient civilisations. Thus, it was named 'one of the world's greatest Oriental cultural discoveries'. Moreover, it serves as an irreplaceable role in foreign artistic exchange and preservation of the integrity of the traditional monastic settlement. The crisp dryness in the desert is most suitable for preservation of artworks and manuscripts, thus contributing to the conservation of this precious historical treasure. On top of garnering worldwide attention, it has also received national and global recognition, enlisted as one of the UNESCO World Heritage Site on account of its humongous supplementary and emending researching value of evolution of eras of ancient China.

The Mogao Grottoes are undoubtedly one of the most prized cultural heritages, bearing witness of the vicissitudes of generations of the Chinese civilisation. Though the colours on the walls may fade away over time, its mystical tales will remain engraved forever in the majesty of the sacred wonder.

The Mogao Grottoes: A Place of Ancient Culture

Tai Kwong Hilary College, Ho, Alvin – 14

Located in an oasis called Dunhuang on the Silk Road in Gansu Province, China, the Mogao Grottoes are a collection of an astonishingly large amount of perfectly preserved cave-temples – four hundred and ninety-two to be exact, according to UNESCO, on a two-kilometer-long cliffside. Also known as The Thousand Buddha Caves, they are well known for the historical treasures found within: ancient manuscripts as well as multiple pieces of art, from simple paintings to detailed sculptures and murals. The construction of the Mogao Grottoes were originally started by a Buddhist monk in 366 AD. Over time, many people from commoners to even royalty from old dynasties helped construct the caves and made them what they are now: a historical relic of a bygone age.

Just above the entrance lies a seven-storey-tall temple, built into the face of the cliff. Painted red in colour, any visitors who approach it can't help but marvel at the sheer size of the majestic building. Yet, the true spectacle lies within... Of the four hundred and ninety-two caves, only a measly twenty are open to the public. The few caves available for tourists to visit are rotated regularly, so people might go back there a month or two later and find that the caves they see are completely different from what they saw the previous time. But, although the available caves are few, it doesn't diminish the glory of the antique paintings and sculptures within, available for tourists (and especially those interested in Chinese History) to gasp and gawk at.

One especially famous cave within the Mogao Grottoes is Cave 17, otherwise known as the Library Cave. It was originally used as a memorial cave for a monk named Hongbian. But, for some unknown reason, it was walled off sometime during the 11th century. To this day, nobody really knows why it was walled off, but what's important are the manuscripts that were discovered within. Documents rolled up in scrolls, paper books and short texts as well as textiles and even figurines of Buddhas were found inside the well-preserved cave, totalling up to a massive amount of over sixteen thousand items containing valuable historical information. Although most of the treasures found within were taken away to multiple different places for examination by historians (the historians definitely had a field day at this discovery), the cave itself is still a wonder to look at. A Buddha statue, murals on the wall depicting the olden times and a couple of scrolls stacked on top of each other can be viewed by curious tourists.

There are a lot of different types of art in the Mogao Grottoes, ranging from simple paintings on silk and paper to large murals that fill up every space available on the walls of the caves. The paintings leap off the page (or in this case, leap off the wall?) at the tourists in awe of their beauty. The detailed and vibrant paintings display various elements from the Chinese and the Indian painting styles. The textiles found in the Library Cave include altar hangings, banners made of silk and more, which provide more knowledge as to the types of silk and embroidery available in the past.

The Mogao Grottoes are one of the largest collections of ancient historical treasures ever known to man. Not only are they historically important, the paintings that can be observed are magnificent. All the caves that are open to the public are full of their own unique paintings, elaborate statues of Chinese, Greek and Indian gods as well as ancient architecture, so the Mogao Grottoes definitely won't disappoint any tourists who decide to visit this gem of a place.

The Mogao Caves

Tai Kwong Hilary College, Kwong, Sin Ying – 12

Excavated into a mile of cliff outside Dunhuang, an oasis town at the edge of the Gobi Desert, the ancient Mogao Caves came into the public eye in 1900, when a treasure trove of manuscripts was unearthed. Along with the astonishing discovery of these 50,000 ancient documents that can significantly change all the history books in the world, the world's largest collection of Buddhist art was found, as well as an intriguing amount of painted clay sculptures. It is, without doubt, the most remarkable discovery on this planet.

The Mogao Caves are well known for their buddha statues and paintings. The inside of the caves is like a museum filled with art, decorated with art on the walls and brightly painted Buddha statues all surrounding the cave.

In the deepest floor in the Mogao Caves, lies a chamber that is filled with gold, a gigantic gold Buddha statue, an enormous number of ancient scripts that record the history of medieval China. Also, a gigantic shelf and mind-blowing paintings that are somehow still perfectly intact perfectly, not even a crack.

One of the scripts contains writing in English, with Isaac Newton's name on it. The script talks about Isaac Newton's childhood and his own problems. There are also a few other people in the script.

The Cave has taught us how the old society worked and even with no technology they can still make something unique, one of a kind.

The Cave of a Thousand Buddhas

The Chinese Foundation Secondary School, Jin, Ai Sha – 14

Introduction

Mogao Grottoes is a nine-story cave situated at a strategic point along the Silk Route, which is today's Dunhuang. It is not only for Buddhism activities, but also a crossroad of trade, religious, culture, and intellectual influences. It is a very important gateway during ancient China. This cave is famous for its statues and wall paintings of 1000 years of Buddhism. It is now designated as one of the world's heritage sites.

What is inside this cave?

Have you ever been into a cave or thought about what is inside it? Well most people think that a cave is just simply a rock shelter underneath the ground, but not for the Mogao Grottoes. It is more than a cave. It is more like a complex carved into a cliff which has 492 caves of different sizes. Inside each Grotto, you can see impressive Buddha statues. There are more than 2000 colored statues that were carved 1500 years ago. Although the statues were carved a long time ago, they have been preserved very well. Up till now, the lines of the statues are still clearly shown and not a piece is missing! Moreover, there are mural paintings in the cave that can be found on the walls and roofs. The enlightening paintings are mostly stories about Buddhism, sutra illustrations, and the likes. In addition, you can learn about various aspects of medieval life, such as farming, war, and architecture. Furthermore, archaeologists have excavated some articles from the Grotto, about ancient China, which are of great research value.

What makes the Mogao Grottoes so special?

You may be thinking it is just a cave with many different Buddhist artworks and statues, but what makes it so fascinating that people from all around the globe would like to visit it? One of the reasons is its background history.

Mogao Grottoes first served as a place for monks to meditate but then was developed to serve a monastery nearby. The family ruling the Northern Zhou and Northern Wei built many caves in it and it flourished. During the Tang dynasty, it became a place of worship and pilgrimage for the public. Since then, Mogao Grottoes became a center of trade along the Silk Road. It was the first trading town reached by foreign merchants entering Chinese-administered territory from the west. The caves witness the evolution of Buddhist art and the civilization of ancient China. They provide an abundance of vivid materials that depict various aspects of medieval politics, economics, culture, and arts, from western China. They were also a place of worship.

There is actually an enchanting story about the Mogao Caves as a remote sanctuary of sacred wonder. Many made the pilgrimage to pay homage and witness its splendor with their own eyes throughout the centuries. According to a legend, there was also a little "behind the scenes" story about the building the Mogao Grottoes. There was once a monk named Yuezun who had a vision of a thousand radiant Buddhas on the cliff face which inspired him to begin excavating the caves.

Conclusion

The Mogao Grottoes is the world's largest, most richly endowed, and longest used treasure house of Buddhist art. It is an outstanding Buddhist rock art sanctuary. It represents a unique artistic achievement and played a decisive role in artistic exchanges between China, Central Asia and India. The Mogao Grottoes do not only display various artworks and sculptures of Buddhism, or they also act as an important gateway to the West, and witness the evolution of ancient China. China has developed from a primitive nation into a civilized country. But without the Mogao Grottoes, or much other historic architecture, we would not have discovered the unknown about the Tang dynasty or the Silk Road. We would not have learnt so much from the past, and China would not have developed so quickly and become today's world's largest trading nation. William Wordsworth once said, "Life is divided into three terms—which was, which is, and which will be. Let us learn from the past to profit by the present, and from the present, to live better in the future."

New Tales of Mogao Grottoes

The Chinese Foundation Secondary School, Tsui, Sophie – 13

Introduction

Have you ever been to a site where over a hundred caves were crafted by hand 1700 years ago? Today, I will be introducing you to the Mogao Grottoes which are in Dunhuang, China, somewhere along the Silk Route. The Mogao Grottoes, also known as the Thousand Buddha Caves. It is a site with a gigantic number of caves loaded with Buddhist statues. In fact, this place is one of the largest sites for grotto art in China and even in the whole world. According to a legend, a monk named Yuezun saw a thousand radiant Buddhas on the cliff, which inspired him to begin excavating caves. There are 735 caves, 2415 painted sculptures, and 45,000 square meters of frescoes. Inside each cave, there are hundreds of figures on its walls such as of Buddha and much palm-sized artwork. Although there are thousands of Buddhas, the art and objects found at Mogao display the varied cultures along the Silk Road. For example, there are texts of different languages such as Confucian, Daoist, and Christian at the site. Documents too, in multiple languages like Chinese, Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Old Turkish.

There are many fascinating and valuable historical relics which attract a huge number of tourists visiting Mogao. In 1987, Mogao was designated a UNESCO World Heritage site. Tourism activities at Mogao have been significantly increased since then. This posed a tremendous challenge to those conserving the Mogao caves.

Dilemma

Due to the large number of visitors, the humidity and temperature inside the caves has increased. The moisture and the carbon dioxide exhaled by tourists is damaging the caves' frescoes and painted sculptures. Sand and wind also threaten conservation efforts. Archaeologists say that the caves are deteriorating more rapidly than in the past. Also, the scent of perfume sticks around in the cave for days and harms the frescoes, fading the colours. In order to promote sustainable tourism activities at the site while minimizing the damages on the frescoes, the government is using new monitoring technology and augmented reality to save the Mogao.

Solutions

Monitoring the cave interior environment is important to detect changes in the air quality inside the cave as it deteriorates. It is crucial to build an effective environmental monitoring system. The caves can then be closed temporarily for rest and treatment if the air quality indicators exceed certain values. Also, the opening of the caves can be done on a rotating basis too.

The deputy director of Dunhuang Research Academy said digitalising murals inside the Mogao is the most useful way to protect it. There will be 3D movies about the frescoes and sculptures in some caves displayed in the visitor centre, and visitors will be led to watch the movie before starting their tour of the real caves. This not only protects the caves but also helps the visitors to have a contextual understanding of Mogao. The academy also limits the viewing time for the visitors of the site. Although there are thousands of figures and Buddhas, the tourists cannot clearly see mural details under dim lighting and limited time, so high-definition prints are displayed in the museum, so that people can see the details clearly. The project has enabled the museum artefacts to be shown all around the world with 3D technology. However, because of the large amount of time and patience needed, many high tech companies leave soon after they said they want to contribute. Also, this project requires more financial resources because of the high cost of digitalization.

Other suggestions

Aside from the academy itself, tourists should also participate in the protection of Mogao. As tourists are responsible for breaking the ecological balance of Mogao Caves cultural site they should participate in the ecological environment construction. They should read and learn about the Mogao Caves Cultural Heritage Site's Code of Conduct and Rules for Visitors before entering the site. After that, tourists should be tested on whether they are allowed to touch or photograph the cave's frescoes, sculpture, and other crafts. The academy could also recreate the cave's exterior and the surrounding ecology of the cultural site to test if visitors are exposed to environmental pollution and damage through their travels. To make this information worldwide, the academy can use the YouTube channels to educate visitors on what they should do before visiting sites, and also to promote the spirit of protecting heritage sites.

Furthermore, educational programs about the history and the story behind each cave should be included in regular courses at primary and secondary schools. This process of patriotic education could be effective in the long term.

Conclusion

It is without doubt true that sustainable tourism is a crucial industry in China, but it is also important to preserve the heritage sites because they are valuable cultural assets. The Mogao grottoes should be regularly shut for maintenance. In addition, the academy should also hold fund raising activities regularly to speed up the funding of digitalization process. Aside from digitizing the site, the academy can make use of the latest AR technology to provide the visitors with an augmented reality guided experience. This can greatly reduce the need to go to the heritage site physically. Indeed, striking the balance between the needs of preservation at heritage sites and the development of sustainable tourism is still a great challenge which requires the academy and tourists to work together.

Mogao grottoes

Wellington College, Shanghai, Yi, Ding – 12

The Mogao Grottoes played an important role in commerce, religion. As a strategic point on the Silk Road, it was long respected. Situated on the edge of the Gobi Desert, twenty-five kilometers to the nearest village. The mogao grottoes position makes it hard to imagine as a critical nerve center of the eastern part of the Silk Road.

Cave 254

A classical example of a cave in the mogao grottoes is the cave 254 Constructed in the Northern Wei dynasty, and located on the middle section of the cliff, this is the earliest central-pillared cave at Mogao. It has a gabled ceiling in the front and a flat ceiling in the back. Under the two ends of the beam of the gabled ceiling and the molded rafters on both slopes are wooden brackets, a structure of Traditional Chinese architecture. Between the rafters are images of celestial beings holding lotuses. The flat ceiling in the back is connected to the ground by the central pillar, which has niches in all four sides for various statues. The large niche in the east side contains a cross-legged Maitreya Bodhisattva, which was originally flanked by four attendants, and now there is only one on the south side and two on the north side. On both sides of the nimbus on the west wall in the niche are attendant bodhisattvas respectively above Vasistha and Mrgasira. On the ceiling of the niche are apsaras. The lintel is decorated with reborn children on lotuses. The niche beam shaped like a dragon is supported by two pillars wrapped in painted silk. Most molded figurines on the two sides or above the niche have been damaged, only a few are preserved. The other three sides each have two niches, one above the other. The upper niches shaped like the Chinese traditional gateway on the south and north sides each contain a cross-legged Maitreya bodhisattva, while the lower arch niches contain a dhyana Buddha. The upper niche shaped in the form of two spreading trees and the lower arch niche in the west side each contain a dhyana Buddha flanked by two attendant bodhisattvas out of the niche. There are molded figurines on the two sides and above the upper niche, which are blackened by sootiness.

Even though the mogao grottoes caves are mostly protected well in modern days but discovered in the 20th century it is sure that it is gonna be trampled by intruders...

The biggest theft of knowledge in human history

Dispute the fact the mogao grottoes are crucial to the Buddhist religion, one need to first know that the primary information of the mogao grottoes: the mogao grottoes is first constructed in 366AD it represents the excessive achievement of Buddhist art from the 4th to the 14th century. The mogao grottoes includes 492 caves which are presently preserved, applying about 45,000 square meters of murals and more than 2,000 painted sculptures.

Not only the statues and wall paintings are idolized, discovered in the nineteen hundred the Mogao grottoes has at least fifty thousand books, ninety percent of them are found about Buddhist. the books that were originally found in Mogao grottoes are spread widely around the world they are found in for example the British museum, the national museum of France, the Institute of Oriental Documents of the Russian Academy of Sciences. In 1910 there was only 8000 books that are collected by the national museum. Presently there 16 thousand books collected in the national museum of China. Recorded in 1910 there were fifty thousand books how can such a big amount disappear in a short decade?

Despite that the mogao grottoes is situated so far from human civilization it is expeditiously forgotten by human being,, but after it was discovered after the nineteen hundred, it became famous...

A Chinese master wang yuan Zhu when cleaning cave 16 he found a cave behind the walls of the corridors of cave 16 (after named cave 17)

Cave 17

Constructed between the fifth year of Dazhong era and the third year of Xiantong era (851–862), cave 17 served as a memorial cave for Hong Bian, a Monastic Official in Hexi region in the Late Tang dynasty. It is located in the north wall of the corridor of Cave 16 and was discovered by Taoist priest Wang Yuanlu who lived at Mogao in the 26th year of Guangxu era of the Qing dynasty (1900). It is called the Library Cave because there were over 50,000 artifacts including Buddhist scriptures, social documents, silk paintings, embroideries, and Buddhist utensils dating back to the fourth to the fourteenth centuries. The cave is square in plan with a truncated pyramidal ceiling. There are no murals on the four slopes or the ceiling center. An octangular altar is built in front of the north wall, on which a statue of the monk, Hong Bian sits. The west wall contains a stele recording that Hong Bian was appointed the highest Buddhist official in Hexi region in the fifth year of

Dazhong era (851). There is a painting of two trees of the Late Tang on the north wall. Under the tree on the west side is a standing upasika (holding a scepter and towel). A cloth bag is hung on the tree. Under the tree on the east side is a Buddhist nun (bhikkhuni, holding a silk fan), and a water kettle is hung on the tree. There are no wall paintings on the south and east walls, no corridor and no front chamber.

In 1907 a British archaeologist named Marc Aurel Stein came on his second journey to Asia following the Silk Road. Marc heard about the Mogao grottoes. Marc arrived because the officials of the China at that time did not pay much attention to the Mogao grottoes, Marc easily got the permission to read and “buy” the books in the Mogao grottoes. As a result, Marc using a cheap price, took 24 boxes of books and 5 boxes of other pieces of artwork.

In 1914, Stein came to Mogao grottoes again, and bought 570 Dunhuang documents with 250 kilograms of silver from Wang Yuanxuan. He led an expedition to carry out archaeological excavations in Xinjiang, China, and when he saw that the book that general Changyu gave him was a copy from the Tang dynasty's, he couldn't wait to find out where it came from and so he arrived in Dunhuang in March 1908.

Boshihe is a knowledgeable sinologist, he with a deep foundation of Chinese studies and rich archaeological knowledge, all the remains of the cave through the examination. He said to himself “I dare to say that there is no such thing as the scrolls in the cave that are discarded without a second eye.” There's a selfie of Burch and the theft of the cave's remains: he crouched in a cave, facing a mountain of scrolls, flipping through the next piece of candles, page by page... He spent three weeks in the cave, not only touching every manuscript, but also flipping through every piece of paper. His thorough knowledge of Chinese and Chinese history led him to choose all the essences of the Tibetan cave. So, the scrolls he stole were the most valuable and the best, with about sixty or seventy pieces in his collection in Paris. The greatest value of Dunhuang's legacy is the preservation of many ancient doctrines and the preservation of ancient notes. For example, the Analects, read only one kind of book, that is, the book of Ho's note. The Tibetan Cave found the book of the Emperor's Note, which contains the main points of the "Analects" spoken by everyone between the Han dynasties to the Wei dynasties, and was stolen by Boshihe.

Boshihe and himself boasted that the rolls he had taken were almost always the most valuable in Dunhuang. He loaded more than 6,000 volumes and paintings of more valuable volumes and linguistics, archaeologically valuable ones and paintings that Stein had neglected by translation, and shipped them to Paris in 10 trucks. Most of the collections have been donated to the British Museum and some museums in India. The British Museum now has about 137,000 Dunhuang-related collections, the largest collection of Dunhuang artifacts in the world, but the museum's poor protection of Chinese artifacts and even theft, has been criticized.

Summing up 15626 pieces of artwork are stolen of western invaders, including the most precious pieces of the Mogao grottoes, maybe some were bought but in really low prices.

Conclusion

Although in modern days the Mogao grottoes is protected well because of its title given by the United Nations, and the attention that the Chinese government pay the Mogao grottoes has always maintain its original shape, the wild ambition of the western intruders can be never forgotten.

The Mogao grottoes is not only a storage of dedicated artifacts neither it is a place to be in a bucket list, it is a bank full of knowledge.