



# Non-Fiction

Group 4

# The Mogao Grotto

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

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

As one enters inside the Mogao Grotto, it is as if the world metamorphosed into a different dimension. Thousands of pathways twist and weave like vines and within this intricate system of caves are relics and murals scattered around through the cave walls. These artefacts provide an insight into the integral historic events that shape much of China. In the dazzling Mogao cave 323, a painting delineates the origins of Chinese Buddhism. The painting was commissioned and completed between 140–187 CE and references a legend where Emperor Wu worshipped two metal statues after his victory in war. After edging out in a war against the Xiongnu, Emperor Wu wanted to inquire more about the values the statues signified. Thus, he summoned Zhang Qian to the western region to investigate and discover the stories behind the statues. Zhang Qian returned to the Emperor and explained the religion of Buddha and the significance of the statues. Therefore, this legend is often credited for the origins of Buddhism within ancient China. Another pivotal artwork that provided insight into the way of life and the importance of Buddhism to China was also found in Mogao cave 323 constructed in 326 CE. However, a portion of the mural was removed by American explorer Langdon Warner in 1924 and is currently displayed in Harvard’s Art Museum. The mural portrays the moving of a discovered bronze Buddha statue in Yangzhou, the Buddha statue was constructed by the fourth daughter of the Indian king, Asoka. The painting provides a depiction of the way of life, methods of transportation and also the significance of religion to the locals. In the painting, eight men traversed through the river via a wooden boat that docked upon the

shores. Ox carts were arranged to move the bronze Buddha to the town centre. The technology the ancient Chinese had access to were fairly primitive and utilized methods such as boats and ox carts to transport heavier objects. Furthermore, the large amount of manpower mobilized to move the heavy bronze statue elucidates the dedication to Buddhism the locals possessed. Thus, this artwork was able to give a glimpse of the way of life in the past. Another piece of artwork that gave a glimpse into the past lies in Mogao cave 17 of a statue of an influential monk named Hong Bian. The statue depicts him to be peacefully meditating, the craftsmanship displayed is exquisite with precious carvings that transcend its realism. Hong Bian was a crucial figure in the formation of early Buddhism and was the chief of monks in the Hexi area. Moreover, he was highly influential politically and was known to be the highest-ranked religious official in the region. The collections of artworks and relics found in the Mogao Grotto not only acts as a time capsule for stories and legends but also shed light upon lessons and values enshrined into the daily life of Buddhists.

The immersive world in Mogao Grottoes is an escape from reality where stories and legends dominate the narrative through murals and paintings. One of the famous tales depicted on the walls of Mogao Grottoes is a Jataka tale portraying Prince Mahasattva. This masterpiece was constructed in Cave 428 in the year 557–581 and teaches the values of selflessness. The story begins with the King and Queen sending their three sons off into the woods. The terrain was uneven but the surrounding environment was lush with greenery. As they rest at the base of the mountains, the brothers spot a troop of tigers. The mother was frail, and her skin contoured around her feeble bones. She stares at her lion cubs with her mouth wide open, salivating at the thought of eating her children. The brothers immediately came and intervened with the mother, promising to bring her food in exchange for the sparing of the tiger cubs. The youngest, Prince Mahasattva, ordered the other two brothers to gather food while he stayed to look after the tiger. The brothers agreed and went their separate ways to gather food. However, Prince Mahasattva knew that there was no food available for the tigress in the nearby vicinity. After the departure of the two brothers, the Prince took off his clothes and offered himself to the tigress. He wanted the tigress to take his life instead of the lives of her children. To his surprise, the tigress refused and rejected the goodwill from the prince. The prince was in disbelief but his desire to save tigers overwhelmed him. Driven by determination, the prince climbed to the edge of a nearby mountain and took his own life. As his body slumped onto the cold and uneven ground, blood bled profusely from his head. The tigress and her cubs had no choice but to accept the sacrifice made by the prince. When the brothers returned, they were in great shock and knew what had happened. They carried his remains and traversed the cruel forest terrain, they were in deep grief and anguish at the death of their brother. To commemorate his death and recognise his sacrifice, the family built a stupa in his honour. Another legend that is depicted in the murals again discusses the values of selflessness. One day, King Sivi comes across a helpless dove trying to manoeuvre its way from a falcon. To save the dove, King Sivi struck a deal with the falcon to save its life. The falcon demanded that it will only let the dove go if it can receive the same mass of flesh from the King as that of the dove. The King agreed without hesitation and had a butcher slice off the flesh from his legs to offer the falcon. After slicing more and more flesh from his legs, the weight was still not equal to the weight of the dove. Finally, King Sivi offered himself to the falcon in exchange for the sparing of the dove. These timeless stories are entangled with positive values and lessons for people to learn from. Therefore, the caves of Mogao Grottoes are filled with legends and stories that not only inform but inspire and teach crucial values and lessons.

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

# Beyond the Beauty of the Mogao Grottoes

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

What a site of quintessential Buddhist art and culture.

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

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

The tortuous history of the Mogao Grottoes displays persistence through the test of time. With the astonishing cave temples and decorative art, countless people would visit the Mogao Grottoes for various purposes. Besides serving as a site for religious practice and the worshiping of the gods by believers, the Mogao Grottoes was also a place where traders along the Silk Road would stop by to restore supplies, admiring the astonishing caves at the same time. During the rule of Tibet from 781 to 847 AD, Dunhuang was conquered by competing dynasties, local aristocrats, and foreign powers. Despite the frequent discord that surrounded Dunhuang, the creative enterprise of the Mogao Grottoes persisted. Successive rulers financed the carving of new caves and emblazoned them with their own pious images. [2] This displays the extraordinary persistence of the people who made the Mogao Grottoes for what they are today. Unfortunately, Dunhuang was left desolate when the Silk Road was abandoned in the Ming Dynasty, rendering the Mogao Grottoes to be forgotten. In the 1890s, a Daoist monk named Wang Yuanlu appointed himself the guardian of the caves. Miraculously, he discovered a cache of manuscripts that was concealed in one of the Mogao caves, which is now known as the Library Caves. Unbeknownst to the world at the time, the site contained up to fifty thousand ancient documents that included sutras, contracts, poems, prayer sheets and official documents. [3] The preservation of the old documents juxtaposes the fates of other Chinese historical records, most of which had been lost in warfare, fire and material deterioration. The rediscovery of the treasures of the Mogao Grottoes brought about widespread attention and the popularity of the site surged once again. The history of how the carvings and decorations of the Mogao Grottoes were able to persist during turbulent times and how it still flourishes in modern day make the Mogao Grottoes all the more impressive.

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

Mogao Grottoes is absolutely breathtaking, but what makes the site particularly unique? What lies beyond the beauty of the Mogao Grottoes?

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

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

The murals of the Mogao Grottoes are not solely for aesthetic appreciation, they reflect the lifestyles and values of people in ancient society as well. In Mogao Cave 23 (High Tang, 705–791 AD), the murals depict the famous Parable of the Herbal Medicine Chapter from 'The Farmers Working in Heavy Rain'. The painting shows the dim sky and hard rain. One farmer is whipping the cow to plow while another is carrying the harvest on his shoulders. The farmers' backs are slightly hunched over, depicting the physical hardships of farmwork. Despite the tricky weather, the farmers are still able to grind through and continue to manage their crops. The persistent hard work of the villagers are shone through in this illustration, showing the hard and honest living of rural people during the High Tang Dynasty. At the lower left corner of the mural, children appear to be playing music and dancing, indicative of joviality and celebration. This reflects the carefree lifestyle of the country. [5] In Mogao Cave 148 (Tang, A.D. 705–781), a mural depicts a funeral procession that is on the way to the Buddha's cremation. The Bodhisattvas, priests and kings are carrying banners and offerings solemnly. There is a corridor which has the illustration of the Sutra of Requiting Blessing Received in Chinese writing, which emphasizes filial piety, an important Confucian teaching. [2] This suggests the adherence of traditional Chinese values and filial practices among people during the Tang Dynasty. As a result, the murals of the Mogao Grottoes reveal the lifestyles and values of people in the olden days.

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

Mogao Grottoes, there are a multitude of murals that teach us invaluable life lessons, inspiring believers to put the Buddhism values into practice and emulate Mahasattva's noteworthy deeds.

The murals of the Mogao Grottoes also reflect the convergence between the East and West. In a broader artistic sense, the murals display different artistic styles. According to experts, the 'unique artistic style of Dunhuang art in the Mogao Grottoes derives not only from the amalgamation of Han Chinese traditions and ancient Indian and Gandharan customs, but also from the integration of Turkish and ancient Tibetan art'. [6] Since Mogao is situated between Mongolia and Tibet, Dunhuang was a vital juncture on the Silk Road. The existence of an array of artistic techniques is a testament of the merging between the East and West. [7] In addition, the cultural exchanges along the Silk Road during the Sui Dynasty are thoroughly depicted in the murals in the Mogao Grottoes. For instance, Mogao Cave 302 contains illustrative scenes of the interplay between the Western and Eastern cultures. Illustrations of camels pulling carts signify the high mobility and frequent trading between East and West along the Silk Road at the time. There are numerous paintings of black horses with stretching legs, vividly depicting their leaps and gallops as they dash through mountains and dirt roads to reach their destination. This reinforces the rapid exchange of goods between the cultures as they modernise. Therefore, the murals reflect the convergence between Eastern and Western cultures, vibrantly showcasing the process of modernisation and assimilation of different countries.

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

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

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

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# The Mogao Grottoes: A Historical Gem Hidden Among the Sand Dunes

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Chiseled in the rocky cliff faces at the edge of the Gobi desert, lies a treasure trove of Buddhist art pieces. Situated at a crossroads of the ancient silk road, 25 km southeast of Dunhuang – an oasis city in the Gansu Province of China – the Mogao Grottoes are a series of grottoes best known for their murals, sculptures, and artifacts. The name ‘Mogao’ refers to the administrative district the caves were in during the Tang dynasty, but translates to ‘peerless’. Peerless, meaning ‘matchless or incomparable’, is a perfect descriptor of the grottoes, in regards to their beauty and history. Not only is the site a wonder to behold, but it also provides a window back into the ancient Chinese civilization, by showing an evolution of ancient Buddhist art pieces.

Though surrounded by barren desert slopes, the beauty and splendor of the caves hidden inside is exceptional. In the grottoes lie about 45,000 square meters of murals – about 40 times the size of the Sistine Chapel – and over 2,000 painted structures. Painted first as line drawings with bold blacks and reds, then filled in with bright mineral pigments and organic colorants, the brilliant colors and fine details of the murals record the customs, traditions, and beliefs of the old world. Though worn by the wear of time, they continue to dazzle visitors today. The statues, showcasing elegant Buddhist styles and sculptural skills display a variety of important figures: Buddha and his students, Bodhisattva, monks, the God of heaven, the God of Earth, and guardians of the ancient world. Combined, these art pieces paint a vivid picture of the arts, economics, politics, and culture of ancient society, and display the evolution of Buddhist art throughout a millennium (from the 4th to the 14th century).

But while the beauty of the caves is extraordinary, it is the long and fascinating history that really makes this site stand out. The caves were first constructed nearly 17 centuries ago, in 366 AD, on the desert crossroads of the famed silk road. Legend states, a wandering Buddhist monk named Yuezun (or Le Zun) imagined a thousand radiant Buddhas on the sandstone cliff face. The monk was inspired to begin painstakingly hand carving the caves, the first being no bigger than a coffin. Others followed and began carving their own caverns. Being situated at the crossroads of a busy trade hub allowed travelers to stop by and carve their own stories, and prayers for a safe journey ahead. The Mogao Grottoes soon became a pilgrimage site.

After a millennium, the monk’s vision became a reality. Funded by affluent traders and important officials, the caves soon grew to a system of hundreds of temples and caves, flourishing in the Sui, Tang, and Song dynasty. In its peak in the Tang dynasty – often referred to as the golden age of Chinese culture and arts – more than a thousand caves existed. Far more than one thousand Buddhas reside in the caves today, earning it the nickname “Caves of a Thousand Buddhas.” Inside, it is a wonder to behold, with exquisite Buddhist sculptures and paintings featured in every cave. As journalist Brook Larmer of the National Geographic magazine wrote, “Thousands of Buddhas in every hue radiated across the grotto walls, their robes glinting with imported gold.”

However, following the gradual decline in the use of the silk road in the 11th century and the collapse of the Yuan dynasty, the caves fell into disuse. Despite the long history and hard work, the caves lay forgotten for many years. Facing both nature and neglect, many caves have been lost since the Tang Dynasty. Only half survive, with 492 grottoes remaining preserved today.

Only on June 25th, 1900, did a Taoist monk named Wang Yuanlu rediscover the caves. He named himself the guardian of the abandoned grottoes, and notified Qing government officials of his find, but got no reply. No further action was taken until European archeologist and explorer Marc Aurel Stein heard rumors of the caves. He visited in 1907, and bribed the Taoist caretaker in order to remove countless scrolls and artifacts. Inspired by Stein, other explorers, treasure hunters and scholars flocked over. Several expeditions took place over the course of many years, going largely unnoticed by the government. Sadly, it was common for explorers to take valuable artifacts, with whole chunks of the wall being taken away from the original site. Textual and artistic material from Dunhuang can now be found scattered all over the globe, far away from the original site. Interestingly, in 1921, roughly 500 Bolsheviks were detained for 5 months and jailed by the Chinese government in the caves. The marks from the smoke of their fires and graffiti can still be found on the walls today.

Luckily, before further damage could be done, the rising popularity of the caves led it to be noticed around the world and further investigation was undertaken. One of the most notable finds was Cave 17, also known as the Library Cave, which contained an estimated number of forty thousand manuscripts, scrolls, booklets, and paintings. Consisting of



contracts, ledgers, and official files, they provide a realistic image of the religion and literature at the time. Further, though the documents were stored by Buddhist monks, they show many religious and cultural influences. Not only were these works written in ancient Chinese, but also a variety of rare ancient languages such as Tibetan, Sanskrit, and Uyghur. Due to the diverse documented languages and artistic styles, historians refer to the caves as a melting pot of cultures, having experienced various religious, cultural, and intellectual influences. In particular, they show the cultural, political, and artistic exchanges between China, Central Asia, and India. These written works provide an invaluable insight into the complex history of the old world.

The Mogao Grottoes were hailed as one of the century's greatest archeological finds with a total of approximately 4,500 cultural relics found. In 1987, it was designated as a UNESCO world heritage site, attracting further global attention. 10 years later in 1997, state-run Dunhuang Research Academy partnered with Los Angeles's Getty Institute to watch over the caves. Using Cave 85, the two organizations have worked together for more than 20 years now, doing research into how to implement preservation action. This type of unified action symbolizes how even countries halfway across the world recognize the importance of the site, and are willing to collaborate to preserve such a precious gem.

Although some may view the old age of the Mogao Grottoes as a weakness, the very age is what makes it so special. Not only is it the largest and most richly decorated Buddhist art site, but also the oldest and longest-used. The drawings and literature in the Mogao Caves contribute significantly to the written history of China, which is the longest of any country in the world today (stretching back three thousand years), thanks to sites such as the Mogao Grottoes. Overall, the preservation of the grottoes connects us to the past, adding to our Chinese identity and pride.

While there are basic similarities, by focusing on different parts of Buddhist and Chinese culture, each cave presents something uniquely valuable. To give a few examples, Cave 96, behind the iconic seven-story pagoda, has two astonishingly large Buddhas, one at 35.5 meters tall. Cave 148 has a 26 meters tall reclining Buddha and showcases rare fragments of old languages such as Manichaean and Uyghur. Cave 17, the Library Cave, was where the world's earliest dated book (with an attested date of 868 CE), the Diamond Sutra, was found.

Currently, the site is the largest collection of Buddhist art on Earth, offering an authentic picture of life in a vibrant, cosmopolitan society that has almost been forgotten. As one of China's most ancient historical sites, the Mogao grottoes continue to hold immense historical significance, providing the modern-day civilization an unparalleled glimpse into medieval Western China. This is why even at approximately 2,300 kilometers from China's capital city, Beijing, thousands still pour in every day to catch a glimpse of the wonders inside.

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# The Mystical Mogao Grottoes

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With a system of close to 500 temples, and decorative ceilings and walls totalling up to 500,000 square feet, the Mogao Grottoes is known for bearing fundamental evidence toward showing the extensive history that has spanned more than 1000 years. Its diverse collection of materials makes it captivating among the numerous wonders of the world, showing the evolution of Buddhist art, while also introducing the numerous aspects of north-western China.

Located just outside of Dunhuang, Gansu province, it was excavated into a cliff face of over a mile. The native name for the caverns 莫高窟 means peerless and implies the unrivalled nature and scale of the caves. In addition, the Mogao Caves are also known as the Thousand Buddha Grottoes and store the vastest collection of Buddhist art known to humankind ranging from Architecture to Textiles and presents stories of the Buddha, Buddhist sutras, portraits of cave donors, ornamental designs, and scenes of social and commercial life.

According to legend, it was first constructed in 366 AD through the idea of a monk named Yuezuen. He was inspired to excavate the caves through his vision of a thousand Buddhas bathed in golden light at the site. Over time, the site gradually developed and expanded, as by 400 AD a monastic community had united there, creating a monument of faith. Initially, the site served as a location for meditation, but despite that, it developed to serve the public as a place of meditation and devoted to worship. Consequentially, it flourished and by the dawn of the Tang dynasty, there were a shocking number of over 1,000 caves. Then on from the 4th to 14th Century, came some of the greatest representations of Buddhist art to have ever seen the light of day, these included new creations of paintings and architecture to aid meditation and act as tools to educate and illiterate Buddhist's beliefs and stories. During the Tang dynasty, the Mogao Cave rose to become a major pivot of interchange for the Silk Road and a major religious appeal as the artists of the generation rose above and beyond creating finely detailed Buddhist narratives that used textures, colour, and realism to bring alive the visionary scenery, while at the same time, fully captivating the Chinese style with displays covering mass numbers of walls. However, after the Tang dynasty, the Silk Road fell into disuse, and by the 1400s, (and for centuries later) Mogao was forgotten as it declined in relevancy and the caves' entrances were suffocated by the sand from the Gobi Desert, then on entombed. Despite the caves being deserted, the sculptures and wall paintings in the Dunhuang caves remained remarkably well preserved, thanks in part to the desert climate and its remote location surviving not only war and despoils but also nature and neglect.

However, little did they know the Mogao Caves were to reach new heights that had been unprecedented until the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. This came with Wang Yuanlu appointing himself the guardian of the temples, as he saw the potential and limitless possibilities in the indescribable beauty of the caves and therefore raised funds to repair the statues. Unexpectedly, he found himself face to face with thousands upon thousands of scrolls crammed behind a hidden door leading to a small cave (later known as the Library cave), inside housing a trove of over 50,000 documents, of which comprised of the world's oldest book – the Diamond Sutra. Years later, he spent his time exhibiting the contents of the scrolls to officials who expressed interest in the manuscripts, regardless, fate only led him to disappointment as he was ordered to seal the sea of scrolls behind closed doors. This was due to officials raising concerns over expenses for transporting these manuscripts. It wasn't until Aurel Stein, a Hungarian-born scholar working for the British government in India and the British Museum, made it to Dunhuang in early 1907. After being given permission, Stein was able to remove 24 cases of manuscripts and five cases of artworks and relics. This made one of the richest hauls in all of archaeological history and for his accomplishments, he was knighted by the English. Following this, other countries followed in his footsteps and sought the many treasures that Stein had acquired. As a total, archaeologists unearthed more than 243 caves including living quarters, meditation cells, burial chambers, silver coins, and more.

Despite the rich history of the Mogao grottoes, the true spotlight shines upon what is housed inside the caves. Some that have had the pleasure of visiting the Mogao caves have described the murals within with the word “surreal”. Compared to the monochrome and lifelessness of the desert the murals are exuberant of colour and movement, each one distinct as they reveal their story, page by page scenery unfolds before the observer's eyes. Some may even go as far as to say that these paintings come across as three-dimensional, creating a sensation of satisfaction as the observer walks through the wall, entering the magical stories that have been kept from the world within these cave walls. Some will hear the melodic sound of the pipa being played, while others see thousands of Buddhas in every hue radiated across the grotto walls, their robes glinting with glittering gold, fully capturing the colour-saturated details of the murals. And as the light bounces off the paintings it portrayed each scenario of the painting with compelling animation highlighting the vivid

colour schemes. Some are sharp and intense while others are peaceful and dreamlike, every one prominent in their own unique way. From all angles a mesmerizing view. No matter where they turn, what faces them is only captivating as each scene is full of life and soul carrying their emotions through their experiences of the past decades. Some are sad and heart-breaking while others are filled with joy and laughter, but alas is what contributes to the story and shapes it to be what it is: a rich a fulfilling narrative.

Another mystical treasure of the Mogao caves includes the manuscripts and other materials found in a cave known as the Library cave. This treasure trove of manuscripts was mentioned above and is said to house over 50,000 pieces of materials including manuscripts, scrolls, booklets, and more. To say that these treasures were fascinating would be an understatement. Some specific materials decipher aspects of previous unknowns that have been topics of many scientists' interests. The discovery of these materials has aided those seeking out to have a clearer understanding by unveiling the clues left behind by the intellectual Tang artists. Then on revealing more pieces of a puzzle that were previously unknown. Like the many murals on the cave walls, these manuscripts and scrolls also include sacred stories and knowledge that has forever changed the course of history with evolutionary pieces that have contributed to the improvement of fields like history, religious studies, linguistics, and manuscript studies.

However, although the Library cave reveals some answers, the biggest mystery remains the reason behind why the manuscripts were placed in the cave and why the cave was sealed off. To this day many have made their own hypothesis making it a popular subject of speculation. Among the vast amount of talk and guesswork, Aural Stein suggested that that the manuscripts were "sacred waste", an explanation that found favour with later scholars including Fujieda Akira. More recently, it has also been theorized that the cave had the function of serving as a storeroom for the Buddhist library. Nevertheless, the cave may have been sealed in the first place to have it protected from armies at the advent of invasion, or more simply could have just been because it ran out of room. What the answer is we may never have the chance to know unless more evidence and resources are found to assist the journey to uncover the mysteries of this peculiar cave.

Lastly, another hidden gem of the Mogao caves includes the numerous clay sculptures exhibited at Mogao. There are about 24,000 surviving clay structures that have withstood the countless events of calamity. Many of the early clay sculptures were relatively simple and mainly of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. But though these sculptures were only early versions of many more to come, it doesn't stop it from showing off the amazing craftsmanship of the sculptors. Various techniques can be seen to have been used on the sculptures and it shows with every curl of the hair, every facial expression perfectly produced, and without a doubt is concrete evidence showing how advanced the Chinese were in terms of creating and solidifying their art styles. Their willingness to experiment, makes them stand out from the crowd, therefore playing a principal role in developing art to be what it is today— a way of conveying imaginative and conceptual ideas.

Among other notable pieces in the exhibition are the wooden sculptures of two of the four Heavenly Kings (deities that are each tasked with guarding quarters of the Buddhist universe). These two structures appear to mirror each other as both are stationed opposite each other, their feet resting on a frightening demon or hideous beast, and although the vibrant colours of the original piece have faded and erased, the poise of their physique remains, maintaining their sense of duty as they are ready to protect the universe at all costs. As divine warriors, they possess a tremendous amount of grace and agility, matching their status as protectors of the universe.

Many stories can be told about these extraordinary caves, in ancient times a cultural crossroads, today a small city with looming potential for touristic expansion. Its impact has allowed for the place to remain one of the most influential places on the planet, helping those who go to visit have a better understanding on Chinese culture and growing appreciation for Buddhist art. A visit there would undoubtedly be an unforgettable experience.

# The Takeaways from the Successful Cultural Preservation Projects of the Mogao Grottoes

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Situated in the important outpost of Dunhuang on the silk road, the Mogao Grottoes have existed and continuously expanded for more than a millennium. However, as sea routes connecting the east and west started to prop up, the silk road was considered inferior, and thus fewer travelers and traders used it. As a result, the Mogao Grottoes' became less visited and abandoned. By the time of the Yuan Dynasty, the site was essentially forgotten and fell into disrepair. Luckily, centuries later in the late Qing dynasty, Wang Yuanlu, a Chinese Taoist monk, rediscovered the caves. Today, the Mogao Grottoes are known to contain some of the most culturally important pieces of art, literature and murals that resembled the era when it once prosperous. The nearly abandoned cave system was transformed into a unique attraction and its legacy lives in the hearts of the many that visited it. What could we learn from the process and impacts of the cultural preservation that happened at the Mogao Grottoes? Furthermore, how can we apply these to similar projects?

The conservation measures taken by government to restore the Mogao Grottoes to its former glory brings us valuable knowledge in the methods of maintaining monuments. Ever since its rediscovery in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Mogao Grottoes have undergone a series of measures that aimed to bring its cultural treasures to the public. At the start, these efforts were not more that taking the paintings and manuscript inside the caves into the outer world to be exhibited in different museums. Later on, throughout the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the central government of China introduced different schemes to repair the dilapidated caves. Laws and constitutions were set up to protect the site. In 1987, the site became a UNESCO world heritage site, furthering cementing its historical prominence. Throughout the events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, active measures taken by the government to protect heritage sites is pivotal in preserving them.

Without significant government intervention, the efforts that went into protecting the caves only involved removing the relics inside them to be shown to the public in other venues, an ex-situ approach. While this approach is more cost-effective and faster in execution, it is not a universal solution to all monuments. An in-situ approach, renovating and preserving the site as a whole instead of just the few valuable artworks and books inside it is much more preferable in protecting the Mogao Grottoes. This is because the Mogao Grottoes, aside from being renowned for the vast amount of artwork and literary pieces that it contains, is also famous for its architecture and wall murals, and there is no better way than renovating the original site to preserve architecture. However, in-situ operations usually involve large scale construction work. This means that only the government can carry out such projects. In essence, without government actions, the incredible architecture of the Mogao Grottoes could never be preserved, decreasing its cultural and historical value. Hence, governments all around the world have the responsibility to carry out in-situ operations to conserve monuments such that citizens are able to visit most if not all historic sites.

The Mogao Grottoes are the perfect example to show that laws can effectively prevent ancient buildings from sustaining further damage. Before relevant laws were set up, the Mogao Grottoes were vandalized by soldiers and explorers that went into them. However, after laws were passed to protect the caves in the 1960s, not only did the public awareness Mogao Grottoes rise, but the historical value of the monument was also protected by law. As a result, the Mogao Grottoes was spared from the widespread destruction of religious locations during the Cultural Revolution in mainland China. Hence, it can be seen that regulations surrounding historical sites is an effective way to prevent them from being damaged in unwanted ways.

Unfortunately, the journey in preserving Mogao Grottoes was not all sunshine and rainbow, particularly in the early days of its rediscovery due to a lack of attention by the government. The Mogao Caves were rediscovered in 1900. However, due to the political instability of the Qing dynasty at the time, the Qing government showed little interest in preserving the site. Without adequate laws and active restoration effort, the fate of the site was left in the hands of the civilians. In order to gain funds for restoring the caves, Wang Yuanlu let western explorers bring home many important artworks and manuscripts. It is estimated that around 13000 pieces of cultural relics are exhibited in the British Museum. Quite an unreasonable place for Chinese relics to be displayed at. Hence, governments must actively monitor monuments so as to prevent outsiders from harming the site by different means such as taking away important relics.

Renovating cultural relics will definitely benefit citizen's livelihoods, but in what ways does it exactly do so? Turns out, renovating historical monuments can benefit citizen's economic and cultural quality of life.

Restoring ancient sites into tourist attractions can bring massive economic growth by promoting cultural tourism. Nowadays, people look for more than pure enjoyment and fun when they go abroad. Tourists also want to learn more

about the culture and history of the countries they visit, sparking a boom in the cultural tourism industry. To capitalize on this new mode of tourism, there must be sufficient heritage sites and museums that can present cultural knowledge to tourists. Certainly, it can be argued that plainly displaying the cultural relics retrieved from a historical monument in large museums would suffice, but would that ever be as appealing as a full blown historical monument open to tourists? Owing to its cultural importance, over 2.2 million tourists went to the cave in 2019. Art and literature found inside the caves are currently exhibited in museums all over China and the international world. The restoration of the Mogao Grottoes have brought in millions of tourist into the small city of Dunhuang, rapidly growing its tourism sector. In the first half of 2021, the city of Dunhuang saw its tourism revenue soar, generating 9.25 billion USD. Tourists visiting the city not only spend money at the large attractions, they will also purchase goods from local stores, and stay at local hotels, bringing income to the respective sectors. Evidently, the heritage importance and cultural appeal of the city's historical sites have pulled in massive amounts of wealth for its citizens, improving their economic quality of life. Therefore, restoring cultural sites is more than just renovating old and run-down places, it can also be treated as an investment into the area's tourism industry, potentially sparking economic growth around it.

Aside from the economic prospects, restoring historical monuments can also increase the sense of belonging and cultural quality of life of citizens. The Mogao Grottoes contain some of the most valuable literary works, artworks, made during its time. The grottoes also contain important information about the development of Buddhism in the early days of China. By restoring the caves, citizens are able to visit them and see the site at its full glory during their holidays. Meanwhile, historians can use the information retrieved inside the caves to have clearer picture of the era. As a result, more resources that can enhance their knowledge of the Mogao Grottoes are provided to citizens. This improves their understanding about the culture and history of the city of Dunhuang as well as Buddhism. As a result, they will feel more attached to the place and have a better sense of belonging to their country. This can improve their spiritual life and cultural quality of life. Thus, restoring valuable historical monuments like the Mogao Grottoes also improves our quality of living in a non-material way by increasing our sense of belonging to our culture.

To sum up, the Mogao Grottoes perfectly exemplify the necessity, expected benefits and methods behind conserving heritage sites. No matter for huge ancient monuments like the Mogao Grottoes or small historic buildings like Mei Ho House in Hong Kong, governments should actively try to protect and conserve such sites. They should do so by setting up laws to protect the sites, constantly monitoring the condition of them and initiating crucial restoration projects when necessary. If such measures can be successfully implemented, then it is not out of the blue to see substantial economic growth in the tourism sector in the area. On top of that, it can also be expected that citizens will find themselves having a clearer cultural identity. If the takeaways from the cultural preservation process of the Mogao Grottoes had to be summed up in one sentence, it will go a little something like this: put your heart into something, it will live in the hearts of others. Weirdly enough, that also applies to everything else we do in life.

# All About the Mogao Grottoes

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The Mogao Grottoes are a collection of caves painted with art and filled with old Buddhist scrolls and books. As claimed by myth, one monk from the Northern Liang dynasty walked across the busy Hexi corridor that linked China, at the time the Northern Yuan, to places like Xinjiang and Kazakhstan. It was a business hub and a religious hub at the time, as Buddhist monks, Christian missionaries, and Islam preachers often circulate around the corridor, spreading their belief. So this Buddhist monk at the time, he saw thousands of Golden Buddhas shining inside a cave in the corridor while walking across the corridor to China, and thought that this was guidance from Buddha himself to build a temple inside the caves. It was rough at first, with only some paintings and scrolls inside showing its little relevance to Buddhists and the Hexi Corridor. But, over time, things kind of changed. More and more Buddhist monks, seeing such a cave temple, also wanted to devote time and effort to the cave temple. And so, even though Zhongyuan was facing many changes politically, as the Northern Liang Dynasty fell, Zhongyuan was never united perfectly until the Northern Wei Dynasty, and it was pure chaos and anarchy, but these political events never seem to be bothered by monks from different corners of China.

Over time, these monks devoted lots of effort and time into remodeling the caves. The small cave temple, once unknown by many, became a structured and complex cave system that went through dugout caves and caves, with murals dating from the later Western Wei, Northern Zhou, and the Sui. These murals show the change of artistic styles. Like in the Northern Liang dynasty, the cave was largely based for monks who travelled nearby, so the murals weren't big and had a more Indian and Central Asian style in them, but soon developed into a more pro-Chinese vivid and stylish art style, known as the Dunhuang Art Style. But, in the Northern Zhou dynasty, murals started to get bigger and bigger over time, with more vivid colours and the new Dunhuang art style in use. The size of these murals skyrocketed throughout the years. In early days, they were on the walls only, but later on, those murals expanded to the roof, and literally, to the ceiling of such caves. Cave 45 is a highlighted example of such a feature.

But murals aren't just the only highlights of the Grottoes. In 1900, a Chinese Taoist, who was digging in the cave system to build a Taoist temple there, found a sealed cave in which he saw a hoard of Buddhist manuscripts, paintings, and many more. The cave, called Cave 17, was extraordinary. It was called the Library Cave for its large stock of Buddhist manuscripts and paintings. Although British archaeologists like Paul Pelliot stole many precious manuscripts from the library and was called a thief by scholars no matter from old Nationalist China to the present Communist China, it did expand Buddhism as a whole, with ancient stories and hand copied scriptures, showing scholars from the 20th century the beauty of Buddhism as a whole. Mud statues and textiles are the last of the cave's highlights. The mud statues mostly represent the different gods and goddesses in Buddhism, and the largest Buddha inside, was constructed during the Tang dynasty, commissioned by Wu Zetian herself, along with a number of Buddhist monasteries nearby. The Mogao Grottoes have been remodeled and rebuilt all the time, with the Tang Buddha destroyed and rebuilt several times. Most of the larger mud statues represent the Buddha, with statues of attendants next to the Buddha. For example, a Northern Wei Buddha may have two attendant Bodhisattvas, and throughout dynasties, the size of the attendants grows as well. There could be more Bodhisattvas, and numerous smaller statues like the heavenly kings, devas, and apsaras, accompanying the Buddha as servants. The Mogao Grottoes also has a wide collection of textiles and printed papers. The most famous of all, is the Diamond Sutra. A copy of the Diamond Sutra exists in the library, and its preciousness is immeasurable. This is because it is the earliest printed book globally, printed on 11 May 868 AD. Later, it was also renowned for being the first book in public domain due to it having the text at the end, "for universal free distribution". Textiles like clothing from the Tang with pretty tapestries like a small bird on the tapestry, makes the Cave unique as there are seldom any cave systems with such a fascinating find.

Until the 1900s, many seldom knew the Mogao Grottoes again. After the Yuan Dynasty, although some Buddhist monks lived, many of the monks that knew the secret died during the fighting between the Yuan and the Ming. It went, lost and forgotten, until the late nineteenth century, found by Western scholars who came to this land, hoping to seek glory from discovering new artifacts, and were interested in researching the Silk Road. In 1900, the Taoist we just said, found the Library Cave. Not until 1907 when Paul Pelliot came, no large discovery was made after the 1900 discovery. But after 1907, things started to go wrong. The discovery brought Dunhuang into light and glory, but also doomed it. Pelliot took many of the cave's murals and manuscripts, and since then, scholars such as Otani Kozui and Sergei L.

Oldenburg led expedition teams and took a lot of the manuscripts inside the caves, and since they saw the murals had an inner layer as well, they destroyed the murals outside just to check the inner workings of the murals. The worst expedition yet was from White Russian soldiers, who fled to Nationalist China, seeking refuge. They vandalised and damaged the Mogao Grottoes even more, significantly damaging some of the caves when they arrived. This was certainly a sad moment for Chinese archeologists, which praised Dunhuang's Mogao Grottoes a lot due to its significance in Buddhist transmission into China. This finally stopped in 1944, where it was protected just so slightly by the Research Institute of Dunhuang Art, founded in 1944, to care and protect the Mogao Grottoes. In 1956, the Mogao Grottoes, First Premier Zhou Enlai, saw great interest in the caves and vowed to protect it. And so, the caves were repaired much faster. The first large renovation after the Mogao Grottoes' destruction happened in 1941, led by painter Zhang Daqian. They spent two and a half years repairing and protecting the murals of the caves. Since then, renovation missions and projects have been made in the 20th century, as it was finally recognised by UNESCO in 1987.

Now, the Mogao Grottoes is a famous landmark and tourist attraction in modern Gansu province, for its Buddhist art and design. It is no longer a tale, a myth made-up by the older monks, and the Grottoes have come back as a famous Buddhist heritage site for all of the tourists to see, admire, and visit.



# Mogao Grottoes— The Hidden Treasure of China

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

The ancient Mogao Grottoes, the splendid ancient world,

A visit to the Mogao Grottoes, a change of our my life journey,

Following the light of Buddha, the light to the true wisdom and peace.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A well-known scholar Luo, Zhenyu, edited some of the manuscripts Pelliot which was then compiled into a book which was then published in 1909 as "Manuscripts of the Dunhuang Caves". After such a great loss, scholars in Peking(now named Beijing) finally acknowledged the value of the 'ruin'. Having worries that the remaining manuscripts might be lost again, the central government decided to start recovering the rest of the manuscripts for sending them back to Peking. However, not all the remaining manuscripts were taken to Peking, and of those retrieved, some were then stolen by treasure hunters. Rumors of caches of documents taken by local people had continued for some time, and a cache of documents hidden by Wang from the authorities was later found in the 1940s. However, this was only the start of the loss.

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

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

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

Apart from its renowned history, one of the most important aspects of the Mogao Caves is to enjoy its beauty in order to identify its preciousness. The art of Dunhuang covers more than ten major genres, including architecture, stucco sculpture, wall paintings, silk paintings, calligraphy, woodblock printing, embroidery, literature, music and dance, and popular entertainment. From the perspective of architecture, it is an example of rock-cut architecture, but unlike Longmen Grottoes and Yungang Grottoes, the local rock is a rather soft gravel conglomerate that is not suitable for either sculpture or elaborate architectural details, so it is indeed very rare but precious in China. Many of the caves originally had wooden porches or fore-temples built out from the cliff, but most of these have decayed or been lost in other ways, with only five remaining, the two earliest of which are rare surviving examples of Song dynasty wooden architecture. For the most prominent wooden building at the site, we must mention the first one built during the Tang dynasty. The compound houses the Great Buddha and was originally four storeys high, but it was repaired for at least five times, so it is no longer in its original structure. For further development, a storey was added between 874–885, and it was repaired in the Guiyijun period. In 1898, two further storeys were added during a restoration. With two further restorations carried out in the 20th century, the stunning 9-storey structure is the building we can see today .

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

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

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

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

Before the discovery in the Library Cave, original paintings on silk and paper from the Tang dynasty, an influential period in Chinese art, were indeed very rare. However, as the Library Cave was revealed, over a thousand paintings on silk, banners, and embroideries were found, which contributes more clues for historians to learn more about the lifestyle of ancient people. Though most of the paintings are anonymous, they are of high quality, especially from the Tang

dynasty. Most are sutra paintings, images of Buddha, and narrative paintings. The paintings show the features of the contemporary Chinese style of the capital Chang'an, but many also reflect Indian, Tibetan and Uighur painting styles.

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

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

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

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

# Significance of the Mogao Caves

*Marymount Secondary School, Hung, Wing See Venice – 16*

The Mogao Caves offer a significant representation of Buddhism. They have a wide collection of statues, paintings and murals that span over 1000 years of Buddhist art. As the caves are located at a strategic point along the Silk Road, the caves became tools of spreading Buddhist culture to the West. Inside the caves are murals of the Silk Road, signifying the connection between the East and West. Manuscripts were also found in the caves. The most fascinating part is of course the sophisticated Buddhist artworks that were created centuries ago such as the mural of Feitian and sculpture of the Thousand-armed Guanyin. These artworks are extremely detailed and all hand crafted. It is amazing to see these spectacular artworks as there were very limited techniques available back then, yet these artworks are in great detail and created on a large scale. The artworks are also influenced by the different cultures in different dynasties. They are the witnesses of the development of China and Buddhism, showing the world the profound history of Buddhism.

## Tourism Leaflet

*Marymount Secondary School, Lee, Sze Yue Evelyn – 16*

You may have heard of the Mogao Caves before, but what exactly is it? Follow us on the amazing journey to unveil the mystery of DunHuang, one of the most important stops of the ancient Silk Road.

Located in the Gansu province of China, famous for its Buddhist culture and heritage, the Mogao Caves, also known as the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas, is a cave-wall mural that reveals the authentic Buddhist history of China. There are 492 cave-temples ranging from nearly 9 centuries. The caves were carved by hand from 1700 years ago. Looking carefully into each detail of the characters and patterns of the cave, you will no doubt be fascinated by the artistic elements and the intelligence of the ancient Chinese. Inside the caves, you can also study the history of DunHuang, how the scroll paintings and sculptures inside the cave had changed, and have a real visual, cultural experience that surely will arouse your interest in this enchanting history of DunHuang.

Still not feeling enough of the history of the Mogao caves? Explore the boundless stretch of the desert in DunHuang. Camel riding is the way you enjoy your desert dreams. The nearly cloudless sky and sand dunes will make your trip even more unforgettable. While being here, eating camel noodles is also a must. The slurping noodles made from camel's meat will overturn your bad judgement of camels.

Today, the Mogao cave-temples of Dunhuang are a World Heritage Site. What are you waiting for for this unforgettable journey!

# Mogao Caves: Relic Filled With Mysteries

*Pui Kiu College, Au, Sik Chi Angie – 15*

China is known for its uncountable historic sites. Thousands or even millions of tourists visit places such as the Great Wall, the Forbidden City and Emperor Qin Shi Huang's Mausoleum Site every year. Not only relics about China's history such as all the dynasties in different time periods, but also the archaeological finds about one of the most commonly known religions, Buddhism. Talking about Buddhist art sites, Buddhists would definitely tell you that the most spectacular historical remains must be the Mogao Caves, also known as Thousand Buddha Grottoes or Caves of the Thousand Buddhas located in China Dun Huang. Excavated into a mile of cliff face outside Dunhuang, an oasis town at the edge of the Gobi Desert, the site's Chinese name "Mo Gao Ku" means "peerless caves". Thousands or even millions of sculptures, artwork, paintings, manuscripts, textiles from the cave have been studied by archaeologists from the past till now. Here, I am going to introduce the history, background story, and some of its memorable artworks and basically all aspects about this mysterious Mogao Grottoes.

To understand the explanation of the caves' details, we should get ourselves familiar with the cause or the background of the cave. Starting off with the history of China Buddhism. Chinese Buddhism is the largest institutionalized religion in Mainland China, also ranking the fifth religion in the most popular religion, with approximately five million members. Just in China, there is an estimation of already 185 to 250 million Chinese Buddhists. This religion is actually a Chinese form of Mahayana Buddhism which was originated in India. It had played a significant role in shaping the Chinese ancient culture in a wide variety of places, for instance, the civilization of art, literature, philosophy, medicine in China is all deeply related to Buddhism beliefs and stories. However, what makes it different from the original Buddhism in India? Well, Chinese Buddhism was influenced by other ancient China beliefs such as Confucianism, also known as Ruism and Daoism. It would be too complicated to deeply dive into its differences. But to name one of the biggest and most interesting contrast, I would say it is believed the original Buddha reached enlightenment after fasting. They believe fasting is a way to show respect to Buddhas, so it has an extremely skinny and gaunt image. While Chinese Buddhism's main goal or belief in life is to be happy, therefore it is often to see fat, laughing and smiling Buddha sculptures in China.

Back to our main topic, Caves of the Thousands Buddhas. Let me introduce its basic information first, It is located in the southeast side of Dun Huang, specifically an oasis on the Silk Road in Gan Su. The first cave was dug during AD 366 by Buddhists to have a meditation and worship area. There are different sayings about the story of how the cave was dug. The most popular story is about a Buddhist monk Le Zun. One day, while Le Zun was taking a rest in that area, he suddenly saw many golden rays shining from the sky. Then, the vision of thousands of Buddhas appeared. Le Zun believed this place must have some special meanings to the Buddhas, this had inspired him to find people to help building a cave here. Later on, another monk named Fa Liang joined him, and built the second cave. Since then, the caves became an area of a community of Buddhists from the southeast to have meditation gatherings. The scale of the caves developed rapidly. Royal family members from Northern Wei and Northern Zhou constructed many caves too. People donated money to build the caves of good luck. By the Tang dynasty, there were already over 1000 caves built in that area. The cave also became serving as a shrine and Buddhists all over China started painting the caves and contributed to the caves as a sign of respect. However, when it comes to the Yuan and Ming dynasty, various of sea trading routes were developed, the cave's importance and influence declined as the Silk Road wasn't used as frequently as before and even completely abandoned shortly after. So, the Mogao caves were abandoned by people and deserted for a period of time.

Hold on, if the caves were already forgotten by people during the 11th century, how can we still visit and see studies about the grottos in the modern times now? This leads to the second major topic I'm going to discuss about, the discovery and revival of the Mogao Caves. Between the late 19th and early 20th century, western explorers started show an interest about the ancient Silk Road and the abandoned cities, historic sites in China, especially the areas among Dun Huang. However, the biggest discovery was found by a Chinese Taoist Wang Yan Lu. He tried to raise funds for the reparation of the cave. In 1907, Wang's discovery gained the interest of a group of British and Indian people who was on an archaeological expedition in that area. More and more foreigners visited the caves, but as an aftermath of letting the public to visit the caves, unfortunately, a lot of manuscripts were taken and till now we still can't have a complete tracking of them. Some of them are not even in China. In 1941, Chinese painter Zhang Da Qian arrived at the caves with a group of assistants and stayed for two and a half years to repair and copy the murals. People started to participate in repairing and study about the cultural relics, which has stopped the wide spreading damage and this is why the caves

are still kept in a relatively good condition till now. The Mogao Caves was named to be one of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 1987, and from 1988 to 1995, there were further 248 caves discovered. Till now, the conservation of the caves and research are still going on.

What about now? How is the situation of the caves in the modern century? Are they damaged? Are they being studied by historians all over the globe? Or are they closed to the public to prevent any more damage? The China government developed the Mogao Caves into an informative tourist attraction in starting in 2014. This have allowed people from all around the world to get a chance to see this spectacular heritage with their own eyes. Today, with 492 grottoes, the Mogao Caves also contains some 2,100 coloured statues and 45,000 square meters of murals, it is open for the public to visit. Tourists can purchase tickets and there will be guide with different languages available for leading them to admire the historical tradition and culture of Chinese Buddhism without having the risk of damaging the heritage. One way it helps boost China's tourism at Dun Huang, it also allows more people to learn about ancient Chinese Buddhism.

Now we've acknowledged about the background stories and situations of the Mogao Caves during different time periods, but what's actually so fascinating inside the caves that hundreds of tourists visit Gan Su every year just to check it out? That the China government was willing to put so much capital in rebuilding and conserving the relics? Introducing what's actually inside the caves, let's start off by the Library cave, which is one of most well known caves. The Library Cave was named after Wang Yuan Lu's discovery of Cave 17. It is located off the cave 16 entrance and was built as a memorial tomb for a local monk named Hong Bian who died in year 862. Hong Bian, a member of a wealthy family, was in charge of building cave 16. The Library Cave may have served as his refuge during his lifetime. A vast number of manuscripts, which belonged in date from year 406 to 1002, were discovered in the cave. They were stacked in tightly packed layers of scroll bundles. Talking about its cultural value, the cave is fully filled with manuscripts, scrolls, pamphlets, and paintings on silk. Between the 9th and 10th century, Buddhist monks from the Tang and Song dynasties built the cave, then filled it with ancient literature about topics such as religion, philosophy, history, folk music and dance.

Now, I would like to talk about different forms of Buddhist art inside the cave one by one. I will start with mentioning the Buddhism themed murals inside the Mogao caves. By definition, murals refer to all kinds of artwork done on wall. There are over 490,000 square feet of murals inside all the Mogao caves, and the most fully painted caves even have artworks covering the ceiling and all over the walls. The Buddhist arts inside the cave are even called "Gem in the world's history of art" by people internationally. Early murals' styles from the caves were influenced from India and Central Asia in terms of both content and painting techniques. For instance, the faces of the characters in the paintings not only have the distinguishing features of "foreigners," but they also have rich tones to create a 3D image, which is an art style and technique usually seen in Indian and Western countries but not in China. Furthermore, the figures' clothing in such murals are relatively foreign styled, with some of them being half-naked, which is rarely seen in traditional Chinese art, as the ancient China society was less open-minded compared to western countries. The murals' painting style evolved throughout the years, as the amount of traditional Chinese painting techniques started increase and replace the foreign styles. Perhaps, the particular reason of this circumstance is because more Chinese artists were hired for painting the caves, but no one knows for sure and it remains a mystery till now. The content developed and changed over time as well. Instead of religious imagery and stories, which were occasionally romanticized, murals began to be on a more realistic style that represented the citizens' daily life, such as working in the fields, hunting for food, farming, celebrating ancient Chinese festivals and so on. Moreover, during the Tang dynasty, the people in the paintings became more well-dressed and also chubbier, fitting the common beauty standards during that period of time. They were seen playing traditional instruments like the Chinese lute, and pipa. To conclude, the characteristics of Mogao cave murals I introduced above, from the artworks, we can tell the changes of history in terms of beauty standards, painting styles. No wonder it is called "the treasure house of ancient art" worldwide.

To continue, I've mentioned the word manuscript plenty of times above, the manuscripts from the Mogao caves are also worth introducing. The definition of a manuscript is a document, or a book written by hand rather than typed or printed. It's possible that up to 50,000 manuscripts were held there, making it one of the largest treasure troves of historic texts ever discovered. While the majority of the records are in Chinese, there are also documents in Tibetan, Uighur, Sanskrit, and Sogdian, as well as the then-unknown Khotanese. Manuscripts varying from the Christian Jingjiao Documents to the Dunhuang Go Manual and ancient music scores, as well as a representation of the Chinese astronomy Dunhuang map, are among the scrolls. These scrolls capture the development of Buddhism in China, as well as the political and cultural life of the time. These scrolls capture the development of Buddhism in China, as well as the political and cultural life of the time, as well as ordinary affairs, providing a rare view into the lives of regular people

during these periods. Following the aftermath of this discovery, the manuscripts were spreaded all across the world and a large number of them are still missing till now. However, some manuscripts were translated to different languages and being sent to China's museums, so the historical value from the caves' documents got to be kept and studied by archaeologists.

Moving to the art that's way more realistic and spectacular, another interesting artwork that is worth for seeing in the Mogao caves are the sculptures. There are around 2,400 clay sculptures that have remained. These were built on a wooden frame and padded with reed before being modelled in clay plaster and painted. Early sculptures were based on Indian and Central Asian models, including some in the Gandhara Greco-Indian style. The sculptures gradually became more eastern styled as they included more Chinese influences, such as Maitreya Buddha in cave 275 from Northern Liang, one of the earliest caves. One interesting story is that because one of the most gigantic and significant Buddhas from the Tibetan periods were partly destroyed in an earthquake, it has been repaired and rebuilt several times by different professionals all around the world. Therefore, its dress, colour, and motions have all been altered, with just the head retaining its original Early Tang characteristic. It is now located in the National Art Museum of China, Beijing.

Now let's move on to the painting on silk and paper from the Mogao cave. Most paintings from China were only found from the Tang dynasty, which is an influential period of Chinese artworks. However, after the discovery of the Library cave I mentioned earlier, over a thousand paintings on silk, banners, and embroideries were found. The majority of the paintings are nameless, but many are in excellent quality, particularly those from the Tang dynasty. Sutra paintings, Buddha images, and narrative paintings make up the majority of the collection. Many of the paintings represent Indian, Tibetan, and Uighur painting techniques, as well as the capital Chang An's contemporary Chinese style. Single figures are the most common, and most paintings were most likely presented by an individual, who is frequently depicted on a small size. By the 10th century, the donor figures' costume has become noticeably more magnificent. While about the textiles discovered in the cave, silk banners, altar hangings, manuscript wrappings, and monks' clothing are among the items discovered in the Library Cave. As a symbol of humility, monks would wear garments made up of a patchwork of different bits of cloth.

The contribution of the Mogao caves made to the research of ancient eastern history is uncountable and remarkable. From the heritage in the caves like paintings, sculptures, murals, we can learn about the transitions of history between centuries. Not only it has recorded the cultural changes in China, but also the religious influence from eastern countries, and even the fact that western people got in contact with the cave and developed the trade routes and cultural exchange across the globe. The Chinese government decided to conserve the artifacts, putting them in museums for better storage and also developing the caves into a tourist attraction and a landmark in Dun Huang. People get to understand the history behind the caves with the help of local guides and explanations in the museum. It also helps spreading the Chinese ancient culture and Buddhism worldwide. I hope the information above have helped you to have a deeper dive into this topic.



# The Only Remaining Civilized Cave System in China?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Mogao Caves system is built on a hill, where it is just south east of the existing city, Dunhuang. The Mingsha Mountain was a preferable location for the caves to be built. As I have just said, the Silk Road was an essential

economic trading node that was significant to the development of the Chinese and the exchange in culture and trade. With the population and trade value in the Silk Road being skyrocketed, the cave system is built in the best location in order to facilitate the nearby citizens and the Westerners to bargain and sell their own religions to the others.

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

For ticket A owners, only eight caves would be visited, one of the most famous caves, the Library Cave, which I will introduce later, as well as Cave 96 and Cave 148. Others will be rotated regularly and are random every time. In Cave 96, we can see the 35.5 tall Buddha, which I have explained in the previous section. While inside Cave 148, a smaller but still enormous Buddha statue with a height of 26m would be closely observed and appreciated by the visitors there. For ticket B owners, the tour is much shorter but grants you more freedom to view around the caves, yet only 4 caves will be available for visitors to enjoy. Overall, ticket A will be more useful and enjoyable for tourists to purchase and ticket B would be for those who are in a rush and have a great understanding of the Chinese language. Please be noted that photography is prohibited inside the caves, poor weather conditions such as rain, snow, sand storm or hail would cause the caves to close in order to protect the environment and the caves.

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

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

With this being said, the historical value of the Mogao Grottoes should not be overseen and ignored. Being one of the many outstanding ancient ruins that China owns, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural

Organizations have always considered such wonders from mankind in the past to be one of their most valuable and favoured sites for researching and investigating. The Mogao Caves is therefore categorized in the field of world heritage and hundreds of millions of dollars are used in protecting and maintaining it in its best state. This brings up a question, why are the Mogao Caves worth much of our and the world's attention?

To answer this, we can view this question in many ways, one of them being the historical value behind the build. The cave system is estimated to be built during the

dynasty of Sui, around the time of the 6th century AD. It is surprising how the caves have kept their appearance with almost a thousand years of abandonment, as well as their contents. UNESCO has always considered the long lasting history of the grottoes and decided to make them some of the most impressive world heritage in the world.

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

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

# The Treasure of the Mogao Grottoes

*Pui Kiu College, Lau, Sik Nga Lucina – 16*

Thousand Buddha Grottoes or Caves of the Thousand Buddhas, form a system of 500 temples 25 km southeast of the center of Dunhuang, an oasis located at religious and cultural intersections on the Silk Road, in Gansu province, China. The caves also are known as the Dunhuang Caves; however, this term is also used as a united term to include other Buddhist cave sites in and around the Dunhuang area, such as the Western Thousand Buddha Caves, Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves, Yulin Caves, and Five Temple Caves. The caves contain some of the finest instances of Buddhist art spanning 1,000 years. The first caves were dug out in 366 AD as places for Buddhist meditation and adoration. The Mogao Caves are the best known of the Chinese Buddhist grottoes and, along with Longmen Grottoes and Yungang Grottoes, are one of the three famous historical Buddhist sculptural sites of China.

In the 1900s, local and transnational scholar-explorers rediscovered the caves. They gradually unlocked its breathtaking mysteries. There were hundreds of grottoes including some of the world's excellent portraits, statues, and literature—including the oldest dated, printed book in the world. It was like a passage to a lost realm in the past.

On July 10, the North Minutes Evening Post published an article that some archeologists have discovered some new research on the Mogao Cave, and they believe that the Mogao Grottoes are more ancient than what we are now expected to be. In this post, we'll explain what has reportedly happened, the history of the Mogao Grottoes, and provide some tips for traveling to the Mogao Grottoes.

On June 09, archeologists found a dead body in the library cave of Mogao Grottoes. After further research, they confirmed that the dead body belong to Liu Xi, the final emperor of the Xiongnu-led Chinese Han Zhao dynasty, one of the dominions of the sixteen kingdoms on July 09. It is believed that it is the most ancient dead body that is found in the world.

Liu Xi was Liu Yao's son by his first Empress Yang Xianrong. After he became emperor in 318 AD following Jin Zhun's coup against the emperor Liu Can, he created her empress in 319 AD and gave Liu Xi crown prince. However, She died in 322 AD.

Following to her death, a succession question came about. Liu Xi's older brother Liu Yin, Liu Yao's prior heir apparent, whom Liu Yao had assumed to have been killed in Jin Zhun's coup, had escaped but was taken as a slave by the Heiniyuju tribe. In 323 AD, Liu Yin revealed his identity to the chief of the tribe, who promptly delivered him back to his father. Liu Yao considered replacing Liu Xi with Liu Yin since Liu Yin was previously his heir, but Liu Yin's uncle Bu Tai and another official Han Guang spoke against it, and Liu Yin himself personally declined to replace Liu Xi. Liu Yao let Liu Xi remain, crown prince while granting Liu Yin special honors, including requiring Liu Xi to yield to Liu Yin as an older brother in ceremonies, rather than for Liu Yin to yield to Liu Xi as the crown prince.

Around the new year of 329 AD, Liu Yao was captured in battle by Later Zhao forces. Liu Xi became effectively acting emperor, and after consulting with Liu Yin, he decided to withdraw from the capital Chang'an west to Shanggui, the capital of the mountainous Qin Province, considered more easily defensible. However, the withdrawal caused a panic, and all Han Zhao generals abandoned their positions and fled to Qin Province as well, easily yielding most of the remaining Han Zhao territory to Later Zhao.

In fall 329 AD, Han Zhao forces, under Liu Yin's command, tried to recapture Chang'an. Initially, he had some successes and recaptured much of the territory lost to Later Zhao. However, as he besieged Chang'an, the Later Zhao general Shi Hu arrived and defeated him. Liu Yin retreated toward Shanggui, and Shi Hu trailed him and defeated him again, capturing Shanggui. He forcibly relocated all other officials and the large clans of Qin and Yong Provinces to the Later Zhao capital Xiangguo, and massacred, in Luoyang, the members of the Xiongnu nobility. Han Zhao came to an end. He killed Liu Yin, along with all Han Zhao princes and high-level officials and generals, while Liu Xi was escaped before the defeated. No one knows where Liu Xi had been, and no one knows how Liu Xi is just before its dead body is found.

Some believe that Liu Xi tried to escape to Mogao Grottoes but failed, leading to his death. Nevertheless, some archeologists believe that Liu Xi had successfully escaped to Mogao Grottoes and spent a wonderful time there. But no one knows the truth and it is open to question.

Mogao Grottoes was known to be built in the period of the Sixteen Kingdoms. In the second year of Jianyuan of the Qin Dynasty, a monk passed by this mountain and suddenly saw the golden light shine, so he dug the first cave in the rock wall. Since then, Zen Masters have continued to build caves here for meditation. They are called "Mogao Caves", which means "high places in the desert."

Williston Ho Pak Kiu, the head archeologist of the Mogao Grottoes research team, believed that there is more secret that is waiting for them to find out. "Mogao Grottoes has a history of more than two thousand years. Although we have already found many paintings and sculptures, we are sure that there are many new things waiting for us for further research." Liu Xi is the first dead body found in Mogao Grottoes, it is believed that there will be more dead bodies being found, and more stories behind history will surface.

During the Northern Wei, Western Wei, and Northern Zhou Dynasties, the rulers believed in Buddhism, and the construction of grottoes was supported by princes and nobles and developed rapidly. During the Sui and Tang Dynasties, with the prosperity of the Silk Road, Mogao Grottoes flourished, and there were more than a thousand caves in Wu Zetian. After the Anshi Rebellion, Dunhuang was successively occupied by Tubo and Guiyi troops, but the sculpture activities were not greatly affected. The Mogao Grottoes during the Uighur period developed to the largest peak in history. The famous or clear and complete portraits and Buddhist sculptures are seen so far were restored and newly built during this period. In the Northern Song, Xixia, and Yuan dynasties, Mogao Grottoes gradually declined, and only the former dynasty caves were rebuilt, with very few newly built caves. After the Yuan Dynasty, along with the abandonment of the Silk Road, the construction of Mogao Grottoes was stopped and gradually disappeared from the world's sight. It wasn't until forty years after Emperor Kangxi of the Qing Dynasty that people noticed this place again. However, in modern times, the Mogao Grottoes have suffered many man-made damages, a large number of cultural relics have been lost, and their integrity has been severely damaged. In modern times, people usually call it the "Thousand-Buddha Cave".

There are 735 caves from the Northern Wei Dynasty to the Yuan Dynasty at Mogao Grottoes, which are divided into north and south areas. The southern part is the main body of the Mogao Grottoes. It is a place for monks to engage in religious activities. There are 487 caves, all with murals or statues. There are 248 caves in the north area, of which only 5 have frescoes or statues, while the others are places where monks practice, live, and bury them after death. There are tukang, stove, Kang, flue, alcove, table lamp, and other living facilities. There are a total of 492 caves in the two districts with murals and statues, including 45,000 square meters of murals, 2,415 clay sculptures, 5 wooden cliffs in the Tang and Song Dynasties, and thousands of lotus pillars and floor tiles.

Dunhuang was established as a frontier garrison outpost by the Han Dynasty Emperor Wudi to protect against the Xiongnu in 111 BC. It also became an important gateway to the West, a center of commerce along the Silk Road, as well as a meeting place of various people and religions such as Buddhism.

The construction of the Mogao Caves near Dunhuang is generally taken to have begun sometime in the fourth century AD. According to a book written during the reign of Tang Empress Wu, Fokan Ji by Li Junxiu, a Buddhist monk named Lè Zūn had a vision of a thousand Buddhas bathed in golden light at the site in 366 AD, inspiring him to build a cave here. The story is also found in other sources, such as in inscriptions on a stele in cave 332; an earlier date of 353 however was given in another document, Shazhou Tujing. He was later joined by a second monk Faliang, and the site gradually grew, by the time of the Northern Liang a small community of monks had formed at the site. The caves initially served only as a place of meditation for hermit monks but developed to serve the monasteries that sprang up nearby. Members of the ruling family of Northern Wei and Northern Zhou constructed many caves here, and it flourished in the short-lived Sui Dynasty. By the Tang Dynasty, the number of caves had reached over a thousand.

By the Sui and Tang dynasties, Mogao Caves had become a place of worship and pilgrimage for the public. From the 4th until the 14th century, caves were constructed by monks to serve as shrines with funds from donors. These caves were elaborately painted, the cave paintings and architecture serving as aids to meditation, as visual representations of the quest

for enlightenment, as mnemonic devices, and as teaching tools to inform those illiterate about Buddhist beliefs and stories. The major caves were sponsored by patrons such as important clergy, the local ruling elite, foreign dignitaries, as well as Chinese emperors. Other caves may have been funded by merchants, military officers, and other local people such as women's groups.

During the Tang Dynasty, Dunhuang became the main hub of commerce of the Silk Road and a major religious center. A large number of the caves were constructed at Mogao during this era, including the two large statues of Buddha at the site, the largest one constructed in 695 following an edict a year earlier by Tang Empress Wu Zetian to build giant statues across the country. The site escaped the persecution of Buddhists ordered by Emperor Wuzong in 845 as it was then under Tibetan control. As a frontier town, Dunhuang had been occupied at various times by other non-Han Chinese people.

After the Tang Dynasty, the site went into a gradual decline, and construction of new caves ceased entirely after the Yuan Dynasty. By then Islam had conquered much of Central Asia, and the Silk Road declined in importance when trading via sea-routes began to dominate Chinese trade with the outside world. During the Ming Dynasty, the Silk Road was finally officially abandoned, and Dunhuang slowly became depopulated and largely forgotten by the outside world. Most of the Mogao caves were abandoned; the site, however, was still a place of pilgrimage and was used as a place of worship by local people at the beginning of the twentieth century when there was renewed interest in the site.

There are 735 caves from the Northern Wei Dynasty to the Yuan Dynasty at Mogao Grottoes, which are divided into north and south areas. The southern part is the main body of the Mogao Grottoes. It is a place for monks to engage in religious activities. There are 487 caves, all with murals or statues. There are 248 caves in the north area, of which only 5 have frescoes or statues, while the others are places where monks practice, live, and bury them after death. There are *tukang*, stove *Kang*, flue, alcove, table lamp, and other living facilities. There are a total of 492 caves in the two districts with murals and statues, including 45,000 square meters of murals, 2,415 clay sculptures, 5 wooden cliffs in the Tang and Song Dynasties, and thousands of lotus pillars and floor tiles. The Mogao Grottoes scenic spot consists of two parts: Mogao Grottoes Digital Exhibition Center and Mogao Grottoes. The Mogao Grottoes Digital Exhibition Center will show short films about Mogao Grottoes. The grotto has been excavated for thousands of years, and it has a large number of murals, grottoes, cultural relics, etc. It is a world-famous Buddhist art resort. The artistic characteristics of Gaokuo are mainly manifested in the ingenious combination of architecture, statues, and Dunhuang murals, which vividly and harmoniously express the artistic styles of multiple dynasties. Currently, there are more than 40 caves open to the public.

I have been to Mogao Grottoes once, in a hot August. My advice is to watch the two digital-themed movies in the digital center, then take the shuttle bus in the scenic area to enter the cave. "A Thousand Years of Mogao" and the dome film "Dream Buddha Palace", both introduce the thousand-year history and the splendid culture of Mogao Grottoes. Thousand-year of history is all concentrated in hundreds of caves. The normal ticket is to provide eight caves, three of which are must-sees, and the other five are randomly selected by the tour guide. Groups of 20-30 people are equipped with full-time guides. Listening to the tour guide telling me the stories that I have never known before, and admiring the superb skills, the murals are too wonderful to be forgotten for a long time. To inherit and protect, Mogao Grottoes cannot take photos with a flashlight, and everyone is very conscious about it. In the exhibition center not far away, several cave paintings have been copied to make them look clearer. It is amazing to keep them for such a long time. After the normal tour, the instructor brought us to the souvenir bookstore in the library cave. Next to the Library cave, you can visit some historical pieces of information in the art gallery. Also, there are two special cave visits daily, 12:00 and 14:30. There are 8 special caves in total, the ticket price is 200 per person per cave. Each field can visit four caves. These special caves preserve more complete or special with higher historical value, in addition, the explainer will speak will more detailed information.

I have chosen cave 45 for my further destination, which is indeed better preserved. At that time, the tour guide told us that we should walk gently into each cave with a pious heart. When I walked into the cave, I was shocked at that moment, seeing the extremely exquisite murals on each wall the characters are lifelike, the colors are colorful, the soft posture of each statue, and the smile at the corners of the mouth are so faint and quiet, and there are the caves. The top of the is also decorated to be extremely gorgeous as if seeing the craftsman of a thousand years ago with the most religious heart, carefully portraying the holiest and most beautiful yearning in their heart.

In addition, there are several one-to-one re-enactment caves in the research institute to the direction of the shuttle bus. Several special caves have re-enactment versions here, but most of them are lonely because of the lack of commentators.

It is hoped that Mogao Grottoes is a tremendous place for all the tourists that are planning or already visit there. The paintings which are gorgeous and glamorous, the sculptures which are stunning and desirable, and other attractive cave and cultural relics. By giving some advice of the Mogao Grottoes visiting from my own experience, I wish that you all have an incredible visiting in there, which is fascinating and impressive.

Mogao Grottoes, our treasure of history, should be truly protected and cured. Due to the break out of Liu Xi's dead body in the news recently, we can believe that there will be more painting, sculptures, and even dead bodies will be found in the future and more history stories behind them will float on the surface. Protecting cultural relics play an important role in studying national culture and ensuring the continuity of a nation's culture. At the same time, the protection of cultural relics can also enhance the identity of the people of the nation with their own culture, enhance national pride, and improve cohesion. The protection and management of cultural relics and scientific research are of great significance for people to understand their history and creative power, reveal the objective laws of the development of human society, and recognize and promote the development of contemporary and future society. Conservation management and scientific research are interrelated, mutually reinforcing, and complementary, and are a systematic and comprehensive science. Cultural relics are relics and relics of historical, artistic, and scientific value leftover by human beings in social activities. It is a precious historical and cultural heritage of mankind. Therefore, we should protect the cultural heritage, especially the ones which are containing a large number of historical stories. To conserve them, we should be avoiding to touch or even damaging the ancestry. Also, many heritage cannot use flashlights or even the blue light from their phones, so please regulate the rule in the destination. Although it is very difficult to change a group of people to protect the monuments, the accumulation of small amounts can make a big difference. As long as everyone makes small changes, it can make a big impact. So let's start protecting our heritage by making small differences.

# The Mogao Caves

*Pui Kiu College, Men, Ruihan – 14*

## Brief Introduction

Mogao Caves (Caves of the Thousand Buddhas), form a system of 500 temples 25 km (16 miles) southeast of the center of Dunhuang, an oasis located at a religious and cultural crossroads on the Silk Road, in Gansu province, China. The caves may also be known as the Dunhuang Caves.

The Mogao Caves are the best known of the Chinese Buddhist grottoes and, along with Longmen Grottoes and Yungang Grottoes, are one of the three famous ancient Buddhist sculptural sites of China.

Mogao cave has a large significance to China, it's like an oasis in Wang Wei's Poem "Big desert lonely smoke straight, Long River Setting Sun Round." It's a spring located in blown yellow sand and ruins of culture in western China. It is a tear, slowly flowing in a large scaled desert, have been recording the history of China for thousands of years.

## History

In 111 BC, Emperor Wudi of the Han Dynasty erected Dunhuang as a frontier garrison outpost to protect against the Xiongnu. It also served as a major gateway to the West, a commercial hub along the Silk Road, and a gathering point for people of diverse cultures and beliefs, including Buddhism.

Mogao Caves had become a public place of prayer and pilgrimage during the Sui and Tang dynasties. Monks built caves to use as shrines with cash from benefactors from the fourth through the fourteenth centuries. The cave paintings and architecture served as aids to meditation, visual representations of the journey for enlightenment, mnemonic devices, and teaching tools to tell individuals who were illiterate about Buddhist ideas and stories. Important clergy, local ruling class, foreign guests, and Chinese emperors were among the sponsors of the great caves. Merchants and military officers, and other local people such as women's groups, may have contributed to the construction of other caverns.

Mogao Caves is a vast grotto temple that combines paintings, sculpture, and architectural art, with murals serving as the primary focus and statues serving as a complement. Zen caverns, central tower caves, temple caves, central Buddhist altar caves, four-walled three-niche caves, huge statue caves, and Nirvana caves are among the grottoes found there. The caves vary in size, with the largest cave 16 measuring 268 square meters and the tiniest cave 37 measuring only a few meters. Corridors and plank paths connect the old wooden temples outside the cave, but most of them have vanished.

Western explorers became interested in the historic Silk Road and the lost towns of Central Asia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and those who traveled through Dunhuang observed the paintings, sculptures, and relics such as the Stele of Sulaiman at Mogao. The caverns include an estimated half-million square feet of religious wall artwork. However, the most significant finding was made by a Chinese Taoist called Wang Yuanlu, who had declared himself caretaker of several of these temples at the turn of the century and attempted to acquire funds to restore the sculptures.

Some of the caverns had become obstructed by sand at that time, so Wang went about cleaning it away and attempting to restore the site. Wang followed the trail of smoke from a cigarette into one of these caves on 25<sup>th</sup> June, 1900, and discovered a walled-off room behind one side of a passageway leading to a major cave. A little cave hidden behind the wall was crammed with an immense trove of manuscripts. Following an order from the governor of Gansu concerned about the cost of transporting these documents, Wang took some manuscripts to show to various officials, who expressed varying levels of interest. However, Wang re-sealed the cave in 1904 following an order from the governor of Gansu concerned about the cost of transporting these documents.

The caves were declared a specially protected historical monument by the State Council in 1961, and large-scale renovation work at Mogao began soon after. The first Premier of the People's Republic of China, Zhou Enlai, took a personal interest in the caves and sanctioned a grant to repair and protect the site; and in 1961, the Mogao Caves were declared a specially protected historical monument by the State Council, and large-scale renovation work at Mogao began soon after. During the Cultural Revolution, many religious sites were damaged, but this one was spared.

Efforts to protect and investigate the site and its contents are still underway today. In 1987, the Mogao Caves were designated



as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. A total of 248 caverns were discovered between 1988 and 1995 to the north of the 487 caves known from the early 1900s.

#### Importance to Chinese Culture

Architecture, stucco sculpture, wall paintings, silk paintings, calligraphy, woodblock printing, embroidery, literature, music and dance, and popular entertainment are all examples of Dunhuang's art.

#### Architecture

The caves are examples of rock-cut architecture, the local rock is a rather soft gravel conglomerate that is not suitable for either sculpture or elaborate architectural details.

Many of the caverns used to have wooden porches or fore-temples constructed out of the rock, but most have rotted or been lost in different ways, leaving just five standing, two of which are rare surviving examples of Song dynasty wooden architecture. The Great Buddha is housed in the site's most conspicuous wooden building, which was erected during the Tang dynasty and was originally four stories high, but it has been restored at least five times and is no longer the original construction. Between 874 and 885, a story was erected, then renovated during the Guiyijun era, and two more storeys were added in 1898 during a renovation. In the twentieth century, there were two further restorations, and the building is now a 9-storey structure.

#### Murals

Murals is another aspect which is very famous in Mogao Caves.

The cave frescoes date back a thousand years, from the 5th to the 14th centuries, and most of the early murals were repainted later in this period. The murals are extensive over an area of 46,000 square meters. The walls and ceilings of the most perfectly colored caves are decorated with paintings, and there are geometrical ornaments or floral patterns that fill the spaces not occupied by figurative images, which is the Buddha. The sculptures are also brightly painted. The murals are appreciated for the scale, richness, and artistry of their content. Buddhist subjects are most common, however some have traditional mythical subjects and portraits of patrons. These murals document the changing styles of Buddhist art in China for nearly a thousand years. The artistry of the murals reached its apogee during the Tang period, and the quality of the work dropped after the tenth century.

#### Sculptures

There are about 2400 surviving sculptures in Mogao Caves. The sculptures are majorly constructed by wood and painted with colorful pigment. It is same as other forms of art in Mogao Caves, almost all sculptures are great buddha. Chinese religious history is clearly shown in it.

The "Library Cave's" initial purpose was to serve as a shrine to the 9th-century monk Hong Bian. His portrait statue, which is unique among all surviving Chinese masterpieces, was transported to another location after the cave was locked off in the 11th century but has recently been recovered since the library was demolished. There's also a stone stele commemorating his life, and the wall behind the statue is painted with an accompanying figure; this kind of mixing of painted sculpture and wall paintings into a unified composition is prevalent at the site.

#### Geographical Characteristics

##### Location of Mogao Caves

Mogao Caves are located on the Silk Road in the western part of China (Gansu Province).

The caves are far away from the major cities in China, such as Beijing, Shanghai, etc., that located near the eastern coast (Pacific Ocean) of China.

Although it is in the western part of China, where obtains a lower economic development. Dunhuang, the city in which Mogao Cave located, is still very famous in China. Dunhuang is a significant city on the silk road. Instead of Mogao Caves, Yumen Pass and Yang Pass are the other great and enjoyable viewpoint in Dunhuang. They are the end point of Han Great Wall.

### Relief in Dunhuang

Dunhuang is located at the northern edge of Qingzang plateau, western part of Hexi Corridor. There are some oases located near Dang River. Additionally, it is surrounded by the Taklamakan Desert, which is the largest desert in China. The altitude is around 1200 meters.

### Climate in Dunhuang

Dunhuang has a mild desert climate with an annual total precipitation of 67 millimeters (2.64 in), the bulk of which falls in the summer; precipitation falls in trace quantities and evaporates fast. Summers are hot, with an average of 24.6 °C in July; the annual mean is 9.48 °C. Winters are lengthy and cold, with a 24-hour average temperature of 8.3 °C in January. The annual diurnal temperature fluctuation is 16.1 °C. The city enjoys 3,258 hours of bright sunlight yearly, with monthly percent potential sunshine ranging from 69 percent in March to 82 percent in October, making it one of the sunniest in the country.

Overall, the climate in Dunhuang can be concluded as 'very dry and full of sunlight'.

### Transportation and Tourism in Western China

As mentioned before, the economics and business centers of China are majorly located near the eastern and southern coast, Mogao Caves are far away from those large cities.

China National Highway 215 and Dunhuang Mogao International Airport serve Dunhuang.

The Dunhuang railway, also called as the Liudun Railway, was built in 2004–2006 to connect Dunhuang with the Lanzhou–Xinjiang railway's Liugou Station (in Guazhou County). The route is regularly used by passengers, with overnight trains running from Dunhuang to Lanzhou and Xi'an. Dunhuang Station is near the airport and is located northeast of town.

The railway from Dunhuang was extended south into Qinghai, linking Dunhuang to the Qingzang railway stations at Subei, Mahai, and Yinmaxia (near Golmud). On December 18, 2019, the core section of this railway opened, completing the through route.

As China is pursuing poverty alleviation policies, and the western region is gradually being developed. Traveling to the western part of China will be easier and more convenient than before, therefore tourism in the western region (including Mogao Caves) is gradually developing nowadays in a fast rate.

### The status quo in Mogao Cave

#### Tourism

Mogao Cave is opened to the public as a national park. 200 Chinese yuan per person for several caves and museums. For a long time, the number of visitors to Mogao Caves has almost reached the highest limit, and the carbon dioxide and other substances produced by the crowd have slowly changed the status and condition of the cultural relics (murals, sculptures, etc. in Mogao Caves). For cultural preservation, the Chinese government is planning to control the flow of people in it. In addition, due to the outbreak of the epidemic, it is difficult for tourists from all over the world to enter China and visit the Mogao Caves in Dunhuang. Tencent decided to cooperate with the local Dunhuang Research Institute to carry out the digitization of cultural relics. The data of cultural relics such as murals and sculptures in multiple caves are recorded through cameras and other equipment and uploaded to the Internet in 3D format by advanced image capture technology. Users can appreciate the unique sights of Mogao Caves from all over the world. As of mid-2021, the number of users of the "digital Mogao Caves" has reached about 40 million. This move can connect the cultural exchanges between China and the Western world as a cultural output of China. Also, it shows the charm of Chinese history to people in the world who are interested in China. Tencent's plan also cooperates with foreign museums to bring foreign cultural relics into China via the Internet and strengthen cultural exchanges between the two sides under the epidemic.

#### Conservation

The Japanese government helped Mogao Caves to build a semi-underground museum located opposite the ticket office in 1992. It is free to visit with tickets for Mogao Caves. The main exhibitions include the archaeological discoveries of Mogao Caves, the protection and research history of Mogao Caves, the introduction of cooperation projects with foreign research institutions, etc., the Dunhuang Grottoes Cultural Relics Exhibition Hall, exhibits the cultural relics unearthed in the Mogao Caves, and the Dunhuang Mogao Caves Exhibition units such as the creation of the Dunhuang murals, copying treasures of Dunhuang murals, painting tools used by painters in drawing caves, exquisite

ancient silk fabrics found in Mogao Caves, authentic ancient manuscripts found in Tibetan scripture caves, and Dunhuang tile art. They reflect the development history and colorful cultural relics of Mogao Caves from different sides.

In 2008, 261 million RMB was used for the conservation project. The project included protection and utilization facilities, cliff projects and roads, wind, and sand security, etc. The project was completed in 2011.

#### Conclusion

With the development and cultural exchanges in western China, more and more people are aware of the existence of Mogao Grottoes. As a pearl in the desert, it contains the cultural memory of ancient Chinese history and records the spread of Chinese culture. Hope that Mogao Caves can be well protected and Chinese culture can shine on the international stage!

# Discovering the Mogao Caves

*Pui Kiu College, Sin, Hei Ching – 15*

"Mogao Caves was like a tunnel to a lost world in the past." Scholars said. You might be wondering what are the features of the mysterious caves, in this article, I will give a brief introduction of the Mogao Caves, and let's discover the secrets of it together.

## Introduction

The Thousand Buddha Grottoes, Thousand Buddha Caves, and Dunhuang Caves are all names for the Mogao Caves. It is a 500-temple complex located 25 kilometers southeast of the city core of Dunhuang.

The Mogao Caves are the most well-known of the Chinese Buddhist grottoes, together with the Longmen and Yungang Grottoes.

They are also one of the three most well-known ancient Buddhist sculpture sites in China.

The Mogao caves are the world's biggest, wealthiest, and most well-known Buddhist art treasure house. As a result of their strategic location along the Silk Road, they have significant religious, cultural, and intellectual impacts.

The caves themselves have become a major tourist attraction, with a number of them available to the public.

## History

During the Han Dynasty, Emperor Wudi built the Mogao caverns as a boundary military post to defend against the Xiongnu. It also served as a major western entry point. It became a crossroads for the Silk Road trade as well as a gathering place for people of many nationalities and faiths, including Buddhism.

-The Mogao Caves in Dunhuang are estimated to have started to grow around the fourth century AD.

Mogao Caves became a public place of devotion and worship throughout the Sui and Tang dynasties.

From the fourth to the fourteenth centuries, monks used donations to build temple caves. For those who are unfamiliar with Buddhist ideas and stories, the cave paintings and architecture function as meditation assistance, visual representations of the path to enlightenment, memory devices, and teaching aids. Donors of the major caves included the clergy, local governing elite, foreign dignitaries, Chinese emperors, and others. Other caves may have been built with the help of merchants, military leaders, and other locals, such as women's clubs.

During the Tang Dynasty, Dunhuang became a prominent religious center as well as a major Silk Road trade hub. A vast number of caves were built at Mogao during this period, including the two gigantic Buddha statues on the site, the largest of which was built in 695 AD after Tang Empress Wu Zetian issued an edict a year earlier ordering the construction of giant statues across the country.

Because it was under Tibetan administration at the time, the site survived Emperor Wuzong's command to persecute Buddhists in 845 AD. Dunhuang had been occupied by non-Han Chinese people at various times as a frontier settlement. The location began to deteriorate during the Tang Dynasty, and fresh cave construction ended totally after the Yuan Dynasty. By then, Islam had overrun much of Central Asia, and the Silk Road began to fade in prominence as Chinese trade with the rest of the world shifted to sea routes. The Silk Road was officially abandoned during the Ming Dynasty, and Dunhuang gradually became depopulated and mostly forgotten by the outside world.

Most of the caves were neglected. However, when interest in the Mogao caves reappeared in the early twentieth century, the site remained a center of devotion and was used as a place of prayer by local people.

In 1987, the Mogao Caves were designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

A total of 248 caves were discovered between 1988 and 1995 to the north of the 487 caves known from the early 1900s.

## Legends

According to a book written during the reign of Tang Empress Wu, a Buddhist monk named Le Zun was on his way to the Western Paradise. He halted at Sanwei Mountain near Dunhuang while crossing the Gobi Desert. Then he came across a unique spring and sat down to rest after quenching his thirst with its lovely waters.

It was dusk, and the mountains began to glow as he gazed at the sunset. He immediately raised his head, and a magnificent golden Maitreya Buddha appeared in the sky. A thousand smiling Buddhas appeared out of nowhere, surrounded by winged fairies singing beautiful songs.

The scene moved Le Zun so much that he chose to stay and celebrate it. Le Zun had studied painting and sculpture so he used his knowledge to reproduce his vision.

Years later, Fa Liang, a Buddhist monk, traveled at the same location and experienced the same vision. After that, he decorated a second cave with paintings and statues depicting the holy scene. When a small community of monks had arisen at the location during Northern Liang, the place steadily grew. Originally, the caves were only used by monks as a place of meditation. However, it later became a pilgrimage spot for Buddhists, artists, government officials, and others.

Many caverns were later built here by members of the governing families of Northern Wei and Northern Zhou. Sanwei Mountain has more than 500 caves, with more than 1000 caves dug by the Tang Dynasty.

Religious books and innumerable Buddhist murals were added to the caves over the years.

Today, they house some of the most important Tang Dynasty murals, sculptures, and antiques.

## Art

A total of 4,500 important cultural relics were discovered in the Buddhist Sutra Cave in 1900, dated from 256 AD to 1002, including silk paintings, needlework, and documents in uncommon languages such as ancient Tibetan and Sanskrit. This is considered one of the greatest Oriental cultural discoveries ever made.

## Murals

The Mogao caves house the world's largest Buddhist art collection. Extensive murals representing Buddha legends, Buddhist sutras, portraits of cave donors, ornamental decorations, and scenes of social and commercial life cover the walls and ceilings of the painted caverns, which occupy almost 500,000 square feet. There are nearly 2,000 brightly painted clay sculptures of the Buddha and other figures in the caves, the tallest of which is almost 100 feet tall.

## Sculptures

The carving of the grotto began in 366 AD and lasted for about 1,000 years, according to historical data. The Mogao Grottoes include 492 well-preserved cells and caves, with murals totaling 45,000 square meters and over 2,000 colored sculptures. Their statues and murals are well-known.

Mogao Grottoes' painted clay sculptures and murals are mostly Buddhist in theme, although there are also statues of characters portraying diverse societies and cultures from various eras. They also displayed several eras' painting techniques in terms of the arrangement, character design, outline, color, and the fusion of Chinese and Western art. The painted clay figures range in size from 33 meters to 10cm in height.

## Painting on silk and papers

Art pieces on silk and paper from the Tang dynasty, an important era in Chinese art, were scarce before their discovery in the Library Cave, and the majority of the surviving pieces were reproductions done in subsequent periods. In the Library Cave, more than a thousand silk paintings, banners, and needlework were discovered, none of which appeared to

be older than the late seventh century. Most of the paintings are nameless, although many are of excellent quality, particularly those from the Tang dynasty. Sutra paintings, Buddha images, and narrative paintings make up the majority of the collection. Many of the paintings represent Indian, Tibetan, and Uighur painting techniques, as well as the city Chang'an's modern Chinese style.

#### Printed Images

The Library Cave is also significant as a reference for rare ancient pictures and writings created by woodblock printing, including the legendary Diamond Sutra, the world's oldest printed book. Other printed pictures were prepared to be displayed, with meditations and often a commitment by the religious commissioner; at least two prints were commissioned by Cao Yuanzhong, Royal Commissioner at Dunhuang in 947. The printed outline of many of the photos has been hand-colored. Multiple copies of the same block with a Buddha image can be found on several pages.

These could be equipment for cutting when sold to travelers, however, markings on certain samples reveal that they were also produced at different periods by an individual as a devotion to gain merit. It's uncertain if those people had their own blocks or had the images produced at a temple.

#### Textiles

The textiles found in the Library Cave include silk banners, altar hangings, wrappings for manuscripts, and monks' apparel. The monks normally used fabrics consisting of a patchwork of different scraps of cloth as a sign of humility; these, therefore, provide valuable insights into the various type of silk cloth and embroidery available at the time.

Silk banners were used to adorn the cliff-face at the caves during festivals, and these are painted and maybe embroidered. Valances used to decorate altars and temples had a horizontal stripe at the top, from which hung streamers made from strips of different cloths ending in a V that looked like a modern male necktie.

#### Architecture

The caverns are instances of stone architecture; the surrounding rock is a fragile gravel mixture that is unsuitable for sculptures or complex architectural elements. Several of the older caves were based on previous Buddhist rock-cut chaitya forms, which had a rectangular-shaped central pillar with sculptures in holes representing the stupa that worshipers could receive.

The rest are hall caverns with architectural inspirations from traditional Chinese and Buddhist monasteries. Such caverns might have a collapsed pyramidal top, which is occasionally painted to look like a tent, or a flattened or gabled ceiling, which mimics conventional structures. Some of the meditation caves are based on the Indian temple cave plan, with side-chambers that barely fit a single person.

From 874 to 885, a storey was erected, then renovated during the Guiyijun time, and two more storeys were built in 1898 throughout a renovation. The building was restored twice more in the twentieth century, and it is currently a nine-story building.

#### Significance

The Mogao Caves, which bear exceptional bystander to ancient China's cultures during the Sui, Tang, and Song dynasties, are strong evidence of the transformation of Buddhist art in China's northwest region, providing plenty of lively materials that illustrate different aspects of medieval politics, economics, culture, arts, religion, ethnic relations, and daily dress in western China, making them of unrivaled historical value.

Dunhuang's distinct artistic style is a result of a fusion of Han Chinese artistic tradition and styles adopted from ancient Indian and Gandharan cultures, as well as an integration of Turks, ancient Tibetans, and other Chinese ethnic minorities' arts.

The Mogao Caves, an amazing example of a Buddhist rock art sanctuary, have symbolized a one-of-a-kind artistic achievement and have played an important part in artistic interactions between China, Central Asia, and India.

The Library Cave at the Mogao Caves was founded in 1990, and the tens of thousands of manuscripts and treasures it held were deemed the world's most remarkable discovery of medieval eastern culture. This significant legacy provides an excellent source for researching ancient China's and Central Asia's complex histories.

#### Cultural heritage

The Mogao Grottoes exhibit a wide range of art forms, including building, painting, and statues. Mogao's caves represent a singular artistic triumph, both in terms of the organization of space into 492 caves on five levels and the fabrication of almost 2,000 painted sculptures and nearly 45,000 square meters of murals, many of which are classics of Chinese art. Ancient Chinese artists developed Buddhist artworks with significant local characteristics by adopting the artistic traditions of China's central and western areas and absorbing the qualities of art pieces from India, Greece, and Iran.

These pieces of art are priceless artifacts of human civilization, giving invaluable data for research into China's ancient politics, economy, culture, religion, ethnic relations, and foreign interactions. In addition, there are approximately 50,000 scriptures, papers, paintings, and weavings recorded in various dialects covering the Three Kingdoms Period (AD 220–280) through the Northern Song Dynasty (690–1127).

One of the oldest and most vivid representations of cultural exchanges along the Silk Road can be seen in Sui Dynasty Cave 302, which depicts a camel carrying a carriage typical of trade expeditions of the time. Farmers in the fields and a line of soldiers are shown in Tang Dynasty caves 23 and 156, correspondingly. The magnificent scenery of Wutai Mountain, Cave 61 of the Song Dynasty, is an early example of creative Chinese mapping. Mountains, rivers, cities, temples, roads, and caravans were all featured in it.

### Conclusion

After reading this article, I hope you will all have a better understanding of the Mogao caves. You can also take a visit to the Mogao caves and discover the secrets of the mysterious caves.

The Mogao caves are outstanding human achievements, but their conservation is an ongoing challenge due to natural threats and human endeavors. Climate change, tourism, and pollution are all threats to the Mogao caverns. To ensure the survival of these priceless sites, new technologies and ways for preserving and recording them must be developed.

# Witness of Chinese History, as well as the Artwork On The Wall —— The Mogao Caves

*Pui Kiu College, Sze, Man Chi Gigi – 15*

"This cave is really amazing. It has gone through ten dynasties in China. The art of each dynasty has its wisdom, its aesthetics, and each artwork has its own unique image. " This is how Fan Jinshi, the dean of Dunhuang Academy, described the Mogao Caves. Mogao Caves, also known as the Thousand Buddha Grottoes or Caves of the Thousand Buddhas, is the world's biggest buddhist art site. It is located in an oasis located at the Silk Road, 25km away southeast of the center of Dunhuang, in Gansu province, China. It is famous for its stunning murals and sculptures, and therefore has a reputation of "Art gallery of the world" and "museum on the wall". It is said that there are 753 caves, 45000 square metres of murals, and 2415 coloured clay sculptures in the Mogao Caves.

It is definitely reasonable to say that the Mogao Caves is a mind-blowing art. It looks like seven Chinese style houses stacked upon each other, while the highest one is smallest and lowest one is largest, which forms a trapezium shape when looking up. It is painted in grey, except for the red pillars that are supporting the roof. Its bright red colour makes it conspicuous in the muddy yellow desert, and it looks even more magnificent when viewed under the blue sky. It is not easy to imagine how people in the past could build such a spectacular building, with the level of technology in ancient times. Moreover, it is truly a miracle that the building can last till nowadays, with only some damages.

The first caves were dug out in 366 AD, around the period of Sixteen Kingdoms, by a Buddhist monk named Lè Zūn (Yuezun). It was said that he had seen the thousand Buddhas bathed in golden light at the site, inspiring him to build a cave there. The name "Mogao Caves" came from an administrative name in the Tang dynasty, where Mogao may also mean "peerless". By the Sui and Tang dynasties, Mogao Caves had become a place of worship and pilgrimage for the public, the worshippers believed that the god lived in a pure land in far west and would save the true believers, and the Mogao Caves would be the entrance to the paradise. Moreover, some businessmen and travelers would also donate money for building the Mogao Caves in order to pray for safety wherever they go.

It is not too much to say that The Mogao Caves is a witness of the Chinese Civilization. During Northern Wei and Northern Zhou, when the royal family constructed many caves, was the period that Mogao Caves started to rise up and gained fame. By the Sui and Tang Dynasty, which was also the peak of development of Mogao Caves, the number of caves had reached over thousands. In the Sui Dynasty, a large number of grottoes were carved at Mogao. The most common form of grotto dating from this dynasty is the inverted conical grotto. A typical example is the seven-layer conical tower in Grotto No 303, converted from a central tower pillar. Murals in this period were full of Chinese art style and were the most creative ones. From the development of The Mogao Caves in these periods, we can also see that Buddhism was also recognized as a formal religion in China, which setted the main religion of Chinese nowadays. However, the Tang Dynasty was the turning point of the prosperity of Mogao Caves, after the Tang Dynasty, the site started to decline. During the Five Dynasties and Song Dynasties, most of the caves were just the rebuilding or repaints of pre-dynasty caves, as well as copying the style of late Tang Dynasty, the art skills were also not as good as the Tang Dynasty, and construction of new caves ceased entirely after the Yuan Dynasty. In the Ming Dynasty, the Silk Road declined in importance and was later officially abandoned. Eventually, most of the Mogao caves were abandoned too.



As both the Sui and Tang Dynasty was the peak of development of The Mogao Caves as mentioned, it can be known that Buddhism, the major feature of the caves, was greatly welcomed in these periods, especially the Sui Dynasty, which was the golden age for Buddhism in Chinese history. Born in a Buddhist nunnery, Emperor Yang Jian, founder of the Sui Dynasty, was an enthusiastic Buddhist. He therefore made Buddhism the national religion after he united the whole country. Even though The Mogao Caves had not reached its peak at that time, still, about 5,000 temples were built, thousands of Buddhist sculptures were carved, and there were around 500,000 Buddhist monks and nuns. After his death, as his son, Emperor Yang Guang was also keen on Buddhism, development of The Mogao Caves continued. He had 1,000 copies of the Fahua Sutra published and established a school of Buddhism. As a result, the Mogao Grottoes experienced their heyday of construction during The Sui and Tang Dynasty.

The art of Dunhuang covers more than ten major genres and wall painting is one of them. As mentioned, Mogao Caves is well known for its murals, painted on the walls, ceiling, and niches. Early murals showed a strong Indian and Central Asian influence, known from the painting techniques used, but a distinct Dunhuang style began to emerge during the Northern Wei Dynasty, where Chinese elements popped up during the Western Wei period. For instance, Bodhisattvas and Avalokitesvara (Guanyin) started appearing during the Northern Zhou period, Mahayana Buddhism became the dominant form during the Sui Dynasty, and the iconography of Tantric Buddhism, such as the eleven-headed and thousand-armed Avalokitesvara, also emerged during the Tang period. Not only the elements, but also the painting techniques changed during the development of Mogao murals. After the influences from European paintings, Indian and Central Asian techniques could no longer be seen. Instead, murals in Mogao started to show techniques such as shading to achieve a three-dimensional or chiaroscuro effect.

The Mogao Caves is a kind of rock-cut architecture, even though it usually uses excavated solid rocks, but as the local rocks in Mogao are gravel conglomerate which are rather soft and not suitable for either sculpture or elaborate, most sculptures are made up of timber,

wood, and clay. Many of the early caves were developed from earlier Buddhist rock-cut chaitya styles in places such as India, while others are hall caves influenced by traditional Chinese and Buddhist temple architecture. These caves either have a truncated pyramidal ceiling to resemble a tent, or have a flat or gabled ceiling that imitates traditional buildings.

Originally, most of the caves had wooden porches or fore-temples built out from the cliff, however, most of these have decayed or been lost in other ways. There are only five of them remaining, and the two earliest of which are rare examples of Song dynasty wooden architecture that last till the present.

The library cave, which contains a lot of Dunhuang manuscripts, is significantly important for the study of Dunhuang history. It was discovered on 25 June 1900, by a Chinese Taoist named Wang Yuanlu, when he was clearing away the sand in Cave 16. While cleaning, he discovered a walled up area behind one side of a corridor leading to a main cave. The cave contained a lot of historical literature, and was named Cave 17, the Library Cave. It is said that the cave was originally used as a memorial cave for a local monk Hongbian, who was responsible for the construction of Cave 16, as there was a stone stele describing his life. There are different sayings of the reasons why it had been sealed, but the most trustable one is that the monks hurriedly hid the documents when Xi Xia invaded in 1035 or when Muslims were moving eastwards. In the library cave, bundles of scrolls, paper books and shorter texts were found. As expected, most of them were in Chinese, but there were also a large number of documents that were written in various other languages. Moreover, manuscripts found included Christian Jingjiao Documents, Dunhuang Go Manual, ancient music

scores as well as Chinese astronomy Dunhuang map. Not only manuscripts, but over a thousand paintings on silk, banners, and embroideries were also discovered in the cave. The paintings found included sutra paintings, images of Buddha, and narrative paintings, most of them related to Buddhism. The paintings, especially from the Tang Dynasty, are of a high quality and have been kept well throughout the decades.

However, as the library cave is so precious and full of historical value, it must attract some outlanders to explore as well. During the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, Western explorers began to show interest in the ancient Silk Road and the lost cities of Central Asia, and those who passed through Dunhuang noted the murals, sculptures, and artifacts in the library cave. In 1907, British archaeologist Aurel Stein negotiated with Wang Yuanlu, to allow him to take some of the manuscripts as well as the finest paintings and textiles, in exchange for a donation to Wang's restoration effort. He ended up using £130 in exchange for 7,000 complete manuscripts and 6,000 fragments, which is actually a very low price, the Dunhuang relics are a lot more valuable than that. Losses of relics had continued, in 1908, French archaeologist Paul Pelliot acquired around 10000 documents in exchange for £90, which was even a lower price. Scholars in Beijing, after seeing samples of the documents in Pelliot's possession as well as the interests from other countries on the Dunhuang relics, finally became aware of their value. Concerned that the remaining manuscripts might be lost or taken away, the Qing government appointed He Yanshen to send the remaining relics to Beijing in 1909. However, not all the remaining manuscripts were taken to Beijing, as some of them were hidden by Wang and He, and some were then stolen, as said by the local people. At last, only 8757 out of around 50000 historical relics were sent to Beijing, which is less than 20% for sure. In 1911 and 1914, some historical relics were sold to a Japanese named Otani Kozui in 1911 and a Russian named Sergei F. Oldenburg, only a very small amount of relics in the library caves were left. After losses of valuable relics, there were also damages to the library cave. From 1924 to 1939, some of the caves and murals were damaged by White Russian soldiers, American explorer Langdon Warner, and by Kuomintang soldiers.

As the library cave was almost destroyed, and people noticed the importance of it, they started to work on the protection and conservation of the cave. In 1941, Zhang Daqian, a famous painter in China and a small team of assistants stayed for two and a half years to repair and copy the murals, which is also a main reason why the library cave can be kept till nowadays. Furthermore, in 1944, an institution, the Research Institute of Dunhuang Art, was set up to protect and investigate, as well as doing some research on the site. In 1956, the first Premier of the People's Republic of China, Zhou Enlai, allocated funds to repair and look after the cave out of personal interest. In 1961, the Mogao Caves were announced to be a protected historical monument, and large-scale renovation work at Mogao started around that year too. Moreover, in 1984, Research Institute of Dunhuang Art became the Dunhuang Academy, with technological support, a Sand control project was launched, and they actively used digital technology and other technologies to strengthen protection. Last but not least, The Mogao Caves became one of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 1987. For tourism use nowadays, of the massive number of caves, only twenty of them were opened to the public. Entrance is strictly controlled as it's impossible to visit them independently. Photography is prohibited inside the caves. The Chinese Government takes a lot of protection on the caves.

To sum up, The Mogao Caves is a world heritage site that was built in 366 AD. It is famous for its stunning murals and art works as well as the spectacular architecture. It cannot be denied that it fully reflects the historical development of Chinese art and religion over a thousand years. Even though it has experienced rise and fall, damages and protections, it is still well kept in the 21st century. I sincerely hope that the fame and prosperity of The Mogao Caves can continue in the future, and its protection work can be done better and better.

# Mogao Grottoes – Enormous and Enigmatic Cave

*Pui Kiu College, Yuen, Elson – 15*

## Introduction

Have you ever been to Mogao Grottoes? It's located in Dunhuang District of Gansu Province in China, 25 km (16 mi) southeast of the center of Dunhuang. While there's more than 500 temples in the cave, which contains some age-old and magnificent buddhist art spanning for over 1000 years. Not only the archaic of the temples but also the splendid statue has attracted many tourists to come from.

## History

In the past, Buddhism was popular throughout China. Therefore, some monks created Mogao grottoes during the period of sixteen kingdoms (AC 366). Then, monks kept expanding the cave with some new paintings and statues. According to annals, during the Wu Zetian reign, there were already about thousands of caves in Mogao Grottoes. However, declination of the grottoes started in the Northern Song Dynasty. Until the Yuan Dynasty, it stopped the expansion due to the abandonment of the silk road, which also led to a decreasing amount of people going there.

## Revival & Discovery

Between the 19th century and 20th century, western explorers felt interested in ancient silk road and lost cities in china. Passing through the silk road, they found some murals, sculptures and artifacts such as the Stele of Sulaiman at Mogao. Yet, the biggest discovery was found by Wang Yuanlu, a Chinese Taoist. He discovered a wall-up area behind one side of a corridor. Enormous hoard of manuscripts was found in a small cave behind it. The discovery attracted more Western explorers to explore Mogao Grottoes. After the discovery, Luo Zhenyu edited some of the manuscripts Pelliot acquired into a volume which was then published in 1909 as "Manuscripts of the Dunhuang Caves". Since then, more and more people know about Mogao Grottoes.

## Architecture

The cave is in a Rock-cut architecture, while the local rock is a rather soft gravel conglomerate. The cut-style of the rock is the Buddhist rock-cut chaitya style due to Buddhist culture, with a square-sectioned central column, with sculpture in niches. The whole building is influenced by traditional Chinese and buddhism culture. It is a 9-storey building built with wood with flat or gabled ceiling.

## Murals

Murals stayed in the cave for over thousands of years, from the 5th century until now. The murals cover 46,000 meter square. Most of the painting was on the wall and the ceiling, with some plant decoration to fulfil the empty space without painting or statue. Indian and Central Asian influenced the painting techniques of early murals. Nevertheless, the mural started to develop its "Dunhuang Style" from the Northern Wei Dynasty. There are also thousands of small seated buddha figures in many caves, that is why people also call mogao grottoes as 'Thousand Buddha Cave'. Those figures are made by stencils, which makes the figure may be repeated. Usually celestials are depicted on the ceiling or on top of buddha, while the paintings usually depict religious themes, avadana which are parables of the doctrine of karma or jataka tales which are stories of the life of Buddha. Many early murals were also found to use painting techniques from India where shading was applied to achieve a three-dimensional or chiaroscuro effect.

## Characters in murals

There are two characters which are always shown in the murals. One of them is Avalokiteśvara (Guanyin). He is a bodhisattva who embodies the compassion of all Buddhas. He has 108 avatars; one notable avatar being Padmapāṇi, the one who holds the lotus (padma). The second character is Bodhisattvas, which represent the people who are reaching the

buddhahood. These paintings are mostly influenced by Mahayana and Sravakayana (Theravada or Hinayana). One interesting fact is that characters in the painting are commonly semi-nude, occasionally fully-nude

#### Present murals' situation

Many murals have been darkened because of the long exposure to air and light, which lead to oxidation of lead-based pigments. The darkening of the paint used in shading over time resulted in heavy outlines which is not what the painters had originally intended.

#### Sculpture

There are about 2400 clay sculptures in Mogao Cave which are surviving. They are constructed on a wood frame, filled with reed, modelled in clay stucco and finished with paint. The giant statues have a stone core. Some examples of the statues are Buddha, which is generally shown in the center. It was attended by some mythical creatures such as devas, heavenly kings etc. There are two giant statues representing Maitreya Buddha. The earlier and larger one in cave 96, at 35.5 m high. It was constructed under the edicts from Empress Wu Zetian in 695. The smaller one is 27 m tall and was constructed in 713-41. The northern larger giant buddha was damaged by the earthquake and had been repaired many times. Therefore, clothes, colors, gestures are different from the original, only the head retains the original appearance.

#### Printed Images

The library cave has provided a rare source of early images and texts by woodblock printing including the famous Diamond Sutra, the earliest printed book to survive. Several sheets contain repeated impressions of the same block with a Buddha image. Possibly it reflects stock for cutting when sold to pilgrims, but inscriptions in some examples show these were also printed out at different times by an individual as a devotion to acquire merit. It is unclear whether such people owned their own blocks, or visited a monastery to have the images printed.

#### Textiles

Different types of textiles can be discovered in Mogao cave. For instance, silk banners, altar hangings, wrappings for manuscripts, and monks' apparel (kāṣāya).

The main use of silk banners is to adorn the cliff-face at the cave when there are festivals, and these are painted and may be embroidered. In the cave, there are also valances, which are used to decorate the altar and temple with a horizontal strip at the top.

#### Transportation

Commonly, tourists go to Mogao cave from Gua Zhou.

Mogao cave is located about 70km away from Guazhou Railway station, about 1 hour by car. Tourist could first arrive Guazhou railway station by railway. Then you could choose to ride local chartered vehicles, which are commonly found in small counties, negotiate the price in advance and you may meet travel partners (only suggested for independent travelers who speak Chinese well and have a good direction, plenty of time). Instead, tourists could also travel with China discovery and enjoy private direct transfer. It will be more convenient and recommended than spending time on finding possible methods on your own.

# Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

*Pui Kiu College, Zhang, Yunqian Ozymandias – 16*

Does anyone know about Mogao grottoes? It is an ancient cave with thousands of buddhas located in Dunhuang, also known as Mogao Caves and Qian Fo Dong. Despite the great historical value it has, there are still many people do not realize how important it is, and know little about this precious site, and I want to tell people about this special place through this article. This essay examines firstly the history and the unique structure and precious art of Mogao caves, then discusses the hidden stories of Mogao grottoes and what we can learn from it, and finally why we all should value Mogao grottoes.

According to a book named *Li Kerang Rebuilt the Buddha's Niche Stele at Mogao Grottoes*, this gorgeous historical site was started to be constructed in the Pre Qin–Dynasty, because Lezun, who is a monk, passed through a mountain in Dunhuang when it suddenly started to shine in a bright golden light, just like there was ten thousand Buddhas. Hence the first cave was dug in the rock wall. Since then, Master Faliang and others continued to build caves and practice meditation here, called "Mogao Grottoes", which means "high places in the desert". Constructed right next to the silk road, which is the main trade outlet. With the massive transactive occurred around Mogao cave, it developed rapidly and even became an essential economic center. However, the construction of it stopped after the Yuan Dynasty, and only started to drag people's attention after Dunhuang's economy recovered. The external form of the central tower column preserved from the early grottoes reflects the ancient artists' acceptance of foreign art while digesting and assimilating it, making it a Chinese national form, many of which are masterpieces of existing ancient architecture. There are relatively complete wooden eaves of the Tang and Song dynasties outside the caves, which are rare physical materials of ancient wooden structures and have extremely high research value.

That rarely recorded information such as the construction and historical process of the Dunhuang Grottoes, the long history of Dunhuang, the local influential families and surnames, and the relationship between Dunhuang and the surrounding ethnic groups may be found in Qian Fo Dong. There are thousands of portraits of supporters, which are able to help us find, realize and understand many historical conditions and historical clues.

There are more than 500 caves inside Mogao Grottoes in total. The external form of the central tower column preserved from the early grottoes reflects the ancient artists' acceptance of foreign art while digesting and assimilating it, making it a Chinese national form. There are relatively complete wooden eaves of the Tang Dynasty and Song Dynasty outside the caves, which are rare physical materials of ancient wooden structures and have extremely high research value.

The Qian Fo Dong are usually excavated on conglomerate. Except for the stone–shaped clay sculptures built against the mountains, the rest of the sculpture are mostly made from wooden frame. The Painted sculptures in Dunhuang uses the traditional mean in that region. Workers apply mud to the outside of the grass or wooden frame, press and polish. After that, workers put white powder on the mud, and finally, paint on it. The rich themes and the superb craftsmanship inside Mogao Grottoes make it a Buddhist colored sculpture museum. It is one of the earliest real–life portraits of the eminent monk in China and has a high history and art value.

Although the Mogao Grottoes had these extremely precious and high valued works of art, unfortunately, many of them have been damaged in the last century. Taoist Wang Yuanlu, who discovered the Mogao caves broke the walls in a rude way with fineness mural painting and left a whole on it. Years later, a French Sinologist and Orientalist named Paul Pelliot took around five thousand documents form Wang Yuanlu without informing the official, including the only copy of *Lunyu's* annotation written by Heyan. After that, another archaeologist and art historian specializing in East Asian art even used glue to stick the frescos off from the wall, which is an unrepairable huge destruction to the art itself.

Fortunately, there are still numerous amounts of remained grotto murals which are rich and colorful, with various stories of Buddhist scriptures, mountains and rivers, architectural paintings. There was a story called *A Deer of Nine Colors*, which is about the story of a merchant who was in a forest alone and was going to sink. He saw nine beautiful colors shining through the sands when his hope of survival was slipping away. The gorgeous deer was actually the past life of a Buddha, and the deer saved the person. In return, the deer asked the people keep its habitat as a secret, and never tell anyone else. The person immediately promised and returned to his country. Unfortunately, the greedy Queen dreamed

of the deer with nine colors and wanted a cloak made of the deerskin. Hence the King made an announcement to every citizen that whoever caught the nine-colored deer would be rewarded with a big prize. The businessman gave in to his greed and led the King to the place where he saw the deer after knowing there will be a huge reward. Facing the King, the deer asked him how he knew its location. The King said it was the merchant who led the way. Feeling betrayed, the King heard the whole story about the deer of nine colors saving the man and him breaking the promise from the deer. The appearance of this despicable man let the King feel being ashamed. He exiled the merchant and asked everyone inside his country to protect this deer from then on. This story is a well-known tale till now. Parents tell this story to their children when others have helped them, they must be grateful, and condemn the shameful acts of perfidy and revenge.

The other interesting and educational story is recorded in ceiling of the No.454 cave. Once upon a time, there was a there was a cruel and greedy king named A Yu Wang. In order to make sure his power in this country, he built a big prison that is rare in the world to kill all those who share different views with him: the wall is high and strong, and the corner tower stands on the wall. The prison has all kinds of instruments, making it just as creepy as hell. After that, he found an evil peasant who killed his own parent to be in charge of it. The King told the person that he can kill anyone comes in the prison. One day, the wicked prison guard caught a monk, and put him in a huge pot with heated oil inside. However, no matter how the evil person heated the pot, he can not hurt the monk. Feeling it very strange, the prison guard angrily told the king about the monk. A Yu Wang was also surprised, so he went to the prison to see what happened. Nevertheless, the king was also caught by the prison guard, the king was confused and asked why. "You told me to kill every person come into this prison, and now you are here. So, I can kill you according to your word!" Facing the death threat, the King answered wisely. "When construction of the prison completed, you were the first person who comes in. Hence, you are the one who should be killed!" A Yu Wang's servant quickly controlled the prison guard and saved the King. After observing the chaos, the monk told the King that the leader of a country definitely influences the citizen, and that's why the prison guard dare to kill him. Finally, A Yu Wang took the monk's advice and became a great and glorious king. Since then, A Yu Wang has truly won the love and support of the people. The people in the country live and work in peace and contentment, and there are no criminals and rebels. Many other small countries have come to claim submission, and the county becomes even greater.

Despite Mogao grottoes' historical significance, there are other social importance which make it even crucial for us, Chinese to learn more about it. Ethnic identity is someone's feeling of belonging to a particular group. Knowing more about Mogao caves means people have more knowledge about their own history, which is one of the most important understandings of the individual as a coherent whole subject into a collection of various cultural identifiers. Since one of the main characteristics of people's identify is its "historical reservoir," historical heritages like Mogao caves can actually contribute to the bolster of the strength of our own cultural identity, which unites the citizen more by giving us the same history and feel more connections with others. Mogao grottoes are not only rare cultural relics from the past, but also became the current tight bound between each one of us. Hence, there is an extremely great necessity for us to study more about the hidden treasures-- Mogao grottoes.

The good news is Mogao grottoes have now became one of the most famous tourists attractions here in China! With the super convenient online booking system, anyone can pay a visit to there any time they want without long queuing. The site also offers free documents about Mogao grottoes in its own theater. This attracted enormous amount of people to visit Mogao caves and realize the beauty of it. If you don't have the time to visit in person, then check out the advanced Digital Dunhuang. It is a website gives out a 3D view of all the caves with a clear and detailed introduction for each of them. So, if you want to understand more about the Mogao grottoes, there are all sorts of meths you can use.

Overall, the unknowns of Mogao caves still exist, and let us all do our best to learn more about them and enhance our knowledge. I truly hope that you will be interested in Mogao caves because there are still many valuable facts and attractive facts about the Mogao grottoes waiting for the public to discover, and we, as people who live in the present, should all know more about the cultural meaning of these historical sites which can enhance our ethnic identity of Chinese culture.

# The Mogao Grottoes – A Cultural Treasure

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Albert Camus, a French Philosopher who once said, “A man's work is nothing but this slow trek to rediscover, through the detours of art, those two or three great and simple images in whose presence his heart first opened.” This is quite literally applicable to the history behind the Mogao Caves which were rediscovered in the 1900s. In 366AD, Yue Zun, a monk from Central China, had a vision of a thousand Buddhas bathed in golden light at a cliff of Mingsha Mountain. He was inspired to build the first cave and practiced meditation inside. Over the next 1,000 years, the upkeep of Thousand Buddha Caves for more than ten dynasties transformed the site into a more than 1,700-meter-long corridor dotted with grottoes. Thus, the Mogao Grottoes become one of the world’s largest surviving treasure troves of Buddhist art, including architecture, colored sculptures, and murals.

To understand the cultural and social significance of the Mogao Grottoes, it is important to trace back their origin to the different Chinese Dynasties, with the peak of construction during the Tang Dynasty, with more than 200 caves built. Also famously called the Dunhuang caves, Dun meaning grand and Huang is to flourish, the Dunhuang Academy records, “In the 2nd year of Jianyuan of the Former Qin Dynasty, the monk Yue Zun carved the first cave on the cliff at the Mogao Grottoes. Afterward, Zen master Fa Liang built the second cave. The rising of Buddhist grottoes originated from these two monks”. Along with Han, the few other dynasties that played a significant role in the history of the caves include Sui Dynasty (581–618), Tang Dynasty (618–906), and Song Dynasty (960–1279).

These Dynasties shared different values and beliefs, which resulted in the production of various types of art and literature. Since originating, the Mogao Caves have been a significant heritage preserving historic art and literature, which provides and allows historians a deeper insight into China’s ancient and complex history. 45,000 square meters of murals, more than 2,000 painted sculptures and 492 caves are preserved in the sanctuary of the Mogao Caves which have provided valuable references to the livelihood of ancient China. One of the Sui dynasty’s greatest accomplishments was the Grand Canal. The Canal provided a means of trade and transportation between North China and Southern China through ships that traveled between China's two main river systems. The Grand Canal played a major role in China’s economy as it benefited both trade and transportation during the Sui dynasty. This major achievement was preserved in Cave 302 of the Mogao Caves by displaying a camel pulling a cart which is typical of trade missions. Cave 302 also contained other historic and authentic scenes of trade and cultural exchanges along the Silk Road, forever capturing the Sui dynasty’s success. Whereas, the Tang Dynasty, also known as the Golden Ages of ancient China, carries on its legacy through caves 23 and 156 which illustrate workers in the fields and a line of prepared and well-trained warriors. Not only does this scene show the rich and educated society of the Tang Dynasty, but also its well-governed society that allowed for that period to be ancient China’s Golden Ages. Lastly, the Song Dynasty which was most known for its flourishing artistic implications, utilized Cave 61 to display Mount Wutai’s landscape which portrays the earliest examples of Chinese cartography detailing all mountains, rivers, cities, temples, roads, and caravans.

By the Sui and Tang dynasties, Mogao Caves had become a place of worship and pilgrimage for the public. From the 4th until the 14th century, caves were constructed by monks to serve as shrines with funds from donors. These caves were elaborately painted, the cave paintings and architecture serving as aids to meditation, as visual representations of the quest for enlightenment, as mnemonic devices, and as teaching tools to inform those that are illiterate about Buddhist beliefs and stories.

In addition to the mural paintings and inscriptions in the Mogao caves, more than 50,000 manuscripts and portable paintings were sealed away for more than a millennium before their rediscovery in 1900 by the caretaker and Taoist priest Wang Yuanlu, all from one cave, numbered Mogao cave 17, known as the “library cave.” The caves also included multiple other genres of art, such as sculptures, silk paintings, calligraphy, embroidery, representations of music and dance, etc. There are around 2,400 surviving clay sculptures at Mogao. These were first constructed on a wooden frame, padded with a reed, then modeled in clay stucco, and finished with paint. The giant statues however have a stone core. The Buddha is generally shown as the central statue, often attended by other mythical creatures.

Before the discovery in the Library Cave, original paintings on silk and paper from the Tang dynasty, an influential period in Chinese art, were very rare, and most of the surviving examples were copies made in later periods. Over a thousand paintings on silk, banners, and embroideries were found in the Library Cave, none apparently dating before the late 7th century. The great majority of the paintings are anonymous, but many are of high quality, especially

from the Tang. Most are sutra paintings, images of Buddha, and narrative paintings. The paintings show something of the contemporary Chinese style of the capital Chang'an, but many also reflect Indian, Tibetan, and Uighur painting styles. The textiles found in the Library Cave include silk banners, altar hangings, wrappings for manuscripts, and monks' apparel. The monks normally used fabrics consisting of a patchwork of different scraps of cloth as a sign of humility; these, therefore, provide valuable insights into the various type of silk cloth and embroidery available at the time.

A distinct text among the many was the Diamond Sutra, "a sacred Mahāyāna Buddhist text dating to the year 868 CE. This copy is among the world's earliest extant printed texts, making it an essential piece of art contributing to the caves. Commissioned by a man named Wang Jie on behalf of his parents, it is the first known complete book bearing a date. The large frontispiece, which depicts the Buddha in Jeta Grove preaching to the elder disciple, Subhūti, is followed by a 'speech purifying' mantra (jing kouye zhenyan), dedications to eight vajra deities, Kumārajīva's translation of the influential Mahāyāna text, another mantra, and finally the single-line dated colophon—making it one of the world's oldest dated complete printed books, if not the earliest. The book's sophisticated woodblock printing on paper points to the mature publishing industry that existed in China at this early date" (Harvard Divinity Bulletin). Formal depictions of Buddhist sutras and parables intended to guide and to convert allow contemporary viewers to glimpse the power the art would have possessed when beheld by pilgrims and merchants, considering the dangers and hardships of crossing the desert wastelands on horseback and camel.

Buddhism was actively practiced and supported by everyone visiting Mogao ever since the beginning of the first thousand years. From India, Buddhism spread throughout trade routes, the Silk Road, and the Dunhuang, ultimately making its way to China during the Han dynasty. The Mogao Caves visibly depict the artistry of Buddhist themes and iconography through the murals. Moreover, religious knowledge was transmitted by voyagers traveling along the Silk Road. The main reason how the earliest sources of Buddhism spread from India to China was due to peripatetic monks who transported sacred texts and relics, allowing the practice of Buddhism to be passed down for years and years despite the long distances. As evident in the original manuscripts, there was a wide range of cultural diversity. From a Buddhist pilgrim text recording a monk's journey from northern China to northeastern India to another rare manuscript containing a Hebrew prayer, a book of omens written in Old Turkic, and a Tibetan sutra including a Chinese commentary.

However, Buddhism originally formed in the sixth century BCE, within Northeastern India, in what is today known as Nepal. The assimilation of Buddhism took over a century to settle within China and this was done with the help of Daoism. To help the Chinese comprehend Buddhist concepts, ideas were borrowed from Daoism via the Chinese language. Both Buddhism and Daoism benefited from this exchange. Taoists expanded their ideas about the cosmos and ways to structure their monastic orders. Buddhists gained terminology that made it easier to teach their tradition. By the sixth century, however, Buddhism surpassed Daoism in popularity and political influence. It was during this time, and over the next three centuries, that major schools of Chinese Buddhism formed. Two schools that retain their influence today are Pure Land Buddhism and Chan (Zen) Buddhism. Buddhism in China along with Daoism and Confucianism underwent many changes throughout the country's history and was varied in its social and religious manifestations and philosophical beliefs. In the so-called classical period of Buddhism in China (Tang dynasty, 618–907 CE), there were a number of schools of Buddhism that taught and promoted their own philosophies and meditation practices. The Huayen and Tiantai schools, for instance, varied in philosophy, location, and political influence. The teachings of various schools were influenced and were adapted by Korea and Japan.

One of the most popular figures in Chinese Buddhism is the Bodhisattva Guanyin (the one who perceives the laments of the world—Guanshiyin). Having originated from Indian Buddhism as a superior being who aids the suffering of the world, Guanyin has become a key figure in the devotional practices of Chinese Buddhists and Daoists alike. Figures as such were significantly represented within the caves. Buddhist representation through art and music was also displayed. In 1940 the surface layers of the murals on the four walls in cave 220 gradually fell off, revealing the original early Tang paintings from 1,300 years ago. Within these paintings, a combination of music and dance in Sutra illustrations covered the south and north wall. There were over 500 musical groups and 4,500 musical instruments portrayed on the murals. Specific dances such as the Whirling dance, which was introduced to the central plains during the reign of Emperor Wu of Northern Zhou and officially included in the formation of Yanyue (music for formal feasts in the court) in the Tang Dynasty, with dancers known as Kang Whirling dancers. At important imperial banquets, ten different ensembles would each perform a different kind of music, among which whirling dancers will perform for the Music of Kang Kingdom. Ten kinds of music played in the Tang Dynasty are Yanyue (court music), Qingshangyue (court music of the southern dynasties), music of Western Liang, Music of India, Music of Goryeo, Music of Kucha,



Music of An Kingdom, Music of Shule Kingdom, Music of Kang Kingdom, and Music of Gaochang. Alongside the dances, music was an essential complimenting factor. Instruments used along these dances include the pipa, sheng, zheng, ruan, dizi, and various percussion instruments. Twenty–five scores for pipa players dating from the Tang dynasty were among tens of thousands of manuscripts discovered in the “Library Cave” in 1990. However, the knowledge of Dunhuang music is still limited, and there are only a few scholars dedicated to the task of deciphering ancient scores.

The Dunhuang caves give us deep insights into the rich history of Chinese culture and the development of the Silk Road. In 111 BC, the Four Commanderies along the Hexi Corridor (Gansu Corridor) were established by the Emperor Wu of Han, thus connecting Dunhuang with Chang’an (now Xian), the capital of the Han Dynasty. Dunhuang became an intersection of the Silk Road and the only route leading to the Han Empire. Dunhuang was the place where merchants, monks, missionaries, and adventurers from various countries set off to Chang’an, and envoys, armies, and caravans of the Han Dynasty traveled west. Gradually, the commercial exchanges between China and the Western regions, India, Persia, Rome, and other countries prospered. As an essential location to pass on route to Chang’an, Dunhuang headed for prosperity as the Silk Road thrived.

The Silk Road consisted of trade routes connecting China and the Far East with the Middle East and Europe. Established when the Han Dynasty in China officially opened trade with the West in 130 B.C., the Silk Road routes remained in use until 1453 A.D., when the Ottoman Empire boycotted trade with China and closed them. Han Emperor Wu sent imperial envoy Zhang Qian to make contact with cultures in Central Asia in 138 B.C., and his reports from his journeys conveyed valuable information about the people and lands that lay to the West. Although it’s been nearly 600 years since the Silk Road has been used for international trade, the routes had a lasting impact on commerce, culture, and history that resonates even today. But the transport of goods and services along these routes dates back even further. The Royal Road, which connected Susa (in present–day Iran) more than 1,600 miles west to Sardis (near the Mediterranean Sea in modern Turkey), was established by the Persian ruler Darius I during the Achaemenid Empire—some 300 years before the opening of the Silk Road. Trade along the Silk Road economic belt included fruits and vegetables, livestock, grain, leather and hides, tools, religious objects, artwork, precious stones and metals, and—perhaps more importantly—language, culture, religious beliefs, philosophy, and science. Commodities such as paper and gunpowder, both invented by the Chinese during the Han Dynasty, had obvious and lasting impacts on culture and history in the West. They were also among the most–traded items between the East and West. Paper was invented in China during the 3rd century B.C., and its use spread via the Silk Road, arriving first in Samarkand in around 700 A.D., before moving to Europe through the then–Islamic ports of Sicily and Spain. Of course, paper’s arrival in Europe fostered significant industrial change, with the written word becoming a key form of mass communication for the first time. The eventual development of Gutenberg’s printing press allowed for the mass production of books and, later, newspapers, which enabled a wider exchange of news and information (History).

Near the early twentieth century, Western explorers and scholars began displaying interest in the ancient Silk Road. Often traveling under harsh conditions, the explorers, scholars, and archaeologists of these expeditions sought to discover the ancient languages and cultures that once flourished in the region and to acquire collections for the empires that they represented. One of the most influential of these scholars was Marc Aurel Stein (1862–1943). In 1887, Stein traveled to India and took up the positions of Principal of the Oriental College, Lahore, and Registrar of Punjab University. From his base in Kashmir, he made four expeditions to northwest China. The Stein Collection in the British Museum includes the Asia department which holds archaeological findings from Xinjiang, as well as paintings, prints, and textiles from the Library Cave (Cave 17), Dunhuang. Taoist Wang Yuanlu who was credited for the prominent discovery of the library cave, held himself responsible for repairing artifacts. As Stein requested to take artifacts back to Britain, Wang Yuanlu traded the artifacts for funds that would help maintain the caves. In the end, Stein paid four silver ingots which allowed Yuanlu to preserve the caves successfully. Stories as such represent the constant and meaningful role that trade played in the history of these caves.

As these objects were dispersed in the early 20th century to other library and museum collections, the most prominent of which is the British Library, the National Museum of India, and the Pelliot collection in the Musée National des Arts Asiatiques–Guimet and Bibliothèque Nationale de France, the study of Dunhuang art and culture increased through encompassing both objects held in museum and library collections worldwide as well as mural paintings and sculptures located on–site in the cave shrines. Bringing these two bodies of material into conversation with one another enables a nuanced understanding to countries globally of Dunhuang as a religious and artistic center, focusing in particular on the Mogao caves. The caves, which some refer to as a portal to historic Chinese art, literature, and culture will continue to hold a significant place in Chinese history.

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# The Symbolism of the Mogao Grottoes' Hidden Library: The Past, the Present, and a Future of Academia

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## MOGAO GROTTOS

There is a meticulous irony to the etymology behind Mogao Grottoes. Despite being given the moniker of the “highest point in the desert”, this overflowing fountain of heritage is locked away in the depths of a grotto.

Interestingly, due to the gradual shift in Chinese linguistics, the phrase ‘Mogao’ could also mean ‘nothing higher’ – almost as if it’s signaling towards the fact that human society will only plummet after the Grottoes’ collapse.

The different iterations of names allude to the pinnacle of a secluded civilization concealed by the mirage of a desert – yet its eventual collapse earned more fame than its zenith.

Originally a hermitage, the Grottoes were intended as a retreat from normality as a refuge. Housing enlightened individuals unrecognized in their contemporary era, it quickly grew to be representative of the cultural exchange across the Silk Road. Shortly after, it would again only appeal to pilgrims when sea trade became prevalent. Were the Grottoes also destined by its founders to fall in obscurity, only to be rediscovered when the time was ripe?

Perhaps it was the case, for we know the story did not end with Le Zun discovering the cave and founding his own hermitage in this remote sanctuary. It merely began, as more pilgrims would join the once-lonesome monk. This desert, a barren wasteland with little remnants of civilization, would give rise to the most perpetual fountains of knowledge. What drove this grotto to become the most renowned source of higher philosophy was the plethora of artworks and sacred texts flourishing within – records of a past, once forsaken, now reclaimed.

Poetic as the Mogao Grottoes are, as with all caves, it eventually fell into disrepair when the Silk Road fell out of fashion. Though the Grottoes were left desolate, the actions its inhabitants undertook to preserve their legacy was far from natural. The Library Cave, one of the key deposits of rich information, was sealed completely, and only rediscovered when Wang Yuanlu attempted to restore the sanctuary.

What more is hidden beneath the surface?

## THE TEXTS

The texts harbored knowledge beyond the scope of Buddhism, and beyond the medium of Chinese. The Hidden Library was undoubtedly among the first to coalesce knowledge without borders and creed, which modern academia fails to replicate to this day. The lesions of colonialist prejudice haunt us, the imprints of academics’ affiliations befuddle our criticality, and the strings of institutions puppeteer malleable marionettes.

The Hidden Library could allow the mutual existence of conflicting schools of thought from all walks of life and vastly different religions with contrasting founding principles. The Mogao Grottoes showed us that intellectual pursuits are mutually cooperative. “Scientia potentia est.” The power of knowledge is not in limiting our worldview to a single school of thought, but rather the comparison and synthesis of merits from cultures distinct from our own. That is to say, knowledge is only powerful when it is diverse and plentiful, for a skewed tale serves no purpose apart from isolating ourselves in echo chambers. Though secluded in the desert and locked away in the depths of a mountain, the Mogao Grottoes have surpassed limits of transportation and cultural exchange through the one goal of religious pursuit of wisdom. From Jewish philosophy, to Confucian poetry from central China, its collections showed diversity and nuance.

Despite this, Mogao Grottoes also reveals the mentality surrounding intellect at the time: Knowledge was not to be divulged with the public. Perhaps the enlightened wisdom was too unconventional for the contemporary barbaric

warlords, falling on deaf ears, or worse, eradicated, were it to be published. Perhaps the monks wished to hoard such knowledge, as it would give them a hegemony over the interpretation of holy scriptures.

## THE PAST

Why did they seal the Hidden Library?

No pilgrim, explorer or scholar knows for sure.

The Mogao Grottoes functioned as a Curia for the enlightened. An institution known only to the ones seeking pilgrimage for this pursuit of higher philosophy.

The value of the Mogao Grottoes' position, and as a result the culture emanating within, was no doubt well-recognized by the monks. Functioning as the crossroads of the Silk Road, both culturally and geographically, it captured only the finest – the wayfarers that would endure the trials of a desert, the culture that travels through numerous generations to find themselves in a foreign land, and the brightest theorems to withstand the cogs of time. Even when the Ming Dynasty abandoned the Silk Road, it could not create a new cultural crossroads to rival this one – the sea trade was too fast and too industrialized to perceive cultural importance in a world of capital, profits and materialistic efficiency.

Such understanding made it vital to seal the grottoes. No matter the speculation, a common theme resides. The Hidden Library was sealed out of fear of those who would decimate these priceless relics and artifacts, not out of deliberated, scholarly objection, but simply from a brutal mentality of tribalism. Never was it viewed as intellectual property but by the monks themselves – to empires, it was needless instability if not a bargaining tool; to rival religions, it was hypocrisy and blasphemy, sacrilegious solely because the text mentioned the wrong name; to opportunistic explorers, only the profit margins were at stake.

In fact, centuries later, we meet Wang Yuanlu, who attempted to restore the caves as he understood its significance as a religious construct. However, Wang would find himself having to reseal the library cave, knowing of the value of the texts within, and comprehending his powerlessness to protect them, even with the aid of government officials. He had a daunting task ahead that was larger than himself – to fend off what were no longer bandits nor warlords, but colonists seeking glory and fame, desecrating the noble purpose of his arduous pilgrimage by requisitioning these artifacts.

Hopelessly, Wang would find himself opening the seal under the promise of capital, which he desperately needed to restore the temple, allowing the opportunists to rob what was once part of his creed's legacy – which is why Wang was reviled by other pilgrims who shared his insight on the cultural importance of the Mogao Grottoes.

## THE PRESENT

Perhaps, Stein and Pelliot's 'sackings' of the Hidden Library were simply attempts to materialize the value of these ancient texts. Were they not brought to foreign countries and quantified, the tale of the Dunhuang manuscripts would only be the incessant ramblings of out-of-touch scholars. They were able to secure the significance of heritage, no matter how ungraceful the means were.

Stein and Pelliot's rivalry over appraising and purchasing the Dunhuang Manuscripts was certainly a double-edged sword, however. It was clear that from beginning to end it was a vile struggle for dominance over the Manuscripts. By limiting this knowledge to themselves, they have figuratively 'sealed away' the Dunhuang Manuscripts once again. This time, it would not be the creators who deemed us unworthy, but our own pride and greed.

Many proud of the culture behind the Dunhuang Manuscripts fear it will suffer the same fate as the many other artifacts

lost to colonialism, such as the fabled Koh-i-Noor diamond of India which was repurposed as a jewel among many in the crown of the monarch of the United Kingdom.

In fact, the Dunhuang Manuscripts have lost their meaning and succumbed to the gatekeeping present in modern academia. Little of these revered texts are ever present in modern papers, and the owners are unwilling to relinquish their miniscule fragments of each script.

So when the bounties of the depths are uncovered, is their fate to be gatekept by academic authority once again?

## A FUTURE

Will these texts be restricted once more, not with a remote library concealed at the edge of the earth, but through arbitrary conventions that limit our equality in accessing common knowledge and our cultural roots? With the Dunhuang Manuscripts, we need not worry, for their prominence is already well-known. However, the Mogao Grottoes reveal a glimpse of human and social nature in gathering knowledge.

Our modern world boasts unparalleled infrastructure and universality of culture, and yet many choose to resort to tribalism to explain their own justice when worldviews are at conflict – if the many religious texts could not find peace with each other, or if invaders pillaged the Grottoes and destroyed the texts, the Mogao Grottoes would have ceased to exist long before its rediscovery. The Mogao Grottoes tell us that these acts decimate flourishing intellectual collections, and are the very reasons why they were initially sealed.

With modern sociocultural environments, the pursuit of knowledge is increasingly connected with the rest of the world. It is indubitable that knowledge serves more purpose than mere self-discovery – it is the source of fervent discussions online, and has grown increasingly dependent on social climate, acting as a stark contrast to the Mogao Grottoes that were once free from the influence of merchants and empires. This development is to be commended as one of the major advancements of the Information Age.

When the Dunhuang Manuscripts are published and serialized, along with all other artifacts of the past, perhaps we would have a more complete perspective on the history of humankind. Then, we can reach the pinnacle of the desert once more, only this time, illuminated by the sun and free from the clutching darkness of an unbeknownst grotto.

# The Mogao Grottoes: the Meaning Within

*St. Paul's Co-educational College, Kong, Tsz Hin – 16*

More than a millenia ago, a monk called Yuezun stood at where the Mogao Grottoes reside nowadays. At that moment, he had a vision of golden lights shimmering between the peaks, as if a thousand Buddhas had descended upon the earthly realm. Enchanted by the shimmering lights, Yuezun started to lay the foundations of what would become the legendary Mogao Grottoes. As time went by, royals, officials, even ordinary people would carve out caves in the cliffs as places of worship and meditation.

In the present day, thousands of tourists flock to the Grottoes every year, it is a fascinating place to visit with a rich history and religious significance. In order to get to the Grottoes, many have to embark on a laborious journey to reach the destination, since it is located far from any civilized or developed city. The “pilgrimage” itself requires visitors to be committed, an act of purification suitable for the occasion.

In contrast with the historical monuments such as the pyramids of Giza or the Roman Colosseum, the Mogao Grottoes are not frozen in a period of time. The Mogao Grottoes are not a relic of a particular dynasty, but a testament to the dynamic and changing history of China. Following the darker colours of war-torn periods before the Tsui dynasty, the art depicted in the Grottoes start to become more colourful and living as history progresses into the prosperous Tang dynasty. Every colour known to man is brought to life and utilized in these breath-taking pieces of artwork. The art created in the Song dynasty is characterised by its more detailed and skilled artwork. Of course, the Mogao Grottoes are also famous for their religious significance.

# Hidden secrets of the Mogao Grottoes

*St. Paul's Convent School, Chan, Maisie – 16*

In the Mingsha Shan in Dunhuang, West Central China, there is a towering five-storey building arising from an escarpment. Inside lies a conglomeration of Buddhist temples, preserving a plethora of intoxicating Buddhist arts and priceless treasures. First constructed in 366 AD, it has stood tall for 1600 years, witnessing the transformation of China from the Sui dynasty to the modern 21st century. Not only was it a legend and a miracle, but it was also a testimony of civilization—its name is the Mogao Grottoes.

In 366 AD, a monk arrived at the Sanwei Shan, the mountain opposite to the site of the grottoes. It was dawn, and the monk was looking for a place to rest. All of a sudden, he saw beams of radiant light in Sanwei Shan, shimmering as if Buddha had manifested himself in thousands of images. Believing that he had a religious experience, the monk knelt down and made a vow that he would build temples and grottoes there, turning the spot into a sacred place. During the Sui dynasty and the Tang dynasty, when Buddhism was the most prevalent religion in China, tens of thousands of pilgrims travelled miles and miles to visit the sacred temple. Devotees and believers of Buddhism came to seek for inner peace, some created masterpieces of Buddhist arts and added them to the collection of artifacts inside the grottoes. The construction continued for several dynasties. As the grottoes expanded in size and scale, more and more temples were built in the sanctum. The grottoes were expansive, it was no surprise that the construction and renovation process was excruciating. Nevertheless, numerous Buddhist believers devoted their time, sweat and blood to build the grottoes and ornate it with sculptures and murals. Many of them were simply commoners and normal citizens, without any special skills but earnestness and faith. Together, these exceptional nameless artists had recorded and passed down the glory of the past to their descendants, such that now we are able to see the prosperity of the ancient times through the murals and carvings.

The Mogao Grottoes was special, because it had been redecorated generation after generation. In each dynasty, work had been done to preserve the artifacts left behind from the previous dynasties, while new artwork was being added to the kaleidoscope of artifacts inside the grottoes. The Taj Mahal in India, the Colosseum of Rome in Italy, and the Pyramids of Giza in Egypt were all built at a time and they flourished only for a short period of time. Unlike other historical heritages in the world, the Mogao Grottoes had accumulated countless artwork across thousands of years. It was an embodiment of sacred, sincere faith of the multitude of Buddhist followers. It was an epitome of Chinese and Buddhist art throughout thousands of years. It was a witness of the history of China. Since Dunhuang was part of the silk road, merchants and travelers who walked past the grottoes often donated money for its construction and renovations in the hope of receiving good fortune in their journey. Only until the Yuan Dynasty, when the silk road was no longer popular, did the Mogao Grottoes become dilapidated.

Often referred to as the 'Chinese Palace of Versailles', the Mogao Grottoes had been known for its breathtaking murals, carvings and statues. Yet, beneath the fancy facade, lies a shameful tragedy that is yet to unveil. Back in the late Qing Dynasty, when the Mogao Caves had remained buried in the sand for hundreds of years, forgotten in history, a Taoist Priest, Wang Yuan-Lu, accidentally discovered the Mogao Grottoes. Bit by bit, he dug up the relics of the Mogao Grottoes from dusts and sand dunes. The secret chambers and underground tunnels, along with its countless ancient texts, scriptures and artifacts were brought to light. Being the discoverer of the legendary ancient caves, Wang was ironically both the greatest contributor to Dunhuang studies and one of the most notorious traitors to the Chinese nation. Bewildered and disoriented by the hitherto undiscovered Mogao Grottoes, Wang had informed the Qing government. Yet, due to the deserted geographical location of the Grottoes and the corrupt government bureaucracy, none of the government officials responded to Wang's report. As the news of the uncovering spreaded to European countries, foreigners travelled across continents to visit the Grottoes. Out of his despicable greed and ignorance, Wang traded the invaluable artifacts from the Grottoes for scraps of goods and pathetically less amount of money with the foreigners.

Years passed by, again and again, Wang's appeal to the Qing officials had been ignored—they thought that the transportation process would cost too much, nor did they understand the preciousness of the artifacts. Once again, adventurers, scholars and archeologists from foreign countries bereft the grottoes of its treasures. Years later, the Qing

government had finally realized the historical value of the grottoes, they transported what little artifacts that were left behind to the capital. However, this was not the end of the calamity. Eventually, lots of foreign adventurers dug down the murals from the walls of the grottoes, they cut down the statues, even attempting to move the whole structure away, irrevocably destroying the Mogao Grottoes. Most of the artifacts in the grottoes nowadays were those that have been repaired and renovated in the early Republic of China Era. Only remnants of the original grottoes were left. The ignorant and corrupt Qing government, as well as the greedy and contemptible Taoist Priest had become culprits of this greatest cultural robbery in the history of China. Nevertheless, the blame could not be entirely put onto Wang or the Qing government or the European adventurers. After all, the low awareness of the people in the past towards cultural relics conservation was the main reason for the deterioration of the grottoes. At least, the foreigners who brought away artifacts of the grottoes also spread Chinese culture to the rest of the world.

Many lamentable stories were mottled within the dusty walls of the Mogao Grottoes. In 1921, after the white army had been defeated in the Soviet Union Civil War, hundreds of soldiers escaped across the Russian boundary into China. They were held captive for 6 months and settled in the Mogao Grottoes. Out of exasperation and despair, they vent their anger onto the murals in the Grottoes. They started a fire at a corner for cooking, as a result, vast areas of the murals were burned into pitch-black ashes. In 1941, the prodigious Chinese painter Chang Dai Chien visited the Grottoes for observation, staying for two and a half years in total. In order to study the painting styles and techniques in different dynasties, Chang Dai Chien peeled off the murals layer by layer. His own painting skills did improve a lot, at the cost of causing irreversible damages to the thousand-year-old cultural heritage.

Tragedies had taken place in the Mogao Grottoes before, but so did stories of bravery. Once, a group of 'guardians of the grottoes' willingly gave up higher living standards, better working conditions and the warmth of family. They went into the desert in Dunhuang, into the middle of nowhere in order to protect the Mogao Grottoes. Chang Shu-Hong was one of them. Ever since he had seen pictures of the Mogao Grottoes in the Dunhuang Catalogue, he felt an inexplicable attraction to the beauty of the Grottoes. His obsession with the grottoes marked the turning point of the rest of his life. He gave up his comfortable life in Paris, and devoted himself into the preservation work in the Mogao Grottoes. His life in the grottoes was tough, just like 'serving a sentence in a labour camp', as he had claimed. His wife could not adapt to the hardships in Dunhuang and abandoned Chang with his children. Despite all the difficulties, Chang persisted. The preservation work was not simple, every day the Chang had to race with time. Anything in the natural environment could be pernicious to the murals—the weather, water vapour in air, sunlight, wind, to name but a few. And so, Chang spent the next 50 years of his life protecting the grottoes. His love and enthusiasm towards the Mogao Grottoes have aroused a surge of profound respect in anyone who hears about his story.

Countless stories and history abounded in the Mogao Grottoes. Although some of the artefacts had been burned, cut, stolen and destroyed, the Grottoes remain unfell, standing tall still, just like when it was first constructed 1600 years ago—and it will continue to stand tall for many more years to come. The Mogao Grottoes is not just a museum—it has inherited the spirit of our nation, it is a gateway into both the past and the future. And I'm certain that more stories and legends will take place in the future. Therefore, let us all look forward to the new tales of the Mogao Grottoes in the future!



