



Non-Fiction

Group 1

The Mogao Grottos – got us wondering!

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Daga, Ishana – 8

The Mogao Grottos in western China has existed for over 1650 years! It is of great cultural and historical significance, and as such it is recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Over 2 million people visit the Grottos and its marvellous caves every year. The visitors are left with their mouths open, larger than the cave entrances, in awe, as they journey through the past. But why do they go there? What makes it so interesting? Let's see!

Mogao means peerless as it really is, because it is home to the largest, most intricate and the most breath-taking amount of Buddhist artwork ever created [and maybe even more waiting to be discovered!!!]. The Mogao Grottos took a thousand years to build. That may seem like a very long time, but it took that long because there are 735 caves containing more than 2000 coloured sculptures and 45 thousand meters of frescoes. Now let's visit my personal favourite part of the Grottos. The Library Cave. The Library Cave holds nearly 50,000 ancient manuscripts dating from the early 1000 A.D. Even super cool things like the Diamond Sutra, the world's first printed book was found there!!

Imagine how it would be like, if all the smartest people put their heads together and discuss their ideas. That is what happened in the Mogao grottos thousands of years ago. Unfortunately, visitors can only view 110 of the caves, but that's good enough.

But how were the caves created? A long time ago, around the 4th century AD people from all over the world started to make magnificent things in the many caves. Ever so sadly, in the 1400s, people forgot about it, and they stopped going there. It became a legend, about which people had only heard about. But not for very long! In the 1890s, a monk called Wang Yuanlu rediscovered it. Yay! Three cheers for Wang Yuanlu! He helped the world see one of the greatest creations of mankind, which would have otherwise been lost forever. Luckily the dry desert climate kept the Grottos safe.

I hope that we can preserve ancient and wonderful works of art like the Grottos because they help us take a glimpse into the past, and as they say, studying the past is the best way to create a better future. Would you like to visit the Mogao Grottos? I would! I bet that it will be fun!!

New Tales from The Mogao Grottoes

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Ip, Everett – 7

The mogao grottos is also called the thousand buddha cave is in the Gansu Province, China. The cave was built on a cliff side. The monks started building it from 366 AD for 1000 years, and it was forgotten over the years then was restored.

The mogao grottoes was for Buddhist activities, such as meditating and worship. It is in the south side, it was for Buddhist art, but the paint on the art rusted off and over the years people took the sculptures and art or damaged them.

There are 735 caves there. The caves are close to two kilometres long. Inside the caves were a lot of sculptures and art. In the northern side 248 caves are currently found there. They are for meditation, the monks live there. In the southern side 487 caves are there.

The two biggest sculptures both are Mairaya Buddhas. The biggest one is 35.5m tall. It is in cave 96. The smallest cave 96. The smallest Buddha is 10cm tall only.

Mogao Grottoes

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Li, Noah – 7

Mogao Grottoes is on the silk road and it's where lots of countries connect like Europe, Italy, and so on. Mogao Grottoes has lots and lots of caves. It has 492 caves or more. It is built there because lots of people travel there to go to the west. It is very old, and it is built over 1000 years ago! It has lots of sculpture, paintings on walls, models, patterns, and much more cool stuff like that. Other countries have sculpture and drawings like that too, but there are not in caves, and there is also not as many paintings, sculpture, and models as Mogao Grottoes.

In Mogao Grottoes, there are lots of different kinds of caves. Some are small, some have two rooms, some have a tower in the middle of the cave, and lots of caves like that. Mogao Grottoes is named like that because Mogao means sandy, and Grottoes means caves.

If you want to know how people make sculpture in Mogao Grottoes, here is how they make it: for small sculpture, smaller than a person, they use wood to kind of make the shape of the sculpture, then use thin dust to cover the hole piece of wood and paint the detail on the dust with a brush. For sculpture that are medium size, as the same big as a grown-up person, they use a wooden piece to be the base, and sticks and branches to make a little sculpture, then, they use some straw to fill in the gaps and to cover the stick and branches. After, they use thick dust to cover the straw. Last, they use thin dust to cover the thick dust, and then they use a brush to draw the details. For huge size sculpture, the workers already thought that there's going to be a big sculpture here, so when they dug up the cave, on piece of wall was the shape of the sculpture, and then they covered it with thick and thin dust and detailed it with a brush.

The most thing that impresses me in Mogao Grottoes is the colour because Mogao Grottoes is very old and I didn't know really about Mogao Grottoes, and I thought that there was only the colour of the dust in the drawings and sculpture. I am also surprised that the drawings and not just about Buddha. It's also about daily life, and life not just in Buddha, but about India, middle east, and even Europe! I want to go there, but right now there's covid, so I guess no.

New Tales from The Mogao Grottoes

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Xu, Blair – 7

The Mogao Grottoes are a series of caves near Dunhuang in northwest China, which was located on the ancient Silk Road near the Gobi Desert. Hundreds of caves in Mogao contained treasures of Buddhist arts, mostly in the form of wall paintings and sculptures. The Mogao Grottoes had over one thousand years of history, spanning throughout several dynasties that ruled ancient China.

The art works of the Mogao Grottoes showed us what people living one thousand years ago believed and valued. One example is Cave 257. It has seven murals illustrating the tale of the nine-coloured deer. In the story, the nine-coloured deer rescued a drowning man but was later betrayed by him when the queen wanted to kill the deer for its fur. The deer later convinced the King, and the man met his well-deserved fate. The painters used contrasting colours of black, earth red, green, and turquoise to depict different characters and used white to express the inner world of the deer. The key message brought about by the murals was that good deeds bring blessing and evil deeds result in punishment.

Two years ago, I watched the Chinese animation movie made in 1980s about the Nine-Coloured Deer. I was very impressed by the mural-style mythological figures and the decorative colour schemes in it. When doing research for this article, I learned that, to make that animation movie, the animation makers went to the Mogao Grottoes and stayed in Cave 257 for 23 days straight. The animation makers had to hand copy all the characters and the backgrounds as photo-taking was not allowed. At the end of the 23 days, they made thousands of sketches that filled five large sketch books. The animation became a huge success, and most of the children in China watched and enjoyed it.

Cave 17, also known as the "Library Cave", is another fascinating example of the importance of the Mogao Grottoes. It was almost a miracle that Cave 17 was discovered in the first place by a Taoist monk because its entrance was hidden by a wall painting. Its existence was hence not known for centuries. Cave 17 was filled with manuscripts, paintings, textiles, and other documents from various dynasties. A lot about what life was like in China and about traveling on the Silk Road one thousand years ago was learned by studying the art works discovered. Today the manuscripts from Cave 17 are on display in museums and being studied by people around the world.

Why does the Mogao Grottoes matter? Everybody may have a different angle and my answer is, a passage to history. It feels amazing that we can see and feel the beauty created by artists one thousand years ago, and the values shared by people living then still receive echoes from us. Hope I can go to see the Mogao Grottoes with my own eyes the first thing after COVID is gone.

Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

Discovery Mind Primary School, Wright, Daniel – 8

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Forgotten Caves

Li Sing Tai Hang School, Manglicmot, Mark Kristopher – 8

Caves...what's the first thing that comes to your mind about caves? Big boulders of rocks, pebbles or a bat hanging on darkness of the caves...mmm...I bet you didn't think of hundreds of paintings, murals, sculptures and Buddha, let us explore the history of the Mogao Caves.

One evening in 366 A.D. when a Buddhist monk named Yuezun was making the long journey to Western Paradise, he was stopped by a mountain near Dunhuang and rested there. Suddenly, the mountain began to glow and so a thousand Buddha were blazing on a cliff. The monk decided to stay and learn painting and sculptures and this also inspired him to build a cave.

Years later, a second monk named Fanliang joined him to build and filled a second cave with paintings and statues. It became a pilgrimage site for Buddhist and many others. Buddhist monks collect sculptures and many pilgrims passing the caves are painted murals inside the cave. Many of the caves was constructed by the members of the ruling family of Northern Wei and Northern Zhou. It builds for the monks to prepare themselves according to their religious beliefs and a place for meditation.

Centuries later, the Mogao caves were forgotten and some of the caves have been blocked by sand and a monk named Wang Yuanlu discovered the hidden library cave which you can find the world's oldest book called the Diamond Sutra and there are nearly 50,000 manuscripts.

Wow! The history of the Mogao Caves is so amazing and fascinating. I feel like if I was reading a great discovery of history, I was surprised how they built the caves not only one, but hundreds and a thousand Buddha's paintings, murals and sculptures. It's like living in a magical world.

Today, the Mogao Caves are the world's heritage site. It was forgotten for many years, but because of its uniqueness, it remains remarkably well preserved. With 492 well preserved Mogao Caves with artworks, this breathtaking hidden treasure was the most protected sites and was put under the protection of National Law. And Mogao Caves mean 'Peerless Caves' and one Buddha statue is over 30 metres tall and the caves contain the world's largest Buddha collection. For over many years, many archaeologists study on what ways to preserve the Mogao Caves temples for the future.

New technologies use 3-D scanning to share data to other people around the world. Experts use advanced technologies to provide wider access to the world's famous ancient murals. Many tourists are enjoying the views of the Mogao Caves. Mogao caves can also teach you a lesson, it teaches you that the more hard work you put into something, the more you can achieve your goal.

This hidden treasure was once forgotten, but it's still recognized in its true form by some and is still as important as before.

New Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Tse, Yui Hang Makis – 9

Long, long ago, according to legend, a monk (a religious man) named Yuezun had a vision of a thousand luminous Buddhas on a cliff face in Mogao, which inspired him to begin exploring the caves.

All together there are 735 caves and about 492 with artwork and sculptures. There are about 45,000 square meters of murals (an artwork drawn on a wall), more than 2,000 painted clay figures and five wooden structures. The sculptures are created during Northern Liang (A.D. 397–439), Northern Wei (A.D. 386–534), Western Wei (A.D. 535–556), Northern Zhou (A.D. 557–581), Sui (A.D. 581–618), Tang (A.D. 618–906), Five Dynasties (A.D. 907–960), Song (A.D. 960–1279), Western Xia (A.D. 1038–1227) and Yuan (A.D. 1279–1368) Dynasties. Most of the sculptures were created by the Five Dynasties period. By that time the people had run out of space and could not make any more grottoes. But still, there are a lot of grottoes.

Mogao Caves were occupied by Buddhist monks from the end of the 19th century up to 1930. In 1900, the priest Wang Yuanku discovered the famous Hidden Library, a trove of 50,000 documents, including the Diamond Sutra, the world's oldest book. But in 1907, the British–Hungarian archaeologist Sir Aurel Stein paid Wang four silver pieces and took thousands of manuscripts, silk scroll paintings and wood slips, and the Diamond Sutra out of China. These are now housed in the British Museum, the British Library and the National Museum in New Delhi.

The grottoes contain Buddha and Bodhisattva statues and lots of paintings, such as paradise, asparas (angels), religious scenes, et cetera. Did you know that the oldest cave dates back to the 4th century?

The largest cave is very tall. It is 130 feet (3,962.4 cm) high! It contains a 100–foot (3,048 cm) tall Buddha statue installed during the Tang Dynasty (A.D. 618–906). Lots of caves are so tiny that they can only accommodate very little people at a time. The smallest cave is only 1 foot tall (30.48 cm)!

Carved out between the 4th and the 14th centuries, the grottoes have survived the ravages of war, pillage, nature and neglect.

It is such a miracle for these caves to have survived for such a long time!

Treasures of the Mogao Grottoes

Regents Primary School of Shenzhen, Guo, Xinmiao – 9

Magnificent art treasures are filling the famed Mogao Grottoes, among the ancient and consummate creations in China carved in the Mongolian conquest. The grottoes show an uninterpreted history of Chinese painting over nearly a thousand years.

The Mogao Grottoes, popularly known as the Thousand Buddhas Caves, were built on the eastern cliff of Mingsha Mountain, 25 kilometers to the southeast of Dun Huang city. In 366 A.D. a monk named Yunezun had a vision of the Buddhas over the Sanwei Mountain opposite the cliff of the Mingsha Mountain, so the devout believer set out to build the first caves into the cliff. Afterwards more and more caves were excavated over a thousand years. The Grottoes are the largest globally and are the best preserved treasure – house of Buddhist art, housing 492 caves, 45,000 square meters of murals, and about 3,000 painted statues.

New Tales of the Mogao Grottoes

Regents Primary School of Shenzhen, Liu, Xinyuan – 9

I have never seen the Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes before, so it's very mysterious in my mind. I researched the information through the internet.

The grottoes in the Mogao Caves are the world's largest and oldest treasure house of Buddhist art. The Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes, also known as the One-Thousand-Buddha Grottoes, are located on the eastern, rocky side of Singing Sand Mountain, near Dunhuang City Gansu Province. According to historical records, their carving was started in 366 AD and continued for about 1,000 years.

In 1900, a total of 4,500 valuable cultural relics dating from 256 AD to 1002 AD were found in the Buddhist Sutra Cave, including silk paintings, embroidery, and documents in rare languages such as ancient Tibetan and Sanskrit. This is regarded as one of the world's most significant oriental cultural discoveries.

About 50,000 cultural relics were found in a sanctum sealed behind the northern wall of Grotto No. 16. These articles included Buddhist sutras, documents, embroidery works, and paintings from the 4th to the 12th centuries.

The Mogao Grottoes

Shanghai Singapore International School, Krishna, Rohan – 8

The Mogao Caves, or the Thousand Buddha Grottoes, situated in the east of Dunhuang—China are known for their figures and divider canvases, seething 1000 years of Buddhist craftsmanship by the Sui and Tang lines. The Mogao caves has turned into a position of love and a sacred spot for the general population.

From the fourth until the fourteenth century, the caves were developed by priests to fill in as holy places with assets from givers. The Mogao caves were locked in by the Buddhist priests from the end of the nineteenth century up to 1930. In 1900, the cleric Wang Yuanku founded the well-known Hidden Library, a treasure of 50,000 records including the Diamond Sutra – the world’s oldest book.

The fascinating elements inside the caverns of the Dunhuang are the improved caverns dividers and roofs adding up to near 500,000 square feet. They are covered with elaborate artworks portraying accounts of Buddha. The Buddhist sutras are representative of the cavern benefactors, and are decorated with plans and scenes of social and business life.

The Guardians of the Mogao Caves

St. Paul's Co-educational College Primary School, Chan, Kalista – 6

Once upon a time, there was a Chinese monk called Shao-long. Shao-long loved to create different artworks like paintings and sculpture. He also wrote many books to advocate Buddhism. He wanted to show the world his wonderful artworks therefore he decided to travel from China to the Western countries with his artworks and literature through the Silk Road.

Shao-long commenced his journey from the starting point of the Silk Road – Chang' an. He walked and walked then he arrived a desert in Dunhuang. As the desert was too large, Shao-long eventually got lost. He finished all his food and water and he felt so hungry and thirsty. He could not find the exit or place to rest so he finally fainted out. Suddenly, “someone” was licking Shao-long’s face. He woke up in a shock and he saw so many desert animals including camels, lizards, snakes and foxes were surrounding him. The foxes shake their heads to show him there were footprints on the desert. He followed the footprints and found an oasis! There were so much fish and fresh water for him to eat and drink. He felt so amazing and he strongly believed that there must be some spirits guarding this place.

After Shao-long recovered, he decided not to continue his journey to the Western countries. He wanted to discover this miracle desert so he started to visit around. He finally arrived a mysterious place called the Mogao Caves. To be thankful for the desert and animals saving him, he put all his paintings, sculptures and literature into the caves. Days by days, he kept designing more artworks to put inside the Mogao caves. He also encouraged more people to visit the desert and contributed in the decoration of the decoration of the caves.

One day, a group of robbers came to the Mogao Caves. They wanted to steal all the artworks and literature to sell so that they could have so much money. Shao-long and all the other artists were standing at the entrance of the Mogao Caves, holding their hands together to protect the caves. After a big fight, the robbers won as they had swords and knives. They stole all of the artworks and left. When they passed the desert, a horrible sandstorm suddenly appeared. There were strong wind and sand that they couldn't open their eyes. At the same time, all of the desert animals attacked the robbers. The sandstorm stopped, the robbers were covered by the sand and all died. Unbelievably, all the artworks and literature were lying on the surface of the sand and none of them had been damaged. Shao-long and the artists took back all the paintings and literature back to the Mogao caves. They were all surprised by the magical spirits protecting the desert and the caves.

Since then, Shao-long and many Chinese artists designed more and more beautiful artworks and literature for the caves to show their thankfulness to the guardians of the desert. The Mogao caves became a famous art gallery in China.

In the Eye of the Beholder

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

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

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

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

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

Mogao Grottoes – Embrace Different Cultures

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Cheung, Nga Ting Annette – 9

My interest in the Mogao Grottoes, Dunhuang, acclaimed as an "Encyclopaedia of the Middle Ages", is induced by my love of "Journey to the West", the Chinese novel following the journey of the Buddhist monk, Tang Sanzang, and his entourage, to Dunhuang and how the monk and the Monkey King were painted in one of the caves! If one extract from one wall painting relates to the great Chinese classical novel, what about other breathtaking secrets?

The Mogao Grottoes are located in Dunhuang, Gansu Province, People's Republic of China. According to the International Council on Monuments and Sites of April 1987, the Mogao Grottoes comprise 492 cells, 200 Buddhist sculptures, and approximately 45,000 square meters of murals. They witness the civilisation of ancient China for more than 1,000 years from 366 A.D. for several dynasties, like the Tang, Song and Yuan Dynasties, as well as the transcontinental history and propagation of Buddhism in Asia. Trades, arts and communications were freely exchanged in this strategic area of the ancient Silk Road and Chinese, Tibetan, Hebrew and other manuscripts were found in this melting pot of cultures.

The Mogao Grottoes are justified in being on the World Heritage List of 1987 because they fulfil six of the ten World Heritage criteria. For example, they represent a masterpiece of human creative genius and a unique testimony to a civilization over a span of time. Amongst the brilliant works, I like the Dunhuang flying Apsaras, the symbol of Dunhuang murals, most. Their faces and artistic styles change over different periods to embrace the influences of

China, India, Greece, Tibet and Mongolia. These flying Apsaras can dance freely in the sky with ribbons. If they joined the Olympics rhythmic gymnastics competitions, they would surely win the gold medals!

If the Mogao Grottoes were not rediscovered in 1900, I would not feel the pulse of the ancient Oriental cultures and the adventures in "Journey to the West". However, since the opening of the Mogao Grottoes, the original internal ecology, including the murals, architecture, and painted sculptures, has deteriorated, discoloured, darkened or peeled off due to heat, carbon dioxide and humidity from excessive tourism. Its external ecological problems become more severe due to natural erosion from the encroaching Gobi Desert nearby and other natural disasters.

Luckily, besides restrictions on where visitors can enter and a recyclable water use method to relieve the ecological pressures, a three-dimensional "Digital Dunhuang" project capturing its heritage resources, at www.e-dunhuang.com, has been developed by the Dunhuang Academy to help preserve and maintain the Grottoes by encouraging visitors to explore them online rather than in person.

The Mogao Grottoes' embracing of Buddhism and Chinese cultures, though different from those of other countries, touches and reminds me to understand any culture, religion or tradition, not only in an algebraic way through their symbols and scripts, but with a thorough understanding and respect of its origin, developments and interactions with various aspects of the world. Let's protect and treasure the Mogao Grottoes for our future generations!

The Amazing and Magical Mogao Grottoes

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Yeung, Karissa – 8

The Mogao Grottoes of Dunhuang is located on the North West of China. It was on the Silk Road and was an international metropolis of the ancient China. The first grottoes were built in Tang and continued to be built until they were abandoned by the Ming Dynasty. The previously unknown grottoes were then sealed by drifting sand. They were accidentally discovered by a Taoist monk in about 1900. To study and maintain these treasures, he needed to get financial support. He sent letters to King of the Ching Dynasty but it was a messy era and he did not get any response. However, western explorers heard this news and flocked to the desert of Dunhuang. When they arrived, they were completely in awe of the discovery.

Grottoes, murals, coloured sculptures and Buddhist Scriptures are all over Mogao. Today, many tourists visit them and spend hours wandering around Mogao every day. The murals, or what can be called wall paintings, are unique to Mogao.

The books state that Duhuang spirit is devoted with peace and serenity. You could close your eyes, listen to Buddha and dive into the Buddhist world to inspire the people of today. Although I am a Catholic, I would believe people pray for a nice and peaceful world, bring joy and happiness around and let go all the worries.

Dunhuang is a big topic, I have read many articles found one of the most famous images in mural arts, the “Feitian”, the flying dancers. It’s like a goddess type of a thing. It looks like it was brought to China from other cultures but it then received like the clothing and the style from China culture.

The flying dancer images are laden with colourful and wonderful costumes with long beautiful ribbons that fly with swirling patterns from low to high and high to low. Many of the Feitian carried a Pipa on their back. Pipa is a Chinese traditional musical instrument with four strings. Just imagine the murals images coming alive, the dance would be so amazing.

Studies revealed that the painters must have observed a lot of dancing and drawn a lot of outlines before the paintings. The positions of the heads, necks, waists, hips and legs have all been carefully planned. They were sometimes far from reality but it was great in an artistic way. Professional dancers continued to analyse the Feitian and study their movements nowadays. They found the figures were so touching to them and filled with inspirations. They thought that the Feitian needed to be study further, the dance movement and posture were complex.

I wish I had a time machine to take a trip to Mogao Grottoes in the past.



Non-Fiction

Group 2

The Mogao Grottoes

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Lam, Season Season – 9

The Mogao grottoes is an amazing place located in china 25km southeast of the centre of Dunhuang. Fun fact: did you know that there are 492 caves? A group of the caves at Mogao represent the unique artistic achievement by both organization of space into 492 caves built on five levels and by production of more than 2000 pieces of art and approximately 45,000 square meters of murals among many which are masterpieces of Chinese art.

Who founded the Mogao Grottoes?

The Mogao grottoes were founded by priest Wang Yuanku. Caves were occupied by Buddhist monks from the end of the 19th century up to 1930. In 1900, the priest Wang Yuanku discovered the famous Hidden Library, a trove of 50,000 documents, including the Diamond Sutra, the world's oldest book.

Where the Mogao grottoes are located

The Mogao grottoes, also known as the thousand year buddha grottoes or the cave of the thousand buddha form a system of 500 temples 25km south east The Mogao Grottoes on the cliffs.

They were made in cliffs because the Buddhists think that they need a clean environment free from the interference of secular life as much as possible.

Long ago the Mogao grottoes were used as a trade market. Written in a scroll a large amount of the things they traded were produced in the city and the surrounding regions and sold to merchants including silks of many varieties, tea, ceramics, medicine, jade, animals, food and tools. During the Turpan depression fruit trees and melon grapes grew very well. Every year more than a thousand tons of grapes are exported to foreign countries. Turpan used to be an important point on the silk road.

They were a significant part of history.

The Mogao grottoes, bearing exceptional witness to civilization of ancient china during the sui, tang and song dynasties, are extremely important evidence of the evolution of Buddhist art in the north west part of china, providing an abundance of vivid materials that depict various aspects of medieval politics, economics, culture, art, religion, ethnic relations, and daily dress in western china, so they are unmatched historical value. The unique artistic style of Dunhuang art derive not only from the amalgamation of Han Chinese artist tradition and style assimilated from ancient Indian and Gandharan custom, but also from an integration of the art of the Turk, ancient Tibetans and other Chinese ethnic minorities. The Mogao caves, an outstanding example of Buddhist rock art sanctuary, have a unique artistic achievement and played a decisive role in artistic exchanges, central Asia and India.

The discovery of the library cave at the Mogao grottoes in 1990, together with the tens of thousands of manuscripts and relics it contained, has been appreciated as the world's most exceptional discovery of ancient oriental culture. This important heritage offers invaluable reference for studying the complex history of ancient China and central Asia.

The Mogao grottoes are an amazing historical discovery. They are one of the many tourist attractions of china

A Journey Through Time into the Mogao Grottoes

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Ng, Miranda – 9

The Mogao Grottoes were ancient caves that were home to many paintings, sculptures and treasured literature pieces. The caves were located above the Dachuan River in Gansu Province, China. The caves were once a popular route along the old silk road, allowing the trade of valuable goods across Asia. The Mogao Grottoes were created in 366 AD, but over time, travellers started taking different routes and the caves were forgotten around a thousand years later.

Before the creation of the Mogao Grottoes around one and a half millennia ago, a monk stumbled across a unique cave along the Silk Road and decided to stay. He along with many other adventurous pilgrims found the caves special and they began using them to create sacred art and literature. Over time they dug 492 caves that were preserved with more than 2000 sculptures.

The Mogao Grottoes have unmatched historical value, they were home to the creation of a diverse range of art focussed on culture, religion, economics and politics. The formation of this extraordinary art was linked to the Han Chinese culture, ancient Tibetans otherwise known as Turks, and other Chinese ethnic minority groups. This heritage hub had unparalleled aesthetic talents and gave rise to many masterpieces along with the evolution of Buddhist art.

The Silk Road was not one single route from Asia into Europe, but a range of multiple routes that encouraged trading across these regions. Some historians preferred to call these the silk routes instead of the silk road because it reflects the many paths taken by traders. The silk road spanned 6,437 kilometres or 4000 miles across some of the most extreme landscapes, like the Gobi Desert and the Pamir Mountains. These routes were not maintained, which made the travellers' journeys a lot more dangerous and gave rise to on-route lodging. Although, few travellers completed the entire journey, but rather traded with middlemen along the way.

Among these traders was the famous Marco Polo, who travelled to China with his father when he was only 17 years old. Their journey lasted over three years, where Marco was sent to parts of Asia to gather and trade valuable goods. He wrote about his journey once he completed his travels which led to his fame along with the increase in popularity of the silk routes. He paved the way forward to understanding Asia and the many diverse cultures that they represented.

A variety of goods and resources were transported along the Silk Road. Goods such as silk, tea, jade, spices, precious stones, and porcelain were among the items that were transported from Asia. The travellers would then return with horses, textiles, glass, and manufactured goods to provide alternative value for the consumers of Asia. Horses were also gathered in Europe and brought back to Asia, which contributed to the strength of the Mongol Empire. Gunpowder was Asia's exchange for this which ultimately caused that evolution of war.

These routes provided important cultural exchanges, which united the East and West. Some parts of the silk routes are still preserved today and are listed on UNESCO's World Heritage Sites. The diverse range of cultures allowed ideas and beliefs to expand, contributing to some of the advanced concepts of famous philosophers. These interactions also gave rise to new technologies and inventions that helped us progress towards the modern world we know today. Although, ideas and goods were not the only things that were transported from Asia. Research suggests that the Black Death spread across the Silk Road and devastated Eurasia killing 75–200 million people.

The Mogao Grottoes caves were forgotten because traders started taking other routes. However, they were rediscovered in 1990 by a group of international explorers. This led to the appreciation of the forgotten cultural treasures that the caves were once valued for. The rediscovery was almost like a doorway to the past, where some of the world's most famous paintings, sculptures and literature pieces were found, including the world's oldest printed book. The Mogao Grottoes were truly a heritage site with incomparable ancient value.

Mogao Caves

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Mogao Grottoes is located in Dunhuang, China. Mogao Caves is also known as Thousand Buddha Grottoes or Caves of the Thousand Buddhas. Mogao Grottoes is a 45,000 square meter cave. The Mogao Caves form a system of 500 temples.

An important stack of books of documents were discovered in 1900 in the weirdly called “Library Cave”, which had been stacked up in the 11th Century. The contents of the library were subsequently spread around the world, and the largest collections are now found in Beijing, London, Paris and Berlin.

The construction/building of the Mogao Caves near Dunhuang is generally taken to have begun some time in the fourth century. During late 19th Century and early 20th Century, Western explorers/tourists have begun to show a lot of engagement and interest in the Ancient Silk Road.

The Ancient Silk Road connects the East and West, connects a network of trading goods. The Silk Road routes from China to the west passed to the north and south of the Taklamakan Desert, and Dunhuang lay on the junction where these two routes came together. The silk road is also surprisingly long, gaining a total of 4,000 miles. The start of the Silk Road starts at Chang’an (Now called Xi’an) and the end of the Silk Road ended in Rome.

The art inside the Mogao Caves has a lot of detail, which goes by a Fancy and Detailed Theme. The Art quality looks old and rusty, and it reminds people about Ancient times. The art is extremely colourful, with colours like Red, Brown, Yellow, Blue, White, and Orange.

The Mogao Caves were cut into the side of a cliff which is approximately 2 kilometers long. As its height, during the Tang Dynasty, there were more than a thousand caves, but over time many caves were lost, including the earlier ones. 735 caves currently exist in the Mogao Caves; the best-known ones are the 487 caves located in the southern section of the cliff which are places of pilgrimage and worship. 248 caves have also been found to the north which were living quarters, meditation chambers, and burial sites for the monks.

In Mogao Caves, there are also a lot of sculptures (Mostly Clay). Currently, there are approximately around 2,400 surviving clay sculptures in Mogao Caves. These were first constructed on a wooden frame, padded with reed, then modelled in clay stucco, and then finished in paint.

Why were the Mogao Caves built on a cliff? Mogao Caves is carved into the cliffs above the Dachuan River. The grotto temple is a place for Buddhism Activities, which is not much different to the other temples. According to Buddhism, monasteries and temples need a clean environment.

Priest Wang Yuanku found the Mogao Caves. Mogao Caves were occupied by Buddhist monks from the end of the 19th century up to 1930. In around 1900, Priest Wang Yuanku discovered the famous hidden library. A trove of 50,000 documents, even including The Diamond Sutra, aka the world's oldest book.

By the Sui and Tang Dynasties, Mogao Caves became a place for the public to worship. From the 4th to the 14th century, caves were constructed by Monks.

The Mogao Caves contain the world's largest collection of Buddhist Art. All the decorated, detailed walls and ceilings, are covered by beautiful paintings following stories of the Buddha, Buddhist sutras, portraits of cave donors, ornamental designs, and scenes of social life.

The material of the paper in the hidden library is Paper and Ink. A study of inks and paper-making by Pascale Richardin and colleagues was conducted on two Chinese manuscripts in the Pelliot collections in the National Library in France.

Currently, as of January 2022, Mogao Caves are one of the most recommended caves rated by locals. It is also the 2nd most recommended cave destination in China.

Mogao Grottoes

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Wow! The Mogao Caves are so enchanting. Peace and nature around everywhere. I'm here to find the oldest printed book in the world. People have theories but that doesn't work for me. I need the real truth and I need to see it.

Drawings everywhere! Large statues surround me. Some are human and some are characters from old fables. Some are scary, like they are threatening me with their stares, especially the Buddhas. Some smaller human statues are beautiful and elegant. Hundreds of them surround me. Each one is different and shows a different personality.

Beautiful artefacts and drawings. Colours everywhere! What do the Mogao Caves not have?

What's that?

A small drawing in red... of a man and a monster?

Wait, is that blood? That can't be right...

It's the only thing that's red in all of these drawings. Who drew it? Why did they draw it?

Whooooosh!

Who's that?

I turn around. There's no one behind me. It must be the wind.

It can't be the wind. It's really hot and humid here.

I'm sure it's nothing.

Huh, what's this on the ground?

Looks like ancient writing.

I look around for clues but there's nothing.

Is it a riddle?

A charcoal voice comes from within the cave.

"The chosen one has come."

"Who said that?"

The voice comes back. "Avar..."

I start to worry.

The floor begins to glow. Drawings of cats, tigers and pigs, the tiles perfectly separated from each other The floor melts away around the drawings.

What should I do?

I take a step back and meditate.

Sweat drips down my face.

which way do I go

THINK! I say to myself.

I finally got it!

Since this is an ancient cave, it must have an old riddle! I remember learning about caves and riddles when I was 200 years old. I remember! Step on the pigs! The cat and tiger always bite!

I take my first step

The tiles around me disintegrate, except the ones with pigs.

This is no ordinary cave.

PLOP! A metal key drops from the ceiling.

What's this for?

Whooshh!

Not this again.

Candles are floating next to me, lighting up one by one, showing a big Buddha statue. On the leg there is a small keyhole. Before I go in, I grab a candle just in case.

What's this?

A secret room?

Roses, candles, and drawings are lined up all around the walls. The thorns of the roses are strong and spiky. The candles can barely hold the fire. Drawings of people and hearts... But that doesn't make sense. Who did this?

Wait, what are those two red dots in the corner? It's weirdly dark there. I hold up my candle to see what it is.

A hairy monster comes out of the darkness.

I freeze.

Is that...

The monster in the drawing?

The monster's eyes are as red as blood, teeth as sharp as a cat's claw. The monster's nose is big and black. It can smell anything! His back is old and crumpled like a camel's back. It has three lumps. He's very hairy, his hair is dark brown and he looks very very very big and strong.

The doors lock and the monster opens his mouth.

His voice is familiar like I heard it before.

It was the voice from earlier.

"I can't believe it! After all these years of being alone, somebody finally came!" the voice is saying

Huh?

The monster talks again.

"This must be very confusing. Let me explain. My name is Mog Wai Yue. I need to see if people are worthy enough to enter."

I say, "Let us fight! Don't be a chicken!"

The monster replies in a confused voice, "I never meant fighting."

"Huh?"

"I think it is so old fashioned so it's always a math quiz!"

I think to myself: Oh shoot! I don't know anything about math except my 2 and 5 times table without thinking. I say it's on.

"Let's start! What's $987-678+12\sqrt{7000}\times 80+8000.0001(870-799.99)\times 0$?"

Oh, I know this!

I remember. My father taught me when I was two hundred years young. Too young to even talk yet.

He said that zero times anything is always...

"Zero!"

His eyes begin to fire water works.

"You are the chosen one. I never thought this day would come!"

As the beast disintegrates, I start kneeling down and rummaging through sand for clues. There has to be a reason he turned to sand. As I look through, I look through the sand I find

A small, golden key.

I pick up the key and suddenly a cloud of darkness appears right in front of me.

I open my eyes and see that there is a door.

I unlock the door.

In the center of the room, there is a golden book shining brighter than the sun. Below it, there is a silver stand brighter than the moon.

I drop the key on the ground.

Nothing...

Everything is gone....

Sweat drips down my face like a snail slowly walking. At this point I feel faint.

"I did it!"

Tears of relief and happiness roll down my face like a person going down a slide.

I open the book and start to read it. Something about all of this feels familiar...

I read about the writer's life and it weirdly makes me think of someone, but I can't think of who it is...

As I flip the book from DAY 1 to DAY 1000, all their emotions and actions feel familiar...

My daughter is born! But I am not there to celebrate her. Something happened, I can't believe my daughter was born on the same day I was born, the 10th of May. she will someday meet me.

I freeze. My eyes start to twitch. 10th of May... that's my birthday!

This is my name. This is me.

It all makes sense now... why I barely saw him, why I barely knew him.

The Mogao Grottoes

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The Mogao Grottoes, also known as the Thousand Buddha Grottoes or the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas, are evidence of evolution in Buddhist art in the northwestern region of China. They form a system of 500 temples 25km (16 mi) southeast of the center of Dunhuang.

Situated at a strategic point along the Silk Route, at the crossroads of trade as well as religious, cultural, and intellectual influences, the 492 cells and cave sanctuaries in Mogao are famous for their statues and wall paintings, spanning 1,000 years of Buddhist art.

They provide an abundance of various ancient Chinese politics, economics, culture, arts, religion, ethnic relations, and daily dress in western China. They are bearing exceptional witness to China in the time of the Sui, Tang, and Song dynasties. In the 4th to 14th century, Buddhist monks, wealthy families and locals built the Mogao Grottoes over 1700 years ago. There were many rare artifacts stored in the Mogao Grottoes. These include the earliest printing book. The Mogao Grottoes provides invaluable reference for studying the complex history of ancient China and Central Asia. 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 centre of commerce along the Silk Road, as well as a meeting place of various people and religions such as Buddhism.

Why was the Grotto built on a cliff? It is because it is a place for Buddhist activity. It was not that different from other Buddhist temples. Monasteries and temples need a clean environment, free from the interference of secular life as much as possible. The cave's remote location has helped it survive for a long time. The caves were cut into the side of a cliff which is close to two kilometers long. The materials found in the library cave offer a vivid picture of medieval China in that time period.

The stable temperature and humidity, the lack of human contact, and long-lasting painting materials make the painting last for a long time in near pristine conditions. Right now, 492 caves are being preserved; it has about 45,000 square meters of murals and more than 2,000 painted sculptures in the Mogao Grottoes.

This treasure trove of writings was collected between the 9th and 10th centuries CE, by Tang and Song dynasty Buddhist monks who carved the cave and then filled it with ancient and current manuscripts on topics ranging from religion and philosophy, history and mathematics, folk songs, and dance

The Mogao caves were first constructed in 366 AD by members of the ruling family in northern Wei and Northern Zhou constructed many caves there, and it flourished in the short-lived Sui dynasty (581–618 ce). 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.

It was discovered in 1900 in the so-called "Library Cave". It was first abandoned in the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). It was abandoned before 1006 because people of Dunhuang heard about the fall of the

The Buddhist kingdom of Khotan to the Islamic conquerors of Kashgar and sought to avoid the destruction that had occurred to Buddhist establishments there.

The Library cave, which was unsealed by Wang Yuan. He is a Chinese itinerant monk. He was originally from Shanxi province in China. The Mogadishu Grottoes / Caves contain nearly 50,000 ancient silk banners and manuscripts, paintings, fine silk embroideries, and other rare textiles dating from before the year 1000. Words of Wang's discovery drew the attention of a British / Indian group of archaeologists led by Ariel Stein, a Hungarian-born British archaeologist who was on an archeological exploration in the area in 1907.

The artwork of Dunhuang includes more than 10 major genres. In the Mogao Grottoes, there are lots of masterpieces of architecture, culture, wall paintings, silk paintings, calligraphy, woodblock printing, literature, embroidery music and dance and popular entertainment. One type of caves constructed during Tibetan era is the Nirvana Cave, which features a large

reclining Buddha that covers the entire length of the hall. Figures of mourners in murals or in sculptural forms are also depicted along the length of the hall behind the Buddha. The Buddha figure in cave 158 measures 15.6 m long. The early figures are relatively simple and mainly of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. The Buddhas of Northern Wei may have two attendant Bodhisattvas, and two further disciples were added in Northern Zhou, forming a group of five.

The Sixteen Kingdoms made 7 caves, Northern Wei made 10 from each phase, Northern Zhou made 15 caves, The Sui dynasty made 70, High Tang made a little bit more than the Sui dynasty with 80 caves, and Early Tang made only 44. Middle Tang made the same amount as Early Tang, having 44. (This era in Dunhuang is also known as the Tibetan period because they were under Tibetan rule. Late Tang has made 60. The Five Dynasties made 32, The Song Dynasty made 43, Western Xia made 82, and lastly, The Yuan dynasty made 10 caves. All the caves combined give 507 caves in total.

Altar hangings, silk banners, wrappings for manuscripts and Monks apparel. The Monks normally use fabric consisting of a patchwork of different scraps as a sign of humility; these therefore provide valuable insights into the various types of silk cloth and embroidery available at that time. These are some types of textiles found in the Library cave.

There are around 2400 surviving clay sculptures at the Mogao Grottoes. These were first constructed on a wooden frame, padded with reed, then modelled in clay stucco, and finished with paint. About 100 of them are biblical texts, covering the entire Hebrew Bible except Esther. Most of the manuscripts are sectarian writings. The murals are extensive, covering a large area of 490,000 square feet (46,000 square metres).

An Amazing Trip to The Mogao Grottoes

Ching Chung Hau Po Woon Primary School, Huang, Yimiao – 10

The old saying goes, “Seeing is believing”. This Chinese proverb undoubtedly applied to my experience of joining a tour to the Mogao Grottoes in the Dunhuang district of Gansu with my family. The Mogao Grottoes are well-known as the Pearl of the oasis in the desert on the Silk Road, for they contain hundreds and thousands of the world’s finest and oldest paintings, sculptures, and literature. Although I had been told how magnificent the Mogao Grottoes are throughout my life, I could understand their magnificence only by visiting the grottoes in person.

“Now, we are standing in front of the murals of the Buddhas,” said the tour guide proudly and pointed at the murals. The murals showed different Buddhas and other deities dressing in blue robes and wearing different accessories like golden tiaras, silver necklaces and bracelets. Although the Buddhas and deities looked stern, tourists like me did not feel intimidated, but calm and peaceful. I was so obsessed with looking at the murals that I almost lost track of time and the introduction given by the tour guide.

“It is a world-famous art shrine integrating architecture, sculpture and painting.” The guide continued. “The grottoes are over 1,600 meters long from north to south, with five floors up and down, with the highest point of 50 meters. There are 492 existing caves, 45,000 square meters of murals, 2,415 painted sculptures and 4,000 flying sculptures. The Mogao Grottoes are large in scale, rich in content and have a long history.”

“Who dug the caves and painted the murals?” I asked out of curiosity. “More than one and half millennia ago, a monk discovered the caves when he was travelling on the Silk Road. He thought the caves were sacred because he could feel the presence of Buddhas there. Therefore throughout the centuries, hundreds and thousands of pilgrims came to dig more caves and create as many murals and sculptures as possible to pay respect to Buddhas and deities,” replied the guide.

It was a mystery that I found myself deeply mesmerized by the Mogao Grottoes. I could not take my eyes off the murals and sculptures for hours. I had a feeling that I had stayed there for a very long time before. It was like my old home. After I went back to my hotel home, I kept searching for a load of information on the Mogao Grottoes on the Internet about this cave until I fell asleep.

The sleep seemed to last for ages. All of a sudden, a cold breeze woke me up. I was not in my bright, comfy hotel room but a dark cave full of tunnels. Then I had a cold feeling inside my head. The moment I touched my head, I screamed like it was the end of the world, “Ahh! My hair! Where's my hair? How come I became a bald man?” Then I looked at my clothes and exclaimed, “Oh my god! I am a monk in a torn cassock. I must have gone back to the past.”

I ran into different tunnels, tried to find an escape route but with no success. When I was about to give up, I suddenly saw a myriad of golden rays in one of the tunnels. I was curious so I headed for those rays.

The tunnel was so damp and gloomy. It also gave a foul smell that made me almost vomit. While I was walking towards the golden rays, a group of bats flew towards me. I quickly squat down so that they could not attack me. At the end of the tunnel, there was a light so bright that I could not open my eyes for a minute. When I could finally open my eyes, I was amazed to see hundreds and thousands of monks painting the murals and making sculptures of different Buddhas and deities in an exceptionally large cave.

The cave was surrounded by the aura of dignity. It turned out that the cave was an altar set up to worship Buddha. The monks were painting the murals and making the sculptures of different Buddhas and deities transferring knowledge to commoners, teaching them to appreciate arts and improve their society. These murals and sculptures must be the precious treasure of our country, for they documented the art and history of the motherland. At that moment, I felt my life was content. I was delighted to spend my whole life studying the art and history of Buddhas, deities and human societies throughout the millennia.

Suddenly, I heard a sound from the sky. The sky said with a gentle voice, “My dear child, it’s time for you to go home. I am delighted to know young children like you still appreciate our arts and culture. I hope you can encourage more people to do that.”

As soon as the sky finished his saying, I heard my mum's voice, "Wake up, son! Look at the clock! It's 10 o'clock in the morning!" It was my mum. Everything was just a dream. But the dream was so real that I thought I could still sense the presence of the monks and artifacts.

After this amazing "adventure", I discovered how precious the Mogao Grottoes are as the historical heritage of our country. I will strive to encourage people close to me to appreciate this cultural treasure and spiritual wealth of mankind by sharing my experience of Mogao Grottoes.

A Fascinating Tale from The Mogao Grottoes

Ching Chung Hau Po Woon Primary School, Ngai, Ching Ki – 11

The Mogao Grottoes are located on the cliff at the Mingsha mountain in Mogao Town, 25 kilometers southeast of Dunhuang City, Gansu Province, China. The caves are scattered high and low, row upon row, with up to five floors above and below it. It is famous all over the world for its exquisite murals and statues.

There are many murals hidden in the Mogao Grottoes. Each mural has its own story. Among them, the most profound one is that Prince Xuan sacrificed his body to feed a tiger. This story was drawn on the south wall of the main room of Cave 254 of the Northern Wei Dynasty at Mogao Grottoes. It is one of the most popular subjects in early Buddhist art.

Once upon a time, there was a big country in Nanzhan Tribe, called Sahara Tannang, which meant 'big treasure,' and it contained five thousand small countries. The King had three sons. The eldest son was named Eunding, the second one was called Diwa, and the third one was called Xuan. Although Prince Xuan was the youngest, he was very kind-hearted and cherished all living things very much. One day, the King took his officials, as well as the queen and his sons, on an outing to the forest. After walking for a long distance, the King was a little tired and hence he took a rest under a tree. Meanwhile, the three young princes were still energetic and they went up the hills, playing around and drilling the woods.

Suddenly, they saw a tigress in a cave, staring at two little tigers who were snuggling next to him, showing a ferocious look. They were soon dying of hunger. Prince Xuan told his two older brothers, 'this tigress has just given birth to the cubs, and it is breastfeeding the cubs. But it is too hungry to walk that it is dying. If it dies, its children will soon die as well. What a pity!' The two older brothers said, 'yes! They are dying.' Xuan asked, 'so what kind of food does the tiger eat? How can we save them?' They replied, 'it's better to have some fresh flesh and blood.' Xuan asked again, 'where can we find fresh flesh then?' They said, 'it's not easy at all. Also, it would be so unfair to kill more lives in order to save another life!' Prince Xuan lowered his head and thought for a long time. After thorough consideration, he determined to sacrifice himself to save the tigress and the little tigers. He talked to his brothers, 'you two go first! I have something to do, and I'll come later.' When his two brothers left, Prince Xuan rushed back to the cave and lied down in front of the tigress to allow the tiger to eat him. However, the tigress was so weak that it could not even have open its mouth, and could not bite the Prince. Therefore, Prince Xuan picked up a sharp wooden stick on the floor, pierced his body, and shed a lot of blood. The tigress licked the prince's blood, then one bite at a time, and gradually ate the prince Xuan.

The two older brothers waited for a long time, so they rushed back but they could not see Prince Xuan. They remembered the conversation with Xuan about the hungry tiger and they knew he might sacrifice himself to save others' lives. They were shocked and ran to the cave. When they arrived, Prince Xuan had already been eaten by the tiger, leaving some bones and pieces of flesh in the cave. They cried and went downhill to inform their parents. The King and the Queen fainted, like a thunderbolt in the sky, when they learnt about the incident. Minutes later, they regained consciousness and hurried to the cave to look for their son. By that time, they could only collect the leftover bones of the Prince and take them back for burial.

Prince Xuan was very kind that he was willing to sacrifice himself to save other creatures. His spirit is really worth learning from. This is only one of the great stories hidden in the Mogao Grottoes. The more stories you learn from the murals, the more gorgeousness you can appreciate from the Mogao Grottoes.

The Forgotten Mogao Grottoes

Ching Chung Hau Po Woon Primary School, Tse, Tsz Ue – 10

More than one and half millennia ago, a monk decided there was something special about a cave he found at an oasis in the desert on the Silk Road in China.

Over the centuries, thousands of pilgrims arrived and decided to stay, digging more caves, and spending their time creating sacred art and literature.

But time passed, and more than 1000 years later, travelers started taking other routes. The Mogao Caves in the Dunhuang district of Gansu province in west central China were forgotten, becoming little more than a dusty legend.

Then, in the 1900s, local and international scholar-explorers rediscovered the caves. They gradually unlocked its breathtaking secrets. There were hundreds of caverns containing some of the world's finest paintings, sculpture, and literature— including the oldest dated, printed book in the world.

It was like a tunnel to a lost world in the past, scholars had said.

A large number of documents dating from 406 to 1002 were found in the Mogao Caves, heaped up in closely packed layers of bundles of scrolls. In addition to the 1100 bundles of scrolls, there were also over 15, 000 paper books and shorter texts, including a Hebrew penitential prayer.

There are more than 2000 colored statues that were carved about 1500 years ago. More than 1400 statues are well-preserved so they can still be appreciated. You can see statues of Buddha, Bodhisattva, students of Buddha, monks, flying apsaras, God of heaven, God of Earth, and guardians.

My Brief Explanation of Mogao Grottoes

Ching Chung Hau Po Woon Primary School, Yiu, Ho I – 10

So what are the Mogao Grottoes? Here's a basic explanation of them. First of all, where is even this huge place? Magao Grottoes are one of the caves in Dunhuang Caves, which is in Gansu province of China. 'But what is it, a tower or a building?' I hear you asking. It's a thousand-year-old system of thousands of Buddhist sculptures and paintings. When I just said Mogao Grottoes was a huge place, I wasn't exaggerating! The place is forty-five thousand square meters in area. When I first heard about Mogao Grottoes, it was in my General Studies class when I was in primary three. But since my teacher didn't talk about it very in depth, a lot of history and facts were missed. 'Well, how are you qualified to write about Magao Grottoes?' you ask again. Of course I did lots of research on this topic. While researching Magao Grottoes, I found a helpful series of videos that described the art inside it and what was going on. Another source is Wikipedia, which gave me a clear explanation of Mogao Grottoes. In 2018 there was an exhibition of Mogao Grottoes in Hong Kong, but sadly it's not here anymore. I wonder if it'll reopen. I think it would have been an amazing way to get information about Mogao Grottoes. It all started in the fourth century, when a Buddhist monk named Le Zun had a vision of a thousand Buddhas bathed in golden light, which inspired him to construct a cave that would be known as Mogao Grottoes today. At first, Mogao Grottoes served only as a place to meditate for the Buddhist monks, but later on it also served the monasteries that sprang up nearby. Members of the ruling family of Northern Wei and Northern Zhou built many caves there later. Three centuries had past and now we are at the Tang Dynasty. Over one thousand detailed caves of Buddhist art have been constructed at Mogao Grottoes. By Tang Dynasty, Mogao Grottoes had become a place of worship and pilgrimage for the public. A thousand years had passed, from the fourth to the fourteenth century, all this time of monks have been at hard work building these amazing and fascinating caves that make up the gigantic and famous Mogao Grottoes. By then, Mogao Grottoes had become lots of things, including aids to meditation, visual representations of the quest for enlightenment, mnemonic devices and as teaching tools to inform those illiterates about Buddhist beliefs and stories. Later on, a British archaeologist named Aurel Stien and a couple other explorers came and discovered Mogao Grottoes. Although there are many amazing murals and statues inside it, my favourite art work inside Mogao Grottoes is the Nirvana Buddha. This sculpture is a Buddha sleeping on its side, this posture is also called Lion's Posture, the name originated from India. Even though some stories interpret it as if the Buddha has died, this posture of lying on its right is different from lying on one's back as adopted by the dead of the mundane world, indicating that the Nirvana Buddha is not dead. The entire image of the Buddha bespeaks the ultimate realm of enjoying spiritual tranquility. Other than Buddhist art, not all caves are about sculptures and paintings. The 17th cave called the Library Caves stored thousands of manuscripts, scrolls, booklets and paintings on silk, hemp and paper were found literally stuffed inside the cave. These scrolls weigh several tons while all just from paper! There must've been a lot! There is a lot of information I couldn't possibly cover considering how complex Mogao Grottoes is. So in conclusion, Mogao Grottoes are giant Buddhist caves consisting of many murals and sculptures. And if you want to know more about it, I would suggest you to take a look at the Wikipedia. It's an amazing source that tells you all about Mogao Grottoes

The Mysterious Mogao Grottoes

Diocesan Girls' Junior School, Wong, Seen Yi Katrina – 11

Mogao Grottoes is a treasure house that was built in 366 AD and is home to great Buddhist art from the 4th to 14th century. It rests above the Dachuan River. Tourists from around the world flock to see its stunning and magnificent sculptures and murals.

Out of the 735 caves, 492 caves are presently preserved. The caves are filled with murals and sculptures of different dynasties and eras, such as: the Song Dynasty, the Sui Dynasty and the Yuan Dynasty.

Cave 61 depicts the landscape of Mount Wutai, where everything is in the picture, including roads, rivers, mountains and so on. Nothing is left out. The Caves 23 and 156 show the scene of workers working in the fields and a line of warriors respectively. Cave 302 from the Sui dynasty displays various cultural exchanges along the Silk road, portraying a camel pulling a cart full of goods during that period.

The Mogao Caves have unmatched historical value, as its murals and works provide numerous aspects of politics, economics, culture, arts, religion, ethnic relations, and daily costumes during that time period. Its artwork can reveal the life of the Chinese in the olden days too. If not for its artwork, we might not know about some things that happened in the past. This is why we need to protect them, as they record important historical events.

The Significance behind the Ancient Buddhist Masterpiece – Tha Mogao Caves

Diocesan Preparatory School, So, Yin Dui Damien Raphael – 12

By 130 BCE Zhang Qian had just found the Silk Road route, spreading trade, religion and knowledge between China and other countries en-route. Situated in the middle of Silk Road, lies an invaluable ancient masterpiece, now an UNESCO World Heritage site --- The Mogao Caves, which depicts the lifestyle and Buddhism more than 1500 years ago.

When the Kushan empire came to control the Silk Road trade through Central and South East Asia, and because the Kushans patronised Buddhism, many Buddhist centres were built and the Mogao(meaning 'a high place in the desert') caves were built in 336 AD as a sanctuary for meditation and worship. But were those built for the Kushans or tradesmen? Developing over 10 centuries, it has been built as a pilgrimage for the Buddhists like Mecca is to the Muslims, and Jerusalem to the Christians and Jews. The cliffs were carved into 24 kilometres of 492 caves filled with painted scrolls, manuscripts, wall paintings, sculptures and 45,000 square metres of murals with 60,000 written texts in Chinese, Tibetan, Sanskrit, Uighur and Tangut.

The overall architecture of the Mogao caves was Tantric Age inspired, and kept to its origins. They were built using soft gravel conglomerate and many of the early caves used a Buddhist rock-cut chaitya style. Other hall caves used a more traditional Chinese and Buddhist temple architecture style, these hall caves sometimes used a truncated pyramidal ceiling and may also be painted to resemble a tent, or been have designed with a flat or gabled ceiling that imitates traditional buildings. Some caves that are used for meditation are adaptations of the Indian vihara cave planning and have side-chambers that have just enough space to for a person to sit inside. We learned that the caves have kept its form and have existed for sixteen centuries, surviving seven Chinese dynasties, which was a culmination of centuries of historical relic and artifacts.

The art in this cave used a variant of colours which is very uncommon during ancient time due to the fact that multiple colour ingredients are very hard to obtain or needed to be sourced from a various amount of places (that could have possibly been transported from Persia or the Middle East). Also, the craftsmanship of the figures in the paintings is very immaculate need a various amount of detail to perfect these type of paintings. The Mogao caves are very valuable by knowledge and how we understand ancient China's art pieces and historical artifacts.

The Silk Road transmission of Buddhism to China may have started in the late 2 AD, but because of the Mogao caves' existence, Buddhism has been widely spread all across China and has become a major religion over centuries. At its peak influence, Buddhism had grown into a major religion from Tang dynasty to Song dynasty. From China, Buddhism was introduced to its neighbours Korea, Japan and Vietnam between 2 AD to 7 AD.

Buddhist institutions built along the caves and the Silk Road offer classical Indian knowledge such as grammar, astrology, and medicine. It was a melting pot for writing and literacy, and a place to learn traditional Chinese medicine, Ayurveda and Tibetan medicine. These approaches to health were later adopted into Sri Lanka, Burma, Tibet and Thailand. The Buddhists were also at the forefront of adopting Chinese technologies such as bookmaking, papermaking, and block printing.

Through the Silk Road, the Mogao caves have been influencing other nations and house many different types of Buddhist thinking, philosophies and beliefs throughout centuries. To this date, Buddhism has not only transformed China's core believes but it has become one of the three major influences in our culture alongside with Confucianism and Taosim, but the Mogao Cave has become a sought-after site that many international scholars seek to understand in terms of its archaeological or art context.

All about the Legendary Mogao Caves

Diocesan Preparatory School, Tang, Chun Yin – 10

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

New Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

Diocesan Preparatory School, Yan, Zi Rui – 10

Background and history

Lying just 25 km away from an Dunhuang, one of the cultural hotspots of the once-legendary Silk Road, the Mogao Grottoes, otherwise known as the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas, are a breath-taking series of caves bearing numerous masterpieces of Chinese art and literature from over a millennium ago.

Legend has it that in 366 AD, a Buddhist monk named Yuezun had a vision of a thousand incandescent Buddhas on the face of a cliff near the oasis town of Dunhuang in the Gobi Desert, inspiring him to start excavating the cliff face to make his vision a reality. As the years went by, fuelled by the rise of the Silk Road, a community of pilgrims and monks from all over Asia and Europe arrived and settled in the caves, producing a unique melting pot of cultures where manuscripts, carvings, and sculptures of Buddhist, Confucian, Daoist, and even Christian ideologies were created.

For the next 10 centuries, the community thrived, and the caves witnessed the rise and fall of the Sui, Tang, and Song dynasties. Each dynasty added their own touch to the caves, with their inhabitants spending their time forging a treasure trove of works depicting every aspect of their lives – from their religious beliefs to their political relations, from their arts to their daily dress, and from their economics to their entertainment. Sadly, as the Silk Road, the lifeblood of the Grottoes, ran its historical course and fell into disuse in the 14th century, the Mogao Grottoes suffered the same fate, fading into the memories of a select few as time churned on. Soon, the caves were but a forgotten legend, the abandoned entrances choked by sand pouring in from the storms of the Gobi.

While a few pilgrims still visited the sites at the time, the true glory of the caves lay buried in plain sight for another five centuries, until a Daoist monk named Wang Yuanlu stumbled upon a hidden door to the sealed up caves once again, leading to the great rediscovery of the ancient relics buried within. In the years to follow, a surge of archaeologists from all over the world flocked to the caves, slowly unlocking the secrets of that once-lost world.

Historical significance

As explorers sought to uncover every inch of the Grottoes, the vast expanse of the cave system soon came to light. Spanning a distance of 1.6 km and containing 492 known cells, the caves feature over 2000 painted sculptures of religious figures, and over 480,000 square feet of murals depicting religious events, influential people, and scenes of life in their time.

Part of the historical significance of the caves lies in how it bore witness to life in the civilizations of Northwest China throughout ten tumultuous centuries. Through masterclasses of artistic achievement, each cave portrays its own snapshots and tells its own stories of Oriental culture. For example, Cave 302, established in the Sui dynasty, holds one of the most breath-taking depictions of cultural exchange along the Silk Road, immortalizing the scenes of commercial life of merchants and traders along the iconic route. Cave 23 of the Tang dynasty shows workers labouring in the fields, while other caves showed scenes of war, shining light on different aspects of daily life in this famous era. Among the art produced in the Song dynasty, Cave 61 contains the *pièce de résistance* – an early work of Chinese cartography representing the grand landscape of Mount Wutai, including the flowing rivers, bustling cities, sacred temples, dusty roads, and little caravans.

Not only are the caves and the works within them kaleidoscopes to a lost age granting us a peek into life a thousand years ago, the area also marks the artistic and religious exchange between different cultures, and is testament to the evolution of Asian art over time. During its active years, the location of the Mogao Grottoes brought in artists from various religious backgrounds and countries, hence playing a central role in the exchange of ideas between these communities. This is made abundantly clear by the immense variety of art in the caves, ranging from Buddhist rock art to styles assimilated from Indian, Gandharan, Turkish, and Tibetan cultures. Yet, there is no greater evidence of this exchange than the very first cave discovered – the Library Cave, containing tens of thousands of manuscripts and relics capturing the very spirit and knowledge of their times, earning its place as the crown jewel in the study of history of ancient China and central Asia.

Reflection

The story of the Mogao Grottoes serve as an inspirational tale in many ways. From the one man who started it all, to the united band of explorers who were determined to preserve and protect all that the caves had to offer. Today, the Grottoes stand tall as a proud reminder of our past. I had my breath taken away by the sheer variety and volume of wonders that those caves contained. In a way, the Grottoes not only represent the culture and dreams of our brothers from another era, but also a beacon directing one's imagination once again to the countless wonders awaiting curious explorers. Throughout our history, humanity has always been an inquisitive species, and here in modern Hong Kong where the focus has been

shifting ever greatly onto the many different stresses of life, perhaps just once in a while, we should remember our dreamer roots and celebrate the spirit of adventure and imagination — even if it is as simple as meeting new people, appreciating new cultures, and maybe even creating testaments of our own wonders. As for the rest of the world, who knows what our ancestors of the distant past have in store for us next? Who knows what other wonders of the world lie waiting, perhaps just in plain sight, as the Mogao Grottoes were merely a century ago? Perhaps with a little bit of that long-lost spirit and a splash of luck, we'll know sooner than we think.

The Entrance To Pure Land Paradise –Facts About The Mogao Caves

ESF Glenealy School, Li, Tan – 8

Introduction

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

Where are the Mogao Caves located?

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

Why were the Mogao Caves built?

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

Discovery, dispersal and revival

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

Many foreign explorers, including Aurel Stein, a British Hungarian descent; Paul Pelliot, a French sinologist; Zuicho Tachibana and Yoshikawa Koichiro, members of Japanese **expedition** team and Langdon Warner who was known to take murals using plastering tape and glue, came to Dunhuang and purchased a great amount of treasured arts and documents for an extremely low price. It was until then, Chinese scholars (now known as Dunhuang Academy) decided that it was time to send all the relics to Beijing to keep them safe. Unfortunately only 8,000 of the 10,000 relic items made it to Beijing, the remaining were either stolen or lost.

A thousand years of art

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

Dunhuang Today

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

Conclusion

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

Timeline of the Mogao Caves:

366 AD: First cave built by Buddhist monk.

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

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

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

1930 – 1940: Chinese scholars inspected the Mogao Caves.

1944: National Dunhuang Art Institution established.

1950 – 1984: Professionals started rebuilding the Mogao Caves.

1987: Became world heritage site.

Now: Scientific conservation

Author's Note

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Glossary: definition comes from Dictionary.com

Buddhism: [boo-diz-ulm] a religion, originated in India by Buddha.

Prodigious: [pruh-dij-uls] wonderful or marvelous

Millennium: [mi-len-ee-ulm] a period of 1,000 years.

Relic: [rel-ik] a surviving memorial of something past.

Expedition: [ek-spi-dish-uhn] an excursion, journey, or voyage made for some specific purpose, as of war or exploration.

Heritage: [her-i-tij] something that is handed down from the past, as a tradition.

Conservation: [kon-ser-vey-shuhn] the act of conserving; prevention of injury, decay, waste, or loss.

The Caves of the Silk Road

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Lui-Schwille, Tristan – 11

The Splendour of the Caves:

Standing nine storeys tall, and hewn into the cliffs of a sand-strewn valley in China's northern province of Gansu, are found the ornate rock-cut temples known as the Mogao Caves. Situated on the ancient Silk Road near the border town of DunHuang, the Mogao Caves are a breathtaking reminder of China's cultural heritage, dating back as far as the Tang Dynasty. With their immense scale and intricate detail, the Mogao Caves came to house some of the world's finest examples of Buddhist art. Now largely restored and open to the public, the splendour of the Mogao Caves continues to be accessible to tourists and scholars alike.

Modest Beginnings:

Legend has it that in 366 C.E. a devoted Buddhist monk called YueZun imagined he saw the faces of a thousand Buddhas, shimmering in golden light on the rock of DunHuang's SanWei Mountain. This sight inspired him to carve out a small meditation chamber into the cliff face. Inspired by YueZun's example, other monks also began to carve out their own spaces into the rock. These first carved chambers were only a few feet across; however soon after, monastic communities took interest and began carving out large caverns for public acts of devotion and pilgrimage. These would later develop into a breathtaking underground temple that would become globally renowned.

The Silk Road and the Caves:

With the growing importance of the Silk Road trade, the site grew in scale and magnificence. With donors ranging from Emperors to wealthy families and foreign dignitaries, the shrines and tunnels became increasingly elaborate, decorated with religious art of a quality which reflected their social status. As well as Buddhism, many other secondary religions were represented in the Mogao Caves such as Daoism, Zoroastrianism and Nestorianism.

During the eleventh century, the importance of the Silk Road began to decline. This was in part due to conflict in Central and Western Asia; it was also due to the fact that other countries began to learn the process of making their own silk. This latter development meant a reduced need to rely solely on China for silk; the economic importance of the Silk Road began to decline, finally collapsing altogether; it is understandable that many of the Caves fell into disuse.

Important Discoveries:

The decline of the Silk Road could have been the end for the prominence of the Mogao Caves. However, during the early nineteenth and twentieth centuries, European travellers began to show interest in the Silk Road and the cities along its route, and with this began to develop global awareness of the Caves and of their significance.

Soon after the existence of the Caves once again became widely known, an important discovery was made; a Daoist monk called Wang YuanLu uncovered a walled-off section of a cave, behind which was found what would come to be known as the "Library Cave." This contained nearly fifty-thousand ancient religious paintings, items of silk embroidery and other rare textiles. Well-preserved by the arid environment, these rare artifacts included the world's oldest printed book, printed in 868 C.E., almost six hundred years before the first printing press in Europe.

The Need for Preservation:

Now, in the twenty-first century, the Caves are more popular than ever. Yet with larger numbers of tourists and the climate in Northwest China rising, humidity levels in the Caves have increased; this in turn risks damaging the well-preserved but fragile wall paintings inside. To relieve the pressure of visitors, there is now a daily limit on the number of tickets which may be issued. As well as a daily limit on tourists, the DunHuang Academy and government have organised a program to research what protective materials would be best used to preserve the Caves.

The Mogao Caves are truly a spectacular site. They possess a cultural and historical significance that is unmatched by any other cave site from around the world. At the same time, we must remember the fragility of the Caves which reminds us of the importance of preservation – such that future generations may continue to have the opportunity to marvel at their size and detailed design, and also at the role of the ancient Silk Road itself.

New Biography of Mogao Grottoes

Kingston International School, Huang, Yiming – 10

Mogao Grottoes, also known as Thousand Buddha Caves, is located at the western end of the Hexi Corridor of Sweet Potato Province, 25 kilometers southeast of Dunhuang City, on the cliff at the foot of Mingsha Mountain. The West Thousand Buddha Caves, Yulin Grottoes and East Thousand Buddha Caves together form the Dunhuang Grottoes.

The Mogao Grottoes are located at a strategic point along the Silk Road. It has been a battleground for the military since ancient times, and it is also a meeting place for religion, culture and knowledge, and a transit point for trade between the East and the West.

In 366 AD, when the eminent monk Le Zun passed by Mingsha East Road, he suddenly saw golden light shining like ten thousand Buddhas, so he dug the first cave on the rock wall. Le Zun's inadvertent actions started a thousand-year-old cultural legend. The construction of the Mogao Grottoes has never stopped for more than a thousand years since then. It has witnessed the rise and fall of Chinese democracy, chaos and governance, and has been ruled by the Central Plains Dynasty, Tubo, Xixia and local separatist regimes successively. Despite the change of dynasties, people have always insisted on the construction of the Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang. Everyone invariably carried out careful carving and depiction of the Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang on the basis of their predecessors, until Jiayuguan was blocked by Emperor Jiajing. The Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang were gradually abandoned in the dust of history.

Until June 22, 1900, the Taoist priest Wang Yuanlu, known as Wang Taoist, who was in charge of the grotto, invited Yang, who came to write the scriptures, to insert a lamp in the crack of the wall, and found that the wall was empty, so he found a secret room. There are more than 40,000 pieces of classics, histories, books, collections of various documents and paintings from the Western Jin Dynasty to the Song Dynasty. Among them, the stolen treasures have been robbed in more than ten countries and regions, and there are also Western archaeologists who bought many murals/scriptures of the Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang and brought them back to their home countries to donate to museum collections. Among them, there are 13,700 collections related to Dunhuang in the British Museum. It is the place with the largest collection of Dunhuang cultural relics in the world.

Mogao Grottoes is a large-scale cave temple that integrates painting, sculpture and architectural art, with murals as the mainstay and statues as auxiliary. The murals of Mogao Grottoes are located on the four walls of the caves, on the top of the caves and in the Buddhist niches.

As China becomes more open and convenient in transportation, people from all over the world can come to China by plane and high-speed rail to visit the extensive and profound cultural relics of the Mogao Grottoes, appreciate the splendid Dunhuang frescoes and watch the majestic grottoes. The murals in each grotto can bring out a historical story, such as the meditation Buddha statue in Cave 259, which is nicknamed "Oriental Mona Lisa". The cave was built in the Taihe period of the Northern Wei Dynasty and was one of the early Dunhuang caves.

I also traveled to the Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang with a tour group in the summer of 2018, visited the grottoes, and learned and gained a lot of historical knowledge from different dynasties. Back in Hong Kong, I also shared the experience of this trip with my classmates and encouraged them to visit these majestic buildings in Dunhuang during the holidays.

As a Chinese, I am very proud and proud that China has preserved such a long history and culture of the Mogao Grottoes.

The Mysteries of the Buddhist Cavern

Marymount Primary School, Choi, Ki Ching Victoria – 11

Located above the serene waters of the Dachuan River, the sacred hideout for the medieval Buddha artworks is carved into the jagged cliffs. The remarkable Mogao Caves, a collection of nearly 500 caves in the cliffs to the south of the city, contain the largest depository of historic documents along the Silk Roads and bear witness to the cultural, religious, social and commercial activity that took place in Dunhuang across the first millennium. The word 'Mogao' means 'peerless', and the historical caves undoubtedly live up to its name. A nostalgic, evocative atmosphere hangs over the majestic towering mansion, and as Wang Yuanlu, a monk who founded these richly endowed grottoes determined, the home for the Buddha architecture was meant for something special.

The Mogao Caves, also known as the Thousand Buddha Grottoes, has been home to 2,400 clay sculptures and 45,000 square meters of treasured ancient murals. The Mogao Grottoes are considered one of the most monumental and resplendent collections of Buddhist representation in the world. 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. This remote sanctuary is a sacred wonder, which throughout the centuries many have made the pilgrimage to pay homage and to witness its splendour with their own eyes. Some images depicted the grand solemnity of Buddha; others the terrors of Hell for the wicked. It was a common belief that deities appeared to the faithful in visions, and the scenes were thus taken as accurate depictions, an earthly glimpse into otherworldly realms. Though located near the scorching hot desert, this sector had become infested with crossroads due to the iconic representative of Buddhism and became a popular accommodation to visit during the fourth century.

The construction of this elevated region of religion was initially constructed in 366 AD by an itinerant monk named Yuezun. Positioned in Dunhuang, the monk believed in a spiritual and meaningful connection between him and this array of fierce rocks. As legend has it, the monk was making the long journey to the Western Paradise. Crossing the Gobi Desert, he stopped by Sanwei Mountain, near Dunhuang. There he found a special spring and, having quenched his thirst with its sweet waters, sat down to rest. The mountain gradually grew an unnatural radiant gold, and Yuezun envisioned thousands of luminous Buddhas emerging and perching on the cliff face, and the divine scene invigorating him to excavate the cave. Buddhist monks began to pour in, cultivating their thoughts with the currently flourishing Buddhism. Mogao quickly became a pilgrimage site for Buddhists, artists, officials, and many others. From time to time during the magisterial Tang dynasty, striking statues and sublime murals would be transported into the moderately expanding assemblage of grottoes. The Mogao Caves illustrate not only the religious importance of Dunhuang however, but also its significance as a centre of cultural and commercial exchange.

This leads us to the ginormous part of the Mogao Grottoes' location that participated in producing this exalted site. If it weren't for its headquarters in the well-known Silk Road, it might not have resulted in such a quintessential mark of history being visited by bustling tourists every moment of the day. The municipality of Dunhuang, in northwest China, is situated at a point of vital strategic and logistical importance, on a crossroads of two major trade routes within the Silk Road network. The Silk Road routes from China to the west, and Dunhuang lay on the junction where these two routes evolved together. One of the most prominent caves, known as the 'library cave', contains as many as 40,000 scrolls, a depository of documents that is of enormous value in understanding the cultural diversity of this Silk Road city. The arrangement of the documents provide a spectacle of Dunhuang as a vibrant hub of the Silk Road trade and give an indication of the range of goods that were exchanged in the city. According to these detailed scrolls of important history, the range of goods transported into the cave to aid the grottoes are countless. They include fragrances and silk, and a tremendous amount of precious stones. Crafts and skills also moved along the Silk Roads as traders and craftsmen met and exchanged notes, and a small number of scrolls in the Mogao Caves illustrate the use of woodblock printing in Dunhuang, a technique that originated in China in the early 8th century.

But as time drove by in a racecar, with the decline of the Silk Road, the Mogao Caves were slowly neglected by the outside world. But as distinct sea routes opened and more agile ships were constructed, land caravans slipped into obsolescence. China, moreover, lost control over large portions of the Silk Road, and Islam had commenced its long migration over the mountains from Central Asia. Sparse monks scrambled over to the caves during the early 11th century, distributing tens of thousands of manuscripts and paintings in a small side chamber adjoining a larger Mogao grotto. No one is certain about their acknowledgement on this matter, but the only definite answer is that the chamber was sealed up, plastered over, and concealed by murals. The secluded cache would remain entombed for 900 years until 1900 when a Taoist priest named Wang Yuanlu became the sanctuaries' self-appointed guardian, many of the abandoned grottoes were

buried in the sand. But they were vaguely ignored. It would take another encounter with the West to reveal the secrets of the caves—and to sound China's patriotic alarms. From then on, miscellaneous people would jam-pack the caves. Some Chinese officials, echoing their counterparts in Egypt and Greece, have called for the Mogao artefacts to be returned. Foreign curators, meanwhile, contend that their museums have saved treasures that might otherwise have been lost forever. Despite this ongoing debate of ownership over these treasures, the Mogao Grottoes are undeniably distinctive.

The History of The Mogao Caves

Marymount Primary School, Fung, Ching Yau Roselle – 10

When I first started learning about the Mogao Caves, I felt overwhelmed by the richness of its history, the mystery hidden in the cave art and the sheer number of buddha statues found there. With the stunning façade of the nine-storey building with red porticos at the entrance, the Mogao Caves looked like a setting straight from a movie. Why did someone build such beautiful architecture in the middle of a desert? What stories lie behind the paintings and sculpture? A million questions sprang up in my head and I started doing research on the internet. It was satisfying to find the answers to my questions. Now, let me share my answers with you.

WHAT are the different names of the Mogao Caves and HOW did they come about?

Different names have been given to the Mogao Caves (Chinese: 莫高窟), each with a different story behind. To begin with, 'Mogao' used to be the name of an 'administrative district' in the Tang dynasty. However, the name 'Mogao' also bears the meaning of "peerless" or "none higher than", which makes sense since the Mogao Caves is situated in the desert and "mo" could also mean "desert" in Chinese.

The Mogao Caves is also called the 'Thousand Buddha Caves' (Chinese: 千佛洞) because there are almost over a thousand Buddhas inside the caves. It could also relate to the legend of how a monk called Yuezun had a vision of a thousand Buddhas appearing at the site in 366AD, which I will explain further later.

It is also called the Dunhuang Caves or Dunhuang Grottoes. A 'grotto' is a small cave, either natural or man-made, usually used for religious purposes. Dunhuang is the nearest city to the caves. The name 'Dunhuang' means "blazing beacon" as it used to be a frontier outpost where beacons of fire were used to warn its citizens of attacks by nomadic tribes.

WHAT was special about Dunhuang?

Dunhuang was an important city on the frontier of China. It was established as a garrison outpost by the Han Dynasty Emperor Wudi to protect its citizens against the invaders, Xiongnu, in 111 BC and since then it had become an important centre of trade along the Silk Road. Not only was it a trading centre, it was also a meeting place of various people and religions such as Buddhism, Taoist and ideas from the west.

WHEN and HOW were the grottoes built?

A writer, Brook Larmer, wrote in National Geographic, "The caves began as a vision of light." This was because legend has it that in 366 AD, a wandering monk named YueZun passed by the Singing Sand Mountain in the desert where the Mogao Caves are today. There he had a vision of a thousand radiant, golden Buddhas shining on the face of a cliff. He thought it was a vision sent to him with a purpose, and that was why he began to excavate the caves. He started to chisel a small coffin-sized cell into the rock used for meditation. Later, the monastic communities began to carve out bigger caverns with images of Buddha for worship.

YueZun not only dedicated his life to building the caves and meditating there, he also started a movement that lasted for over a period of a thousand years where monks and scholars continued to construct caves and create sculptures, murals and manuscripts from the 4th to the 14th century.

What can you find at the Mogao Caves?

The Mogao Caves comprises of a series of grottoes situated about 25 kilometers southeast of the city of Dunhuang in Gansu Province. The grottoes are carved out of the sandstone cliffs of Mingsha Mountain and extend about 1600 meters from north to south.

Without dispute, it is the greatest collection of Buddhist art found in a single location anywhere in the world. There are numerous temples and shrines with sculptures, murals (wall paintings) and manuscripts. The remaining Mogao Grottoes contain about 45,000 square meters of mural paintings, and more than 2000 painted sculptures. In the Mogao Caves, there are a total of 735 original grottoes, of which only 492 of them survived over time.

Another major discovery happened in the 1900's. In the early 20th century, a Taoist monk named Wang YuanLu was taking care of some of the grottoes. He discovered a hidden cave behind a wall. It turned out that he made a discover of the century! What he discovered was later known as the 'Scripture Cave' or 'Library Cave'. People referred to the

manuscripts found inside the Library Cave as 'Dunhuang Manuscripts' and they were sealed off inside the cave sometime early in the 11th century. There were a lot of complete sutras in Chinese, complete paintings and complete Tibetan, Sogdian, Khotanese texts, nearly 50, 000 ancient manuscripts, silk banners and paintings, fine silk embroideries and other rare textiles and scrolls.

However, without knowing the significance of his discovery, Wang YuanLu sold many of these manuscripts off to foreign explorers for small sums of money.

Conclusion: What have I learnt from my research of the Mogao Caves?

Learning about the Mogao Caves is like solving a mystery to me. I am so glad to learn more about this important historical and cultural heritage. The amazing treasure-trove of Buddhist art gives us an accurate idea of what life was like before. The legends and stories about the murals, Buddhas, caves, monks and priests make the Mogao Caves an endless source of imagination. Because of all these, the Mogao Caves were designated a World Heritage site in 1987.

I hope reading my research has given you an interest to visit the Mogao Caves in the future. You can travel there by air or by train, but remember to book a tour online or in-person!

Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

Po On Commercial Association Wan Ho Kan Primary School, Kaur, Ashmeet – 13

More than one and half millennia ago, a monk thought there was something special he found at an oasis in the desert on the Silk Road in China. The Mogao Caves also known as Thousand Buddha Caves is a massive group of caves filled with Buddhist Statues.

The caves are found on the side of a cliff which is close to two kilometers long. During the Tang Dynasty, there were more than a thousand caves, but over time many of the caves were lost, including the earliest caves. 735 caves currently exist in Mogao and the best-known ones are the 487 caves located in the southern section of the cliff which are places of pilgrimage and worship. 248 caves have also been found to the north which were living quarters, meditation chambers, and burial sites for the monks. The caves at the southern section are decorated, while those at the northern section are mostly plain.

The art of Dunhuang covers more than ten major genres, such as architecture, stucco sculpture, wall paintings, silk paintings, calligraphy, woodblock printing, embroidery, literature, music and dance, and other popular entertainment.

The caves are example of rock-cut architecture, but unlike Longmen Grottoes the local rock in Yungang Grottoes is a rather soft gravel conglomerate that is not suitable for either sculpturing or elaborate details. Many of the early caves developed from earlier Buddhist rock-cut styles are seen in India, with a square-sectioned central column, with sculpture in niches representing the stupa around which worshippers bow and gain blessings. Others are caves influenced by traditional Chinese and Buddhist temple architecture.

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

Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

Po On Commercial Association Wan Ho Kan Primary School, Kaur, Tajvir – 10

In Mogao Caves, there are many paintings, more than two thousand statues, magnificent works on silk and paper, thousands of ancient manuscripts, such as sutras, poems, and prayer sheets, which in 1900 were found sealed in one of the caves and then dispersed to museums throughout the world.

There are 735 caves in Mogao. There are also a lot of Buddhist art and stories hidden there. Mogao caves are very important for us because they are important evidence of the evolution of Buddhist art in the northwest region of China.

The caves are strongly linked to the history of transcontinental relations and of the spread of Buddhism throughout Asia. For centuries the Dunhuang Oasis, near which the two branches of the Silk Road forked, enjoyed the privilege of being a relay station where not only merchandises were traded, but also exemplified the ideas of the Chinese, Tibetan, Sogdian, Kho tan, and Uighur. Hebrew manuscripts are also found within the caves.

The Mogao Caves were included in the World Heritage list in 1987. This site was put under top-level protection by the government. In 1961, the Mogao Caves was listed as one of the State Priority Protected Sites by the State Council and was put under the protection of nation laws including the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Cultures Relics. The Regulations for the Conservation of the Mogao in Dunhuang, Gansu Province (2002) has confirmed the boundaries of the conservation area, and the Master Plan for the conservation of the Mogao Caves at Dunhuang (2006–2025), which has been reported to the Gansu Provincial Government and will be issued soon, adds the area for the control of construction, which overlaps with the buffer zone. The two directives are the most important measures taken for preserving the authenticity and integrity of the Mogao Caves. The Administrative Institution of the Mogao Caves has been cooperating with international counter parts to study conservation and site management and looks forward to continuing its work in preserving the heritage of the site.

The goal in the future is to implement the measures put out in the management plan by the scheduled time, to learn from advanced experiences in heritage site conservation and the authenticity and integrity of the heritage site and its setting, and to make its full historical information and value available to future generations.

The location of the Mogao Caves and its settings are faithful to the authentic historical context in which they were created. The design, materials, traditions, techniques, spirit, and impression of the caves, wall paintings, painted sculptures and movable cultural relics still exhibit the characteristics of the periods in which they were created. The continued utilization of the Mogao Caves for tourism has indeed promoted its historic significance. Conservation plans have established the guidelines for the caves' utilization and conservation and therefore will ensure the authenticity of the site and its setting

The Mogao Grottoes

Regents Primary School of Shenzhen, Chen, Yunqing Leona – 10

A long, long time ago,

there was a secret nobody knew.

A secret that traveled back to ancient times.

When Dunhuang had not yet become the home of thousands of caves.

That secret traveled through the rivers, went across the mountains and was finally buried in the desert.

Not until the child picked up that leaf was the secret revealed. A long, long time ago,

an ugly monster attacked a peaceful village where people had faith in Buddha

It set fire to burn the town and took away all the children.

Parents cried for rain, but not a single drop of water came.

The Wise said, “There must be something that the monster fears... Build the Buddha!”

Everyone worked together to build the Buddha, and it worked!

It scared the monster and called the rain! He brought back all the children that had been taken away

And by then, citizens built the Buddha statues year after year, generation after generation, becoming the Mogao caves people visit today.

The Mogao Grottoes

Regents Primary School of Shenzhen, Xiao, Ziyue – 12

The Mogao Grottoes is a mysterious place, a network of 492 caves spanning a vast area, richly and entirely decorated by 45,000 murals and 2,415 clay sculptures. They are a treasure house of murals, sculptures and other cultural relics. They are the largest and the most abundant Buddhist art place.

More than 1000 years ago, a monk discovered The Mogao Grottoes. He and others dug caves together and put their sculptures into the caves, but 1000 years later, travelers began to explore other places. The Mogao Grottoes had been forgotten. However, in the 1900s, explorers rediscovered the caves and discovered many artifacts. In A.D.366, during the Eastern Jin Dynasty, a monk named Yue Seng chiseled the first cave here. The endeavor continued the chiseling through later dynasties, including the Northern Wei, Western Wei, Northern Zhou, Sui, Tang, Five Dynasties, Song, Western Xia, and Yuan. In 1987, UNESCO placed the Mogao Grottoes under the protection of the world cultural heritage list. Therefore, Mogao Grottoes become a legend.

Humans have not fully discovered the secrets of the Mogao Grottoes. Scientists are still studying the secrets of the Mogao Grottoes. They look forward to one day when all the mysteries of the Mogao Grottoes will be solved. The insight these works have given into the history of China is invaluable, and the illustrious heritage of the site echoes throughout its many caves. We are supposed to cherish such treasures from the past.

A Trip To the Mogao Grottoes

Regents Primary School of Shenzhen, Xu, Tsz Lam – 11

I visited Mogao grottoes in the Dun Huang district of Gansu province in west-central China during the summer holiday. I had a taste of its true face, it gave me a deep impression, so I could not forget it for a long time.

On the Silk-Road. It was said that more than one and half million years ago, a monk decided there was something special about a cave he found at an oasis in the desert on the silk Road in China. Mogao grottoes, commonly known as Thousand – Buddha Caves, are located west of the Hexi Corridor. Over the centuries, thousands of pilgrims arrived and decided to stay, digging more caves and spending their time creating sacred art and literature. But time passed, and travelers started taking other routes more than 1000 years later. The Mogao caves were forgotten, becoming little more than a dusty legend.

Then, in the 1900s, local and international scholar-explorers rediscovered the caves. They gradually unlocked their breathtaking secrets. There were hundreds of caverns containing some of the world's finest paintings, sculptures, and literature—including the oldest printed book in the world.

The Grottoes were built in the Qin Dynasty. There are 735 caves, 45000 square meters of murals, and 2415 Clay sculptures, one of the world's most significant artistic works.

When I entered the Mogao grottoes, I saw a honeycomb of caves arranged on the uneven walls, which gave an unpredicted artistic atmosphere. Following the guide's footsteps, finally, we reached the first cave. On entering, I could not help praising highly: " It's spectacular!" Other visitors were also amazed.

After visiting the caves, my heart was deeply shocked. I have to say the works are the best in China. It is no doubt worthy of being a world-class cultural heritage. We must protect them so that this famous treasure house of art will live forever.

Mogao grottoes, I will never forget you!

The History of the Mogao Grottoes

Shanghai Singapore International School, Krishna, Shreyas – 11

What are the Mogao Grottoes?

The Mogao Grottoes, otherwise called the Thousand Buddha Grottoes or Caves of the Thousand Buddhas, is an arrangement of 500 temples, 25 km southeast of the focal point of Dunhuang, a desert garden situated at a junction on the Silk Road, in Gansu area, China. The caverns may likewise be known as the Dunhuang Caves.

Who made the Mogao Grottoes?

The development of the Mogao Caves seems to have started at some point in the fourth century AD. As per a book composed during the rule of Tang Empress Wu, Fokan Ji – *An Account of Buddhist Shrines* by Li Junxiu, a Buddhist priest named Lè Zūn had a dream of 1,000 Buddhas washed in brilliant light at the site in 366 AD, motivating him to fabricate a cavern there. The story is additionally found in different sources, for example, in engravings on a stele in cave 332; in another archive, Shazhou Tujing (Geography of Shazhou). He was subsequently joined by a second priest Falian, and the site progressively developed. The caverns at first served distinctly as a position of contemplation for loner priests. Individuals from the decision group of Northern Wei and Northern Zhou built many caverns here, and it prospered in the brief Sui Dynasty. By the Tang Dynasty, the quantity of caverns had reached over a thousand.

By the Sui and Tang administrations, Mogao Caves had turned into a position of love and journey for the public. From the fourth until the fourteenth century, caves were built by priests to fill in as holy places with assets from givers. These caverns were extravagantly painted, the cavern artworks and engineering filling helped in reflection, as visual portrayals of the mission for edification, as memory aides, and as training devices to illuminate those ignorant to Buddhist convictions and stories. The significant caverns were supported by benefactors like significant holy places, nearby decisionmakers, senior dignitaries. Different caverns might have been financed by dealers, military officials, and other nearby individuals and groups.

Why were the Mogao Grottoes forgotten?

The caves lay forgotten for hundreds of years. The Silk Road fell into disuse by the 1400s, and for centuries Mogao was all but forgotten with the caves' entrances choked by sand from the Gobi Desert. In the 1890s a Daoist monk named Wang Yuanlu appointed himself guardian of the caves.

How was it revealed?

The Mogao grottoes were revealed by a priest called Wang Yuanlu and some foreigners unlocked the breathtaking secrets inside the caves. The priest and the foreigners were fascinated with the beautiful paintings and sculpture.

The Mogao Grottoes

Shanghai Singapore International School, Qian, Johnny – 9

It was the year 366 when Lezun, a monk, travelled to Mingshan Mountain, Dunhuang. Suddenly, he noticed that Sanwei Mountain was bathed in thousands of golden lights, like thousands of Buddhas just appeared. Believing that this indeed was a sign from the Buddhas, he hired men to carve the first Mogao Grotto in history. Following Lezun, another Buddhist monk named Faliang carved the second grotto in history. From then on, carving, painting and preserving of the Mogao Grottoes started to take place.

After Faliang's grotto, people designing the Mogao Grottoes translated the infinite worship to Shakyamuni and the longing for a Buddhist world into early grotto buildings. The first buildings were mostly shapes of Buddhist and Central Column Grottoes. The Buddhist Grottoes' use was for monk meditation. For example, in grotto 285, there is a main square room with a niche holding Buddhist statues used for the purpose of meditation included in the central wall. At the sides, however, the walls are cut into two or four chambers, each large enough for only one person to meditate. In the grotto of central column (or tower temple grotto), a square column starting from the floor and going up to the ceiling stands in the center, each of the four sides had niches cut into them holding Buddhist statues.

During the time of the sixteen kingdoms and the Northern and Southern Dynasties (304–508), Buddhist Grottoes and Central Column Grottoes were the most popular at the Mogao. Buddhist Grottoes came from Indian Vihara Grottoes, while Central Column Grottoes developed from Indian Catiya Grottoes and later changed into Qiuci Grottoes of the Western Regions (Qiuci being a kingdom from the Han Dynasty). However, foreign grottoes were not copied by the grottoes of the periods. Chinese architectural style was introduced by cutters of the Grottoes. The roof of the grotto in front of Central Column was improved into an inversed V-shaped roof, and the middle contained a ridge with slopes on both sides added to wooden parts including tie beams, arches, and rafters.

Hundreds of years ago, thieves and robbers from other parts of the world broke into the Mogao Grottoes. They stole parts of the statues and sold them all over the world. Fortunately, the Grottoes are well-cared by the keepers. They open different caves and close the other ones in order to repair and protect them. You are able to visit eight caves a day.

As you can see, the Mogao Grottoes have lots of uses, they have absorbed a wide range of arts from around Asia and are a tremendous sight, even when you are just visiting. Every piece of art has a story behind it, while each story being more interesting than the last. The Mogao Grottoes are not only a treasure to Asia, but the whole world.

Mogao Grottoes

Shanghai Singapore International School, Vadgama, Durva Miteshkumar – 10

Have you ever wondered about the Mogao Grottoes? Who made the Mogao Grottoes? How were they made? When could they make these caves? In this huge world, where did they make it? For what reason did they make it? So many questions! At the end of this piece, you will be able to share this information with other people or even know more secrets about these mysterious caves. If I were you, I would start reading this straight away!

According to www.chinahighlights.com, the first grotto was chiseled out in 366 AD by a monk called Le Zun. Le Zun was going home when suddenly he saw the top of a mountain glinting with golden light, as if there were thousands of buddhas shining on top. Then he started to believe that the Mogao area was a holy land for Buddhists, and with that, he decided that he was going to stay there and dig caves.

Others were inspired by Le Zun's example and followed him. There were 10 dynasties which kept adding to the Mogao Grottoes! By the time each dynasty ended, there was something added to the Mogao Grottoes. After the Tang Dynasty ended, the number of art works in the Mogao Grottoes reached its peak. There were literally more than 1,000 caves, and each cave contained more than ! Can you believe that? Unfortunately, after the Yuan Dynasty, the Mogao Grottoes were sealed and therefore forgotten by the rest of the world. People sealed them to avoid any damage from wars.

After that, no one tried to rediscover the beautiful caves until the year 1900. However, it became once again popular in the year 1900. A person named Wang Yanlu, made the amazing discovery by accident.

According to ancient-origins.com, in 1900, a hidden door was stumbled upon while sand from Cave 16 was being cleared away. Behind this secret door was a small cave filled with ancient manuscripts and sutras, as well as paintings on silk and paper.

Well, after all this information, I think you should get to know some interesting facts about the Mogao Grottoes. Did you know that there was a replica of the mogao grottoes made in Shenzhen? Visitors can now appreciate the art in detail through an immersive experience that uses cutting-edge technology!

If you like mysteries, there is a very exciting mystery about the Mogao Grottoes! As you know, a lot of people took things away from the Mogao Grottoes, so some people wonder about how many things there were in the caves at the beginning! With 735 caves, there were more than 45,000 square meters of murals and 2,415 colored sculptures of different sizes a long time ago.

According to www.chinadiscovery.com, Mogao Caves is one of the greatest repositories of Buddhist art in the world. You can trace the development of Chinese art over 1,600 years from one dynasty to the next because each dynasty built own caves to record its own features. This site along with Longmen Grottoes, Yungang Grottoes and Maijishan Grottoes are the four greatest Buddhist grottoes in China.

It was only in 1961 that the importance of the Mogao Grottoes was finally recognized by the Chinese people, and it was declared a national monument. In 1987, the Mogao Grottoes were designated a World Heritage site. Over the years, this site has become a tourist attraction and archaeological conservation work is being carried out there. If I were you, I would straight away go and book a ticket to the Mogao Grottoes to see the beautiful scenery with my own eyes.

Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

St. Paul's Co-educational College Primary School, Leung, Callum Gregson – 9

More than one and half millennia ago, a monk decided there was something special about a cave he found at an oasis in the Gobi desert on the Silk Road in China. The Silk Road was an ancient network of trade routes which connected the East to the West. These connections resulted in the trading of goods, notably silk, and the spread of ideas of diseases.

What's the origin of the name "Silk Road"? Silk was a highly valued commodity, indication of social status in ancient times. The Silk Road was the only way to procure silk in China because the country had a monopoly on silk for a long time; its production process was tightly guarded. Aside from silk, many other goods were traded on the Silk Road, including gold, bronze, glassware, tea, spices, gunpowder and textiles. Camels had also been an essential part of trading, either being used to transport goods or being traded themselves.

Over the centuries, thousands of pilgrims arrived and decided to stay, digging more caves, and spending their time creating sacred art and literature. Some of the routes were long but safe, and others were shorter but more dangerous.

But time passed, and more than 1000 years later, travellers started taking other routes. The Mogao Caves (also known as Thousand Buddha Caves or Mogao Grottoes), is a group of ancient caves which were built in different dynasties, situated in the Dunhuang district of Gansu province in west central China were forgotten, becoming little more than a dusty legend.

Then, in the 1900s, local and international scholar-explorers discovered the caves. They gradually unlocked its breathtaking secrets. There were hundreds of caverns containing some of the world's finest paintings, sculpture, and literature – including the oldest dated, printed book in the world.

It was like a tunnel to a lost world in the past, scholars said. It was magnificent, with 735 caves, more than 45,000 square meters of murals, 2,415 colored sculptures of different size. It was like a paradise, full of treasures that combine the travel of people, their beliefs, ideas and technology of the Silk Road. Religion is an important inspiration for art in many countries, and much of the art of the Silk Road was religious in origin. Many of the art of the Silk Road was created to encourage religious devotion, we value it as a source of precious historical information.

The Mogao Caves are filled with extensive and exquisite collections of Chinese landscape paintings. Every surface of the walls and ceilings is covered with painted clay stucco, some 45,000 square meters in all. A lot of the Chinese landscape motifs made their way west along the Silk Road to Persia. Some of the landscape painting background settings shows picture-stories of the daily life of the Buddha, graceful acrobats of the sky scatter flowers and garlands, while dancers and musicians celebrate the beauties of the Buddhist Pure Lands. Some other paintings feature layered-plane treatment of mountains with hard outlines and the trees silhouetted on mountain ridges became prominent features of Persian miniatures. These paintings are now in leading academic institutions such as the British Museum and the Beijing National Library. Scholars have found these materials to be a treasure love of information not only on the history of Buddhism, but also for popular literature and history.

The Chinese sculptures were also discovered in the Mogao Caves, they were beautifully crafted and extraordinarily rare. Some of them even look like Angels crafted them. From these ancient sculptures, there is a motif of the three wise monkeys, and many of us believed that they are bought to China from India through the Silk Road, and eventually to Japan. The three wise monkeys – one covering his eyes, one his ears, and one his mouth, they symbolize the proverbial saying, "See no evil. Hear no evil. Speak no evil." In our modern world, the three wise monkeys still embody the proverb they originally represented but there are various meanings ascribed to them. In social media, their usage is common for expressing feelings of joys, surprise and embarrassment. The images of the three wise monkeys are sometimes printed on t-shirts and figurines.

Thousands of literatures were found and they are valuable assets to teach many generations in the world. The books were well kept although some pages were missing. Some books said there was a battle between Hercules and Zeus, but God came and separated them, and God took them to the Angels' Garden where they could take a good rest. There was a large winged, fire-breathing dragon, the myths often described that the dragon had golden scales, red eyes redder than a phoenix, the dragon's flame hotter than the burning sun and it flew faster than a North American X-15 jet (the current

world record for the fastest manned aircraft) with thousands of rocket boosters. The dragon was indeed guarding a precious golden chest inside the Mogao Cave, inside the golden chest there were gold, precious gemstones, pearl rings, jade necklaces and other luxury items.

Other amazing discoveries of the Silk Road would be the blue-and-white porcelain, which was produced in China from the 13th century onward. This porcelain combines the art of China and other Asia cities such as Southeast Asia and Middle East. Muslim merchants travelled in Chinese coastal cities and introduced the Islamic cobalt-decorated ware to China. Later, potters in South China began decorating white porcelain vessels with cobalt blue, and most of the Chinese blue-and-white porcelain was exported to Southeast Asia and the Middle-East.

The Silk Road from its opening to its closure had great impact on the development of world civilization that it is difficult to imagine the modern world without it. And the greatest value of the Silk Road was the exchange of cross-culture, the groundwork for the development of the modern world we are living in today.

The Secret of the Mogao Caves

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Wong, Chung Pui Curtis – 11

I am now in the Mogao Caves, in Dunhuang, China. It is truly an awesome place. Firstly, I will tell you the story about the Mogao Caves. The Mogao Caves literally means “Mo” which stands for “none” and “Gao” which stands for high. Together it means “none higher”. It is also known as the Thousand Buddha's Cave. According to a book written during the reign of an empress named Wu during the Tang Dynasty, a monk called Yuezhen had a vision of a thousand buddhas which inspired him to build a cave there. Here in the caves, lies many dark secrets. It is a place where a thousand buddhas watch you and stare at you wherever you go.

I wonder about the story of the Mogao Caves. Who was Empress Wu? Why did the monk Yuezhen have a vision? It was so long ago that no one has these answers, but I can imagine how he built a thousand caves through his hard work. I can also imagine how the Buddha came to life in his vision and now lives in the caves, spiritually watching everyone from above.

The dark and dank feeling inside the caves made me feel disgusted and a shiver went down my spine. “Hello,” I said, and the booming echoes came bouncing back at me. I was surrounded by buddhas of different shapes and sizes. I stood in awe in the cave, amazed with one of the buddhas in particular. It was large and stately, sitting there almost 4 times as tall as me. Its eyes were the size of tennis balls and I was scared but also amazed. I could imagine it rising from its seat and suspended in the air for some time. The atmosphere in the cave was horrifying but intriguing.

I discovered many buddhas and it was amazing, but it was also kind of scary because there were echoes from the walls of each side, and the buddhas looked like they are staring at you— a visual illusion. It seemed like the eyes are following your every movement, but they aren't moving. When I came out of the caves, it was amazing. It was something special and I guarantee you won't regret going there as well. You have to visit it at least once before you die.

It is such an amazing and special place. It has inspired me to find out more about Chinese history and my heritage. In Hong Kong we see many buddhas and it seems quite ordinary but because of the Mogao Caves I am inspired to learn more about the Buddha. Buddha was an amazing man and an amazing historical figure but what does he have to do with my life? Through my experience of going to the Mogao Caves, I feel superbly motivated by the Buddha. Buddha was a spiritual man and many people did many good things to respect him. I have realised that the secret is not in the cave but the secret lives inside our hearts and in our actions.

What are the Cultural Impacts of the Mogao Grottoes' Discovery Within and Outside of China?

Stewards Pooi Kei Primary School, Wang, Alice – 11

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

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

Dunhuang, where the Mogao Grottoes are located, was a giant cultural mixing pot. In the early ages, it allowed people to peacefully come together. During the peak prosperity of the Silk Road, Chinese and Western cultures were able to meet at the grottoes. Different faces from all over the world were blended together through wall paintings, and some pieces have even absorbed the strengths of ancient art from Iran, India and Greece, amongst other places. It is proof that cultures have been historically mixed and embedded everywhere. This was the start of alleviating racism, xenophobia and the removal of racial boundaries. Hence, the benefits and significance of Chinese heritage crossing international borders by far outweigh any type of loss. Ultimately, it has contributed immensely to decreasing discrimination and increasing foreigners' understanding and knowledge of Chinese culture.

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

Overall, the Mogao Grottoes are a crucial discovery in history, ancient art, and commerce. Their impact can be witnessed everywhere, even in foreign countries and modern-day culture. They give insight into Chinese heritage, customs and religion. The most essential part is that they open the door of Chinese history to people in China and all over the world.

Therefore, as one of mankind's precious treasures, the Mogao Grottoes should have a chance to be repaired and most importantly, they should be closed off to the public. Even though some will consider it a regrettable choice, it is imperative to ensure the preservation of the priceless artifacts. Lastly, it would be a great endeavor and honor for archeologists to continue discovering additional caves and spread Chinese culture even further to other nations.

My Own Three-Day Experience of The Mogao Grottoes

The British International School Shanghai, Puxi Campus, Lee, Hajin – 11

1st February 2022

I've really been enjoying my first few days in Dunhuang with my friends so far. On the First day, we enjoyed the flabbergasting views of the Mogao Grottoes (or 莫高窟 in Chinese) from our hotel room, tasting the local food and I especially enjoyed one dish in particular: a food I'd never even heard of before called Niang Pi Zi(酿皮子), which is a yellowish, jade-like food, that's spicy yet sour. I gobbled it up like a hungry wolf as we checked-in and unpacked our stuff in our traditionally decorated hotel room.

2nd February 2022

On the 2nd day, the first thing me, Zhang Li and Li Shan did was to start to head towards the tourist centre (just a five-minute walk) to purchase the tickets. The person who sold those said that there were 3 options: Option A: a tour that you can visit 8 caves, 4 museums and a few movies, with transportation directly to the grottoes. And the B&C option (for native Chinese people) so we chose option A, got on the shuttle bus and started to head towards the grottoes in a terrific speed...

It was amazingly big and mystic. "Wow! I never knew they had the knowledge to build something like this 1600 years ago." I thought, as we sauntered towards the entrance of the Mogao Grottoes. Thinking of this, I remembered a legend my friend used to tell me: in the year 366 AD, a monk called Yue Zun, once had a dream of Golden Buddhas'. Therefore, he decided to turn this dream into reality, which is the present Mogao Grottoes. As I looked up, my eyes got fixed at a magnificent giant buddha statue staring all of us. Well, technically, sitting. I wondered to myself, "How come 1600 years passed and the caves are in a perfectly clean state apart from some peelings?" Well, I guess my friend, Zhang Li, somehow read my mind, because he taught me that it hadn't been discovered for 800 years since it was finished...until the early 1900s, when another monk with a surname of Wang, discovered it and sold some of the scrolls he discovered to a British person for approximately 200 pounds and the sad fact that those still haven't been returned to China still, even though 110 years passed after that incident.

The first cave we looked at was the one with a king-looking Buddha sitting, cross-legged, with people who seemed like his servants, looking down, and so was the rest similar to those. As I did so, I thought to myself: "So the person who made the caves must've gotten inspiration from Buddhism." As we headed towards the last cave (which I expected to be pretty much the same as the other caves), What I saw, blew my socks off-how wrong I was! The moment I entered, I was surrounded by an atmosphere of different ancient Chinese wall paintings of creatures, which I think were waiting for us to come, greeted me in a happy mood; I never knew that the grottoes contained Chinese culture AND Buddhism! So, after we spent a once-in-a-lifetime-experience sightseeing the Mogao Grottoes, we returned to our hotel (since the museum we were supposed to go was closed due to renovation); I really wanted to visit the museum, but unfortunately, we couldn't; it was full of priceless information and ancient things I didn't want to miss out on!

After that, we went out to the city centre from our hotel for some dinner (Chinese food, of course.). Surprisingly, it turned out that the city of Dunhuang contained lots of tasty restaurants! After thinking for a long time (because we had so many options to savour) we went into this luxurious restaurant which sold many Chinese dishes including Niang Pi Zi, Donkey meat, which seemed extremely disgusting, noodles, hot pot, and many others. In the end, I had to eat Donkey meat, which was actually so good that I even licked off the plate! After dinner, we went back to our comforting hotel room like the speed of the wind, and dozed off as loud as a sleeping bear because we were extremely exhausted!

3rd February 2022

The trip has nearly come to an end. We booked the High-Speed Railway to Shanghai which will take 24 Hours(A lot) at 8pm. So, during the time we have, we decided to go to some other places in Dunhuang like the Crescent Moon Pool, The Mogao Grottoes Museum(Luckily, it was open today), the Dunhuang Temple, and so on. After we finished the busy sightseeing around Dunhuang, it was already 5pm so we rushed to the train station as fast as lightning and grabbed some fast food, and Zhang Li kindly bought the train tickets for us(since me and Li Shan didn't know how to do so) and hopped on the train to Shanghai. On the train, I had a really cool dream of talking to the golden Buddhas, like the dream Yue Zun had 1900 years ago. I wish that I could revisit the Mogao Caves with my parents, since it was an amazing and terrific adventure I could never forget in my lifetime.

Mogao Grottoes

Yaumati Catholic Primary School (Hoi Wang Road), Bok, Tsz To Lukas – 10

One of China's well known art, the Mogao Grottoes are located in the south-east of the centre of Dunhuang, an oasis on the Silk Road in the Gansu province. The caves are also referred to as the Thousand Buddha Grottoes or Caves of the Thousand Buddhas. They exhibit various forms of art that include architecture, sculptures, paintings, calligraphy and literature, but the most famous one is the murals.

The murals in the caves were created from the fifth to the fourteenth century, and many earlier ones were re-painted at later points within the period. They are extensive, covering an area of more than 490 000 square feet! Most of them hang on the walls or ceilings, with geometrical shapes or plants filling the space not taken by the figures. Images about Buddhas are common. The murals look awesome!

The grottos are found along the side of a cliff that is nearly two kilometres long. During the Tang Dynasty, there were more than one thousand caves. However, only 735 caves exist nowadays.

Cave 17 was discovered by Wang Yuanlu. It came to be known as the Library Cave. It is located off the entrance leading to Cave 16 and it was originally used as a memorial cave for a local monk, Hongbian, on his death in 852. Hongbian was from a wealthy Wu family and was responsible for the construction of Cave 16. The Library Cave may have been used as his retreat. The cave originally contained his statue. A large number of documents dating from 406 to 1002 were found in the cave in the form of packed layers of scrolls. Nowadays, scholars are still discovering what the documents are saying.

At present, the caves are a popular tourist destination. Although many people visited the caves, they are still mysterious. Many scholars said that the caves were like tunnels to a lost world. Regarding who created the caves and many other similar questions, they are like the priceless relics hidden in the caves, awaiting to be uncovered.



Non-Fiction

Group 3

Hidden Caves, Common Ground: Lessons from Mogao

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Xu, Patrick – 12

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Treasures We Seek

Carmel School – Elsa High School, Yahyagil, Peter Gian – 13

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

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

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

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

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

Citations:

<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/440/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mogao_Caves#Etymology

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

French International School, Fung, Sum Yi Emily – 13

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

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

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

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

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

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

Daoist Wang's pleas to the Qing government to fund the caves' restoration were met with aloofness. The notion of selling the caves' contents to fund restoration first struck Wang during his 1907 encounter with Aurel Stein. The monk eventually sold Stein 29 crates of manuscripts, paintings and artworks for 130 British pounds, equivalent to 16,000 British pounds today. During the ensuing years, Wang sold tens of thousands of manuscripts and artifacts to foreign explorers. By the time he stopped in 1924, the Library Cave's contents were half-depleted.

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

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

Being illiterate, Wang Yuanlu was probably oblivious to the value of his discovery. His decision to sell the relics to fund restoration work was fueled by three unsuccessful attempts to secure government funding. Without public support, how could Wang possibly have carried out his work for the remaining hundreds of caves? Wang, brushed aside by officialdom, turned to

selling artifacts, which seems to be his only viable option in the context of his day. He sought not fame, nor to sell his days for gold, but rather to safeguard and protect a national resource that failed to resonate with public leaders.

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

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

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

If anyone is to be accused of putting personal interest ahead of national culture, Zhang Daqian, the prolific 20th century Chinese traditional painter, might fit the bill. In 1941, Zhang and his entourage of artists ventured to the Mogao caves, spending more than two years copying Buddhist murals. Zhang’s artwork won acclaim as part of the UNESCO global contemporary art exhibition in 1945, yet a dark side to his technique would cast a pall on his distinction. His method included peeling off the outer layers of the murals, irrevocably damaging many. These techniques were later strictly forbidden by the National Research Institute on Dunhuang Art in 1945. They also exposed Zhang’s self–serving, fame–seeking motives.

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

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

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

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

Mogao Grottoes: Traces of a Long-forgotten Past

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Hu, Catherine – 13

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

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

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

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

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

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

However, the story does not end here.

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

It was the notable discovery of the Library Cave that sparked modern interest in rediscovery and excavation of the caves. The cave was, surprisingly, discovered by accident, when Wang noticed his cigarette smoke drifting to the back of the wall in a shrine. He knocked down the walls and discovered piles of ancient manuscripts, textiles, and Buddhist paraphernalia. However, when Wang brought the documents forward to local authorities, they dismissed him, occupied with the Boxer Rebellion. Though the authorities refused to acknowledge them at first, what was even more important was the interest of renowned Indologist and explorer Aurel Stein in the caves. News of the caves spread throughout the world, historians everywhere all wanting to acquire some of the documents. When the Chinese government finally decided to transfer the documents to Beijing, only a fifth remained. Today, many of them reside in museums outside of China, such as in London,

Paris, Tokyo and St. Petersburg. People's interest in the caves has not subsided even today, and currently, there are multiple organizations from across the globe that work to learn more.

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

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

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

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

Culture, history and global connections: these are what make the Grottoes so remarkable. All these important aspects of the Grottoes can allow us to understand people of the past more, answering our questions and helping us recognize the thoughts and beliefs of those from long ago. They are truly a remarkable place that has stood the test of time.

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

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The Mogao Grottoes: A Reservoir of Culture and Heritage

Heep Yunn School, Lau, Yin Tung – 13

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

New Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mogao Grottoes, a place of treasures

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Mogao Grottoes, the holy place

Immaculate Heart of Mary College, Zhao, Kangru – 12

Ancient and legendary, enormous and wide,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Tales Hidden in the Mogao Caves

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Heritage

Marymount Secondary School, Kwok, Hin Tung Hilari – 14

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

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

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

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

A Factsheet for any Traveller

Marymount Secondary School, Yau, Yau Long Anna – 14

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

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

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

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

Journey Along the Silk Road

Shanghai American School – Pudong, Lin, Gina – 13

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

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

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

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

Story of the Mogao Grottoes

Singapore International School, Lim, Jie Xun Lucas – 12

Much more than a 1000 years ago,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Mogao Grottoes— a place to explore

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

My Next Destination— Mogao Grottoes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Cave Library– DunHuang Manuscript

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Secrets of the Mystical Mystery – The Mogao Grottoes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Mogao Grottoes: A Place of Ancient Culture

Tai Kwong Hilary College, Ho, Alvin – 14

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

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

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

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

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

The Mogao Caves

Tai Kwong Hilary College, Kwong, Sin Ying – 12

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

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

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

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

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

The Cave of a Thousand Buddhas

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

Introduction

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

What is inside this cave?

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

What makes the Mogao Grottoes so special?

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

New Tales of Mogao Grottoes

The Chinese Foundation Secondary School, Tsui, Sophie – 13

Introduction

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

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

Dilemma

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

Solutions

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

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

Other suggestions

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

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

Conclusion

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

Mogao grottoes

Wellington College, Shanghai, Yi, Ding – 12

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

Cave 254

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

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

The biggest theft of knowledge in human history

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

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

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

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

Cave 17

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

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



Non-Fiction

Group 4

The Mogao Grotto

Chinese International School, Choi, Danny – 16

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

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

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

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

The immersive world in Mogao Grottoes is an escape from reality where stories and legends dominate the narrative through murals and paintings. One of the famous tales depicted on the walls of Mogao Grottoes is a 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

Diocesan Girls' School, Chung, Mong Joo Nicole – 17

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

What a site of quintessential Buddhist art and culture.

The Mogao Grottoes is a World Heritage site located in Dunhuang, Gansu province, China. The name 'Mogao' literally means 'peerless' in Chinese, which highlights the unparalleled grandeur of the caves. According to UNESCO, the Mogao Grottoes are situated at a 'strategic point along the Silk Road', which is the crossroads of trade, in addition to religious, cultural and intellectual influences. Dug in the fourth century by monks, thousands of pilgrims visited the site to dig more caves and deck them with art over the centuries until the Yuan dynasty of the Mongols. Today, the Mogao Grottoes with rock-cut architecture form a system of more than a thousand caves and five hundred temples. The cave temples have blossomed into one of the Silk Road's great Mecca's of Buddhist art. The interiors are honeycombed with over 2400 brightly painted sculptures of the Buddha and 45,000 square meters of murals, the styles of which span across dynasties and cultures. The 'Library Cave', one of the caves of Mogao, once contained a cache of long-hidden ancient documents, which have now been dispersed around the world. [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 20th 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 than taking the paintings and manuscript inside the caves into the outer world to be exhibited in different museums. Later on, throughout the mid-20th 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 20th 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 it's 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 abandon, as well as their contents. UNESCO has always considered the long lasting history of the grottoes and decided to make them some of the most impressive world heritage in the world.

While the cultural value of the site 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 25th 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

Shanghai Community International School, Chawla, Suhani – 16

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

St. Joseph's College, Sit, Pok Shun Jaden – 15

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!

