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Perception of the Mogao Caves' Murals in Republican China (1911–1949): from Obscurity to National Treasure

The Mogao complex at Dunhuang in Gansu province, China, contains more than a thousand cliffside caves which were excavated and decorated between the 4th and 14th centuries C. E. Murals and sculptures preserved in hundreds of the caves showcase a continuous blending of artistic traditions from cultures along the historical Silk Road [1, p. 1]. The significance of the murals at the Mogao caves is now unquestionable. The caves are the subject of their own discipline of study, “Dunhuangology.” Dunhuang is home to a renowned research institute, the Dunhuang Academy, which controls first-hand access to the contents of the caves and perquisites to study pre-Mongol art *in situ*. In 2008, the National Art Museum of China in Beijing organized a series of exhibitions on Dunhuang art. Fan Di’an, the director of the museum, described the Mogao cave complex as “a savior and keeper of the national spirit,” and called the complex “the gallery of national collective memory” [12]. However, a century ago, the idea of ascribing such values to religious murals and sculptures located thousands of kilometers away from contemporary cultural centers would not have been considered reasonable¹. In this paper, we trace the shift in the perception of the Mogao cave murals among the intellectual and political classes from the rediscovery of the caves in 1899 to the first large-scale exhibition in Beijing in 1951. We argue that this gradual transition from neglect towards the sacralization of Mogao art should be considered in the context of the paradigm shift which itself was a response to arriving modernity in China. The pressure of new concepts of art, national identity, and history thrust Mogao art from obscurity into a national treasure.

The Mogao cave complex (previously called the “Caves of a Thousand Buddhas” — *Qianfodong*) lies 25 km away from the town of Dunhuang, an oasis along the historical Silk Road between the Gobi Desert to the east and the Taklamakan Desert to the west. Founded as an outpost to protect the western frontier during the Han dynasty (202 B. C.–220 A. D.), Dunhuang became a prosperous trading entrepôt and center of Buddhist religious activity by the 5th

¹ By the turn of the century there were two museums in China — Zicawei museum established by French Jesuits in 1868, and Shanghai museum organized by Royal Asiatic Society in 1874 — both in Shanghai. In 1905, a famous industrial entrepreneur and social reformer Zhang Jian (張謇 1853–1926) launched the first Chinese museum in Nantong, Jiangsu to provide “protection against the loss of cultural artifacts” and “exhibit the civilizing strength and wealth of the state” [7, p. 569]. However, there were neither sufficient funds to support any possible initiative, nor expertise to organize proper research and conservation, nor recognition of the Mogao caves as a Chinese cultural and historical treasure to prompt acquiring funds or expertise.

century. The town preserved its economic and cultural significance until the late 14th century. By the beginning of the 20th century, the caves of Mogao had fallen into neglect. Throughout its history, Dunhuang was a remote destination: even in the 1930s, an overland trek from Xi'an to Dunhuang might still have taken three to four months². Although "Chinese Turkestan" was merely a blank area on British and Russian maps, with roughly indicated locations of oasis towns, by the end of the 19th century, Dunhuang had become a rather popular destination among foreign expeditions³. In 1899, a Daoist monk named Wang Yuanlu (王圓籙 1849–1931) discovered a sealed "library cave" containing thousands of manuscripts, painting scrolls, and banner paintings. Wang reported his find to local authorities, making the Mogao caves an attraction for antique hunters and plunderers⁴. After the 1907 expedition of the Hungarian-born British archeologist Aurel Stein (1862–1943), the caves became a pilgrimage destination for explorers from Europe, the Russian Empire, and Japan. Yet throughout this time, the Chinese authorities and public generally remained indifferent to the caves.

Chinese indifference to the findings of Dunhuang at the beginning of the 20th century was due to the different cultural paradigms of history, memory, and art that then prevailed in China. These paradigms did not commonly assign high value to abandoned Buddhist monuments, nor to their artistic features. Historians largely relied on texts and did not traditionally utilize archaeological finds to augment historiographical records [39]. Religious murals and sculptures were not considered high art, and any trace of non-Han cultural influence was generally ignored. Meanwhile, European explorers, historians, and archaeologists were often concerned with creating their own version of world history, consciously or unconsciously acting within imperialist ideologies⁵. In such a view, discovered artifacts were redefined as symbols of what could be called "knowledge-authorized power"⁶.

Since foreign explorers took most of the discoveries from the library cave abroad, Chinese authorities and intellectuals only gained access to a limited number of manuscripts in 1909, when the leader of the French expedition, Paul Pelliot (1878–1945), brought some selected manuscripts to Beijing. Luo Zhenyu (羅振玉 1866–1940) and other Qing scholars visited Pelliot and copied the manuscripts [36, pp. 227–230]. Later, Luo published a list of manuscripts discovered in the "stone chamber" of Dunhuang, mentioning the "murals at every cave" only in

² The development of communication was crucial to making Dunhuang more accessible to field researchers in the 20th century. In 1930, the opening of airline service between Lanzhou and other Chinese cities curtailed the journey to six–ten weeks. An airport in Dunhuang was built in 1982, and the train station was opened in 2006.

³ In 1879, the Hungarian expedition reached Dunhuang while searching for the Uyghur roots of Hungarians [37, p. 360]. The Russian traveler Nikolai Przhevalsky (1839–1888) visited Dunhuang in 1879 during his first Tibetan expedition [34, p. 163].

⁴ The library cave was discovered on July 2, 1899. The county magistrate of Dunhuang obtained some manuscripts and paintings from Wang Yuanlu and sent some of them to the Qing official Ye Changchi (葉昌熾 1849–1917). Ye suggested transferring the collection to Lanzhou. However, lack of funding prevented the transfer [45].

⁵ Scholars W. Carruthers and S. Van Damme argue that in the 19th century archaeology became "instrumental in securing new regimes of proof, evidence and certainty, and re-scaling the past through the use of instruments and measures." [2, p. 256]. In contrast to the history of ideas focused on text, archaeology offered a methodology of natural science to study the past.

⁶ By "knowledge-authorized power" here we mean an appropriation of scientifically obtained knowledge to conform with an ideology and worldview.

passing [30, p.42]. The encounter of these intellectuals with the manuscripts from the library cave launched the beginning of Dunhuang studies in China, which for the next several decades continued to remain highly text-oriented.

The findings of the library cave were soon acknowledged by scholars as items of “national essence” 國粹. Between 1910–1911, the *Journal of National Essence* 國粹學報 published thirty articles on the Dunhuang manuscripts, including twenty-six articles written by Lui Shipei (劉師培 1884–1919), who first formulated the “national essence” concept⁷. All publications were devoted to manuscripts from the Tang dynasty. The editorial board of the journal held progressive views on the concept of “fine arts,” *meishu* 美術: in 1911, they published the first book collection dedicated to this subject in China — *Collectanea of Books on Fine Arts* 美術叢書. Nevertheless, murals were not included in any category within the concept of *meishu* and were widely disregarded by early art publications. In 1912, the first photographs of the facade of the Dunhuang caves were introduced to a wider public by the popular journal *Eastern Miscellany* 東方雜誌. However, the images failed to highlight any paintings or sculptures, or to hint at the extent of murals preserved inside the caves⁸. For the next two decades, scholars concentrated their efforts on studying Dunhuang manuscripts and cataloging items from the library cave.

In the 1920s, the art from Dunhuang had not yet become a special subject of study in China, and it was featured in books and periodicals only occasionally. A reproduction of the 10th century silk painting of Bodhisattva Guanyin, published in 1918 in the magazine *Famous Chinese Paintings* 中國名畫, was one of the earliest Chinese publications of a painting found in the library cave [48, p.2]⁹. For a long time, Chinese scholars therefore relied on foreign sources for images of Dunhuang. The photographs of the caves published in Pelliot’s multivolume *Les Grottes de Touen-houang* for decades remained the main visual reference for studying Dunhuang murals in China¹⁰. One of the earliest art historical studies, *History of Chinese Painting* 中國繪畫史, published in 1926 by the artist and art educator Pan Tianshou (潘天壽 1897–1971), included an image of a Dunhuang wall painting [32, p.232] which was a reprint of the photograph originally taken from Pelliot’s book¹¹. However, Pan Tianshou used this image to illustrate the style of Tang dynasty painting without elaborating on its Dunhuang provenance.

⁷ According to Liu Yu-ren’s definition, *Journal of National Essence* “was among the cultural endeavors initiated by the Society of Preserving National Learning (*Guoxue baocunhui*), a loosely organized group established in Shanghai in early 1905. The Society sought to salvage the nation by preserving China’s ‘national learning’ and hoped to inaugurate a Chinese Renaissance” [28, p.228].

⁸ In 1912, En Yuru (恩裕如 fl. early 20th century), a chief of Anxi prefecture *ex officio*, contributed two panorama pictures of the Dunhuang cave temples to *Eastern Miscellany* [10, p.1].

⁹ The magazine identified the painting as “Song-dynasty image of Guanyin from the Lingxiu monastery” (宋零修寺觀音畫像). After the discovery of the library cave this painting came into the possession of the Qing official Duan Fang (端方 1861–1911) [36, pp. 96–97]. In 1927 it was sold by Yamanaka and Company to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (accession number: 27.570).

¹⁰ Writing in 1951 archaeologist Chen Mengjia (陳夢家 1911–1966) noted that until then China did not publish any illustrated album that could substitute Pelliot’s catalog [5, p.73].

¹¹ Ambiguously identified by Pan as Tang dynasty “mural fragment from Dunhuang Cave” 敦煌石室壁畫之一部, the illustration reproduced a mural from the left part of the right interior wall of Cave 70 (according to Pelliot’s classification). See plate CXXIV from Pelliot’s catalog *Les Grottes de Touen-Houang* [33].

In the late 1920s, the activities and output of the Peking University scholar and photographer Chen Wanli (陳萬里 1892–1969) began to attract attention to the Dunhuang murals. Chen accompanied the American archaeologist Langdon Warner (1881–1955) on an expedition to Dunhuang in 1925¹². The next year, Chen published his account of the expedition in his book *Diary of a Journey to the West* 西行日記. An introduction to this book written by the Chinese historian, Gu Jiegang (顧頤剛 1893–1980), was published in extracts in the popular newspaper *Shenbao* 申報. Gu praised Chen Wanli for being an extremely rare kind of intellectual: one who was interested in art and nature, willing to suffer hardship of long travel, possessed of talents in photography, drawing and medicine, and compared him to a famous travel writer and geographer of the Ming dynasty, Xu Xiake (徐霞客 1587–1641). He validated geographical exploration as a modern and progressive way of learning about the past, arguing that Chen's generation could be singled out from others by being able to perceive mural painting not only to be an object of worship, but as an object of historical and cultural research [16]. During his visit to the Mogao caves, Chen managed to produce eighteen photographs of the murals. He showed them at his personal exhibition in Shanghai¹³ and published some of them in an album, *Collection of Murals of the Western Frontiers* 西陲壁畫集¹⁴. Although his photographs were hardly comparable with the volumes produced by Pelliot¹⁵, they attracted widespread attention.

Chen Wanli's interest in the Dunhuang heritage was not merely artistic or exploratory. It was stirred up by the climate of emerging nationalism, which urged officials and intellectuals to issue calls to protect the Dunhuang caves from foreign "plunderers". In 1925, for example, the governor of Lanzhou appealed to the Beijing Ministry of Education, lobbying for the protection of the caves [15]. In the following year, the Ministry of Education published its letter to Gansu governor Xue Dubi (薛篤弼 1892–1973) bringing further attention to the issues of protection [26]. However, the caves were not recognized as a national symbol until the establishment of the Nanjing Nationalist government in 1928. In 1930, the government declared the *Antiquities Preservation Act* 古物保存法, "the first national cultural relic protection law in Chinese history" [40, p. 174]. In the same year, Chinese intellectuals disrupted the fourth expedition of Aurel Stein [23, p. 10], while articles in *Library Science Quarterly* [25] and *Student Journal* [49; 50] revealed the extent of the artifacts Stein had transported away during his earlier expeditions¹⁶. In

¹² Harvard University sponsored two expeditions to Dunhuang under the leadership of Langdon Warner. During the first expedition in 1923–1924, an American archaeological team removed twelve fragments from six caves and took them back home to place in the Harvard University Fogg Museum. According to historian Justin M. Jacobs, the second expedition in 1925 was highly unsuccessful. Local peasants sabotaged the expedition. The team spent only three days at the Mogao complex and barely had time to explore the site [20, pp. 3–4].

¹³ Chen Wanli's personal exhibition was organized by the Shanghai-based "Heavenly Horse Society" 天馬會. It took place over two days, August 19–20 at the Moor Memorial Church in Shanghai. Sixty out of two hundred exhibited photographs were images of stone carvings of Yungang caves, murals of Mogao and Yulin, and newly excavated bronze vessels from Xinzheng (Henan) [13].

¹⁴ The publication includes eight photographs from three different Mogao caves, nine images from Yulin caves in Anxi, and one image from Guazhou [6].

¹⁵ Comparison with Pelliot's photographs shows that most of Chen's images are peripheral to the main composition. They are inset images of individual fragments, such as the donor's portrait, donor's inscription, or details of a decor like deity's halo [6, plates 1, 3–4, 5, 7].

¹⁶ By the mid-1930s, Chinese public opinion likewise began to associate the name of Langdon Warner with the plunder of Chinese cultural heritage. Three fragments of the Mogao murals from Fogg Museum were ex-

1931–1932, the newly launched *Voice of Gansu*¹⁷ published at least seventeen articles under the heading *Loss of Dunhuang* 敦煌適遺, while an article, *The System of Buddhist Art at Dunhuang* 敦煌佛教藝術的系統, by historian He Changqun (賀昌群 1903–1973), became the first art historical study in Chinese devoted exclusively to the study of the Mogao murals¹⁸.

The 1940s marked the beginning of active field investigation of the Mogao murals, resulting in several independent copying projects. According to some recent publications, the first person to copy the Mogao murals was a graduate of Shanghai art academy Li Dinglong (李丁龍 1905–1999) [29]. As stated there, he arrived in Dunhuang in the fall of 1938 and stayed there until May 1939, studying and copying murals. The same year he exhibited his copies in Xi'an, and the following two years, in Chongqing and Chengdu. During these years, Li allegedly wrote letters to the Ministry of Education and Culture Committee urging the government to preserve the murals. The studies of Li Dinglong's trip to Dunhuang, however, are not supported by any primary sources or visual evidence, leaving a gap in the history of the Mogao murals rediscovery.

Much better documented and highly publicized was an expedition of painter Zhang Daqian, who by the 1940s was already a famous artist of traditional ink painting. Zhang first came to Dunhuang in March 1941 and stayed there until July [43, pp. 116, 121]. Realizing that he would need more time and resources to copy the murals¹⁹, Zhang Daqian left Dunhuang to collect money for a second expedition and returned there in August–September 1941. During his second visit to Mogao, Zhang was accompanied by twenty people including his wife, children, cousins, assistants, and a cook, along with seventy-eight cartloads of equipment and provisions. The group was escorted by a military convoy provided by the local Muslim warlord General Ma [38, p. 106]. For the next twenty months, Zhang and his assistants traced murals at Mogao and Yulin, a neighboring cave complex. Among his assistants were five Tibetan monks from the Kumbum monastery (in Chinese, *Taersi* 塔爾寺) in Qinghai province. Along with preparing pigments and copying murals, the monks assisted Zhang in the construction of a seamless fabric²⁰. By 1943 Zhang with his assistants had created two hundred seventy-six life-sized copies

hibited in 1935–1936 at the International Exhibition of Chinese Art in Burlington (UK) in the gallery 3 “Tang Dynasty. The period of Six Dynasties. Sung Dynasty” [18, pp. 50–51, plates 675, 676, 679]. The sculpture of Bodhisattva with folded hands (2399) also taken by Warner from Dunhuang was shown in the gallery with Buddhist sculpture; however, an illustrated supplement to the catalog did not include its image [19, p. 219]. Warner himself gave two lectures at Burlington House despite the objections of the Chinese side. For more on the Burlington exhibition and the catalog see Anna Guseva [17].

¹⁷ *The Voice of Gansu* 甘肅民聲 was published monthly in Shanghai from June 1931 to April 1932. We found only three volumes (vol. 2, 4 and 8) in the Shanghai Library; therefore, we might underrate the overall number of articles on Dunhuang published in this journal.

¹⁸ He Changqun never went to Dunhuang himself and based his research on Chen Wanli's photographs along with an illustrated catalog of British, French, and Japanese expeditions which he came across while studying in Japan [4]. The 21-page-long article was illustrated by eight photographs from Pelliot's volume [22].

¹⁹ Zhang recalls his first impression of Dunhuang in an interview with his biographer Xie Jiaxiao (or Chia-Hsiao Hsieh 謝家孝 1931–1994): “We arrived at the caves before dawn. I could not restrain my impatience and went to inspect the caves with a lamp. I was stunned. They turned out to be more magnificent than even my wildest expectations. Initially, I planned to stay here only in March. But after the first day of a brief inspection of some caves, I immediately told my wife, children, and nephews that I was afraid that even if we stayed for six months, that would not be enough!” [43, p. 118]

²⁰ As Zhang Daqian recalls, the most important task of preparation for the second trip to Dunhuang was

on paper and silk²¹. In the same year, the copies were exhibited privately in Chengdu and later in Lanzhou, followed by exhibitions in Chengdu and Chongqing in 1944, and a 1946 exhibition in Shanghai. The announcements and reviews of Zhang's shows were published in newspapers and popular journals, such as *Shenbao*, *Tianjin Pictorial Daily* 天津民國日報畫刊 and *United Pictorial* 聯合畫報. The appreciation of Dunhuang art by the artist from the lineage of renowned traditional masters validated the murals and brought them to the broad public view.

In 1940, the Ministry of Education organized the Northwest art and cultural relics expedition 西北藝術文物考察團 assigning leadership to Paris-trained artist and sculptor Wang Ziyun (王子云 1897–1990). For four years, the expedition explored cave monasteries and tombs in Shaanxi, Gansu, and Qinghai provinces. Between May 1942 and May 1943, Wang, accompanied by art professors from the National Art School, launched their research work at Mogao and Yulin, thus intersecting with the expedition of Zhang Daqian²². During this period, the team made multiple photographs of caves and sculptures and copied ninety-two fragments of murals [9]. In 1948, Wang Ziyun as head of the Research Center of Northwestern Cultural Relics 西北文物研究室 at the State Northwestern University in Xi'an, organized an exhibition on cultural relics of Dunhuang. Unlike Zhang Daqian's shows of copies, this exhibition had a more comprehensive approach and included archaeological findings from Dunhuang, copies of murals, a panoramic display of the caves, and various photographs²³. This exhibition highlighted the multicultural character of Dunhuang art and its significance for historical and cultural studies. The review of the exhibition in *Shenbao* argued that the artistic value of the Dunhuang sculptures surpassed those of Ancient Greece and Rome [31], thus instantiating an incipient recognition of Buddhist art as the heritage of the Chinese nation.

The idea of institutionalizing the preservation of the Mogao caves was already in the air in the early 1940s²⁴. Yu Youren (于右任 1879–1964), the director of Control Yuan, a government agency, first proposed the creation of the Institute of Dunhuang after his visit to the site in

to hire Tibetan monk artists from the monastery Kumbum. They obtained a unique skill of sewing fabric seamlessly. The longest fabric available to Zhang Daqian was about 4 m (1.2 *zhang*), while some of the mural paintings were more than 40 m long (12 *zhang* and 4 *chi*). Moreover, the fabric must be stretched on a wooden frame, covered by three layers of powder glue and polished by stone. Only when its surface was shining, it could be used for painting [43, pp. 119, 123, 126].

²¹ The total amount of traced copies varies in different sources. According to the review of the Shanghai exhibition in 1946 [8], Zhang Daqian produced one hundred twenty copies, among them forty were unfinished. Meanwhile, the review of the Tianjin exhibition in 1946 claims that “about a hundred copies” were completed by the artist while in Dunhuang [27, p. 2].

²² Sarah E. Fraser put both expeditions, of Zhang Daqian and Wang Ziyun, in the context of a new discipline *kaogu meishu* — “archaeology of art” [14]. However, we might argue that Zhang Daqian's exploration of caves was not conscious of neither perspective of Buddhism studies nor archaeology. Zhang's commitment to his unprecedented project was a coincidence provoked by his interest in Tang dynasty painting and fueled by his personal distress — the sudden death of his elder brother.

²³ For more on Wang Ziyun's approach see Sarah E. Fraser's article “Buddhist Archaeology in Republican China: A New Relationship to the Past” [14, p. 190].

²⁴ Another factor which could explain the exceptional attention to Dunhuang in the 1940s was the shift of the center of power to the West of the country: during the Second Sino-Japanese War, the Republican government moved to Chongqing in 1937 and remained there till 1946. Most of the universities and research institutions in the occupied zone were relocated to inland cities such as Changsha, Kunming, and Chongqing. In this context, all expeditions to the Northwest became more relevant and affordable.

1941 [46]. The next year, the Ministry of Education formed a special committee to launch the Institute. Chang Shuhong (常書鴻 1904–1994), an oil painter²⁵, was appointed vice-chairman of the committee²⁶ and later director of the Institute. He established the Institute's focus on the artistic value of Dunhuang as well as its national and international status. In 1942, he arrived in Lanzhou and recruited five volunteers who agreed to accompany him to Dunhuang. They reached Dunhuang in late March 1943 after five weeks of travel. This trip marked the creation of the Research Institute of Dunhuang Art 敦煌藝術研究院 (below “Research Institute”). Later more volunteers joined Chang Shuhong. From the very beginning, Chang's team was overbalanced by artists: in 1943–1945, three archaeologists were outnumbered by nine students and graduates of art academies [24, pp. 27–28]. After the end of The Second Sino-Japanese War (1939–1945), most of the artists went back home, but between 1947 and 1948, Chang was again joined by more than ten artists and archaeologists who helped him fulfill his plan to copy murals from different historical periods.

In 1948, the same year as Wang Ziyun's exhibition in Xi'an, at least four hundred copies of the murals made by the staff of the Research Institute were exhibited in Nanjing and Shanghai²⁷. The unprecedented scale of the exhibitions made them a national event²⁸. A special issue of the illustrated journal *Today Pictorial* 今日畫報 published an overview of the exhibition together with a preface written by a distinguished scholar of aesthetics Zong Baihua (宗白華 1897–1986). Zong, well acquainted with Western modern art through his studies in Europe, compared murals of Dunhuang with the modernist styles of the “Paris School”. Drawing analogies between ancient murals and the works of H. Matisse, P. Picasso, G. Rouault, and A. Derain, he states that Dunhuang art embodies the “modern spirit” 現代趣味²⁹. He concludes that the avant-garde styles were largely influenced by Dunhuang art, made accessible through publications and museum collection in Europe, and suggests that “Chinese artists dreaming to study ‘modern painting’ do not need to go to faraway Europe, but instead could search for it in the art treasure trove of their own country” [21, p. 6].

²⁵ From 1927 to 1936, Chang Shuhong studied oil painting in Lyon and Paris, France. It was in a Paris's bookstore where he came across Pelliot's volume and became highly intrigued by Dunhuang art. His artistic training and international experience allowed him to imagine the Institute as a world-level research organization. In 1948, he launched the exhibition hall of Dunhuang and planned to publish *The Catalog of the Mogao Caves Images* in the US, while discussing Dunhuang art exhibitions in China and abroad with the Ministry of Education [35]. In the following year, his daughter Chang Shana (常沙娜 1931) exhibited her copies of mural paintings in New York [41]. After the establishment of the People's Republic of China, Chang's plan for the international promotion of Dunhuang was realized. In 1956–1957, exhibition *The Art of Dunhuang* visited Poland, Czechoslovakia, India, Myanmar, and Japan.

²⁶ The appointment might be a voluntary exile. Only Chang Shuhong's personal passion for Dunhuang could explain his decision to change a secure and comfortable life for rural countryside in a remote desert and stay there for more than fifty years.

²⁷ The review of the exhibition in *Shenbao* mentions four hundred copies [11]. The journal *Today Pictorial* states that there were seven hundred and forty copies, among which one hundred eighteen works were completed by Chang Shana, Chang Shuhong's daughter [21, p. 16].

²⁸ The 1948 exhibition in Nanjing was attended by the president of the Republic of China Chiang Kai-shek and his wife.

²⁹ Zong Baihua draws similar analogies in his 1948 article *Few Words on the Meaning and Value of Dunhuang Art* [51].

The next large-scale exhibition of Dunhuang cultural relics opened in 1951 in a new political context, after the founding of the People's Republic of China. The exhibition took place in Beijing's Historical Museum housed in the Meridian gate of the former Imperial Palace. The exhibition was initially designed by the government to raise the patriotic spirit of Chinese nation during the Korean War (1950–1953)³⁰. The scale of the exposition had to be commensurate with its patriotic mission. One thousand copies of Dunhuang murals made by the artists of the Research Institute over the course of seven years were shown along with cultural relics and the manuscripts from the library cave. The exposition of the copies was celebrated by scholars in multiple reviews as a triumph of “folk art tradition,” of the “collective spirit of the ancient artisans” long disregarded by the aesthetics of the literati [47, p. 7].

The rediscovery of the Mogao caves was not an instant cultural event but a prolonged process complicated by the internal and external affairs of China at the beginning of the 20th century. The gradual transition from obscurity towards the sacralization of Mogao art occurred in the context of the cultural paradigm shift. The development of archeology stirred up by the new framework of knowledge-authorized power in the West led to the acknowledgement of cultural artifacts previously unknown or neglected in world history. Mogao caves became one of those rediscovered gems. The actions of foreign agents in removing the artifacts created a chain reaction in China. In the 1900–1910s, Dunhuang art in China was generally neglected due to disregard for religious art or particularly Buddhist art, and by the lack of tradition and adequate methods of field research and preservation. Although archaeological and field studies began to emerge as a legitimate method of research in 1920s China, the art of Dunhuang was mostly still out of the public eye. Chinese intellectuals were mostly focused on studying manuscripts from the library cave. During the Nanjing Decade (1928–1937), new concepts of cultural heritage began to materialize in legal acts, drawing attention to heritage protection and academic research of the art from the Mogao caves and other sites (although still based on secondary sources). Although the initial rediscovery of the murals by the highly respected ink painter Zhang Daqian might be considered as a fortuitous event, nevertheless, all later expeditions recognized that the Dunhuang murals and sculptures were valuable cultural and historical artifacts as well as works of fine art. By the 1950s, the art from Mogao caves became revered as “a treasure of the Chinese nation” while the caves themselves were regarded as “the greatest exposition of Chinese ancient art” [42, p. 62].

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³⁰ In his 1950 telegram, the secretary of the Cultural Department Zheng Zhenduo (郑振铎 1898–1958) informed Chang Shuhong about Central Government's decision to organize “a large-scale exhibition of cultural relics of Dunhuang to foster patriotic education in order to complement resistance to United States and support to Korea” [3, p. 160].

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Title. Perception of the Mogao Caves' Art Heritage in Republican China (1911–1949): From Obscurity to National Treasure

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Abstract. This paper examines the history of the re-discovery of the Mogao murals and how the public's perception of their artistic value changed over the course of the first half of the 20th century. The analysis of primary sources shows that the evolution of that perception coincided with the shift in the understanding of art, national identity, and history in China. The cave-temple complex of Mogao in Dunhuang (Gansu province, China) contains more than a thousand cliffside caves which were excavated and decorated between the 4th and 14th centuries C.E. The murals and sculptures in these caves demonstrate a unique multicultural exchange that took place along the Silk Road trade routes for a millennium. By the beginning of the 20th century, the Mogao complex had fallen into neglect. In 1899, the Daoist monk Wang Yuanlu discovered a "library-cave" with thousands of manuscripts and fragments of paintings. The encounter of Chinese intellectuals with manuscripts from the library cave in the 1900s launched the beginning of the Dunhuang studies, which for the next few decades remained highly text-oriented. After the Qing empire fell in 1911, the public associated the Mogao complex primarily with the looting of cultural relics by "foreign imperialists." It was only towards the end of the 1930s that the intellectuals of Republican China became interested in the murals. This interest grew into a series of expeditions led by Chinese artists and archaeologists. Multiple exhibitions of copies of the murals introduced the art of Dunhuang to the Chinese public, and by the time of the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, they had become a national cultural symbol.

Keywords: Dunhuang, Mogao complex, preservation of cultural heritage, mural painting, copying, Chen Wanli, Zhang Daqian, Chang Shuhong, Wang Ziyun

Название статьи. Восприятие росписей пещерного комплекса Могао в период Китайской Республики (1912–1949): от забвения к сокровищнице китайской культуры

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Аннотация. Данная статья посвящена истории вторичного открытия настенных росписей комплекса Могао в период Китайской Республики (1912–1949). Цель данного исследования — проследить, как менялось восприятие художественного наследия комплекса Могао на протяжении данного периода. Храмовый комплекс Могао в Дуньхуане (провинция Ганьсу, КНР) включает более тысячи пещер, созданных в период с IV по XIV вв. Настенные росписи и скульптуры, украшающие пещеры, представляют собой результат уникального синтеза художественных традиций Шёлкового Пути. К началу XX в. комплекс Могао находился в полуразрушенном состоянии. После того как в 1899 г. даосский монах Ван Юаньлу обнаружил в одной из пещер собрание библиотеки, комплекс Могао стал точкой притяжения исследователей и археологов из Европы, Российской империи и Японии. Знакомство китайских учёных с отдельными рукописями из библиотеки в начале XX в. положило начало изучению наследия Дуньхуана в Китае. Следующие несколько десятилетий внимание китайских исследователей было сосредоточено на каталогизации находок библиотеки и изучении рукописей. Настенные росписи комплекса Могао появлялись лишь эпизодически в виде фоторепродукций в монографиях и периодических изданиях. После того, как в 1930 г. в Китае был принят закон об охране древних памятников, настенные росписи комплекса Могао привлекли внимание интеллектуальной элиты Китайской Республики. Однако активное изучение пещерного комплекса и настенных росписей началось только в начале 1940-х гг., когда было организовано несколько независимых друг от друга экспедиций под руководством художников Чжан Дацяня (1899–1983), Ван Цзыюня (1897–1990) и Чан Шухуна (1904–1994). Копии росписей, созданные художниками и их ассистентами, способствовали дальнейшему признанию художественной и исторической значимости пещерного комплекса. С выставки «Культурные ценности Дуньхуана», состоявшейся в 1951 г., два года спустя после основания КНР, начался новый этап восприятия пещерного комплекса: образ искусства Могао эволюционировал в национальный символ народной культуры, а сам комплекс был признан сокровищницей китайской культуры.

Ключевые слова: Дуньхуан, комплекс Могао, охрана культурного наследия, скальные храмы, стенная живопись, копирование, Чэнь Ванли, Чжан Дацянь, Чан Шухун, Ван Цзыюнь