

Ms. Fan Jinshi

A Life Dedicated to Preserving the Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes



Award
2019 LUI Che Woo Prize - Positive Energy

The Daughter of Dunhuang

Ms. Fan Jinshi dedicated her entire life to the Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes in China. Her persistence and positive energy have been an inspiration to many. As the Director of the Dunhuang Academy from 1998 to 2015, Ms. Fan has earned the title "Daughter of Dunhuang" for her commitment and achievement to studying, preserving and disseminating the Dunhuang culture.

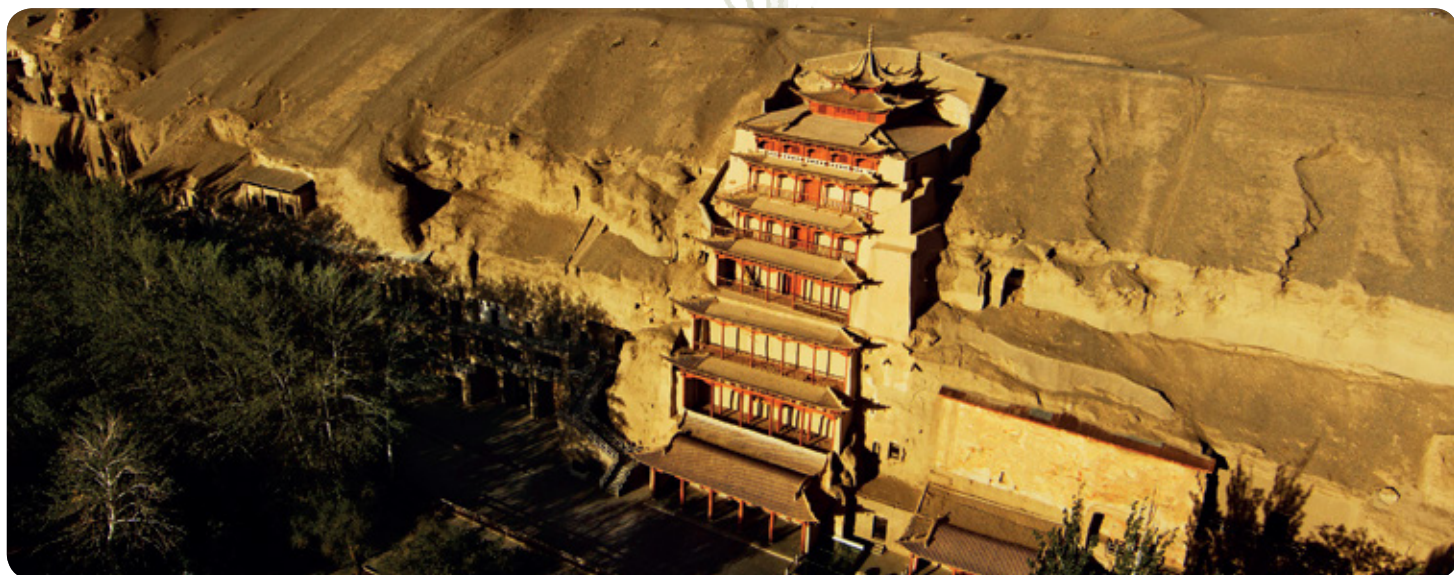


Ms. Fan working in the Dunhuang Academy (1964)

Over 56 years of dedication and challenges

Ms. Fan was born in Beijing and raised in Shanghai. She graduated from the Archaeology major in the Department of History, Peking University, in 1963, after which she joined the Dunhuang Academy. Although her parents were reluctant about Ms. Fan working far away from home at the age of 25, she persisted with the school's arrangement due to her affection for the Dunhuang area.

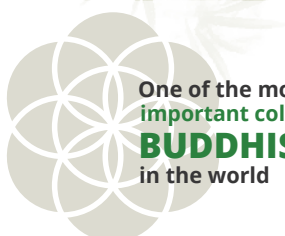
The living condition around Dunhuang at that time was tough, with water scarcity and shortage in electricity, and her family was not around. Even so, Ms. Fan was deeply attracted by the beauty and history of the Mogao Grottoes. She has been working in the field for over 50 years. Although she has faced various kinds of challenges, she developed a profound determination and optimism for her work.



Panoramic view of Mogao Grottoes



The Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang
1,650+ YEARS
of history



One of the most
important collections of
BUDDHIST ART
in the world



**EAST-MEET-WEST
COMMERCIAL AND
CULTURAL HUB**
on the Silk Road
in Tang dynasty

Preserving a historical gem and nurturing world civilisation

The Mogao Grottoes are a time capsule that preserves a great number of historical artefacts for hundreds of years. In particular, the Library Cave has over 50,000 literature and silk paintings dated back from the 5th to 11th centuries, including *The Diamond Sutra*, the literature with the world's earliest record for engraved printing. If there were no Mogao Grottoes and the Library Cave, artefacts such as ancient arts, calligraphy, paintings, social instruments and traditions from the Tang dynasty will be lost and destroyed over the course of history, where we cannot trace back such a comprehensive picture of the prosperity of the Tang dynasty.

The Dunhuang Grottoes I: Caves 266-275 of Mogao Grottoes led and edited by Ms. Fan laid the foundation for preservation and research of the Grottoes. Professor Jao Tsung-I, the Master of Chinese studies, described Ms. Fan's work as an explicitly accurate publication which brings the study of Dunhuang Grottoes to a whole new level.

Today, thanks in no small part to the hard work of Ms. Fan and her team, the Mogao Grottoes continue to be the cultural treasure between East and West where history, art and culture come together; in turn nurturing and enriching world civilisation.



At Cave 112, there is a painting on lute and dance, where the lines are skillful and natural; the order of the lines and the shades of the ink and each painting stroke reflect the character's figure, posture and expression. The main colours of the painting are red, green, yellow, black and white, presenting a gentle and decorous beauty in colour, which remains vibrant even after a thousand years.



At Cave 45, the figures are replicas of the stucco statues enshrined in the niche of its principal wall. The seven statues are horizontally and more or less symmetrically arrayed on both sides of the Buddha statue, demonstrating the classic grouping of one Buddha in the centre, two disciples, two bodhisattvas and two heavenly kings. The varying status and personality of the Buddha and each of his acolytes are vividly represented. The superb artistry demonstrated by these works has rendered them the most representative group of high Tang statues found at Mogao Grottoes.

Digitalising Dunhuang

Ms. Fan is a legendary female figure in the field of cultural conservation, who overcame countless social and financial hardships. Her persistence in her work has increased public awareness of such an important cultural gem of the world. Ms. Fan knew that the natural, physical deterioration of the Mogao Grottoes is irreversible and inevitable. When she was the Director of the Dunhuang Academy, she found a balance in using the resources and led the Academy to build a digital archive of the art pieces, tremendously contributing to the preservation and promotion of Dunhuang to the world, setting new standards for successful cultural preservation.

Scan this QR code for more information.



In the 90s, the rapid growth of tourism to the Grottoes has threatened the protection of the coloured wall paintings. Apart from developing a comprehensive measure for tourism management, Ms. Fan came up with the idea to use the latest technology at that time to preserve the Mogao Grottoes by digitalising every detail of the Grottoes: photos, videos, 3D data and other literature data of every cave are integrated into a digital repository of cultural relics of the Grottoes, where this valuable database can be put online to be showcased to the world. Digitalisation does not only prevent the caves from destruction due to overtourism, the digital library also allows Mogao Grottoes' beauty and richly artistic collections to be appreciated beyond time and space.



Ms. Fan at the highly precise digitalisation photography working sessions in Dunhuang Grottoes (2006)

Friends of Dunhuang Hong Kong

Ms. Fan's effort and dedication towards Dunhuang Grottoes has aroused other of ancient art's enthusiasts to establish a group to support the preservation of Dunhuang Grottoes. The Friends of Dunhuang Hong Kong (FoDHK), supported and recognised by the Dunhuang Academy, was established in Hong Kong in 2010, with Fan being its Honorary President. FoDHK aims to raise funds for the Dunhuang Academy, in order to support the Academy to preserve the Grottoes and nurture talents. Besides, it is also committed to promoting the art and culture of Dunhuang locally and internationally. Every year, FoDHK will organise field trips for donors to learn about the conservation work in Dunhuang.