

The Achievements and Existing Problems in the Study of Dunhuang Uighur Grottoes

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Abstract

Due to factors such as frequent changes in political power, blending of artistic styles, and less documentary records in the late Dunhuang grottoes, the issue of staging is rather confusing. The early academic circles' classification of the Dunhuang Uighur Grottoes was restricted by factors such as time, data, manpower, and difficulty in field investigation. The staging was mainly based on the portraits of Uighur supporters, the inscriptions of the caves, and the comparative study of the Uighur Grottoes outside Dunhuang to determine the Dunhuang Uyghur Grottoes. However, the closely related Uighur history has not received more attention. The historical staged discussions of the Dunhuang Uighur Grottoes mainly focus on phased and unitary research, and they are relatively fragmented and fail to be systematically studied. First of all, the early Dunhuang Uighur Grottoes lacked attention to the historical background of the Uyghur nation; secondly, the ability to recognize and apply ethnic minority characters in the Dunhuang Grottoes was still weak, and some Dunhuang Uighurs and their descendants did not receive more attention for their contributions to the Dunhuang Grottoes ; The influence of the study of the Xixia Grottoes on the Uighur Grottoes in Dunhuang and so on. With the many achievements and new discoveries of Uighur research in recent years, it shows us the history and new research perspectives of the Uighur people's activities in Dunhuang and surrounding areas from the Five Dynasties to the Yuan Dynasty. Solving the problem of determining the age of the late Dunhuang grottoes, the Dunhuang Uyghur grottoes may become a breakthrough. Since then, the research on the Dunhuang Uyghur Grottoes has faced endless problems, which require careful study.

Keywords

Dunhuang Grottoes; Shazhou Uighur; Qočo Uighur.

1. Introduction

In recent years, with the advancement of Uighur historical research, Uighur grottoes and related frescoes, costumes and other research have attracted the attention of academic circles. In the history of Dunhuang, the Uighur people have had historical activities for five centuries, leaving behind a rich historical and cultural heritage. The numerous Uighur grottoes are preserved in the group of caves dominated by Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes and Yulin Grottoes, which are a rare treasure for us to understand Uighur culture.

At present, the academic circles have made new progress in the research fields of the construction age, artistic style, costume culture, and supporting portraits of the Dunhuang Uygur grottoes. In the past, Chinese historical records had very few records on the Uighur culture in the Guasha area, and the Dunhuang Uighur materials with many records were not published systematically, resulting in extremely limited academic understanding of the Uighur culture in Dunhuang. The dating of the early Dunhuang Uighur Grottoes is difficult to distinguish because of the blending with the Western Xia Grottoes and other later grottoes. The determination of the Dunhuang Uighur Grottoes is mostly determined by comparison with

other caves outside Dunhuang. Coupled with the diversity and complexity of the late Dunhuang grottoes, the problems accompanying the research have become more prominent. This article intends to sort out and summarize these research results, and put forward some humble opinions for the study of the Dunhuang Uyghur Grottoes, and hope that Fang scholars will criticize and guide them.

Through the tireless research of the former sages, we can see that the Uighurs played an important role in the history of Dunhuang. However, the Dunhuang Uighur Grottoes have always been a difficult problem in the academic circles due to the frequent changes of regimes and the intricate relations between the regimes, and the lack of records in the *Twenty Four Histories* and other documents due to wars and other reasons at that time. Until the publication of the book "*Manuscripts Ouïgours du IXe-Xe Siècle de Touen-Houang*" from the French scholar James Hamilton, he provided us with more than 30 pieces belonging to 9-11 Early Uighur literature of the 20th century.[1] In the 1980s and 1990s, archaeologists cleaned up and excavated the northern area of Mogao Grottoes, and obtained a wealth of documents in the late Uighur language. In addition, the late Uighur documents discovered in the Mogao Grottoes North District by Paul Pelliot and Marc Aurel Stein in the early years have been published successively. It provides unprecedented information for the study of the history and culture of the Uighurs in Dunhuang. All of these have provided us with the possibility for a more comprehensive understanding of the history and culture of the Uighurs in Dunhuang.

At present, the dating of Dunhuang Uighur Grottoes is based on word materials such as inscriptions of donors and paintings, and some are based on painting style and content. Here is a brief review of the relevant research results of the Dunhuang Uighur Grottoes at this stage.

2. Uighur Activities in Dunhuang

There are many discussions about Uighurs in Dunhuang historical academic circles. The record of Hexi Uighurs' ascent of Dunhuang's historical stage roughly began when the Uighurs moved westward in 840. Research results in recent years show that there are still traces of Uighurs in Dunhuang until the Yuan Dynasty. It can be seen from the literature that the Uighurs have been stubbornly blazing new trails for survival since they were break up by Qirqiz in 840 and moved west to the Hexi Corridor. He first relied on Tubo, and continued to develop himself with the help of the Gui-Yi-Jun, and later adopted methods such as continuous tribute and marriage with the Central Plains dynasty, which are frequently seen in the annals of history.

The current academic research on the Dunhuang Uighur Grottoes focuses more on the Shazhou Uighur Kingdom, that is, the Shazhou Uighur's ethnic origin, the establishment of the government, the organization of the government, the nature of the society, the economy, culture, religion and the grottoes. Talking about the Dunhuang Uighur Grottoes, it is difficult to avoid the historical issue of the Dunhuang Uighur. Regarding this issue, the academic circles have a lot of controversy mainly on the existence of the Shazhou Uighur, the question of time and the question of the ownership of its regime. It was first proposed by the Japanese scholar Moriyasu Takao that Dunhuang had the Shazhou Uyghur group, and the historical issues of this group were textually verified. It is inferred that at the beginning of the eleventh century, or the first half of the twelfth century, the Uighur group did exist in Shazhou, and the Shazhou Uighurs were not under the jurisdiction of the Ganzhou Uighurs.[2] Later, he discussing that the Shazhou Uighur group initially manipulated the Gui-Yi-Jun-Jie-Du-Shi Cao Xianshun, and eventually ruled Shazhou completely in the 1220s and 1250s. Moreover, he believes that the Uighur documents discovered in Dunhuang originated from the Xizhou Uighur Kingdom, and the Shazhou Uighur Group continued to develop under the rule of the Xizhou Uighurs from the end of the 10th century to the 11th century. [3] Qian Boquan believes that the Shazhou Uighurs are

the Kucha Uighurs and the Sali Uighurs. During 1014-1146, the Shazhou Uighurs directly ruled Dunhuang for more than 130 years; Between 1147-1226, the Shazhou Uighurs were attached to Xixia and existed as a ruler for eighty years.[4] In "*History of Uyghur in Dunhuang*", it is pointed out that from the middle of the ninth century to the end of the thirteenth century, the Uighur had a huge influence on the history of Dunhuang. The relationship between the Uighurs in Ganzhou and the Gui-Yi-Jun regime led to the rise and fall of the latter, and even became the suzerain state of the Gui-Yi-Jun regime. After the eleventh century, the Kucha Uighur went on to directly rule Dunhuang for nearly 140 years. [5]

Chen Guangwen analyzed P.3451 "*Zhang Huai Shen Bianwen*", Gua and Sha Uighur attacked in June or July of the first year of Qianfu (874) and occupied Guazhou within a short period of time. After that, they were defeated by Zhang Huaishen's troops. After the court ordered it to be released, the Uighur took advantage of the envoy's return, and in September, invaded Shazhou and was defeated by the Gui-Yi-Jun. It is believed that the Uighurs who entered the Gua and Sha areas were relatively weak in the early stage, and gradually developed into the Shazhou Uighur group in the later stage. After the second year of Qianfu (875), the Xizhou Uighurs and Ganzhou Uighurs gradually became the main threats to the Gui-Yi-Jun. The Ganzhou Uyghur once attacked almost to the foot of Shazhou City. In this process, the melon and sand Uighurs merged into part of the Xizhou Uighurs and Ganzhou Uighur tribes, becoming new melons and sand Uighurs, their strength has been strengthened, and gradually developed into an important force that will influence the political direction of Gua and Sha-- Shazhou Uighur Group.

Du Hai pointed out that there is no affiliation between Shazhou Uighurs and Xizhou Uighurs. He believed that in the later period of Cao's Gui-Yi-Jun, the Shazhou Uighur served as an envoy to the Central Plains, and later participated in the internal affairs of the Gui-Yi-Jun. The rise of the Shazhou Uighur was accompanied by the demise of the Cao's Gui-Yi-Jun. [6] Chen Guangwen pointed out that the Shazhou Uighur came from a branch of the Uighur that was scattered in the melon and sand in 840 AD. And it is believed that the growing Shazhou Uighur group absorbed part of the Xizhou Uighur and Ganzhou Uighur group. [7]

Liu Yuquan believes that in 1030, the Shazhou Uighur regime replaced the Cao's return to the rebel regime and ruled Shazhou, and then died out in 1120. [8] Li Zhengyu argued that the Shazhou Uighur regime seized the power of the Guasha region in 1036 AD and was occupied by Xixia in 1067 AD. The Shazhou Uighur regime directly ruled the Guasha area for 31 years. [9] Yang Fuxue then used Chinese historical records and Dunhuang Uighur documents as the basis, combined with the Uighur murals and inscriptions in the Dunhuang Grottoes, to demonstrate the existence of the Shazhou Uighurs, and believed that Xixia did not establish an effective rule in Shazhou in 1036. In 1067, the Xixia regime occupied Shazhou again.[10] Due to the intricacies of Dunhuang history at this stage and the scarcity of historical records, it is necessary to find new evidence to clarify this problem systematically.

3. Dunhuang Uighur Culture

In the grotto system dominated by Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes, there are rich Uighur cultural relics, including Uighur literature, Uighur wood movable type, Uighur caves and murals, Uighur inscriptions and so on. The remains of the Dunhuang Uighur Grottoes are now preserved in Mogao Grottoes, West Thousand Buddha Caves and Yulin Grottoes.

The art of Dunhuang Grottoes lasts for thousands of years, changing times, thinking, new content, and different styles, forming a history of Dunhuang Buddhist art. Indian Buddhist art spread to Dunhuang through Central Asia and the Western Regions, and experienced a gradual sinicization process. [11] After the Uighurs moved west to Dunhuang, they gradually accepted Buddhist ideas based on their original beliefs in Shamanism and Manichaeism. As well as scholars such as Geng Shimin, Zhang Tieshan, Ayidar Mirkammali, and Abu Durexiti

Yakup, they have done research on Uighur Buddhist literature. Du Doucheng and Yang Fuxue outlined the history and characteristics of the rise and fall of Hexi Uighur Buddhism through the Dunhuang Uighur Grottoes, Uighur Buddhist scriptures, and Uighur monks. They believed that the Buddhism and culture of the Hexi Uighur in the 9th to 14th centuries were quite developed.[12] Yang Fuxue further elaborated that the Uighurs who moved west to Dunhuang were greatly influenced by Dunhuang Buddhism. There are many Uighurs who have converted from Manichaeism to Buddhism. They mainly believe in Mahayana Buddhism, and are also influenced by Buddhism such as Han, Tibetan and Hinayana. [13] The Uighur Buddhist cultural heritage in Dunhuang is relatively rich. Yang Fuxue's *"Shazhou Uighur and Its Documents"* published the Uighur religious documents mainly unearthed from the Tibetan scripture cave. Niu Ruji's *"Uighur Buddhist Manuscripts-General Introduction to Buddhist Scriptures and Buddhist Manuscripts in Dunhuang Uyghur Manuscripts Collected in Paris"* mainly studies the Buddhist manuscripts in Dunhuang Uighur Manuscripts collected in Paris, France. Later, the three-volume *"Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes North Area Grottoes"* published by the Dunhuang Research Institute included photos of broken Buddhist scriptures in Uyghur script, wooden movable type in Uyghur script, and other materials.

The statues in the Uighur Grottoes during the Gui-Yi-Jun period and the portrait of the Uighur Princess provide clues for us to uncover the veil of the Uighur Grottoes in Dunhuang. Yang Fuxue and Lu Hong *"Re-examination of the Heavenly Princess of Ganzhou Uighur"* by studying the portraits and inscriptions of the Heavenly Princess in the Dunhuang Uighur Grottoes, they believe that after Cao Yijin's political marriage with the Ganzhou Uighur Princess, the political influence of the Heavenly Princess Tian the situation of the relationship between the two places. As a result, Princess Tian has become a bridge between the two. Yang Fuxue's *"History of the Uighurs in Ganzhou"* analyzed the title of the Uighur "Tian Princess" and believed that this phenomenon was related to the early Uighur's belief in shamanism and respect to heaven. His *"Uighur and Dunhuang"* respectively explored the costumes and corresponding inscriptions of the portraits of the Uighur princess in Cave 98, Cave 100 and Cave 61 in Mogao Grottoes. Combined with the Dunhuang manuscript, he believes that the Cao family returned to the Yijun regime and the Ganzhou Uighurs. The relationship is friendly. Xie Jing's *"Research on Uighur Princess Costumes in Dunhuang Grottoes"* explored the Uighur Princess costumes that absorbed some of the characteristics of Han costumes, and the two interacted with each other, and gradually formed the upper-class mainstream dress style of Dunhuang during the Five Dynasties. Recently, Zhou Xiaoping believes that in the 10th century, the Ganzhou Uighurs combined worship objects of different beliefs and created the image of the Buddhist auspicious goddess and the four-armed Guanyin characterized by the Uighur Princess.[14]

In addition, Liu Yuquan's article *"Shazhou Uighur Grotto Art"* in the early study of portraits of Uighur supporters, based on a comprehensive survey of 23 Shazhou Uighur Grottoes, determined that there are 23 Shazhou Uighur Grottoes and 13 of the grottoes are painted of Uighur supporter. At the beginning of this century, the British scholar Lilla Russell-Smith wrote *"Uyghur Patronage in Dunhuang. Regional Art Centres on the Northern Silk Road in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries"*, and did research on the Uyghur patrons and Uyghur prayer flag paintings. In addition, Liu Renming's master's thesis *"Dunhuang Shazhou Uighur Grottoes Image Research"* affirmed Liu Yuquan's division of Shazhou Uighur caves and made further analysis based on the case of Mogao Grottoes Cave 409. Research on the patterns of the Uighur Grottoes in Dunhuang includes: Guan Youhui's *"Decorative Style of the Murals of the Dunhuang and Song Xixia Grottoes and Related Issues"*. This article counts the decorative patterns of the Uighur Grottoes and makes a table for analysis. It is believed that the decorative patterns in the Uighur Grottoes in Shazhou are distributed in the Cao family. The

caves in the later period are very similar, and they all belong to the Gua and Sha local grotto art styles.

4. The Periodization of the Dunhuang Uighur Grottoes

In the study of the dating of the Uighur Grottoes in Shazhou, starting from Zhang Daqian's "A Record of Mogao Grottoes" in 1985, five Uighur Grottoes have been divided into Mogao Grottoes, namely, Mogao Grottoes Cave 237, 309, 310, 368,464. In 1993, Liu Yuquan did further research on his article "Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes, Anxi Yulin Grotto Xixia Caves Stages", and his article "On the Division of Shazhou Uighur Caves" based on the Gaochang Uyghur style classified the original 23 Xixia caves. The cave is divided into Shazhou Uighur Grottoes, and its approximate age is determined to be about the beginning of the 11th century to the beginning of the 12th century (The current staging of the Dunhuang Uighur Grottoes is based on this theory). After that, Shi Jinbo and Bai Bin "Study on the Western Xia Inscriptions of Yulin Grottoes at Mogao Grottoes", "Summary of Xixia Materials in Mogao Grottoes and Yulin Grottoes", etc., based on the investigation, transcription and interpretation of Xixia inscriptions, questioned the staging of the Shazhou Uighur Grottoes. Yang Fuxue's book "Uighur and Dunhuang" believes that Liu Yuquan's classification of Shazhou Uighur caves in the early period is roughly the same as the Shazhou Uighur Kingdom listed in the text, which is credible, but the relative age in the later period is not necessarily accurate. In addition, scholars such as Sha Wutian and Zhao Xiaoxing involved the Uighur Grottoes when discussing the Xixia Grottoes.

The comparative study of Shazhou Uighur and Gaochang Kuqa Uighur mainly focuses on comparative portraits and clothing research. Xie Jing and Xie Shengbao's "Analysis of Uighur and Xixia Donor Costumes in Dunhuang Grottoes" compares the Shazhou Uighur and Gaochang Uyghur donor costumes and the Xixia and Uighur costumes. The author believes that although Xixia costumes are influenced by Uighur costumes, they are between the two. The difference is obvious. The costumes of the Uyghur patrons during the Dunhuang Shazhou period were not the costumes of the Xixia Dangxiang people. Shen Yan's article "Research on Uighur Costume Culture" conducts a systematic classification study of the costume information retained in the cave paintings in Dunhuang and Xinjiang. The second part is a classification study of Uighur men's and women's costumes and accessories. Zhu Xiaoen's "The Uighur Costumes of the Shazhou Uighurs in the Dunhuang Grottoes" believes that the dressing characteristics of the Shazhou Uighur supporters are similar to those of the kuqa Uighurs of the Western Regions, indicating that the Shazhou Uighurs are closely related to the Western Uighurs. Zhang Xiantang's "A New Exploration of Dunhuang Mogao Cave No. 148 Xixia Donor Grotto: A Study of Buddhist History as the Core" Through the analysis of the image and identity of the supporter, he believes that the donation figure in Cave 148 is a representative of the Uighurs or Uighurization in the Xixia period.

5. Problems Faced in the Study of Dunhuang Uighur Grottoes

At present, the main body of research on the Dunhuang Uighur Grottoes is mostly concentrated in the Shazhou Uighur Kingdom. The current research has paid little attention to the contributions of the Uighurs in other periods to the Dunhuang Grottoes. The research content focuses on the study of Uighur costumes, Uighur inscriptions, etc. The overall study of the Uighur Grottoes in Dunhuang is relatively fragmented and still remains in a single and staged study. It fails to find clues to the Uyghur nation from grotto murals, grotto inscriptions, merit tablets, etc. The activities of the past five centuries are connected in series for overall consideration and analysis. The minority characters in the grottoes have weak recognition and application capabilities. The Uighur Grottoes during the Gui-Yi-Jun period and the Uighur Heavenly Princess and other related issues were also unsystematic. Research on the Uighur Grottoes in Dunhuang in the Western Xia and Yuan Dynasties was even weaker.

The construction of the Dunhuang Uighur Grottoes in the Yuan Dynasty was not valued by the academic circles. The Dunhuang Grottoes of the Yuan Dynasty are generally considered to be closely related to Tibetan Sakya School of Tantric art, represented by Cave 3 and Cave 465 of Mogao Grottoes. [15] With the deepening of the research, Aydar Mirkammali and Yang Fuxue's "*Study on Uighur Scripts of Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes 464*" confirmed the content of the list of translations and believed that it originated from the translation of "*suvarṇaprabhāsa-sūtram*" by Master Shengguang. In Volume 4, it is presumed that Cave 464 of Mogao Grottoes was the Uighur Grotto in the late Yuan Dynasty. Yang Fuxue also published the article "*The Dating of Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes Cave 464 and Its Relationship with the Uighurs*". He believed that Mogao Grottoes 464 was excavated in the Northern Liang Dynasty. Later, the Uighurs rebuilt and rebuilt this cave with the support of King Xining of Shazhou. According to factors such as the Uighur inscriptions and ancient cultural relics in the cave, it is determined that the front chamber and corridor of this cave are the Uighur caves in the Yuan Dynasty, and the back chamber is the early Yuan Dynasty caves.

The staged study of the Dunhuang Uyghur Grottoes is based on the hard work of scholars, combined with the study of the late Dunhuang grottoes on the basis of the Uighur history becoming clearer and clearer, and may fully clarify the ins and outs of the Dunhuang Uyghur Grottoes. The previous stage of the Dunhuang Uighur Grottoes is based on the comparison of the painting style and the caves outside Dunhuang. Because the Uighur historical research was still in its infancy at that time, the research foundation was weak, and the staff was short of personnel, so it could not be analyzed from the historical perspective of Uighurs. The staging of the Dunhuang Uighur Grottoes, the characteristics of each stage and the historical reasons for its formation still need to be studied in depth.

Furthermore, in the late Dunhuang grottoes, ethnic cultures such as Xixia, Tubo and Uighurs blended together, and Han Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism, and local beliefs in Dunhuang permeated each other. It has brought many difficulties to the staging of the grottoes. The study of Xixia Grottoes has a greater influence on the study of Uighur Grottoes. The specific characteristics of the Xixia Grottoes style have not yet been clarified. Whether the defined timeline is correct has an impact on the study of the Uighur Grottoes.

Therefore, we can only put the study of Dunhuang Uighur Grottoes under the historical background and vision of Uighur history, combined with Dunhuang Grotto archaeological methods, using fine arts archeology, traditional epigraphy, modern archeology, philology archeology, using Buddhist scriptures and translating ancient archaeology. Comparing the plot and image of the fresco's transformation performance, as well as the physical and chemical determination, comprehensive research and integration. Expand ideas, change perspectives, explore materials, and strengthen the source, comparative and characteristic research of grotto art We should not only recognize its "diversity" and recognize a specific work as "Hu Feng" or "Han rhyme", but also pay attention to the pluralistic integration formed after its cultural intersection. [16] The further advancement of Dunhuang Uighur Grottoes may solve the dilemma of the study of late Dunhuang Grottoes.

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