

# The Provenance and Character of the Dunhuang Documents

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Dunhuang 敦煌, a remote locality situated on the edge of the Gobi Desert in westernmost Gansu 甘肅 province, China, is an oasis town on the Silk Road, which has flourished since ancient times. A complex of several hundred caves collectively known as the Mogao Caves 莫高窟 lies about 13 kilometres outside Dunhuang, and they have been registered as a World Heritage Site. The murals on the walls and ceilings of the caves, as well as the clay images of Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and so on enshrined inside the caves, represent the flower of not only Chinese art, but also Central Asian art, and their artistic value is today recognized around the world. However, the several tens of thousands of ancient documents known as the Dunhuang documents which were discovered in one of these caves,<sup>1)</sup> though just as valuable or even more valuable, are not so widely known and are no more than an object of research for a small number of specialists. But it is these documents that represent the greatest discovery in Oriental studies as a whole during the twentieth century, and as research advances, their importance is being increasingly recognized.

The overwhelming majority of the Dunhuang documents are written in Chinese, and these are followed in number by Tibetan documents, of which there are several thousand. If the smallest fragments and scraps are uniformly counted as individual items, the Tibetan documents account even in numerical terms for about ten percent of the total number of documents, but they also include manuscripts of works such as the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* in several hundred large folios, which are in quantity several hundred or several thousand times the size of small fragments and scraps, and in material quantity the Tibetan documents would account for at least thirty or forty percent of the entire corpus of documents. Apart from Chinese and Tibetan documents, there are also documents written in other languages such as Sogdian, Khotanese, Kuchean, Sanskrit, Uighur, and Hebrew, but these are far fewer in number. This

collection of documents written in various languages is at any rate indicative of the character of the oasis town of Dunhuang, a trading centre on the Silk Road where many different peoples came into contact with each other.

The discovery of the Dunhuang documents goes back to the year 1900. It is said that a Daoist priest by the name of Wang Yuanlu 王圓籙 (1849–1931) who was living in the Mogao Caves noticed that cigarette smoke was being drawn through the wall of the corridor leading to a large cave (Cave 16 in the current numbering system), and thinking this odd, he pulled down the painted roughcast wall and discovered a small cave (Cave 17) filled with old documents. He selected a number of old manuscripts, which he then presented to local officials and so on, and as a result news of his discovery spread.

At the time Aurel Stein (1862–1943), a British explorer of Hungarian birth, was conducting an expedition in Central Asia with assistance from the British Government of India and the British Museum, and hearing soon of this discovery, he became the first foreigner to visit the cave. This was about one hundred years ago, in 1907. Following negotiations with Wang, he selected and purchased several thousand documents from the cave, which was still virtually untouched [Stein 1921]. These came to constitute the Stein Collection, which is today housed in the British Library.

About one year after Stein's visit, the French Orientalist Paul Pelliot (1867–1945), who was also on an expedition in Central Asia, hastened to Dunhuang and spent three months there [Pelliot 1908]. A peerless Sinologist also familiar with the various languages of Central Asia, he surveyed with great energy the entire area around Dunhuang and gathered many materials, drawing sketch plans of almost four hundred of the Mogao Caves, making copies of epitaphs, inscriptions and random jottings, and taking stone rubbings of steles and photographs of murals. In this fashion he acquired almost ten thousand documents, and these became the Pelliot Collection which is today held by the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris.

Pelliot's visit was followed by further visits by expeditionary parties from various countries, including the 3rd Central Asian Expedition dispatched by Ōtani Kōzui 大谷光瑞 (1867–1947) of Nishi Honganji 西本願寺 in Japan, and these expeditions each took back to their respective countries the items that they had collected.

Subsequently the Qing 清 government had all the documents re-

maining in the cave transported to Beijing, but a not inconsiderable number of documents were lost en route. Though there is no way of knowing what became of them, they probably form part of the “Dunhuang documents” now scattered around the world. But these include many spurious documents. One reason for this was the existence of collectors, who did everything within their power to acquire even one of these documents which were attracting worldwide attention.

At any rate, although the Dunhuang documents are now held in various locations around the world, they constitute a group of documents that up until their discovery at the start of the twentieth century had been concealed in a small cave for almost one thousand years, and they ought to be understood and interpreted as a whole. But it is practically impossible to gain an overall grasp of this corpus of several tens of thousands of documents which, on top of having become dispersed in geographically distant places in Europe, China, Russia, and Japan, were written in many different languages over a period of several centuries, and it could be said that today, one century after their discovery, the first stage in their sorting and cataloguing has finally been completed.

This state of affairs has been summarized by Rong Xinjiang in the following manner:

The 1900 discovery of the Mogao Cave No. 17 (usually called the library cave) in Dunhuang stunned the scholarly world. The reasons for the sealing of the cave on the northern wall of Cave 16, and its timing, have long interested scholars, for they have a direct bearing on our understanding and analysis of the materials from the cave. Scholars have put forth various theories, but the most influential are still the earliest explanations, first proposed by Sir Aurel Stein and Paul Pelliot. On the basis of the fragments he found in the cave, Stein put forth the waste-repository hypothesis, which held that the cave contained sacred waste collected from different shrines in Dunhuang. The absence of Xi Xia writings, as well as the chaotic piling up of documents, paintings, wall coverings, Buddhist statues, and steles led Pelliot to conclude the cave was sealed off in 1035 as a storage room when the Xi Xia invaded Dunhuang. [Rong 1999–2000: 247–248]

Rong then summarizes his conclusions regarding the nature of the Dunhuang documents, the reasons for the sealing of the cave, and its tim-

ing:

My goal in this paper is to re-examine these two views and to make two new arguments. The surviving evidence, including Stein's own account, indicates the library cave was not a waste repository but instead a book storehouse of the time, complete with manuscript rolls contained in wrappers as well as various materials awaiting repair from a typical Buddhist library. Secondly, this paper argues that the library cave was sealed before 1006, when the people of Dunhuang heard about the fall of the Buddhist kingdom of Khotan to the Islamic conquerors from Kashgar and then sought to avoid the destruction that had occurred to Buddhist establishments there. [Rong 1999-2000: 248]

With regard to the nature of Cave 17 and the nature of the Dunhuang documents that were sealed up in the cave, Rong showed that the monk Daozhen 道真 (916-987<sup>+</sup>) of the Three Realms Monastery (Sanjiesi 三界寺), which stood in front of the Mogao Caves and was founded in 830 [Dohi 1996: 33; Ueyama 2002: 24], made a vow in 934 to repair old and damaged scriptures in the monastery library and supplement its collection, which he then proceeded to do. The scriptures and paintings, spare volumes for repair purposes, damaged manuscripts, waste paper, and so on that were gathered in the course of this project and placed in the Three Realms Monastery were then stored in an orderly fashion in Cave 17. As a natural consequence, the Dunhuang documents ended up including a large number of documents bearing the name or seal of the Three Realms Monastery, and Rong concluded that Cave 17 served as the storehouse of the Three Realms Monastery.

Rong's new thesis attracted much attention, for it was in direct conflict with the hitherto view, proposed by Stein [1921] and others, that the items stored in Cave 17 were "sacred waste." But it also met with considerable criticism, and Dohi [1996] for example offered the following counterarguments.

1. The documents related to the Three Realms Monastery number at the very most no more than two hundred, and they account for a very small proportion of the Dunhuang documents as a whole.
2. There is no definitive proof that the Three Realms Monastery stood in front of the Mogao Caves, and this is no more than a hy-

pothesis.

3. Even if the Three Realms Monastery was located in the vicinity of the Mogao Caves, the nature of the Dunhuang documents as a whole is not such that they can be characterized solely as having constituted the former library of the Three Realms Monastery.

Dohi further points out that from the 970s through to 1002 a large-scale inspection and restocking of the library of the monastery Bao'ensi 報恩寺 in the town of Dunhuang was carried out together with the copying of scriptures, and he draws attention to the fact that several dozen documents related to Bao'ensi have also been found among the Dunhuang documents. Dohi takes the view that it would be best to regard Cave 17 as a storage room for documents that were no longer wanted at Dunhuang's monasteries, including the Three Realms Monastery.

Next, as regards the reason for the sealing of Cave 17 and its date, in the past the most widely accepted view had been that of Pelliot [1908], who suggested that, when a new wave of barbarians in the shape of the Tanguts, or Xixia 西夏, surged into the area in 1035, temple treasures and scriptures were hastily gathered together and stored in a recently excavated cave for their protection, and the cave was then walled up. But Rong pushed the date back and argued that, on hearing that the kingdom of Khotan had been overthrown by the Islamic Karakhanids, the monks of the Three Realms Monastery gathered together the scriptures and so on that had accumulated in the monastery and sealed them up in Cave 17 to protect them. Like Rong's view that Cave 17 was the library of the Three Realms Monastery, mentioned above, this too is an original view, but it is still no more than speculation, with no conclusive materials or grounds to support it, and Rong has done nothing more than present a new hypothesis about the sealing of the library cave to be added to earlier views on the subject.

Such is the current state of the various opinions on the character of the Dunhuang documents, the reasons for their having been sealed up in a cave, and the date of its sealing. The present essay does not offer any new theory or more sound reasoning based on new materials. Its aim is rather to comprehensively review and examine these questions by taking into account a number of established facts that have nonetheless been disregarded or dismissed, though perhaps not deliberately, and to clarify some future issues for a more comprehensive understanding and elucidation with a view to contributing to further advances in research. At the

most, it could be said that whereas most past research has been concerned almost exclusively with Chinese-language documents and has been conducted only within a Chinese context, I have approached the issues from a perspective that takes into consideration the Tibetan context by taking into account the large proportion of Tibetan documents among the Dunhuang documents as a whole and the fact that for about sixty years, from 788<sup>2)</sup> to 848, Dunhuang was under Tibetan military rule. This is an approach that ought to be taken as a matter of course, but up until now this has seldom been the case.

First, I wish to consider the location of the cave where the documents were discovered (Cave 17), its origins, and the circumstances that led to its eventual sealing. This is because these issues may be considered important for apprising ourselves of the character of the documents that were sealed up in the cave.

Cave 17 (generally known as the Library Cave) where the Dunhuang documents were hidden was hollowed out of the right-hand (north) wall of the corridor leading to Cave 16. This Cave 16 is the lowermost cave of a three-storey complex, with Caves 365 and 366 above it (fig. 1). Cave 365, immediately above Cave 16, has inscriptions in Tibetan and Chinese, and the Tibetan inscription informs us that this cave was excavated in the years 832–34 by “Hong pen,” i.e., Hongbian 洪誓 [Huang 1980; Imaeda 2007b]. This deserves special mention, for this is the only cave among Dunhuang’s several hundred caves the date of which can be clearly determined on the basis of a Tibetan inscription. The years 832–34 fell during the period when Dunhuang was under the rule of the military state of Tibet (Tufan 吐蕃), which was at the time pitted against the Tang 唐, and Hongbian was a Chinese monk who held the highest position in the Buddhist hierarchy of Dunhuang. The exact dates of the excavation of Cave 366 above Cave 365 and Cave 16 below are not known, but since it was general practice for caves to be excavated from the upper level, it may be safely assumed that these three caves were excavated as a set, starting with Cave 366, followed by Cave 365, and ending with Cave 16. Hongbian remained active in this region even after Dunhuang’s return to Chinese rule in 848 under the Return-to-Allegiance Army (*guiyijun* 歸義軍), and in 851 he was appointed Buddhist Controller-in-Chief (*du sengtong* 都僧統) of Hexi 河西, the head of all Buddhists in Hexi. The enormous Cave 16, the lowermost of the three caves with which we are here concerned, is said to have been excavated at this time under the direction of Hongbian. Cave 17, a small cave hol-

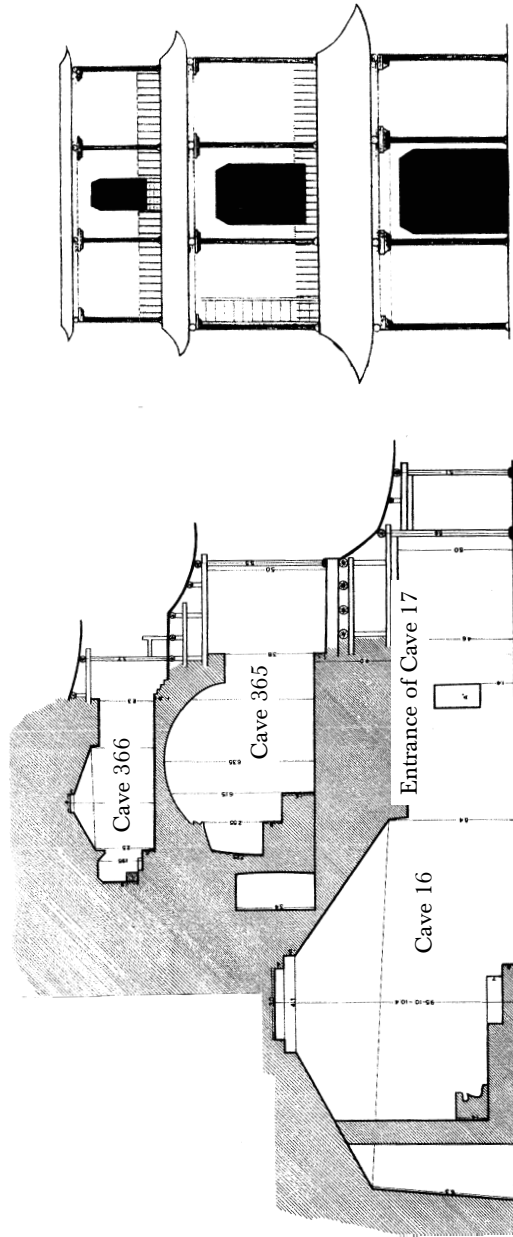


Fig. 1 Three story-complex 三層窟 (Shi 1996: pls. 126-127)

lowed out of the north wall of the corridor leading to Cave 16, is considered by some to have originally been a cave for storing food [Liu 2000: 30], but it is generally believed to have been excavated as Hongbian's meditation cave [Rong 2002: 15; Sha 2006: 70] (fig. 2). At any rate, after Hongbian's death in 862 [Liu 2000: 30] Cave 17 became a memorial chapel enshrining a portrait statue of Hongbian, placed against the main north wall facing the entrance, and a stele recording his achievements, placed against the west wall on the left [Ma 1978: 25; Fang 1991: 221]. Figs. 3 and 4 are thought to represent the state of the cave at this time.

Various items, documents, and so on in the former possession of or

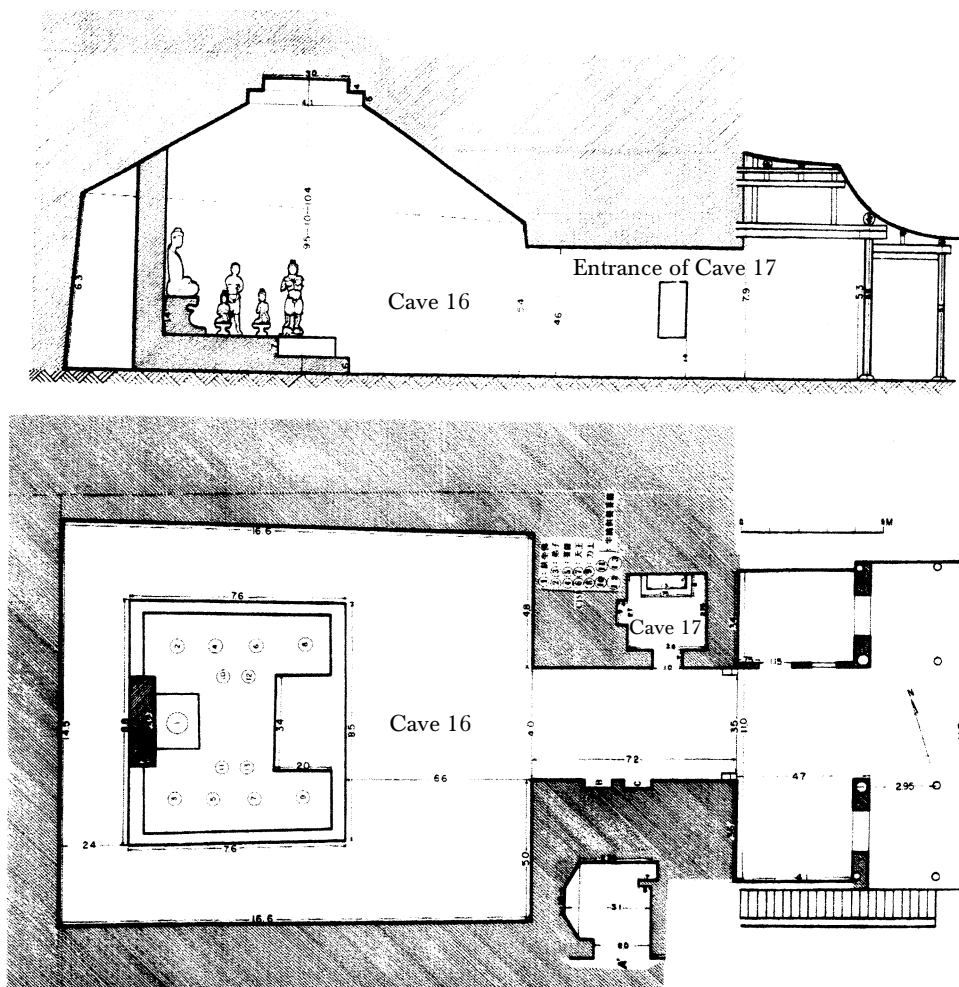


Fig. 2 Caves 16 and 17 (Shi 1996: pl. 125)





Fig. 3 Portrait statue of Hongbian in Cave 17 (NHK Shuzaihan 1980, photograph facing p. 179) 寫真提供:NHK

pertaining to Hongbian would have been kept in this memorial chapel. In view of the cave's position, its origins, and the fact that Hongbian's name or seal is found in a considerable number of documents from the cave, both Chinese and Tibetan, there is nothing unnatural about this assumption. When considered in this light, the documents stored in the cave in the very earliest stage could perhaps be regarded as "personal

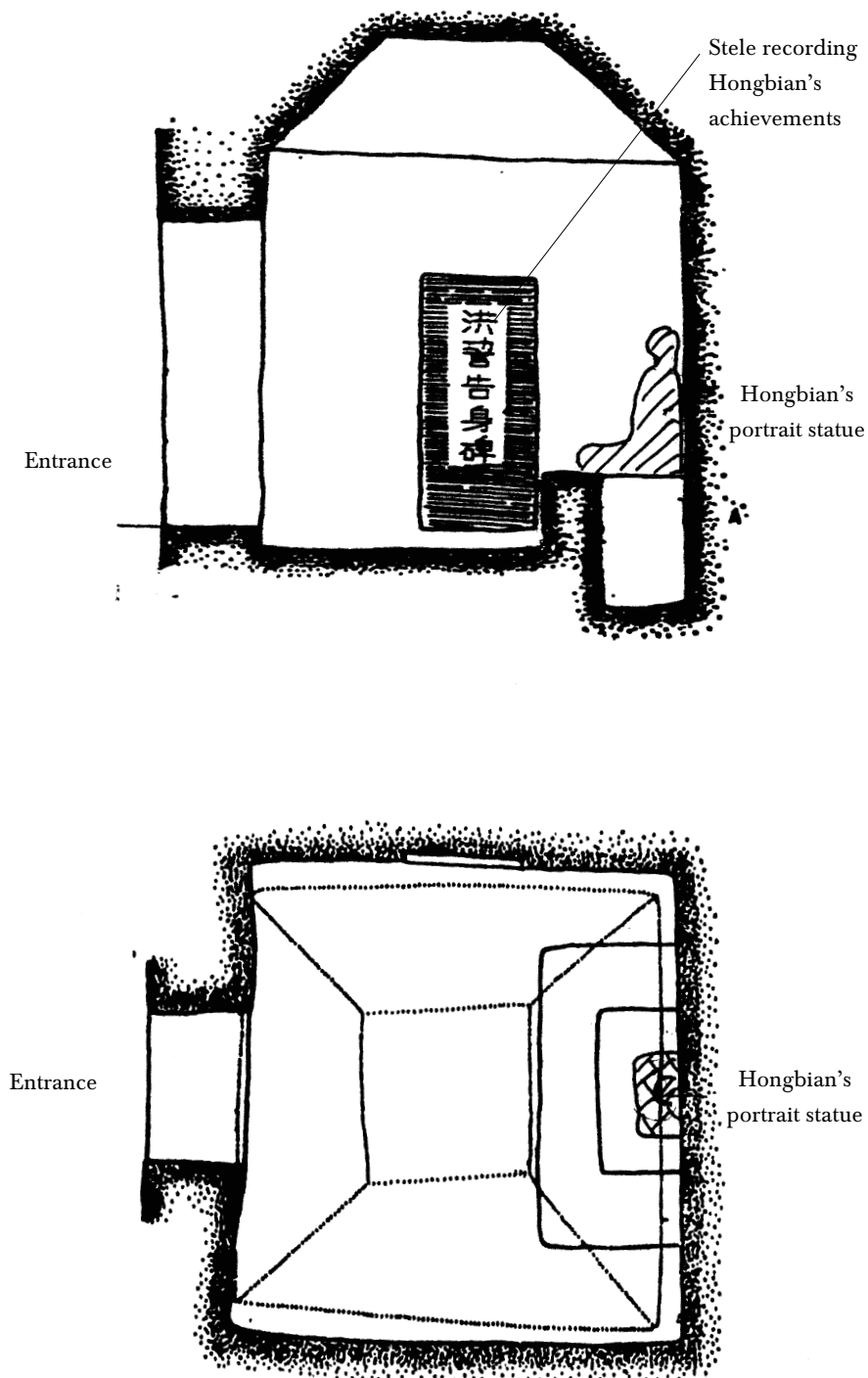


Fig. 4 Cave 17 (Ma 1978: 22, pl. 2. Hongbian's portrait statue is added by the author of the article)

documents” related to the monk Hongbian, who was active in Dunhuang when it was under Tibetan rule and then under the control of the Return-to-Allegiance Army, that is, from the late eighth to mid-ninth century.

Hongbian belonged to the Wu 吳 family, and there immediately springs to mind another member of the Wu family who also had associations with Dunhuang from the late eighth to mid-ninth century. This was the Chinese monk Wu Facheng 吳法成. He was born slightly earlier than Hongbian and was a translator-monk of rare ability who translated Buddhist scriptures from Chinese into Tibetan and from Tibetan into Chinese in Dunhuang during the period of Tibetan rule. Bilingual in Chinese and Tibetan, his Tibetan name was Chos grub, a literal translation of his Chinese name, and several dozen documents bearing his name in Chinese or Tibetan have been found among the Dunhuang documents. His Chinese brand of Buddhism owed much to Tankuang 曇曠, well-known as the author of the *Dacheng ershier wen ben* 大乘二十二問本, which was written in response to questions posed by the ruler (*btsan po*) of Tufan, and several of Tankuang’s works have also been discovered among the Dunhuang documents.<sup>3)</sup>

It is not known whether Facheng and Hongbian were in any way related, but they most certainly both came from the Wu family. When seen in this light, it is evident that at least from the second half of the eighth century through to the mid-ninth century, when Dunhuang was under Tibetan rule, the Wu family produced several monks who played notable roles in the world of Dunhuang Buddhism. Since Facheng and Hongbian were both ordained monks, they would not have had any direct descendants, but members of the Wu family, their kinsmen, considering this three-storey set of caves to have associations with their family line, would have continued to maintain the caves and would have kept the personal effects of these two eminent monks from the Wu family and documents associated with them in Hongbian’s memorial chapel. Rather than having value as treasures in their own right, these documents would have been prized as “family documents” connected with ancestors of the Wu family. It would be precisely for this reason that there have been discovered many secular documents such as contracts, rather than Buddhist texts, that bear Hongbian’s signature or seal. Since the two monks were active at a time when Tibet ruled over Dunhuang, it is only natural that there should be a considerable number of Tibetan documents among the documents that were sealed up in the cave. Furthermore, since

Hongbian in his position as Buddhist Controller-in-Chief of Hexi was the head of all Buddhists in the area centred on Dunhuang, his associations would have been wide-ranging, and this would have been reflected in the diversity of the Dunhuang documents as a whole.

Nothing is known about how Cave 17 was preserved thereafter. There is only one later reference to this cave, a record of a lamp service held in the main caves among the Mogao Caves in 951 by Daozhen, mentioned by Rong. According to this record, three lamps were offered in the Wu Heshang Cave 吳和尚窟 and seven lamps in the Seven Buddhas Cave 七佛窟. The Seven Buddhas Cave can be identified with Cave 365, excavated by Hongbian and dedicated to seven Buddhas centred on Bhaiṣajyaguru, and the Wu Heshang Cave with Cave 16. This means that even in the middle of the tenth century, about one century after their excavation, the caves associated with Hongbian were still being maintained by devotees (not necessarily confined to members of the Wu family) and that Hongbian's great achievements had not been forgotten.

There is no way of knowing in what sort of state Cave 17 would have been at this time, and the following is no more than conjecture. But the reason that I venture to put forward these conjectures is that I believe they may not be altogether useless for considering the provenance and character of the documents sealed up in this cave, the circumstances leading up to the sealing of the cave, and the date of its sealing.

First, on the subject of the portrait statue of Hongbian that stood in this cave, Ueyama writes as follows:

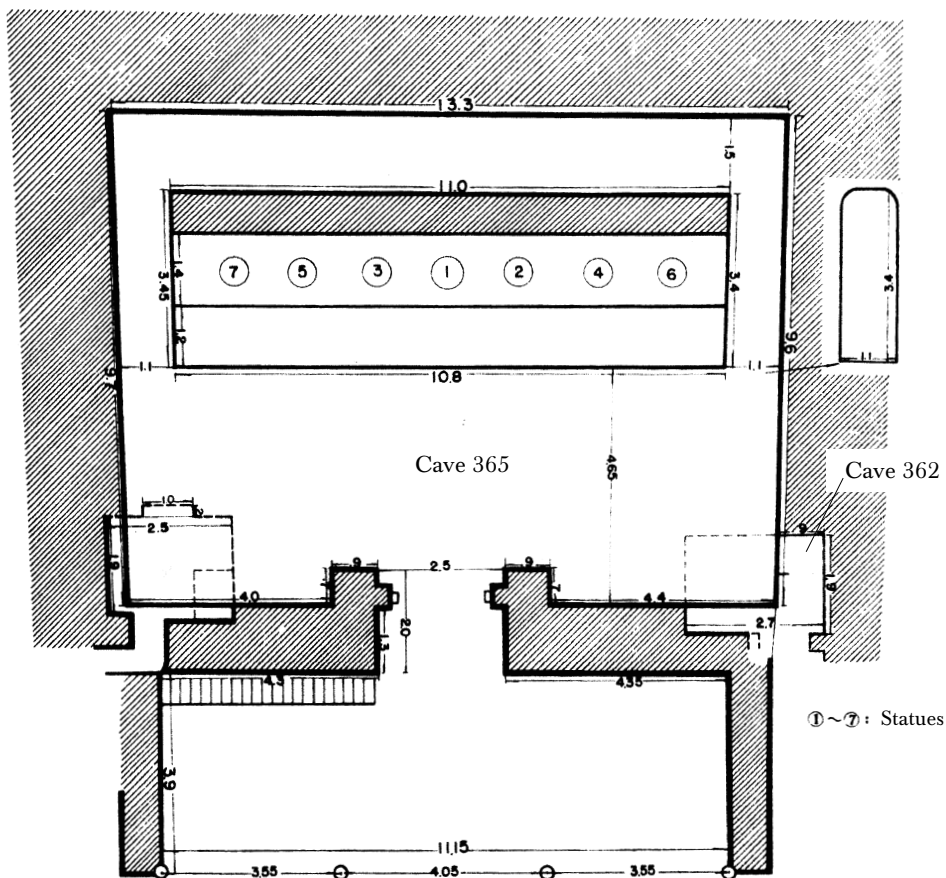
Among these caves, old documents had been sealed up in Cave 17, but this cave had originally been a memorial chapel in which a portrait statue of Wu Hongbian, whose cave it had been, and his ashes and so on had been enshrined. However, his portrait statue was moved to Cave 362 on the second level, the stele recording his achievements was also taken outside, and the documents were sealed up inside.... Today both the statue and the stele have been restored to their original positions, but the reason that the statue was moved elsewhere and the old documents were sealed up inside has not been fully clarified. [Ueyama: 2002: 26]

This is an intriguing view, but the reference to the removal of the stele is a complete misunderstanding on the part of Ueyama. The stele was still inside the cave when the Daoist priest Wang discovered Cave 17

in 1900, and it was Wang himself who removed the stele from the cave. The stele was later returned to the cave, where it has remained to this day. It was only Hongbian's portrait statue that was removed prior to the sealing of the cave. Discovered in Cave 362, a small cave hollowed out of the north side of Cave 365 above Cave 16 (fig. 5), it was identified as the portrait statue of Hongbian and in 1965 returned to its original position in Cave 17 [Ma 1978: 27].

There is no way at all of knowing when and why Hongbian's portrait statue was moved from Cave 17 to Cave 362 above, but in this connection Ueyama ends his article quoted above in the following manner:

I sense something more than mere disparagement in the treatment of



**Fig. 5 Caves 362 and 365 (Shi 1996: pl. 139)**

the memorial chapel of the Wu Family Cave.<sup>4)</sup> Were one to hazard a guess, may not ethnic ostracism have been behind it? What crosses one's mind is that the Return-to-Allegiance Army under the Cao 曹 family was to a considerable extent linked to the Uighurs. The hostility between the Uighurs and Tufan goes far back to the circumstances surrounding the marriage of Princess Wencheng 文成 to the Tibetan king. If such ethnic antagonism had still been alive, it would not have been surprising if actions to ostracize the caves of the Wu family, which had supported the Tufan régime, and their documents had been taken in Dunhuang, where Uighur control had grown stronger. [Ueyama: 2002: 30]

In Ueyama's view, the confinement of Hongbian's portrait statue, 94 centimetres in height, to Cave 362, a small unadorned cave less than one metre high, was an act reflecting "more than mere disparagement" and was probably the action of the Uighurs. That is to say, once the Uighurs, who had historically been at odds with the Tibetans, came to occupy a dominant position in Dunhuang during the time of the Return-to-Allegiance Army under the Cao family, they revenged themselves out of ethnic animosity towards the Tibetans, their former enemies, who had withdrawn from Dunhuang in 848, on Hongbian, a monk from the Wu family who had cooperated with Tufan's military régime during the period of Tibetan rule of Dunhuang, or who had at least held important posts during this time. Although this is an interesting hypothesis, it lacks in positive evidence and is no more than conjecture.

What follows is likewise nothing more than speculation, but in my view the removal of Hongbian's portrait statue was not a measure reflecting "more than mere disparagement," as suggested by Ueyama, but was a measure taken rather out of feelings of respect for Hongbian. After Hongbian's death in 862, Cave 17, which became his memorial chapel, would have become a place for keeping his portrait statue, a stele recording his achievements, and Buddhist images, paintings, documents, and so on associated with him. In addition, documents and so on related to Facheng, another monk of the Wu family who had been active in Dunhuang's Buddhist circles during the period of Tibetan rule, would also have been stored here. These were the items that would have been brought into the cave in the very earliest stage, and it can be supposed that because of the historical background Tibetan documents would have accounted for a sizeable proportion of the documents.

Judging from the fact that in 951, when lamp offerings were made by Daozhen, seven lamps and three lamps respectively were offered in Cave 365 (Seven Buddhas Cave) and Cave 16 (Wu Heshang Cave), both excavated under the supervision of Hongbian, even at this time Hongbian had by no means been forgotten and was presumably still revered.

Then, if I may be permitted to continue with these speculations, at some later date Cave 17's character as Hongbian's memorial chapel diminished for some reason or another, and it became a place for storing things that Dunhuang's Buddhist community no longer needed, such as odd copies of Buddhist texts, sheets of paper ruined by scribal errors, used textbooks, and official and private documents that needed to be disposed of [Dohi 1996: 33]. The documents from the Three Realms Monastery, which have been clarified through Rong's detailed study, would have been some of the items gradually brought into the cave during this time.

As the documents and other items being placed little by little in the cave increased, the small cave, about nine cubic metres in size, would have become more or less full, at which point might not Hongbian's portrait statue have been moved to Cave 362 in order to create some extra storage space? This would certainly not have been an act of contempt, and instead it would have been done out of respect for Hongbian, owing to a reluctance to leave his portrait statue in a cave that, contrary to its original objective, had become a storeroom for disused scriptures and so on. A small cave (Cave 362) would then have been hollowed out anew on the north side of Cave 365 (immediately above Cave 16), which had been excavated under the supervision of none other than Hongbian himself, and his statue would have been installed in this cave. If the removal of his statue had been an act of contempt and revenge by the Uighurs against Hongbian, they would not have gone to this much trouble, and instead they would have knocked off the statue's head or mercilessly destroyed it, as Muslims often did with Buddhist images. Be that as it may, since there are no source materials for clarifying the facts of the matter, the reason for the removal of Hongbian's statue can only be described as an enigma.

The greatest obstacle, and a crucial one at that, to an overall understanding of the Dunhuang documents is that there are no records whatsoever of the state of the interior of Cave 17 when it was opened at the start of the twentieth century. The Daoist priest Wang, who first discovered the cave, left no account at all of conditions inside the cave. Stein too,

the first foreigner to enter the cave, which at the time was still virtually untouched, left only the following brief account:

Heaped up in closely packed layers, but *without any order*, there appeared in the dim light of the priest's flickering lamp a solid mass of manuscript bundles rising to a height of nearly 10 feet. They filled, as subsequent measurement showed, close on 500 cubit feet, the size of the small room or chapel being about 9 feet square and the area left clear within just sufficient for two people to stand in. [Stein 1921: 808; italics added]

Stein took all the documents outside and within the short span of three days selected those that he wished to purchase. But he kept no record of where the documents he chose had originally been inside the cave. If he had at least left some records giving a rough indication of where in which row along which wall each document had been found and whether it had been near the top of a pile, in the middle, or at the bottom, we would today know something about the order in which the documents were brought into the cave and the manner in which they are related to each other. It is most regrettable that Stein, an archaeologist, did not leave any records of this kind.

Pelliot, who entered Cave 17 after Stein, records that it was "stocked on three sides beyond the height of a man to a depth of two and sometimes three rows of scrolls" [Pelliot 1908: 505]. But this describes the state of the cave after Stein had returned the documents which he had removed from the cave, and does not reflect the state of affairs when the sealed cave was initially discovered, and regrettably it has no value as source material.

Consequently one must abandon any thoughts of surmising the original state of the several tens of thousands of documents that were taken from Cave 17, a veritable Pandora's box, in a haphazard manner without any records being made and are now scattered around the world. It is no longer possible to reconstruct the original Library Cave for the purposes of an overall understanding of the Dunhuang documents.

This is a matter of immense regret, for in some respects it makes it difficult to understand and interpret the documents. For example, a riddle relating to the *Annals*, one of the most important of the Tibetan documents, will never be solved. Consisting of 307 lines in its extant form, it is one of the most important documents for the study of ancient Tibetan



history, recording as it does the movements of the *btsan po* of the empire of ancient Tufan and other important events for each year over a period of more than one century from a little before a.d. 650 to 747. But today this document, the opening section of which is damaged, is divided into two parts, with the first 53 lines in the Pelliot Collection (Pt. 1288) and the rest in the Stein Collection (IOL Tib J 750). What is more, there are signs that the document was cut in two with some sort of sharp-edged instrument along line 53, for the lower part of the subscript vowel sign for *u* is clearly visible at the start of the portion in the Stein Collection, and the two documents fit neatly together. It is therefore clear that these two documents originally formed a single continuous scroll [Imaeda 2007c: 230]. However, our interpretation of these two documents is influenced in subtle ways depending on whether this scroll had already been cut in two before the sealing of the cave and the two sections were in different places in the cave or whether it was still a single scroll when it was first found by Stein, who then cut off the damaged opening section and took only the well-preserved remaining section. But today there is no way of determining which it was. What is clear is that Pelliot—who writes, “All the same, I do not think I overlooked anything essential. I handled not only every scroll, but every scrap of paper—and God knows how many bits and pieces there were” [Pelliot 1908: 506]—considered this partially damaged fragment of only 51 lines among the documents left by Stein to be important and took it back with him to France.

To give one more example, there is a *pothi* text that is today divided into two parts, with one part in the Pelliot Collection in Paris (Pt. 16) and the other part in the Stein Collection in London (IOL Tib J 751). This document consists in all of twenty folios numbered from 22 to 41, and the eight folios 34–41 are held in London, while the twelve folios 22–33 are held in Paris [Imaeda 2007c: 5]. It is possible that when Stein first found this document, it was already in two parts that were in two separate places inside the cave, and he took only one part with him while Pelliot took the other part, but it is also conceivable that of the twenty folios that Stein found together he took only eight folios as an example of a Tibetan manuscript in *pothi* form and left the rest. But since he left no records whatsoever, there is again no way of knowing which it was.

Lastly, as regards the date of the sealing of Cave 17, the generally accepted view has been that the latest date recorded in the documents discovered in the cave is 1002 and the cave was sealed not long after this date, which represents the *terminus post quem* of the sealing of the cave.

But according to Dohi's research, the latest recorded date is 1006, and the *terminus post quem* of the cave's sealing must therefore be emended [Ueyama 2002: 28]. Further, there has been found a work by the monk Quanming 詮明, who flourished during the Liao 遼 (907–1125). There are records of contacts between the Cao family, which ruled Dunhuang at the time, and the Liao in 1005, 1017, and 1020, and it is to be surmised that this work was brought to Dunhuang in the course of these contacts [Ueyama 2002: 28–29]. While the date of its arrival in Dunhuang cannot be pinpointed, the *terminus post quem* of Cave 17's sealing needs to be brought still further forward.

At any rate, as far as the date of the cave's sealing is concerned, it could be said that currently there are no factors that enable one to date it any more precisely than the first half of the eleventh century. As regards the reason for its sealing, various theories have been proposed, such as invasions by either the Islamic Karakhanids or Xixia or even Buddhist *mofa* 末法 thought [Sha 2006], but none of them has been definitively proved.

Would it not be more natural to assume that during the course of more than one and a half centuries following its excavation old documents were steadily brought into the cave with the result that, even after Hongbian's portrait statue had been moved elsewhere, there was no longer any space for storing further documents, and the cave was sealed when it could no longer function even as a storage room, which occurred in the first half of the eleventh century? And could it not be said that there are no grounds for seeking the direct or indirect reasons for the sealing of Cave 17 in historical events such as the fall of Khotan to the Islamic Karakhanids in 1006, the invasion of Dunhuang by Xixia in 1035, or the first year of the decline of the Dharma (*mofa*) in 1052?

Instead of providing any new findings or answering any longstanding questions, this essay may have ended up raising some fresh questions. But it is important for our overall understanding of the Dunhuang documents and for the interpretation of individual documents that we resolve these questions on the basis of firm evidence and, when this is not possible, recognize points in question as such and do not rush to seek simplistic solutions or hypotheses.

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## Notes

- 1) Dohi [1996: 32] includes Buddhist paintings and so on in the general designation “Dunhuang documents,” and he states that they come to close to 60,000 items in number if one includes fragments. According to Liu [2000: 29], the Dunhuang documents number approximately 50,000.
- 2) This is based on the latest research by Li Zhengyu [2007]. However, the view that Tibetan rule began in either 786 or 787 still remains worthy of consideration.
- 3) On Tankuang and Facheng, reference should be made to a series of outstanding studies by Ueyama. In particular, Ueyama 1997 deals with the

treatment of documents belonging to Facheng after his death, and it is interesting for its information on the background to some of the materials making up the Dunhuang documents, as well as being important for understanding the process behind the make-up of the documents as a whole.

- 4) It would appear that Ueyama regards Cave 17 (and the three-storey set of caves of which it is part) as the Wu Family Cave. But this was probably not the case. Among these three tiers of caves, the lowermost Cave 16 and the middle-tier Cave 365 were known as the Wu Heshang Cave and Seven Buddhas Cave respectively, and it is to be surmised that the Wu Family Cave was located elsewhere. Cf. Wu 1959: 49; Ma 1978: 58.