

CONSERVATION OF THE ANCIENT SITES ALONG THE SILK ROAD

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Abstract

The ancient sites along the Silk Road in northwestern China are of great cultural significance. They can for the most part be divided into two categories: the first is grotto temples. The second is earthen ruins.

Most of the grottoes were excavated into conglomerate rock, which is soft, consisting of gravels and sands bound by clay or calcium salts. Earthen ruins were built using sand and clay as raw materials. The climate of the Gobi desert—characterized by strong winds carrying wind-blown sand and occasional heavy rain—is responsible for severe damage to earthen structures. Many ancient sites are facing the threat from desertification. Moreover, site protection in the past was inadequate, and unable to combat such practices as exploitation of earthen sites for farming, irrational use, and unplanned excavations by foreign explorers. At present, many ancient sites on the Silk Road are in danger of disappearing.

Dunhuang Academy has over the years conducted conservation research, including the assessment of significance, condition recording, analytical research, and the development of conservation materials and technologies for many sites along the Silk Road. After these some conservation practices were finished, including the Yumen Pass and Hecang site in Dunhuang, Western Xia Emperor No.3 mausoleum in Yinchuan, and the Beacon tower of Jiaohe. The results of the consolidation have assessed and judged effective.