

# BUDDHISM CULTURE TOURISM ROUTES TO PROMOTE DUNHUANG CULTURE DEVELOPMENT; SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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## Abstract

Many cultural heritage sites face challenges in preserving historical significance while promoting tourism to drive economic growth. Dunhuang, a notable cultural hub, confronts similar issues as it seeks to attract tourism while protecting its valuable Buddhist heritage. This literature review examines the key factors contributing to the successful integration of Buddhist culture in tourism development to support cultural tourism in Dunhuang. Focusing on studies published between 2016 and 2023, the review explores various practical strategies, such as cultural preservation initiatives, infrastructure improvements, and community engagement programs, which have supported sustainable tourism and heritage conservation. Experts emphasize the importance of preserving cultural authenticity while enhancing the tourist experience, noting that investments in infrastructure, especially in transportation, accommodation, and preservation technology, are essential for sustainable tourism growth. Furthermore, collaborative efforts, including government policy support and community involvement, are critical in balancing cultural preservation and tourism development. This study highlights the importance of a well-rounded approach, where

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preservation, infrastructure, and community engagement collectively enhance Dunhuang's cultural tourism experience.

**Key words:** Cultural Heritage, Buddhism, Tourism, Dunhuang, Cultural Tourism

## Introduction

The Dunhuang Caves are renowned globally for their architectural features, murals, painted sculptures, and the extensive collection of ancient Buddhist manuscripts. The Dunhuang Caves in present-day Gansu Province, China, consist of grottos and sanctuaries carved into the cliff face (Zhang, 2023). Historically, they were located at a significant cultural exchange site along the Silk Road. The Mogao Caves, the West Thousand Buddha Caves, the Yulin Caves, and the rooms that served as living quarters for monks and storehouses for Buddhist cultural relics collectively constitute what is commonly referred to as the Dunhuang Caves. These approximately 735 caves, encompassing nearly 45,000 square meters of murals and more than 2,000 color sculptures, served as a significant repository of Buddhist art from the 4th to the 14th centuries (Zhang, 2023). They served as a focal point for social interaction, facilitating the exchange and interaction of diverse cultures. The Dunhuang Caves are a significant monument, documenting the relationships between Buddhism and the adjacent societies of China and Central Asia. This paper will analyze the history of the Dunhuang Caves from two perspectives: the artistic evolution of the caves and the social interactions within them.

According to Ruan (2023), the art of the Dunhuang Caves represents a cohesive artistic expression that includes caves, painted sculptures, and murals, which work together to depict elaborate and detailed scenes. The various caves fulfill distinct purposes, such as the Zen Caves, designated for meditation, the Central Pagoda Caves, utilized for both worship and meditation, the Temple Caves, characterized by Inverted bucket-shaped roofs, the Buddhist Altar Caves, for worship and enshrinement, and the

Grand Buddha Caves, intended for paying respect to Buddha. The sculptures, characterized by vivid paint, depict figures including the Buddha, Bodhisattvas, Disciples, Heavenly Kings, and Guardians. Additionally, the murals can be classified into several categories, such as representations of Sakyamuni, ancient Chinese Immortals, and illustrations of sutras, significant Buddhist historical events, and decorative paintings, forming a comprehensive collection of knowledge (Lin, 2019).

The artistic development of the Dunhuang Caves can be categorized into four main stages corresponding to Chinese dynastic periods: the Northern Dynasties (439-581), the Sui (581-681) and Tang (618-907) dynasties, the interval from the Five Dynasties (907-979) to the Song dynasty (960-1279), and the phase from the Western Xia (1038-1227) to the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368) (Zhang, 2023). The initial construction of the Dunhuang Caves occurred during the Northern Dynasties period. By the end of the last millennium, monks were disseminating Mahayana Buddhism (dàshèng in Chinese) from its origin in India into Han China, moving northward and eastward. During this time, the kingdoms comprising the Northern Liang state (420-439) experienced a gradual dissemination of Buddhist art from the Western Regions to Dunhuang, coinciding with the initial construction of caves in the area. The murals, painted sculptures, and architectural style of the earliest caves exhibit distinct features of Buddhist art from the Western Regions, characterized by figures that are high-nosed, big-eyed, and robust (Sørensen, 2023). The murals primarily utilized the technique of stereoscopic blending from the Western Regions, exhibiting a straightforward and dignified style.

In the Northern Wei dynasty (439-534), the native style of the Dunhuang region began to develop, indicating early signs of localization and Sinicization. Subsequently, the influence of central China became evident. The Western Wei (535–556) and Northern Zhou (557–581) dynasties facilitated stylistic and cultural exchanges among China's northern, southern, and western regions. The influence of Chinese culture from the

north, south, and west, along with the local culture of Dunhuang, was further integrated into the caves. Consequently, from their early history, the Dunhuang Caves art exhibited cultural integration features, which resulted from the dissemination of Buddhism and trade along various Silk Routes.

The Sui and Tang dynasties represented a peak in artistic expression at Dunhuang, showcasing a notable secularization of Chinese Buddhism through diverse artistic themes, impressive scenes, and vibrant colours (Lin, 2019). At this stage, character modelling, colour blending, and line drawing have been developed into refined skills. During the Tang Dynasty, the art style of the Dunhuang Caves was significantly shaped by central Chinese culture, resulting in imposing, generous, ethereal, and free characteristics. During the Mid-Tang dynasty, the Dunhuang region was under the control of the Tubo Kingdom, a minority regime that experienced conflicts with the Tang dynasty (Chen & Wang, 2020). This period saw a transformation in the style of mural paintings, which became more delicate and incorporated a wider range of exotic colours. During the late Tang dynasty, the unrest in central China led to a re-influence on the art of Dunhuang Caves, which integrates central Chinese elements with foreign and local cultures. Therefore, the secularization of mural and painted sculpture art was heightened, yet remained subject to certain constraints.

The Dunhuang grottoes, with a history exceeding a thousand years, offer a historical overview of Chinese Buddhist art and reflect the interactions among Buddhism, art, and society in China. Buddhism, which originated in Central Asia, made its way into China, an extensive and populous nation characterized by its cultural diversity and established religions such as Confucianism and Taoism, according to Leach & Mina (2022). Buddhism's inherent inclusiveness, combined with the traditional Chinese capacity to assimilate foreign cultures, initiated a process of secularization from its inception. In a manner akin to Europe's revival of the "humanism" of

ancient Greece during the Renaissance, the Dunhuang caves similarly illustrate the progression of religious art towards a more humanistic expression. Consequently, the Buddhist art of Dunhuang adhered to a trajectory of "moving away from the ethereal and remote realm disconnected from human emotions and physicality, and returning to the tangible world rich with human feelings and meaning," through which Buddhism underwent a process of secularization in China. The caves thus provide a clear record of the process of secularization as it interacted with Chinese society over a thousand years (Leng Lu, 2019).

The Dunhuang Caves illustrate the social and cultural exchanges that occurred through the interaction of Buddhism with society. They also highlight the relationships among local Buddhist monks, Chinese dynastic governments, and various groups involved in the transportation of goods and ideas along the Silk Road, which played a significant role in the secularization of Chinese Buddhism (Chen & Wang, 2020). The Mogao Caves at the site were initially constructed as residences and places of worship by monks. Subsequently, dynasties like Northern Liang, Northern Wei, and Northern Zhou utilized state initiatives to advance the development of the caves. Subsequently, the Dunhuang Caves were constructed not only by Buddhist monks but also by princes, nobles, and commoners, becoming a significant aspect of the social life of the Dunhuang community.

From a social perspective, the characteristics of Dunhuang Caves art, across various periods, mirrored the distinct stages of secularization within Chinese Buddhism (Du, 2024). The Sixteen Kingdoms and Northern Dynasty marked the initial phase of Buddhism's localization and Sinicization in China. This period demonstrated the integration of the distinctive expressive style from the Western Regions with elements from local or Central China, alongside the sacred interpretation of Buddhism. Buddhism experienced significant growth during the Sui and Tang Dynasties, leading to various branches, including Tibetan Buddhism and Zen Buddhism.

Chinese Buddhism interacted with rulers and integrated into people's daily lives, leading to a more rapid and innovative secularization influenced by Han culture (Peng, 2023). The prosperous and elegant atmosphere of the Tang dynasty is reflected in the art of the Dunhuang Caves from this period. The artworks exhibited increased diversity and vibrancy, incorporating legendary figures and substituting the initial mystique of Buddhism with more terrestrial representations such as emperors and ordinary individuals. During the Song and Yuan dynasties, the influence of Buddhism expanded significantly and became increasingly integrated into the daily lives of ordinary individuals. The murals and sculptures in the caves exhibited the vibrant color and texture characteristic of traditional Chinese painting, alongside the dignified, refined, and graceful style associated with Buddhist art (Peng, 2023).

Ultimately, due to the secularization of Buddhism, the Dunhuang Caves also served a social function. The caves, as a significant aspect of Buddhist culture, were constructed to fulfill the religious needs of the general populace, divert attention from social conflicts, and encourage dedication to the government and its rulers (Shen & Wang, 2024). The Dunhuang Caves served the political interests of rulers, who reinforced their authority by advocating Buddhism as a cohesive belief system in China. The development of Dunhuang Buddhist art addressed the spiritual needs of the people. It aligned with the political and economic interests of the emperor, while also serving the religious objective of utilizing politics to strengthen its social standing.

Buddhism is a significant world religion that originated in the sixth century B.C.E. based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama in the Indian subcontinent. It subsequently spread to various regions of Asia, including China, Korea, and Japan, and eventually to the Western world. Buddhism instructs individuals to attain nirvana by following the path outlined by the Buddha. With appropriate practice, knowledge, and meditation, enlightenment is attainable for all individuals (Agarwal, 2015). Buddhism is

a nontheistic religious movement that encompasses the philosophy of the proper way to live as established by the Buddha, who is regarded as enlightened. Buddhism emphasizes individual spiritual growth and the achievement of profound understanding regarding the fundamental nature of existence. Buddhists view him as an enlightened instructor who aimed to liberate other beings from suffering. His teachings address ignorance through the comprehension of the law of dependent origination, which is the fundamental cause of suffering (de Rooij & Koczan, 2015).

Buddhists visit four significant sites (Lumbini, Bodhgaya, Sarnath, and Kushinagar), along with other shrines, as part of a pilgrimage aimed at gaining religious merit and achieving a favorable rebirth, motivated by their devotion to the teachings of the Buddha. Tourists from diverse backgrounds are drawn to Buddhist heritages, as the teachings of the Buddha—emphasizing compassion, non-violence, peaceful coexistence, and fraternity—hold significant relevance in the contemporary chaotic world. Dignitaries such as former US Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, Bhutanese queen mother Ashi Wangchuk, and Nobel peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, among others, have expressed in the visitors' book of the Lumbini Development Trust, "The dream of my life has come true while being in Lumbini, the holy birthplace of Lord Buddha," during their visit to Lumbini. Millions of devotees are eager to fulfill their lifelong aspiration of visiting significant Buddhist pilgrimage sites mentioned by the Buddha.

The study of cultural tourism and economic development has received significant attention for examining the factors that affect the promotion and development of cultural heritage sites, such as Dunhuang. Significant research in this field has been carried out by Shen & Wang, (2024), Zhang (2023), Lin (2019), and Ruan, (2023). The systematic literature review (SLR) approach has seen limited adoption. This research aims to fill a methodological gap by thoroughly reviewing existing literature on the factors influencing the development of cultural tourism, with a specific

focus on tourism routes related to Buddhist culture. This review utilizes a clear and systematic SLR technique, adhering to the guidelines established by Denyer and Tranfield (2019).

## REVIEW METHODOLOGY

A comprehensive assessment was undertaken to examine the efficacy of tourism initiatives in promoting cultural heritage preservation and sustainable tourism development through Buddhist culture tourism routes, specifically in Dunhuang, between 2016 and 2023. Systematic reviews are essential in cultural policy discussions, enabling policymakers to thoroughly understand strategic approaches based on the most relevant and rigorous research. These reviews are a valuable foundation for shaping effective policy (Davis et al., 2014). Moreover, systematic reviews strengthen the credibility of evidence-based decision-making for policymakers (Dacombe, 2018). This study's systematic literature review (SLR) followed the phases outlined by Davis et al. (2014), which include formulating research questions, identifying study types, conducting a comprehensive search for relevant studies, evaluating studies based on specific criteria, analyzing and synthesizing the selected studies, and, ultimately, presenting findings that can guide policy and development strategies. The following phases are explained in detail:

### Stage 1: Research Questions

- i. What is the role of Buddhist cultural tourism routes in promoting the preservation and appreciation of Dunhuang's cultural heritage?
- ii. What are the key factors and best practices for successfully integrating Buddhist culture in tourism development to support cultural tourism in Dunhuang?

### Stage 2: Types of Studies

The inclusion criteria for this systematic literature review focused on selecting studies that specifically examine tourism initiatives, such as cultural heritage preservation, infrastructure investments, and community

engagement, that effectively promote sustainable tourism and cultural development through Buddhist culture tourism routes in Dunhuang. Only studies conducted within the context of Dunhuang or similar cultural heritage sites and published in peer-reviewed journals were considered to ensure relevance and academic rigor. To maintain consistency, only studies published in English were included. Additionally, the review was limited to studies published within the last 8 years (2016–2023) to capture the most recent research and trends in the field. The selected studies were critically evaluated based on their relevance to the research questions, methodological rigor, and the strength of their findings. Only studies that met all inclusion criteria and provided substantial insights into the effectiveness of tourism initiatives for sustainable cultural tourism in Dunhuang were included in the final analysis.

### **Stage 3: Extended Search**

A systematic methodology was employed to conduct a literature review on tourism initiatives effective in promoting cultural heritage preservation and sustainable tourism development through Buddhist culture tourism routes in Dunhuang from 2016 to 2023. Various academic databases, including Google Scholar, Science Direct, Taylor and Francis, Web of Science, Emerald, Sage Publications, JSTOR, Wiley Online Library, and Springer, were utilized to identify relevant articles. Boolean operators were used alongside the following search strings to retrieve pertinent literature:

- **Str1:** ("Buddhism tourism" OR "Cultural tourism routes") AND ("Policy measures" OR "Cultural heritage preservation" OR "Tourism initiatives") AND ("Sustainable tourism" OR "Tourism development") AND ("Dunhuang" OR "Buddhist sites")
- **Str2:** ("Buddhism tourism" OR "Cultural tourism routes") AND ("Infrastructure investments" OR "Community engagement" OR "Tourism strategies") AND ("Sustainable tourism" OR "Tourism development") AND ("Dunhuang" OR "Cultural heritage sites")

- **Str3:** ("Buddhism tourism" OR "Cultural tourism routes") AND ("Heritage conservation" OR "Cultural preservation" OR "Tourism policies") AND ("Sustainable tourism" OR "Tourism development") AND ("Dunhuang" OR "Cultural sites")

This approach enabled a comprehensive review of studies relevant to understanding the role of Buddhist culture tourism routes in fostering cultural development and sustainable tourism in Dunhuang.

#### **Stage 4: Screening**

Four hundred and fifty-eight articles were found matching the criteria. One hundred three duplicates were culled from those articles before reviewing 355 titles and abstracts, of which 345 were rejected. The studies were reviewed, and 10 were included in the review after the full texts were examined. The data in Table 1 were downloaded, and a comprehensive evaluation of the eligibility of the full text of the remaining records was carried out. Following the eligibility assessment, 10 results were obtained for the studies.

Articles identified through Google Scholar, the Science Direct, Taylor and Francis, Web of Science, Emerald, Sage Publications, JSTOR, Wiley Online Library and Springer (n=458)

Exclude 103 duplicates

355 articles were screened for eligibility

149 articles were excluded because they were not in the context of Buddhism, culture tourism, or tourism in Dunhuang, and the full text was not available.

196 articles were excluded because they were not within the years of interest and they were peer not reviewed.

10 articles qualified and were included in the analysis

Table 1: Papers in the review

Author	Title	Journal
Xu, L., Zhang, J., & Nie, Z. (2022)	Role of cultural tendency and involvement in heritage tourism experience: developing a cultural tourism tendency–involvement–experience (TIE) model.	Land
Srisuwan, N. (2016)	The potential of Theravada Buddhism to enhance cultural tourism in Pattaya, Thailand	
Rai, H. D. (2020).	Buddhism and tourism: A study of Lumbini, Nepal.	Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Education
Gilli, M., & Ferrari, S. (2017)	Marginal places and tourism: the role of Buddhist centers in Italy.	Journal of tourism and cultural change
Kalaya, P., Waiapha, Y., Chaoprayoon, P., & Suksumret, M. M. (2018)	A Community's Buddhist Arts Conservation-based Voluntourism Management: A New Innovation Arousing Community's Conservational Participation.	International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health

Xiaoping, Z. (2020)	On the origin and presentation of images of traveling Buddhist monks on pilgrimage for sutras with tame tigers in the Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes	Chinese Studies in History
Santa, E. D., & Tiatco, A. (2019)	Tourism, heritage and cultural performance: Developing a modality of heritage tourism.	Tourism Management Perspectives
Joo, D., Tasci, A. D., Woosnam, K. M., Maruyama, N. U., Hollas, C. R., & Aleshinloye, K. D. (2018)	Contact, emotional solidarity, and social distance explain residents' attitudes towards domestic tourists.	Tourism Management
Fan, D. X., Qiu, H., Jenkins, C. L., & Lau, C. (2023)	Towards a better tourist-host relationship: the role of social contact between tourists' perceived cultural distance and travel attitude.	Theoretical Advancement in Social Impacts Assessment of Tourism Research

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section will discuss the findings based on the research objectives.

### **Q1: What is the role of Buddhist cultural tourism routes in promoting the preservation and appreciation of Dunhuang's cultural heritage?**

Heritage tourism has gained popularity, as many tourists seek a significant connection with history (Xu et al., 2022). Heritage tourism fundamentally revolves around the perceptions that tourists hold regarding heritage sites.

Consequently, the concept of quality in heritage tourism is primarily examined through the lens of the tourists' experience (Xu et al., 2022). The behaviors and experiences of tourists can inform heritage conservation and development. Throughout the years, research on heritage tourism has yielded a variety of focused studies on various subjects, including heritage tourists, heritage experiences, and the stages of experience within heritage tourism. Recent studies have indicated that internal factors and the co-creation process among tourists significantly impact heritage experiences and protection. This validates the influence of tourist initiatives on the tourism experience and heritage management. Heritage encompasses a combination of meanings that reflect various cultural values (Light, 2017), and the inclination of tourists towards different cultures can influence the tourism experience. Nonetheless, research on the various cultural meanings of heritage as experienced by tourists is limited. Furthermore, the equilibrium between developing and preserving heritage remains an ongoing subject of discussion. Thus, recognizing tourists' preferences in heritage culture and implementing focused tourism development can harmonize heritage conservation with development efforts.

In cultural tourism research, cultural contact is frequently employed as a metric to assess tourists' inclination towards the culture of a specific destination (Fan et al., 2023). Cultural contact is a term utilized by archaeologists to describe the interactions between groups of people who engage with another culture over varying durations, including days, years, decades, centuries, or even millennia. Cultural contact refers to a prolonged, direct interaction between individuals from societies with distinct identities. In the tourism literature, cultural contact assesses the intent and extent of the experiences that tourists pursue when they travel to engage with a different culture (Sánchez-Sánchez et al., 2021). Furthermore, it encompasses the inclination of tourists to engage with foreign cultures and the aspiration to regulate that engagement. Previous

research on cultural tourism indicates that cultural tendencies influence the specific behaviours of tourists at cultural tourism sites. For instance, it affects the desire for authentic experiences and the extent of tourists' engagement in tourism (Joo et al., 2018). It influences the tourism experience, assists tourists in creating cultural memories of the destination, and fosters place attachments. Furthermore, a comprehensive understanding of the destination's culture and active engagement in the lives of residents can enhance the authenticity and memorability of the experience for tourists. The historical culture accessible and created in heritage tourism destinations is a significant cultural form that tourists encounter.

Srisuwan (2016) conducted a study to examine the potential for developing tourism centered on the cultural heritage of Theravada Buddhism in Pattaya, a city located in Eastern Thailand, to complement the existing tourism industry in the area. The study seeks to create a strategy for implementing Theravada Buddhism cultural tourism that can be integrated into the Pattaya tourism plan, which currently does not focus on promoting cultural or religious tourism. Prior studies indicate that cultural tourism related to Theravada Buddhism may be able to draw international visitors and stimulate economic development. Religious tourism represents a sustainable and non-commercial approach to tourism development that can potentially preserve local identity. Theravada Buddhism represents a form of cultural capital that can enhance the value of various tourism destinations in Thailand, such as Pattaya. The findings indicate that the advancement of Theravada Buddhism cultural tourism could yield beneficial social and economic impacts on Pattaya. This development would provide an additional source of income for Pattaya's tourism industry; however, the income is expected to be modest compared to existing forms of tourism, such as entertainment, due to the incompatibility of Buddhism with excessively commercial development.

## **Q2: What are the key factors for successfully integrating Buddhist culture into tourism development to support cultural tourism in Dunhuang?**

Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Dunhuang has been recognized as a traditional agricultural county. Subsequently, Dunhuang was identified as one of the initial cities to open to global tourism (Kalaya et al., 2018) through the state. In the early 1900s, the discovery of the Library Cave of Mogao Grottoes had a significant global impact. Subsequently, numerous cultural relics were dispersed to various Western countries, including Dunhuang Manuscripts and Documents from Mogao Grottoes. This led to an increased interest in Dunhuang, driven by the significance of the Mogao Grottoes.

Consequently, before the global opening of Dunhuang tourism, the Mogao Grottoes and the field of Dunhuangology had significantly broadened their reach beyond national boundaries. Since the entry of inbound tourists to Dunhuang in 1979, the region has experienced a significant influx of international visitors interested in its unique Buddhist art treasures, with a notable number of arrivals from Japan (Liu et al., 2022). A scholar from the Dunhuang Academy stated: “The primary attraction for the increase in inbound tourists is the Mogao Grottoes, which boasts a unique and remarkable historical continuity spanning over 1600 years. The significance of this cultural heritage is unparalleled globally.” Japanese individuals exhibit a notable affection and attachment to the Mogao Grottoes. Dunhuang is regarded as a cultural homeland, and visiting Dunhuang is vital for root-seeking tourism. Tourists remark that the grand statues, elegant apsaras, remarkable murals, and exquisitely arranged caisson ceilings of the Mogao Grottoes, along with the sacred aspects of Buddhism, the secular life, the challenges faced by ancient silk traders, and the opulence of the Western Regions' palaces from a thousand years ago were all vividly evident in the Mogao Grottoes. The BBC of the UK, NHK TV of Japan, and CCTV of China collaborated to produce the documentary "Silk

Road," highlighting Dunhuang as a significant node, which in turn generated considerable global interest (Chen & Wang, 2020). The Mogao Grottoes were inscribed on the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage List 1987. The film "Dunhuang," a co-production between China and Japan, premiered in 1988. The international events have significantly established and enhanced the global presence of Dunhuang.

Localized reforms of institutions, industries, and related services are implemented through urban globalization. In 1979, the city government established the Foreign Affairs Office to serve foreign guests effectively. This office, along with its branch, the China International Travel Agency, and the Dunhuang Hotel, is responsible for the reception and hospitality of foreign visitors. An office director of the Dunhuang Tourism Board (0928B2) stated: "At that time, the tourism industry in Dunhuang was primarily viewed as a diplomatic matter, with foreign tourists comprising the majority of visitors. Consequently, the Dunhuang Tourism Board evolved from the former Foreign Affairs Office." A resident (1005A2) stated, "Since the opening of Dunhuang's tourism to the world in the 1980s, an increasing number of foreigners have visited due to the Mogao Grottoes and its Library Cave." We were interested in learning more about foreigners. It was not until the mid-1980s that encounters with foreigners became common, and they gradually adapted to their presence.

A study by Xiaoping (2020) indicates that the depiction of "traveling Buddhist monks on pilgrimage for sutras with tame tigers" found in the Mogao Grottoes emerged from a blend of cultural and religious influences during the Tang and Song dynasties. It was not based on the events of the pilgrimage of Xuanzang, as is commonly assumed in scholarly discussions. The fundamental principles present in the images go beyond their outward characteristics. The evolution of Esoteric Buddhism and the occurrence of traveling monks during various periods, along with their integration into Central Plains folk culture, infused the images with influences from both exoteric and esoteric Buddhist traditions and local

beliefs. Additionally, the depiction of "traveling Buddhist monks on pilgrimage for sutras accompanied by tame tigers" illustrated the beliefs associated with Ratnasambhava tathāgata, which were widespread in the Dunhuang region during the Tang and Song dynasties. The metaphorical representations of iconic monks in these images convey a variety of religious beliefs.

## CONCLUSION

The role of Buddhist cultural tourism routes in promoting the preservation and appreciation of Dunhuang's cultural heritage is multi-faceted. Buddhist cultural tourism not only attracts visitors to heritage sites but also enhances the significance of these sites through a deeper cultural and historical connection. As more tourists seek meaningful experiences linked to heritage, the quality of their engagement becomes central to the preservation efforts. Research suggests that tourists' behavior, perceptions, and interactions with heritage sites contribute to heritage conservation by fostering a sense of respect and attachment to cultural values, thus supporting sustainable tourism initiatives. The desire for authentic experiences, informed by tourists' cultural tendencies and engagement with local customs, drives them to appreciate the nuanced history and meaning embedded in heritage sites. This approach creates a balanced environment where cultural preservation and tourism development coexist, fostering a respectful relationship between tourists and local culture.

Additionally, developing Buddhist cultural tourism routes, as seen in examples like Pattaya's Theravada Buddhism tourism, can bolster local economies and contribute to sustainable development by focusing on cultural values rather than commercial interests. By engaging tourists with authentic religious and cultural elements, destinations like Dunhuang can offer unique and enriching experiences that strengthen cultural heritage. Furthermore, the approach aids in preserving local identities, as religious

and cultural tourism aligns more closely with conservation goals than conventional tourism forms. Consequently, Buddhist cultural tourism routes enhance heritage sites' economic potential and provide visitors with meaningful cultural insights, reinforcing the intrinsic value of preserving and appreciating Dunhuang's heritage.

The successful integration of Buddhist culture in tourism development to support cultural tourism in Dunhuang hinges on various factors, including preserving unique Buddhist heritage, strategic globalization efforts, and collaboration with international stakeholders. The rich history of the Mogao Grottoes, from the discovery of the Library Cave to its designation as a UNESCO World Heritage site, has attracted global attention and underscored Dunhuang's cultural significance. The Mogao Grottoes' portrayal in documentaries, co-produced films, and international tourism events has solidified Dunhuang's global cultural identity. Further, the government's establishment of local infrastructure and services specifically geared toward international visitors has enhanced the accessibility and appeal of Dunhuang as a destination. Additionally, the portrayal of Buddhist cultural symbols, such as the depictions of traveling Buddhist monks on pilgrimage, showcases Dunhuang's unique fusion of religious and cultural beliefs. Integrating local and Buddhist traditions in these artworks appeals to culturally curious tourists, encouraging engagement with Dunhuang's heritage. Overall, this multi-faceted approach, combining preservation with international outreach and cultural interpretation, has been key to fostering a sustainable model of Buddhist cultural tourism in Dunhuang.

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