

then it is impossible to determine whether it was always contemporary with the original construction. The prevalence in the porches of many old shrines of a style of fresco decoration different from the manifestly older compositions in the cellas, but closely resembling that of the procession of large Bodhisattvas painted over the wall which hid the entrance to the Tao-shih's chapel (see Fig. 188), led me to conclude that at some period after the tenth century Ch'ien-fo-tung had seen another protracted spell of prosperity. Perhaps it coincided with the reign of the great Mongol dynasty which for a century assured peace and flourishing trade through vast areas of Central and Eastern Asia. But restorations must have been frequent also at certain other periods, as suggested by the marked variations in the character of the fresco work met with in the antechapels and porches where the plastered surface of the cave walls was most liable to suffer damage.

Photographs and exact ground-plans were the only available means for keeping some record of these remarkable shrines, and they, too, could be prepared only for a select series among those hundreds and hundreds of caves. Fortunately the task of selection was lightened by the general uniformity in their architectural arrangement. I have already described how the temple cella was in each case approached by a broad porch or passage which alone admitted light and air to the interior excavation. The openings of these porches are clearly seen in Figs. 159, 199. Outside them the larger shrines have ordinarily antechapels, of the same width as the cellas but much narrower and often verandah-like, closed by wooden construction in front. In the upper stories communication between the adjoining shrines was once maintained chiefly by passages opening from one antechapel into the other.

Within the cella, which usually is a little deeper than wide—*e.g.* that of Wang Tao-shih's temple measures fifty-four by forty-six feet—the larger shrines have generally a horseshoe-shaped platform facing the porch and elaborately decorated. Its centre is occupied by a colossal stucco image of Buddha, at the back of which a kind of screen and canopy combined has been spared from the rock and