

make up seven cart-loads, and, evidently grudging the cost of transport or the trouble of close examination, had left the whole undisturbed in charge of the Tao-shih, as self-constituted guardian of the temple.

First visit to  
Wang Tao-  
shih.

Chiang's report, nevertheless, gave reason to fear that the priest's peculiar disposition would prove a serious obstacle to the realization of my hopes. The temptation of money would manifestly not offer an adequate means for overcoming his scruples, whether prompted by religious feeling or fear of popular resentment—or, as seemed likely, by both. It seemed best for me to study his case in person. So, accompanied by the Ssü-yeh, I proceeded to pay my formal visit to the Tao-shih and asked to be shown over his restored cave-temple. Ever since he had first come to the sacred site, some eight years earlier, it had been the chief care as well as the mainstay of his Tun-huang existence. Hence my request was met with alacrity.

Wang Tao-  
shih's  
labours of  
restoration.

As he took me through the airy front loggia of the shrine and the lofty antechapel, substantially built of timber and brickwork, I expressed due admiration for the lavish gilding and painting. As we proceeded through the high passage or porch giving access and light to the cella, it seemed difficult not to fix my attention on the spot where, close to the outer end on the right, an ugly patch of brickwork then still masked the door of the hidden chapel (Fig. 200; Plate 43). But instead of asking questions of my pious guide as to its contents, I thought it more useful to display my interest in what his zeal had accomplished in the clearing of the cella and in its sacred adornment. How thorough the restoration had been as regards the sculptures is shown by the photograph in Fig. 200. Within the cella, measuring about 56 by 46 feet, a horseshoe-shaped dais, old but replastered, displayed a collection of new clay images, all over life-size and more ungainly than any, I thought, to be seen in these caves.

The fresco decoration of the cella, consisting chiefly of large diapers of seated Buddhas on the walls and of floral patterns on the ceiling, had fared better and remained well preserved for the most part. Though obviously not as old and artistic as in some of the other large temples, this pictorial work of the cella caused the gaudy coarseness of the statuary and the other modern additions to stand out in painful contrast. But this could not prevent me from being impressed with all that the humble monk's zeal had accomplished. His devotion to this shrine and to the task of religious merit which he had set himself in restoring it was unmistakably genuine.

Wang Tao-  
shih's pious  
efforts.

Having come to the sacred site as a poor friendless mendicant from Shan-hsi, some eight years before my visit, he had devoted himself to restoring this great and badly decayed temple to what he conceived to have been its original glory. Masses of fallen conglomerate then covered the floor of the antechapel and almost completely blocked the mouth of the passage. Heavy drift-sand filled the rest and a considerable portion of the cella. I could not help being touched by the thought of the enthusiasm, perseverance, and efforts which it must have cost the quaint, frail-looking priest by my side to beg all the money needed for the labour of clearing out the sand from the temple and for the substantial reconstructions, as besides the antechapel there were several stories of temple halls solidly built above of hard brick and timber, right to the top of the cliff. His list of charitable subscriptions and his accounts, proudly produced later on to Chiang Ssü-yeh, showed in fact quite a respectable total, laboriously collected during years and all spent upon these labours of piety. That he spent next to nothing on his person or private concerns was clear from the way in which he lived with his two devoted acolytes and from all that Chiang heard about him at Tun-huang.

Wang Tao-  
shih's  
character.

Wang Tao-shih's ignorance of all that constitutes traditional Chinese scholarship had soon been correctly diagnosed by Chiang Ssü-yeh. So I knew that no useful purpose could be served by talking to him about my archaeological interests, about the value of first-hand materials for historical