

Zhang Yichao's Procession from the Perspective of International Communication: A Dual Perspective of Historical Evidence and Heroic Narrative

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Abstract: As a representative work of Dunhuang frescoes in the late Tang Dynasty, the “Zhang Yichao’s Procession” in Cave 156 of Mogao Grottoes reproduces the grandeur of Zhang Yichao’s military travel in the Hexi Festival of the Tang Dynasty with a grand narrative scene. This paper tries to focus on the sacred heroic narrative place of Cave 156 of Mogao Grottoes. Through the mutual evidence of historical books, inscriptions and images about Zhang Yichao’s deeds, this paper reveals the heroic narrative essence of Zhang Yichao, expounds the collective memory of political intention expression, emotional identity communication and national cultural rejuvenation, and excavates the unique value of the image in the international communication of Dunhuang culture by virtue of the cross-cultural advantages of heroic narrative, the cross-cultural support of historical mutual evidence and the cross-cultural translation of visual symbols.

Keywords: Zhang Yichao’s Procession; Heroic Narrative; Historical Evidence; Collective Memory of the International Spread of Dunhuang Culture

Published: Oct 29, 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.62177/chst.v3i4.1783>

1. Introduction

Many scholars have dealt with the history of cave construction in Cave 156 of Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes, the relationship between the political implication and the image of the hero, the identity of the image of the donor, the reason and significance of the appearance of “Mogao Grottoes”, and the Tibetan factors in the cave murals. There have been many research results on the analysis of the content and form structure of the image of “Zhang Yichao’s Procession”. In order to avoid repeated research, this paper intends to take “Zhang Yichao’s Procession” as the core carrier on the basis of previous studies. From the perspective of the close relationship between the rituality of the place, the intertextuality of evidence and the inheritance of memory, combined with three kinds of historical evidence of historical books, inscriptions and images, this paper deeply explores the essence of Zhang Yichao’s hero narrative and interprets the collective memory behind it. At the same time, from the perspective of the international communication of Dunhuang culture, this study further examines the image’s cross-cultural communicative value through heroic narrative, the mutual corroboration of historical evidence, and the translation of visual symbols, thereby offering new research perspectives and approaches for the global dissemination of Dunhuang culture.

2. The Historical Locus of Heroic Narrative

As a special phenomenon existing in specific time and space, narrative involves the organization, presentation, and transmission of events. As the specific product and carrier of narration, narrative works inevitably involve a specific period of time and a specific space. As Long Diyong has observed, “The narrative phenomenon and narrative works beyond time and space are impossible to exist.”^[1] As a fundamental driving force of human cultural creation, narrative assumes diverse forms depending on the criteria by which it is classified. As a distinctive form of narrative, heroic narrative constructs a unique artistic tension through its pronounced sublimity and tragedy. On the one hand, the hero’s sublimity is often manifested through tragic conflict; on the other hand, it implies the tragedy of suffering and sacrifice, which not only evokes a profound spiritual shock but also elicits a deeper sense of the sublime. It is this combination that lends heroic narrative works their tragic style.

The heroic narrative in ancient Chinese art does not exist in a single form, but is intertwined with political ethics, philosophical thought and religious concept in the continuous digestion and reconstruction, forming a unique visual expression system. On the one hand, it shows the background of rights in the game with history, giving it direction and significance. Han Xizai, the tragic hero in Gu Hongzhong’s works, indulges in eroticism and indulges in pleasure, but what is hidden under the gorgeous appearance is the survival fable of Mingzhe self-preservation. The hermit heroes Bo Yi and Shu Qi in Li Tang’s *Cai Wei Tu* (Gathering Vetch) have gaunt faces and resolute expressions; the rocks and stones echo the history of their unyielding solitude and tenacity. On the other hand, it shapes the spiritual world through its entanglement with religion, carrying its teachings and beliefs. In the Dunhuang fresco “Sacrificing Himself to Feed the Tiger,” the Sattva resolutely leapt off the cliff and lay before the tiger. The opportunity to attain Buddhahood implied self-sacrifice without the sword and power, undoubtedly a symbol of the “sacred hero” with great appeal in Buddhist art. At the same time, it shapes collective memory and consolidates its rule and status in competition with politics. The thirteen emperors in *Emperors of Past Dynasties* are depicted with dignified bearing and delicate features; the political ideal of governance by a wise monarch is implied in the dynastic destiny. It is not difficult to see that, in the course of historical evolution, heroic narrative has shaped heroic paradigms of different identities. It maintains its boundaries amid change and reveals to the world the indomitable Chinese spirit.

As a frontier hero of China’s late Tang dynasty, Zhang Yichao was born in Shazhou. He witnessed tyranny, expelled the Tubo, and recovered Hexi. Amid the fragmentation of regional military commands, he remained loyal to the Tang court and stood alone amid peril. When, in his later years, he was viewed with suspicion and went to Chang’an, effectively as a hostage, it is evident that his “return to righteousness” was not merely political loyalty but also a model of the patriotic sentiments embedded in the spirit of the Chinese nation. As a monumental mural in Cave 156 of the Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang, “Zhang Yichao’s Procession” integrates his achievements in recovering Hexi, the political order of the late Tang frontier, and the ideal of national restoration into a visual epic, enabling viewers to transcend time and space and behold the epitome of progress in this desperate situation alongside soldiers of the Guiyi Army, Tang dynasty painters, and Silk Road merchants. In a word, this vivid historical space not only carries the true meaning of heroic narrative, conveys a strong national identity, but also becomes a source of strength that can be lost in the flesh and the city is easy but civilized.

3. Historical Evidence for Heroic Narrative: Mutual Corroboration of Text and Image

3.1 Historical Records and Texts

The historical evidence for heroic narrative generally comprises multiple types of historical materials, including both explicit written records and implicit evidence such as images and objects. This also applies to Zhang Yichao’s Procession as a historical image. The core content related to the construction of the heroic narrative first appears in certain classical works, such as Tang Huiyao, Song History, and Tongdian, as well as the two Tang histories. Key events concerning Zhang Yichao’s armed uprising in Dunhuang are also recorded in the Old Tang Book, New Tang Book, and Zizhi Tongjian; however, the most detailed account appears in “Tubo, Part II” (Tubo Chuanxia) in Volume 216 of the New Tang Book:

The following year, Zhang Yichao, leader of Shazhou, presented maps of eleven prefectures—including Gua, Sha, Yi, Su, and Gan—to the Tang court. Initially, Zhang Yichao had secretly allied with local elites to return to the Tang. One day, a multitude donned armor and raised a clamor at the prefectural gate; the Han populace all assisted them, and the Tubo garrison

fled in alarm, whereupon he assumed control of prefectural affairs. He repaired armor and weapons, engaged in farming while waging war, and recovered all the remaining prefectures. He dispatched ten groups of subordinate officers, each carrying a staff with a memorial concealed inside, northeast to Tiande City. Defense Commissioner Li Pi reported the matter to the throne. The emperor commended his loyalty, ordered envoys to deliver an imperial edict of comfort, and promoted Zhang Yichao to Defense Commissioner of Shazhou.^[2]

These historical records not only reveal the heroic deeds performed amid the beacon fires of Shazhou but also provide scholars with valuable interpretive insights for studying the mural in Cave 156 of the Mogao Grottoes. For instance, Ji Yuanzhi conducted a textual study of the relationship between the figures depicted in Zhang Yichao's Procession and the associated ceremonies, guards, and festivals of the Tang dynasty. Chen Ming examined the basic compositional structure of the procession and the details of the ritual and musical system reflected therein, while Peng Song assessed the style of music and dance performed at the front of the procession depicted in the mural. Collectively, these studies indicate that the mural serves not only as a visual record of a historical event but also as a significant testament to Tang ceremonial and musical institutions.^[3]

3.2 Bianwen and Inscriptions

Historical records document Zhang Yichao's heroic achievements and present a multifaceted heroic legend to the world from a unique perspective. However, the history of the Guiyi Army, which is relatively sparsely documented in historical records, has been gradually unveiled; this development is inseparable from the excavation of Dunhuang documents. As Fujiki observed, "The history of the Guiyijun military governors has attracted scholarly attention only after the discovery of the Dunhuang cave manuscripts."^[4] Among the numerous documents unearthed from the Dunhuang Sutra Cave, there is no shortage of records concerning Zhang Yichao and his Guiyi Army's historical feat of recovering Hexi, expelling the Tubo, and returning to the Tang dynasty. Among these, the most central are the Bianwen and inscriptions concerning Zhang Yichao's deeds.

Scholarly opinion on bianwen remains divided. The theory of stylistic transformation, represented by Zheng Zhenduo, holds that bianwen arose from changes in scriptural style necessitated by the popularization of Buddhist teaching. The theory of divine transformation and variation, represented by Sun Kaidi, maintains that bianwen derives its name from the distinctive nature of its content. The illustrated-exposition theory, represented by the Japanese scholar Nagasawa Kikuya, argues that bianwen is a text form with strong narrativity that combines illustration and explanation.^[5] On the basis of the above definitions of Dunhuang bianwen proposed by these scholars, and drawing on a substantial body of historical documents, it is evident that bianwen exhibits two stylistic features: a combination of verse and prose, and the use of pictorial cues.^[6] These features enable bianwen to transcend, to a certain extent, the limitations of historical and classical texts. In complementarity with official narratives, bianwen continually expands the audience and influence of heroic narrative. In the Dunhuang bianwen manuscripts P.2962 Zhang Yichao Bianwen and P.3451 Zhang Huaishen Bianwen, one can readily perceive the great prestige that Zhang Yichao and his Guiyijun regime enjoyed among the people of Shazhou. The bianwen recounts that Zhang Yichao deployed troops against the Tuyuhun, Tubo, and Uighur forces with godlike efficacy, and writes as follows:

Suddenly they heard that the Quanrong had stirred up a wolfish heart, rebelling and seizing the perilous forest in the western region. Marching troops under the starry night, they rushed along the swift road; at this moment, with all their might, they must capture the foe. The mighty general's stratagems are like rain; how deep can the foolish Tibetan schemes be? For ten years he bore arms to drive out the vile captives, and the fierce barbarians on the three frontiers could not invade. Who would have expected that this year they would stir up harm, and again harbor treacherous intentions as before? Today we must surely strike the bandits' heads; in a moment, the fog gathers, already dark and heavy. The general commanded his men, saying: "Be diligent and do not shirk a hundred years of battle toil. A true man seeks fame and office at the spear's tip; when facing the enemy, why avoid the precious blade!" The Han house wields blades like frost and snow; the enemy cavalry, though the sky is wide, have nowhere to flee. Heads struck by the spear's edge accompany the ridge's soil; blood splashes on barbarian corpses, soaking through battle coats. In one battle, the Tuyuhun are nearly all defeated; the general's might descends, his killing aura high.^[7]

As a form of narrative media, inscriptions also play an important role in the construction of heroic narrative. They define a field of legitimacy in which a "history of consensus" is constructed and presented to the public.^[8] Inscriptions are not only

a primary source for current research on historical processes but also important evidence for reconstructing obscure events of the past. Many of Zhang Yichao's heroic deeds have likewise been attested in the inscription of Zhang Huaishen, son of Zhang Yitan—namely, the “Zhang Huaishen Monument.” Regarding Zhang Yichao's unwavering determination and his reason for raising an army in Hexi, the inscription records: “Gou's confusion and decline, knowing the fate of Tubo.” As for Zhang Yichao, he led his troops eastward, drove the Tibetan garrison to the eastern part of the Hexi Corridor, and finally cowed them into a corner of Liangzhou. The inscription records: “Led the crowd of Pixiu and recruited teachers who dared to die.” Concerning the hardships of the Guiyi Army's combat, the inscription reads: “Captured hundreds alive and made them beg for their lives in front of Go; beheaded the rest, corpses staining Zhenmang,” so that “west of Yiwu and east of Lingwu, over four thousand li, with a million registered households,” and ultimately recovering Hehuang, making “the mountains and rivers of the six counties as they were of old.” Such a hero could not but make Long Yan sigh: “That generals emerge from Guanxi is not an empty saying!” In a word, the Dunhuang documents unearthed from the Dunhuang Sutra Cave are not only primary sources for studying the “Zhang Yichao's Procession” in Cave 156 of the Mogao Grottoes but also uniquely valuable historical evidence for the heroic narrative of this historical event.

3.3 Image: Zhang Yichao's Procession

In the course of historical evolution, images, as media for expressing emotions and disseminating information, have also served as tools and means for the heroic narration of Zhang Yichao's achievements. Unlike textual narration, however, visual narration tends to be more generalized and more complex. On the one hand, image narrative often uses metaphors, symbols and other techniques to elaborate the details of the events depicted and express the theme. On the other hand, it can transform the abstract meaning of visual elements such as symbols, shapes, and colors, and use the association and integrity of visual narrative to play a hidden educational role for the viewer.

Zhang Yichao's Procession is located on the south wall of Cave 156 of Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang. The image is 8.57 meters long and 1.07 meters wide. It is a narrative image depicting the majestic momentum of the hero's return. The travel map can be roughly divided into three parts. The first half is the horizontal blow and the honor guard column. The middle part mainly depicts Zhang Yichao, and the second half is the shooting and hunting team. As the main body of the narrative, Zhang Yichao, riding a white horse, wearing a red robe, wearing a leather belt, holding a short whip, is located in the central position of the whole grand narrative picture space. Its significantly enlarged form makes it visually superior to other members of the queue and becomes the core symbol of the image power space. This grand processional scene accurately depicts the hierarchical order and regulations observed by military commissioners in the middle and late Tang dynasty. In essence, through the organization of visual space, an abstract power structure is expressed in concrete spatial terms. The creation of Zhang Yichao's Procession is not only a visual presentation of the historical event of Zhang Yichao's procession but also a pictorial rendering of historical documents such as Tang Huiyao and Song History, as well as textual narratives such as the inscriptions concerning Zhang Yichao's deeds.

4. Historical Memory of Heroic Narrative

4.1 The Expression of Political Intention

According to the Dunhuang manuscript P.3773, the Fan Jieshi Xinshi Jingjie Ritual, and related records, together with the image inscription “Hexi Jieshi Procurator Zhang Yichao's army □ out of Tibet to recover a shape map of Hexi,” Zhang Yichao's Procession is considered to have been painted to celebrate the complete return of Hexi to the Tang dynasty following the conquest of Liangzhou in the second year of the Xiantong reign (861)^[9]. The mutual corroboration of textual, historical, and visual evidence in this regard not only strengthens the historical credibility of the mural's dating and subject matter but also provides a robust foundation for interpreting the political function of Zhang Yichao's Procession.

As a heroic frontier leader who reconquered the Hexi Corridor in the late Tang Dynasty, Zhang Yichao established the political authority and ruling legitimacy of the Guiyi regime through the visual narrative of the Zhang Yichao's Procession Mural in Mogao Grottoes Cave 156. Through the grand scene of ceremonies, he systematically constructed the authority and legitimacy of his political rule. The first is the return of the authority of the Tang court. Whether it is Jingjie, banners, drums or guards, the murals strictly follow the travel regulations of the Tang Dynasty's military governors. Zhang Yichao

was shaped as an orthodox image of the Tang courtiers. At the same time, the “Double Jing and Double Festival” granted by the central government was placed at the core of the honor guard, as if to declare that the power of Hexi was authorized by the emperor. Secondly, the creation of frescoes during the period of Zhang Yichao’s restoration of Liangzhou, the eastward expansion of the Guiyi Army, and the arrogation of Zhang Yichao’s self-declared Hexi Jiedushi, the contradiction between the central government of the Tang Dynasty and the Guiyi Army is increasing day by day. After Zhang Yichao entered Beijing and Zhang Huaishen repeatedly asked for Jingjie and did not get it, which is also the embodiment of this contradiction. This fragile and ambivalent bilateral relationship endows the mural with subtle political implications, conveying Zhang Yichao’s implicit remonstrance toward the Tang court. Ultimately, the Zhang Yichao’s Procession functions as a visual political manifesto. As a monumental visual epic, it celebrates the dynastic reintegration of the Hexi frontier and shapes a heroic narrative of frontier loyalty to the Chang’an-centered imperial order. Simultaneously, the mural subtly legitimizes the de facto regional autonomy exercised by the Guiyi regime in Hexi.

4.2 The Spread of Emotional Identity

History carries the story of heroes and reproduces vivid memories. It is documented through literature and supported by physical evidence. It consists of. The construction of past materials is triggered by past things. It narrates in a specific sacred space and solidifies and preserves this time. As a historical product of great significance, Buddhist grottoes are such a sacred space for believers to express their personal and group beliefs in a specific period.^[10]

Such a functional space with specific realistic etiquette significance generated under the norms of the merit-based Buddhist belief and secular political thought, among which the “Zhang Yichao Procession” is bound to constitute an important clue for us to understand the history of Dunhuang area in the Zhang Yichao era today. This grand historical scene of long-volume travel is not only an image reproduction of important figures and events in Dunhuang history, but also carries the complex and hot collective memory of the people in Dunhuang and Hexi Corridor in the late Tang Dynasty. It is a symphony of victory and return, loyalty and order, identity and respect. Through the visual epic scene, Zhang Yichao’s travel map has become the core carrier of people’s emotional communication around the profound heroic narrative. First of all, it is the praise of the hero’s merit and the worship of his achievements. The grand honour guard shows the heroic posture of Zhang Yichao’s triumph, and spreads the worship and pride of his worldly achievements of expelling Tubo and recovering the lost land. Here, Zhang Yichao is portrayed as a heroic idol to save his homeland. Secondly, as a symbol of loyalty and orthodox identity, the travel map strictly follows the Tang system, and highlights the visual symbols such as the festival, indicating the Guiyijun regime’s unswerving loyalty to the Tang Dynasty and its legitimacy as a representative of the Chinese orthodox frontier. Finally, the oath of power and the expression of peace belief, the majestic military capacity, the strict queue, and the strong visual impact spread the powerful strength and firm determination of the Guiyi Army as the defender of the national peace order, and aroused and consolidated the people’s cherishment of the hard-won stable life. It not only carries the support of Dunhuang people to Zhang’s regime, but also has the function of ‘collective memory’ and identity. It is a visual monument of hero worship and identity in Dunhuang style in the late Tang Dynasty.

4.3 The Revival of Regional Han Culture

As documented in *The New Book of Tang*, Tibetan domination over the Hexi region triggered severe cultural and social dislocation. During this period, local social disciplines collapsed, traditional rituals and music were abandoned, and the orthodox Han cultural system suffered unprecedented damage. To secure political recognition from the Tang central court and gain popular support from Han residents in Hexi, Zhang Yichao’s allegiance to the Tang Dynasty was inherently underpinned by the advocacy and revival of orthodox Han culture. A core political and cultural mission of Zhang Yichao’s regime was to expel Tibetan forces and restore indigenous Han traditions, which was primarily manifested in the vigorous revival and reconstruction of Confucian culture centered on the ethical values of loyalty and filial piety. The Dunhuang manuscript P.3770v *Record of Imperial Envoys to Hexi* records that in the early Dazhong reign, local envoys traveled to the Tang capital to serve the imperial court, fully reflecting the Dunhuang people’s intense aspiration for the region’s reintegration into the Tang empire. Furthermore, the establishment of Chixin Township symbolized the frontier community’s unwavering loyalty and sincere allegiance to the central dynasty. The ethical ethos of loyalty and filial piety is widely embodied in inscriptions

and textual relics dating to the early Guiyi regime. The Dunhuang manuscript P.4640 Inscription of the Legal Debate Grotto at Shamen Suo of Shazhou records the loyal conduct of Suo Qingning's descendants, who upheld national righteousness and achieved remarkable regional feats. This inscription endorses the traditional Confucian tenet that "filial piety at home extends to loyalty to the state". Zhang Yichao's systematic revival of loyalty-and-filial-piety-oriented Confucian culture garnered widespread recognition not only among Han communities but also among ethnic minorities including the Sogdians. This has also become a distinct symbol of political culture and education in the early days of the Guiyi Army, which is conducive to the construction of a moral order with the concept of loyalty as the core.

Secondly, because the knowledge education in the Tubo period was monopolized by Buddhist temples, and it was urgent to cultivate cultural talents in the early days of the Guiyi Army, Zhang Yichao began to quickly restore the official school system of the Tang Dynasty, and the 'Analects' became the official textbook of official education at that time. At the same time, the restoration of state schools, county schools, the establishment of temples, and even the emergence of private schools in villages, houses, lanes, and social schools, all of which play a vital role in Dunhuang local education. Finally, in order to stabilize the social order, Zhang Yichao actively restored the customs and etiquette of the Tang Dynasty. During the Dazhong period of the early Guiyijun period, Zhang Ao, the secretary of the jieduzhang, made a brief compilation of the literature of calligraphy according to the model of calligraphy in the central plains of the Tang Dynasty, according to the local characteristics and actual needs of Dunhuang, so as to be practical. For example, P.3502 v 'The first volume of the nine noble and humble calligraphies of the nine families in the new collection' was written by Zhang Ao, the secretary of Hexi Jieguang (Dudu) and the assistant lawyer of the Taichang Temple. 'There are many pieces of Dunhuang literature' The two volumes of the new collection of auspicious and evil calligraphies are in order, all of which are written by Zhang Ao. During the Yuanhe period of Emperor Xianzong of the Tang Dynasty, Zheng Yuqing's "One and Preface of the New Book of the Tang Dynasty" was also deleted as a simplified version. It shows the practical purpose and strong local color of its book writing instrument. And according to the records of P.3451 'Zhang Huai Shen Bian Wen': 'unique Shazhou County, character Fenghua, together with the mainland. Shazhou can preserve the cultural features of the mainland, and it is also a true portrayal of Zhang Yichao after the reconstruction of Han culture in Dunhuang.

5. The Unique Value of Zhang Yichao's Procession in the International Communication of Dunhuang Culture

5.1 The Cross-Cultural Advantages of Heroic Narrative

As a visual carrier of the heroic narrative of the historical figure Zhang Yichao, Zhang Yichao's Procession aligns with the general understanding of "heroic spirit" among most international audiences and thus possesses a natural advantage in cross-cultural communication. This mode of heroic narrative holds strong appeal in the global cultural context, enabling it to transcend regional and cultural boundaries and to evoke emotional resonance among diverse audiences from different cultural backgrounds. This is mainly reflected in the following two aspects. On the one hand, heroic narrative features a relatively universal story structure and emotional appeal. As a visual narrative in the international communication of Dunhuang culture, Zhang Yichao's Procession constructs a heroic image of one who endures hardships and saves his homeland. Consequently, even if viewers standing before the mural do not understand the specific historical details, they can intuitively sense the joy of victory, the majesty of power, and the charisma of the hero from the momentum of the composition, the demeanor of the figures, and the order of the procession. These narrative elements, comprehensible and inspiring to global audiences, bypass rational didacticism and directly touch the most primal and universal human emotions through the interplay of multiple spatiotemporal contexts. While telling the Chinese story to the world, the mural also enables international audiences to approach Dunhuang and understand the glorious history of Chinese civilization, which is inclusive and indomitable.

On the other hand, heroic narrative possesses strong cultural symbolic significance. As a carrier of heroic narrative embodying profound cultural codes, Zhang Yichao's Procession is not merely a direct tribute to the personal achievements of the historical figure Zhang Yichao but also a symbol of deeper and grander cultural values. Zhang Yichao rose in rebellion while isolated beyond the frontier. Immediately after his success, he sent envoys to the Tang court, symbolizing the political ethics of restoring order and unifying loyalty and righteousness. The Guiyi Army formed under his leadership comprised Han,

Tubo, Uighur, and other ethnic groups, who fought together to restore peace and order, symbolizing an open spirit of cultural blending and harmony between China and foreign lands. As a unique and magnificent space within the sacred religious space, Zhang Yichao's Procession is painted in Buddhist grottoes, coexisting with Buddhist images and sutra illustrations, symbolizing the cultural confidence of local strength and regional awakening. The cultural symbolic significance of Zhang Yichao's Procession gives it a unique value in the international communication of Dunhuang culture. It provides a core narrative that can be widely understood, establishes emotional connections that can resonate, presents an image of China open to dialogue, and assumes the role of a "cultural messenger" in the new era to the world. It actively tells a Chinese story of loyalty and courage, tolerance and civilization, helping Dunhuang culture shine more brightly in the context of globalization.

5.2 Cross-Cultural Support from Mutual Historical Verification

The unique and powerful cross-cultural communication advantage of 'Zhang Yi Chao Travel Map' compared with other Dunhuang art themes is the support of historical mutual evidence. That is, the mural image and a variety of historical documents, physical remains can confirm each other, support each other, forming a solid 'chain of evidence'. This multi-dimensional historical mutual verification improves the certainty and credibility of the international audience's understanding of Dunhuang history. Its supporting role can be summarized as the following two aspects: First, it is mutual verification with the written history books. The travel scene depicted by 'Zhang Yichao's travel map' is highly consistent with the records of uprisings in authoritative historical books such as 'Zi Zhi Tong Jian', 'New Tang Book', and 'Old Tang Book'. The documents unearthed from the Dunhuang Tibetan cave supplement the grand narrative of the official history in detail. This high unity of images and words is conducive to breaking the international audience's perception of Dunhuang art as only 'religious imagination'. It proves to the world that the heroic deeds of the Northwest Guzhong Zhang Yichao are not imaginary myths, but the officially recorded national history, which lays a historical and credible foundation for the international dissemination of Dunhuang culture.

Secondly, it is the mutual evidence with the remains of civilization along the Silk Road, which provides a solid material evidence for the international dissemination of 'Zhang Yichao's travel map'. The elements such as costumes, travel rituals, musical instruments and weapons appearing in the murals can almost find similar objects in the cultural relics unearthed from the tombs along the Silk Road at the same time. This is not only a key historical witness to the revival of the Silk Road as a road of trade and communication after it fell into a low ebb, but also a Chinese local historical event successfully embedded in the world history narrative of the entire Silk Road. It tells the international community that the heroic deeds of the historical figure Zhang Yichao are directly or indirectly related to the history of all countries and nationalities along the Silk Road. The history of Dunhuang is never an isolated history, but an important chapter in the history of world civilization exchange. This can effectively stimulate the cultural intimacy and academic interest of the countries along the route, and make the international dissemination of Dunhuang culture an effective dialogue around the sharing of historical heritage.

5.3 Cross-Cultural Translation of Visual Symbols

Visual symbols are the most direct and easily perceived media in cross-cultural communication. The effective translation of rich visual symbols by Zhang Yichao's Travel Map is the key path to activate its heroic narrative and realize the value of international communication. First of all, it is the translation of the main symbol from 'jiedushi' to 'hero'. From the scene of the travel map, it is not difficult to see that the picture does not emphasize the complex 'Guiyijun jiedushi' title of the complex 'Guiyijun jiedushi', which is difficult to understand by the international audience, but highlights the core identity of its 'military commander', which helps it transform from an unfamiliar historical figure into a global universal heroic trait.

Secondly, it is the translation of ritual symbols from 'travel etiquette' to 'victory celebration'. The magnificent army, solemn banners and joyful music and dance in the picture all trigger the emotional resonance of human beings to order and strength, victory and joy, collective and glory. This makes the audience from whatever culture can feel the common positive emotions from the momentum and atmosphere of the picture. While being infected by the story, it also subtly establishes an emotional connection with Dunhuang culture.

Finally, it is the translation of cultural symbols from 'Tang Dynasty artifacts' to 'civilization exchange material evidence'. By interpreting the costumes worn by the characters in the picture, the hand-held weapons and the playing instruments in the

context of the cultural exchange of the Silk Road, it can not only show the openness and inclusiveness of Chinese civilization for international audiences, but also form a historical echo with the current ‘ Belt and Road ’ initiative. The cross-cultural translation of this grand visual symbol is essentially a creative transformation from ‘ professional terms ’ to ‘ common language ’, from ‘ historical details ’ to ‘ human emotions ’, from ‘ Chinese stories ’ to ‘ world significance ’.

Conclusion

“Zhang Yichao’s Procession” shows the outline of heroes with a magnificent honorary column, solidifying the moment of history. However, it is not an isolated evidence, but echoes with historical books, inscriptions and other textual objects in the long river of history. The mutual proof of text and image makes Zhang Yichao’s heroic narrative transcend the thin record and sublimate into a historical symbol with eternal vitality. Majestic queue, unyielding text, Zhang Yichao is no longer a pale name in the annals of history, but a symbol of the fracture of civilization, the hero to the flesh and blood to rekindle the fire of hope. “Zhang Yichao’s Procession” is not only a mural that records history, but also plays an important role in the international dissemination of Dunhuang culture. It builds a bridge between Dunhuang culture and the world with cross-cultural heroic narration, solid historical mutual evidence and easy-to-understand visual symbols. Let this cultural treasure that carries the Chinese nation’s tenacity and memory of civilization shine more brightly in the global context.

“Zhang Yichao’s Procession” delineates the hero’s outline through a magnificent honor guard, crystallizing a moment of history. It is not, however, an isolated piece of evidence; rather, it resonates with historical texts, inscriptions, and other textual and material objects across the long river of history. The mutual corroboration of text and image elevates Zhang Yichao’s heroic narrative beyond a thin historical record and transforms it into a historical symbol of enduring vitality. Through its majestic ranks and unyielding inscriptions, Zhang Yichao is no longer a pale name in the annals of history but a symbol of civilizational rupture and a hero who, in flesh and blood, rekindled the fire of hope. Zhang Yichao’s Procession is not merely a mural that records history; it also plays a significant role in the international communication of Dunhuang culture. It builds a bridge between Dunhuang culture and the world through cross-cultural heroic narrative, solid mutual historical verification, and readily intelligible visual symbols. May this cultural treasure, which carries the tenacity of the Chinese nation and the memory of its civilization, shine even more brightly in the global context.

Funding

No

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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