

This is the accepted version of an article that will be published by Taylor & Francis in *Chinese Historical Review*:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ytcr20>

Accepted version downloaded from SOAS Research Online: <http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/25544/>

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Title

Creating Heritage and the *Mission Paul Pelliot*: Early photographs of Dunhuang and their legacy

Abstract

This paper addresses the impact of photographs produced during campaigns of exploration in Northwest China during the transition period between the last decades of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. I propose to focus on an area that had experienced intense scrutiny, namely the oasis of Dunhuang. By scrutinizing the extensive photographic archive created during the French *Mission Paul Pelliot* (1906-08), this paper underlines the emergence of preservation and archaeological concerns, the growing place of photography in academic disciplines like archaeology, while highlighting how these images interacted with local and international cultures. Addressing these questions is intended to help delineate the photograph's visual grammar and gauge their effect in (re)constituting China's national heritage.

Keywords

Photography; Late imperial China; Archaeology; Cultural Heritage; Visual Narrative; Paul Pelliot; Charles Nouette; Dunhuang

Creating Heritage and the *Mission Paul Pelliot*: Early photographs of Dunhuang and their legacy

Marine Cabos

The use of photography in campaigns of exploration occurred across many hinterland regions in China, such as in Yunnan, Mongolia, and Tibet. And yet it is the pictures of sites on the century-old silk roads departing from the Gansu and Xinjiang provinces in Northwest China that deserve particular attention due to their subsequent widespread diffusion and their ability to stimulate international interactions.¹ Within this broad framework I propose to focus on an area that had experienced intense scrutiny at the turn of the twentieth century, namely the oasis of Dunhuang (燉煌) and its now UNESCO preserved Mogao Caves – also called the Thousand–Buddha Caves (*Qianfodong*, 千佛洞). This Buddhist pilgrimage site encompasses nearly five hundred caves built between the fourth and tenth century, inside of which there has been unearthed many rare samples of wall paintings, stucco images, sculptures, and architecture.

‘No place was more important than Dunhuang.’² This superlative sentence reflects a burst of international interest in this oasis located in Gansu province in Northwest China, and in the larger region of Xinjiang province and Central Asia during the transition period between the last decades of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century.³ This attraction began with the unexpected discovery of a Buddhist manuscript that was purchased by the British Captain Bower in 1889 in Khotan, as well as a similar artifact found during the expedition lead by the French geographer Jules-Léon Dutreuil de Rhins (1846-1894) between 1890 and 1895.⁴ Concomitantly, the Russian General Consul of Kashgar called Petrovski began to gather an important collection of terracotta items and manuscripts.⁵ A few years later in 1900 the Daoist priest Wang Yuanlu – who settled down at Mogao caves and dedicated his life to the preservation of the caves – randomly unearthed a small side chamber hidden behind a plastered doorway in cave sixteen in Dunhuang while he was clearing of sand from the

¹ In accordance with current views, I prefer to use the term silk roads instead of the term ‘Silk Road’ coined in 1877 by the geographer Baron Ferdinand von Richthofen (1833-1905). There are few reasons why the umbrella term Silk Road is misleading. First the acceptance of the term started only in the mid-to-late 1930. Second it does not reflect the actual plurality of roads crossing Eurasia. Third it neglects the fact that goods traded included not only silk but also spices, metals, and saddles among other goods. V. Hansen, *The Silk Road: A New History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 5-7.

² Y. Mo, ‘Itineraries for a republic - tourism and travel culture in modern China, 1866-1954’ (PhD diss., University of California, 2011), p.111.

³ Central Asia is generally thought of as a region encompassing Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan, which are bounded on the north by Russia and on the south by Iran, Afghanistan, and China.

⁴ J.P. Desroches, E. Starcky and C. Gras, *Âges et visages de l'Asie : un siècle d'exploration à travers les collections du musée Guimet : Dijon, Musée des Beaux-arts, juillet-octobre 1996* (Dijon: Le Musée, 1996), p. 116.

⁵ P. Pelliot, J. Hackin and J. Bacot, *Bulletin Archéologique Du Musée Guimet: Asie Centrale Et Tibet : Missions Pelliot Et Bacot (documents Exposés Au Musée Guimet)* (Paris: G. Van Oest, 1921), p. 5.

entrance.⁶ This chamber, abandoned for centuries, contained rolled-up scrolls and paintings among a variety of other ancient documents piled-up from the floor to ceiling.

The information about these discoveries quickly propagated, causing groups of Russian, German, Swedes, Japanese, French, and later Chinese adventurers and archaeologists to flock into this western frontier of China at the edge of the Taklamakan Desert.⁷ Still underused as historical sources, these groups frequently created exhaustive photographic surveys and established a specific visual grammar that enable us to grasp how this area was defined and understood. Amongst them, a French expedition under the guidance of the French scholar Paul Pelliot (1878-1945) conducted between 1906 and 1908 gave the opportunity to one of its participants – Charles Nouette (1869-1910) – to constitute a comprehensive archive of over fifteen hundred photographs. To date, Pelliot's expedition has been studied in relation to its historical, archaeological, political, and museological consequences. However, the substantial corpus of photographs it generated remains overlooked.⁸ I propose to help to rectify this in this paper as Nouette's photographs provide a useful case study for examining the emergence of preservation and archaeological concerns, the growing place of photography in academic disciplines like archaeology, while highlighting how these images interacted with local and international cultures. Addressing these questions is intended to help delineate the photograph's visual codes and gauge their effect in (re)constituting China's national heritage. The main sources tapped in this paper include the archives found in the Musée Guimet (Paris), such as original notebooks and letters, original photographs, volumes published in 1914, as well as early twentieth century manuals of field archaeology, early twentieth century periodicals in Chinese and French, and later publications that made use of Nouette's photographs.⁹

The making of a place: Dunhuang through the lens

It is important to remember that the production of photographs of Dunhuang acted within a particular global context. In fact, this period starting from the 1890s corresponded to the moment when the region was still under construction, while experiencing dramatic political and military turmoil. For instance, in 1864 the Muslim Rebellion broke out, dividing the region and leading to the establishment of a short-lived independent Muslim regime, which was later crushed by the Qing Dynasty's armies and transformed in 1884 into the autonomous region hereafter named Xinjiang ('New Territories').¹⁰ Although nominally under the stranglehold of Qing authority, this region was still marked by the presence of

⁶ R. Whitfield, S. Whitfield and N. Agnew, *Cave Temples of Mogao: Art and History on the Silk Road* (Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute and the J. Getty Museum, 2000), p. 34.

⁷ C. Debaine-Francfort, *The Search for Ancient China* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999), p. 21.

⁸ The following is a selection of the latest scholarships on Pelliot. M. Zink, J.P. Drège, G. J. Pinault, C. A. Scherrer-Schaub and P. E. Will, *Paul Pelliot: de l'histoire à la légende : colloque international organisé au collège de France et à l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres (palais De L'institut), 2-3 Octobre 2008* (Paris: Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, 2013); P. Pelliot, J. Ghesquière and F. Macouin, *Carnets de route: 1906-1908* (Paris: Indes savantes, 2008); H. Walravens, *Paul Pelliot (1878-1945): His Life and Works : a Bibliography* (Bloomington, Ind: Indiana University, Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, 2001).

⁹ A great majority of Chinese periodicals have been digitized on *Dacheng* 大成 and *Chinese Periodical Full-text Database* 民國時期期刊全文數據庫. **Most French periodicals can be found at the Bibliothèque nationale de France and its digital library Gallica.**

¹⁰ The Qing Dynasty ruled China between 1644 and 1911. For an in-depth study on the Muslim Rebellion in this region, see: H.D. Kim, *Holy War in China: The Muslim Rebellion and State in Chinese Central Asia, 1864-1877* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2004).

multiple ethnicities, notably by the majority Uyghur population. Following this in the 1890s, the French attempted to expand their authority, notably in the economic sphere on Central Asia in collaboration with Russia, however German, Russian, and British powers retained a substantial stranglehold on this region.¹¹ The rivalry between Russian and British powers over this region is often referred to as the ‘Great Game’ and relates to the efforts made by both countries to expand their territories in search of mineral potentials and political hegemony, two strong driving forces.¹²

In face of this intense local and international rivalry, expeditions conducted under the umbrella term of science were a useful pretext for entering and scrutinizing various strategic sites, such as Dunhuang.¹³ Interestingly, regardless of their variable nature, most of these expeditions shared similar aspirations of unraveling the Chinese past and making it relevant to the present era by preserving and disseminating it through a large corpus of photographs.

Under these conditions, a group of French specialists was gathered within a framework of an established state plan. Hereafter referred to in sources as the *Mission Paul Pelliot*, this expedition originated from a full two years of preparation. Émile Sénart (1847-1928) was the instigator of the project and President of the Comité Français de l’Association Internationale pour l’exploration de l’Asie centrale et de l’Extrême-Orient, which sponsored this archaeological expedition to Northwest China in association with several *Sociétés Savantes* in Paris.¹⁴ As early as August 1905, Pelliot was appointed the head of the expedition, which raised controversies as he was neither an art historian nor a trained archaeologist in contrast to most of the other French experts leading international expeditions at that time.¹⁵ Pelliot was originally more specialized in philology and linguistics. Still his relative inexperience in the field was compensated for by his mastery of Mandarin, which helped him significantly in acquiring valuable items and accessing important places in China.

Pelliot then chose to appoint Nouette as the main operator of the expedition.¹⁶ Nouette was originally a self-taught photographer who only later became familiar with archaeological methods. Biographical information about him is rather scarce, except from the obituary Pelliot wrote on his memory in 1910. Thanks to this we know that Nouette was originally an electrician and that an illness had prevented him from continuing in this profession. He then dedicated his life to photography and this combined with his scientific knowledge and natural ingenuity attracted the attention of various contemporaries, notably Pelliot. He died in Paris from tuberculosis at the age of forty-one while he was still developing Pelliot’s expedition photographs.¹⁷ Information concerning the initial encounter between Pelliot and Nouette

¹¹ S. Gorshenina, *Explorateurs en Asie centrale: voyageurs et aventuriers de Marco Polo à Ella Maillart* (Genève: Éditions Olizane, 2003), p. 66.

¹² S. Dmitriev, ‘Archéologie du Grand Jeu : une brève histoire de L’Asie centrale,’ in *Le Grand Jeu: XIXe siècle, les enjeux géopolitiques de l’Asie Centrale*, ed. J. Piatigorsky and J. Sapir (Paris: Autrement, 2009): pp. 71-72; F. Wood, *The Silk Road: Two Thousand Years in the Heart of Asia* (London: British Library, 2003), p. 147.

¹³ R. Vinograd, ‘Strategic Landscapes,’ in *Ershi Shiji Shanshuihua Yanjiu Wenji* [Studies on twentieth Century Shanshuihua] (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 2006), pp. 293.

¹⁴ *Bulletin de l’Ecole française d’Extrême-Orient*, Volume 5 (1905), 511.

¹⁵ Pelliot’s experience started few years before in Hanoi when he had been appointed head of an archaeological mission by the École Française d’Extrême-Orient (EFO). Zink et al., *Paul Pelliot: de l’histoire à la légende*, p. 53.

¹⁶ The word operator is deliberately used to designate people who manipulated camera, as not all of them were professional photographers.

¹⁷ P. Pelliot, ‘Charles Nouette [Necrologie],’ *Toung Pao*, no.2 May Volume XI (1910), 293.

remains unknown. Primary sources only mention that Pelliot contacted Nouette during an early stage of his preparations for the expedition and asked him to serve as its main operator. Letters exchanged between 1905 and 1906 also revealed that the two men discussed in detail the photographic equipment that would be suitable for the expedition.¹⁸ The particular attention paid to photography from the preparation phase was related to the new methodological emphasis and value ascribed to photography in the archaeological field, which I will discuss later. In the same way that these kinds of expeditions were multidisciplinary, Nouette had multiple duties. Pelliot's notebooks describe that amongst other duties he also checked on the workers that excavated the sites, drew schematic plans of grottoes, took some rubbings and managed the bulk of mails to be delivered. Yet his role as the operator of the mission appeared to be his most prominent position.

In addition to Pelliot and Nouette, there was also Louis Vaillant (1874-?), a doctor of the French Colonial Army who was placed in charge of surveying Chinese topography, astronomy, and natural history. More members joined in situ: the Chinese Ting, Sven Hedin's former tailor Ali Akhoun, and the two Cossacks Iliazov and Bokov.¹⁹

With the nomination of the core members completed, it remained for the expedition route to be planned. An examination of Pelliot's notebooks and Nouette's photographs helps to delineate the general itinerary. The team departed from Paris (June 1906) and headed for Tashkent (the capital of Uzbekistan) via Moscow (September), then continued in Xinjiang (October 1907), crossed Gansu province and visited the town of Dunhuang (February 1908), and headed back to Beijing via Shaanxi and Henan provinces, while at some point navigating through the Yangtze river towards Shanghai.²⁰ A great number of places were explored and photographed on the expedition but even still Dunhuang represented one of the major targets within the whole itinerary alongside the oases of Tumchuq, Kutcha, and Dunhuang, at least according to Pelliot's views.²¹

Pelliot's team was not the first to explore Dunhuang and the borders of China, nor was it the last. One person repeatedly referenced in Pelliot's notebooks was the Hungarian-British archaeologist Marc Aurel Stein (1862-1943), who led four expeditions between 1900 and 1930 to the Tarim Basin. Stein left behind him an archive of over five thousand photographs, now mostly held by the British Library in London. There were also a few earlier attempts to explore the larger North Western region. For instance, the Orientalist Gabriel-Pierre Bonvalot (1853-1933) led several missions between the 1880s-90s with the Prince Henri d'Orléans (1867-1901) and another one with the photographer Jean Guillaume Capus (1857-1931). The mission with Capus between 1880 and 1882 was commissioned by the ministère de l'Instruction publique.²² Around the same time Dutreuil de Rhins led a scientific expedition

¹⁸ Nouette suggested to bring one 18 x 24 and one 9 x 18, 9 x 12 cameras according to his letter sent to Pelliot on 10 April 1906. Pelliot asked to see the negative plates to purchase. See letters exchanged between Pelliot and Nouette between 1905 and 1906. Pel Mi. 21. Musée Guimet, archives de la bibliothèque.

¹⁹ See photo AP7228. Musée Guimet, archives photographiques.

²⁰ The photographic archive encompasses views along the Yangtze River up to Shanghai. Pelliot declared that once the work finished in Dunhuang, the team headed for Shanghai where his companions sent all the documents back to France by the end of 1908. P. Pelliot, 'Trois ans dans la Haute Asie,' *L'Illustration* 12 March (1910), 266.

²¹ The old EFEO transcription writes these names as the following: Toumchouq, Koutchar, Touen-Houang. P. Pelliot, 'Rapport de M. Paul Pelliot sur sa mission au Turkestan chinois (1906-1909)' *Académie des inscriptions & Belles-Lettres – Comptes rendus des séances de l'année 1910* (1910), 58-68.

²² Twenty of so surviving photographs taken by Capus across Central Asia, including Northwest China are now at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (Ref: SG WD- 74). For an account of the genesis of the exploration of Western regions by French, see: S. Geng, 'Boxihe Xiyu Dunhuang tanxian yu Faguo de Dunhuang xueyanjiu,' in *Faguo*

across Khotan (modern Hotan in Xinjiang province), Tibet, and Mongolia between 1890 and 1895. This expedition was subsidized by the Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres²³ and primary sources, notably illustrated periodicals, indicate that Fernand Grenard (1866-1942) – who assisted him during the mission by inquiring into archaeological matters – produced the photographs.²⁴

Yet, the most fruitful expeditions in terms of discovery and photographic archives all occurred during the turn of the twentieth century. To provide a few examples from an international perspective, the German Albert Grünwedel (1856-1935) led the first German expedition to Turpan in Xinjiang in 1902-03 and at the same time, the Japanese Ōtani Kōzui (1876-1948) completed excavations in the region during 1902-03. These efforts were followed soon after by the German Albert von Le Coq (1860-1930) in 1904-05, and the American Ellsworth Huntington (1876-1947) in 1905. Later in the 1920s-30s there were also a number of notable expeditions including efforts made by the American archaeologist and art historian Langdon Warner (1881-1955) who arrived at the Mogao Caves in 1924, and the Swedish expedition's discovery of the Xiaohe Tomb complex in Lop Nur led by Folke Bergman (1902-1946) in the 1930s. Although the majority of these expeditions were sponsored or commissioned by state institutions, orientalist, connoisseurs, and even companies also undertook initiatives to explore these areas, often by joining forces with established scholars. A renowned example is the extensive photographic archive left by the *Mission Citroën* also called *La Croisière Jaune* (1931-32), which was assisted by the archaeologist and director of Musée Guimet, Joseph Hackin (1886-1941), with forty other members participating in the mission. Organized by the French car company André Citroën, the mission aimed to drive across the Asian continent by separating into two groups – one moving from East to West departing from Tianjin, another moving from West to East departing from Beirut – so as to eventually meet in Xinjiang. While this mission served obvious advertising purposes, the French and British governments also supported it. Additionally, a significant photographic archive composed of over nine hundred photographs was created during the mission and images and developments throughout the mission were disseminated through a diverse range of media.²⁵ The outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war of 1937-45 prevented most of these expeditions from pursuing their exploration.

The goals of such 'archive fever', to use the philosopher Jacques Derrida's term, was rarely devoid of hidden agendas.²⁶ Exploring this region was not only focused on understanding Chinese heritage, but for the most part in appropriating it. If Pelliot received the financial support of various institutions, such as the Académie des Inscriptions et des Belles-Lettres, the ministère de l'Instruction publique, the Comité pour l'exploration de l'Asie Centrale, and the Comité de l'Asie Française, it was also because it was anticipated that the expedition would enrich appreciably French museums collections. It is not surprising then to realize that

Dunhuang Xue Jing Cui [Essence of France Dunhuang Studies], ed. B. Zheng (Lanzhou Shi: Gansu renmin chubanshe, 2011), pp. 1-53.

²³ J. L. Dutreuil de Rhins, *Mission scientifique dans la Haute Asie 1890-1895* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1897).

²⁴ The Académie gave him a grant of 15.000 francs (equivalent of 42.500 euros) on 16 May 1890. S. Jacques, 'La mission de Dutreuil de Rhins en Haute-Asie (1891-1894),' *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres 152e année* no.3 (2008), 1268-1269; F. Grenard, 'La dernière mission Dutreuil de Rhins, de Paris à Pékin,' *Le tour du monde* (1896), 313-360.

²⁵ The majority of photographs from the *Mission Citroën* are held in the Centre d'archives de Terre Blanche in Herimoncourt (France). Over a hundred of photographs are also held at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, reference: Richelieu - Société de Géographie - magasin, SG WD- 354.

²⁶ J. Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 84.

Pelliot, Dutreuil de Rhins, and Hackin were the three main expeditions led in Central Asia and Northwest China that enabled the Musée Guimet to constitute its existent collection. It is well established that Pelliot, Stein, and others bought an extensive quantity of archaeological items (mostly rare manuscripts and paintings) for low prices. Pelliot attempted to maintain on-going relationships with locals throughout his journey. Hence he kept various local people up-to-date with his discoveries by sending letters and photographs notably of discovered manuscripts. Most importantly, at the end of the expedition he headed for Beijing in order to share the mission's discoveries with local scholars. By sharing his findings, Pelliot was among those who triggered a sudden burst of protection concerns over archaeological artifacts in Chinese academic circles as, from that moment onwards, Beijing authorities immediately instructed the locality to stop any further sales to foreigners and to close the caves.²⁷

It was difficult at that time for Chinese to gain access to foreigners' findings, since objects were sent abroad and published in reports written in foreign languages.²⁸ Such gradual dispersion of heritage items out of China raised a new awareness and concerns over the notions of heritage and cultural property. The severity of the problem prompted the Qing government of China by the 1910s to progressively implement protection legislation and edict laws, to found specialized organizations such as the China Monument Society and Gallery of Antiquities (*Guwu chenliesuo*, 古物陳列所), to encourage the development of collotype reproduction of antiquities, and to increase collaboration with foreign scientific expeditions.²⁹ Examples of collaborations are the Sino-Swedish expedition led by Sven Hedin (1928-1931), and the collaboration between the geologist Ding Wenjiang 丁文江 (1887-1936) and the French Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), in excavations at Zhoukoudian in 1929 that unearthed the Peking Man.³⁰

In fact, it was not until the mid to late 1920s that the field of archaeology received any support from the Chinese government and was recognized as a branch of academic research. Once established, several Chinese academics explored the North Western region in the later half of the 1920s and early 1930s. Memorable examples from these efforts are the modern archaeologists Xu Xusheng 徐旭生 (1888-1976) and Huang Wenbi 黃文弼 (1893-1966), the latter producing publications illustrated with photographs of excavations. There was also the photographer Chen Wanli 陳萬里 (1892-1969) in the 1920s.

²⁷ Wood, *The Silk Road*, p. 211; J. Fan, *The Caves of Dunhuang* (Hong Kong: Dunhuang Academy in collaboration with London Editions, 2010), p. 227.

²⁸ Mo, 'Itineraries for a republic,' 115.

²⁹ C. H. Wang, 'New Printing Technology and Heritage Preservation: Collotype Reproduction of Antiquities in Modern China, circa 1908-1917,' in *The Role of Japan in Modern Chinese Art*, ed. Joshua A. Fogel (Berkeley, California: Global, Area, and International Archive/University of California Press, 2012), pp. 273-373; R. E. Murowchick, 'Despoiled of the Garments of Her Civilization: Problems and Progress in Archaeological Heritage Management in China,' in A. P. A Underhill, *Companion to Chinese Archaeology* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), pp. 16; For an up-to-date study of the China and its heritage see: J. B. Cuno, *Who Owns Antiquity?: Museums and the Battle Over Our Ancient Heritage* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 88-120.

³⁰ Debaine-Francfort, *The Search for Ancient China*, p. 25; S. A. Hedin, *Reports from the Scientific Expedition to the North-Western Provinces of China Under the Leadership of Dr. Sven Hedin* (Stockholm: Tryckeri Aktiebolaget Thule, 1952).

Later, in the 1940s, the archaeologist Shi Zhangru 石璋如 (1902–2004) excavated and photographed Dunhuang, while the artist Zhang Daqian 張大千 (1899–1983) reproduced the frescos inside the caves. By that time the region had become a popular touristic destination in China, seducing travellers such as the adventurer couple, James and Lucy Lo, who captured a significant set of black-and-white negatives of the caves during their eighteenth-months stay in Dunhuang from 1943–44.³¹

This attests to the multidisciplinary and ‘transcultural form’ of archaeology in China.³² The field was both an international and local affair even though it developed at a different pace in the West and locally. The Northwest region surrounding the Dunhuang site might be regarded as a ‘contact zone’, a network of circuits that provided multidirectional flows of people, who combined efforts to outline a new heritage landmark by means of photographic archives.³³ By producing significant photographic repositories, these people progressively increased the reputation and popular preoccupation with the region of Northwest China.

Photography in the discourses on archaeology

What characterized the production of photographs during these international campaigns of archaeological exploration was a dominant institutional urge to catalogue methodically and rationally. Although the late nineteenth century experienced an upsurge in the conception of photography as a tool for academic disciplines, the debate over photography in the natural and social sciences started as early as the advent of the medium in 1839 and proceeded a century of progress made in human science and positivist philosophy.³⁴ Since its inception, photography has been considered as a medium whose intrinsic nature participated in the development not only of science, but also of arts and industry. In order to clarify its application to these seemingly disparate fields, a flurry of publications introducing technical and theoretical aspects were published from the earliest periods. Within these writings it is possible to discern how negotiations between photography and archaeology were characterized.

Photography was not widespread in archaeological practices until the 1880s.³⁵ Until then visual recording adopted different forms, including sketches, notes, plans, and rubbings. But drawings and engravings began to face criticism due to their presumed unfaithfulness to

³¹ James and Lucy Lo’s photographic archive, manuscript collection, and artist renderings belong to Princeton University’s Art Museum, P.Y. and Kinmay W. Tang Center for East Asian Art, and the East Asian Library.

³² The transculturality of archaeology has been advanced by: M. Díaz-Andreu García, *A World History of Nineteenth-Century Archaeology: Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Past* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 196-197. For a summary of archaeological studies in China, see: L. Chi, ‘Archaeological studies in China,’ in *Essays on the Sources for Chinese History*, ed. D. Leslie, C. Mackerras, G. Wang and C P. Fitzgerald (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1973).

³³ M. L. Pratt, ‘Arts of the Contact Zone,’ *Profession 91* (1991), 33-40.

³⁴ Also called the philosophy of science, the Positivism was developed in the early nineteenth century by the French philosopher Auguste Comte (1798-1857).

³⁵ There were early attempts, such as Joseph Philibert Girault de Prangey’s (1804-1892) daguerreotypes of the Middle East shot during Richard Lepsius’ expedition between 1839 and 1850, which is argued to be amongst the earliest ones. J. P. Girault de Prangey’s, *Monuments arabes d’Égypte, de Syrie, d’Asie Mineure* (Paris: chez l’auteur, 1846); G. Feyler, ‘Contribution à l’histoire des origines de la photographie archéologique : 1839-1880,’ *Mélanges de l’École française de Rome. Antiquité*, Volume 99, no. 2 (1987), 1021.

reality.³⁶ In addition, there was a growing need for archaeology to be distinguished from pure philological studies and this was partly achieved by providing increased support for fieldwork and non-literary evidence, including examinations of landscapes, monuments and excavated items.³⁷ The medium of photography thus appeared as a potential answer to this methodological crisis as it was viewed as supplying an: ‘authentic piece that validates the fact being suggested.’³⁸ There was a strong belief that photography could restore faithfully, and in detail, the physiognomy and context of any type of material vestige. One example illustrating this position is provided by the doctor and archaeologist Édouard Loydreau (1820?-1905?) who criticized the lack of accuracy of sketches made during archaeological expeditions, and instead favored photography describing it as: ‘(...) a brush, yet a severe and faithful brush.’³⁹ Consequently, during the late nineteenth century, photography became the favorite – but not exclusive – recording method for archaeologists. This shift in recording methods stimulated archaeologists to bring cameras with them when conducting fieldwork and over time this proved to offer a more convenient and quicker method for recording information.

Some contemporary authors have suggested that scientific approaches to photography were also informed by artistic conceptions.⁴⁰ And the geologist and naturalist Eugène Trutat’s (1840-1910) himself insisted on the fact that photography even when applied to archaeology remained a ‘matter of taste’ and that the principles advanced in his book would enable one to ‘really obtain artistic results.’ However, it was also recognized as important to elude the pitfalls of ‘exaggeration’ by placing too much emphasis on distortion, contrasts, and projected shadows among other visual effects.⁴¹ Whether or not such aesthetic considerations affected the scientific application of photography, there was a strong aspiration to move towards a rational study of the natural and build world.

According to archaeological principles, an accurate depiction of the physical features of an area involved a punctilious approach. This approach initially manifested through the selection of a *distinct subject matter* – such as views of sites, of monuments, of excavations, and

³⁶ E. Edwards, ‘Photography and the Material Performance of the Past,’ *History and Theory*. 48.4 (2009), 139; 141; 143.

³⁷ Centuries old interests in the preservation of Chinese antiquities, epigraphy, philology, and religion among others paved the way to nineteenth-century French archaeology in China. The discourse over the importance of archaeological evidence originated in seventeenth-century antiquarian thinking, with the French physician Jacob Spon (1647-1685) being one of the most fervent defender. E. Gran-Aymeric, *Naissance De L’archéologie Moderne, 1798-1945* (Paris: CNRS éditions, 1998), p. 23; 90; J. Mohl, *Histoire des Etudes Orientales 1840-1854* (Ganesha Publishing, 2003), p. 5; T.Chang, *Travel, Collecting, and Museums of Asian Art in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Farnham, Surrey ; Burlington, VT : Ashgate, 2013), p. 19. It has been argued that the creation of the École Française d’Extrême-Orient (EFEO) in Saigon in 1900 participated in the development of fieldwork in archaeology. F. Pouillon, *Dictionnaire des orientalistes de langue française* (Paris: IISMM, 2008), p. 350.

³⁸ A. Davanne, *La photographie appliquée aux sciences, conférence faite a la Sorbonne le 26 Février 1881* (Paris: Gauthier-Villars, 1881), p. 21.

³⁹ E. Loydreau, *De la photographie appliquée à l’étude de l’archéologie : notices lues à la Société d’histoire et d’archéologie de Châlon-sur-Saône, les 26 juin 1856 et 30 juin 1857* (Beaune: imprimerie de Lambert, 1866), p. 9.

⁴⁰ K. Weiler, ‘Picturesque Authenticity in Early Archaeological Photography in British India,’ in *Archaeologizing’ Heritage? Transcultural Entanglements between Local Social Practices and Global Virtual Realities : Proceedings of the 1st International Workshop on Cultural Heritage and the Temples of Angkor, 2-4 May 2010, Heidelberg University*, ed. Michael S Falser and Monica Juneja (Berlin: Springer, 2013), pp. 6. Abelé argued that scientists and artists collaborated with each other. Christine Abelé, ‘La photographie de paysage en France au XIXe siècle: des oeuvres et des hommes: 1839-1878’ (PhD diss. Université Paris X-Nanterre, 1994), p. 17.

⁴¹ E. Trutat, *La photographie appliquée à l’archéologie: Reproduction des monuments, oeuvres d’art, mobilier, inscriptions, manuscrits* (Paris: Gauthier-Villars, 1879), 38; 39; 51.

depictions of inscriptions and objects.⁴² But alongside the subject matter, a set of formal elements tended to also be applied: specialists paid peculiar attention to *light* and to the *variation of angles*, including aerial images, general views sharply in focus, frontal shots and close-up views. Finally, the collection of images should involve an *abundance of shots* so as to develop a better idea of the subject's surroundings and be completed with an accurate and *detailed labeling separated from the image*.

The photographs taken during *Mission Paul Pelliot* serve as an illustration of this specific visual methodology (Figures 1 to 12). A visual examination of the body of photographs that started the first volume of the original publication published in 1914 offered a coherent and far-reaching overall view of the Mogao caves in order to reconstruct the general topography of the site, followed by exhaustive inside views. The caves are first portrayed within their environment, behind the Daquan River (*Daquan he*, 大泉河) **that faced the cliff. The river's large branch is portrayed from South West and North West, expanding on a large diagonal of the composition that underlined details of the soil formation on the riverbank. Then a shot on the other side of the riverbank depicted the river viewed from the caves, with a particular emphasis on the trees growing sporadically at the bottom of the cliff. The trees located nearby the river were described by Charles-Eudes Bonin (1865–1929) – a French diplomat and explorer – who was sent on a mission to explore Central Asia and Dunhuang a few years earlier between 1899 and 1900. In his report to the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, he described his first impressions of the site as the following:**

*The first effect is particularly singular (...). In the riverbed are bathing trees that are now centennial and respected by lumberjacks' axes; they compose a real sacred wood, shadowing and partly hiding the grottoes' façade.*⁴³

Recognizing a parallel between Bonin's description and Nouette's photographs help us to grasp the shift from the previous rhetorical exercise of ekphrasis to the systematic photographic survey approach that almost replaced written interpretation.

⁴² The art historian Feyler has advanced these subject matters, which belong to what she defines as 'archaeological photography'. Feyler, 'Contribution à l'histoire des origines de la photographie archéologique', 1035-38.

⁴³ C. E. Bonin, 'Les grottes des Mille Bouddhas,' *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* no.2 (1901), 212.



Figure 1

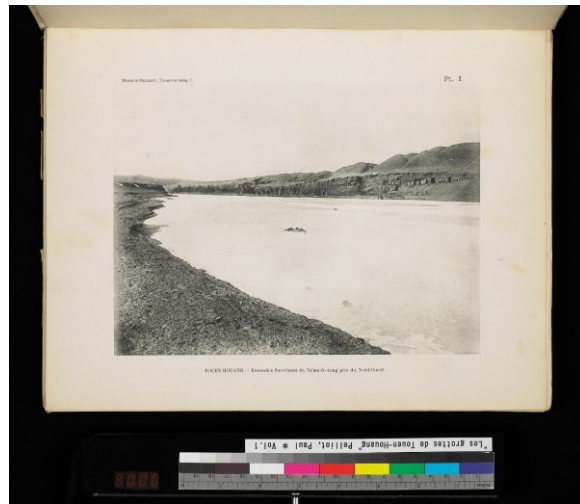


Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4

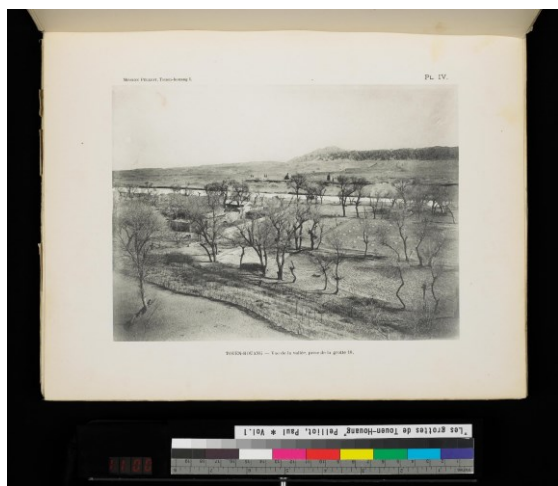


Figure 5

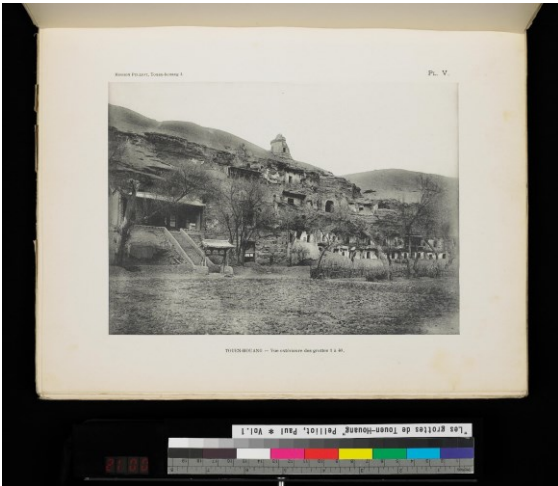


Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9

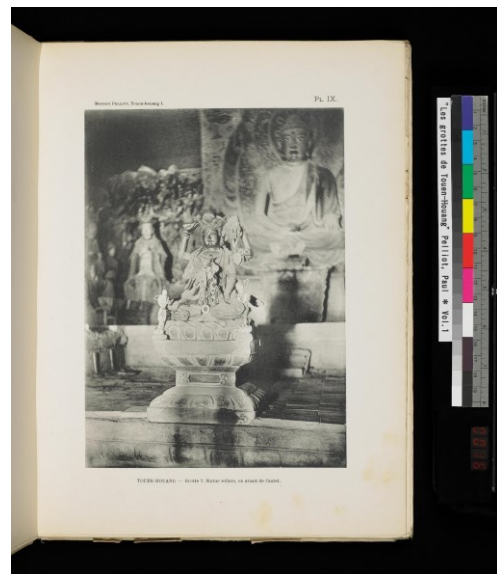


Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12

From top to bottom and left to right ⁴⁴:

Figure 1 – P. Pelliot, *Les grottes de Touen-Houang : peintures et sculptures bouddhiques des époques des Wei, des T'ang et des Song* (Paris: Librairie Paul Geuthner, 1914), cover page.

Figure 2 – ‘PL. I: TOUEN-HOUANG - Ensemble Sud-Ouest du Ts'ien-fo-tong pris du Nord-Ouest.’ From a silver gelatin negative on celluloid roll film taken in 1908, 18 x 24 cm (AP8202).

Figure 3 – ‘PL. II: TOUEN-HOUANG – Ensemble Nord-Ouest du Ts'ien-fo-tong pris de l’Est.’ From a silver gelatin negative on celluloid roll film taken in 1908, 18 x 24 cm (AP8203).

Figure 4 - ‘PL. III: TOUEN-HOUANG – Vue du Ts'ien-fo-tong prise de la grotte 16.’ From a silver gelatin negative on celluloid roll film taken in 1908, 18 x 24 cm (AP8204).

Figure 5 - ‘PL. IV: TOUEN-HOUANG – Vue de la vallée, prise de la grotte 16.’ From a silver gelatin negative on celluloid roll film taken in 1908, 18 x 24 cm (AP8205).

Figure 6 – ‘PL. V: TOUEN-HOUANG – Vue extérieure des grottes 1 à 40.’ From a silver gelatin negative on celluloid roll film taken in 1908, 18 x 24 cm (AP8206).

Figure 7 – ‘PL. VI: TOUEN-HOUANG – Vue extérieure des grottes 76 à 80.’ From a silver gelatin negative on celluloid roll film taken in 1908, 18 x 24 cm (AP8207).

Figure 8 – ‘PL. VII: TOUEN-HOUANG – La rivière du Ts'ien-fo-tong gelée. TOUEN-HOUANG – La rivière dégelée. TOUEN-HOUANG – Première visite au Ts'ien-fo-tong. TOUEN-HOUANG – Le Ts'ien-fo-tong à hauteur du temple où nous logions.’ From a silver gelatin negative on celluloid roll film taken in 1908, 18 x 24 cm (AP8208), and a silver gelatin print on paper taken in 1908, 09 x 12 cm (AP8454_1).

Figure 9 – ‘PL. VIII: TOUEN-HOUANG – Grotte 1. Autel du fond. Peintures anciennes. Statues refaites.’ From a silver gelatin negative on celluloid roll film taken in 1908, 18 x 24 cm (AP7842).

Figure 10 – ‘PL. IX: TOUEN-HOUANG – Grotte 1. Statue refaite, en avant de l’autel.’ From a silver gelatin negative on celluloid roll film taken in 1908, 18 x 24 cm (AP8185).

Figure 11 – ‘PL. X: TOUEN-HOUANG – Peinture modern à l’entrée de la grotte 1.’ From a silver gelatin negative on celluloid roll film taken in 1908, 18 x 24 cm (AP7843).

Figure 12 – ‘PL. XI: Grotte 1. Panneau avant de gauche.’ From a silver gelatin negative on celluloid roll film taken in 1908, 18 x 24 cm (AP7844).

Another important element of the methodical shooting process is the labeling system. If Nouette’s pictures were identified and precisely recorded in Pelliot’s notebooks, labels remained separated from the picture surface, granting the surface to become the most important and relevant information.⁴⁵ The consistent and persistent need to capture the succession of explored/excavated locations through various angles – from surroundings to details – connected with new methodologies championed by the archaeological field. It was also embedded in the burgeoning world of exploratory expeditions conducted under the auspices of developing knowledge for the human or natural sciences. Such consistency triggered a particular visual pattern offering a somewhat systematic and clinical approach. This approach eventually identified and characterized Dunhuang territory.

⁴⁴ Source: Pelliot, Paul. ‘Les grottes de Touen-houang peintures et sculptures bouddhiques des époques des Wei, des T’ang et des Song,’ in *NII ‘Digital Silk Road’ / Toyo Bunko*, doi:10.20676/00000186 <<http://dsr.nii.ac.jp/toyobunko/VIII-5-B6-3/V-1/>> [accessed 11 August 2018].

⁴⁵ Zink et al., *Paul Pelliot: de l'histoire à la légende*, 537.

As discussed above, based on ideal principles, a photograph shot in an archaeological context should supply tangible information by focusing on the visible, by restoring the environment of the vestige, and by utilizing a depersonalized vision.⁴⁶ In other words, employing a blunt gaze focusing strictly on the subject represented rather than giving expression of one's self. These principles were thought to produce 'descriptive catalogues as precise as possible'.⁴⁷ At first glance, one might agree that photographic archives created during *Mission Paul Pelliot* pertained to such a formalized and homogenous vision, perpetuating visual conventions that rendered archives consistent with one another. However, the conventions appear to be more flexible than one might imagine.

If we return to the Figure 4 that portrays the valley as seen from cave sixteen, one may ponder the extent to which such an image commits to a supposed scientific quality while simultaneously potentially displacing it. To elaborate, on the one hand it exploited the kind of formalized vision advocated for in contemporary publications on archaeology as discussed earlier. The operator found a suitable spot that allowed a somewhat panoptic approach, and this resulted in collecting an image that provided an all-encompassing view of the valley. Furthermore, the ladder in the center ground and the trees on the right side provide a sense of proportion and give further information about local flora and topography. The vivid and oblique sunlight causes shadows to be projected and this was one of the standard lighting requirements recommended to strengthen a three-dimensional effect and render more accurately the volume and sharp details.⁴⁸ In totality, all these visual elements appear to be in accordance with contemporary recording methods and the way that photography was conceived in archaeology.

However, on the other hand, the archaeological element of the image was subtly imbedded within a somewhat unessential formal quality. Although the spot chosen offers a rather unobstructed view of the general landscape, such a high-angle shot significantly accentuates the linear perspective and thus gives prominence to the sinuous lines of the cliff edges and soil meanders. By doing so it prevents the production of a strictly frontal prospect of the topography and nearly effaces the archaeological content. The rather unusual diagonal composition, high contrasts, and focus also seem to be less concentrated in portraying the caves along the cliff than in presenting a multiplicity of textures. In addition, the sky is sprinkled with white clouds, which appears to be at odds with usual scientific records of that time, in which the sky usually remains white or blank. The conjunction of Chinese climatic conditions (strong sunlight) and technological limitations (average time exposure evading the rendering of subtle shapes such as clouds) were two factors that made it difficult to capture meteorological effects in the atmosphere. Consequently, it was a frequent occurrence at that time that operators would retouch photograph by adding white or dark highlights. Yet it is not clear that such retouching has taken place on this negative; moreover, there are a few other examples from the same archive that represent clouds in the sky. Whether or not there has been retouching, the clouds in the sky balanced the composition of the overall landscape, mingling a sense of verisimilitude with a painterly quality. Last but not least, the utilization of celluloid film instead of the usually recommended glass plate permitted the production of a negative with smooth textures, even tones and less acute details. This appears at odds with discourses of the period, which advise operators in an archaeological context to use gelatin

⁴⁶ The notion of depersonalization of archaeological vision was mentioned in: F. N. Bohrer, *Photography and Archaeology* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011), p. 25.

⁴⁷ E. Chavannes, *Mission archéologique dans la Chine septentrionale* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1909), p. 1.

⁴⁸ Trutat, *La photographie appliquée à l'archéologie*, 41.

dry plate on glass support.⁴⁹ Technical aspects constitute indeed a key element in visual methods in that, by using celluloid film, Nouette positioned his photographs within new photography developments. Throughout the expedition he manipulated several photographic supports and formats. For the majority of images he used gelatin silver negatives on glass. Yet it seems that once the team arrived in Xinjiang onwards – in other words one year after the beginning of the mission – he also used gelatin silver negatives on celluloid film in combination.⁵⁰ Gelatin silver on glass, or dry plate, was a newly invented technique that had superseded the previous wet collodion by the 1880s. It was championed in the field of archaeology owing to the image stability despite the fragile nature of the glass.⁵¹ Besides glass support was characterized by sharp and detailed negative images, and subsequently detailed positive prints with structureless film, fine grain, and clear whites. The gelatin silver process dramatically simplified photographic practice for it permitted exposure time to go from seconds to fractions of a second. Thus, ‘instant photography’ was finally made possible.⁵² In Dunhuang, Nouette would make use of both of these photographic supports, although there is a significant amount of negatives collected using film, which notably depicted walls decoration inside the grottoes. In this sense, Nouette’s adoption of such formal and technical elements had the propensity to conjure up a paradox, in which the archaeological eye meets the idea of the picturesque.

Such a visual reading does not intend to distinguish Nouette’s photographs from other expeditions as they all offered a new visual knowledge of what was unknown, while shaping broader understanding of preservation concerns. Instead the objective is to highlight how photographs produced within exploratory expeditions gradually delineated the face of Dunhuang. In doing so, they catalyzed its recognition as an important part of the national heritage, notion that was springing up from both foreign and Chinese interpretations.

The shifting trajectories of Dunhuang photographic archives

The photographic archive created during *Mission Paul Pelliot* underwent a wide process of diffusion across borders and throughout time, which continues up to this day. I am interested in this last section in tracing Nouette’s photographs in order to uncover how they were re-arranged, re-appropriated and re-narrativized through diverse channels.

The first method of disseminating the photographs was the official publication Pelliot edited in the aftermath of the expedition titled *Les grottes de Touen-Houang* [The Dunhuang Grottoes]. Gathered in four large size volumes (thirty-four centimeters) that actually bound together six volumes in total, this series of publication gave a prominent place to

⁴⁹ The substantial diminution of stock of glass plates might have been one of the reasons why Nouette employed celluloid film at times, but this currently remains unsubstantiated. It is only known that between their arrival on 14 February 1908 and their departure on 8 June 1908, the team created a consequential set of over four hundred photographs, exhausting almost the entire stock as indicated by Pelliot’s letter dating from 30th April 1908. Pelliot et al. *Carnets de route*, p. 417.

⁵⁰ Amongst the 1530 negatives held currently at the Musée Guimet archives, 1027 are glass plates, 461 are celluloid film, and 35 are prints on paper.

⁵¹ Richard Leach Maddox was the first to successfully make a gelatin dry plate negative in 1871. The process underwent many improvements by a variety of people before it was commercially viable in 1879. ‘Gelatin Dry Plate,’ in *Graphic Atlas* < http://www.graphicatlans.org/identification/?process_id=303 > [accessed November 7, 2015].

⁵² B. Lavédrine, Jean-Paul Gandolfo, and Sibylle Monod, *(Re)Connaître et conserver les photographies anciennes* (Paris: Éd du Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques, 2007) p. 254.

photography.⁵³ This pre-eminence of photography was emphasized by the display, which offered a catalogue of one-page format photographs using high-quality printing that allowed for strong contrasts and sharp details to be displayed. In the introduction, Pelliot stated that the choice of displaying first the ‘superb photographs’ taken by Nouette was deliberate.⁵⁴ It was done, on the one hand, to pay homage to Nouette who had recently died and, on the other, to exalt the prevalence of photography in the archaeological field:

*It seems to me that, in order to initiate the work, it was necessary first and foremost to publish the photographs of the sanctuaries. [Despite] the difficult material conditions, and the utilization of two years old glass plates that suffered from extreme climatic variations, my companion Charles Nouette created veritable marvels. By reproducing these hundreds of records, I am conscious to serve at the same time the interest of our studies as well as to pay a legitimate tribute to a good worker that death stopped in the middle of his task. Incidentally the commentary of these documents itself implies the freedom to go back and forth from one another; this is only possible when all the plates had been published. This is the reason why we first give our photographs.*⁵⁵

At that time, publishing the outcomes of a scientific expedition – whether they were textual and/or visual – was an integral part of the project. Manuscripts and notebooks written by Pelliot over the course of the mission confirm that he was already preparing the sequence of photographs that would be published after their return. Accordingly, the volumes begun with exterior views of Mogao site and explore the inside of the grottoes by moving from South to North (see Figures 1 to 12). The whole project was published by *Paul Geuthner*, a logical choice as this publishing house specialized in Near East, Middle East, and Far East publications.⁵⁶

In addition, throughout the expedition Pelliot continued to send photographs (mostly of manuscripts) to individuals (peers, family members, international and local private collectors), and to institutions, such as the British Library, and the Commercial Press of Shanghai, whose director Mr Chang received thousands of pictures from Pelliot.⁵⁷ Such exchange of images on the one hand corresponded to a willingness to share knowledge but, on the other hand, also served as a lucrative business for Pelliot who was paid for each photographic reproduction.⁵⁸ When photographs were not sent, they were sometimes offered

⁵³ The publications should have been published in 1914 but the outbreak of World War I postponed it until 1924. Another series of volumes was dedicated to facsimiles of manuscripts, other texts, and research outcomes such as in linguistics, translations, and glossaries.

⁵⁴ Pelliot, *Les grottes de Touen-Houang*, p. 2.

⁵⁵ Pelliot, *Les grottes de Touen-Houang*, p. 5.

⁵⁶ Previously named *Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner* and founded in 1901, Geuthner’s publications targeted mainly an educated audience and covered disciplines ranging from Humanities, arts, philology, to religion among others. Éditions Geuthner website, <<http://www.geuthner.com/a-propos>> [accessed November 11, 2015].

⁵⁷ Letters sent to Pelliot on 10 March 1911 and 14 May 1913. Pel Mi 67. Paris, Musée Guimet, archives de la bibliothèque.

⁵⁸ For instance a letter written on 26 December 1909 attests that Pelliot received the amount of ‘five thousands francs’ on behalf of Mister Tongkang so as to obtain the photographic reproduction of documents found in Dunhuang. Pel Mi. 67. Paris, Musée Guimet, archives de la bibliothèque.

as a gift, helping to build or cement the on-going relationship between Pelliot and local scholars.⁵⁹

Conferences were also useful circumstances through which photographs were communicated. In 1909 the year of the team's return to France, Pelliot gave a conference paper at the Sorbonne. Here he not only revealed the images to the audience during the conference for their 'documentary value', but also published some of them in the written report.⁶⁰ Pelliot organized another conference the year after in 1910 and in the first footnote inside the written report of this conference it is divulged that: 'During his exposé, M. Pelliot showed to the Academy members a fair number of photographs related to his excavations in Toumchouq and Koutchar (...).'⁶¹

A decade after the official publication *Les grottes de Touen-Houang* and at the request of the organizers of the Mission Citroën mentioned earlier, Pelliot embarked on the compilation of another monograph that incorporated Nouette's photographs entitled *La Haute Asie* [The High Asia].⁶² More focused on the history of Central Asia – thought of as the association of Tibet, Xinjiang, and Mongolia –, the book inserted Nouette's photographs of Dunhuang including detailed captions yet did not make any mention of his name. This exclusion pinpointed a shift in the original narrative and function of the archive. One of the main outcomes following this decision is that Nouette's name would fade into oblivion and would quickly be substituted by the umbrella term *Mission Paul Pelliot* or even misattributed under Pelliot's name. This depersonalization process appeared consistent with the archaeological ideal of a depersonalized vision, in which the author had to disappear as the subject matter presided over.

This generic nomenclature was disseminated in a similar fashion in popular illustrated press. By entering these circles, Nouette's photographs experienced another phenomenon. They moved beyond the rather limited circles of specialized audience to address popular readers. French popular illustrated periodicals covered the Pelliot's expedition news throughout its duration. An illustrative example of this would be *L'Illustration*, which had around ten articles that covered Pelliot's expedition.⁶³ In regards to the article published in March 1910, the editorial team asked Pelliot to summarize his three year journey for the readers, which he did by compiling a summary accompanied by several of Nouette's photographs. They showed landscapes, inside views of the caves, excavated items, group

⁵⁹ Pelliot et al., *Carnets de route*, p. 321.

⁶⁰ The page six of the report states that: 'The photo-engravings published in this report are made after the M. Nouette's photographs, photographer of the Pelliot's expedition'. P. Pelliot, *Trois ans dans la Haute Asie: conférence de M. Paul Pelliot : au grand amphithéâtre de la Sorbonne, le 10 décembre 1909* (Paris, Comité de l'Asie Française, 1910), p. 16.

⁶¹ P. Pelliot, 'Rapport de M. Paul Pelliot sur sa mission au Turkestan chinois (1906-1909),' *Comptes rendus des séances - Académie des inscriptions & belles-lettres* (1910), 62.

⁶² P. Pelliot, *La Haute Asie* (Paris, L'Édition artistique J. Goudard, 1931).

⁶³ *L'Illustration* was the first weekly-illustrated newspaper in France that targeted a bourgeois audience due to its price (75 centimes). Its format and feature articles that sought to supply useful knowledge in light of contemporary news were greatly indebted to its British precursor *The Illustrated London news*. It was founded by Edouard Charton (1807-1890), Adolphe Joanne (1813-1881), Alexandre Paulin (1793-1859), Jean-Jacques Dubochet (?-1868). It ran between 1843 and 1944, and later between 1945 and 1955 under the name of France Illustration. C. Bellanger, J. Godechot, P. Guiral and F. Terrou, *Histoire générale de la presse française : 2* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1969), p. 300.

portraits of the team, Pelliot deciphering manuscripts in cave sixteen, and the newly opened Pelliot room in the Musée du Louvre in Paris. While the captions below images excluded Nouette's name, Pelliot praised his photographic skills within the text:

*The reader of L'Illustration will clearly notice, in particular, what our photographic documentation gained from the presence of a specialist like M. Nouette. (...) The experience of M. Nouette was particularly precious to us. Never an amateur had been able of capturing such beautiful records despite the narrow and dark corridors and the darkened panels with faded tones.*⁶⁴

The diffusion of Nouette's photographs went far beyond French borders and entered the realm of Chinese language periodicals, which reprinted them from time to time from the 1920s-30s onwards. According to the authoritative databases that have comprehensively digitalized late Qing and Republican periodicals, it seems fair to say that the figures of Pelliot and Stein and their respective expeditions' photographic archives dominated images on the theme of archaeology in Chinese illustrated periodicals.⁶⁵ It is not surprising then that articles tended to amalgamate the pictures taken during both missions, or to use Nouette's photographs in articles talking about Stein.⁶⁶ Amongst the Chinese language periodicals in which Nouette's pictures were diffused were one of the best known popular magazines published by the Commercial Press of Shanghai, namely the *Dongfang Zazhi* 東方雜誌 [Eastern Miscellany], which ran between 1904 and 1948; but also the *Xuesheng Zazhi*, *Weimiao sheng*, *Zhongguo yingzao xueshe huikan* [Bulletin of the Society for Research In Chinese Architecture].⁶⁷

The diffusion of Nouette's photographs was accompanied by the translation of Pelliot's texts, enhancing then the overarching impact of this expedition on the Chinese audience.⁶⁸ These types of articles perpetuated the visibility of Nouette's photographs across borders but while the motor of the narrative remained Dunhuang, the original visual narrative became detached from its original operator and original viewing context, with even the naming being altered.

Nouette's photographs have continued to be used and be reprinted up until the present day. Dunhuang studies have perhaps never been as vivid a field as they are today. In particular, over the past few years, old photographs depicting this oasis have attracted a great deal of interest in the international scholarly community. Additionally, the International Dunhuang Project's (IDP) retakes of Stein's photographs for their IDP News Issue no.32 of 2008, and the Dunhuang Academy's exhibition in 2011, together with its subsequent catalogue of early

⁶⁴ Pelliot, 'Trois ans dans la Haute Asie,' p. 262.

⁶⁵ The databases that can be regarded as the most all-encompassing are *Dacheng* 大成 and *Chinese Periodical Full-text Database* 民國時期期刊全文數據庫.

⁶⁶ 'Sitanyin shi yu Dunhuang shishi: Dunhuang Qianfodong quanjing zhi yi jiao,' *Xuesheng Zazhi* no.9 (1930), 34.

⁶⁷ 'Dunhuang de Fojiao yishu,' *Dongfang Zazhi* [The Eastern Miscellany] no.17 (1931), 1; 'Sitanyin shi yu Dunhuang shishi: Dunhuang Qianfodong quanjing zhi yi jiao,' *Xuesheng Zazhi* no.9 (1930), 34; 'Dunhuang Shiku quanjing,' *Weimiao sheng* no.3 (1937), 56; 'Boxihe xiansheng guanyu Dunhuang jianzhu de yi fengxin,' *Zhongguo yingzao xueshe huikan* [Bulletin of the Society for Research In Chinese Architecture] no.4 (1932), 1.

⁶⁸ Many of Pelliot's writings were translated into Chinese mostly one or two decades after his discoveries in Dunhuang. Among the relevant texts: *Dunhuang shishi fang shuji* (Beijing: Guoli Beiping Tushuguan, 1935), which was a translation of his *Une bibliothèque médiévale retrouvée au Kansou*; P. Pelliot and C. Feng, *Xiyu Nanhai shidi kaozheng yi cong* (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1934).

twentieth-century photographs of Dunhuang – including those taken by Nouette – are just two of a wide variety of events that demonstrate the continuing significance attached to photographic archives.⁶⁹

Among later scholarship that has reproduced Nouette's records, one source deserves particular attention: *The Centenary Catalogue of Dunhuang Mogao Caves: Pelliot's pictures of Dunhuang* (敦煌莫高窟百年圖錄：伯希和敦煌圖錄).⁷⁰ These two large volumes published in 2008 offered essentially a catalogue of pictures that juxtaposed before and after photographs, with the older before images being those shot by Nouette. Likely with the intention of demonstrating the changes that have occurred over time, the contemporary images endeavored to recreate as faithfully as possible the old photographs using a similar angle as well as black and white coloring. A small description usually accompanied each plate. Interestingly, the catalogue begins by juxtaposing the same sequence of photographs found in the original publication. However, not all of the plates displayed were contemporary retakes, a fair number of Nouette's photographs occupied either an entire page or are presented in grid pattern.

Such contemporary publications, similarly to other events re-utilizing photographs of Dunhuang, highlight the extent to which scholars are indebted to the production of early photographic archives. If at that time photographs permitted scholars and institutions to rethink respectively their knowledge and collections, today they offer the sole surviving visual records of landscapes or remains that for some have succumbed to the effects of time. On top of that, the shift towards popular audiences reminds one of the contemporary editorial attitude found in the collections entitled *Lao Zhaopian* 老照片 [Old Photographs]. *Lao Zhaopian* is a publication phenomenon that arose in China from the mid-1990s onwards and has provided numerous black and white photographs of people and places, which engendered a pervasive vogue for re-using historical photographs in different creative media in contemporary times.⁷¹

The international interest in Nouette's photographs nowadays has also engendered a greater dispersal of his archive, which has dramatically increased through the digitization process. While the majority of physical photographs are currently held at the Musée Guimet in Paris, several online databases have rendered freely accessible his pictures in digital files.⁷² The most important source, the International Dunhuang Project (IDP) platform supplies the totality of Nouette's photographs of manuscripts in large format alongside detailed captions.⁷³

⁶⁹ 'A Century On: Documenting Archaeological Sites in Xinjiang: Stein's Silk Road Legacy Revisited,' *IDP News* no.32 2008 <http://idp.bl.uk/archives/news32/idpnews_32.a4d> [accessed September 10, 2012].

⁷⁰ B. Zheng and G. Gao, *Dunhuang Mogaoku bainian tulu: Boxihe Dunhuang tulu* (Lanzhou Shi: Gansu renmin chubanshe, 2008). See also the reutilization of Nouette's photographs in: H. Gu, *Shijie De Dunhuang* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2011); P. Pelliot, L. Hambis, K. Riboud, N. Vandier-Nicolas and M. Paul-David, *Mission Paul Pelliot : documents archéologiques publiés sous les auspices de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1961); R. Grousset, *De la Grèce à la Chine* (Monaco: Documents d'art, 1948).

⁷¹ The *Lao Zhaopian* publishing phenomenon has notably been discussed by: W. Hung, *Zooming in: histories of photography in China* (London, Reaktion Books.), 219-249.

⁷² According to the research thus far, the following institutions also possess photographic records of Pelliot's expedition: the Bibliothèque nationale de France (Paris), and the Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art (INHA, Paris). D. Morelon, 'L'image documentaire et ses métamorphoses: les collections photographiques de la bibliothèque de l'INHA,' in *Photo Archives and the Photographic Memory of Art History*, ed. Costanza Caraffa (Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2011), pp. 291.

⁷³ Launched in 1994, the IDP is a collaborative online platform in which international institutions and libraries around the world share knowledge about Dunhuang studies and its latest news. Among the various documents supplied, a comprehensive database encompasses all photographs taken during Pelliot, Stein and other expeditions.

Moreover, the Beijing National Library offered a small online platform presented in Chinese language, gathering slideshows of photographs taken during Pelliot, Stein, Oldenburg, Shi Zhuangru, and Needham's expeditions. Images are grouped by themes ('Cityscapes of Dunhuang', 'Landscapes of Mogao', 'Monastery of Dunhuang', 'The Mogao caves', 'Mogao stupas', 'Miscellaneous'). This database was a by-product of the photographic exhibition organized by the Dunhuang Academy mentioned above. However, the captions and pictures' files are of lesser quality compared to the IDP resource mentioned above.

This shift from classical print-base archive to multimedia storage is emblematic of what has been termed a new 'regime of memory' proper to software cultures.⁷⁴ Digital archives are attempting to offer coherent archiving system to keep traces from the past online. They 'aspire to enhance, complement or substitute the experience of a site or object of historical and/or cultural significance, by making active use of digital computer technologies.'⁷⁵ However digital archives inexorably alter the understanding of the subject matter, which ultimately complicates the reception and study of visual documents.

Conclusion

This paper addressed the impact of photographs produced during campaigns of exploration in Northwest China during the transition period between the last decades of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. Originating from preservation and archaeological concerns, photographic views of ancient sites such as Dunhuang laid the foundation for a specific visual grammar, which was connected to the development of the various branches of science such as archaeology. I have identified this phenomenon through the case study of the *Mission Paul Pelliot*. It involved the preference for specific photographic techniques, the need to produce an abundance of shots while using a variation of angles, a detached labeling system, and an encompassing way of framing the subject matter. I argued that such visual strategies - combined with the global context within which they were inscribed - generated the reputation of a newly discovered place, turning a landscape into a world heritage site. I also mapped out the diverse trajectories of images, giving evidence that pictures went through a wide diffusion. In doing so, I underlined the role of photography in promoting a dialogue and in sharing interest across cultures, despite the irrefutable role of the camera as a technology of colonial expansion.⁷⁶

Photographs created for the sake of scientific disciplines tend to be undervalued materials in current studies about the history of photography in China. However they disclose another way to examine the practices of photography and their social implications. The goal was not to assert any univocal definition of scientific or archaeological photography. Instead, it aimed at offering new direction for the study of historical photography in China by assessing the role of photography in transmitting and transforming perceptions of China's landmarks, and the extent to which they relate to changes in sociocultural, economical and political life during the transition from the mid-nineteenth century to early twentieth centuries.

⁷⁴ Wo. Ernst and J. Parikka, *Digital Memory and the Archive* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), p. 2; 28; 121.

⁷⁵ L. W. MacDonald, *Digital Heritage: Applying Digital Imaging to Cultural Heritage* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2006), p. 448.

⁷⁶ This cross-cultural approach of photography in Asia has been advanced by the art historian Luke Gartlan in several articles, in particular: L. Gartlan, 'Samuel Cocking and the Rise of Japanese Photography,' *History of Photography* 33 2 (2009), 145-164.

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