This richly colored painting depicts Tejaprabha Buddha, or the Buddha of Blazing Lights, seated on an ox-drawn cart and accompanied by the Five Planets in human form. Multicolored rays emanate from Tejaprabha, symbolizing his power over the planets. In his entourage, Mercury is represented as a woman wearing a monkey headdress and holding a brush and paper; Jupiter is seen as a blue-robed official wearing a headdress with a boar and holding flowers; Saturn is in the form of an old Indian man holding a staff; Venus wears white robes with a cock in her headdress and plays a Chinese lute; and finally, Mars is shown with four arms and carrying multiple weapons. The use of gold and deep colors represents one of two major painting styles in China; the other is the style of monochrome ink-line painting seen in Portrait of a Monk, displayed on the wall opposite.

Paintings depicting Tejaprabha Buddha are rare, and this is one of the earliest known depictions of the subject. Discovered in the Library Cave, this painting also relates to the Yuan dynasty (1260–1368) wall paintings in Cave 61.

This portrait, painted in delicate ink lines, shows a monk seated on a prayer mat with his hands in the gesture of meditation. His shoes are lined up in front, and his rosary and bag are suspended from a tree. A kundika vessel used in Buddhist ceremonies to sprinkle water for purification is behind him. Discovered in the Library Cave among a trove of paintings and manuscripts, Portrait of a Monk represents a painting style that relies on monochrome ink and brushwork.

The Library Cave also contains a wall painted with the similar motif of the tree with a suspended bag, though in color, and the setting is elaborated with a pair of trees in full foliage—the kundika hanging from one tree—and two attendants. A Lo Archive photograph shows the empty cave in 1943–44. Current scholarship has determined that a ninth-century sculpted portrait of a monk was originally placed on the low platform in front of the painted background, as shown in a present-day photograph.

The Middle Length Discourses is composed of dialogues between Buddha and his followers that were translated from a longlost Indian original into Chinese in the late fourth century by Samghadeva, a monk from Jibin(present-day Kashmir). Composed of 222 sutras, or discourses, the text was then translated from Chinese into Tibetan, or in this case into Old Uyghur. Reading from top to bottom and left to right, this manuscript was part of an abridged translation. It is interspersed with Chinese terms with explanations following in Old Uyghur. Peculiarities in Old Uyghur orthography and Chinese language usage indicate that this fragment dates to the Mongol Yuan dynasty (1260–1368).
Chinese
probably Yuan dynasty, 1260–1368
Diagram of Fortune of the 3rd, 6th, 9th, and 12th Lunar Months Controlled by the General of Xiayuan (the 15th day of the 10th month)(Xiayuan jiangjun suoguan si jiyue jixiong tu 下元將軍所管四季月吉凶圖)
Manuscript; Old Uyghur (old Turkic) script
Fragment; ink on paper
mounted: unknown
East Asian Library, Princeton University
This hybrid document with Daoist overtones comprises three joined fragments. The largest, at left, contains a calendrical divination diagram generally corresponding to one in the Record of the Jade Case (Yuxiaji 玉匣記), a popular divination almanac that combines Daoist, Buddhist, and folk elements. The almanac records the days when various deities descend to earth, so that the proper prayers can be performed. Since it would have been translated from Chinese into Old Uyghur, this fragment indicates that a Chinese original of the text must have existed in the Yuan dynasty, predating the earliest surviving Chinese language edition (1433). The small fragment at lower left does not belong to this text and should be replaced with one found in Cave 157, currently in the collection of the Dunhuang Academy. At right, a third fragment in Old Uyghur is joined upside down. The reverse side of each fragment is printed with a Buddhist text in Tangut script.

Chinese
Yuan dynasty, 1260–1368
Flower Garland Sutra (Huayan jing 華嚴經; Skt. Avataśokāstra), vol. 77, with seal of the monk Guanzhuba (bKa’gyur, act. 1302), 14th century
Printed; Xixia script with Chinese stamped on lower half of column 5 from right
Fragment; ink on paper
mounted: 29 × 12 cm (11 7/16 × 4 3/4 in.)
East Asian Library, Princeton University
The interaction of several peoples and cultures is evident in this printed text, which comes from a Tangut language version of the Buddhist Flower Garland Sutra. Tangut was an extinct, but now partially deciphered, Sino-Tibetan language that was spoken in the Tangut kingdom or Western Xia (Xixia) dynasty (1038–1227) in northwestern China. The Tangut script, based on Chinese and Khitan models, is a graphic writing system that was devised under official supervision in the 1030s. Stamped at lower left is a Chinese seal belonging to the Tangut or Tibetan official Guanzhuba, who was charged with the registry of Buddhist clergy in Songjiang prefecture in southeastern China. According to a Chinese colophon to a Tangut text found at Dunhuang, Guanzhuba oversaw the printing of numerous Buddhist texts in Chinese, Tangut, and Tibetan script.

Chinese
Song dynasty, 960–1279
Illustration of Avalokiteśvara, probably 11th–12th century
Manuscript; Old Uyghur (Old Turkic) language and script
Fragment; ink on paper
mounted: 21 × 28 cm (8 1/4 × 11 in.)
East Asian Library, Princeton University
Images on painted banners and wall paintings in the Dunhuang caves can be compared with drawings and stamped images on paper scrolls. Drawn in ink lines on this fragment is the head and upper torso of Avalokiteśvara, the Goddess of Mercy, who is known in Chinese as the bodhisattva Guanyin. Venerated in Mahāyāna Buddhism, the bodhisattva is often depicted holding a willow branch and with a tiny Amitābha Buddha in his/her crown. According to the Lotus Sutra he/she is able to take on many forms in order to help others reach enlightenment. At left is a line in Old Uyghur script reading, “The Buddha said . . .” that probably comes from the Lotus Sutra. On the reverse is handwritten Chinese from the same scripture.
Tibetan
Buddhist prayer, before 14th century
Manuscript; Tibetan "headless" (dbu med) script
Fragment; ink on paper
mounted: unknown
East Asian Library, Princeton University

Tibetan military strength grew in the Dunhuang region during the seventh century, and the city fell under
Tibetan rule in 786. Strong Tibetan support for Buddhism ensured that the Mogao Caves were preserved and
Buddhist texts promulgated. Even after the local Chinese warlord Zhang Yichao retook the area in 848,
Tibetan cultural influence continued—as is reflected in this Tibetan manuscript, a fragment of a Buddhist
prayer that emphasizes the concept of “non-attached awareness” (chogs med ye shes). Written horizontally
from left to right in “headless” script, the old orthography of the manuscript suggests that it was produced
before the fourteenth century.

An artist’s rendering of Procession of Zhang Yichao, from Cave 156 is on display nearby (2013-105).

Chinese
probably Tang dynasty, 618–907
Sutra Spoken by the Buddha on the Names of the Buddhas (Foshuo foming jing 佛衆佛名經; Skt.
Buddhabhāśita-buddhanāma-sūtra), chapter 4
Fragment; ink on paper
mounted: 35.5 × 16.2 cm (14 × 6 3/8 in.)
East Asian Library, Princeton University

This fragment of text belongs to the Sutra Spoken by the Buddha on the Names of the Buddhas, a scripture
translated into Chinese during the Northern Wei dynasty (386–534). The translator was Bodhiruchi (died 527),
a Buddhist monk from northern India who went to the Chinese city of Luoyang where he translated 127
scrolls. The text is written on a light tan paper with ruled guidelines for the calligraphy, and the upper margin
is repeatedly stamped with the image of the Buddha seated on a lotus. Pictographic seals were used in China
since the Shang period (16th–12th century B.C.), and it is likely that small wooden stamps were used to print
the image of the Buddha.

Chinese
Tang dynasty, 618–907
Examination paper, reused for the upper part of a funeral shoe
Fragment; ink on paper
mounted: 49 × 51 cm (19 5/16 × 20 1/16 in.)
East Asian Library, Princeton University

The earliest example of paper in China survives from as early as a.d. 200 at a site not far from Dunhuang in
Fangmatan 扶馬灘, Gansu province. Used for wrapping, mapmaking, and writing, paper was a valuable
commodity that was often reused. Different texts were added to the reverse side, or in the case of this sheet,
the paper was recut to serve as the upper part of a funeral shoe. This fragment of a Tang dynasty
examination paper has lines written in Chinese characters from the Confucian classics the Spring and Autumn
Annals and the Analects. Changes and corrections are evident along with a teacher's notation in two locations
marked with the character “Pass!” (tong 通), enlarged and in bold. While the caves are most commonly
associated with Buddhism, manuscript fragments also signal the presence of Confucian, Daoist, secular, and
Western cultural influences.
The Garland of Legends is a collection of stories focusing on the workings of karmic action and the efficacy of Buddhist faith and devotion. This fragment is probably a tenth-century translation from a text written in Tocharian A, an extinct Indo-European language that itself was translated from a version in Tocharian B. Beginning at left, the text describes a teacher and pupil discussing Buddhist ethical “courses of action.” It is likely from Chapter 9, which deals with the offense of anger. The illustration at right may belong to Chapter 10, in which a young prince, who sleeps with his father’s concubines, falsely accuses his mother of having slept with another man. The enraged king has his wife put into a hollow tree trunk that is twirled around. In the story’s introduction, the king’s anger is compared to wild poisonous snakes, which may correspond to the depiction of two people entwined with a large serpent.

Many pictorial fragments without inscriptions have been recovered from the Dunhuang area. Others, such as the Garland of Legends which Pertain to the Ten Courses of Actions on display here, accompany written texts, demonstrating a close narrative or iconographic relationship between image and text. These pictorial fragments—together with imagery found in surviving cave wall and banner paintings—provide a lens on artistic practice and style at Dunhuang through the ages. The two separate yet related traditions of color painting with ink outlines and monochrome ink-line painting are also represented in these fragments and can be compared with the color painting Tejaprabha Buddha and the Five Planets and the ink-line Portrait of a Monk, both on view in this gallery.
Chinese
Tang dynasty, 618–907
Anonymous
Perfection of Great Wisdom Sutra (Daborebolumiduo jing 大般若波羅蜜多經; Skt. Mahāprajñāparamitā-sūtra), chi 329, 8th–early 9th century
Handscroll; ink on sutra paper
Colophon: 16 x 3 cm. (6 5/16 x 1 3/16 in.)
Painting (Frontispiece): 25.7 x 21.7 cm. (10 1/8 x 8 9/16 in.)
overall height 25.8 w. with knobs 29.5
Calligraphy: 20.3 x 662.7 cm. (8 x 260 7/8 in.)
Mount: h. 25.8 cm. (10 3/16 in.)

The Tang dynasty was a highpoint for the translation of Indian Buddhist scriptures into Chinese, and many of the new translations found their way to Dunhuang. One of the most transcribed was the Perfection of Great Wisdom Sutra in six hundred chapters. This was an encyclopedic collection of texts that is said to have been translated by Xuanzang (died 664), a Chinese monk who journeyed to India via Dunhuang, returning with hundreds of Buddhist texts.

Because of damage or loss, a painting and calligraphy on old paper have been added to the beginning of this scroll to give an impression of completeness. The outer paper wrapper and wood roller were newly added in Japan. The final line at far left bears a genuine signature of a person named Li Yi. Forged characters added above and below the signature supply a false date of 674 and identify Li as a collator from Haiyan (in presentday Qinghai province).

Chinese
Southern and Northern Dynasties, 386–589
Anonymous
Sutra on [the Buddha's] Entering [the Country of] Lanka (Lengjia jing 阿彌陀經; Skt. Loṅkāvatāra-sūtra), 6th century
Handscroll; ink on sutra paper
Calligraphy: 26.2 x 593.0 cm. (10 5/16 x 233 7/16 in.)
Mount: h. 26 cm. (10 1/4 in.)

Dunhuang acted as a center for the exchange of cultural material and ideas. While paper, printing, and precious silk headed westward along the Silk Road, cotton and religious systems, including Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, Nestorianism, Judaism, and emerging Islam, spread into China. Translations of Indian texts associated with Mahāyāna (literally the Great Vehicle) Buddhism explaining how our human experience is constructed in the mind were first introduced to China in the early fifth century. Among these was the Sutra on Entering Lanka that would influence many schools of Buddhism across Asia, including Chan Buddhism. Wound tightly around its original wood roller, the paper material of this handscroll is typical of the Dunhuang scrolls from the late Southern and Northern Dynasties period. Also characteristic of this period are horizontal and vertical ink guidelines that have faded at the front (right) but are still visible near the back (left) of the scroll.
Chinese
Tang dynasty, 618–907
Anonymous
colophon to 1998-123 b: Li Ruiqing 李瑞清, 1867 - 1920
Perfection of Great Wisdom Sutra (Daboreboluomiduo jing 大般若波羅蜜多經; Skt. Mahāprajñāparamitā-sūtra), chi 73–74, 8th–9th century
Pair of handscrolls; ink on sutra paper
Scroll A:
Frontispiece: 26.9 x 81 cm. (10 9/16 x 31 7/8 in.)
Sutra text: 27.3 x 92.6 cm. (10 3/4 x 36 7/16 in.)
Colophon: 29.7 x 15 cm. (11 11/16 x 5 7/8 in.)
Mount: h. 32.3 cm. (12 11/16 in.)

Scroll B:
Frontispiece: 19.3 x 17.9 cm. (7 5/8 x 7 1/16 in.)
Sutra text: 27.7 x 237.5 cm. (10 7/8 x 93 1/2 in.)
Colophons: 27.7 x 237.5 cm. (10 7/8 x 93 1/2 in.)
Mount: h. 33.4 cm. (13 1/8 in.)

As promoted in the teachings of the Mahāyāna school of Buddhism, the Perfection of Wisdom sought complete release from the world of existence and offered a way to enlightenment through wisdom, which dispels the blindness of sensory illusion to reveal things as they really are. The Perfection of Wisdom Sutras (prajñāparamitā-sūtra) is a class of literature focusing on this pursuit. Here, the Perfection of Great Wisdom Sutra is the Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā prajñāparamitā-sūtra in 25,000 lines as translated into Chinese by Kumārajīva (343–413), a Buddhist monk from Kucha, which lies to the west along the northern Silk Route. This pair of handscrolls contains numerous inscriptions by modern collectors.

This text should not be confused with an encyclopedic collection of Mahāyānist texts of the same title, an example of which is also on display.

Chinese
Three Kingdoms period, Wu Kingdom, 222 - 280
Suo Dan 索紞, ca. 250 - ca. 325
Daode jing 道德经, chapters 51–81, 270
Handscroll (fragment); ink on paper
Calligraphy: 30.8 x 208.2 cm. (12 1/8 x 81 15/16 in.)
Colophons: 30.8 x 524.4 cm. (12 1/8 x 206 7/16 in.)
Mount: h. 30.8 cm. (12 1/8 in.)

Suo Dan was from a Dunhuang family whose ancestors had been famous calligraphers. This fragment of the ancient Daoist classic the Laozi, or Daode jing, was reportedly found in the cache of manuscripts and paintings in the hidden Library Cave that was only discovered in 1900. Dated 270, it may be one of the earliest Dunhuang documents recovered, even predating the building of the first caves in the fourth century. As such, the Suo Dan fragment not only signals the practice of Daoism in this remote area but also raises questions about the nature of the early caves.

Although other Daoist fragments have been retrieved at Dunhuang, the authenticity of the Suo Dan manuscript remains controversial. This is partly because the scroll is dated using a reign title belonging to a kingdom that did not govern Dunhuang in 270. Recent scholarship provides evidence of such deliberate use of incorrect reign titles as acts of loyalty or protest. If genuine, the Suo Dan scroll is an important document in the philological history of the Laozi and is equally important in the history of calligraphy.
The procession of General Zhang Yichao appears at the bottom of Cave 156’s south wall, opposite his wife’s procession, and is presented in three distinct sections. The first, closest to the Buddha statue in the west wall, depicts the cavalry troops of Zhang’s army. Interspersed among the mounted soldiers are dancers and musicians on foot. The second section contains a portrait of Zhang. Portrayed larger than the figures surrounding him, Zhang is mounted on a white horse and followed by troops belonging to his clan. The final section of the painting includes scenes of hunting, with pack animals such as camels and mules. The procession’s composition clearly conveys Zhang Yichao’s high military position and political status. The image also reveals much about Chinese military organization during the middle of the ninth century, including arms and armor, troop arrangements, and the movement of provisions and supplies.

Appearing in the bottom register of the north wall of Cave 156, the painting of Lady Song’s procession is similar in structure to her husband’s but differs in a few details. The first section is located closest to the Buddha statue in the west wall, and it features groups of entertainers, including dancers, musicians, and acrobats. In the middle section Lady Song, like her husband, is depicted riding a white horse, although she is accompanied by nine female companions also on horseback. They carry objects for her pleasure, such as toiletry cases and incense burners. Like Zhang Yichao in his painting, Lady Song is shown larger than the surrounding figures, underscoring her social importance. The final section mirrors that of her husband’s painting and portrays hunters as well as camels bearing luggage. Lady Song’s procession provides a rare glimpse of the trappings of elite life during the Tang dynasty (618–907).
The various ancient trading routes known collectively as the Silk Road passed through soaring mountains and vast deserts. Only one means of conveyance was possible in such terrain, the camel. The species most commonly seen along the Silk Road was the two-humped Bactrian camel. These animals are often depicted in ceramic form. The two on display here (y1950-92 and y1950-93) are laden with tent poles, satchels, and drinking bottles, accoutrements necessary for long journeys.

**Exterior of the Mogao Caves at Dunhuang**, 1943–44
Inkjet print from a digital file, exhibition copy
image: 24.6 × 37.5 cm (9 11/16 × 14 3/4 in.)
The Lo Archive
Five Dynasties, 907–960
*Mogao Cave 98, 1943–44*
Inkjet print from a digital file, exhibition copy
image: 25.1 × 37.5 cm (9 7/8 × 14 3/4 in.)
The Lo Archive

Sui dynasty, 589–618
*Mogao Cave 393, 1943–44*
Inkjet print from a digital file, exhibition copy
image: 37.5 × 25 cm (14 3/4 × 9 13/16 in.)
The Lo Archive

Sui dynasty to early Tang dynasty, 589–704
*Mogao Cave 397, 1943–44*
Inkjet print from a digital file, exhibition copy
image: 37.5 × 27.8 cm (14 3/4 × 10 15/16 in.)
The Lo Archive

High Tang dynasty, 705–780
*Ceiling, Mogao Cave 387, 1943–44*
Inkjet print from a digital file, exhibition copy
image: 27.6 × 37.5 cm (10 7/8 × 14 3/4 in.)
The Lo Archive

Early Tang dynasty, 618–704
*Mogao Cave 205, 1943–44*
Inkjet print from a digital file, exhibition copy
image: 37.5 × 24.9 cm (14 3/4 × 9 13/16 in.)
The Lo Archive

Yuan dynasty, 1260–1368
*Mogao Cave 465, 1943–44*
Inkjet print from a digital file, exhibition copy
image: 24.8 × 37.5 cm (9 3/4 × 14 3/4 in.)
The Lo Archive