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Langdon Warner at Dunhuang: What Really Happened?

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From 1923 to 1925, Harvard art historian Langdon Warner led two separate expeditions to the Thousand-Buddha Caves (*qianfodong* 千佛洞) at Dunhuang 敦煌, in the far northwestern corner of China's Gansu 甘肅 province. The goals of both expeditions were simple: to procure a modest stockpile of Asian art and artifacts so as to assist in the development of the "Oriental collections" of the fledgling Fogg Museum, and to encourage "advanced studies in Far Eastern art and archaeology" at Harvard University (Bowie 1966, p. 106). The expeditions themselves, however, coming as they did on the tail end of the heyday of Western and Japanese excavations in northwestern China, have come to be regarded as something less than a success for their undertakers. The material harvest of the first expedition, leaving behind the scars of Warner's makeshift removal techniques, elicited a "lukewarm reaction" among his colleagues in Cambridge and failed to impress prominent art collectors in Boston (Balachandran 2007, p. 16). As for the second, more infamous expedition to Dunhuang in 1925, even Warner himself readily conceded that it had been something of a fiasco, as the Americans were forced to exit China with little more than photographs (Bowie 1966, p. 130).

The Fogg Museum expeditions to Dunhuang in the mid-1920s signaled the first time a foreign scholar encountered insurmountable obstacles to his expedition in China. It comes as something of a surprise, then, to find that so few scholars have attempted to understand just why Warner met with such an ignominious end. Much of this complacency stems from the fact that Warner himself was quick to establish his own "authoritative" version of the events, first made public in his book, *The Long Old Road in China* (1926a). For one reason or another, Warner's narrative, embellished further in his *Buddhist Wall-Paintings: A Study of a Ninth-Century Grotto at Wan Fo Hsia* (1938), has tended to be accepted by later historians at face value. For Theodore Bowie, a former colleague and editor of *Langdon Warner Through His Letters* (1966), Warner's tales of Chinese perfidy and xenophobia served to rehabilitate well-meaning Western scholars whose reputations had suffered through the long decades of decolonization. For Peter Hopkirk, whose *Foreign Devils Along the Silk Road* (1980) introduced an entire new generation of scholars and armchair travelers to the romance and intrigue of Western archaeological adventurers, Warner represented the hubris of the Western imperialist enterprise. Though all Euro-Americans still set out with what they believed were good intentions, their unprecedented achievements had ultimately blinded them to the realization that they could not dictate the terms of their craft forever.

Over the past decade, Western expeditions in pursuit of antiquities in colonial and semi-colonial lands — invariably carried out in the name of science — have garnered significant scholarly attention (see, for example, Reid 2002, Hevia 2007, Balachandran 2007, Goode 2007, Colla 2007, Pettitt 2007, Heaney 2010). More often than not, however, these studies are more concerned with drawing theoretical connections among transnational "cultural imperialisms" writ large than in revisiting the empirical evidence of the expeditions themselves. Recent articles by Sanchita Balachandran (2007) and this author (Jacobs 2010) both illustrate this trend with regard to the Warner expeditions: while Balachandran seldom shies away from condemning the haughty sense of entitlement Warner exhibited as an agent of Western imperialism, I pass similar judgment on Warner's nationalist counterparts in China, whom I portray as engaged in a comparable enterprise of cultural and intellectual disenfranchisement directed toward their own subalterns. Though both authors do make use of a novel empirical source base, such evidence is treated more as a means to a theoretical or ideological end rather than a tool with which to revise the received narrative of the Warner expeditions themselves.

A different perspective can be gained by looking more closely at Warner's version of events, along with evidence, long available, which his influential public narrative has distorted. In 1926, the same year that Warner published *The Long Old Road in China*, Chen Wanli 陳萬里, a Chinese member of the second expedition (Fig. 1), published his own record of the party's journey to Dunhuang just one year previously. Over the ensuing nine decades since the appearance of Chen's *Diary of Westward Travels* (*Xixing riji* 西行日記),

Fig. 1. Chen Wanli in a photo taken by one of the American members of the expedition. After: *Chen 1926, p. 3.*

however, not a single scholar has attempted to compare Chen's version of events to that of Warner. This is all the more remarkable in light of the fact that Warner himself accused Chen of nothing less than treason toward the Americans, a charge repeated by nearly every Western scholar who has had reason to examine Warner's fate in China (see, for example, Bowie 1966, p. 129; Hopkirk 1980, p. 225; Balanchandran 2007, p. 20).[1] Publicly, Warner wrote in the introduction to his *Buddhist Wall-Paintings* (1938, pp. xiv–xv) that Chen later published a book that "explains his association with the Americans as being for the express purpose of keeping track of their actions and preventing them from marauding. He further took the trouble to attempt to cast discredit on the characters of my party in a way that is perhaps worth a flat denial from me." In a private letter to the British archaeologist Aurel Stein, however, Warner referred not to a slanderous book but rather to "a series of articles about his amazing adventures with the foreigners," in which Chen attributes "to my young assistants the vilest motives" (Warner 1926b).

Chen's book has sat gathering dust in the libraries of several prominent American universities for nearly a century. Why has no one thought to pick it up to see whether or not Warner's accusations were warranted? The answer, I believe, is to be found in Warner's deliberate attempts to absolve himself of responsibility for his failures in China by distorting the historical record to make it appear as if forces beyond his control were ultimately responsible for the scant return his donors received on their investment. In this regard, Warner was extremely fortunate that the second expedition partially overlapped with one of the cardinal events in the narrative of modern Chinese nationalism: the May 30, 1925 incident in Shanghai, when British soldiers opened fire upon unarmed Chinese protesters, resulting in numerous fatalities. Never mind that news of the bloodshed in Shanghai did not reach Warner's party in northwestern Gansu until they had already completed most of their survey work at Wanfoxia 萬佛峽 (Myriad Buddha Gorge; what is now known as *Yulin ku* 榆林窟 "Yulin Grottoes"), or that the Americans had departed from Dunhuang a full week before the May 30th incident broke out. The much publicized anti-foreign backlash occasioned by the tragedy, harnessed to great rhetorical effect by the nascent Nationalist and Communist parties, offered Warner an airtight alibi that few Westerners would think to question.

Just one year after his ignominious retreat, Warner had already begun to conflate the May 30th incident with the troubles experienced by the second Fogg Museum expedition in China. In his conclusion to *The Long Old Road in China* (1926) — a book chiefly concerned with the slightly more successful first expedition — Warner alluded to that which would bedevil him on the second:

> I could not guess that in a short seven months the whole Chinese nation was to stir in its sleep and yawn so portentously that all we foreigners would be scuttling back to our Legations. … *But in those months of the first return from the border, the Shanghai shooting* and the marchings and countermarchings of Feng and Chang and Wu were not guessed. We had no idea of *the serious troubles a few months were to bring forth*. [Warner 1926a, pp. 149–50, emphases mine]

This is a gross misrepresentation of the course of events that preceded the second expedition. The first expedition returned to Beijing in the spring of 1924. For Warner to suggest that the "Shanghai shootings" occurred in those amorphous "months of the first return from the border" (or, as he puts it in the following sentence, in the space of "a few months") is deliberately to mislead his readers into thinking that the May 30th incident happened at some point in the second half of 1924, at least half a year—if not more—before its actual date. In *Buddhist Wall-Paintings* (1938), Warner strengthened this misperception by declaring that

their time in the northwest coincided with the death of "Old China," and that "nowhere were we welcome and seldom were we tolerated by the people, and little of our mission could be accomplished" (p. xv).

In his popular treatment of Warner's expedition, read by nearly every student of Western archaeological expeditions, Peter Hopkirk (1980) falls headlong into the trap of misinformation set by his protagonist. In painting the backdrop for Warner's return to China in 1925, Hopkirk contextualizes everything that occurred in the course of the second expedition in light of the May 30th incident, something that "no one could have foreseen." Hopkirk then takes to new literary heights what Warner had merely viewed as a pragmatic alibi:

> A wave of anger against foreigners swept across China. Warner, who had recently arrived in Peking at the head of a larger expedition, reported: 'News of the Shanghai shooting on that day travelled like wild-fire through the interior.' Missionaries and other foreigners in remote stations had to be evacuated. When Warner's party reached Tun-huang, where they had planned to work for eight months, they were met by a menacing mob of peasant farmers – the same people who had welcomed Warner the previous year. [p. 223]

Faced with such compelling "evidence" of cause and effect, few scholars chose to question Warner's accusations of sabotage and slander against Chen Wanli. Of course Chen was a spy. How else could the leaders of a prestigious American expedition from Harvard have made such an egregious miscalculation regarding their fate in China, unless Chinese treachery was involved? In a letter to Stein, Warner, who spent all of one week together with Chen, wrote about the latter that "almost to the end he was aloof & suspicious," and that he "never really believed that we would keep our word about not removing the treasures" (Warner 1926b). Those scholars inclined to look askance upon Western expeditions to China and instead sympathize with the vague "winds of nationalism" described by Hopkirk, need only reinterpret Chinese "perfidy" as "heroism," and depict Chen or his Chinese colleagues in Beijing as the protagonists of the story.

Warner's first expedition to Dunhuang (1923–24), in which he removed a dozen wall paintings from the Thousand-Buddha Caves, did not bring him the measure of acclaim for which he had hoped. It was, however, considered just enough of a "success" to help secure funding for a second, much larger expedition, intended to bring back even more paintings and antiquities for the Fogg Museum. Whereas the first expedition consisted only of Warner and his colleague Horace Jayne, Curator of Oriental Art at the Pennsylvania Museum in Philadelphia (now the Philadelphia Museum of Art), the second expedition included five additional young men who brought with them technical expertise in various aesthetic specialties. Once in Beijing, Warner was asked to take along as a traveling companion Chen Wanli, of the Peking University 北京大學 School of Medicine. "They begged me to have him go along," he later wrote to Stein, "and, though I wasn't anxious to take him, I felt that if they wanted a spy on my actions I could best show my good faith by taking him with me. If they did not, he could do no harm" (1926b). Bowie, however, citing Warner's correspondence from his time in Beijing, concludes that Warner was "highly pleased because he counted on Dr. Ch'en to help interpret some of the very difficult inscriptions found on many of the wall paintings" (1966, p. 126).

For most of the second expedition's time in China, Warner was physically separated from the rest of his party. While Warner stayed behind in Beijing to attend to other matters, Horace Jayne set forth with the rest of the expedition members, ultimately putting about three weeks' distance between the vanguard party and its putative leader. Thus, Warner's understanding of the troubles the rest of the party encountered en route to Dunhuang was mediated almost entirely through telegrams and letters sent to him by Jayne. Until Jayne and the others reached Dunhuang, the only warning signs came during courtesy calls to local officials, who warmly reminisced with the Americans about their first expedition, but also warned both Jayne and Warner that they were not to remove anything from the Thousand-Buddha Caves this time around (Bowie 1966, p. 127). Then, suddenly, just days shy of Dunhuang, Warner was met unexpectedly on the road by Jayne, who had returned from the Thousand-Buddha Caves with the sole purpose of calling off Warner's advance. It is at this point that Warner's narrative — apparently based on Jayne's reports, since Warner never actually made it to Dunhuang during the second expedition — begins to make for riveting reading. "They have been under heavy guard," he wrote to his wife, "forced to come back 4 hours to town each night and an angry crowd outside the inn gates each time. They will not let us live at the caves nor take flashlights." The threat of violence was apparently pervasive. "The crowd are waiting at Anhsi 3 days from here," he noted, "whence we go to Wan Fo Hsia—the smaller group" (Bowie 1966, p. 128).

In describing his time at Wanfoxia, the only site of survey at which Warner was actually present, Warner would ultimately put forth several dramatically different versions of what transpired. In his 1938 preface to *Buddhist Wall-Paintings*, Warner described a situation "of extreme delicacy on account of the presence

of a dozen villagers who had left their ordinary employments, some fifteen miles off, to watch our movements and to try by a thousand expedients to tempt us into a breach of the peace which would warrant an attack or forcible expulsion from the region." According to Warner, "it took unwearying politeness in the face of nagging, treachery, and even open hostility, to avoid physical violence" (pp. xiii–xiv). In letters actually penned during his stay at the Gorge, however, Warner only noted the presence of "sulky villagers" and an "egregious" $200 fine levied by the local magistrate upon his carter, "whose horse is said to have eaten that amount of young wheat" (Bowie 1966, p. 129). Seemingly reinforcing these impressions of only modest tribulations is Warner's 1926 letter to Stein. Though he begins by outlining, in great detail, the party's allegedly rough treatment at Dunhuang, Warner says almost nothing about any difficulties he experienced at Wanfoxia, mentioning only that they visited the Gorge "under guard" (Warner 1926b).

It is, however, the expedition's treatment at Dunhuang that is most associated with Warner's name in China. For the life of him, Warner simply could not understand what he may have done wrong on his earlier visit to elicit such antipathy from the locals. He told Stein that he believed he was in "particularly good odour" when he departed the caves just one year earlier. "The magistrate dined & wined me & prominent citizens saw me on my road with ceremony." Warner even confided to Stein that he had "made a point of telling the magistrate what I [had] done & also telling him that I had seen no scrolls." Thus, both the magistrate and Dunhuang's "prominent citizens" knew what he had done, and they did not seem to care. So why were his colleagues "mobbed at Tun Huang & forbidden the caves" upon their return, and why did they have to be "protected from the populace"? Though he and Jayne "searched our souls, we can find no action of ours which could have excited the people." Warner's confession, repeated in various forms in other letters, appears distinctly odd in light of an earlier paragraph included in the exact same letter to Stein:

> My visit had become a sort of sun myth. They showed Jayne whole hillsides from which I was said to have blasted the chapels. There had been a drought & a partial famine for which I was held responsible and my flash-light photographs had gravely offended the Gods. So far as the truth can be pried out my modest tls. 75., presented to the priest, had grown to $100,000. … Your visit & Pelliot's & mine were by this time grown into huge bandit expeditions & all foreigners were suspect. [Warner 1926b]

In other words, Warner knew exactly what had happened. The peasants of Dunhuang — stricken by a famine, starving, and mired in poverty — had channeled their frustrations toward Warner's blasphemous activities at the Thousand-Buddha Caves, still an active site of worship for them. Warner, it seems, was right to assume that Stein was liable to "blame me for lack of tact & for making foreigners unwelcome in Western Kansu." For Stein had long ago made careful note of the world of difference that obtained when conducting excavations at long-abandoned sites of Buddhist worship in Muslim Xinjiang versus those in China proper, where the Buddhist gods still claimed the pious attentions of their flocks. In the eyes of the locals, removing previously unknown manuscripts and artwork from a secret cave library — as Stein, Pelliot, Otani, and Chinese officials had done — was simply not the same as peeling away the venerated paintings of their visible and public gods.

Warner, the art historian from Harvard, could not publicly admit that one of the first American expeditions to Dunhuang had been thwarted by a bunch of hungry, superstitious peasants. Far better if he could blame an insidious Chinese conspiracy, fanned by the flames of "blind" post-May 30th nationalism. Mainland Chinese historians, however, intrigued by the "peasant mobs" described by Warner, have long been permitted—in accordance with the dictates of Marxist scholarship — to embrace these "organic protectors of China's national heritage" (Liu and Meng 2000, p. 119), so long as they were glossed in a nationalist light. This impulse to interpret the fate of the second Fogg Expedition within a nationalist framework, first evident in Warner's temporal manipulation of the May 30th incident, gained a second lease on life in 1987, with the publication of William Hung's memoirs. In 1978, Hung (Hong Ye 洪業), Dean of Yenching University 燕京大學 at the time of the second Fogg Expedition, revealed to his biographer that he had been responsible for the expedition's tribulations at Dunhuang and Wanfoxia. To hear Hung tell it, the Chinese interpreter from Warner's first expedition, Wang Jinren 王近仁, came to see him one night after he learned that Warner had returned to China and was planning a second trip to the northwest. After hearing what Warner had done the first time around, Hung sprang into action:

> He instructed Wang Chin-jen to go ahead with the trip and act as if nothing was happening. The next morning, Hung went to see the Vice Minister of Education Ch'in Fen [Qin Fen 秦汾], who took immediate action. Ch'in sent a telegram to every governor, district magistrate, and police commissioner along the way to Tun-huang, saying that very soon, a delegation from a great institution

> in America would be coming for archaeological study. He instructed the local authorities to provide these friends with ample protection and courteous treatment, but on no account allow them to touch any historical relics. [Chan 1987, p. 114].

A close reading of Chen's diary, to which we will turn in a moment, appears to confirm Hung's claims. During a conversation with the local police warden of Dunhuang, Chen was told that "the offices of the Defense Commissioner and Circuit Intendant both have multiple secret orders (*dieyou miling* 疊有密令) that compel them to act in such a manner" (Chen 1926, p. 92). Thus, Hung clearly managed to get the Vice-Minister to send out the telegram in question. But was Hung moved to action purely out of selfless, patriotic motives? Just as Warner managed to portray his acute humiliation as one of the first casualties of Chinese nationalism — rather than ignorant peasants — there is reason to suspect that Hung, too, may have engaged in precisely the sort of rhetorical sleight of hand as did his erstwhile nemesis. The only difference was that Hung was claiming a retroactive role for himself as a champion of Chinese nationalism, rather than (as Warner depicted himself) its victim. As a self-proclaimed "latter-day Confucian," Hung would have been just as loath as Warner to give any credit to the superstitious peasants of Dunhuang for foiling the American Goliath.

The key to unraveling the seductive logic of Hung's narrative lies in the recognition that the real Chen Wanli bears no resemblance whatsoever to the slanderous profile that Warner tried so hard to foist upon him. To grasp the implications of this for our understanding of William Hung's motives, we must first prove that Chen was, in fact, not the spy of Warner's vivid imagination. To do so, we need turn no further than the opening lines of Chen's supposedly "slanderous book," his *Diary of Westward Travels*:

> In the spring of 1925, thanks to the introduction provided by Mr. [John Calvin] Ferguson and the generous assistance of [Langdon] Warner and [Horace] Jayne, I received the opportunity to accompany the members of an American archaeological expedition to Dunhuang in order to conduct the first-ever on-site survey for my university's Graduate School of Sinology and its Committee on Archaeology. For me, it was an unforgettable trip that I had longed to undertake for more than a decade. Even though [our time at Dunhuang] lasted less than three days, the joy and happiness I experienced are simply indescribable. [Chen 1926, p. 1]

Nowhere in his diary does Chen betray even the slightest knowledge of a plot to sabotage the expedition, even though he prepared his diary for publication within a political climate that would have made it quite advantageous for him to do so. Moreover, at various points throughout the diary, Chen refers to his American colleagues as his "friends," and on one notable occasion even expresses "deep remorse" for failing to protect his "friends" from "several hours of terror" brought about by "greedy" and unruly peasants in southeastern Gansu (p. 39).

Perhaps the clearest indication of Chen's pro-American sympathies, however, is to be found in his numerous expressions of regret at his inability to fulfill the scientific mission entrusted to him by his colleagues, both American and Chinese. Upon arrival at Dunhuang, Chen writes that it is "not without regret that I will now have to cancel entirely my original plans to carry out a survey of the Western Lake region near the village of Yangguan" (p. 89). When his time at the caves was cut short after less than three days by Jayne's decision to return to Anxi 安西 and intercept Warner before he reached Dunhuang, Chen notes how he lost out on the chance to visit some fifty remaining caves. He also ran out of time to return to numerous other caves that he had hoped to photograph. All this was "truly cause for enormous regret" (p. 94). On his return to Beijing, Chen notes that all his friends "regarded my experience as an impressive journey." In his own eyes, however, the "lack of any accomplishments whatsoever" instead filled him with "great shame and a sense of guilt" (p. 134).

Thus, when authorities at Peking University expressed shock and surprise at the obstruction of the expedition at Dunhuang, they were not — as Warner angrily asserted — engaged in a "masterpiece of shameless evasion" (Bowie 1966, p. 128). Quite the contrary: for Chen and his Chinese colleagues, the expedition's severely circumscribed stay at Dunhuang was every bit as much a professional tragedy as it was for Warner and the Americans. And while Chen and his university peers readily identified Warner as the chief cause of the expedition's troubles — a fact privately conceded by both Warner and Jayne themselves — they did not *blame* Warner for his role as a lightning rod. Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛, one of the most famous intellectuals of the day, wrote in his preface to Chen's diary that "the malice of the locals toward Westerners" was an "enormous cause for regret" (Chen, 1926, p. 3). But both he and Chen went out of their way to make it clear that the only people who should be held accountable for what had transpired were the ignorant residents of Dunhuang —not Warner. Reflecting on the considerable damage visited upon the caves by the residence of White Russian sol-

diers in 1921, Chen expressed befuddlement toward the reception of the expedition just four years later. "I simply cannot understand," Chen wrote, "how the people of Dunhuang, having exhibited such startling stupidity toward the activities of the Russians, could then refuse to countenance Dr. Warner's westward travels while also preventing Dr. Jayne and the rest of the party from residing at the Thousand-Buddha Caves" (pp. 144–45).

Other than the peasants of Dunhuang, the only other person singled out for censure in Chen's diary is Abbot Wang 王道士, the long-time guardian of the Thousand-Buddha Caves, who had discovered the hidden cave library a quarter of a century earlier. "The Thousand-Buddha Caves are partitioned into three stories," Chen wrote in his diary. "The bottom story includes the residence of Abbot Wang, who has unlawfully sold (*daomai* 盜賣) antiquities for more than a decade now." Chen learned that Wang, who had made himself scarce during the expedition's stay at Dunhuang, was said to be suffering from an "ailment of the mind" (*jingshen bing* 精神病). When a temple attendant told Chen that such rumors were false, however, Chen speculated that he was probably just hiding out in order to "avoid severe punishment at the hands of the officials" (p. 96). In Chen's mind, those who sought to purchase such artifacts — presumably for the more lofty purpose of study, display, or transfer to other educated elites — bore no responsibility for the transaction. Their motives, if not always their means, could be understood and respected by other cosmopolitan savants. And yet, to judge from sentiments expressed in Chen's diary, it seems that those who sold items whose true aesthetic or intellectual value was merely incidental to the pursuit of material profit were indeed guilty of "theft," for they had stolen cultural and intellectual treasures away from those most qualified to appreciate them. And, since motive, education, and social class weighed far more heavily on Chen's mind than did means of acquisition or national identity, the attachment of an unsavory label to Warner's actions would reflect just as poorly on Chen himself, whose mission was to mimic and learn from the Americans, not to spy on them.

The realization that Chen Wanli was not the spy of Warner's imagination puts the "patriotic" actions of William Hung in a radically different light. After all, if Chen was not a spy, then Hung is no longer simply the saboteur of Langdon Warner and his American accomplices. He also becomes the saboteur of the first mission to Dunhuang that included a Chinese scholar from the eastern seaboard, at a time when warlord politics and bandit infestations made such a trip exceedingly difficult to undertake. No wonder Hung chose to wait for more than fifty years and the death of Chen Wanli before revealing his role in frustrating the long-cherished ambitions of his crosstown colleague! Previous scholarly treatments of the second Fogg expedition have all acknowledged that both Chen and Hung were intimately involved in Warner's fate, thus marking a dramatic shift from earlier foreign expeditions to China's northwest, which eschewed Chinese scholars from the eastern seaboard. But since these scholars did not know that Chen Wanli was also a staunch friend and sympathizer of his American colleagues, Chen and Hung have found themselves habitually placed in the same historiographical camp: as representatives of the first generation of Western-educated Chinese nationalist scholars, eager to reclaim for China what had long been regarded as the imperialist prerogatives of the foreigners.

How, then, are we to make sense of Hung's actions, which nearly derailed the career of a man who himself might otherwise have become a hero of the nascent Chinese nationalist intelligentsia? The most cynical explanation might be found in the knowledge that expenses for Warner's expedition were drawn from the estate of aluminum magnate Charles Martin Hall. Funds from this estate also endowed Harvard's newly founded Yenching Institute for Asian Studies, along with much of the operating costs of Yenching University itself — where Hung held his position as Dean. Hung's biographer reports that John Leighton Stuart, the principal of the university and Hung's boss, "was perplexed and angered to learn that Warner had been in close contact with the government-run Peking University without Yenching's knowledge. Warner had evidently decided that if Harvard must affiliate with a Chinese institution in order to partake of the Hall estate, it should be a prestigious national university instead of the missionary-ridden Yenching" (Chan 1987, p. 115). Stuart apparently then discussed Warner's betrayal with Hung, who, just days earlier, had asked the Vice-Minister of Education to send out a telegram barring the Americans from touching any historical relics. Though Hung is careful in his memoirs to claim that he visited the Vice-Minister of Education a full two days before Warner's defection to Peking University became known at Yenching — thereby assuring the integrity of his motives — we have only Hung's own words to serve as the basis of such a timeline.

Moreover, such an explanation still fails to answer the most obvious follow-up questions. Would Hung have felt similarly moved to obstruct the Warner expedition had the Americans selected a Chinese scholar from Yenching University to accompany them, rather than from Peking University? And if petty institutional rivalries were beneath Hung, could he not simply have asked Vice-Minister Qin to despatch a second telegram to officials in northwestern Gansu,

once he learned that an earnest Chinese scholar had indeed been attached to the expedition? Why let a budding Chinese scholar and his esteemed colleagues at Peking University invest in the long-term success of a mission doomed from the outset, unless spite and jealously were involved? Was Hung a grandmaster of the nationalist chessboard, sacrificing an unsuspecting Chinese pawn in exchange for the checkmate of an American king? Maybe, maybe not. The most charitable explanation, the only one in which Hung emerges as anything other than a sore loser or a nationalist mastermind, is this: perhaps his goal was only to prevent the removal of historical relics, but otherwise permit the benign on-site study of artifacts, steles, and cave murals.

After all, the telegram bearing Hung's imprint — admittedly known to us only through Hung's own summary of its contents — said nothing at all about restricting either the amount of time or means of access that would be allotted to the expedition at Dunhuang and Wanfoxia. It merely called upon local officials to prevent their guests from touching anything of historical or cultural value. In other words, Hung's telegram, if read as he actually portrayed it half a century later, seems to suggest that the Americans (and Chen) should still be free to look around, take notes, and procure photographs for as long as they wished. The decision to restrict the expedition to three days at Dunhuang and one week at Wanfoxia — and in neither case permit residence at the caves — appears to have been made on site in northwestern Gansu, in light of fluid conditions on the ground.

With this in mind, perhaps it is still possible after all to grant Hung the benefit of the doubt. Regardless of the judgment we ultimately pass on William Hung, however, the foregoing analysis has made one thing clear: the most important factors leading to the dubbing of the second Fogg Museum expedition to Dunhuang as a "fiasco" are to be found in local actors and events at Dunhuang, not in Beijing. Those in Beijing were merely responsible for sabotaging Warner's "Plan A": to fill the halls of the Fogg Museum with cave murals and Buddhist statuary from northwestern Gansu. It was those in Dunhuang who were responsible for "sabotaging" Warner's "Plan B": to spend a minimum of three months' residence at the Thousand-Buddha Caves, where the expedition hoped to produce a comprehensive record of its disintegrating aesthetic bounty through photographs, sketch renditions, and reproductions of mural inscriptions.

In order better to understand what really happened at Dunhuang, let us now take a closer look at the diary of Chen Wanli, who, unlike Warner, expressed no inclination to impugn his foreign colleagues. On May 1, the vanguard party, led by Horace Jayne and including Chen, reached Suzhou 肅州, the administrative seat of the prefecture governing Dunhuang. Jayne and Wang Jinren, the party's Chinese translator, paid a cordial visit to Wu Jingshan 吳靜山, the Defense Commissioner whom Warner had cordially dined with the previous year. Jayne later told Chen that he had broached the question with Wu of removing wall paintings from the Thousand-Buddha Caves, but that Wu would not accede to his request. While still in Suzhou, Chen also met a man named "Old Zhou." A carpenter by trade, Old Zhou told Chen that Warner had hired him the previous year to help him conduct excavations at Khara-khoto and Dunhuang. At the latter site, Zhou claimed, "Warner stayed for seven days and paid the Daoist monk seventy silver *liang* in alms." According to Old Zhou, Warner then "used calico and a type of gum paste to remove more than twenty wall paintings and ship them to Beijing." Old Zhou said that he himself had done most of the work, a claim seemingly corroborated by Jayne's decision to hire Old Zhou again for the present expedition (Chen 1926, p. 81).

By May 15, the party reached Anxi, the last major stop before Dunhuang. The local magistrate, a man by the name of Chen Zhigao 陳芷皋, held a feast for the members of the expedition and insisted they spend the night at his lodgings. Three days later, Magistrate Chen and Defense Commissioner Wu, who had accompanied the party from Suzhou, sat Jayne down for a frank talk. An hour later, Jayne came to Chen and told him that "after we reach Dunhuang, he will go back to Suzhou with [Wang] Jinren to stop Dr. Warner from proceeding westward. The reason is because after Dr. Warner peeled off wall paintings from the Thousand-Buddha Caves last year, the people became quite agitated, and it is feared that further complications may arise on the current trip." On May 18, the party entered Dunhuang County under the escort of Defense Commissioner Wu's soldiers. Though Chen now knew that Warner would not be permitted to return to Dunhuang, he did not seem to think that this would in any way impact upon his own work at the caves. "We are now only seventy *li* away from Dunhuang," Chen wrote in his diary that night. "The Thousand-Buddha Caves of my many dreams these past few months is about to burst into reality. I am thrilled beyond all reckoning" (p. 88).

The events of the next day, May 19, would do much to temper Chen's enthusiasm. After calling upon Yang Yiwen 楊繹聞, the newly appointed magistrate of Dunhuang, Chen, Wang, Jayne, and Alan Priest (a tutor in fine arts at Harvard) proceeded to Yang's *yamen* to discuss the work they hoped to accomplish at the caves. They spoke of their desire to take

photographs, but "achieved no results whatsoever" (*haowu jieguo* 毫無結果). Later that same afternoon, the members of the expedition were called in to an even larger meeting, where they found waiting for them four officials, two heads of the local chambers of commerce and education, and seven or eight representatives of various other interest groups in Dunhuang. Jayne opened the deliberations by saying that "he had originally planned to peel off a portion of the wall paintings, ship them to Beijing, and have them displayed there for the convenience of Chinese and foreign scholars who wished to conduct research on them." According to Chen, Jayne "mentioned that he had discussed this idea with [Gansu] Governor Lu [Hongtao], but it did not meet with his approval. Therefore, he now wanted only to take photographs, and hoped that those present would understand and grant ample time to accomplish this task" (pp. 88–89).

Their hosts responded in turn. Chen records only a summary of what was said. After Warner removed "more than twenty wall paintings and several Buddhist statues," Chen recounted, "the local people went *en masse* (*difang renmin qunxiang* 地方人民群向) to the magistrate to question (*jiewen* 詰問) him about this matter. Then, at a temple meeting this year, another person had made accusations (*jieze* 詰責) against Abbot Wang." As a result, even with an armed escort, "there is a fear that it might prove impossible to guarantee our safety." As for setting up camp at the caves, permission for such a provocative move could not possibly be granted. At most, the expedition would be granted no more than two weeks with which to conduct work at the caves, but they would need to travel back and forth from their lodgings each day, wasting several hours in daily transit. Chen's colleagues, "having nothing else to discuss, promised to respect each stipulation and promptly took their leave." Apparently, permission to photograph the caves was granted, for both the Americans and the Chinese would take many. After this deflating meeting, Jayne made up his mind not to spend the full allotment of two weeks at the caves, reasoning that Warner could not possibly be stopped in time unless they departed on the afternoon of the third day (p. 89). Why Jayne could not simply send one or two members of the expedition back to Suzhou to intercept Warner—as originally planned—is not clear. What is clear is that the decision to spend less than three days at the caves was made by Jayne. It was not the decree of the local Chinese officials, who were prepared to grant him five times that length.

On the following day, the local police commissioner privately told Chen even more about the delicate situation with the peasants. According to this man, when the previous magistrate was transferred from his post the year before, he made it no further than the outskirts of town when suddenly a group of local people "detained" (*jieliu* 截留) him, declaring that they would not release him until he "returned those wall paintings peeled away by Warner." The police commissioner, then serving as an escort for the departing magistrate, "raced back to Dunhuang and called upon the local gentry. Only then was the situation resolved." As a result, the current Magistrate Yang "was taking this present expedition by the foreigners extremely seriously" (p. 92). In Warner's version of events, narrated in a letter to Stein in 1926, his former "friend the magistrate had been expelled for allowing me to make off with untold treasures. His successor had been expelled for failing to produce me dead or alive & the present man was of course trembling in his shoes" (1926b). Warner, of course, was flattering himself to think that he might be the chief determinant in the near annual rotation of Chinese officials in Gansu. More to the point, however, Warner again fails to acknowledge the legitimate grievances of the peasants of Dunhuang — whose religious icons he had defiled — preferring to chalk up his troubles to Chinese perfidy and xenophobia at the highest levels.

From May 21 to 23, Jayne, Chen, and the rest of the vanguard party visited the Thousand-Buddha Caves. Their entire security detail appears to have consisted of one man, Lieutenant Zhang 張哨官. In Cave 120,[2] Jayne pulled Chen aside and told him that this was the cave from which he had originally planned to remove a wall painting. Elsewhere, Chen noted the considerable damage enacted on some of the murals by exiled White Russian soldiers, whom Chinese officials had interred in the caves back in 1921. At Caves 139, 141, 144, and 145, however, Lieutenant Zhang made a point of showing Chen the exact locations from which Warner had peeled off several wall paintings the year before. In his diary, Chen describes these as "those that were peeled away and stolen" (*boli qiequ zhe* 剝離竊去者), though it is not clear here whether he is merely recording the words of Lieutenant Zhang or passing his own judgment on what Warner had done (pp. 92–93). Either way, this notation marks perhaps the first time ever that an unambiguously negative Chinese verb or adjective was used in print to describe the activities of foreign scholars in northwest China (Jacobs 2010).

In all, Chen, Wang, and the Americans spent just two days and two hours at the caves, all of it quite uneventful. As they departed the caves for the last time, Daniel Thompson, an art tutor at Harvard, told Chen about the enormous sum of money that the sponsors of the expedition had invested in their expedition. Calculating their expenses purely in terms of the amount of time they had managed to spend at

the Thousand-Buddha Caves, Thompson concluded that the expedition had spent approximately forty cents per second, and even more if calculated on the basis of individual photographs (p. 94). Clearly, we can see how Warner must have felt an overwhelming sense of pressure to absolve the expedition of all blame for why it had failed to achieve any of its goals. Presumably this is why Warner stuck so tenaciously to his insistence that the Americans "had been mobbed at Tun Huang & forbidden the caves," when in fact no such thing had happened. With only the "utmost difficulty," he later claimed, Jayne had "persuaded the officials to allow them to visit the chapels 3 days in succession" (Warner 1926b), when in fact Jayne had been offered up front two weeks at the caves.

Elsewhere, Warner felt compelled to add the menacing specter of "an angry crowd outside the inn gates each time" (Bowie 1966, p. 128). Yet unless the diary of Chen Wanli is a complete fabrication, the only mobs that greeted the Americans at the gates of their inn at Dunhuang were those desperate to sell what remained of Tang manuscripts from the not-so-secret cave library. On the contrary, the only person who experienced the threat of real physical violence was the magistrate who had condoned Warner's removal of some twelve to twenty wall paintings in the first place. While his successor may indeed have been "trembling in his shoes," it was only because Warner had helped turn his own constituents against him. And as for the intimidating bodyguards and constant surveillance? The lonely Lieutenant Zhang, who ultimately answered to Warner's friend Defense Commissioner Wu, stands out in Chen's account only for pointing out the scars of Warner's infamous handiwork. On the final day of the expedition's stay at Dunhuang, Zhang even made a special trip to the inn where Chen and the others were staying, to chat and bid farewell (p. 94).

By May 26, the vanguard party was back in Anxi, and soon after Warner makes his first appearance in Chen's diary, negotiating with local officials and representatives for an extended stay at Wanfoxia. During multiple meetings on June 1 and 2, Warner demanded a month, but a local representative countered with an offer of only three days. It was at this point that Defense Commissioner Wu rallied to Warner's defense, helping to broker a compromise of one week, with the promise of additional deliberations if the Americans still felt there was a case to be made for further work. Again, Chen makes no mention of Warner's "dozen villagers who had left their ordinary employments, some fifteen miles off, to watch our movements and to try by a thousand expedients to tempt us into a breach of the peace which would warrant an attack or forcible expulsion from the region." And there is certainly no sense in Chen's account that "a single slip, even an angry look, would probably have brought the whole hive about our ears and might well have cost us our lives" (Warner 1938, p. xiv). And yet Chen was clearly not averse to describing such scuffles with the locals when they did in fact occur: a few months earlier during the vanguard party's time in Jingchuan, a village in southeastern Gansu, Chen went into great detail in his diary to describe the threatening intimidation tactics of "greedy" peasants, along with his own personal guilt at failing to protect his American "friends" from several hours of terror. According to Chen, nothing similar occurred at Wanfoxia. On the contrary, Chen writes of how the local magistrate of Anxi, Chen Zhigao, personally assisted in helping to compile register numbers for some of the inscriptions he had copied, thus "incurring much of the rigors of travel" (p. 101).

The only part in Chen's diary which might arouse the suspicion of the historian concerns his failure to mention the May 30th incident in Shanghai, even though he includes multiple references to other current events elsewhere in China in the weeks and months afterward. According to Warner, news of the Shanghai shootings reached the party soon after their arrival at Wanfoxia and coincided with Chen's sudden departure to Beijing on the pretext of an ailing grandmother. Though Chen does not refer to the May 30th incident in his diary — nor to an ailing grandmother — he does offer the following account of his sudden departure from the party. On June 5, right about the time news of May 30th incident would have reached such a remote site in the northwest, Chen describes an after dinner discussion among himself, Jayne, Priest, and Wang. According to Chen, all four men thought it best to return to Beijing forthwith, owing both to the "antipathy of local villagers toward foreigners and the fact that the magistrate himself must return immediately to the city tomorrow." Only Warner, Chen informs us, was "determined to stay here another day" (p. 101). As a result, Chen made up his mind to leave the next day by himself for Anxi and thence Beijing. That very same night, he came down with a severe case of near debilitating indigestion, the symptoms of which he describes in graphic detail over the next several weeks.

Other than Chen's glaring omission of his receiving news of the May 30th incident, there seems to be little else to suspect in his account. It makes perfect sense to think that most members of the expedition, both American and Chinese, would have regarded news of the Shanghai shootings as a clear indication that it might be wise to remove themselves from a Chinese district in which they were already regarded with considerable suspicion by the local peasants — even

if there is no evidence that the Americans were in danger of losing their lives! That Warner would insist on the Americans completing his hard-won week at Wanfoxia sounds most plausible, especially since he had already been rebuffed at Dunhuang. And yet, faced with Warner's determination to remain in hostile territory during a national crisis, Chen seems to have made the eminently sensible decision to distance himself from the expedition immediately and return home to his family, friends, and colleagues in Beijing, even if he would not admit to such a motive in the published version of his diary.

That Chen meant no ill will toward his American friends, however, and continued to sympathize with their scientific mission in spite of the volatile new political atmosphere, was made abundantly clear in his decision to publish his surprisingly sympathetic diary the very next year, when a riveting tale of anti-imperialist sabotage might well have done far more for his political and professional prospects. Though both Warner and Chen certainly prioritized their own professional interests over that of their international colleagues, it is worth noting that only Warner would eventually deem it necessary to repeatedly disparage the name, reputation, and integrity of his foreign collaborator in a public arena. We cannot deny, of course, that if Chen and his home institution, Peking University, had actually been forced, like Warner, to expend enormous sums of political and economic capital for the expedition's passage to northwestern Gansu, it is possible that they, too, facing similar pressures of accountability, might have sung a radically different tune in the years after the "fiasco" at Dunhuang.

In the final analysis, we cannot look for the causes of Warner's frustrations regarding the fate of the second Fogg Museum expedition to Dunhuang in the explanations that Warner himself bequeathed to posterity. Nor can we rely solely on the claims of educated foreign and Chinese elites in Beijing or abroad. Regardless of any concessions Warner may have been forced to make on the eastern seaboard in deference to Chinese "winds of nationalism," the fact of the matter is that he — and many more foreign explorers after him — was still welcome to travel to sites of historical and aesthetic interest along the furthest borderlands of China. As seen in Chen's diary, the Chinese and American members of the vanguard expedition to Dunhuang were welcomed warmly at every official stop on their itinerary, and treated with the utmost courtesy and hospitality.

Warner's great misfortune was not that he attempted to undertake an expedition to China while nationalist indignation against foreign imperialism had peaked. The true source of his misfortune was far less abstract. By turning the peasants of Dunhuang against the local magistrate, Warner broke the unspoken compact that had long existed between late imperial Chinese scholar-officials and their social counterparts from the Western world. In sum, foreign savants were to be treated the same as any other cosmopolitan Confucian elite from inner China might expect to be treated, so long as their actions did not interfere with the governing duties of the host. Though Warner portrayed his presence in northwestern Gansu as marred by an unrelenting series of attempts to inflict public humiliation and bodily harm on the Americans, what actually occurred appears to be have been precisely the opposite. It was, in fact, the local Chinese officials who had been publicly humiliated in front of their own peasants and forced to endure threats of physical violence, all as a direct result of Warner's presence. And yet, despite it all, they still elected to treat Warner and his party with all the pomp and circumstance that his class and occupation obligated of them.

That Langdon Warner could not set foot in Dunhuang and the rest of the expedition not spend more than three days at the Thousand-Buddha Caves had nothing at all to do with Chen Wanli, William Hung, Chinese nationalism, the May 30th incident, or Western imperialism writ large. It also had nothing to do with a rising Chinese consciousness toward the protection of their country's cultural patrimony. It had only to do with the fact that Warner, through his own acknowledged actions, had effectively instigated a peasant rebellion against local Chinese authority. As a result, Warner, no matter how desirable a guest he may have appeared as an individual, was no longer someone that local officials at Dunhuang were prepared to risk their livelihood to host. With famine besetting the land and extractive measures from the warlord government on high only making matters worse, the last thing any official in northwestern Gansu wanted to deal with was a spark to fan the flames.

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Notes

1. Hu Tongqing (2011), a scholar from mainland China, is to my knowledge the only person who has attempted, in systemic fashion, to interrogate Warner's accusations against Chen. Though I also expressed skepticism toward Warner's claims (Jacobs 2010), this was not the chief focus of my research question.

2. The cave numbers given here are those used by Paul Pelliot in his *Les grottes de Touen-Houang. Peintures et Sculptures bouddhiques des époques des Wei, des T'ang et des Song. Grottes 1 a 182* (Paris: Librairie Paul Geuthner, 1914), although it is not clear that they have been accurately recorded in the reported exchange. In many cases, Pelliot designates with a single number several caves, distinguishing them with a superscript letter. The present system used at the Dunhuang Research Institute assigns each cave its own number. Thus, it is uncertain which the current equivalent would be for the reported no. 120, used with superscripts by Pelliot to designate 23 different caves. The equivalent current numbers for the other caves mentioned here are: no. 139 (= current 320), 141 (= 326), 144 (= 329), 145 (= 331). Balachandran 2007 (p. 26n5), who is undoubtedly correct, identifies the cave nos. of Warner's activity on his first expedition as 320, 321, 323, 328, 329, and 335 (that is, Pelliot nos. 139, 139^{a}, 140, 143, 144, 149). For a full correlation table of the Mogao cave numbers in all four of the systems which have been used beginning with Pelliot, see the inserted prefatory material to the Chinese facsimile re-publication of the Pelliot expedition photos (*Dunhuang shiku: Bei Wei, Tang, Song shiqi de fojiao bihua he diaosu Di 1 hao-182 hao ku ji qita* 敦煌石窟. 北魏,唐,宋時时的佛教壁画和雕塑 第1号-182号窟及其它 [Lanzhou: Gansu wenhua chubanshe, 1997]).—*ed.*