Wonderland: Multiplicity of Scale in the Construction of the Mogao Grottoes

A Lecture by
Neil Schmid
Dunhuang Academy, China
March 5, 2019
THH 309K
5:30 p.m.

The Mogao Grottoes contain dozens of miniature caves that replicate in perfect detail the visual programs of larger caves, though at 1/10th the size and too small to hold any ritual practice. This talk provides the first thorough analysis of these small-scale caves, outlining their typologies and content, as well as their distribution among larger grottoes. Crucial to this exploration is the concept of scale in medieval China. An examination of play in scale among Mogao Caves reveals that larger structures contrastively embraced miniature forms through imitative models that include Aśoka stupas current at the time. Finally, through a detailed comparison of form and visuality, we explore how it is impossible to fully understand the Mogao Grottoes as a sacred site without full consideration of these unique miniatures and the prospects in scale they reveal.