

“Shooting took about 20 days, and we had to endure strong winds, sandstorms and a shortage of water,” Teng said. “But historians have already worked there for decades under such difficult environmental conditions. The grottoes there have a great healing power. They show the height of ancient civilizations and the role of the Silk Road.”

Teng said the film has already received screening invitations from several film festivals and UN organizations.

Teng, formerly a distinguished director of TV galas and ceremonies, has more recently made a name for himself by applying advanced modern technologies to produce movies based on traditional Chinese opera.

In 2020, his Peking Opera movie “The Height of the Early Tang Dynasty” received the top opera movie award at the 33rd Golden Rooster Awards. It was cited for using traditional theatrical elements and modern 3D cinematography to tell the story of the prosperous reign of Emperor Taizong (AD 626–649).

“I worked as a magazine photographer for five years in the 1980s,” Teng said. “Celebrated Chinese cinematographers of that era, such as Xie Jin and Wu Tianming, planted the seed of filmmaking deep in my heart.”

Chinese opera and filmmaking are no strangers.

In 1905, China’s first movie — “Dingjun Mountain” — featured Peking Opera master Tan Xinpei (1847-1917) in excerpts from the Peking Opera play “Romance of the Three Kingdoms.”

In 1948, Fei Mu (1906-1951) directed China’s first color film “Happiness Neither in Life nor in Death,” which starred famed Peking Opera artist Mei Lanfang (1894-1961) in a Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) legend. During his career, Mei starred in 14 opera films, bringing the art form to international audiences.

Yueju Opera films flourished after the founding of the People’s Republic of China in

1949. Yueju Opera artists Yuan Xuefen (1922-2011) and Fan Rujuan (1924-2017) starred in the popular 1953 color film “The Butterfly Lovers,” produced by Shanghai Film Studio.

The 1962 Yueju Opera film “A Dream of Red Mansions,” starring Xu Yulan and Wang Wenjuan (1926-2021), was also a box office sensation.

In more recent years, other traditional opera classics have been adapted for film, including China’s first 3D Kunqu Opera movie “The Bell Tolls for a Dynasty” and the Cantonese Opera film “White Snake.”

Elena Zhou, a 40-something Shanghai worker and movie buff, said she and her teenage son always enjoy a good opera film. Both liked the “White Snake,” citing the scenes of Madam White Snake’s daring theft of an herb to save her husband and the flooding of Jinshan Temple.

“Chinese opera films are worth watching over and over again,” Zhou said. “They are rich in cultural connotations and vocal artistry. Even the delicate expression in an artist’s eyes and posture can arouse the imagination.”



Fan Jinshi, former president and current honorary president of Dunhuang Academy China, is more widely known as the “daughter of Dunhuang.” She has spent more than five decades studying and preserving art in the 1,600-year-old Mogao Grottoes. — Xinhua

The UNESCO World Heritage Site is home to an invaluable collection of Buddhist artworks, including **2,415** colored sculptures and **45,000 square meters** of murals spread across **735** caves. Often called “the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas,” the artworks were created by ancient worshippers.



The Mogao Grottoes are home to the world’s largest and richest treasure trove of Buddhist art. — Xinhua