

China restores 800-year-old Buddha statue with 1,000 hands

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Beijing: Chinese experts have completed restoration of an 800-year-old Buddha statue, famous for its 1,000 hands, located in the country's southwest province after seven years.

The restoration of the important landmark in Dazu County in Sichun province had begun in 2008 and was completed at a cost of about 60 million yuan (\$9.8 million).

Visitors could now see a new appearance of the "Qianshou Guanyin", a statue with 1,000 hands in southwestern Chongqing Municipality, state-run Xinhua news agency reported. It is the largest restoration project on the statue, which underwent repairs at least four times in history, it said.

Workers restored 830 hands and 227 instruments using one million gold foils while consolidating the dated pieces of the statue and thoroughly cleaning it.

The project is expected to help the Qianshou Guanyin keep glowing for at least 50 years, said Zhan Changfa, a researcher of the Chinese Academy of Cultural Heritage, who is in charge of the project.

The statue, 7.7 metres high and 12.5 metres wide, was carved during the Southern Song Dynasty (1127 to 1279). It is a masterpiece among thousands of individual rock carvings in the grottoes in Dazu. The carvings date back as early as the Tang Dynasty (618-907). They were listed as major World Heritage sites by UNESCO in 1999.

Over the centuries, the sculpture's colour had faded with some of the gold foils peeling off and cracks appeared. Heritage authorities will continue to monitor the statue's condition and take timely measures to prevent damage and pass its beauty to the next 800 years, said Tong Mingkang, deputy head of the State Administration of Cultural Heritage, at a ceremony marking the completion of restoration on Saturday.