

Chinese Culture

Last week, I watched a programme about China and Chinese culture. It was really an amazing program about an amazing country, China.

Throughout this program, I could envision China vividly, with its people and culture. China, located in East Asia is the third largest country in the world in terms of area and the most populous nation, with a population of more than 1 billion, or nearly one-fourth of the world's total population.

After 1949, traditional Chinese culture was replaced by a new intended to serve the masses and help build socialism. Painting, poetry fiction, drama, opera, film and all sorts of arts are now used to implement the government's political programmes.

The arts of China encompass a large and diverse body of material spanning two millennia. From Neolithic pottery to posters produced by the communes Muhsien country in 1970's, its extent and artistic variety make the idea of continuity just an illusion.

During the 2000 years preceding the revolution of 1912, China evolved a hierarchy of the arts that was but one aspect of the general structure of its society. The literary arts were at the summit followed by Calligraphy, the art of writing with brush and ink. Calligraphy's status was sometimes shared by the art of playing the Chinese lute. These arts were followed by painting, after which came chess and other scholarly pursuits.

Manual crafts, including pottery, sculpture and every architecture, were traditionally considered as products of mere artisans.

Calligraphy, the noblest of the visual arts, was the most direct expression of that prodigious literacy that marked the elite of China. The art of handwriting was cultivated as active element in the education of the scholar-gentry class.

If we move to the art of painting we find out that the earliest known examples of Chinese painting date from the Han dynasty (202 BC-220 AD) when the walls of temples and official halls were often painted with murals. Almost none of the early mural paintings survive, however, except for some within cave temples and on the walls of tombs chambers. These, I find as really impressive as they were shown on the programme. Their style is closely related to the sculptural tomb relief of the period.

Another craft in China, which impressed me a great deal, is that of wearing silk. This was a distinctive craft in China as early as the Shang dynasty. From the Han dynasty the great overland trade routes that linked the Mediterranean countries with China were founded on and other products of the Chinese artisan. The Chinese excelled in the silk craft to the extent that they were called “Silk land”.

China also excelled in sculpture art. By far the largest body of Chinese sculptural art is associated with Buddhism, which reached China from India sometime in the 3rd century AD. Mainly their architecture involves shining tiled roofs and the hierarchic arrangement of endless courtyards, corridors and halls – all of these designed remarkably

as a kind of representation of a vast cosmic order. Seeing such a complex in the programme was very illuminating indeed.

The Chinese literary tradition is remarkable both for its length and for its profuseness. The earliest evidence of Chinese writing on Oracle bones dates from about 3,500 years ago.

Before the Tang period, fiction was largely restricted to brief anecdotes about famous people, the elaboration of strange creatures and happenings. Under the influence of the Buddhist scriptures known as “Transformation texts” extended fictional narratives were composed. These formed the basis of such superb novels as the anonymous “Chin Ping Mei” (1582-96) translated as “The Golden Lotus”. Fiction shaved the influence of Chinese tradition and culture.

If we move to Chinese music we find a diversity of Chinese musical forms. This diversity mirrors that of musical audience and of the situations in which music plays a role. Chinese music has ancient roots. It flourished as an art in the shag dynasty after the 14th century BC, and its origins were surely earlier. Though remarkable for its stagnant and has all the variety and richness to be expected in the art of a vast, ancient, and populous land.

Discussion of Chinese culture is endless as it reflects an enchanting world of beauty and art. That is why I have recorded the programme and I will always cherish it in my videotape library.