

Evolution of Education in China: Artifacts of Education

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Evolution of Education in China: Artifacts

My collection of artifacts reflects my focus on education in China, from its roots in Confucius thought, Daoism and Buddhism and the unification of China under the first Great Emperor of China. I chose to look at China's early period, because it is what makes China so unique among all the world cultures. It was this uniqueness that has always fascinated me about Asia in general – as well as its long history of the importance of education in contrast to the fairly recent development of the value of education in non-eastern civilization. Education in China has always had great value, even if it has not been accessible to many.

The first of my artifacts is a small clay replica of an archer from the Terra Cotta Warrior army that filled the tomb of Emperor Qin Shi Huang Di. Under the ruthless reign of this man, whose tomb is counted among the great wonders of the world today, China was united into one great country for the first time in its history in approximately 221 B.C. Emperor Qin laid the groundwork for education of the masses when he standardized the written Chinese language, making it possible for every person in China to read his edicts and laws. He also standardized the width of axels in wagons and currency used within China's borders – which allowed for the easy transport of people from one place to another. This opened up the path for traders and merchants to sell their wares in places

1) *Qin's Terra Cotta Archer*

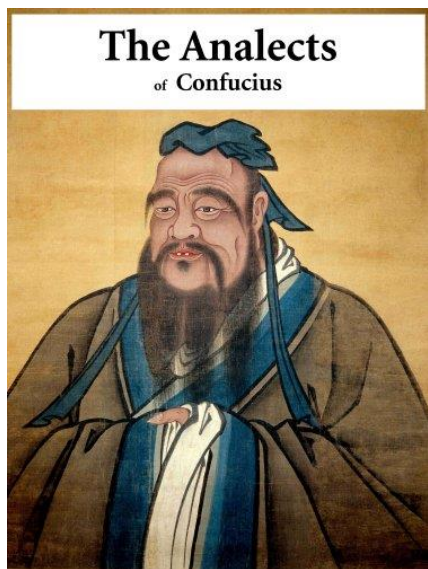


far afield and helped lay the groundwork for the great Silk road, which would one day bring with it Mathematics from Arabia and Buddhist teachings from India.

The next artifact collected was a book of Confucius Analects. Without this man, who lived in exile and was scorned during his life but later revered for his thoughts on politics and culture, there would have been no China as we know it today. Confucius' teachings would lay

the groundwork for China's Dynasties for thousands of years and would become the focus that would propel the Chinese into creating institutions of learning. Confucius'

2) Cover art for *The Analects of Confucius*



ideals of learned men in positions of power formed the basis for the Civil Service Exams, which would be a groundbreaking method for filling government positions with educated men. These tests were open to anybody, and young Chinese men strived to become scholars and pass this test to become Civil Servants within the Imperial Regime. It meant good money, and good reputations. Every family wanted a Civil Servant for a son and went to great lengths to educate

their sons. This was the true beginning of the Asian ideal of the great importance of education. Confucius is one of the greatest men in the long history of China and absolutely essential in the blossoming of the Scholar and institutions of learning within the Middle Kingdom.

Next, the Scholar's greatest treasure: his calligraphy set. Without brushes, ink and paper, no boy could ever hope to become a Scholar. Without a practiced and steady hand, no man could ever hope to pass the Civil Service Exam. With Emperor Qin's standardized Chinese Text, it became possible for Confucius' teachings to be reproduced quickly and accurately, making it

available and, most importantly, legible to all of China. These tools were absolutely essential in the spread of ideals that would solidify the country into one and would play a major role in the spread of many other ideals that would come from



China.

which saw a consistent rise and fall in favor as Dynasties rose and fell. These writing tools allowed the study of Sciences, recorded mathematics, drew maps of places far from the shores of China and preserved its history. There can be no doubt about the importance of these as artifacts connected to the development of

Last, but certainly not least are two artifacts collected at the Po Lin Monastery on Lantau Island and my favorites of the things I brought back with me; Joss sticks and a Kasaya (Jiasha in Chinese). These represent the Buddhist teachings carried from India to China along the great Silk Road routes. These Buddhist teachings would become one of two major religions within China and would cultivate the concept of self-development and learning. In China, Buddhism would split into several different schools of thought and travel through exchanges and conquests to other countries such as Japan and Southeast Asia. Monasteries would become places of learning,



schools for Buddhist thought and practice and were available to everybody. These Buddhist ideals, coupled with Confucian thought and Daoism would lay the foundation for Modern Chinese culture. While religion under Maoist and Communist rule was outlawed in the past, it has seen a slow resurgence in recent years. With the evolution of a Capitalist Communist government, the Chinese people are beginning to see a level of freedom they have never experienced before –

an ability to express their personal beliefs in art and religion, though it is still early in the development and still quite dangerous on Mainland China to say or do anything that can be viewed as a criticism of the government itself.

All these artifacts reflect China at its core, I believe, and so I found them of the utmost importance in my quest to collect things that represented what I thought of as distinctly Chinese. I truly hope that I can return there, someday, to study in a country so steeped in history and so poised to ‘take over the world’. They say China is the place to be, and it’s easy to see why. A booming economy and a growing middle-class as well as a sharp rise in the number of people enrolling in institutes of higher education are clear signs that China is on its way to even greater things. Who wouldn’t want to be there to see it happen?

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