

Open Your Eyes

By Michael Bartley

Do not be fooled! China is not a government; it is not simply the land under heaven or the people that have carried it and celebrated it for thousands of years. China is the culture of civilization born in ages unknown to history, nurtured by the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors and raised under the tutelage of Confucius' teachings. It is a culture that has seen many emperors and dynasties rise and fall, and has only grew richer and wiser through it all. Even with the colonialism of the West and the brutal iconoclasm it witnessed during the red dawn, China has still managed to stand proud and tall.

Look with your own eyes! What do you see? A culture that has spread globally. From its earlier influences on its East Asian neighbors to the migration of its people to various regions of the world, there are few, if any, who can claim to have not come into contact with something Chinese. How many of the world's citizens can claim to have never tasted from its rich culinary arts? Its foods have traveled to many lands, and satisfied many bellies. Its elegant writing system is now found to be in style as artists from all corners of the world try to find any excuse to place Hànzì in their works. And its profound philosophies are now studied at many universities by students searching for deeper meaning. Even in this day and age, the wise, enigmatic words of Laozi and Zhuangzi provide lessons to be learned.

Listen with your own ears! Though the traditional and folk songs of China are perhaps the most recognizable to the foreign ear, do not let that limit your aural appreciation. China also has an ever developing pop music culture, with the likes of Andy Lau and Jay Chou creating and popularizing new forms of Chinese music that have already reached great success in East Asia, and perhaps one day the rest of the world; for lo and behold it seems that Chinese language classes are on the rise in schools around the U.S. as the economic opportunities of the P.R.C. begin to manifest.

Think with your own mind! The land that is tied to this great culture has been painted with many different colors but perhaps the best color to exemplify China is that of red: to the Western eye it may conjure images of Communism and the blood of many, but to the Chinese eye it is associated with happiness and prosperity. It is important to realize this difference in meaning and understanding because China truly is perceived differently by different people. For many it is perceived as a potential threat, a political anomaly that should be watched vigilantly as it tries to find its own way. But for others it is a potential ally, with the promise of many opportunities. And one must not forget the many that call it home. Do not let others interpret China for you, open your eyes and be willing to learn about China for yourself.

As for me, China still remains a mystery. Although I enjoy many of the fruits of its culture and have read its history and philosophies there is much I still wish to learn and see before I decide what China means to me.