

WRITERS' JOURNAL TRAVEL WRITING CONTEST

November 2003 Winners

First Prize Winner

Orkney Day-Tripper—Janet Morrison, Harrisburg, NC

Second Prize Winner

A Russian River Cruise—Mary Smith Pritchard, Midlothian, TX

Third Prize Winner

The Confucian Temple and Forest Cemetery—Nancy Pine, Altadena, CA

Honorable Mention Winners

An Island Rises From the Sea—Dennis Magliozzi, Dover, NH

A Closer Look at Florence—Jacquelin Cangro, Brooklyn, NY

The Sewers of Paris—Jacqueline Acuff, Robstown, TX

Crater Lake, A World Treasure—Dan Wyant, Eugene, OR

The Confucian Temple and Forest Cemetery

Exploring Layers of Chinese History

Passing through the thick-walled entrance of the Confucian Temple in Qufu, 2500 years of Chinese history flows around you. The Confucian Temple, Family Mansion, and the Family Forest Cemetery, all United Nations Heritage Sites, occupy a major portion of this small city, a day's travel from Shanghai or Beijing.

You will join chatting Chinese couples, grandparents and children, factory workers gathered around pennant-carrying guides, and friends snapping photos of each other in front of ancient stone-carved monuments. Chinese tourists come to the Confucian Temple and Family Mansion because Confucian teachings are at the core of their daily lives—from respecting their parents and grandparents to exhorting their children to study for the competitive school exams.

By spending a day at the Qufu sites, a Westerner can begin to comprehend some of the layers of Chinese history that influence modern Chinese. Although Confucius's teachings over the centuries reinforced stratification of social relationships, including the inequality of women, and were attacked by Mao Zedong and his Red Guard, the power of Confucius's careful thinking and emphasis on honoring family was also absorbed. Now that the anti-Confucian days of the 20th century have passed, Chinese freely describe Confucianism as entwined throughout their everyday lives. As one adult commented recently, "The concern for honoring our parents, of never disgracing them, is in every fabric of society."

BY NANCY PINE



Another added, "Although Confucianism is condemned for some of its views, it is infused in us Chinese and our life." After some thought, the first then added, "Even those who have no schooling are imbued with Confucian thinking, with respect for their parents, and with the need and duty to honor the family."

You enter the temple grounds through a massive gate, purchasing your ticket at a small building just outside. A guard will tear off a corner of the ticket and return the rest to you, proof that you have paid and a souvenir of your visit. As the cool courtyard envelops you, it is easy to imagine Confucius here in 500 B.C., his disciples sitting on the raised platforms, walking among the trees and perhaps along these very paving stones. The halls, pavilions, and gnarled cypress and pines pull you toward ancient images.

Confucius lived poor and taught in Qufu (pronounced approximately Chufu) for most of his life (551-479 B.C.). He had little recognition or political success because of his idealism and his outspoken criticism of political leaders. A passionate learner and natural teacher, he devoted himself to teaching others how to follow a virtuous life that kept government in balance. He insisted that leaders govern for the welfare of the state and its people at a time when local rulers preferred to wage war against their neighbors for personal gain. Confucianism has evolved for 2500 years, sometimes

■ *continued on page 36*

large, carefully decorated buildings and rectangular tree-lined temple courtyards to the untrammelled woods, wild grasses, and informally placed monuments of the walled forest cemetery. You can rent a bicycle near the gate and pedal along the curving roads, passing only an occasional car, usually parked so its occupants can walk among the trees. If you have already spent some days in China in Beijing, Shanghai, and major cities and tourist sites, you will become instantly aware of the informality of the woods and cemetery, the pastoral setting, the tranquility. The grave markers and occasional monuments are scattered among the old trees. Stone carvings of stylized animals and imperial scholars call you to examine their elegant simplicity. The forest provides a time to think, to sit, to look at the thousands of trees and listen to the birds. Time to imagine the layers of history represented here by seventy-six generations of the Kung family, Confucius's descendants.

In the Confucian Temple and Family Mansion, heavy tiled, curved roofs, plaques, and decorative elements dominate. Roofs overlap with roofs, and courtyard paving stones are carefully lined with the trees. But here the old, varied trees dominate; the foot-high grasses command attention. The grave markers and simple statues spread casually among the trees. You can feel the luxury of space.

The tranquility of these woods provides you time to think about the power of Confucius's ideas in China today and how they have evolved and changed over 2500 years. You can begin to imagine how the lives of the Chinese people around you are influenced by this long, complex history. It is worth the trip to Qufu.

Nancy Pine writes from Altadena, CA. 🏠

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