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Qufu: A civilisation centre of Northern China

Rosita Dellios

Bond University, rosita_dellios@bond.edu.au

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Qufu: A civilisation centre of Northern China

Abstract

Extract:

At first glance - both on the map and upon arrival - Qufu is an unassuming place to visit. Located some 500 kilometres south of Beijing in Shandong Province, its urban population stands at 60,000. This figure extends to 650,000 people when incorporating the surrounding countryside of its administrative region. In comparison to China's large urban centres, Qufu is 'off the beaten track'. For many, of course, this in itself is an attraction. True, there are many townships like Qufu dotted throughout China. What distinguishes Qufu from any other provincial town, however, is a philosopher who lived two-and-a-half thousand years ago.

Keywords

Confucius, Qufu, historical, cultural cities, arts

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Regions and Developments in China - *Centre Report*:

Qufu: A Civilisation Centre of Northern China

Qufu: Birthplace of Confucius

At first glance - both on the map and upon arrival - Qufu is an unassuming place to visit. Located some 500 kilometres south of Beijing in Shandong Province, its urban population stands at 60,000. This figure extends to 650,000 people when incorporating the surrounding countryside of its administrative region. In comparison to China's large urban centres, Qufu is 'off the beaten track'. For many, of course, this in itself is an attraction. True, there are many townships like Qufu dotted throughout China. What distinguishes Qufu from any other provincial town, however, is a philosopher who lived two-and-a-half thousand years ago.



Qufu Region(1)

This philosopher's civilisational legacy is so profound as to put Qufu on the cultural map - not only in China but worldwide - alongside Athens, Jerusalem, and Varanasi. Qufu is the birthplace of Kong Fu Zi (551-479 BC), whose Latinised name of Confucius is synonymous in the West with 'Oriental' wisdom. Although largely ignored in his own lifetime, Confucius' contribution to Chinese culture is all pervasive. Thanks to his dedicated disciples, the teachings of Confucius have been preserved and transmitted to future generations. Among the classical texts, the *Analecets* became the centrepiece of Confucian teaching.

Confucianism

After the passing of the philosopher, Confucianism emerged on a grand scale as the state ideology of imperial China. At the popular level, it provided every Chinese with guidelines for ethical conduct; every family with a standard of interpersonal behaviour, be it between husband and wife, old and young, or among siblings. Correct cultivation of the relationship between friends and that of king and subject is also called to our attention. To quote the eminent Sinologist, John King Fairbank, in assessing Confucianism:

In its larger sense as a philosophy of life, we have generally associated with Confucianism the quiet virtues of patience, pacifism, and compromise; the golden mean; conservatism and contentment; reverence for ancestors, the aged, and the learned; and above all, a mellow humanism - taking man, not God, as the centre of the universe.(2)

Temple of Confucius



The Main Hall of the Confucius Temple Complex

That Qufu is the home of China's most revered teacher becomes amply evident to the visitor in the trinity of Confucius' temple, residence and cemetery. These special sites of commemoration transform Qufu from just another dot on the Chinese map. Indeed, a fifth of the town is taken up by the huge Temple of Confucius. Intended as a symbolic centre paying homage to the sage, it has been extended over dynastic time - particularly during the Ming and Qing - to occupy 21.8 hectares, with 466 rooms, nine courtyards and more than a thousand steles amid ancient pines. The Hall of Great Achievement with its magnificent dragon-carved stone columns and elaborate roof tiling stands at the heart of the temple complex. It is here that Confucius is honoured, particularly on his birthday (28 September). Drums, gongs, chanting and traditional dancing form part of the annual celebrations which extend from 26 September to 10 October.

Mansions of the Kong Clan

East of the Temple is another extensive historical complex, known as the Mansions of Confucius. Comprising 450 halls, this residence was used by the Kong family, headed by the eldest male direct descendants of Confucius who were granted special privileges by the emperors. Indeed, Qufu was a mere extension of this palatial home. To quote the ubiquitous *Lonely Planet* travel guide:

The town of Qufu, which grew around the Mansions, was an autonomous estate administered by the Kongs, who had powers of taxation and execution. Emperors could drop in to visit - the Ceremonial Gate near the south entrance was opened only for this event.(3)

The last Kong descendant to live in the Mansions left for Taiwan in the 1940s before the Communist Revolution established Mao Zedong's new, anti-Confucian, order. Confucius has since been rehabilitated by the Chinese government. He is now viewed as a great statesman and a possible counter-weight to the socially corrosive 'money-worship' that accompanied market reforms.

The Cemetery as Forest

North of the Mansions lies the final resting place of Confucius and his descendants. The cemetery is commonly known as the Forest of Confucius because of the large number of trees - over 20,000 - planted there by the Kong clan. At 200 hectares, the cemetery-cum-forest is China's largest artificial park, with numerous tombstones, temples, pavilions and sculptures. While intended for the dead, it invigorates the living with a walking tour into the Chinese past. China's uninterrupted continuity across generations is most simply and vividly represented in this cemetery of the country's most revered thinker.

While the temple, residence and cemetery of Confucius are the three main historical attractions of Qufu, there are still more than 100 other historical sites considered important enough to place under state or provincial protection. Such a wealth of history comes from Qufu's prominence in ancient China when, among other distinctions, it had been capital of the state of Lu. Qufu's historical importance is such that it is designated one of China's 24 great cultural cities.



The Grave of Confucius

Six Arts City

Apart from the old, there is also the new which commemorates Confucius. *Confucius Six Arts City* is an educational theme park show-casing the life and work of Confucius. *Six Arts City* takes its name from the six arts mastered by Confucius - music, mathematics, calligraphy, charioteering, archery and ancient rituals.

Each of the arts is presented in separate settings in an area of 200,000 square metres of impressive architecture and decor. Apart from the educational and entertainment value of the centre, it speaks of the sustainability of the Confucian heritage well into the modern world.

Indeed, the legacy of Confucius has not only given rise to this Sino-American joint venture into cultural tourism, but has taken a more earthy turn - the Kong Family Liquor is a spirit wine named after Confucius' Kong clan and contributes to the local economy,(4) not to mention its social life. A fitting occasion for a glass of Kong Family Liquor might be to welcome guests, in accordance with Confucius famous saying, "Is it not delightful to have friends come to you from afar!" With Confucius' 2,550 special birthday celebrations this year, attracting Confucian scholars from all over China and the world,(5) this may well prove a common greeting in Qufu.



Monumental Sculpture Commemorating the Art of Charioteering, Six Arts City

Footnotes

1. Adapted from map provided by courtesy of PCL Map Library.
2. John King Fairbank, *The United States and China*, (4th ed.), Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1979, p53.
3. *Lonely Planet: China*, 6th ed., Lonely Planet Publications, Hawthorn, Australia, 1998, p331.
4. About 10% of Qufu's 1,900 enterprises have names related to Confucius, "Confucius Says: Profit Well From My Name", *China Daily*, 24 October 1998, p1.
5. Including the founding members of the Centre for East-West Cultural and Economic Studies, which publishes *The Culture Mandala*.

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The Centre for East-West Cultural and Economic Studies,

The School of Humanities and Social Sciences,

Bond University, Queensland, Australia