Revitalizing History

A calligraphy and painting exhibition brings the spirit of the Tang Dynasty civilization back by Ding Ying

H ad the time machine been invented, the Tang Dynasty (618–907) would be a perfect choice for time travelers who want to experience history.

It’s a period full of energy, openness and creativity. Chang’an (today’s Xian in Shaanxi Province in northwest China), the capital of the great empire, used to be an international metropolis. Merchants from different regions arrived with exotic goods; foreigners became officials and generals of their extraordinary ability; and the most talented poets, singers, dancers, artists and craftspeople artfully created a splendid civilization.

Now history and culture buffs can get a closer glimpse of the Tang Dynasty without a time machine by visiting the Meet the Tang Dynasty Again calligraphy and painting exhibition in the Liaoning Provincial Museum in Shenyang, the capital of Liaoning Province in northeast China. They will also discover the spirit of the Tang civilization, which was characterized by confidence, openness and inclusiveness.

A feast of art

Li Qi, a 34-year-old resident of Shenyang, is one of the first to visit the opening ceremony of the exhibition on October 7. The opening ceremony of the exhibition on October 7.

The exhibition displays the outstanding traditional culture of China to the world. Liu said:

Calligraphy and paintings are historical evidences of the flourishing Tang Dynasty. They represent the politics, culture, religion and other aspects of society and embody the most valuable cultural heritage and social memory of the Chinese people.

“This is the first time in the world that the Tang Dynasty has been showcased through calligraphy and paintings,” cultural studies scholar Liu Chuanming said. Liu is also the curator of the exhibition that has been engaged in Tang history studies for decades.

The exhibition hall recreates the atmosphere of the Tang Dynasty. Zhang said:

“Tang Dynasty has been excavated in Chaoyang, a traditional Chinese musical instrument with seven strings that has a history of thousands of years ago and Chang’an’s beautiful landscape and riverside scenery. They can step into people’s life in that age and relive their experiences.”

“We hope visitors can have a real feel of the Tang Dynasty and be proud of our splendid civilization,” Liu said.

A brilliant period

“The Tang Dynasty is an outstanding period in the 5,000-year Chinese civilization,” Lu Calong, Vice President of China’s International Publishing Group, said at the forum.

The exhibition displays the outstanding traditional culture of China to the world, Liu said:

Calligraphy and paintings are historical evidences of the flourishing Tang Dynasty. They represent the politics, culture, religion and other aspects of society and embody the most valuable cultural heritage and social memory of the Chinese people.

“This is the first time in the world that the Tang Dynasty has been showcased through calligraphy and paintings,” cultural studies scholar Liu Chuanming said. Liu is also the curator of the exhibition that has been engaged in Tang history studies for decades.

The exhibition hall recreates the atmosphere of the Tang Dynasty.

Why was the Tang Dynasty a period of grandeur and prosperity? Ge Chengying, a research fellow with the Chinese Academy of Cultural Heritage, believes the answer lies in the cosmopolitan culture of that age.

The exhibition has also adopted hi-tech to create interactions between the exhibits and visitors. Through those interactive devices with audiovisual effects, visitors can see the prosperity that prevailed thousands of years ago and Chang’an’s beautiful landscape and riverside scenery. They can step into people’s life in that age and relive their experiences.

“We hope visitors can have a real feel of the Tang Dynasty and be proud of our splendid civilization,” Liu said.

A cosmopolitan age

Why was the Tang Dynasty a period of grandeur and prosperity? Ge Chengying, a research fellow with the Chinese Academy of Cultural Heritage, believes the answer lies in the cosmopolitan culture of that age.

The Tang empire attracted people from different countries with its openness, inclusiveness and prosperity, and influenced their development. It established an advanced administrative system that allowed foreigners to participate in it, which was rare at that time, Ge said at the forum.

The period was also characterized by East-West cultural exchanges thanks to the ancient Silk Road. For example, Ge explained, gold coins from the Byantine Empire and statues of camels have been excavated in Chaoyang, a city in west Liaoning, which used to be the easternmost territory of the Tang Dynasty.

“The excellently preserved Tang Dynasty culture will be a very important stop on the ancient Silk Road. In my view, Chaoyang in the Tang Dynasty was like today’s Shenzhen, a frontier of foreign trade,” he said. Shenzhen in south China’s Guangdong Province is a hub of trade and industry.

Wang agreed that it was the openness of the Tang Dynasty that enabled it to be so advanced socially and culturally. “We should never forget the cultural heritage of the Tang Dynasty. We should protect it and use it wisely to assist in today’s national development and diplomatic relations,” he said.

Liu’s conclusion was that the confidence, openness and tolerance of the Tang Dynasty are a necessity today, in China and in today’s world.