

Laufer Letter Notes

Goals for objects he brought back:

Ceramics:

“I spared no pains to make a collection as representative as possible of the pottery and porcelain of this epoch and succeeded in bringing 133 pieces together” (12).

“I acquired a goodly number of this pottery, some of great beauty, and inscribed with dates; aside from its artistic value, it is apt to illustrate many, interesting features of the daily life” (13).

Paintings:

“My object was to have each important subject of pictorial art efficiently represented rather than to be guided by schools or names of artists” (14).

Subjects:

landscape

rain

snow

bamboo sketch

flowers and birds

portraits

religious subjects

“These pictures are all of superior quality, interesting in subject, and highly instructive as manifestations of Chinese genius during the culminating period of art development” (14).

Laquer □ Laufer’s favorite objects?

“The most striking and spectacular exhibition objects obtained for the Museum are a large red-lacquered bed...red lacquer and painted wash-stand...[an] elaborately carved bridal chair...[and] a red lacquered chair painted with five-clawed dragons from the palace of the Ming emperors” (9).

-There weren't any lacquer pieces previous to Laufer's collection—he brought back 84 pieces

-Also brought theatrical costumes, jade, and bird cages/cricket boxes (a new phenomena for any museum)

Overall statements about Chinese people/China:

“I left China more than ever convinced that she produced the most marvelous civilization on earth and the finest types of humanity that may be found in any society” (20)

“The majority of people are good, civil, well-mannered, open-minded, kind-hearted, energetic, intelligent, generous, and hospitable, wonderful in every respect” (20)

“I received nothing but genuine courtesy and kindness, respectful consideration, and sympathetic understanding of my mission” (20)

Other Comments:

-Laufer was picky—as he said, “only the best” for the museum

-Overall he seemed to strive to provide a comprehensive collection in all subjects—in order to educate the public on China's unique culture

-If we put all the information about the MANY objects he brought back, should we address the question, “Okay cool! So...where is it now???”

“I see life and progress everywhere and trust in the future of China. I believe that her literature will bring forth new facts and new thoughts, and that the time will come when it will arrest the attention of the world at large. It is to be hoped that the near future may see many American scholars

taking a real interest in this literature, and when the time comes they will have at hand here in Chicago ample foundation material for their studies and investigations”

---Berhold Laufer of the Field Museum, writing in 1913 about the collection that he created for China scholars in Chicago