

## THE TERRA COTTA ARMY HAS A HIDDEN MESSAGE

By

PAUL ANDREWS

Have you seen programmes on the Terra Cotta army, or even visited the museum? Have you admired the number and the quality of the statues? Have you heard the archaeologists explain how they were made, and historians recount how China was re-united under the Ch'in emperor after centuries of division? Do you wonder if there is a story behind the terra cotta army which is relevant to today's world?

I believe there is a story here which is extraordinarily relevant to the modern world, but it is a story which the public is not being told. The whole story is not being told, because those who know it find it embarrassing and disturbing.

The full story is set out in a book called "Tiger of Chin" by Leonard Cottrell, which was first published decades ago by Evans Brothers Ltd in 1962. This draws on the history of Ssu Ma Ch'ien, which was written two thousand years ago.

The story goes something like this:

The King of Ch'in annexed the other Chinese kingdoms and unified China. China had previously been a feudal empire, with provinces which had broken away from central control and become a collection of aristocratic warring states.

The Ch'in emperor carved the country up into military provinces with military commanders. He built the first Great Wall. He standardised writing and weights and measures. In order to stop any backsliding into the old feudal order, he ordered all books (except those on science – including astrology and divination) to be burnt and destroyed. Anybody found with any of the forbidden books was executed. His rule was autocratic to an extreme, and based on "legalism" – ie the emperor's right to control everything.

The weakness of his system was that his governors could not resist the temptations of exploiting their position, and were easily corrupted. The last few years of the emperor's life were spent touring the provinces to prevent this. After his death, corruption became rampant, the government became unpopular, and there was a revolution and a bloody civil war.

One of the rebel leaders was Liu Pang. He started life as a peasant farmer, and probably never learnt to read or write. He was highly intelligent and exceptionally competent, as well as being a charismatic leader. His first army was ten convicts who he happened to find himself in charge of. He rose up the ranks and eventually became the rebel leader, and in 206 BC, the first emperor of the Han dynasty.

He was not the first Chinese emperor to start from humble beginnings. The first Ming emperor was also a peasant, and of course in modern times there was also Mao Tse Tung, who was emperor in all but name.

Once he had won the empire. Liu Pang had a problem: how was he to govern his vast empire and maintain order, unity and loyalty to his new dynasty, when the Ch'in model had failed so spectacularly and the aristocracy (who would have despised his peasant background) were the only class with any administrative experience?

No doubt while he was pondering these difficult issues, a group of scholars requested an audience. The Ch'in dynasty had gone, but the edict against the books was still law. They had hidden their favourite books and wanted to be allowed to read them again.

"Why does my empire need books?" Liu Pang asked. "I won my empire on horseback, didn't I?"

"Yes you did," replied the scholars, "but can you keep it on horseback?"

At this moment it would have dawned on the new emperor that the scholars before him represented a whole class who were neither military men nor exclusively from an aristocratic background, that they had considerable influence amongst all social classes, and that if he rescinded the edict, they would be eternally grateful. So as well as rescinding the edict, he asked the scholars to help him govern his empire.

He kept Ch'in's unifying reforms and administrative system, he did not restore the aristocracy to their pre-Ch'in pre-eminence, and some of his ministers were scholars.

Liu Pang's far sighted reforms kept his family in power for four hundred years, the longest of the great Chinese dynasties. He called his dynasty the Han dynasty, and even today, Chinese call themselves the "men of Han", and use the description "Han Chinese" to distinguish themselves from the other varied ethnic groups which inhabit the "People's Republic of China."

The scholar-official system lasted 2,100 years. It was refined by Liu Pang's successors and evolved over the centuries, until nearly every official position could only be filled by a scholar. In theory almost anybody could become a scholar, and the best scholars would attain the highest government offices. There are stories of scholars who started as peasants and gave their labour free in return for free lessons at schools, but most students would have had to pay for lessons. They had to learn between 40,000 and 50,000 characters, and had to study and learn the empire's literature, law and philosophy, including literature written in Classical Chinese, a difficult language which fell out of use after about 850 AD. At the end of their studies, students were locked up in individual cells for three days while they sat their exams, which were a rigorous test of memory, comprehension and application. Many students died in their cells while sitting the exams – it was a very stiff test.

No student could pass the exams unless he was highly intelligent and hard-working. As the students became steeped in the national literature and Confucian philosophy, they would want to follow the teachings of Confucius and develop a strong commitment to act in a responsible way. The product of this system were administrators who were highly intelligent, hardworking and highly motivated. Emperors could come and go; dynasties could rise and fall; the empire could contract or expand or become divided or re-united, but the scholars continued to be the real rulers of the empire until the modern era – right up until the communist revolution.

Compared with other cultures, they were relatively incorrupt and incorruptible. They gave China stable government when the rest of the world was in chaos. There were wars, invasions, civil wars

rebellions, palace revolutions etc. but not to anything like the same extent as has happened in Europe over the last two millennia. If one reads, for example, the Times History of the World, the history of China is in relatively short sections, and China is often referred to as the best place to live in most historical periods. This may reflect the comparative stability of the empire.

The last mandarins, as we call these scholar officials, were murdered by the Japanese and the communists, or they fled into exile. The story of the missionary Gladys Aylward (the Inn of the Sixth Happiness) which was made into a film includes the story of her dealings with one of these officials who was governing the district where she was preaching before the Japanese invasion.

The full story behind the terra cotta army is still relevant to China today, even though the government might not like to admit it. The Communists took over the empire, and were confident they could substitute their political philosophy for what had gone before. The pagodas were pulled down, and those temples (including the temples to Confucius) which were not destroyed were kept as museums only. The old order was consigned to history, along with much of its Confucian values and ideas.

However, communist philosophy led to huge catastrophic mistakes which caused the deaths of millions, and so it was discredited and had to be abandoned. This leaves the Communist Party in power presiding over a capitalist economy. Not surprisingly, as money and finance have been raised almost to the level of a religion, corruption has become rife, and the party, keen on maintaining its “leading” position, is repeatedly having to crack down on it. They too are now faced with the same question as Liu Pang: “We won the empire by violence. How can we keep it?”

My wife and I visited China in 2005. It was a fascinating country, and we chose to visit places which are unknown to most Westerners. We walked up the steep paved ascent of Mount Thai. There were thousands of people doing the same – nearly all Chinese: we did not see another European. Mount Thai is one of the old imperial “holy” mountains. There are temples and monuments all the way to the top. They had all been repaired, and there were even priests at work in the temples.

We visited Chu Fu, the birth place of Confucius, and the ancestral home of his family. There was a huge temple complex – no priests, but thousands of Chinese and Far Eastern tourists. There is a huge green burial ground, with gravestones interspersed amongst a forest of trees. Confucius’ tomb is still marked, and the gravestones mark the tombs of his family. We were told that two of his descendants were still alive. His family’s home was also open to visitors. All the monuments had been neatly tidied up, and were open to tourists. They were there in their thousands – and again we did not see a single European.

We visited the Ming Tombs. The Spirit Way was well kept, the grass had been cut, and the statues had been cleaned and polished and were in immaculate condition. Several of the tombs are open to visitors. The tomb of Emperor Yung Lo, the greatest of the Ming emperors, was crowded, although this time there were a few Europeans. The tomb complex had been carefully restored and the crown jewels of another Ming emperor, Wan Li, and his empress were on display.

In Bei Jing we entered Tien An Men Square. This is the biggest city square in the world, comprising over a square mile. It is dominated by Mao’s mausoleum and the “Great Hall of the People” – modern concrete buildings which have little affinity with Chinese tradition. Tien An Men means the

“Gate of Heavenly Peace”. In imperial times, this area was the hub of the imperial civil service, and was full of buildings. The communists cleared these and turned the whole area into a huge square where they could hold military parades and demonstrate their power. It is the square where the great student protest took place at the end of the last century, and where the students were so ruthlessly crushed.

The old imperial palace, the Forbidden City built by Yung Lo and occupied by all his successors, is at one end of this enormous square. The famous palace gate from which Mao declared the inauguration of the People’s Republic of China is at the centre of the palace wall. The Forbidden City with its traditional curved roof Chinese architecture sticks out against the modern concrete buildings in the square like a sore thumb. Mao would have had the whole complex levelled to the ground, and the demolition plan was only stopped on the intervention of his Prime Minister, Chou En Lai.

However, when we visited the Forbidden City it was being carefully restored. It is now a World Heritage Site. Parts of the building were out of bounds to visitors while repairs were being carried out. What we saw was immaculate, carefully preserved and well looked after. All the fading paint work was being redone – even new gold-leaf paint was being added to touch up the old. The palace complex is so immense that we were only able to see a small part of it, but what we did see was magnificent. There were a few European tourists there, but these were almost lost amongst the crowds of Chinese who were there in their thousands.

The Temple of Heaven complex was undergoing a similar resoration, and so was the Winter palace. I could go on.....

Much of the restoration work could be explained as part of China’s preparations for the Olympics. However, one could not help feeling that somehow the government had decided that, now travel restrictions had been lifted, it was no bad idea to look back into China’s imperial history and take pride in the past. One could take a cynical view and wonder if the government was trying to promote the tradition of a benevolent but autocratic form of government, and fit in with it. As with the emperors, all kinds of freedom are now allowed: personal freedom, commercial freedom, even a limited freedom of the press: the one freedom which is not allowed now, and was not allowed by the emperors, is political freedom.

The image the Chinese communists seem to want to project to the outside world is rather like a Western socialist or social democratic party which is keen to provide sound public services, including free education. It is not clear to me how well the characters are taught. I hear from one source that the characters are not taught at school until the age of 18; from another source, that they learn them from an early age, from the parents of an English student of Chinese at Beijing University, that the student was expected to learn 40 new characters a day. During the “Long March”, Mao made each of his followers wear an image of a character on his back, so that the man behind could read and learn it. The communists simplified the old characters. We saw road signs which were written in both the Romanised “Pin Yin” script, as well as in characters, but most shop signs were in characters, and our guide reckoned that literacy in China was over 80%.

Our guides told us that the difficult but no longer spoken Classical Chinese language is still being taught at school. Mao is reported to have had a great affection for Tang dynasty poetry, which is written in Classical Chinese, and used to recite verses from it by heart. The guides also assured us

that Confucius and Confucian philosophy was also taught at school, although I was not sure the guides themselves knew very much about Confucius.

So it is just possible that today's communist leaders might be reconsidering the values of the old imperial system as a way to justify their continuing monopoly of power, and of instilling sound ethics into their officials, particularly those who are in positions which lay themselves wide open to corruption, if held by bent officials.

So it may be in the interest of the government to promote the Ch'in emperor as the great unifier. So why are they so embarrassed to give as much weight to the events which followed and completed the change from feudal to the scholar-led imperial system? Could it be that they are afraid of admitting in public how sound the mandarin system was, particularly as they had murdered the mandarins who could not escape the country in 1947?

But the Chinese communists are not the only people to tell only half the story of the change from feudal to the scholar-official system of imperial China. Why are western journalists and media presenters so content to follow the current propaganda of China's communist state? Does this have anything to do with the way we in the modernised West distrust scholars and intellectuals? Has it something to do with the way we abhor elites?

There have been historical periods in Europe when scholars were pre-eminent. However, this seems to have occurred more by accident than deliberate policy, and concerns the study of the Greek and Roman classics. It is therefore important to consider how the Greek and Roman Classics developed and were handed down to us.

The Romans conquered Greece in the second century BC. However, their civilisation was not as sophisticated as ancient Greece, and so Greek ideas gradually took hold, and the Roman empire became not so much "Romanised" as a "Graeco – Roman" civilisation which drew heavily on Greece. In time all Roman art and literature had to follow Greek models, if they were to get published, valued or sold.

The Roman governing classes had to learn Greek. This cannot have been an easy task, as although Greek was an inflected language like Latin, Greek is quite a different language. So they were taught it from an early age, many children having their own personal tutor, who was usually a Greek slave. When in their late teens, some went to Athens or Alexandria: to one of the famous schools of philosophy there, to complete their education – the equivalent of modern universities.

At first Greek influence tended to be one of many factors which undermined established Roman traditions, and there was a breakdown in the Republican constitution, as corruption became rife, and leading politicians put their own self-interest above the public interest. The outcome was the benevolent but autocratic rule of the emperors. The problem was how to stop a vast empire from falling apart without letting the army and its commanders become too powerful. Part of the solution was similar to the Chinese system. The armies were cut down to minimum manpower, highly trained, and kept at arms-length, stationed on the frontiers, as far away from Rome as possible. Provincial governors were appointed from the governing classes. Although these often had military experience and responsibilities, they were highly educated men. As such they would have been familiar with the Greek as well as the Roman classics, including the ethical teachings of all the great

philosophers and had a detailed knowledge of Roman law, which they had to administer. Roman law, in particular, was one of the empire's unique selling points: only citizens could use it, and it was the world's best and fairest. Roman law could not have maintained its reputation for justice and fairness if it had existed side by side with corruption. So the corruption was cleaned up, and due to their education, the officials had to be, like the Chinese mandarins, intelligent, hard-working, and highly motivated. This system worked well and gave the Roman empire peace, stability and prosperity for over two hundred years until 190 AD, when it began to break down and change as the old religions and the literature which was based on those religions became discredited, and pressures from within and without gradually wore the empire down.

Latin continued to be spoken for some centuries after 460 AD, when the Western empire officially came to an end, but the Roman classics were read less and the old texts were often pasted over, so that the parchment which they were written on could be re-used. As time went on, the only people who were trained to read and write were monks and clergymen, and books only survived the dark ages if they were kept in monasteries.

The Roman Empire continued in the East, and for centuries was Europe's mediaeval super power. It became known as the Byzantine Empire. The old authors were preserved in libraries, but in 529 AD the emperor Justinian closed the philosophical schools in Athens. His reasoning for this was probably that the Empire was now completely Christian, and it was therefore inappropriate for books which were steeped in the pagan religion to be studied any more. Nevertheless, the impact on intellectual life would probably have been equivalent to the closure of Oxford and Cambridge universities now, if that were ever to happen. Even so, the Greek Classics continued to be taught to the super rich and powerful. However, much was lost as some books became standard school books, and the rest were forgotten. So, for example out of more than 90 known plays written by or attributed to Aeschylus, only seven survive.

In the meantime European civilisation sank backwards into the ignorance, savagery and semi-barbarism of the Dark Ages. There followed the feudal regimes of the middle and late mediaeval periods, when many beautiful buildings were erected, but mostly either churches or castles. Europe only came out of this semi-barbaric state when a new class of scholars emerged and began to educate the rich and powerful and show them that there was a better way to live and rule and govern their estates and countries.

Universities were built and famous public schools like Eton, to educate the children of the rich and powerful. Grammar schools were built for the children of the emerging middle class. They were called "Grammar" schools, because their main purpose was to teach Latin – not English - grammar.

The old Latin manuscripts in the monasteries were read and carefully copied. Where old texts had been written over, the paste was removed and the old text rediscovered and then copied. This process which had already begun in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century received a huge boost in the fifteenth century with the fall of Constantinople.

After centuries of neglect there was a revival of interest in the Classics at the Byzantine Court. Anna Comnena wrote the *Alexiad*, the story of the reign of her father, Alexius Comnenus, which includes a graphic, first - hand account of the First Crusade. She wrote it in Ancient Greek. Scholars dusted off the manuscripts in the libraries at Constantinople, and copied them. In the meantime the old empire

was disintegrating and by the beginning of the Fifteenth Century, all that was left was Constantinople and a small territory around it and a semi-autonomous province in the Peloponese. It was hard pressed by the rising Turkish Ottoman sultanate, but the end was delayed by an attack by Tamberlane on the Ottoman lands. The Ottoman army was defeated and it took half a century for the Turks to recover. At the same time it became obvious that the days of Constantinople were numbered. Many scholars left, taking their manuscripts with them. They were welcomed into the courts of Europe. The final blow came in 1453, when Constantinople was taken by the Turks, but by then most of the scholars had gone.

Europe was fascinated and inspired by this new literature – two thousand years old, but new to Western Europe. Doctors studied Greek medical texts: they still have to abide by the Hypocratic oath. Architects borrowed from Vitruvius and improved on his work. Lawyers studied Justinian's legal code and applied it to their cases: the Code Napoleon and the German legal codes are based on Roman Law. The Elizabethan playwrights, notably Shakespeare, studied Greek and Roman plays and used them as models. Rulers like Henry VIII modernised the administration of their feudal kingdoms along Roman lines. Philosophers followed the footsteps of Aristotle and other great philosophers. The feudal levies were abandoned, and their place was taken by professional armies organised in a way which resembled the Roman army. The aristocracy employed painters to decorate their palaces and stately homes with scenes from the Greek myths. In a society dominated by the church, there had been very little secular literature in Western Europe. Now there was a change. Literature written in honour of Pagan gods took on a purely secular character, now that belief in the pagan gods was long gone. So authors began to write secular literature in their own languages, using Classical texts as models. It was an earth-shattering but bloodless revolution, fuelled by scholarly research. Europe was reborn, and the name given to this great revolution is "The Renaissance".

The Renaissance revolution modernised Europe. Its first test came as the Moslem Turks renewed their invasion of Christian territory. Their armies overwhelmed the Balkans, Transylvania, Hungary, and all the kingdoms circled by the Carpathian mountains, and, in 1683, arrived at the gates of Vienna. They were beaten back: they got no further than Vienna. Their navy tried to get control of the Mediterranean. They were defeated by a Spanish fleet at the battle of Lepanto in 1571.

The impetus of the Renaissance led Europeans to explore, conquer, and set up bases in distant lands. This eventually brought them into direct contact with the Chinese empire for the first time ever.

In 1644 the Chinese Ming dynasty had been supplanted by the Manchu or Ch'ing dynasty. A series of energetic emperors of the new dynasty extended Chinese power and the empire reached its zenith in the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century under the last great emperor, Ch'ien Lung. It was the biggest, greatest and most powerful and prosperous empire on earth, and was well admired. Many Georgian country houses have a "Chinese Room" – a room decorated in Chinese style and populated with Chinese furniture, porcelain and screens.

At the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century the Chinese Empire was eclipsed by the Europeans whose military technology had only just overtaken the Chinese. China went into decline, but not before Europeans had absorbed some interesting lessons.

European travellers would have found a vast, powerful and prosperous land, ruled over by a benevolent autocrat, and held together by a tight and complex network of scholar-officials, who were not only highly intelligent, hard-working and highly motivated, but also, on the whole, incorrupt and incorruptible. They were particularly impressed by the system of imperial examinations, and took this favourable impression home with them.

In Europe at that time, preferment depended entirely on birth and family connections – on who you knew rather than what you knew. MP's were elected from "rotten boroughs", and there was a property qualification on the right to vote. In 1806, when the Ch'ing emperors were still at the zenith of their power – six years after Ch'ien Lung retired - examinations were introduced for entry into the British civil service. The intention was that henceforth promotion would be by ability, and to make the civil service less corrupt and more efficient. This was successful and the examination system eventually spread to other walks of life – including schools and universities. The prize of all student was to get into Oxford or Cambridge. The quality of schools was not based on league tables, but came to be measured by the yearly number of students they could get to pass the exams which would get them into Oxbridge.

A knowledge of Latin was a prerequisite to entrance to Oxford and Cambridge Universities, and students had to be examined in it. School children who were good at Latin were encouraged to try Greek. The classics degree at both universities was one of the most severe ever. It was nicknamed "Greats." Both languages are difficult enough as they are, and being inflected, work in a different way to most modern languages. So learning the language was hard enough. However, Oxbridge Greats students had to go much further. They had to learn some Roman and Greek poetry by heart. They had to be able to translate from Latin and Greek authors, and had to be able not only to translate from English into the languages using the style of a specified ancient author, but also from English poetry into Latin and Greek verse.

There is a true story from the Second World War. A British commando unit made a daring raid Crete which was at the time occupied by the Germans. Their mission was to kidnap the German military governor, General Heinrich Kreipe. The raid was successful, and while waiting to be taken off the island by sea at night, the German prisoner began to mutter to himself and recite a verse of the Roman poet Horace which seemed particularly apt to his misfortune. The British officer in charge (the author Leigh Fermor) picked up the quotation and completed it!

The Oxbridge "Greats" was a four year course, and the last few years concentrated on the texts of the great philosophers, particularly on ethics. These are extremely difficult to translate. No student could pass a degree of this kind without being highly intelligent and working very hard. Few such students could leave university with a degree in Greats without absorbing and being inspired by the values of the ancient authors and being highly motivated as a result.

As the European empires expanded in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, a Colonial service evolved, and Classics graduates tended to be appointed to senior positions in the colonies. The story goes that in the 1930's one British Colonial Secretary had a second class honours Classics degree, and all the governors he appointed also had second class honours degrees in Classics – he never appointed a first class honours Classics graduate, in case he would be out-ranked!

The British Empire was by no means perfect, but on the whole the governors and their staff were intelligent, hard-working and highly motivated, and the administration was efficient, fair and effective. I would like to think that to a very great measure this was at least partly due to many of the governors and their senior staff having an educational background akin to the scholar officials of Imperial China.

How has this changed since independence? Some years ago we visited Kenya. It was an eye-opener. There were a few main roads which were in good condition. The rest of the roads were badly potholed, and so badly damaged that vehicles had to drive outside the tracks and round the potholes. They had not been maintained or repaired for years. We passed the remains of broken fences and wooden ranch entrances, where farmland had gone back to bush. We were warned on no account to go to a Kenyan hospital – however ill we might be. My wife was mugged in broad daylight in the middle of Nairobi, the capital, while I was walking with her. The lampposts in Nairobi had clearly been in good condition once, but when we saw them, most were bent or damaged and had live cables sticking out of them. All houses, hotels and other buildings were surrounded with walls with barbed wire and cut glass on top. There was evidence of corruption everywhere. As we drove out of Nairobi on the way to the Masai Mara game reserve, there was mile upon mile of shanty towns. I never could have imagined people living in such squalor and poverty. I know that there was much poverty in Africa in imperial times, but there were missionaries and philanthropic societies who went out to address this. I cannot believe anything as bad as this could have existed under the colonial regime.

The Christian Church was very strong, and we went to a service at the cathedral. There were hundreds of people inside and outside. There were no Europeans apart from ourselves, but even so, we felt completely safe, and were made welcome. The outgoing archbishop gave what he called “three brief addresses”. The service was a moving and memorable experience, and included singing by several choirs. It lasted over three hours but the cathedral was packed and the service was relayed electronically to the crowd outside. The archbishop’s sermons were difficult to understand because of his accent. However much of it was political, railing about the corruption, saying that people were no better off than under the empire and that independence had done them no good, and retailing stories about his numerous escapes from various assassination attempts.

The influence of religion could not have been more clearly marked than by the contrast between the crowds at the cathedral, where we felt safe, and the insecurity within the towns, where bureaux d’exchange were guarded by men with automatic weapons.

Nevertheless there was much that was good in Kenya. There were tea plantations and extensive Del Monte pineapple farms. The game reserves seemed well looked after, and the Masai tribesmen who ran the Masai Mara game park were particularly impressive. One day they took us out up some hills on a walk in the park. They had only spears and swords and no firearms, but we felt completely safe with them. We were taken up to a place where young warriors sleep when going through their initiation trials: the next hill had a solar-powered mobile phone mast on it. Quite a contrast.

Then there is Zimbabwe. Once the breadbasket of Africa, it has been ruined by one man and his followers who have become totally corrupted by power. Would Robert Mugabwe have caused this ruin if he had been brought up as a scholar, I wonder?

South Africa is another interesting post-colonial country. For years it remained under apartheid Afrikaaner rule. Then the black Africans got the vote and Nelson Mandela became president. Mandela was well educated and a Christian. He wanted whites and blacks to live together in harmony – a very courageous stand from someone who had spent more than twenty years in prison for his opposition to apartheid. He was followed by Mbeki, also well educated. However, Mbeki has been ousted by Zuma who everybody knows is corrupt. So now the world is quietly holding its breath and hoping the constitutional checks set up by Mandela and the influence of the Christian church will prevail, and Zuma will be a statesman and not become just another Mugabwe.

We are now taught to be ashamed of our imperial past. I think this is quite wrong. The British Empire brought peace, sound administration, law and order, education, prosperity and western medicine to the colonies as well as roads and railways and much else besides. It is true that the Empire had its sinister side. There was China, for example, which was too big to take over: the Western Powers divided China into spheres of influence and Britain ruthlessly exploited the opium trade. When a mandarin challenged a shipment of opium and confiscated it, Britain declared war on China, the Chinese army was technologically inferior and easily defeated, and then we imposed the opium trade on China as never before. The Chinese don't forget. In our travels in China we were shown a number of historic houses with rooms where opium was smoked. This situation was only possible because the dragon throne was suffering a series of weak emperors who were controlled by a powerful empress who preferred to spend her money on herself and build an entirely new summer palace instead of putting her money into modernising the army as the Japanese emperors had.

All the European empires had one huge flaw, and that was the belief in white supremacy – the belief that European civilisation was the best. Perhaps there might have been some justification for this belief in Africa, but most of the diverse nations of the British Empire had been civilised countries when people in Britain were living in straw huts. So the concept of white supremacy was a little odd. It was a mistake never made by the Romans. In Roman times, nobody had to be a Roman citizen if they didn't want to be, but clearly it was in the interest of the empire that everybody should want to feel part of Rome. So Rome used its unique selling point: Roman law. You could only use Roman Law if you were a Roman citizen. This worked, and by 206 AD everybody was a Roman citizen and everybody felt they were part of the empire – so much so that when the Romans finally left, they were much missed. There was no restriction on citizenship in regard to the colour of your skin. Skin colours are hardly mentioned in the surviving literature, although there were so many diverse races and cultures that they must have mixed freely. Indeed, the remains of a black African Roman have been found in York.

We should not be ashamed of our imperial past. We should be proud of it, just as the Italians can be proud of the great days of Rome, and Greeks can be proud of the glories of Alexander and the Hellenistic empires and the great centuries of Byzantium. Even so, this should not stop us from acknowledging the worst excesses of imperial power.

So why is it that we in the West are reluctant to acknowledge the contribution which scholars have made to society? We have not murdered our scholar officials or burnt their books: so what is the problem?

I think the problem relates to a fear of elitism. In a democracy we all have only one vote, however rich or poor, but we don't like elites, and we want to make life as easy as we can for ourselves. For

example, so that everybody should theoretically have the chance to become a qualified solicitor, we make the exams easier. Whereas before solicitors had to pass a difficult examination which one was only encouraged to take if one had a second class honours law degree, now anybody with any law degree can do the professional course, and the main legal qualification is the degree and not the straightforward test at the end of the professional course. This may be excellent for aspiring law students, but is it in the interests of the public? And why then is the legal profession so surprised that insurance premiums have rocketed skywards since this change was introduced? Think what might happen if entry to the medical profession was relaxed in the same way? How do we know it hasn't? I could go on.....

When I took my Classics degree the standard had changed. The old "Greats" degrees continued right through the sixties. Round about this time Oxbridge dropped its requirement for prospective students to have at least passed in Latin at 'O' Level GCE. Latin is a difficult language, and if Latin grammar is learnt systematically, it is not a particularly interesting subject at the beginning. Learning Latin is to an extent what it might have been like for a student to learn to read Elizabethan English if English were a dead language: the student would not be taught to speak the dead language, and would not be particularly enthused until he was sufficiently knowledgeable to read one of Shakespeare's plays.

When I started learning Latin, I did so because school made me. I could see no use for it and I hated it – as did many others. So, once the Oxbridge requirement was dropped, the study of Latin and Greek went into rapid decline, and soon became either optional or fell off school curricula altogether.

In order to counteract this, various attempts were made to produce courses which were more interesting and attractive to students – and therefore easier. As a consequence, when Classics students reached university they knew much less than previous "Greats" students, and university courses had to change to accommodate this.

When I left school I did a Law degree. I found this very dull and dry, and ended up reading my Classical texts in my spare time – just to relieve the tedium. After I qualified I turned to the texts again, and thought about an external London University degree in Classics. What I found was a complete surprise: the verse translation paper had been discontinued; translation into Latin and Greek was optional, as was the translation of unseen texts from Latin and Greek. Even the set books were optional, and anyway reduced to two authors. I could get away with studying one Greek play and fifteen hundred lines or so of Virgil's Aeneid – I could have done easier authors if I'd wanted to. As it happened I took the degree seriously and did the optional papers for translating into Latin and Greek and from unseen passages into English. I got a very good degree, but am no scholar. There is no way I could have done all the work necessary to pass an old-style "Greats" degree and at the same time, do a full time professional job.

Recently I checked the Cambridge Classics degree syllabus. This was much the same as the London University degree I had taken, but with another refinement: the student did not have to have any previous knowledge of Greek, but the course could be extended by a year to allow him to learn that language. Even now I simply cannot get my head round how one can get a degree in any foreign language, without having to prove one's ability at least to translate a written text from a famous author which one has not seen before.

I would emphasise this is not a criticism of the universities themselves: they have simply had to make the best of a very bad situation.

So why is scholarship important in a modern society? Why, for example, won't a degree in Politics, Philosophy and Economics or Sociology do?

This is a difficult question to answer, because everybody nowadays seems only interested in getting an immediate and direct benefit from their studies, and there are not many jobs immediately available for classicists. One has to consider not only the direct benefits, but also the indirect benefits, and realise that value of the indirect benefits of something can sometimes exceed the value of the direct benefits of others. Once one considers the indirect benefits of scholarship, the question becomes easier to answer. Here are a few practical examples.

Tony Blair has been much criticised for the way he handled the Gulf War and its aftermath. The critics forget how successful his intervention was in former Yugoslavia, when that country fell apart. Why was he so successful in the one and such a failure in the other? The answer is that he had been brought up to believe that once any country had been given the opportunity to be democratic and adopt western values, they would welcome it without reservation. So they did in former Yugoslavia, which had an European tradition, but Iraq, which had not, was different. If he had been a Classics scholar, Mr. Blair would have studied a different civilisation with an entirely different religion to our own, and would have appreciated that different cultures have different values and would not have made the foolish assumption that most Iraqis would want to copy European values. The same applies to Afghanistan. In both cases, a politician with a background in Classics might have been better able to deal with the situation.

Take another example, and consider Hitler. He was not well educated and got into power by demagoguery. He thought he could conquer the world and almost succeeded. However, he had no idea how to deal with the territories he conquered. Resistance was violently suppressed and the holocaust took place in order to violently exterminate an imaginary enemy. He should not have gone to war in the first place, of course, but once Germany had made conquests he was faced with the same dilemma as Liu Pang two millennia before: "You have won your empire on horseback, but can you keep it on horseback?" Hitler had conquered by violence, and wrongly thought he could keep his conquests by violence. He had ended up living by the sword and so he died by the sword, and took millions with him.

There is another similarity between Hitler and the Ch'in emperor in China: both tried to stamp out the culture of previous times – both despised scholars and burnt their books.

Throughout this article I have shown how scholarship can make people highly motivated so that they know when to put the public interest ahead of their own interests. The only other agency which is able to do this is religion, but unfortunately church attendance continues to fall and the influence of religion is on the decline. Something more than religion is needed. If people will not listen to what their religious leaders say, they should still have regard to the logical arguments of ethical philosophy. The trouble with this is that there are many diverse ethical philosophies, and the main ethical philosophy in people's minds now is that nobody should do anything unless it is in their own interests. It is a concept which has become rooted in law: trustees under a landed settlement, for

example, are obliged to manage the trust to the best financial advantage of the beneficiaries – if they don't they can be sued.

This ethical system is the reason no banker could see anything wrong in taking huge bonuses or termination payments, when the banks were collapsing a few years ago, and still pay themselves extraordinary bonuses out of the taxpayer money which has been entrusted to them to save their businesses. It is why banks saw nothing wrong in manipulating the Libor interest rate to their own advantage. It is why superstore chains can see nothing wrong in using their commercial power to close down whole town centres, regardless of the damage to local business communities and local employment. It is why President Assad won't relinquish power. It is why the officials at the European Union are quite happy to carry on business without books which have been passed by auditors. It is why there are so many divorces, regardless of the harm to children. It is why governments have economised on river maintenance – in the anticipation that they won't be in power to face the consequences when the floods come. It's the reason so many people prefer to receive benefits instead of working. It is why a government was quite content to close all our coal mines, so that coal could be bought from abroad from mines where miners were badly exploited. It's why Mugabwe has "Africanised" the white owned farms – regardless of the impact on his country's economy. It's why Zuma and so many other African leaders are corrupt. It's why the Chinese government is having so many problems weeding out corruption amongst their own officials. This list can go on and on, and it all boils down to the same perverse ethical considerations which pervade all modern society: self-interest is king.

A scholar will know this is not right. He knows the heroes in the books he has studied do not act like this, but many of the villains do. He finds inspiration from his books. Jason in Euripides *Medea* divorces his wife for purely selfish motives, and ends up as a disappointed man after the murder of his prospective new spouse and his own children. Aeschylus' self-interested and self-glorifying Agamemnon rides into town with his new mistress at his side, and comes to a sticky end after his vanity induces him to walk with his wife into his palace over the vestments of the gods. The brash, arrogant and self-interested Zeus of Aeschylus' *Prometheus* can only survive with the help of the self-denying fellow immortal who he has chained and cast into the lowest depths of pain and misery in Hades. A scholar's inspiration should give insight and this insight is fortified by the philosophical writings of great men such as Plato or Aristotle, both of whom saw a society with similar attitudes and similar problems, and tried to persuade people to change.

One might say that all this could be achieved by reading material which is more up to date. The difference is that there is an awful lot of rubbish printed these days. Fashions come and go, and ideas which seem good last year may not suit tomorrow. There is a shifting relativity about modern ideas which is about as changeable as the weather. So it is difficult to distinguish what is ephemeral and transitory from true value. The Classics on the other hand have stood the test of time. Only a fraction of the literature survives, but what is left represents what generations of scribes liked and thought worth keeping and copying. In other words what is left has a lasting appeal and enduring value. By definition a "classic" is a work which sets a standard which can be used as a model to measure and judge all literature.

It will no doubt be suggested that this is fine, but why should it be necessary to study the language when there are so many good translations? Much is lost in translation of course, but there is another

reason. The translation of Latin and Greek texts does require a distinct logical, analytical, intellectual discipline, which once learnt, stays with you for the rest of your life. I used to know a headmaster of a well-known private school who discontinued Latin soon after the new syllabus came out and it was no longer necessary to learn Latin grammar in the methodical and systematic manner it had traditionally been taught. He felt the intellectual discipline was no longer there, and for that reason alone, could see no reason to continue teaching the language.

After long experience in management positions within the public service, I've come to the conclusion that there are two kinds of mistakes which are made far too often, and both are equally destructive. The first is the man who cannot see the wood for the trees. Officials who make this kind of mistake get themselves bogged down in extraordinary detail and have difficulty in making any decisions at all. At the other extreme are the men with the big ideas and the "big picture". The big picture comes right out of their imagination, and they then try and make detailed considerations fit into it. The result is a lot of wildly erratic schemes which are criticised when they go wrong because they "have not been thought through properly." Some politicians turn this into an art: they invent one new initiative with its own media sensitive big picture, and follow it with another and another and another, so as to keep one step ahead of the press, as one by one each of the initiatives fail.

The Classics student learns he cannot make an accurate translation until he has understood and analysed every word and its position and function in the text. In other words, if the final translation is the equivalent of a "big picture", the big picture grows out of the details, just as an accurate final translation grows out of the analysis of the words in a Latin sentence. A student with a mind trained by a Classical education should therefore be in a better position to be able to see the wood through the trees, than one who is not.

This argument has taken us a long way from the terra cotta army and Liu Pang and his scholars. So where is it taking us. Am I suggesting that the West should immediately appoint scholar officials and leave them to run the country? If this were ever to happen, Thucydides, Aristotle, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Aristophanes, Herodotus and most of the other Classic Greek authors would turn in their graves. It would be completely contrary to everything they stood for, because Classical Greek literature, if it has any single common theme, is all about democracy. No. the tradition of Western Europe is all about influence: we need to listen to scholars and be guided by their influence. Our ancestors listened as the walls of Constantinople came tumbling down, and that is how we eventually came to have the freedom, prosperity and democracy we enjoy today.

Unfortunately, the free world is in a moral vacuum. Religion has fallen out of fashion, and not many people listen to our religious leaders any more – except to pay lip service. At the same time, Classical scholarship has also fallen out of fashion. The result is a reliance on self-interest as never before, and the world has gone amoral, and ignorance often prevails. One solution would be to restore Classical scholarship to its old pre-eminence. This could be the saving of the credibility of our failing institutions. We need the influence of good Classical scholars just as much as we need good lawyers, doctors, politicians, bankers, businesses, soldiers etc. The scholars don't need to run the country as they did in China, but their influence is still needed in Law, in the media, in politics, in business, in administration, in the diplomatic corps and in the armed forces. Classical scholars are needed for the invaluable insight which they can provide. Their influence can help to bring back conventional ideals

of hard work and the kind of self-less motivation into public life which might encourage people in responsible positions to put the interests of the public and the community ahead of their own .

Steps need to be taken to attract more students and make Classics courses more rigorous. Perhaps the top universities might consider giving priority to students who have passed Latin at GCSE, or perhaps Latin could be given greater weighting in school league tables than many other subjects. Ancient Greek might be revived and seen to be worth re-introducing to schools, if a combined Greek degree could be offered, which includes Modern Greek, Classical Greek and the study of some Byzantine texts.

So, when we visit the terra cotta army and admire it, we should remember the story behind the statues – the whole story and not just the part which we want to hear - and what it means for us. The story has a message and a lesson which is very relevant to today's world.

THE END