

The Imperial Exams

Name: _____

<p>Meritocracy: one of the most important concepts of good government is the idea of a meritocracy. A meritocracy is a system in which power and success are given to people who earn it. This is very different from many systems where wealth or social status determine power and success. In a meritocracy, the sons of nobles won't necessarily be nobles as well and a peasant has just as good a chance as the son of an emperor.</p>	<p>Define "meritocracy" in your own words:</p>
<p>Bureaucrat: a bureaucrat is someone who makes sure laws are enacted and helps run a government. They are a government official but not a leader. They aren't senators or presidents or prince or kings. IRS agents are bureaucrats, as are DMV workers, police officers, and teachers. People hired by the state.</p>	<p>Define "bureaucrat" in your own words:</p>
<p>Imperial Exams: to become a bureaucrat in the Chinese Empire, you had to pass an exam. Those who passed were given degrees and instantly became part of the Chinese Nobility. These imperial exams were extremely rigorous and difficult. They also had multiple levels. The lowest degrees qualified people for jobs like tax collectors and deputy police commissioners. The highest degrees qualified for jobs like Field Marshall of the Army or Attendants to the Emperor himself.</p>	<p>What was the Imperial Exam?</p> <p>What did you get for passing?</p> <p>What did you need a degree to do?</p>
<p>Development: Exams were given as early as the Han period. However, it would not be until the Sui Dynasty that the modern exam was created as a way to test potential candidates for office. In 605 the exam became the <i>only legitimate way</i> to become a bureaucrat or noble.</p>	<p>Why is the Sui Dynasty more responsible for the exams than the Han?</p>
<p>The exam made China a meritocracy. Sons of nobles could not be assured that they too would be nobles. They had to study for years to pass the exam and many would fail to do so, dropping them out of the rank of nobles. Similarly, even lowly peasants could take the exam if they could scrap together the moderate amount of money to pay the fee. Only the lowliest people were not able to take it: slaves, prostitutes, and actors.</p>	<p>Why did the exam make China a meritocracy?</p> <p>Why would it be a little difficult for poor people to take?</p>
<p>Content: the exam, however, did not test technical ability in the job. It tested knowledge and analysis of Confucian principles. The core texts are called the Four Books and Five Classics—a selection of Confucius's works as well as a few more ancient works that Confucius found to be exceptionally valuable. At the lowest degrees, one needed to have read and understood these books to a very great level. The tests were extremely difficult. The lowest degree, the provincial, had only a 1-2% pass rate. At the highest levels, one needed to have almost entirely memorized the collection of books.</p>	<p>What was the Imperial Exam testing?</p> <p>What would you need to pass the exam?</p>

<p>Pacifying: the imperial exam was a major tool in pacifying conquered people. The bureaucrats in China were viewed as wise, educated people and so commoners were generally pretty happy with the transition to Chinese rule. Secondly, the exam gave even the lowliest people a chance to become nobles. This again pacified commoners, who were happier to live under this system than non-meritocracies.</p>	<p>What are the 2 ways in which the exam pacified?</p>
<p>Assimilation: Chinese imperial culture was based heavily on Confucianism. The exams made it so that you could only become a noble by dedicating years of your life to studying Confucianism. This forced people to embrace Chinese culture if they wanted to become nobility. It also was only offered in the Chinese language, so it made people learn the language as well.</p>	<p>What are the 2 ways in which the exam helped assimilate non-Chinese people?</p>
<p>Good Administration: There were definitely problems with the Chinese bureaucracy. It was often viewed as complex, elitist, and impossible for outsiders to navigate. However, it was centuries ahead of the rest of the world. A bureaucrat in China had to be educated, unlike anywhere else in the world until about 1600. Even if the education was not really related to their job, just that they could read and solve problems was an enormous advantage for China. The Empire generally enjoyed a very capable government</p>	<p>What problems were there with the Chinese bureaucracy?</p> <p>Why was it still a good thing?</p>
<p>Wealth Inequality: technically there was nothing to separate the wealthy-born from the peasants in terms of taking the test. However, in actuality it was much harder for poor people to pass. The test required years of study even to pass the provincial level. So people needed enough money to be comfortable not working for years. Then the test required a fee. It wasn't enormous but it was a barrier for the poor. The wealthy could try to pass many times and retry. The poor could not afford to. Lastly, during times of bad administration, exam givers could be easily bribed. Despite all this, poor people did succeed frequently. During the Qing Dynasty, 1/3rd of all holders of the highest degree (the Jinshi), had been born of low class.</p>	<p>List a few reasons it was harder for the poor to pass the exam:</p> <p>Does this still count as a meritocracy? Why?</p>
<p>Intellectual Stagnation: for all the good the exams did, there exists an argument that they are the main reason China lost its technological advantage. The intellectuals of China were not spending their young years studying science, they were spending it studying Confucius. By the Qing Dynasty, even the newest of the exam material was over 2,000 years old. So as science became more complex and required more study, it became more difficult for Chinese intellectuals to actually spend the time required to develop and understanding of that material. Others argue that this is a simplistic view and the exams only were part of a much larger problem.</p>	<p>Why do some argue the exams impacted China's technological development?</p> <p>Do you think this argument has merit? Why?</p>