

## How were the children educated in China?

Childhood could be a very happy time; punishments were few, and there were lots of toy and sweetsellers in the towns. Children were brought up to be gentle, obedient and friendly, and they

were encouraged to live on good terms with relatives, friends and strangers, and to respect all elders.

Poor children remained illiterate, whilst the sons of the wealthy had a private tutor before going on to school. The boys in the towns learned the basics of reading and writing, and how to use an abacus. After the tenth century more people were educated because printing produced more books. It was rare for a girl to receive any education. Occasionally a father would teach his daughter, but the arts of spinning, embroidery, and playing musical instruments were the skills that were valued.

### A typical school in Han times

#### Where?

The capital city – Chang'an.

#### Who?

Sons of highly placed families and sons of officials. Boys of promise from lower backgrounds were chosen by some officials to be educated in the capital.

#### Curriculum?

Many hours were spent mastering the written characters. Word-lists were compiled to assist in this. The texts of the classics were closely studied. The theory and practice of mathematics was also necessary.

#### Purpose?

To train future officials for the Civil Service.

#### Result?

Improved character by correction of faults and repression of ignoble motives, and exploitation of natural talents. Recognised as a scholar.

#### Future?

Nomination for a lower official's post, and then an examination by the senior officials in the capital or even by the Emperor himself. If successful, the award of a first, second or third class grade, and then a long wait for a vacancy. Sometimes up to a thousand men were waiting.

### Civil Service examinations

By the time of the Song dynasty (960–1279) the only way to become an official was to pass the Civil Service examinations, which lasted in China until 1905. The idea was copied in the nineteenth century for the British Civil Service.

There was no age limit, and some men repeated the ordeal year after year. On the appointed day in the spring men went to the capital equipped with ink, brushes, and food. The examinations usually lasted three days. Each candidate was put into a numbered cubicle where he wrote his answers and ate his food – a type of solitary confinement. If anyone died, the corpse was hoisted over the wall! The examination comprised essays on the meaning of lines from one of the classics. Each essay was graded. Only about one per cent of the candidates were successful. Most entrants were financed by their families, showing the value placed on success.

### The official's job

At work officials received reports from colleagues, interviewed the public, completed tax records and made suggestions to superiors. There was a strict hierarchy, and recognition of who was above and who below in the career structure. This resulted in a lot of ceremonies and rules of etiquette, like the kowtow, which was to bow as low as possible with the head touching the floor, in front of a superior.

Every three years a report was written on an official by his superior. It was fairly basic, and often required simply filling in the gaps.

Such a report might be followed by promotion or demotion. All this resulted in the large majority of officials working honestly and with a conscientious devotion to duty.

There were a few stories of corruption: a building project in 80 BC required 30,000 carts of sand and gravel to be moved by hired oxen. This had been calculated at

1000 coins for each load. A high official indicated in the records that 2000 coins per load had been paid, thus making a profit of 30 million coins for himself!

### CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES: EDUCATION IN CHINA

- Why did parents want to send their sons to a school like the one on page 36?
- Using the evidence fill in the chart to decide the effects of this type of education and career structure.
  - Is one of these effects more important than the others? Explain your answer.
- Read Marco Polo's comment on page 3, beginning with, 'The natives of Hangzhou are men of peace ...' Was this because of the type of education that the men had received, or would other factors contribute to this outlook upon life? Explain your answer.
- How would you describe your education? Think of the subjects that you study plus all the other things you do at school.
  - What values and attitudes are you acquiring? How?
  - How far is your character being shaped by your education? Do other things count?
  - How far is your future being shaped by your education? Do other things contribute?
- How did education make a contribution to China as a civilisation?

	gave unity to the people by ...	prevented new ideas and change by ...	encouraged curiosity about the world and ideas beyond China by ...
education			
career structure			

Name and position...  
How long in the job...  
Height... Age...  
Distance from native home...  
Ability to read...  
Ability to write...  
Ability to manage accounts...  
Knowledge of the laws...  
Assessment of services...  
High/Medium/Low



An official in court dress