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The Civil Service Exam in Ancient China

Ancient China created what has become known as the oldest surviving culture in the world today. There were many inventions and innovations that helped shape what is known about ancient China now. Chinese empires created writing, architecture, and religion to evolve their cultures and make everyday life easier. One important invention was paper, which was invented in the Han dynasty and helped create a strong foundation for making clothing and wrapping mail and boxes today. Another invention that helped move the Chinese empire forward was gunpowder which strengthened the military. Ancient Chinese government officials wanted people to represent their government based solely on merit and intelligence and not social status. The invention of the civil service examination system by the Han dynasty had a significant impact in that it influenced the shift in perspective on average Chinese citizens, and it helped mold the political and social fabric of the Chinese empires.

The development of the civil service system by the Han dynasty began around 206 BCE (Ducksters). The civil service system was an exam for young men that had multiple levels that were difficult to pass, which made it more authentic and trustworthy when people were able to pass it. The civil service examination system was an important part of ancient Chinese civilization because it encouraged the success of individually intelligent citizens. The system was

the first attempt at a recruitment process that was based solely on worthiness (Jacobs). It was necessary for a successful government because it helped to shape a representative form of government and helped promote the inventions of ancient China to other parts of the world. In order to pass the exam, young men had to go through three levels of examination, each one a written test on what they know about topics ranging from the government to knowledge about agriculture. This creation of an exam system was made in order to justify a fair government led by the smartest individuals in the empires. This particular reason was important to ancient Chinese civilizations because it subjected them to a more equal way of appointing government officials. It also helped people feel safer in their homes because they knew that they were being protected by the smartest people from their civilization (Cohen and Teiser).

One of the biggest influences of the creation of the civil service exam system was that it shifted the view on everyday Chinese citizens. Before the civil service system, there was no real chance of males from poorer backgrounds to be an influential part of the government. The test determined how high in the government hierarchy a man would be able to rise. The beginning of the civil service exam brought together the civilizations and made them stronger because it gave everyone an equal chance at becoming an important part of uniting the nation of ancient Chinese society through the use of their government (Han 158). This system was the first time any country had thought of doing a recruitment process based on intelligence and not social status. Before the civil service system, in the Zhou dynasty, government officials were chosen based on recommendations from men of high class and nobles were appointed by the king to rule over certain regions (“Zhou Dynasty Government”). There was still an emperor ruling the ancient Chinese government and this person did have full power over the people, but they had three main

councils of state which were the people who kept up with the military budget and helped command and discipline the military. Then there were nine other ministers who held power over their own individual specialized ministries (Tredinnick). This system was put in place in order to bolster the intellect of the minds that were seated in higher positions in government places. When everyone is looked at the same way, it can improve relationships throughout the civilizations which lead to lower conflict between people in different classes. However, this could also be seen in a way that the more fortunate people may look down upon the smarter poor people because they are given the same opportunities as them.

Another great influence of the civil service system was that it helped shape the political and social structure of ancient Chinese society. Ancient Chinese main political components were trade and the exchange of money, which was made stronger with the creation of a smarter government to help control the trade and money (Ancient China Lesson for Kids: Money & Economy). Under the ruling of Qin Shi Huang, it was forbidden to educate using private schools. Official school education was further developed during the time of the civil service exam system. This was helpful because it allowed for all young males to get the same education which gave them an opportunity to learn the lessons needed for the civil service exam. The government was an important part of civilization in ancient China, which made it even more important to have a strong foundation of smart and capable leaders. The only major negative impact that was shown was the large number of people that failed the tests, which brought down the number of people able to lead the government. It tested on a variety of vastly different subjects, which meant that even if someone passed one test, another test could prove to be quite difficult for the same individual. The number of literate men in ancient China was only around 40% of the population

at this time, while the number of literate women was only 10%. This could block the opportunity for many young men who wanted to become a person higher in the government. The civil service exam was important to world affairs as well, because it created a range of intelligent individuals who could open the shared communication between countries and communities which helps with exchanging information and lowers the risk of misunderstanding and miscommunication.

The civil service exam system impacted the outside views of ancient China in a positive way by showing the world that China placed importance on intelligence rather than the usual social status or money driven classes. Ancient Chinese societies were greatly influenced by the creation and application of the civil exam system because it helped to shape a stronger economy. The outcome of the exam system in social and political viewpoints tightened the community bond and faded the line of judgment between different groups of people. Every young male had an equal chance when taking the exam, which grew equality throughout civil societies. The civil service system strengthened the trade and money part of the government, which helped out in jobs and safety through the societies. The civil service exam raised the quality of the government, by making the workers take high quality tests that actually measured the men's knowledge of pertinent information fitting to higher government workers.

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