

## Evolution of the Chinese Civil Service Exam

President of the Republic of China, Hsu Shi-chang, 1920 from his book, *China After the War*

In later periods, in spite of minor changes, the importance of moral virtues continued to be stressed upon. For instance, during the most flourishing period of Tang Dynasty (627-650 A.D.), the Imperial Academy of Learning, known as Kuo-tzu-chien, was composed of four collegiate departments, in which ethics was considered as the most important of all studies. It was said that in the Academy there were more than three thousand students who were able and virtuous in nearly all respects, while the total enrolment, including aspirants from Korea and Japan, was as high as eight thousand. At the same time, there was a system of "elections" through which able and virtuous men were recommended by different districts to the Emperor for appointment to public offices. College training and local elections supplemented each other, but in both moral virtues were given the greatest emphasis.

Although the Imperial Academy exists till this day, it has never been as nourishing as during that period. For this change the introduction of the competitive examination or Ko-chü system, must be held responsible. The "election" system furnished no fixed standard for the recommendation of public service candidates, and, as a result, tended to create an aristocratic class from which alone were to be found eligible men. Consequently, the Sung Emperors (960-1277 A.D.) abolished the elections, set aside the Imperial Academy, and inaugurated the competitive examination system in their place. The examinations were to supply both scholars and practical statesmen, and they were periodically held throughout the later dynasties until the introduction of the modern educational regime. Useless and stereotyped as they were in later days, they once served some useful purpose. Besides, the ethical background of Chinese education had already been so firmly established, that, in spite of the emphasis laid by these examinations on pure literary attainments, moral teachings have survived till this day in family education and in private schools.

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