

Worth the Wait

Civil Service Exam results coming soon

By Sarah Cabbage

Last week's Civil Servant exam results are due out by the end of the month. Men from all parts of Chinese society wait anxiously to know if they will be selected to become a civil servant to the Empire. Those with the fifty top scores can expect their lives to change dramatically; they may be asked to join the emperor's Grand School. Education at the Grand School is the highest and most respected of positions in our society.

The exams, begun around 130 BC by our great emperor Wu Di, have singled out the smartest and brightest among our fellow Chinamen. Because any man, of noble or common blood, can prepare for the exam, the tests have long been seen as a unique opportunity for those of lower birth. The only requirement is that they be able to study for and pass several challenging exams.



<http://www.chinapage.com/emperor/wudi0007.html>

Emperor Wu Di started the Civil Service exams 15 years ago in order to create strong, respected, and educated community leaders and advisors. Wu Di will be remembered for beginning this influential program.

The exams are difficult to pass and require years of study, so many fewer men than are eligible take on the challenge. To pass the exams the student must have a thorough understanding of the ideas of Confucianism. Wu Di considers Confucius and his teachings to perfect those who study it. In addition to learning about the great philosopher a civil service candidate is required to memorize all 431,286 classic words and be well versed in Chinese literature.



A Chinese Scholar studying for his civil service exams.

<http://www.chinapage.com/poremp6.gif>

If the top level, that which qualifies the one who passes to become a minister to the emperor and even to marry a princess, seems to difficult to attain there are many lower levels of highly respected positions.

You may wonder what makes this amount of work worth it. To begin with, civil service is one of the most highly respected positions in Chinese society. They can expect a life of leadership. They will be assigned to govern and supervise towns or cities. As leaders the prefect (their title) is in charge of

enforcing the laws, making judgments, and signing people up for working on Chinese building projects. He will also have the privilege of collecting taxes and supervising schools.

In addition, the man who passes will wear special badges, clothing, and jewelry that will designate them as powerful and deserving of respect. Their families will benefit, too.

Results of the exams will be posted on the local magistrates wall by the last day of the month. Celebrations are sure to follow.

Sources:

1. World Book Encyclopedia- Online.
Keyword: Wu Di and Grand School
2. World; Textbook- c. 1999. pg.
3. Ancient China. Maria Backus.
“Becoming a Civil Servant.” c. 2002.
pg. 12.