


History of Ancient China

Section 4



MAIN IDEAS

1. Confucianism, based on Confucius's teachings about proper behavior, dramatically influenced the Song system of government.
2. Scholar-officials ran China's government during the Song dynasty.

Key Terms

bureaucracy body of unelected government officials

civil service service as a government official

scholar-official an educated member of the government

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Section Summary

CONFUCIANISM

Confucianism is the name given to the ideas of the Chinese philosopher Confucius. Confucius's teachings focused on ethics, or proper behavior, of individuals and governments. He argued that society would function best if everyone followed two principles, *ren* and *li*. *Ren* means concern for others, and *li* means appropriate behavior. Order in society is maintained when people know their place and behave appropriately.

For a thousand years after his death, Confucius's ideas went in and out of favor several times. Early in the Song dynasty, however, a new version of Confucianism, known as Neo-Confucianism, was adopted as official government policy. In addition to teaching proper behavior, Neo-Confucian scholars and officials discussed spiritual questions like what made human beings do bad things even if their basic nature was good.

What two principles did Confucius emphasize in his teachings?

What was the name of the version of Confucianism adopted as official policy by the Song dynasty?

SCHOLAR-OFFICIALS

The Song dynasty took another major step that would affect the Chinese imperial state for centuries to come. The Song improved the system by which people went to work for the government. These

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workers formed a large **bureaucracy** by passing a series of written **civil service** examinations.

The tests covered both the traditional teachings of Confucius and related ideas. Because the tests were extremely difficult, students spent years preparing for them. Candidates had a strong incentive for studying hard. Passing the tests meant life as a **scholar-official**, whose benefits included considerable respect and reduced penalties for breaking the law.

The civil service examination system helped ensure that talented, intelligent people became scholar-officials. This system was a major factor in the stability of the Song government.

What did people have to do to get a government job during the Song dynasty?

What were the benefits of becoming a scholar-official in the Song dynasty?

CHALLENGE ACTIVITY ← *Complete this!*

Critical Thinking: Evaluating Information Would you prefer a government that gave people jobs based on test scores or one that gave people jobs based on their family connections? Explain your answer.

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bureaucracy	civil service	Confucius
ethics	Neo-Confucianism	scholar-official

DIRECTIONS Read each sentence and fill in the blank with the word in the word pair that best completes the sentence.

1. _____ means service as a government official.
(bureaucracy/civil service)
2. People who went to work for the government formed a large _____,
a body of government officials. (bureaucracy/scholar-official)
3. _____ followed the teachings of Confucius, but also
emphasized spiritual matters. (civil service/Neo-Confucianism)
4. Confucius's teachings focused on _____, proper behavior,
instead of religious beliefs. (civil service/ethics)
5. In order to become a government official, a person had to pass a series of exams
that tested students' knowledge of the teachings of _____
and spiritual questions. (bureaucracy/Confucius)
6. A _____ was an elite member of society who received
considerable respect, a good salary, and reduced penalties for breaking the law.
(scholar-official/bureaucracy)

DIRECTIONS On the line provided before each statement, write **T** if a statement is true and **F** if a statement is false. If the statement is false, write the correct term on the line after each sentence that makes the sentence a true statement.

_____ 7. Ethics taught that people should conduct their lives according to two basic principles, *ren* and *li*.

_____ 8. Often, only 1 in 20 students passed the civil service examinations.
