**The Political Development of Imperial China**-Sec 4

**4. Meritocracy: The Song Dynasty**

Under Song emperors, the idea of scholar-officials reached its height. The Song relied on civil service exams and opened them up to far more candidates. In this way, they created a **meritocracy**.



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The exams were influenced by a new school of thought known as neo-Confucianism. This new teaching blended the teachings of Confucius with elements of Buddhism and Daoism (two traditional religions in China).

A Confucian scholar, Zhu Xi (JU SHEE), commented on classic Chinese writings. In 1190, his work was published as the Four Books. This work became the basis of study for all civil service exams.

Confucius taught that people must act properly in five important relationships: ruler and subject, father and son, older sibling and younger sibling, husband and wife, and friend and friend. Except for friends, one person in each relationship is above the other. Those above should be kind to those below. Those below should respect and obey those above. In particular, subjects must be loyal to their rulers. Song emperors and scholars believed that officials who had studied Confucius would be rational, moral, and able to maintain order.

Under the Song, people from lower classes gained the ability to become scholar-officials. They could attend the new state-supported schools and go on to the university. If they passed a local test, they could take the imperial exam in the capital. On those exams, they wrote essays and poems in a certain style. They answered questions about political and social problems based on Confucian ideas.

The exams were set up to prevent cheating. Candidates were locked in a small room for several days. A second person copied each paper so that the examiners wouldn’t know whose work they were reading.

Only a small proportion of candidates passed the difficult exams. Those who failed could take the tests again in the future. Those who passed had to wait a few years before their first appointment. When it came, it was for a job far from their hometown, so that they could not play favorites among family and friends. At the end of three years, officials could move up in rank.

Despite the challenges, people were happy to get such respected jobs. As government officials, they also enjoyed certain privileges, such as being excused from taxes and military service.