

Politics and Education

The main focus of this work is to examine the changes in the political landscape as well as the changes in the education system (institutions, curriculum and examination) that the three major East Asian countries experienced between the fourteenth and the seventeenth century. The research questions were: Is there a visible connection/a political interest behind the changes in the education system? Are there any changes which were not introduced by the local ruling powers?

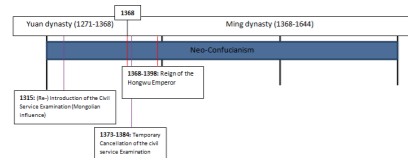
Methodology

Great importance while writing of this work was the historical analysis, which summarized the history and politics of East Asian countries, such as China, Korea and Japan. Also, we went through many historical records in order to find information about the educational system in the respective country during that time span. Besides, during conduction of the research and description of the material comparative study was used so as to understand the relations between the political history and the development of the educational system. Interestingly, there are hardly any sources which combine those two areas (see: State of the Art), so, a big part of our work consisted in comparing and evaluating the information found in the respective source material.

State of the Art

Even though there are some books with regard to educational developments, those deal mostly with the introduction of the ideology (Neo-Confucianism/Buddhism), and political events are for the most part merely glossed over if mentioned at all. In works of history however, there tended to be a bit of information about institutional changes but hardly any to none with respect to changes in the curriculum.

China



Throughout the history of China, it can be seen that Chinese education was always under the influence of either the political situation in the country or general development of the world. In 1271 - 1368 China was under the rule of the **Mongolian Yuan Dynasty**. During that time and until **1315 civil service examinations were revoked**. The dominance of the dynasty led to the spread of Mongolian writing and creation of Mongolian schools that existed along with the Chinese schools. During the Yuan Dynasty astronomical, mathematical and medical sciences were developed, which contributed to the creation of a number of educational institutions with the corresponding profiles.

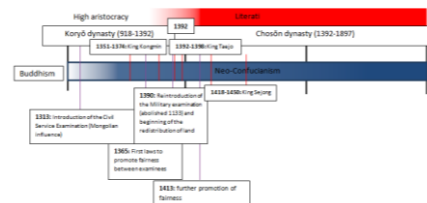
An important stage in the history of medieval education in China was the reign of the **Ming Dynasty (1368 - 1644)**. At this time preconditions appeared for organization of universal primary education, primarily by increasing the network of elementary educational institutions. In **Beijing and Nanjing specialized institutions** of higher education were set up for training senior authorities. Also, reforms of public examinations were continued, which became even more complicated and regulated. Exam essays, for example, consisted of eight sections with a strictly limited number of characters (not less than 300 and not more than 700). Students were allowed to write only about the **events** that took place **after 220 AD**.

Perhaps because of the origin of the **Hong-wu Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang (1328 - 1398)**, the founder of the dynasty, the examination system did not play a great role in the end of the 14th century. Actually, there was a **temporary suspension of the civil service examination from 1373 to 1384**. But, after some time, Zhu Yuanzhang realized that uneducated officials were not able to cope with the majority of public affairs. So, he decided to issue a decree requiring **all Imperial schools to study Ming's law** as well as toughening the examination system. Indeed, examinations were in great demand, despite of its complexity. However, only those who had been able to go through all the stages of the examination system were admitted to the high **official positions** and could influence the government policy. That is why many applicants went to all sorts of

tricks and deceit, and **corruption** among the organizers often occurred.

Despite many violations in the organization of examinations and even corruption, the **system of public examinations** found a positive response in large parts of China, and therefore it was seen as one of the three main **sources of replenishment government officials** until the beginning of the **XX century**.

Korea



During the second half of the fourteenth and the fifteenth century Korea experienced great changes in its political as well as its educational system. In the years surrounding the decline of the late Koryŏ dynasty and the rise of what would later be the Chosŏn dynasty the education changed from a **aristocracy-dominated environment of master-protegeé relationships** between the students and teachers towards a **“device to bring about centralisation of power through the use of men of Confucian learning”** as Kim Yong-Doek is paraphrased in the book *Korean cultural heritage: Koreana, volume 2*. This new education included a system for military examination, laws to promote fairness between student in the final examination and massive changes in the general curriculum of higher education due to the rising importance of the Neo-Confucian doctrine which included the redistribution of land from Buddhist temples to the newly emerging Neo-Confucian academies.

However, **all of these changes were at least partly politically motivated**, although some of them, like the introduction of the **military service examination** by King T'aejo in **1392**, did not immediately have the desired outcome. It was only after his successor abolished private armies and forbade the possession of weapons that the military power was centralized.

Similarly to the military examination the **laws to promote fairness** introduced by King Kongmin in **1368**, and

expanded by King T'aejo and his successor, the first Kings of the Chosŏn dynasty, were most likely meant to **curb the power of the high aristocracy** by making education and the civil service examination accessible for a wider range of social classes. Those laws included a prohibition to bring books to classes as well as a very elaborate system to ensure the anonymity of the examinee during the evaluation.

The **redistribution of land** started in **1390** and continued until the Reign of King Sejong. Those who lost a lot of land during this reform were the big landowners who had close ties to the mongols due to their position as middlemen for collecting levies during the reign of the Mongolian Yuan dynasty in China, as well as the big Buddhist temples who had close ties to the old king.



1: Reuse of older structures: a buddhist temple (left) and a Neo-Confucian school

Those who **profited** from it were not only the newly ascending **Neo-Confucian schools**, many of which were actually build on the sites of former Buddhist temples, but also the **new king and his family who gained an enormous amount of income** by placing a big part of the expropriated territory under direct government control. Once again, the profit for the new education system is more likely to be just a by-product of the process of establishing a new dynasty.

Japan



After the **Ōnin War (1467-1477)**, the Ashikaga shogunate gradually lost its influence while local **lords gained more power** and independence. **These provincial lords**, who to this point only exerted military leadership, while (high-ranking) officials came from aristocratic houses, **now had to concern themselves with matters of civil government** too and made it necessary to be able to write eloquent letters. Some letters soon became standard

learning texts and where used extensively throughout Japan. Most famous of them the **“Imagawa Letter”** by Imagawa Ryōshun, which later went on to become a Tokugawa school textbook.

The **Tokugawa shogunate** established **Confucianism** as a way to get control over the people. Although it was not until the latter half of the Tokugawa rule that it became a widespread and accepted philosophy as 'Neo-Confucianism', the foundation for this development was still laid during that time and was an essential part of learning.

Results

After looking at these countries in this time period we can see that the content and even the way of learning are almost always connected to politics. Be it change or continuation, those in power saw the necessity of education and education itself as way to increase their own standing or to weaken their adversaries.

A very interesting aspect is that in none of the three countries, the ideology behind the educational system (Neo-Confucianism in China and Korea, Buddhism in Japan) changed. The Imagawa letters may also serve as an example for a new part of the educational system (in this case an expansion of the curriculum) that was not established by the ruling dynasty but still became part of the education system.

Apart from this, however, the situation in the three countries with respect to changes in the educational system should be seen as fundamentally different.

While the changes in Korea were mostly changes implemented by the King to re-establish the balance of power in his favour, the changes in Japan were slower and happened not in a set year, but over a period of time which could be seen as a way of adapting to changing needs of maintaining a position of power.

In China, the educational system remained unchanged for the most part after the fall of the Yuan dynasty.

Even though education in East Asia, particularly in China, was much earlier and better developed at that time, it is interesting that **Vienna University** was established quite early for Europe (**1365**)

and was the **first university in the German-speaking world**.

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