Systems of Government in Medieval China

## Goals & Objectives

Students will learn about three main systems of government Chinese emperors used throughout the middle ages. Students will identify, evaluate and argue the concepts of nepotism, meritocracy, and the role of aristocracy in systems of rule employed by emperors.

## California State Content Standard

7.3 *Students analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the civilizations of China in the Middle Ages.*

*7.3.6 Describe the development of the imperial state and the scholar-official class.*

### Lesson Introduction

The teacher will hand out the following quote to the class. In pairs, the students will analyze the quote and decide if they agree (or not) with the criteria presented by Emperor Taizong in determining what makes a good official. The class will discuss student responses.

*Government affairs should be departmentalized to make the best use of officials’ abilities. A tripod large enough for an ox should not be used to cook a chicken, nor should a raccoon good only at catching rats be ordered to fight against huge beasts. … Those with low intelligence or capability should not be entrusted with heavy tasks or responsibilities. If the right person is given the right task or responsibility, the empire can be governed with ease. This is the proper way of utilizing people. Whether the emperor gets hold of the right person for the right task determines whether his empire will be well governed. …*

### Vocabulary

The key terms for this lesson will be introduced in the body of the lesson. The terms will be used extensively in the student engagement activity. The key terms are:

* Nepotism
* Meritocracy
* Aristocracy
* Scholar
* Bureaucracy
* Hierarchy

### Content Delivery

The main focus of this lesson will be a group discussion on what type of official would best be hired by an emperor to help them rule. Before the discussion activity, the teacher will build background knowledge by presenting the concept of a ***bureaucracy*** and how it functions in a government. A graphic organizer will be used to visually display the hierarchical order of a bureaucracy. The teacher will lead a short class discussion on how governments/schools/businesses operate using bureaucracies to help with organizational efficiency. To engage student thinking, the teacher will ask the students how and why the school system operates as a bureaucracy.

### Student Engagement (Critical Thinking & Student Activities)

After the presentation on the concept of *bureaucracy*, the teacher will pass out information on three types of officials that an emperor might employ to help him rule: relatives (nepotism), aristocrats, and scholars (meritocracy). Students will read about all three types of officials, and then brainstorm (in small groups) the pros and cons of recruiting each type of official. The teacher will then engage the class in a group discussion on what type of official would be the most beneficial to the emperor. The strategy for the discussion is as follows:

Value Lines

The teacher will create a set of value lines (see example below) to assess student beliefs of various systems of rule. Divide the students into groups of four and give them each a different colored note card or post-it note (students will identify by their color). The teacher will read each statement below and instruct students to place their card on the value line according to their point of view.

Statements:

* If I were the emperor of China, I would choose my relatives to help me rule
* If I were the emperor of China, I would choose wealthy aristocrats to help me rule
* If I were the emperor of China, I would choose educated scholars to help me rule

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

The teacher will call on various students to explain and defend their answers (for instance, say “group 2, blue…what position did you take?”) This allows for randomization in asking for student responses. As students declare their responses, the teacher will ask other students to ask follow-up or opposing questions to move the discussion forward and get students to engage in critical-thinking and decision-making. After all 3 questions and been asked and students have had time to respond and state their view, the teacher will take a final poll as to what type of official would best help an emperor rule.

### Lesson Closure

Students will write a *postcard to the emperor* persuading him/her to incorporate the service of aristocrats, family members, or educated scholars in government.

### Assessment (Formative & Summative)

Formative – As the discussion progresses, the teacher will listen closely to student responses to assess their level of critical-thinking and mediate the discussion if necessary.

Summative – The teacher will assess the postcard to the emperor to evaluate student’s understanding of different types of rule, as well as their critical-thinking and writing skills.

## Accommodations for English Learners, Striving Readers and Students with Special Needs

The teacher will provide additional vocabulary support for English Learners, striving readers and students with special needs, including terms with definitions and images of common words used in discussions. The teacher will also group English Learners with other native speakers, if possible.