

Name: _____ Class: _____

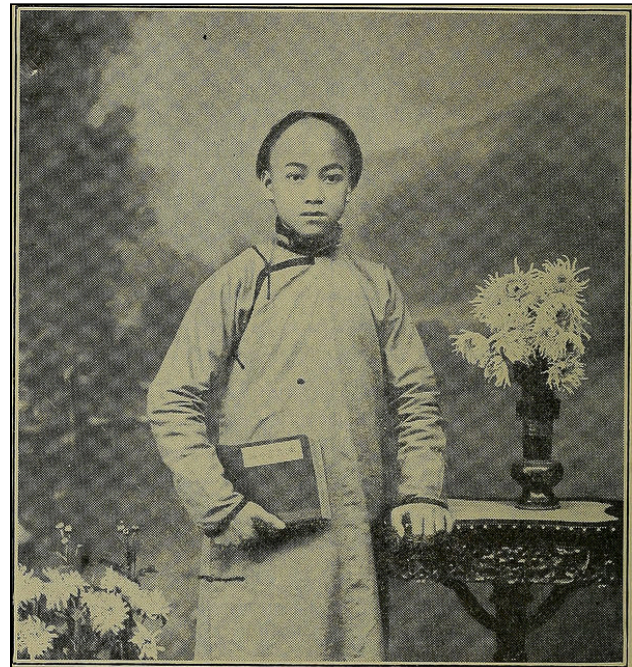
Village Schools and Traveling Soldiers

By Arthur Henderson Smith
1899

Arthur Henderson Smith (1845-1932) was an American missionary who traveled to China in the late 19th century and wrote books describing the country and its customs to foreign readers. In this excerpt, he describes traditional Chinese views on education. As you read this text, take notes on the differences between what is expected of the educated and the uneducated child.

[1] The object of Chinese education is to pump up the wisdom of the ancients into the minds of the moderns. In order to do this, however, it is necessary to keep the stream in a constant flow, at whatever cost, else much of the preceding labour is lost. According to Chinese theory, or practice, a school which should only be in session for six months of the year, would be a gross absurdity.¹ The moment a child fails to attend school, he is supposed (and with reason) to become "wild."

The territory to be traversed is so vast that the most unremitting² diligence³ is absolutely indispensable.⁴ This continues true, however advanced the pupil may be; as witness the popular saying, "Ten years a graduate (without studying), and one is a nobody." The same saying is current in regard to the second degree, and with not less reason.



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The necessity of confining one's attention to study alone, leads to the selection of one or more of the sons of a family as the recipient of an education. The one who is chosen is clothed in the best style which his family circumstances will allow, his little cue⁵ neatly tied with a red string, and he is provided, as we have seen, with a copy of the Hundred Surnames and of the Trimetrical Classic. This young Confucianist⁶ is the bud and prototype⁷ of the adult scholar. His twin brother, who has not been chosen to this high calling, roams about the village all summer in the costume of the garden of Eden,⁸ gathering fuel, swimming in the village mud-hole, busy when he must be busy, idle when he can be idle. He may be incomparably more useful to his family than the other, but so far as education goes he is only a "wild" lad.

1. Here, the word "gross" means "in every way" or "from every point of view."
2. **Unremitting (adjective):** not stopping
3. **Diligence (noun):** careful and persistent work or effort
4. **Indispensable (adjective):** absolutely necessary
5. a required hairstyle for men during the Qing dynasty, consisting of a low braid or ponytail at the back of the head (also spelled "queue")
6. Confucianism is a Chinese philosophy that emphasizes family relationships and ethical living.
7. a standard or typical example

If the student is quick and bright, and gives good promise of distinguishing himself, he stands an excellent chance of being spoiled through thoughtless praises. "That boy," remarks a bystander to a stranger, and in the lad's hearing, "is only thirteen years old, but he has read all the Four Books, and all of the Book of Poetry, etc. By the time he is twenty, he is sure to graduate." When questioned as to his attainments,⁹ the lad replies without any of that pertness¹⁰ and forwardness which too often characterizes Western youth, but as he has been taught to do, in a bashful and modest manner, and in a way to win at once the good opinion of the stranger. His manner leaves nothing to be desired, but in reality he is the victim of the most dangerous of all flatteries, the inferiority¹¹ of what is around him. In order to hold his relative position, it is necessary, as already pointed out to bestow the most unwearied attention on his books. His brothers are all day in the fields, or learning a trade, or are assistants to some one engaged in business, as the case may be, but *he* is doing nothing, absolutely and literally nothing, but study.

- [5] So much confinement, and such close application from the very earliest years, can scarcely fail to show their effects in his physical constitution.¹² His brother hoes the ground, bareheaded throughout the blistering heats of July, but such exposure to the sun would soon give him the headache. His brother works with more or less energy all day long (with intermittent¹³ sequence), but were *he* compelled to do the same the result would not improbably be that he would soon begin to spit blood. That he is physically by no means so strong as he once was, is undeniable. He has very little opportunity to learn anything of practical affairs, and still less disposition.¹⁴ The fact that a student has no time to devote to ordinary affairs is not so much the reason of his ignorance,¹⁵ as is the fact that for him to do common things is not respectable. Among the four classes of mankind, scholars rank first, farmers, labourers, and merchants being at a great remove.

The two things that a pupil is sure to learn in a Chinese school are obedience, and the habit of concentrating his attention upon whatever he is reading, to the entire disregard of surrounding distractions. So far as they go these are valuable acquirements, although they can scarcely be termed an education.

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8. According to the Bible, people in the Garden of Eden were naked until they decided to cover themselves with leaves.
 9. achievements
 10. confidence and a lack of respect
 11. **Inferiority (noun):** the state of not being as good as somebody/something else
 12. a person's physical condition and health
 13. **Intermittent (adjective):** coming and going at intervals; not continuous
 14. a natural tendency or desire to do something
 15. **Ignorance (noun):** a lack of knowledge or awareness in general

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. Compare and contrast the lives of the twins described in paragraphs 3-6. Cite evidence from the text in your response.

2. PART A: Which TWO of the following best identify the central ideas of this text?
- A. Traditional Chinese education requires constant study.
 - B. Education in China is superior to education elsewhere.
 - C. Without traditional Chinese education, children will become arrogant.
 - D. The goal of education is to master many skills, both practical and intellectual.
 - E. Education is only for some—others become “wild” laborers.
 - F. With a good education, a “wild” child can become more useful to his family.
3. PART B: Which TWO phrases from the text best support the answers to Part A?
- A. “The object of Chinese education is to pump up the wisdom of the ancients into the minds of the moderns” (Paragraph 1)
 - B. “According to Chinese theory, or practice, a school which should only be in session for six months of the year, would be a gross absurdity” (Paragraph 1)
 - C. “The same saying is current in regard to the second degree, and with not less reason” (Paragraph 2)
 - D. “He may be incomparably more useful to his family than the other, but so far as education goes he is only a ‘wild’ lad” (Paragraph 3)
 - E. “He has very little opportunity to learn anything of practical affairs, and still less disposition” (Paragraph 5)
 - F. “So far as they go these are valuable acquirements, although they can scarcely be termed an education” (Paragraph 6)
4. PART A: What does the word “gross” most closely mean as it is used in Paragraph 1?
- A. Largely unacceptable
 - B. Muddy or dirty
 - C. Nauseating
 - D. Undiscovered

5. PART B: Which phrase from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
- A. "The object of Chinese education is to pump up the wisdom of the ancients into the minds of the moderns." (Paragraph 1)
 - B. "a school which should only be in session for six months of the year" (Paragraph 1)
 - C. "The moment a child fails to attend school, he is supposed (and with reason) to become 'wild.'" (Paragraph 1)
 - D. "The territory to be traversed is so vast" (Paragraph 2)

