



# Official Education during the Jin Dynasties

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## Abstract

During the Jin Dynasties, the central official education was generally characterized by the establishment of schools from time to time. The Imperial College (in feudal China) set up special Imperial College doctors and The Imperial Academy in ancient China set up libationers, doctors and teaching assistants. Chamberlain for ceremonials is the highest official leader of the central official education. The prosperity and decline of local official schools were closely related to the degree to which local officials attach importance to themselves. The establishment of schools by local officials was a “rebellion” against the social trend of the Jin Dynasties, which advocated metaphysical style.

## Subject Areas

Education, History

## Keywords

The Jin Dynasties, The Central Official School, Local Official Schools, Education

## 1. Introduction

Academic circles have paid much attention to the problems of official school education in the Wei, Jin, Northern and Southern Dynasties. However, unfortunately, the academic research on the problems of official education in the period of the Jin Dynasties is weak and few targeted articles are published. In order to make up for these shortcomings, the author tries to start from the relevant historical facts and discuss the characteristics, organizational structure, general situation and characteristics of the central official school and the local official school in this period, hoping to deepen the knowledge and understanding of the problems of the official school education in the Jin Dynasties.

## 2. Characteristics of the Central Official School

The Sima family is one of the great Confucian families in the north area of the middle reaches of the Yellow River. The foundation of the regime of the Jin Dynasties was the noble, important, or privileged families, especially the Confucian families [1]. In order to cooperate with the political rule of powerful and influential families, Sima family advocated worshipping Confucianism and vitalizing education after in power, attached great importance to the education of the noble, important, or privileged families and set up The Imperial College (in feudal China) and The Imperial Academy in ancient China in the central government.

In the early years of the Western Jin Dynasty, there were as many as three thousand students, among which the personnel is multifarious, no distinction of the great and the humble, whose composition not only included the noble, important, or privileged families, but also included children of the county countries and the soldiers' children. Children from the noble, important, or privileged families felt their identities insulted to study with other children, thus not willing to learn in The Imperial College (in feudal China). In order to select talented people with genuine talents through school education, and at the same time to achieve the purpose of "The nobles and commoners are distinguished as well as the nobles and the humbles" so that the children of the noble, important, or privileged families could enter the school to receive orthodox Confucian education [2], Emperor Wu of Jin took two measures: first, he combined study with official career, formulated the assessment mechanism of survival of the fittest, and selected talented and learned people from The Imperial College, so as to make "those who take part in the examination feel glorious, and thus making those who hear about the examination system envy those who have won the honor" [3]. The assessment of the students of The Imperial College was mainly to investigate the meaning of the classics. If they were able to be the Class Four Official in Chinese Feudal Gubernatorial Hierarchy, they would continue to study in The Imperial College, and the rest of the students were sent back to their counties [3]. Second, he set up a noble school for the children from the noble, important, or privileged families—The Imperial Academy in ancient China (276). May in the second year of Xianning of Emperor Wu in the Jin Dynasty, The Imperial Academy in ancient China was established [4]. The establishment of The Imperial Academy in ancient China reflected the current situation of the opposition between the noble, important, or privileged families and the scholars from the humble families.

At the end of the Western Jin Dynasty, the turbulent social environment brought many unfavorable factors to the development of the central official education. According to historical records: "There is no etiquette to teach order and no sound of peace eulogy." [3] In the early years of the Eastern Jin Dynasty, with unceasing wars and unrepaired schools, people had different attitudes towards the restoration of schools. Wang Dao, the commanding general of

Zhongxing, was a visionary. He wrote a memorial to the throne to request Emperor Yuan of Jin to set up a school for Confucianism and select the children of the court to study, as well as select the scholars of “the learned, capable and respecting the etiquette and morality” as the teachers. Its purpose is to educate the people and establish the prestige of Emperor Yuan. Wang’s suggestion is of guiding significance to the establishment of the school education policy of the Eastern Jin Dynasty, and objectively provides a good learning environment for the scholars, as well as enhances their enthusiasm for learning. Emperor Yuan of Jin adopted the advice of Wang Dao and was faithful to daoism and advocated Confucianism together with supporting the development of the central official school. In November of the first year of Jianwu (317), the imperial edict to establish The Imperial College was issued [4]. The imperial edict distributed a Wang for *the Book of Changes*, a Zheng for *Book of History*, a Kong for *Ancient Chinese prose*, a Zheng for *Mao Poetry*, *Zhou Officials*, *The Book of Rites*, *The Analects of Confucius* and *The Classic of Filial Piety*, and a Du and a Fu doctor for *The Spring and Autumn Annals*, altogether nine people to make notes for these books. But the edict was not really enforced because of rebellion of Wang Dui. During the years of Xiankang of Emperor Cheng, the environment was relatively stable, January in the third year of Xiankang (337), Emperor Cheng ordered the reconstruction of The Imperial College [4]. In the same year, state libationer Yuan Gui, and chamberlain for ceremonials, Feng Huai, wrote memorial again to request the establishment of The Imperial Academy. However, it was not really established. “Therefore, it was discussed to establish The Imperial Academy in ancient China and called upon students to study it. However, since the ideological trend of inaction thought of Zhuangzi and Laozi was prevailing in the whole society at that time, no one was willing to devote himself to the study of Confucian classics.” [3] In the 8th year in Yonghe of Emperor Mu (352), Yin Hao expedited westward and The Imperial College was abolished again. After the Battle of Fei River, the Eastern Jin Dynasty was relatively stable. In the ninth year in Taiyuan of Emperor Xiaowu (384 years), Minister Xie Shi requested to restore the national school to educate the sons of the aristocracy [3]. Emperor Xiaowu took his advice and implemented some measures to develop the central official school. In April of the ninth year in Taiyuan (384), about 100 students were added [4]. In February of the following year, The Imperial Academy in ancient China was established [4], and the children of the imperial guards of Gongqing, sheriff and feudal provincial were selected as students and in the meanwhile, the scale of The Imperial Academy was expanded. After Emperor Xiaowu established The Imperial Academy, The Imperial College was incorporated into The Imperial Academy. However, the combination of The Imperial College and The Imperial Academy had brought about a series of disadvantages. First, the ingredients of the students in The Imperial Academy were too complex, students from the noble, important, or privileged families felt their identities insulted to study with other students. In addition, there were specula-

tors who pretended to be students of The Imperial Academy in order to exempt from service or avoid paying taxes. Second, the school management was lax, and the students were naughty. For example, in the first month of the tenth year in Taiyuan (385), “students of The Imperial Academy burned down more than a hundred houses while setting fire to the wind” [4]. Therefore, although Emperor Xiaowu initiated the study, the effect of central government education was not obvious. Although state libationer Yin Mao proposed ways to change the defects of The Imperial Academy, his Suggestions were not accepted by Emperor Xiaowu.

From the above discussion, we can see that in the Jin Dynasties, the government’s primary cultural and educational policy was to “advocate Confucianism”. During this period, the central official school education’s overall characteristic is to have the establishment of schools from time to time. There are two reasons for this:

First, metaphysical style prevailed in the period of Jin Dynasties. The ninety-one volume of *The Book of Jin, Preface of Scholars’ Bibliography* carries “since the Eastern Jin Dynasty, the state had advocated rhetoric, followed the metaphysics, abandoned the Confucian classics, followed the words of the reign of Zhengshi year in Cao Wei as well as regarded the rites and laws as a secular action, and the unbridled would be considered high performance.” [4] During the Xiankang period, Emperor Cheng wanted to establish the national official school and recruit students, But the world advocated Chuang-tzu and Lao Zi, and no one is willing to learn the Confucian classics [3].

Secondly, the overall level of doctors of chamberlain for ceremonials and The Imperial Academy in ancient China was not high, and there were few famous teachers in the central official school education. According to the history book, “there are many Confucianism scholars of Jiangdong (an area on the south of Yangtze River beyond Fuhu and Nanjing), while there are few experts who are good at learning a certain Confucian classics argumentation.” [2] What’s more, the ninety-one volume of *The Book of Jin, Xu Miao’s Bibliography from Scholars’ Bibliography* carries “since the Wei and Jin dynasties, many people of low rank and low learning in the state have come to teach their students as doctors, but the students did not respect them as teachers” [4].

During the Jin Dynasties, the township drinking ceremony and Shi Dian ceremony were integral parts of the central official school system. In this period, in order to demonstrate the state’s attention to education, concern for cultural undertakings were showed and respect for elders and sages were promoted with the purpose of achieving and maintaining the ruling order. The emperor or crown prince would personally go to the school to inspect, talk about the classics and ceremonies, reward students and school officials and hold the township drinking ceremony. According to the *Stele in the Pi Yong Hall of the Jin Dynasty* written in the fourth year of Xianning (278), Emperor Wu of the Jin Dynasty visited the town three times to hold the township drinking ceremony and the

crown prince Sima Zhong visited the town twice. A total of 257 students from the states and western regions in the early western Jin dynasty attended the ceremony [5]. In addition, once the emperor or crown prince learned to read a sutra, the township drinking ceremony was held. The rulers of the Jin Dynasties advocated the concept of “governing the world with filial piety” and “filial piety is the basis of being a man and doing scholarship”. Therefore, this period, the emperor or crown prince of the classics was mainly “filial piety”. When the emperor or crown prince lectured on *The Classic of Filial Piety*, the ceremony was very grand, and the famous and important officials in the court were responsible for reading attendant, lecturing, reading aloud, taking the scriptures and picking out chapters and sentences.

From what has been mentioned above, we may see that during the Jin Dynasties, the central official education was generally characterized by the establishment of schools from time to time. The Imperial College (in feudal China) set up special Imperial College doctors and The Imperial Academy in ancient China set up libationers, doctors and teaching assistants.

### 3. The Organizational Structure of the Central Official School

In the early Western Jin Dynasty, the top management of The Imperial College was the chamberlain for ceremonials, and doctor of chamberlain for ceremonials was a subordinate official who was responsible for the specific management and teaching of The Imperial College. Before long, The Imperial College set up a special The Imperial College doctor, who was clearly distinguished from doctor of chamberlain for ceremonials. The Western Jin Dynasty set 19 doctors of chamberlain for ceremonials, ranking Class Six Official. In the early years of the Emperor Yuan in the Eastern Jin Dynasty, the number of doctors of chamberlain for ceremonials was reduced to nine. To the end of Emperor Yuan, two doctors for the *Etiquette*, *The Commentary of Gongyang* were added respectively, after that, doctors of chamberlain for ceremonials increased to 16 [4].

The top management of The Imperial Academy is also chamberlain for ceremonials. In the fourth year of Xianning (278), Emperor Wu of Jin established The Imperial Academy in ancient China, in which there were respectively one special Imperial College doctor and one libationer and 15 teaching assistants. In February of the 10th year of Emperor Xiaowu of the Eastern Jin Dynasty (385), when The Imperial Academy was established, the number of teaching assistants was 10. According to the national convention, the state libationer would also be added the title of “Sanqichangshi”, being Class Three Official in Chinese Feudal Gubernatorial Hierarchy [6] and sometimes was called doctor libationer. State doctors were also usually added “Sanqichangshi”, who was not only responsible for imparting the classics and the task of carrying forward Confucianism, but also had the function of discussing the national etiquette and justice system together with preparing for imperial consultation. Therefore, state doctors were all above Class Three Official in Chinese Feudal Gubernatorial Hierarchy with good

knowledge and good moral character. In the past, during the reign of Xianning, Taikang, Yuankang and Yongjia, Privy Counselor, Changshi and Huangmen (all official positions) were very learned and proficient in old adage and made sense of the past and the present [3]. The selection criteria are very strict. The teaching assistants in The Imperial Academy were engaged in specific teaching work, whose status was lower than that of doctor, but whose ceremonial dress was the same as doctor.

The leadership of the chamberlains for ceremonials to the central official school education is to put forward the opinions of the establishment of the doctors in the official school and the selection and trial work of the libationers. It is worth noting that at that time, the dominant official selection system was the nine grades of rank in former, in which official positions were mostly held by noble and powerful families, and the sons of ordinary people rarely became doctors of the central official school.

#### 4. General Situation and Characteristics of Local Official Schools

During the Jin Dynasties, local official schools had no guarantee of the state system, no unified plan and no fixed source of funds. *Decrees of the Jin Dynasty* stipulates “a county in every thousand households should set up a school and a place having less than a thousand households should also set up one.” [7] However, policies and decrees were meaningless in the process of implementation. They were only in the form but had no practical effect. For example, during Emperor Xiaowu’s reign, Li Liao wrote memorial to request to “restore the Confucius temple and build a place for lecturing ... give them the *Six Classics*, set up schools, hire teachers with profound knowledge, and recruit students to study extensively. However, Emperor Xiaowu did not even review Li Liao’s memorial [3].

Local official schools were mostly run by local officials themselves. When Yang Hu was the Governor of Jingzhou on all military and the Chijie (to hold the imperial insignia and serve as a diplomatic envoy), he led the army to the Hanjiang River basin and “open schools” there [4]. 1014 When Du Yu was the local magistrate, he “built state institutions of higher learning”, which made “the people in the Hanjiang River basin greatly grateful and greatly influenced by moral education” [4]. 1031 In the administrative region of Poyang Internal official, Yu Pu, “a large number of schools were built and students were recruited extensively”, corresponding school rules were formulated, documents were issued to reward and lecture students, and more than 700 scholars were interviewed. During the reign of Emperor Xiaowu, Yuhang county magistrate, Fan Ning, “established schools in the county to recruit students and set an example by setting an example himself. He paid attention to the Confucianism ethics and there were no virtuous scholars not to follow the example of worship. A year later, the custom of education was widely popular.” History books gave a very high

evaluation “since Zhongxing (a reign title), no one can math Fanning in advocating learning and encouraging education.” [4]

Therefore, the prosperity and decline of local official schools are closely related to the degree to which local officials attach importance to themselves. Once the local officials who were enthusiastic about education died or were transferred from their posts, the schools they set up would decline and the measures they carried out for establishing local schools would also be suspended.

During the reign of Emperor Cheng of Jin Dynasty, the national situation was relatively stable. Yu Liang carried out a series of activities on building schools and issued teaching orders. He opened schools according to the actual situation of each district, build classroom for tutoring, and stipulated the composition of the student is “auxiliary general’s son, namely, my sons.” No speculator who was undisciplined and lacking in moral education and who wished to enjoy the privilege of being exempt from taxation and duty should be allowed to enter the school. He also recruited more talented people to enrich the school and improve the treatment of teachers. Effects of Yu Liang’s action in opening schools in Wuchang is notable for a time, and the local schools in part of the middle reaches of the Yangtze river were able to restore, like the county schools in Linchuan and Lin He. Unfortunately, after the death of Yu Liang in the first month of the sixth year in Xiankang (340), the government’s policy of benefiting students and supporting the country’s education was left unknown.

During Emperor Xiaowu’s reign, Li Liao requested the revival of Confucius’ hometown and Confucius’ temple and he also lectured there. The proposal was supported by Minister Xie Shi and King Qiao, Sima Ttian. However, after the death of Xie Shi and Sima Ttian, the restoration of the “Confucius temple” stopped [3].

On the whole, local official schools in the Jin Dynasties were underdeveloped. During the reign of Emperor Xiaowu, the hometown of Confucius and Confucius’ temple “collapsed, and there was no standard and rules at all” [3]. This is a true reflection of the current situation of underdeveloped local government schools in this period. However, it is undeniable that during this period, the behavior of knowledgeable local officials paying attention to local officials’ learning played an important role in improving the cultural level of that turbulent period, and to a certain extent ensured the quality of the national bureaucratic system. In addition, local officials set up schools to carry forward the Confucian culture and provide a good learning environment for local students, which was objectively a “rebellion” against the social trend of advocating metaphysical style in the Jin Dynasties.

## 5. Conclusion

To summarize, during the Jin Dynasties, the central official education was generally characterized by the establishment of schools from time to time. The Imperial College (in feudal China) set up special Imperial College doctors and The

Imperial Academy in ancient China set up libationers, doctors and teaching assistants. Chamberlain for ceremonials is the highest official leader of the central official education. The prosperity and decline of local official schools were closely related to the degree to which local officials attach importance to themselves. The establishment of schools by local officials was a “rebellion” against the social trend of the Jin Dynasties, which advocated metaphysical style.

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### **Conflicts of Interest**

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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