

Education in Korea

The nobility and well-to-do people give their children a good education. They take tutors in their service to teach them how to read and write, skills to which this nation is much inclined. This is done gently and with good manners. The children are constantly being told about many wise sages of the past and how these obtained rank and honor. They mostly sit day and night and read. It is admirable to see how these young boys know and explain the texts that form the basis of their learning.

Every year in each province, examination sessions are held in two or three towns. Examiners visit to test the knowledge of those seeking employment in the military and the police as well. The names of those who are found fit to be vested with executive powers are passed on to the court. There every year a session is held, where the king's delegates examine candidates from across the entire country. All the important people of the country gather there...

Those who pass the examinations receive a letter of promotion from the King. This is a very coveted document. Graduation has made many a young nobleman an aged beggar, because he may exhaust his means of subsistence... in the high expenses of donations and banquets he is expected to give. Many parents invest large sums for the study of their children. Many do not succeed in actually obtaining the government post that was their goal. But the bare fact that their sons are promoted... offers satisfaction to parents and compensates for their sacrifices.

Parents love their children very much, as do children their parents. If parents have committed a crime from which they escaped, the children have to answer for it, as parents for their children.

From "Hamel' Journal and a description of the Kingdom of Korea,
1653-1666"

(In 1653 Hendrik Hamel and his company of Dutch sailors were shipwrecked off the southwestern coast of Korea. Although rescued by Koreans, they were held captive as spies for thirteen years. When Hamel escaped, he returned to Holland and published the first book on Korea in 1688. This was Europe's first introduction to Korea)