# **Concubines of Ancient China - Ancient Chinese Emperors sometimes kept thousands of concubines**

Directions: In the left column, create one #hashtag per paragraph that sums up the main idea for that section of the text. Annotate and highlight the right column text for the main ideas as well as supporting details.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *Example: #more$morewomen* | Concubines are women who cohabit with men but are not married to them. In ancient China it was common for successful men to have several concubines – the Chinese Emperors often kept thousands. Concubines’ situation ranged from pseudo-wives to poorly treated prostitutes.  Concubines do not officially exist in modern China, but ‘Ernai’ or ‘second wives’ are increasingly common. Unlike in the West, keeping a mistress is not always frowned upon in China. The CCP tried to stamp out concubinage, which they saw as a feudal vice, but among China’s new breed of super-rich businessman, keeping a young, fashionable, spoilt young woman as a mistress can gain you face – which in turn is good for business. Concubinage was not abolished in Hong Kong until 1971.  In ancient China position of the concubine was inferior to that of the wife. The concubine was heavily dependent on the nature of the wife, and the favour of her ‘husband’. A concubine could improve her lot by producing an heir (although their sons would be inferior to legitimate children), but this could happen at the expense of the goodwill of the wife. Chinese history is littered with wife-concubine intrigues that often end in murder. Concubines were sometimes buried alive with their master to keep him company in the afterlife.  The Chinese Emperors kept concubines with them in the Forbidden City. By the Qing dynasty there were around 20,000. They served a dual purpose – to ensure the Emperor a very good chance of producing an heir and, of course, limitless opportunities to indulge his more licentious instincts. There was also a very convenient Daoist theory that helped the Emperor justify requiring the favour of 20,000 different women. According to the theory, the Emperor represented the extreme of Yang, and so therefore it was essential for the harmony of the cosmos that he have sex with as many women (women are yin) as possible.  The Imperial concubines were guarded by an equally obscene number of eunuchs (men who’ve been castrated) to ensure that they couldn’t be made pregnant by anybody except the Emperor. Becoming a concubine might not seem like a very appealing career path, but successful concubines became extremely rich, and were able to use their position to promote the interests of their own family. In the classic of Chinese literature ‘The Dream of the Red Chamber’, three generations of the Jia family are supported by one favourite concubine of the Emperor.  Perhaps the most successful concubine in China’s history was Yehenala, otherwise known as Dowager Empress Cixi. Cixi first entered the court as a concubine to the Xian Feng Emperor and gave birth to his only male heir. By killing off our outmanoeuvring her rivals (including her own son), she took the reigns of power and held onto them for almost half a century.  There’s a popular Chinese explanation why Chinese men need multiple women but women are expected to make do with just one man: ‘One teapot is usually accompanied by four cups. But have you ever seen one cup with four teapots?’ |
|  |
|  |
|  |
|  |
|  |
|  |

**Abstract Tweet**

* *Abstract: a summary of the contents of a book, article, or formal speech.*
* You have read and highlighted the text, summarizing main ideas of the paragraphs in your #hashtags.

Directions: As a group, write an abstract of the text, capturing the main idea and most important details.

Here’s the catch: your abstract may only be 140 characters long, no more. So you’ll really have to break this down to the most important elements and avoid using unnecessary wording.

|  |
| --- |
|  |