

Gaokao gruel

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- The world's most important exam is flawed.
- Years of cramming at the expense of any other activity in the hope of a *gaokao* score that will qualify them for admission to a leading university.

Cherished and despised

- The exam is both cherished and despised.
- It is praised by many as being a relatively corruption-free method of ensuring advancement for those who study hard.
- But many people resent the huge stress it imposes on adolescents.

- Both the test and the schooling that prepares students for it are unfair and ill-suited to the needs of a country that wants its workers to be more innovative.
- A common complaint about the gaokao is that it requires so much rote-learning.

- Schools usually focus only on cramming students for it during their three years of senior high school.
- Other skills that are needed for the creation of the “knowledge economy” such as teamwork and creativity, are neglected.
- Parents complain whenever schools encourage students to do things other than learn gaokao-required facts.

Another worry

- Those who have the best chance of scoring well are rich city-dwellers.
- Poorer people in many countries suffer disadvantages in education, but in China such problems are magnified by government spending on schools that is heavily skewed in favour of cities.

- Students have to tailor their answers to suit the Communist Party's views.
- This year candidates were required to write essays about the thoughts of Mr Xi.