Knowledge Power
The Imperial Examination System of the Qing Dynasty

Science and Exams
Science, Power: The Exam System of the Qing Dynasty

Exhibition Layout Plan

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Introduction
The Chinese imperial examination was a pioneering system that combined education with recruitment for the state bureaucracy. Upholding the principles of free participation, public examination, open competition and selection on merit, the system provided the masses with access to social mobility. The system was considered an innovation when compared with the hereditary succession practiced by the European contemporaries in feudal times. The system inspired the Asian neighbours such as Japan, Korea and Vietnam in the recruitment of the state bureaucracy.

Throughout the history of 1,300 years, the imperial examination system produced over 700 zhuangyuan (principal graduates of the palace examination), 110,000 graduates with jinshi degrees, several millions graduates with juren degrees and countless students securing the membership of xiexiu status. Ever since the Sui and Tang dynasties, the imperial examination system gave rise to a new class of literati, among them were prominent government officials, philosophers, art masters who excelled themselves at different levels of the imperial examination system.

Showcasing over 100 sets of artefacts selected from the collection of the Shanghai Jingdezhen Museum and solicited from local sources, the exhibition takes us back to the Qing dynasty to revisit the imperial examination system, its development, demise and legacy. Also featured in the exhibition is a series of interactive educational displays which give us a better understanding of how the system shaped the Chinese society and culture over a period of 1,300 years.

In a thousand years of countless examinations have emerged, there were more than a hundred of the grand men, ten million people, millions of people, and finally the excellent, and brilliant, and famous, and famous, and famous, and famous, and famous. If the Chinese examination was the basis of the Chinese society and culture, the examination system was the cornerstone of the Chinese society, and the examination system was the foundation of the Chinese society. If the Chinese examination was the basis of the Chinese society and culture, the examination system was the cornerstone of the Chinese society, and the examination system was the foundation of the Chinese society. If the Chinese examination was the basis of the Chinese society and culture, the examination system was the cornerstone of the Chinese society, and the examination system was the foundation of the Chinese society.
1. 學而優則仕

Appointment on Merit

科舉制度於公元六零五年始於中國，推行科舉制度，自此朝

代至今日仍為公認制度，以評選領導階層，繼而授予官職。

The Chinese imperial examination system dates back to the Su-dynasty of AD 605. Emperor Yang introduced the system to recruit state officials. Ever since, the imperial court regularly held public examinations on different subjects to select individuals with talents, to whom government positions were offered. Combining education, examination and recruitment systems, the imperial examinations were considered an effective means to consolidate the imperial rule.

2. 入學須知

The Apprentice

明時時期，孩童於六、七歲時便會入學，當戶家庭或宮學

先生在家執教，而各地鄉鎮則設立祠堂，寺廟或民宅設置學堂

或書院，為人子弟提供教育機會。這些不同性質的學堂

內，聚集不同年齡的幼稚一同上課，老師會因應每個人的

程度而因材施教。

In the Ming and Qing dynasties, children began their formal education at the age of six or seven. For rich families, tutors were hired for home schooling. Other village children would attend schools at their ancestral halls, temples and village houses. The elementary education was privately run at local level. Classes were taught to children of all ages in accordance with their individual abilities.

3. 文舉—萬卷書與萬里路

The Odyssey

科舉考試為中國歷來重要，成為地方考试和京師試

考。唐代及以後設於萬年元年（公元

六八九年）創立童試，自始形成「解試」、「省試」和「殿試」三級考試制，

並為後世所沿襲。元、明、清各朝，則改為「童

試」、「鄉試」、「會試」和「殿試」。

The Chinese imperial examinations comprised a series of local examinations and a central examination. The palace examination was formally introduced in AD 689 during the Tang dynasty. The examination system was then institutionalised of three levels: provincial, metropolitan and palace such structure was adopted ever since. During the Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties, the system was further developed into preliminary, provincial, metropolitan and palace levels.

4. 生員資格

The Students

「秀才」成為府試縣、府、縣三級童試及成為「生員」，俗稱「秀才」，各生

員按入學資質後，可到府學或府一地縣學，學習讀書。入學後經地方文教敘

賦，可參加鄉試，獲選庶士，開設學額生員，可獲稱為「秀才」，為秀才與

舉人之間的特殊階級，屬正式出仕，為登科進士所學士。

According to the imperial examination system, candidates were required to take and pass examinations at different levels to obtain qualifications to officialdom. Candidates, upon passing the three tests at the preliminary examination, earned the status of luoxi and secured the admission to state colleges. Only students of state colleges would be nominated by local officials to take the provincial examination or to attend the imperial Academy.
The imperial military examination was introduced in AD 702 by Emperor Wu of the Tang dynasty to select talents for military posts. Military examinations were not adopted consistently in different dynasties; only some 50 rounds were held throughout the history of China. Military examinations became regular again in AD 1904 of the Ming dynasty when they were held biennially. The practice continued throughout the Qing dynasty for 256 years, from Emperor Shunzhi till Emperor Guangxu (AD 1901). Apart from mastering martial arts, candidates were also required to take written tests on military classics.

The glorious moments came with the announcement of the examination results. Names of the graduates were listed on a scroll and posted outside the examination hall. Junior graduates who passed the provincial examinations were qualified for appointment to government posts. Gongshi graduates who passed the metropolitan examinations would be recommended to sit the palace examination of which graduates were further divided into three classes by their results — the top three candidates were bestowed with honorary titles of zhuyuan, bingyuan and furuhuo respectively. Graduates in the second and third classes earned their own specific degrees and titles.
The Imperial Examination System

The Imperial examination system, after centuries of development, became a collective mentality in the Chinese society. The dream of rising from rags to riches by education and examination was shared by many. The desire for success motivated the candidates, united families and clans. The presence of the system and its values were felt everywhere in household items, architectural decorations and leisure activities. Candidates would resort to patron deities for strength and support. Stories of their agonies and frustrations were vividly featured in the illustrated news emerged in the late Qing period.

In Qing dynasty, graduates who passed the palace examinations with the first class merit were rewarded with appointments in the Hanlin Academy for further study to become top officials. Government officials were divided into nine ranks matched with respective salaries and benefits. Rank badges were bestowed to officials to be worn on top of the robes to signify their status - embroidered beads for civilian ranks and embroidered mammals for military ranks. The official attire was completed with court gown and hat.

From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, the Qing government was rocked by both internal turmoil and foreign aggression. Influences from the West aroused severe criticism of the imperial examination system and the state bureaucracy. The traditional education system was failing to meet challenges of the times, especially in the military field. The state bureaucracy had been further corrupted by the sale of official titles. China's defeat in the Sino-Japanese War and its signing of the Treaty of Shimonoseki in 1895 sparked off territory-wide anger. The Hundred Days Reform in 1898 had drastic changes to reform the examination system. In 1905, an imperial decree was announced to abolish all provincial and metropolitan examinations, which finally brought the imperial examination system to an end.

Certificate of graduation, 1914.

Imperial decrees on the abolition of the imperial examinations (Replica).

Impaired 1914 in Chinese.