

Iona D. Man-Cheong. *The Class of 1761: Examinations, State and Elite in Eighteenth Century China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004. xii, 298 pp. Hardcover \$55.00, ISBN 0-8047-4146-8.

There are two major strengths of Iona Man-Cheong's account of the 1761 palace examination. First, she deftly uses the documents from that event to show how the examination system worked. Second, she describes in detail what the system meant for the state, the bureaucracy, and the "class of 1761." Her findings in each respect are not unique, but she does reiterate that the civil examinations in practice represented an overlap of throne, bureaucracy, and family interests. Her book thus tells us a great deal about a few of the 214 men who passed the 1761 examination. It also tells us a bit about the larger pool of 5,059 provincial graduates who took the 1761 metropolitan test that led up to the palace examination. In the main, this book is about the 4.3 percent who survived the former and went on to take the latter.

There are also many specific strengths of the book that deserve mention. First, Man-Cheong carefully describes the role of special examinations (*enke*) under the Manchu rulers and how these extra tests solidified the image of the Qing throne as the beneficent patron of its literati subjects. Second, she also carefully reviews the content of the top policy answers for the palace examination, which were presented to the Qianlong emperor for his personal review. Third, she describes in detail how the avoidance laws for civil examinations worked to defuse the special interests—affinal ties and collateral kin—that both candidates and examiners brought to these examinations. She focuses on the threat of unfairness in the selection process posed by the "insiders" then serving in the Grand Council (*Junji Chu*), and she shows how the Qianlong emperor tried to ensure the fairness of the selection process. In particular, her account documents how the avoidance system could work against Southern literati like Zhao Yi, who was a minor functionary in the Grand Council at the time he took the 1761 palace examination. Fourth, she shows how the newly established but poorly understood court examination (*chao kao*), which followed the palace examination, was used from 1723 to establish rankings for immediate appointments into the Hanlin Academy. Fifth, and finally, she ties the political careers of the "class of 1761" to their subsequent civilian and military roles in the Manchu government.

Man-Cheong explains how the civil officials of 1761 played an important part in the subsequent military expansion of the Qing realm during the mid-Qianlong era. She points to a new political constellation that evolved under the Qianlong emperor that enabled Han Chinese officials to serve the Manchu multicultural state in both military and civil affairs. Graduates of 1761 such as Zhao Yi and Sun

Shiyi gained valuable experience in the Burma campaigns (1766–1770). Their careers overlapped with the annexation of Tibet (1790–1792) and the White Lotus uprising (1796), but they also faced hardships when assigned to Qing campaigns in Annam (1788–1789) and aboriginal revolts in Taiwan (1787–1788).

The most controversial claim in this volume, which is emphasized in chapter 5, “Paths to Glory,” is that the civil examinations created a proto-national esprit de corps among the palace graduates. The “virtual space of the archive state” not only recorded the results and the trials men faced in rising up the Qing ladder of success, but it also shaped the officials who were chosen, and unified them through disciplinary training. This training elaborated a collective identity under a centralized imperial state that eventually became the “nation-state of modern intelligentsia” and contributed to modern Chinese nationalism.

Man-Cheong continually reads the terminology of the “nation” (*guojia* 國家) into her account of Qing imperial institutions such as the civil examinations. This view is plausible but problematic. In her account of the 1761 palace essays, for example, she assumes (inspired by Benedict Anderson’s “Imagined Communities”) that when the 1761 palace graduates used *guojia* in their answers they were beginning to invent “our nation.” It is more likely, however, that *guojia*, like *guochao* 國朝, referred in this era to “our dynasty” and its imperial constituencies, most notably the Manchu court, the ruler, and his loyal Han Chinese officials. Consequently, it is more plausible to conclude that the Qing civil examinations helped create the collective identity of an “empire-wide” official elite than to leap to the conclusion—based on an overdetermined reading of *guojia* in a few eighteenth-century palace examination essays—that this cultural “matrix” marked the origin of “our nation.”

The national elites that modern nationalism spawned certainly were the historical heirs of the empire-wide elite that the Qing dynasty created through the civil examinations and appointed as officials. But the exact “cultural matrix” in late imperial China that invented a “proto-nation-space” and later informed the “nation-space” of educated elites in the twentieth century occurred in the late nineteenth century and was tied to anti-Manchism, a point that Man-Cheong’s account overlooks. Instead, she downplays the role of Han Chinese in the rise of proto-nationalism under the Qing regime and stresses instead the Manchu adaptation of the imperial system. For Man-Cheong, the Manchu state created the political environment for the Sino-Manchu sharing of language and cultural literacy in the eighteenth century that would invent the proto-nation-space on top of the “greater Qing” empire. Geographically speaking, she has a point, but how things worked out conceptually is still debatable.

When Chinese revolutionaries and nationalists in the early twentieth century called for eliminating the Manchu state, they regarded the Qing dynasty and its imperial system—especially its civil examinations—as antithetical to the creation of a modern Chinese nation-state. While we can say that the examination system

in imperial China was an institution that was prematurely “modern” (ever since the Tang dynasty!), whether or not it created the space for the modern nation-state is still unclear. The Taipings used civil examinations in peculiar ways to legitimate their “Heavenly Kingdom,” which deserves more scrutiny. Moreover, Sun Yat-sen presented the “examination bureau” (*kaoshi yuan* 考試院) as an important part of the Republican government only after calling for the elimination of the Manchu throne and its imperial pretensions to rule over the Chinese people. Nevertheless, he clearly perceived the importance of education and a ladder of success via examination to build the modern Chinese nation.

Some other oversights mar this otherwise well-researched book. In chapter 2, “Regulating Aspirations,” Man-Cheong notes in her tables and text that the term *jinggu* 經古 (pp. 31–32) refers to “an examination on the Classical canon and the study of antiquity.” For this, she draws on the work of Etienne Zi’s pioneering *Pratique des Examens Litteraires en Chine* (Shanghai: Imprimerie de la Mission Catholique, 1894, pp. 58–59). Zi defines *jinggu* as an “Explication des Livres Canoniques et sur l’Etude de l’antiquité,” but Man-Cheong fails to read note 1, where Zi explains that the first is a *jingjie* 經解 (explication of the classic) piece, and the second is a *guxue* 國學 (ancient studies) piece where “l’Examineur donne généralement pour sujet une description poétique *fou* 賦.” The latter *gu* 古 thus takes up in regulated verse form ancient matters from ancient history to the solving of arithmetical problems. Zi thus did not mean, as Man-Cheong claims in note 10 (p. 239), that “the *jing gu* was a special examination session in which students did not write in the formal eight-legged examination essay usually required; instead, they had to demonstrate substantive knowledge of the Confucian classics and the standard histories.” Local candidates in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries continued to prepare eight-legged essays in local examinations (the *jing*) as well as prepare a poem using Tang dynasty–style regulated verse (the *gu*). The Dynastic Histories were tested in the policy questions.

Man-Cheong also fails to situate the 1761 palace examination in its proper historical context between 1757 and 1787, when major civil examination reforms were carried out. She gives no source for her claim that the reintroduction of poetry occurred on an examination in 1723 (p. 39), but she rightly notes the use of poetry in special examinations administered during imperial tours of the South. I would add that although poetry questions were not used on regular local, provincial, metropolitan, and palace examinations during the Ming and early Qing, they were used in the written examinations for Hanlin academicians and for repeat examinations when there were irregularities in the original venue. When the court examination was added in 1723, it included a poem (*shi* 詩) composed in eight-rhyme, five-word meters. Man-Cheong also notes that there was a poetry question on the second session of the metropolitan examination in 1761. How did it get there?

Beginning in 1756–1757, the format of the three testing sessions for provincial and metropolitan degrees, which had not changed for 372 years, was transformed,

although the initial changes were not put into effect permanently until 1759. For the provincial and metropolitan examinations, quotations from the Four Books remained on the first session, but in deference to the popularity of Han Learning, and due to the problems in the quotas for classical specialization, the Five Classics were moved from session one to become the core of session two. The classics were replaced in the first session by the discourse essay, which was moved up from the second session. Along with quotations from the Classics, students were also expected to compose a poem in eight-rhyme, five-character regulated poetry (*bayun wuyan lüshi* 八韻五言律詩) during session two, indicating the revival of interest in Tang and Song poetry as a testable measure of cultural attainment.

The Qianlong revival of Tang poetry represented a reversal of the Yuan-Ming civil examination regime stressing the classical essay. The revival of ancient learning, particularly pre-Song forms of literati writing and commentaries, brought in its wake an increased awareness by Qing literati of the role of poetry and *belles lettres* in Tang and Song civil examinations. The shift toward the examination essay, which began in the Song, continued in the Yuan and climaxed with the eight-legged essay stressing Zhu Xi's views during the Ming, when poetry, which was finally eliminated from civil examinations, had run its course. Slowly but surely, the Qing court approved requests to roll back key elements in the Ming examination curriculum. Examiners again considered poetry as a proper measure of literati talent for officialdom. In addition, the formalistic requirements of the poetry question gave examiners an additional tool, along with the eight-legged essay, to grade papers more efficiently.

As with other changes in the examination curriculum, the court asked its examiners to test the new stress on regulated verse. They asked the first candidates for the revised provincial degree empire-wide to discuss the reforms in policy questions for the third session of the 1759 and 1760 provincial examinations, which addressed the poetry requirement. Thereafter, this procedure for eliciting candidates' opinions about the very examinations they were taking—even on the 1761 palace examination, as Man-Cheong shows—frequently was used by the Ministry of Rites and the Hanlin Academy to size up literati opinion and prepared the way to upgrade poetry further to a position of eminence by moving the question to the first session of provincial and metropolitan examinations in 1787 and eliminating the Song Learning-oriented discourse essay.

Similarly, although her discussion of the top palace examination essays is a major strength of her book, Man-Cheong's discussion of the classical issues undergirding the essays is sometimes off the mark. In chapter 3, "Rites of Spring," she contends that the palace examination essays represent an "identifiable constellation of discourse" that she interprets in light of the "three camps" of learning in the Qianlong era: Song Learning, Han Learning, and Evidential Learning (*kao-zheng* 考證). Here, however, she fails to see that the links between Han Learning and evidential studies were so close that it is ahistorical in the mid-eighteenth

century to separate *kaozheng* from Han Learning and see it as a separate methodological discourse.

Man-Cheong also argues that not one of these three camps “as yet had a dominant position, much less a monopoly” in 1761. Given the centrality of Zhu Xi’s synthesis of examination learning for the eight-legged essay for local, provincial, and metropolitan examinations since the early Ming dynasty, this is a curious point. The point might be better stated that in 1761 the preferred priority of Song Learning over Han Learning was ignored in the palace essays by those who advocated *kaozheng*. Nevertheless, Man-Cheong’s efforts to use these aspects of classical learning to explicate the four policy themes of (1) “technologies of Confucian scholarship,” (2) administrative evaluation, (3) civil-service selection methods, and (4) economic policy in the 1761 palace examination are valuable for those interested in Qing classical studies. She concludes that Wang Jie (the *optimus*) favored Song learning, Hu Gaowang (*secundus*) tilted toward Han Learning, and Zhao Yi (*tertius*) represented evidential learning and was statecraft oriented. Man-Cheong convincingly demonstrates that a variety of acceptable positions and a range of ideologies were possible in the 1761 palace essays.

Another misstep in the volume is likely editorial. When she first discusses Empress Wu Zetian, Man-Cheong presents her as a female emperor (p. 4), who was arguably the first to use the civil examinations politically. Later, however, she presents Wu Zetian as a man (p. 58), who first used the palace examination “under his personal auspices.” Actually Song Taizu (r. 960–976) was the first to administer the palace examination himself. But how did Empress Wu turn into a man? I bring this harmless example up because of my experiences some years earlier during the brouhaha that developed over a prizewinning book by James Hevia, when some scholars excoriated Hevia’s translations to try to convince us through innuendo that the book in question was fatally flawed.

I think Man-Cheong knows that Wu Zetian was a woman. Hence, while some poor editing is probably involved here, it would be supercilious to criticize her book simply because of this elementary sort of embarrassing mistake, which all of us have committed at one time or another. I can imagine, however, that if a non-Chinese writer were to make a similar harmless misstep, many would delightedly rush to belittle his or her historical knowledge on account of it.

I would also like to address Man-Cheong’s opening chapter, in which she tries to delineate “The Meanings of Examinations.” She regards 1761 as a typical palace examination, which entitles her to make global statements about civil examinations in China from medieval to modern times. Applying the views of a number of theoreticians, she presents her book as a study of ideology in practice and gainsays those who claim that there was a preexisting ideology of classical learning that informed the civil examinations. Hence, based on her findings in 1761, she assumes that there was no preexisting monolithic or authoritative ideology in the civil examinations. Instead, by addressing examination practices in 1761 as enunciated

ated in bureaucratic actions, Man-Cheong contends that the examinations reveal only a “managerial discourse,” which she calls “bureaucratic Confucian ideology.”

She gainsays efforts by intellectual historians to define orthodoxy in terms of ideas or as instruments of ideology because they fail to get at how that orthodoxy is generated as ideology through practice. Fair enough, but are the few 1761 policy answers she analyzes sufficient to prove that the classical learning informing all Chinese civil examinations “fall[s] outside strictly defined categories of intellectual thought”? I would urge a bit more caution here. Arguably palace examination essays—in particular those during the Qianlong reign—did performatively enact multiple classical trends, including both Han and Song Learning. But there were some 112 palace examinations during the Qing dynasty, and eighty-nine under the Ming. Can 1761 stand for all of them?

Man-Cheong maintains that the managerial discourse she uncovers yielded only literati “obedience” and “conformity” to a sociopolitical logic of norms and practices whereby “candidates were drilled into submission.” Could the civil examinations really have been so successful? Possibly, but only when we look at the top graduates, and even among them we have a variety of responses, as she shows. When we look at the hundreds of thousands of local degree candidates and licentiates (*shengyuan*) in the mid-eighteenth century, however, we find that the Qing government knew that things were getting out of hand. Throughout the Qianlong reign, the court complained that required procedures in the local licensing examinations were regularly abused. In 1738, education officials were told to watch for cases where a candidate had someone else take the examination for him. Again, in 1743, charges of fraud were raised where someone else took the candidate’s place in the examination. If caught, such people were to get eighty blows.

Nevertheless, fraud in the examinations remained. In 1745, some candidates in Jiangsu Province were taking the local renewal examinations in several places; some were selling examination papers. Again, the court asked education officials to supervise candidate registrations more carefully. In 1746, the court reemphasized that the registration information on candidates was to be carefully checked in county and department examinations. Those caught using false names would have their status removed and would be prosecuted.

The list of transgressions continued in 1752. Candidates were handing in papers using false names; clerks were collecting duplicate papers, sometimes three, four, or five times more than the number of candidates. The education commissioner had to report such flagrant cases to the governor for action. The court later noted in 1764 and 1766 that in local examinations the registration forms often indicated that the candidate was a youth, and yet the person taking the examination was sometimes forty or fifty years old. At the time of registration and entry, education officials had to compare the forms to the person entering to take the examination to prevent fraud.

To streamline the process, in 1758 the court allowed some local officials to consolidate examinations beyond the periodic practice of combining the licensing, renewal, and qualifying tests. Normally each county held its own local examinations. Now, in cases where two counties were in the same city, they could jointly hold licensing and qualifying examinations. Because the county was the beginning of the selection process, and local examination papers were sent to the education commissioner for review, this new procedure meant that the education commissioner and his staff of clerks and advisors could supervise examinations in two counties at once.

Finally, Man-Cheong contends that civil examinations were an important part of what made imperial China a meritocracy. She focuses on the 1761 Qing civil examination to show that the selection process served more as a common training program for literati than as a gatekeeper to keep non-elites out. Despite the symbiotic relationship between the court and its literati, the emperor played the final card in the selection process. The asymmetrical relationship between the throne and its elites nevertheless empowered elites to seek upward mobility through the system.

Man-Cheong's micro-study of some of the 1761 passers sets aside the larger scope of the examinations outside state precincts. Her "definitions of failure" are presented in terms of individual graduates and state efficiency. Zhao Yi is presented as a political failure on his own terms. Wang Jie on the other hand was extremely successful in the court bureaucracy. By limiting her focus to the palace examination graduates, Man-Cheong does not tell us what the examinations meant for the vast majority of examination failures. Yet, on the final pages of her book, she does hint at the emergence of a scholarly community outside the cut-throat examination competition. What role did the examination process play in creating this community?

To see the larger place of civil examinations in Chinese society, we must look beyond the official meritocracy of the graduates and the immediate families they came from. One of the unintended consequences of the civil examinations was the creation of legions of classically literate men (and women) who used their linguistic talents for a variety of nonofficial purposes, from literati physicians to local pettifoggers, fiction-writers, and examination essay teachers. If there was much social mobility—that is, the opportunity for members of the lower classes to rise in the social hierarchy—it was likely here. The archives indicate that peasants and artisans, who made up over 90 percent of the population, were not among those one hundred annual or twenty-five thousand total Qing palace graduates. Nor were they a significant part of the two million or so who failed examinations at the lower levels every two years during the late Qing.

Occupational fluidity among merchants, military families, and gentry translated into a substantial circulation of lower and upper elites in the examination marketplace. "Commoners" became elites before they became degree holders.

Women and Buddhist and Daoist clergy were excluded, so the pool of candidates was exclusive. When we add to this competition the educational requirement to master non-vernacular classical texts, we can grasp the educational barrier between those licensed to take examinations and those who could not because they were classically illiterate.

Overall, licentiates were not peasants, artisans, clergy, or women. What Man-Cheong and others who follow Ping-ti Ho mean by “social mobility” might be better described as a healthy circulation of lower and upper elites. When we add the even healthier circulation of partially literate non-elites, who were the unintended by-products of the civil examination’s educational process, then we will better understand the “meanings of examinations” for the many and not just the few in imperial China, such as the “class of 1761.”

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Melanie Manion. *Corruption by Design: Building Clean Government in Mainland China and Hong Kong*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004. \$49.95, ISBN 0-674-01486-3.

After replacing a planned economy with a market economy, perhaps the next most salient development of the People’s Republic of China over the last two decades have been the various attempts to institutionalize the rule of law. Melanie Manion’s book *Corruption by Design: Building Clean Government in Mainland China and Hong Kong* offers readers a systematic and thorough analysis of this important topic. It is not that sinologists and legal scholars have ignored the justice system in China. Chiu (1981) and Liu et al. (2001) have studied the criminal justice system, and the work of He and Waltz (1995), much quoted by Manion herself in this book, has compared China’s criminal justice system with that in the United States. Corruption in China has attracted even more attention from scholars and journalists than the criminal justice system. Gong (1994), Kwong (1997), and Lu (2000), to mention just a few, have examined the genesis of corruption and its practice in the different sectors. But Manion is the first to bring the two