

SEE ALSO *ASEAN, Relations with; East Central European States, Relations with; Germany, Relations with; United Kingdom, Relations with.*

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Casarini, Nicola. *Remaking Global Order: The Evolution of Europe-China Relations and Its Implications for East Asia and the United States*. Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Kerr, David, and Liu Fei. *The International Politics of EU-China Relations*. Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Shambaugh, David, Eberhard Sandschneider, and Zhou Hong. *China-Europe Relations: Perceptions, Policies, and Prospects*. London and New York: Routledge, 2007.

David Kerr

EXAMINATION SYSTEM, 1800–1905

Late imperial Chinese civil examinations played a central role in Chinese political, social, and intellectual life from 1800 to 1905. Local elites and the imperial court continually reexamined and adjusted the classical curriculum and entertained new ways to improve the system for selecting civil officials. As a test of educational merit, civil examinations tied the dynasty and literati culture together bureaucratically. Civil examinations reflected the larger literati culture because they were already penetrated by imperial interests and local elites, who together formed the classical curriculum.

Civil examinations were an effective cultural, social, political, and educational construction that met the needs of the government while simultaneously supporting late imperial social structure. Gentry and merchant status groups were defined in part by their examination credentials. Civil examinations themselves were not an avenue for social mobility because the selection process entailed the social, political, and cultural selection of those who were elites already. Nevertheless, a social by-product was the limited circulation of lower and upper gentry, military, and merchant elites in the government. In addition, the large pool of examination failures created a rich collection of literary talent that filled ancillary roles as novelists, playwrights, pettifoggers, ritual specialists, and lineage agents. When the civil examinations were summarily eliminated by modern reformers in 1904, this event touched off the unforeseen demise of the partnership between the dynasty in power and its gentry-merchant elites. Because imperial interests and literati values were equally served, they fell together in the twentieth-century Chinese revolution.

Examination System, 1800–1905

Imperial examinations continued the long-standing commitment to the moral and cosmological teachings associated with the Learning of the Way (neo-Confucianism), which served as the state orthodoxy in official life and in literati culture. The intersections between elite social life, popular culture, religion, and the mantic arts reveal the full cultural scope and magnitude of the examination process in 1,300 counties, 140 prefectures, and 17 provinces, as well as in the capital region. These regular testing sites, which in terms of the role of police surveillance in the selection process also operated as “cultural prisons” (“prisons” that elites fought to enter), elicited the voluntary participation of millions of men—women were excluded—and attracted the attention of elites and commoners at all levels of society.

POWER, POLITICS, AND EXAMINATIONS

Classical philosophy and imperial politics were dubious partners during the Qing dynasty (1644–1912), when Song classical interpretations remained the orthodox guidelines for the examination system. Qing appropriations of that orthodoxy as a single-minded and monocular political ideology affected politically and socially how literati learning would be interpreted and used in later dynasties. The mark of the late imperial civil system was its elaboration of the civil examination models through the impact of commercialization and demographic growth when the reach of the process expanded from metropolitan and provincial capitals to all 1,300 counties. In addition, the upsurge in numbers of candidates was marked by degree inflation at the lower levels. Palace graduate degree-holders dominated most positions of higher office. Officialdom became the prerogative of a slim minority. As the door to official appointment, civil examinations also conferred social and cultural status on families seeking to become or maintain their status as local elites.

Competitive tensions in the examination market explain the policelike rigor of the civil service examinations as a systematic and stylized educational form of cultural hegemony that elites and rulers could both support. Imperial power and bureaucratic authority were conveyed through the accredited cultural institutions of the Ministry of Rites, the Hanlin Academy, and civil examinations. Political legitimation transmitted through education succeeded because enhanced social status and legal privileges were an important by-product of the examination competition to enter the civil service.

Fixed quotas based on the ratio between successful and failed candidates demonstrated that the state saw educational access to the civil service as a means to regulate the power of elites. Government control of civil and

Examination System, 1800–1905

CIVIL SERVICE EXAMINATIONS, 1800–1905

Operating under the aegis of the Ministry of Rites, with the emperor playing the role of chief examiner, the government of late-imperial China devoted significant time, energy, and resources to the recruitment and selection of its personnel. Central to this process was a series of examinations that began in China's myriad counties and ended within the Forbidden City in Beijing. Although the chances of ultimate success were slim—6,000 to 1, according to one estimate in the post-Taiping era—millions of Chinese men, young and old alike, vied for degrees in this highly competitive process.

The government cast a wide net. Most literate males could register and sit for the relatively noncompetitive entrance examination supervised by the education officials of their county. An estimated two million men, referred to as *tonghseng*, would make it past this first step, and most of these men would also pass the examination supervised by prefectural officials. A third examination, however, also given at the prefectural level but supervised by provincial authorities, was very competitive. The lowest examination degree, the *shengyuan*, was awarded on the basis of strict quotas established by the central government, and only one or two men out of a hundred were successful. Across the empire about 30,000 *shengyuan* degree holders, men known colloquially as *xiuca* or “flourishing talents,” were advanced to the provincial-level examinations in the post-Taiping era.

In the fall these *shengyuan* traveled to their respective provincial capitals and sat for a series of three competitive examinations conducted over a period of a week under the auspices of examination officials dispatched from Beijing. At these examinations candidates toiled in cramped examination cells constructed in vast compounds, each in

isolation amid thousands of others. After the third and final examination, about 1,500 men throughout China were awarded the provincial *juren* degree, also apportioned on a quota basis by province, and began their preparation for the final series of examinations held in Beijing.

Unlike the *shengyuan* degree, the *juren* degree was granted for life. Anyone who held this degree could seek the highest degree, the *jins*hi. Every three years thousands of *juren*, the number could exceed 10,000, traveled to Beijing to compete for this most-coveted metropolitan degree. Each step winnowed the group, and at the end of this process, which resembled the one for the provincial examinations, an average of only 300 men remained. A final palace examination, presided over by the emperor, ranked the men, some of whom were appointed to the prestigious Hanlin Academy. Others, through an appointment process supervised by the Ministry of Personnel, gained jobs in the bureaucracy, which had about 20,000 slots. With this final mark of distinction, *jins*hi degree holders had their names engraved on stone tablets, some of which can still be seen in the temple dedicated to Confucius in Beijing.

This “regular” route to office, and often power and prestige, was balanced by an “irregular route” that began with registering for the county-level entrance examination. After registration men could purchase a degree. These *jiansheng* were quite numerous, and after the Taiping Uprising (1851–1864) the sale of such degrees generated significant revenue for the government. The number of men with any one of these degrees, regular or irregular, has been estimated at about 1.4 million in late-nineteenth-century China.

Roger R. Thompson

military selection quotas was most keenly felt at the initial licensing stages for the privilege to enter the examination selection process at the county level. In 1600, there were perhaps 500,000 civil licentiates in a total population of some 150 million, or a ratio of one licentiate per three thousand persons. By 1850, with a population of 350 million, there were only some 800,000 civil and military licentiates, but still only about half a million were civil, a ratio of one per one thousand persons.

Because of economic advantages in South China (especially the Yangzi Delta but including the southeast), candidates from the south performed better on the civil examinations than candidates from less prosperous regions in the north, northwest, and southwest. To keep the south's domination of the examinations within acceptable bounds, Qing education officials maintained the official ratio of 60:40 for allocations of the highest *jins*hi (literati eligible for appointments) degree to candidates from the

Format of provincial and metropolitan civil service examinations during the Qing dynasty, 1793–1898

Session no.	No. of questions
One	
1. Four books	3 quotations
2. Poetry question	1 poetic model
Two	
1. Change	1 quotation
2. Documents	1 quotation
3. Poetry	1 quotation
4. Annals	1 quotation
5. Rites	1 quotation
Three	
1. Policy questions	5 essays

Table 1

south versus the north, which was slightly modified to 55:10:35 by allocating 10 percent for the central region.

The overcrowded examination hall became a contested site, where the political interests of the dynasty, the social interests of its elites, and the cultural ideals of classical learning were all compromised. Moreover, examination halls empirewide were supervised by literati officials who were in charge of the military and police apparatus when so many men were brought together to be tested at a single place. Forms of resistance to imperial prerogative emerged among examiners, and widespread dissatisfaction and corruption among the candidates at times triumphed over the high-minded goals of the classical examinations.

LITERACY AND SOCIAL DIMENSIONS

The monopolization of “cultural resources” by local elites depended on their linguistic mastery of nonvernacular classical texts tested by the state. Imperial examinations created a written language barrier that stood between those who were allowed into the empire’s examination compounds and those classical illiterates who were kept out. In a society where there were no “public” schools, education was monopolized by gentry and merchants who organized into lineages and clans to provide superior classical educations. The Mandarin vernacular and classical literacy played central roles in culturally defining high and low social status in Chinese society. The selection process permitted some circulation of elites in and out of the total pool, but the educational curriculum and its formidable linguistic requirements effectively eliminated the lower classes from the selection process. In addition, an unstated gender ideology simply assumed that women were ineligible.

Literati regularly turned to religion and the mantic arts to understand and rationalize their chances of success in the competitive local, provincial, and metropolitan examinations. Examination dreams and popular lore spawned a remarkable literature about the temples candidates visited, the dreams that they or members of their family had, and the magical events in their early lives that were premonitions of later success. Both elites and commoners used fate to describe the forces operating in the examination marketplace. The anxiety produced by examinations was a historical phenomenon, which was experienced most personally and deeply by boys and men. They encoded fate using cultural glosses that had unconscious ties to popular religion.

The civil service competition affirmed a classical curriculum that consolidated elite families into a culturally defined status group of degree-holders that shared: (1) internalization of a common classical language; (2) memorization of a shared canon of classics; and (3) a literary style of writing known as the “eight-legged essay.” Elite literary culture was in part defined by the civil examination curriculum, but that curriculum also showed the impact of literati opinions about education. The moral cultivation of the literatus was a perennial concern of the imperial court as it sought to ensure that the officials it chose in the examination market would be loyal to the ruling family. For the literatus, it was important that the dynasty conformed to classical ideals that literati themselves had formulated.

The bureaucracy made an enormous financial commitment to staffing and operating the empirewide examination regime. Ironically, the chief consequence was that by 1800 examiners no longer could read each essay carefully. Final rankings, even for the eight-legged essay, appeared very haphazard as a result. While acknowledging the educational impact of the curriculum in force, one should guard against portraying weary examiners with so many papers to read as the dynasty’s “thought police” inside the examination halls trying to impose orthodoxy from above. Overall, however, examiners as an interpretive community did uphold canonical standards. They marked their cognitive world according to the moral attitudes, social dispositions, and political compulsions of their day.

FIELDS OF LEARNING

In the nineteenth century, the examination curriculum increasingly conformed to the statecraft and evidential research currents then popular. In the late eighteenth century, the Qing dynasty had initiated “ancient learning” curricular reforms to make the examinations more difficult for the increasing numbers of candidates by requiring mastery of not one but all Five Classics, which included the *Changes*, *Documents*, and *Poetry* classics, along with the *Spring and Autumn Annals* and the *Record of Rites*. In addition, the formalistic requirements of a new poetry

Export Processing Zones

question after 1787 gave examiners an additional tool, along with the eight-legged essay “grid,” to grade papers more efficiently. The grid rigidly defined the number of words and parallel sentence patterns that students had to employ to present their arguments, and its rigidity represented, for reformers toward the end of the dynasty, the pivot of political conservatism. Later rulers failed to recognize that an important aspect of the civil examinations was the periodic questioning of the system from within that gave it credibility from without.

Literati fields of learning, such as natural studies and history, were also represented in late imperial civil examinations, particularly in the reformist era after 1860. Such inclusion showed the influence of the Qing court and its regional officials, who for political reasons widened the scope of policy questions on examinations in the 1880s and 1890s.

DELEGITIMATION AND DECANONIZATION

Radical reforms were initiated to meet the challenges of the Taiping Uprising (1851–1864) and Western imperialism. Even the Taipings instituted their own Christian-based civil examinations in the 1850s. When the civil examinations lost their cultural luster and became an object of ridicule even among literati officials, the system was derided as an “unnatural” educational regime that should be discarded. During the 1890s and 1900s, new political, institutional, and cultural forms emerged that challenged the creedal system of the late empire and internationalized its educational institutions.

The demise of civil examinations yielded consequences the last rulers of imperial China and reformist gentry generally underestimated. The Manchu court was complicit in its own dismantling after the forces of delegitimation and decanonization were unleashed by reformist Chinese gentry, who prevailed in education circles in the 1890s and persuaded the imperial court to eliminate the institution in 1904.

Education reform and the elimination of examinations after 1905 were tied to newly defined goals of Western-style change that superseded the conservative goals of reproducing dynastic power, granting elite prestige, and affirming the classical orthodoxy. The ideal of national unity replaced dynastic solidarity, as the sprawling, multiethnic Manchu Empire became a struggling Chinese Republic. It was later refashioned as a multiethnic Communist nation in 1949. With the Republican revolution of 1911, the imperial system ended abruptly, but its demise was already ensured in 1904 when the Qing state lost control of the examination system.

The emperor, his bureaucracy, and literati cultural forms quickly became symbols of backwardness. Tradi-

tional forms of knowledge were uncritically labeled as “superstition,” while “modern science” in its European and American forms was championed by new intellectuals as the path to knowledge, enlightenment, and national power. Perhaps the most representative change occurred in the dismantling of the political, social, and cultural functions of the civil examination regime in 1904 to 1905. By dismantling imperial institutions such as the civil examination system so rapidly, the Chinese reformers and early Republican revolutionaries underestimated the public reach of historical institutions that had taken two dynasties and five hundred years to build. When they delegitimated them all within the space of two decades starting in 1890, Han Chinese literati helped bring down together the Manchu dynasty and the imperial system of governance. Its fall concluded a millennium of elite belief in literati values and five hundred years of an empirewide civil service examination.

SEE ALSO *Education: 1800–1949; Government Administration, 1800–1912; Reform under the Qing Dynasty, 1800–1912; Taiping Uprising.*

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Deng Siyu. *Zhongguo kaoshi zhidu shi* [History of Chinese examination institutions]. Taipei: Student Bookstore, 1967.
- Elman, Benjamin. *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.
- He Bingdi (Ho Ping-ti). *The Ladder of Success in Imperial China: Aspects of Social Mobility, 1368–1911*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1962.
- Miyazaki Ichisada. *China's Examination Hell: The Civil Service Examinations of Imperial China*. Trans. Conrad Schirokauer. New York: Weatherhill, 1976.
- Shang Yanliu. *Qingdai keju kaoshi shulue* [Summary of civil examinations during the Qing period]. Beijing: Sanlian Bookstore, 1958.
- Zi, Etienne. *Pratique des examens littéraires en Chine* [The Chinese literary examinations in practice]. Shanghai: Imprimerie de la Mission Catholique, 1894.

Benjamin A. Elman

EXPORT PROCESSING ZONES

SEE *Taiwan, Republic of China.*

EXTRATERRITORIALITY

Extraterritoriality (*zhiwai faquan*), the system by which most foreigners and their enterprises were exempt from Chinese jurisdiction and subject only to the law of their