FOUNDATIONS OF AN EMPIRE

UNDERSTANDING THE CHINESE IMPERIAL EXAM AND ITS ARCHITECTURE THROUGH A STUDY OF THE JIANGNAN GONGYUAN

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INTRODUCTION

THE IMPERIAL EXAMINATIONS, ITS HISTORY AND SCHOLARSHIP

"How delightful it is to study and to review from time to time what one has learned."

[Analects 1:1]

In *On A Chinese Screen*, a collection of notes from his journey to China in 1920, British travel writer, Somerset Maugham, relayed the following statement from a Confucian philosopher: "Do you know that we tried an experiment which is unique in the history of the world? We sought to rule this great [Chinese empire] not by force, but by wisdom. And for centuries we succeeded."¹

For thirteen hundred years, the *keju*, or imperial examinations, had a great effect on the political, social, and cultural landscape of the Chinese empire. Designed to recruit large numbers of well-educated and capable men for civil service, it upheld long-standing Confucian traditions of selecting and appointing officials based on their merits, rather than inherited status. Although the there have been several international and even modern systems of selection and education based on it, none has ever come close to matching the original model, either in sophistication or scale. The imperial examination was truly a unique institution and one of the most distinctive features of Chinese civilization. Its components—both ideological and spatial—are the focus of this study, and their historical importance cannot be overstated.

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¹ Justin Crozier, "A Unique Experiment," *The Journal of the Society for Anglo-Chinese Understanding* 12 (2002).

1. ABOUT THE EXAMINATION SYSTEM

To make sense of the cultural significance of the examination system, and in turn its architecture, it is necessary, first, to briefly discuss the development of merit-based recruitment in China's dynastic history.

The idea that officials should be chosen for their intellectual achievement rather than birth was a significant social invention that dates back to the time of Confucius (551–479 BCE). A teacher, theorist, and politician, Confucius regarded government and education as inseparable. Without education, he reasoned, there would be no cultivation of morality, and without morality, it would be impossible to find good leaders to guide the people. His philosophies drew many influential disciples and followers, who continued to organize and spread his ideas for centuries after his death. Among these supporters was the Emperor Wu of Han (r. 141 BCE – 87 CE), the first to promote Confucian doctrine as a state ideology and institute a system for official recruitment.² Under his rule, a select group of talented men from elite ruling families were recommended to the capital, where they took part in an oral review of the Confucian classics; those who passed were assigned an area of specialty and given a rank within the bureaucracy.³ Half a millennia later, this rudimentary practice served as the foundation for a much more comprehensive civil service recruitment system, known as the *keju*.

The *keju*, in its classical manifestation, was said to have been established in 605, during the brief Sui dynasty (581–618), although it did not reach full maturity until a much later time. Under the vast and multicultural Tang dynasty (618–907), the system began

² Jan L. Hagman, "Schools and Civil Service in the Ming Dynasty," in *Hawaii Reader in Traditional Chinese Culture*, edited by Victor Mair, et. al., (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), 494.

³ Ibid., 496.

accepting "new blood," or candidates with no official lineage. This helped limit the political influence of rival families by generating non-hereditary administrators, known as scholarofficials.4 Additionally, because the traditional oral exam often disqualified non-elite candidates from outside the capital for using regional dialects, a standardized system of written tests was introduced in 681.5 As literacy and education improved in the Song dynasty (960–1279), it became the official method of examination. Between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, the number of candidates grew from the hundreds to the hundreds-of-thousands and stringent regulations, such as anonymous submission and regional quotas, were instituted to prevent the system from failing under its own weight.⁶ This period of expansion was interrupted by Mongol conquest in 1279, when, under the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368), Confucian philosophies and scholars were discriminated against and the Chinese civil service system was abandoned.⁷ Revitalized by the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), the imperial examination reached its heyday in the late imperial period. During this time, great attention was given to the administrative procedures while the tests themselves also became more rigorous and demanding. Qing dynasty (1644-1911) examinations continued to adhere to the Ming model, but the shortcomings of the system soon began to show. Too many candidates and not enough jobs led to widespread cynicism and corruption while the rigid structure of the test stifled intellectual growth.⁸ By the end of the nineteenth century, Confucianism had lost its place in the modernizing world and the civil service examination was abolished in 1905.

⁴ Wolfgang Franke, *The Reform and Abolition of the Traditional Chinese Examination System,* (Cambridge: Harvard University Center of East Asian Studies, 196), 5, 8.

⁵ Ihid 9

⁶ Judith A. Berling, "Confucianism," Focus on Asian Studies 2, no. 1 (1982): 6.

⁷ Rui Wang, *The Chinese Imperial Examination System*, (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2013), 6.

⁸ Benjamin A. Elman, "Civil Service Examinations," in *Berkshire Encyclopedia of China*, edited by Linsun Cheng, (Great Barrington: Berkshire Publishing Group LLC, 2009), 408.

In theory, anyone, no matter their station, could rise to a place of privilege and honor by passing the exams. In practice, the path to officialdom was, more often than not, a lifelong endeavor and it was not unusual for preparation to begin almost as soon as a boy could read. Starting with foundational primers and progressing into the study of classics, a solid Confucian education was prerequisite for a career in government. In most cases, boys attended a local temple, or village academy, but sons of the wealthy often worked with private tutors at home, studying in a refined atmosphere that was conducive to learning. Despite the discrepancies, however, students in either circumstance were expected to master the same set of Confucian texts and teachings. For the majority, completing the school system meant the end of academic study, but for a few who demonstrated exceptional talent, it was only a beginning.

Those who wished to pursue official work had to prove their worth through the civil service examination system. But first, a series of qualifying examinations, determined whether or not a student was even ready to compete at the next level. About half of all candidates were usually eliminated at this stage; those who passed became *shengyuan*, or licentiates, and were eligible to partake in the imperial examinations proper. ¹² The provincial exams, held once every three years in large cities around the empire, were conducted in designated testing facilities, known as *gongyuan*, or examination compounds. ¹³ Passing the exam earned candidates the title of *juren*, literally translated as "recommended man"—more often referred to as graduate—and qualified them for official

⁹ Ichisada Miyazaki, *China's Examination Hell*, translated by Conrad Schirokauer, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 8.

¹⁰ Dieter Kuhn, *The Age of Confucian Rule: The Song Transformation of China,* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press), 122.

¹¹ Miyazaki, 15.

¹² Ibid., 25.

¹³ Ibid., 41.

assignment in the lower echelons of the bureaucracy. Additionally, it meant that they could compete in the higher, metropolitan exam, at the capital the following year. Historically, this was the final level of the examination system. Candidates who passed were awarded the degree of *jinshi*, "presented scholar," or doctorate, and registered as high-ranking officials. At the height of examination fervor, millions of men participated in the qualifying tests each cycle, but only a few tens of thousands of licentiates advanced to the provincial exams and even fewer graduates—in the range of a couple thousands—to the metropolitan. In the end, only a hundred or so individuals managed to successfully navigate the long road to office, power, and prestige. (See Table 1)

2. HISTORIOGRAPHY

For more than two millennia, the distinctive social, political, and educational forces of Confucianism helped shape Chinese civilization. Out of this cultural phenomenon was born the civil service examination system, which influenced centuries of imperial rule and became one of the most exceptional components of traditional Chinese society. The following study will attempt to shed light on the built spaces that were designed to accommodate this important practice. Specifically, it will focus on the *gongyuan*, or examination compound, an exclusive area only open to candidates during the provincial and metropolitan testing periods. For hundreds of years, the inner world and workings of the examination compound remained a mystery to the general public, and in many ways, it

¹⁴ Ibid., 57-59.

¹⁵ Roger R. Thompson, "Civil Service Examinations, 1800–1905," in *Encyclopedia of Modern China*, edited by David Pong, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2009), 540.

¹⁶ During the Ming dynasty, a palace exam was added to further assign ranks among successful doctorates. Miyazaki, 74-75, also Encyclopedia Britannica Online, s.v., "China," accessed February 12, 2014, http://www.britannica.com/ EBchecked/topic/111803/China/71744/Later-innovations.

is still an unknown entity to most of the modern world. A comprehensive look at the history of the Jiangnan Gongyuan in Nanjing should reveal more about this type of enigmatic architecture.

Firstly, any study that relates to the Chinese imperial examinations, the or even just Chinese history for that matter, must contain some mention of Confucianism. Lucky, the study of Confucian beliefs and practices is neither a new nor sparse, in either eastern or western scholarship. Indeed, foreign commentaries on the system have existed since the time of the Jesuit China missions in sixteenth century, and to date, much has been written in English regarding Confucianism as a secular world view, a state philosophy, and religious practice. While a general understanding of Confucianism is undoubtedly essential, for the purposes of this study it is even more important to understand the specific role it played in the development of the imperial examination system—a brief overview of this relationship has already been presented in the previous section.

Benjamin Elman, professor of East Asian Studies and History at Princeton University, is one of the leading scholars of Chinese intellectual and cultural history. His seminal work, *A Cultural History of Civil Examination in Late Imperial China*, published in 2000, deftly ties the ideological principles of Confucianism to the political, social and cultural aspects of government recruitment in the Ming and Qing dynasties. As the title implies, his study is a focused analysis of the development of the examination system between the fourteenth and twentieth centuries and not an overview of its entire history. Nevertheless it is an invaluable resource for understanding one of the most pivotal times in China's imperial system and the effects it had on the civil service. Not only is Elman's work

¹⁷ Benjamin A. Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Examination in Late Imperial China*, (Berkley: University of California Press, 2000).

a rich font of information regarding the examination process; it is also a leading example of how to approach a well-rounded study on the subject. He writes, "[the study of] civil service examinations in pre-modern China should be combined with careful study of the primary sources that inform us of the educational, cultural, social, and political practices [of the time]." While this would be ideal, due to limited access to primary sources a variety of secondary works by pioneering scholars was consulted instead for this study. Among them is John Chaffee's *The Thorny Gates of Learning in Sung China*, which analyzes the development of examination culture in the early dynasties. Despite much sparser records of tenth through thirteenth century examinations, Chaffee, a professor of Asian studies, elegantly communicates the social and institutional conditions of medieval China. His work is a crucial supplement to Elman's study of the late empire.

While much time has gone towards understanding the ideological components of the imperial examination, it seems that western scholars have overlooked, or least sidelined, research into the physical aspects of the system. It is important to recognize that the examinations mobilized people on an immense scale—at its height, thousands of tests were administered on a regular basis in 1,300 counties, 140 prefectures, 17 provinces, and the capital region.²⁰ The various types of spaces in which the exams were held ranged from the modest *kaopeng*, exam shed, and *shiyuan*, testing center, at the qualifying levels, to the vast and sprawling, *gongyuan*, or examination compound, at the provincial and metropolitan levels, as well as, for a period, the intimate, courtly setting of the palace

¹⁸ Ibid., xvii.

¹⁹ E.A. Kracke Jr., *Civil Service in Early Sung China*, 960–1067, (Cambridge: Harvard-Yenching Institute, 1968), 54, also John Chaffee, *The Thorny Gates of Learning in Sun China*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

²⁰ Elman, "Civil Service Examinations," 407.

exams. (Fig. i.1) Considering the enormous scope of this system and the amount of infrastructure that was needed to sustain it, the body of scholarship that relates to the architecture of examinations is surprisingly limited.

Miyazaki Ichisada's China's Examination Hell, served as an immense point of reference in this respect. Published in 1981 it was one of the earliest, and still is one of the few, works that attempt to portray the labyrinthine world of the examinations. 21 Considered a great figure of Japanese Sinology in the twentieth century, Miyazaki wrote over seven decades of scholarship, which have been translated into English from their original Japanese and are regarded as some of the most comprehensive and accessible guides for western scholars studying the imperial system of the late Qing. Outside of his work, research on examination architecture has primarily been conducted and published by Chinese historians and institutions. These studies often followed a prescribed system: cultural brief, then construction history, then straightforward descriptions about form. While they were more detailed in their architectural investigations, many lacked the narrative appeal of western studies. A prime example of this is *Jiangnan gongyuan*, a report of the history of the Nanjing site compiled by Chinese historian, Daoxiang Zhou, in 2008.²² Published for a non-specialist audience base, there are several chapters on the history of the imperial examination system, as well as several chapters on the development of the examination compound; but, these two lines of inquiry never come together to illustrate the overall cultural significance of the *gongyuan*. Although the *Jiangnan gongyuan* is still an incredibly informative piece of work, it is also a greatly missed opportunity.

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²¹ Miyazaki.

²² Daoxiang Zhou, ed., *Jiangnan gongyuan*, (Nanjing: Nanjing Publishing House, 2008).

If the goal is to generate more attention on the subject of examination architecture in international circles, then studies must focus more on the "larger picture"—how the *gongyuan* related to its surrounding city, and in an even broader sense, the political, social, and cultural conditions of the empire—and not on the site as an isolated entity. However, not much physical evidence remains of these examination compounds, so a "larger picture" must be derived from the synthesis of disparate resources, including maps, imperial records, illustrations, and descriptive accounts, which will be detailed below.

Regarding the first matter of maps and the subject of city in ancient China, Nancy Steinhardt, professor of Chinese Art and Architecture at the University of Pennsylvania, is a leading scholar in the field. Her book, Chinese Imperial City Planning, published in 1990, was a major source of insight and images for this study.²³ (Fig. 1.2) Combined with additional contextual information from the set of commemorative steles at the Jiangnan Gongyuan, they illustrate the changing urban and political conditions of the Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties. (Fig. i.3) While other forms of visual representations, would of course be just as invaluable to the study of the examination compound, they are few and far between. Chaffee, in *Thorny Gates of Learning*, presents a diagram of the site from the Song dynasty but interestingly—and in accordance with what was said earlier about a lack of regard for the architecture of the exams—provided no further descriptive analyses.²⁴ (Fig. i.4) A more comprehensive set of images relating to the Jiangnan Gongyuan, published by nineteenth century French scholar, Etienne Zi, in Pratiques des examens littéraires en Chine, depict perspective views of compound, as well as a plan of the site in its final form, during the late Qing period. (Fig. i.5) These images, along with a series of first hand accounts of the

²³ Nancy Steinhardt, Chinese Imperial City Planning, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999).

²⁴ Chaffee, 165.

examination experience, satirical novels, and semi-autobiographical works, help to flesh out the historical world of the Jiangnan Gongyuan.

3. CHAPTER OVERVIEWS

This thesis strives to bring together all the disparate areas of study and types of evidence that were mentioned above, in a comprehensive and cohesive examination of *gongyuan* architecture. The following chapters will combine the study of this building typology with a specific look at the conditions of the Jiangnan Gongyuan in Nanjing, as well as broader investigations relating to political ideology, social identity, and cultural transformation.

Chapter One will trace the evolution of the Jiangnan Gongyuan throughout major periods of expansion and decline, from its establishment in the Song dynasty to its end in the Qing. It will also look at the general typology of the examination compound and how changing urban, political, social, and cultural conditions relate to its development. Chapter Two will then build off of the spatial understanding of the examination compound that was established in the first section, and ask how the specifics of the site relate to Confucian ideas about order and control. The topic will be explored from two perspectives: government and individual. And finally, in Chapter Three, the examination compound will be studied through the particulars of Jiangnan literaticulture and the late imperial period as China's traditional system was pushed towards a final tipping point.

CHAPTER 1

JIANGNAN EXAM COMPOUND, EVOLUTION OF THE GONGYUAN

Consider a spoonful of water, but then look at water's unfathomable depths. Precious things abound there.
[Classic of Rites 26:9]

At the beginning of the eleventh century, four hundred years after the institution of the first written tests in the Sui dynasty, the civil service examinations officially became the principle and most prestigious path to attaining a government post. Over the next one hundred years, as the system continued to mature in the Song dynasty, a pervasive "examination culture" was established. Out of it was born new symbols of status, including ceremonies, clothing, and social institutions, as well as new forms of architecture. It was in this cultural atmosphere that the *gongyuan*, or examination compound, emerged as a common fixture in the urban landscape of traditional China.

As an architectural typology, the *gongyuan* is little known and even less often studied outside of China. Yet, it is also one of the most remarkable physical testaments to the distinctive role the civil service examination system has played in Chinese civilization. These testing compounds were exclusive spaces, only open to candidates during the exam period, when, over the course of several days—and under the watchful eye of imperial officials—all activity, communication, and movement, were carefully observed and

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¹ John W. Chaffee, *The Thorny Gates of Learning in Sung China*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 17.

contained within the site. From the outside, the imposing walls and watchtowers of these compounds served as public reminders of an elite examination culture that was closely tied to imperial rule. However, for centuries, the true nature of the *gongyuan*, the inner world of the examination system, was known only to a select few.

1. Typology

Although examination compounds were shrouded behind a veil of mystery for the general public, the civil service exams and its facilities were well documented in imperial records. This is especially valuable for the study of its spatial logic, considering what little remained of its built environment after the fall of China's feudal system. What is known today about the architecture of the civil service exams derives mainly from the textual research that has been diligently conducted by Chinese scholars. This historical evidence, together with discerning political and cultural analyses written by modern scholars on China's dynastic and bureaucratic system, help shed light on the evolution of the *gongyuan* as an architectural typology.

For most of the early history of the system, the civil service examinations were held in temporarily repurposed spaces, such as temples, local schools, and government offices.² Imperial records indicate, however, that, in 1112, an order was issued for dedicated examination sites to be constructed at all testing locations. According to the *Song Dynasty Manuscript Compendium*, the general rule was that any prefecture with more than a hundred candidates was required to build a testing facility.³ This was primarily due to the

² Ibid., 164.

³ The *Song Dynasty Manuscript Compendium, Song huiyao jigao*, a work on Chinese history compiled in the Qing dynasty. *Song huiyao jigao: xuanju* section (Taipei: Shih-chieh shu-ch<u>ü</u>, 1964), 4/27 a-b, 16/26a, from Ibid., 240.

increased prominence of the examinations during the time of the Song. Because of a swell in the number of candidates, which had grown from the hundreds in the Tang, to the hundreds of thousands in the Song, temporary sites became inadequate.⁴ Instead, large, walled complexes were built in many places, to satisfy the demand for more space. The grandest of these facilities was the gongyuan, which serviced both the provincial and metropolitan exams, and were therefore located in only a few of the most prominent cities. Bolstered by imperial investment in strengthening the civil service system, the construction of examination compounds became a source of pride for local communities, and impressed upon the public their ties to the empire. Such joint local and imperial endeavors were often recorded in stone inscriptions called stele, or bei in Chinese. This was part of an ancient practice of carving characters onto upright stone tablets in intaglio and erecting them on sites of great social or religious importance. Ancient Chinese stele served a multitude of artistic and prosaic functions, from commemorating talented individuals and inscribing poems and maps to honor a site, to demarcating boundaries and describing details of ownership, contribution, and construction regarding public buildings.⁶ After gaining widespread popularity during the Tang dynasty, the stele was further elevated in the Song, as a status symbol, and regularly used by emperors in the later Ming and Qing dynasties. The discovery of such markers around former examination compounds, not only provided insight into the history and evolution of gongyuan architecture, which will be

⁴ Dieter Kuhn, *The Age of Confucian Rule: The Song Transformation of China,* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press), 121.

⁵ Chaffee, 167.

⁶ Endymion Porter Wilkinson, *Chinese History: A Manual*, (Cambridge: Harvard-Yenching Institute, 2000), 436.

discussed in more detail later, but also revealed just how important these sites were as expressions of imperial rule.

In its most basic form, the *gongyuan* reflected an application of Confucian ideas, including formality, symmetry, straight lines, and the hierarchy of importance, to imperial architecture.⁷ Following the classical principles of geomancy and cosmology that were used in ancient Chinese urban planning, examination compounds were situated in the esteemed eastern section of walled cities, near the sacrificial halls to ancestors and sages.⁸ (Fig. 1.1) Oriented to the cardinal directions, facing south, as was the standard practice in traditional Chinese architecture, the rectangular compound was isolated from the outside world by high masonry walls. With only a single entrance through a great central gate, the visual impact of the perimeter must have been striking, a permanent reminder of the mysterious world of the examinations that lay on the other side. Hidden from view of the general public was a second set of walls, covered in brambles and thorny plants to deter scaling the so call "Thorny Gates," through which all aspiring candidates had to pass. 10 The space within was further subdivided into sections for candidates and officials. Before either group could enter, however, they were carefully screened at a series of checkpoints, to make certain they brought with them nothing but the essentials. Test takers, especially were subject to a series of daunting searches of their supplies, clothing, and persons.

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⁷ Andrew Boyd, *Chinese Architecture and Town Planning, 1500 B.C–A.D. 191,* (London: Alec Tiranti Ltd., 1962), 111.

⁸ The layout of ancient Chinese cities is codified in the classical text *Kaogong ji*, or *Record of Trades*, which describes a diagrammatic square plan divided into nine sections, each with its own number and characteristic. The designation of certain spaces within, such as temples, altars, halls, and markets, were based on function and perceived importance. Chaffee, 166, also, Nancy Steinhardt, "Beginnings," in *Chinese Imperial City Planning*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999), 33, and Edward H. Schafer, "A Cosmic Plan," in *Ancient China* (New York: Time Inc., 1967): 102, also Cai Yanxin, *Chinese Architecture*, translated by Andrea Lee, Selina Lim, and David Gu, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 32.

⁹ Ichisada Miyazaki, *China's Examination Hell*, translated by Conrad Schirokauer, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 42.

¹⁰ Chaffee, 164.

Anyone found with testing aids and other illegal materials were immediately turned away, punished, and in some cases removed of their candidate status altogether.¹¹ (Fig. 1.2) Only if they passed through the initial set of inspections were candidates finally allowed inside the testing area. Once there, the stark and solemn grounds of the compound contrasted sharply with the commercial bustle of the city. As they entered onto the stately central avenue running south to north—itself a reflection of the imperial axis mundi—candidates were reminded of the gravity of the moment and the place in which they had arrived.¹²

The rest of the labyrinthine compound was no less intimidating than the imposing ceremonial entrance, reinforcing the authority and grandeur of imperial rule. On either side of the main avenue was an aggregation of discrete spaces that served a variety of functions, all working together as a cohesive whole. Appropriately, this layout has often been compared to a honeycomb.¹³ Not only did it include maze-like tenements for the multitude of test takers, but also auxiliary buildings for the administrative staff, who were likewise confined within the compound for several days. With the front gate barred and sealed, and with no other secondary opening large enough to pass through, the site was designed to be entirely self-contained and self-sustaining for the duration of the tests. Candidates taking the provincial exams spent three days and two nights in succession isolated in numbered cells, known as *haoshe*.¹⁴ (Fig. 1.3) Rows upon rows of these small, unfurnished partitions, stretched out east and west from the main south-to-north path. Each row was designated by a single large character, which was painted at the entrance that faced the central avenue.

California Press, 2000), 185. ¹² Chaffee, 166.

¹¹ Benjamin A. Elman, A Cultural History of Civil Examination in Late Imperial China, (Berkley: University of

¹³ Miyazaki, 41.

¹⁴ Ibid.

(Fig. 1.4) These characters, which were often derived from a passage of a classical text or Confucian primer, helped candidates navigate the site and find their assigned cells.¹⁵ Approximately 3 feet wide, 4 feet deep, and 6 to 8 feet high, the cell was both a working and a living quarter. 16 Built up on three sides by brick walls and covered by a wooden roof, there was no door on the fourth side to separate the test taker from the elements. The only provisions were three movable, wooden boards that spanned the width of the room and rested on protrusions on either side of the cell.¹⁷ For the most part these boards served as shelf, desk, and seat, but could also be rearranged to form alternate surfaces for working or resting. (Fig. 1.5) Candidates sat with their backs to the wall of their cell, looking out onto the bleak backside of the row of cells running parallel to it. 18 Long and narrow alleys, about 4 to 6 feet wide and disproportionately long, stretched between them. (Fig. 1.6) On one end, large earthenware jars were placed at the entrance, along the central avenue, from which candidates could fetch water for their ink stones, or to use to cook and drink.¹⁹ At the other end were the public latrines, which created unbearable conditions for candidates sitting closest to them.²⁰ The straight path from one end of the alley to the other provided guards with unobstructed views of test takers inside their cells as they patrolled the lanes and observed from their watchtowers. Their platforms, or *liaolou*, were raised high above ground level and situated at regular intervals along the perimeter of the site for easier

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¹⁵ Elman, 185.

¹⁶ Bing Li, *Qiannian keju*, (Hunan: Yuelu Publishing, 2010), 124.

¹⁷ Miyazaki, 41.

¹⁸ Elman, 185.

¹⁹ Because it was a necessity, special arrangements were made for receiving water from the outside and jars were replenished by laborers with water left on the water platform, *shuitai*, at the front gate. Ibid., 181, also Miyazaki, 42.

²⁰ Miyazaki, 42.

surveillance.²¹ (Fig. 1.7) Like the test takers, the staff that were tasked with overseeing the exams, were also confined to the compound during test time. A special area reserved for registrars, proctors, graders and clerk-copyists was secured within its own walled and gated enclosure on the site. This was further divided into an outer and inner section based on specific administrative duties. The outer-section officials, in charge of watching over candidates, were stationed near the entrance and had access to the examination site, while the inner-section officials, who were in charge of judging papers, were physically restricted to the back half of the site, well removed from the examination cells.²² Because the process of recopying and grading the exams took so long, officials were sometimes segregated from the outside world for up to a month. The administrative section of the compound therefore included proper living quarters and offices to work in, as well as kitchens and storehouses to sustain them.²³ Since the examination site was seldom used—only once every three years—conditions in the majority of the site were very poor. Lanes of packed dirt were often overgrown with plants and weeds, and sections of cells were at times left on the verge of collapse.²⁴ Furthermore, only a few staff, if any at all, were employed to maintain these sprawling sites. Despite better intentions, upkeep quickly fell to the wayside and occasional repairs were mainly limited to the administrative quarter.²⁵ The public image and allure of examination honor, however, remained strong. As the number of candidates continued to grow in later centuries, the shape of the compound was adapted in various ways from its initial rectangular form, in order to accommodate more cells and offices, as

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²¹ Ibid., 41, also Elman, 182.

²² Miyazaki, 42.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 41.

²⁵ Elman, 194.

well as its changing urban context.²⁶ While the overall plan of the *gongyuan* certainly varied from one site to another, the main components—walls, gates, examination cells, watchtowers, offices and living quarters—remained unchanged.

As a product of the pervasive and ever-changing civil service examination system, the *gongyuan* cannot be understood simply as a typology. The rest of this chapter will consider the Jiangnan Examination Compound at Nanjing through the lenses of place and time, focusing on its establishment, stagnation, vast expansion, and eventual decline in southern China over course of four imperial dynasties and spanning eight centuries. It is an ideal case study that best reflects the rise and fall of examination culture, in relation to political and social changes, as well as the visual impact of imperial power and influence, expressed through architecture. While some details of planning, construction, and function are specific to this Nanjing site, they can, nevertheless, shed light on the general trends that impacted all *gongyuan* construction at the time.

2. ESTABLISHMENT IN THE SONG (960-1279)

Although written examinations were first introduced in the Sui and Tang dynasties, it did not truly come into its own until later centuries, which is where this study will begin. A series of political and educational reforms instituted during the long-lived and venerated Song dynasty that followed contributed greatly to the shaping of the civil service examination system and its architecture. Policy changes by Emperor Taizu (r. 960–976), including the adoption of Neo-Confucianism as a state philosophy, paved the way for a new class of Chinese gentry to rise to prominence. The success of these scholar-officials, who achieved "fortune and fame" through hard work and Confucian study, as opposed to birth,

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²⁶ Ibid., 181.

encouraged other men to seek out their destinies in the imperial examinations.²⁷ By the thirteenth century, the subsequent growth in education and literacy, as well as the rise of a public examination culture, had brought about an intellectually rich and sophisticated time in the later Song period.²⁸ The influence of this social phenomenon was not limited to the imperial capital of Lin'an, modern day Hangzhou, but spread throughout the empire, most notably around the successful regions in the south, where the examinations formed a part of a broader culture of learning.²⁹

The growing prestige of the examinations and the subsequent swell in the number of candidates during the Song had a significant impact on the urban landscape of several large and important cultural centers, including the city of Nanjing, then known as Jiankang. Situated on the southern shores of the Yangtze River, Jiankang, was not only a booming commercial hub and center of opulence and luxury, but also a well-cultivated site of learning. While the imperial capital in the later Song dynasty was located at Lin'an, in the Liangzhe Circuit, Jiankang served as the regional capital of the bordering Jiangnandong Circuit—circuits being the highest administrative division at this time. With its significant population of wealthy and official families, there was no shortage of elite private schools and state-run academies to train men for the civil service. And, since a high level of competition from the very start was thought to be advantageous for candidates, to prepare them for the severe trials of the higher-level provincial and metropolitan examinations, Jiankang became a popular destination for taking the qualifying tests and drew intellectuals

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²⁷ Rui Wang, *The Chinese Imperial Examination System: An Annotated Bibliography*, (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2013), 4.

²⁸ F.W. Mote, *Imperial China*, 900–1800, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 150.

²⁹ Chaffee. 157.

³⁰ Ibid., 164.

³¹ Mote, 294.

from across the country.³² In accordance with the imperial directive to build designated testing facilities in locations where the number of candidates was especially high, construction of an examination compound within the city was begun in the twelfth century.³³

In 1168, during the sixth year of the reign of Emperor Xiaozong (r. 1162–1189 A.D.), work was completed on the original compound in the bustling Oinhuai district of Jiangkang.³⁴ According to imperial records, the auspicious plot of land was located on a north shore of the inner Oinhuai River, in the southeastern corner of the walled city.³⁵ Intimately linked to its riverfront surroundings, the site was chosen for its geomantic properties, as well as its cultural significance. (Fig. 1.8) As a branch of the Yangtze, the Qinhuai was the mother river and "life blood" of the city. It was divided into an outer and inner course that formed, respectively, part of the moat around the city and the major waterway within.³⁶ The tranquil inner canal, commonly referred to as the shili Qinhuai, or the "Ten-mile Qinhuai," wound serenely from east to west, supplying water for daily consumption and transportation.³⁷ By the early Song period, its scenic and temperate banks, which attracted wealthy merchants and esteemed families, had become a nucleus of urban and cultural growth. In particular, the temple-academy complex, or wenniao, erected along the river—just west of the would-be site of the examination compound—in 1034, played an important role in transforming the eastern stretch of the inner Qinhuai

³² Miyazaki, 24-25.

³³ Chaffee, 164.

³⁴ Jiahong Feng, "Zhongguo keju zhidu wenhua jianzheng," Journal of Jiangsu Socialism 1 (2008): 1.

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³⁶ P. Du and A. Koenig, "History of Water Supply in Pre-Modern China," in *Evolution of Water Supply Through the Millennia*, edited by Andreas N. Angelakis, et al, (London: IWA Publishing, 2012), 177.

³⁷ Ibid.

into a thriving zone of learning and education.³⁸ Made up of a Confucius temple, *kongmiao*, in the front and prefectural academy, *xuegong*, in the back, the *wenmiao* was dedicated to the study of Confucian teachings and political ideologies, which formed the basis of the examination system.³⁹ At the center of this courtyard complex was a sacrificial hall known as *Dachengdian*, or Hall of Great Achievement, in which ritual offerings were made to honor the accumulated learning of past Confucian sages and philosophers. Behind it was located the *Mingdetang*, or Hall of Clear Virtue, in which students received edification from their masters and contemplated the wisdom of Confucian ideologies. Together, these ritual and preparatory traditions were indispensable parts of the local examination culture. (Fig. 1.9) With the erection of the examination compound nearby, the area around the *wenmiao* was permanently transformed into a center of Confucian worship and education.⁴⁰

Although there is too little evidence to accurately define what the original layout of the compound was like, imperial records from the late Song period give us a reasonable approximation of how it may have appeared early on. A thirteenth century plan of the site, made during renovations in 1261, serves as a rudimentary visual guide.⁴¹ (Fig. i.3) In the tradition of Song architectural painting, however, the drawing serves more as a symbolic expression of the order between discrete parts than an accurate representation of the architectural space.⁴² For example, the southern wall, an irregular feature of the site that followed the natural path of the river in reality, was "corrected" in the illustration to better

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³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Sometimes, this tradition is recognized as *zuomiao youxue*, literally translated as Confucius temple on the right, academy on the right. Anna Sun, *Confucianism as a World Religion: Contested Histories and Contemporary Realities*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 155.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

 $^{^{41}}$ It is the only surviving drawing from the Song dynasty that illustrates this type of architecture. Chaffee, 166.

⁴² Anita Chung, *Drawing Boundaries: Architectural Images in Qing China*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004), 5.

achieve an artistic ideal of displaying straight and well-defined boundaries.⁴³ Also, because of the tedious process of painting with a line-brush and ruler, the depiction of extremely repetitive elements, such as the rows upon rows of examination cells on either side of the central avenue, of which there were probably several hundred at the time, was abbreviated by the artist, which shortens the overall length of the site, in the image.⁴⁴ Despite these alterations, the illustration is still a useful tool for understanding the major components and spatial relationships that existed within the compound.

For the most part, this plan adhered to the standard layout described in the previous section. Oriented to the cardinal directions, the compound was isolated from its surroundings by a large double walled enclosure, corner watchtowers, 20 feet high, and a ring of open land at the periphery. To hinder people from scaling the site during examination periods the tops of the walls were overgrown with spiny plants and the area in between was carefully patrolled by imperial soldiers. The only way in and out was a single south-facing entrance, known as the *Damen*, or Great Gate, which overlooked the Qinhuai River. According to imperial records, a sign above the gate, which read *gongyuan*, was painted in large black characters over a vermillion base and featured prominently over the busy waterway. Through the Great Gate was an open plaza, flanked on the east and west by offices for the registrars and gatekeepers, as well as guardrooms, where candidates were searched upon entry. North of this area, a second gate, the *Zhongmen*, or Central Gate, lay before a broad, central avenue. This commanding path stretched down the length of the

⁴³ Above all else, illustrations of Chinese architecture expressed Confucian ideas of order, harmony, correctness, and rationality. Ibid., 20.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 9, also, Chaffee, 166.

⁴⁵ Feng, 2.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 1.

examination site, from south to north, past innumerable rows of cells that branched east and west, across the width of the site. Following the main road to the end, however, led to the administrative quarters in the rear.⁴⁷ These offices and living spaces were isolated from the rest of the compound by yet another set of walls. Prominent amongst the array of buildings in this exclusive area were two main courtroom-like buildings, where final papers were presented and graded. Rising above the rest of the structures on the site, the *Zhengting*, or Hall of Rectification, and the *Hengjaintang*, or Hall of the Scale and Mirror, clearly standout in the drawing.⁴⁸ Most impressively, the Hall of Rectification, which separated the exam and administrative zones, appears to dominate the entrance into the inner compound. With its commanding position at the northern end of the main avenue and its sweeping, double-tier roof, the structure helped emphasize the imperial grandeur and stately authority of the examination compound.

In addition to highlighting key architectural moments, the illustration also depicts several other important features of the site. Most notably, water jars and reservoirs were drawn near the main gate, along the central avenue, and in front of the entrance to the rear compound. (Fig. 1.11) Although it may seem like these were relatively minor components of the site, water, as well as waste, management infrastructure were, in reality, essential for the proper functioning of the compound, during examination and grading periods. In fact, while the site was otherwise completely closed off from the outside world for days at a time, special arrangements were made for the frequent maintenance and upkeep of these two systems so as to not compromise the sequestration of the candidates.⁴⁹ Therefore, it is

⁴⁷ Chaffee, 166.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Miyazaki, 42.

important to consider how the need for access to water and waste facilities were reflected in the layout of the site. Because a large quantity of water was required to sustain the candidates and administrative staff for the duration of an exam, a constant supply had to be attained from nearby sources, including the Qinhuai. This was collected in large water platforms outside the compound, and brought in daily, by water-bearers, through a side door of the main gate. To ensure that candidates were not greatly disturbed during this process, large, earthenware containers were located outside each row of examination cells, on the main avenue, with direct access from the main gate. This allowed laborers to come and go as quickly as possible and was also convenient for candidates to fetch their own share, as needed, for writing, cleaning, or drinking.⁵⁰ Conversely, the public latrines—not explicitly shown in the plan, but described in the memoirs of scholar-officials—were placed at the periphery of the site, and in generally out of the way areas.⁵¹ Located at the ends of each row block, the toilet was essentially a ditch or a tub that was routinely bailed out by specially trained workers when full. Indeed, the collection of human waste was a highly organized process by the time of the Song, and high standards of cleanliness, set in place by public authorities to ensure the sanitation of public streets and canals, were well established.⁵² However, because waste management procedures were more involved than water transport and operated at the scale of the city, it had the potential to be much more disruptive. Therefore, a full clearing of the compound was not possible until after the examinations were over, at which time public workers were allowed in to remove the

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Yanliu Shang, *Qinqdai keju kaoshi shulu*, (Beijing: Sanlian Bookstore, 1958), 66-67.

⁵² Jacques Gernet, *Daily Life in China on the Eve of the Mongol Invasion 1250-1276,* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), 43.

waste.⁵³ In the meantime, a series of cesspits constructed at the eastern and northern edges of the site served as temporary disposal facilities.⁵⁴ These arrangements for water and waste management not only allowed the examination compound to operate effectively, but also reflect the overall care and consideration that was put into its layout and function.

The successful rise of the examination compound at Jiankang lay with the growth of its urban context, a sophisticated center of administration and Confucian learning, as well as its ability to perform as a self-sustaining entity. However, the combination of factors that helped both the city and the examination system flourish in the Song dynasty were not to last. Fluctuating social, political, and cultural conditions in the following Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties all had significant impacts on the development of the city and its examination compound, in the centuries to come.

3. STAGNATION IN THE YUAN (1271–1368)

The conquering of the Song, by the Mongol Empire, led by Khubilai Khan (r. 1260–1294), in 1271, marked the first time a foreign dynasty reigned over all of China. Naturally, this had a great impact on the cultural, and governmental structure of the subsequent Yuan dynasty. Under the rule of non-native peoples, the ethnic Han Chinese were treated as second-class citizens, while society developed a higher tolerance for new and foreign ideas. Through significantly increased contact and trade with the west, non-indigenous religions and philosophies, such as Islam, Nestorianism, Roman Catholicism, and Tibetan Buddhism

⁵³ Waste was often sold as manure, to farmers in rural areas and the eastern suburbs, which created an important economic link between the urban and rural communities. Ibid.

⁵⁴ Miyazaki, 42.

⁵⁵ Prior to this, foreign peoples had only managed partial rule, with Han Chinese maintaining control of various parts of China.

⁵⁶ W. Scott Morton and Charlton M. Lewis, *China: Its History and Culture,* (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 2005), 119, also Mote, 451.

enjoyed a period of growth. Meanwhile, Confucianism, the fundamental ideology of classical Chinese culture and the foundational philosophy of traditional politics, was relegated to the background of Yuan society and only slightly better tolerated in the imperial administration as a tool for exerting order over ethnic Han elites. At the urging of his statesmen, Khubilai Khan reluctantly adopted the Chinese-style central government to serve his long-range political ambitions.⁵⁷ However, he remained distrustful of Chinese-speaking officials and did not want to commit himself fully to the use of Confucian traditions at court.⁵⁸ Consequently, the civil service examinations and its architecture, which had flourished along with Confucian education and culture in the Song, suffered with the marginalization of classical traditions under the Yuan regime.

The suspension of the primary recruitment system, at this time, also effected the development of *gongyuan* architecture throughout the empire. Khubilai Khan's reform of the military and administrative spheres borrowed greatly from Mongol, Khitan, Jurchen, and Tibetan institutions, which deeply impacted the roles and influences of Confucian scholars. Not only were they heavily discriminated against, but most were also barred from entry into the Mongol dominated administration, which had reverted to a system of appointing officials. ⁵⁹ From 1279 until 1315 no civil service exams were held, and examination compounds fell into disuse. The energy and resources that were previously

⁵⁷ The most important advocate was Liu Ping-chung, a Buddhist monk in Khubilai Khan's Mongol court. Hoklam Chang, "Liu Ping-chung," in *In the Service of the Khan: Eminent Personalities of the Early Mongol-Yüan Period (1200–1300)*, edited by Igor de Rachewiltz, et al, (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 1993), 245. ⁵⁸ This discrimination was in large part due to the fact that Khubilai Khan never fully learned the Chinese language and did not identify with the Chinese cultural legacy. Morris Rossabi, "The Reign of Khubilai Khan," in *The Cambridge History of China: 907–1368: Alien Regimes and Border States*, edited by Denis C. Twitchett, Herbert Franke, and John King Fairbank, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 418, also Mote, *Imperial China*, 451.

⁵⁹ Under the new class system of the Yuan dynasty, Confucian scholars were equivalent to entertainers and prostitutes. *Jiangnan gongyuan*, edited by Daoxiang Zhou, (Nanjing: Nanjing Publishing House, 2008), 8.

expended on scholarly pursuits and cultural development, including the construction of designated testing facilities, were redirected towards works of practical benefit, such as foreign expeditions and the building of cities and waterways.⁶⁰

Even when the examinations were finally reintroduced in 1315, its system and infrastructure remained greatly affected by Mongol geopolitical agendas. Khubilai Khan's empire included several large northern territories, known today as Mongolia, Manchuria, and Korea, that were not previously under Song control. As a result, it became necessary to establish a new seat of government, further north than Lin'an, as well as a new set of administrative divisions, for better control of the growing empire. With imperial authority centered on the Yuan capital of Dadu, near modern day Beijing, power quickly shifted from the once integral circuits of the south to the northern areas around the capital, known as the Central Region. Although Jiankang retained its renown as a commercial city, administratively, it was demoted to prefectural status within the newly created Jiangzhe Province—province being the new primary administrative level, ranked above circuits.⁶¹ (fig) With the political decline of the city, the role of its examination compound that had previously dominated urban life was likewise greatly diminished. For the remainder of the dynasty, Jiankang hosted the qualifying exams on a reduced frequency and played no part in the higher provincial-level tests. In addition to the decreased number of recruitment opportunities, the fall of examination culture in the south was also exacerbated by new classification and quota systems instituted under the Yuan. Candidates vying for government positions were divided into four racially-based groups, or castes. At the top

⁶⁰ Morton and Lewis, 121.

⁶¹ "A Concise History of the City of Nanjing: How It Relates to the City You See Today," *Nanjing Walls*, 2003, http://nanjingwalls.pomosa.com/history.pdf.

were the Mongols, who were most favored, followed by their non-Han allies, the Semu-ren, a class that consisted of multiple ethnic groups, including Uyghur, Tangut, Tibetan, Christian, Russian, Arab, Persian, and Turkic peoples. 62 Then came the Northern Chinese, which referred to the Han population living in the Central Region, which was under more direct Mongol occupation and control, as well the Khitans, Jurchens, and Koreans in the north. Finally, in the lowest position were the Southerners, or all subjects of the former Southern Song dynasty, including Han Chinese and other native ethnic groups in the area. Under the revised system, degrees were awarded arithmetically among the four groups, rather than proportionally based on regional population.⁶³ Naturally, the majority of official positions in every three-year examination cycle were reserved for the relatively small population of Mongol, Semu-ren, and Northern peoples while the remaining handful of positions were drawn from the much larger population of Southern Han and Confucian scholars. Harsher restrictions, in addition to a more demanding exam syllabus, meant that most Chinese candidates could not hope to enter government office, in the Yuan dynasty.⁶⁴ Even amongst those who were successful, many suffered long, discouraging years of service and low pay as county and prefectural clerks, without any real hope for promotion. 65 Facing blatant discrimination, many well-educated, yet marginalized, students in the southern regions abandoned the examinations entirely to focus their intellectual talents, instead, on literature, art, and other cultural pursuits.

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⁶² E. A. Kracke Jr., "Region, Family, and Individual in the Chinese Examination System," in *Chinese Thoughts and Institutions*, edited by John K. Fairbank, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 263.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Jiangnan gongyuan, 8.

⁶⁵ Valerie Hansen, *The Open Empire: A History of China Through 1600*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000), 352.

As dreams of civil service came to a halt, so too did much of the cultural and architectural growth of southern cities, which had been buoyed by the once fervent practices of imperial recruitment. The examination compound at Jiankang is a testament to this. There are no records from the first half of the fourteenth century that explicitly speak of its condition, but the overall lack of records regarding the site—in contrast to the wealth of information produced during the previous Song dynasty—suggests an administrative, if not physical, stagnation.⁶⁶ Furthermore, taking into account the decline of the city, the marginalization of Southern peoples, and the waning of the Chinese recruitment system at this time, the examination compound at Jiankang was faced with an uncertain future. Fortunately, political and social disorder in the last years of the Mongol reign provided a perfect opportunity for its resurgence. With the collapse of the Yuan in 1368 came the rise of a new dynasty and a new determination to take the civil service examination system and its infrastructure to a level never before seen.

4. Promotion and Expansion During the Ming (1368-1644)

The decades leading up to the end of the Mongol era were witness to the chaotic disintegration of the Yuan administrative system and the gradual emergence of militarized civilian forces outside the Central Region. Born out of this struggle was an unlikely leader, Zhu Yuanzhang (1328–1398), a destitute southern youth turned rebel commander of a small Han faction, who ultimately became the founding emperor of the long-lasting Ming dynasty.⁶⁷ His bold and calculated visions for himself and for his legacy not only brought

⁶⁶ Jiangnan gongyuan, 8.

⁶⁷ Patricia Ebrey, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of China*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 190.

about the end of a foreign rule, but also marked the revival of Confucian education and examination culture at a turning point of Chinese history.

In 1356, while looking to cement his supremacy over opponents in the south, Zhu successfully occupied the city of Jiankang. Its strategic location on the Yangtze River gave him uncontested control over the prosperous southern proveniences, as well as access to Mongol strongholds in the north. It was only natural therefore that Zhu chose to establish it as his permanent base of operations.⁶⁸ One of his first acts as ruler of the city was to change its name to Yingtian, meaning responding to Heaven. As a defender of Confucian traditions, Zhu believed that it was his divine mission to restore ethnic Han rule in the empire and the new name declared that he was ready to take on this destiny.⁶⁹ Over the next decade, his military prowess and fervent stance against Mongol rule attracted many talented scholars into his service and as his fame and ambition grew so too did his city. By the mid-1360s, vast numbers of people had flocked to Yingtian from throughout the empire, increasing its population tenfold and forcing it to more than quadruple in size.⁷⁰ To protect it from invasion, Zhu began erecting high perimeter walls, with prominent gate and tower complexes, made of stone, brick, and packed earth—an immense undertaking that took over twenty-one years to complete and was not finished until 1386. Even as he worked to shore up defenses in the south, Zhu continued his offensive in the north, finally capturing the Mongol capital at Dadu, in 1368, and proclaiming himself emperor of the Great Ming dynasty.⁷¹ In a symbolic move, he did not to settle at the conquered Yuan capital, but chose

⁶⁸ Bamber Gascoigne, *The Dynasties of China: A History*, (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2003), 151.

⁶⁹ "A Concise History of the City of Nanjing," 3

⁷⁰ Dorothy Perkins, *Encyclopedia of China: The Essential Reference to China, Its History and Culture*, (New York: Routledge, 2013), 338.

⁷¹ Joshua Gilbert, "The Battle of Poyang Lake," *Military History Online*, 2008,

http://www.militaryhistoryonline.com/medieval/articles/battleofpoyanglake.aspx.

instead to return to his base at Yingtian, becoming the first Han Chinese ruler to govern a unified empire from a southern seat of power.⁷² But, Zhu's radical rise to power marked only the beginning of a pivotal reign that lasted from 1368 until 1398, one driven by two major desires: to establish his imperial authority and to return to a classical system of government based on Confucian ideas. These entwined ambitions helped shape not only the framework of his government, but also the urban fabric of his city.

After dismantling the Yuan government, Zhu was eager to establish his own dynastic legacy. He started by disbanding the Central Region, where Mongol power had been concentrated, and creating a new administrative division, around his base at Yingtian, known as South Zhili Province. Gradually rebuilding his military stronghold into a stately metropolis, Zhu constructed a number of new palace complexes, ceremonial halls, altars, temples, and royal tombs throughout the city.⁷³ In 1378, ten years after the fall of the Yuan, a transformed Yingtian was officially declared to be the imperial capital of the Ming Empire. Renamed Nanjing, meaning southern capital, the city soon blossomed into one of the largest and most important cultural centers of the ancient world.⁷⁴ Meanwhile, Zhu continued to make alterations to the structure of his central government, assuming personal control over all administrative functions and instituting a series of subordinate agencies to help manage the affairs of the realm. By 1380, tens-of-thousands of new offices and officials had been created throughout the empire, but, because of the inequities of the late Yuan, too few qualified scholars remained to meet the immense staffing needs.⁷⁵ To

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⁷² Steinhardt, "Ming, Qing, and Beyond," in *Chinese Imperial City Planning*, 161.

⁷³ Ibid., 165.

⁷⁴ Stephen R. Turnbull, "Design and Development," in *Chinese Walled Cities 221BC–AD1644*, (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2009), 18, also Ibid., 165-166.

⁷⁵ "A Concise History of the City of Nanjing," 3, also Mote, 517.

encourage more talented men to apply for office and to produce a pool of future candidates, Zhu founded a new Confucian school system that was based on both the development of moral character and the acquisition of knowledge. Nowhere was the effect of his decree more evident than at the capital where ritual and education, presided over by the emperor himself, helped revitalize the city's once thriving center of learning.⁷⁶ The area around the inner Oinhuai River, in particular, location of the wenmiao complex and examination compound, experienced a period of significant development and growth when Confucian state ceremonies began to be held at the temple-academy. Imperial adornments—including an honorific stone archway, or *lingxing men*, meaning Gate of the Top Scholar, erected at its south entrance—and the emperor's annual procession to the sacrificial hall lent great prestige to the site. In turn, this distinction drew large numbers of scholars to the school, prompting an expansion of the lecture hall and preparatory academy at the back of complex. Adjacent, the site of the Song dynasty gongyuan was similarly affected by the resurgence of Confucian culture when, in 1385, with competition for government office on the rise, Zhu revived the triennial civil service examinations and reopened the empire's hallowed testing centers.⁷⁷ What transpired in the following two and one-half centuries was an escalation of examination fervor in Ming society and the dramatic transformation of the Nanjing compound.

Despite a lack of visual evidence, such as illustrations or plans, the evolution of the examination compound during the Ming dynasty is known by way of a series of twenty-three commemorative steles, which still exist to this day. Erected between the fifteenth and

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⁷⁶ Leon Stover, *Imperial China and the State Cult of Confucius*, (Jefferson: McFarland, 2005),155, also Anna Sun, "The Revival of Confucian Rites in Contemporary China," in *Confucianism and Spiritual Traditions in Modern China and Beyond*, edited by Fenggang Yang and Joseph Tamney, (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 313 ⁷⁷ Mote, 572.

nineteenth centuries, these inscriptions describe several significant milestones that took place throughout the history and development of the site. Beginning in the last years of Zhu's reign, and for a brief period after his death in 1398, the Nanjing compound served the highest, metropolitan, and office-granting exams. However, civil war and usurpation among Zhu's descendants eventually led the third Ming emperor, to move his primary capital, and the final exams, to Beijing—previously Yuan Dadu, in 1421.78 Even so, Nanjing remained a secondary capital and cultural heart of the empire and its examination compound a beacon of Zhu's autocratic legacy. Following his pattern of imperial rule, cases of moral and political failure within the central government were severely punished as inept officials lost their titles, or even their lives, and had their private properties re-appropriated for state projects. During one such instance in 1457, a parcel of land, confiscated from corrupt officials along the inner Qinhuai, was used as the basis for new construction at the examination compound. Chronicled on the Commemorative Stele for the New Exam Compound at Yingtianfu, this phase of building included the creation of additional officers' rooms, a courtroom, and 3,000 new examination cells.⁷⁹ In the following decades, as the provincial-level exam grew in importance and attracted more applicants to Nanjing, architectural expansion of the examination compound continued. By the 1530s, there were reportedly 3,700 cells, 77 administrative rooms, and three great halls on the site.⁸⁰ But, perhaps the most visually striking and functionally significant addition of this period was the *Mingyuanlou*, or Building of Foresight and Reason, an imposing, three-story guard and signal tower constructed at the epicenter of the compound. (Fig. 1.12) Measuring 40 feet

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⁷⁸ Mote. 619.

⁷⁹ Yingtianfu xinjian gongyuan ji bei, inscription, (Nanjing, 1457).

⁸⁰ Zeng xiu Yingtianfu xiangshi yuan ji bei, inscription, (Nanjing, 1534).

high and 30 feet wide along each of its four sides, the structure was built of brick, stone, and wood with light colored plaster, dark tile roofs, and upturned eaves that exemplified the authoritative and austere style of Ming dynasty architecture and, when it was erected in 1534, midway along the central avenue, loomed over all other buildings, both within and around the compound. 81 Easy to see from and easy to see, the tower was a direct response to the need for additional surveillance infrastructure on the growing site. Specifically, large, ground level entrances on all sides provided easy access for patrol, while upper pavilions offered sweeping views of the surrounding examination cells and watchtowers. Furthermore, the building was visible from anywhere within the compound, and in an emergency could be used to signal guards and test-takers to take action in a quick and effective manner.⁸² (Fig. 1.13) Its addition not only reinforced the seriousness of the exams, but also greatly facilitated the continued expansion of the site and, after a second wave of construction—noted in later inscriptions to have taken place in 1578—there were a total of 8,000 cells and 330 administrative rooms.83 According to the Commemorative Stele of the Expansion and Repairs of the Examination Compound, by 1600, the compound was so extensive that upkeep had become a problem. Old and new sections, both, suffered from a combination of long periods of disuse in between exams and extremely heavy use during the testing cycle. As a result, many structures were in need of intensive renovation and repair by the late Ming, including the tower, weakened over the years by wind and rain, which needed to be reinforced, and a section of exam cells, located in low-lying areas prone

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⁸¹ Feng, 1-2.

⁸² Flags were flown in the daytime and lanterns raised at night. Ibid.

⁸³ Zeng xiu gongyuan beiji, inscription, (Nanjing, 1724), and Yingtianfu chongxiu gongyuan beiji, inscription, (Nanjing, 1580).

to floods, which had to be raised.⁸⁴ The development and maintenance of the Nanjing compound was a demanding, yet necessary process. Not only did it help promote a strong imperial image, but it also helped define the cultural identity of an empire.

Buoyed by the maturation of Confucian culture, as well as the growth of the examination compound and wenmiao complex, the banks of the inner Qinhuai became a celebrated zone of intellectualism and commerce during the Ming dynasty. Referred to as the Fuzimiao District, the area attracted men from all walks of life, social classes, and ethnic backgrounds looking to try their hand at obtaining examination success and prestige. Soon, an entire industry sprung up around this experience, fed by a regular stream of persons entering and leaving the city. Inns and hostels catering to various levels of economy and class provided food and rest for travel-weary scholars. Set up during the weeks, or months, leading up to an exam and dismantled by the time candidates began dispersing for home, these short-term operations helped generate additional income for the local community. However, as the pool of candidates increased and chances of passing on the first try decreased, more and more men chose to remain in the city, either to retake the exam or because they did not have a motivation to leave. For these individuals, the Fuzimiao was a convenient place of settlement, offering easy access to the latest scholarly discourses, as well as opportunities for alternative employment as teachers, patrons, and managers. With this shift, temporary enterprises were turned into permanent establishments along the river, where teahouses, gardens, and bookshops, helped sustain a fertile, intellectual atmosphere and shops, bazaars, brothels, and pleasure boats catered to other social

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⁸⁴ Yingtianfu xiugai gongyuan ji bei, inscription, (Nanjing, 1600).

desires. By the middle of the fifteenth century, Nanjing's escapist atmosphere had quickly become its own attraction and its canal—part of the grand network of waterways connecting the empire—served as a main access route into the heart of the city. Be Travelers arriving at the Fuzimiao by boat were greeted with well-maintained docks, stone balustrades, and a public plaza, filled with commercial stalls and stands, on the north bank. Feig. 1.14) On the opposite shore, a *zhaobi*, or screen wall, constructed in 1574, dominated the scene. Measuring approximately 360 feet long by 30 feet high and decorated with a stone relief carving of two golden dragons battling over a fiery pearl on a sea of vermillion red, the wall was a prominent reminder of the fierce pursuit of wisdom, power, and prestige, as well as the long arm of imperial authority, in Ming society. Capping off the transformation of the riverfront, in 1586, was the erection of a handsome *pailou*, or commemorative gateway, at the southern edge of the plaza. Inscribed with the phrase "tianxia wenshu," it officially declared the Fuzimiao to be a "center of learning under heaven". Fig. 1.15)

With a population devoted to educational pursuits and refinement, the Ming Empire boasted multiple flourishing branches of art and science, as well as the highest levels of literacy in the world, at that time. However, despite its vibrant society, its government soon began to deteriorate. By 1620, an onslaught of natural disasters, wars, and rebellions, exacerbated by the fateful reigns of a few weak and inept emperors, had dragged the dynasty into a steep economic and political decline. Twenty years of imperial dysfunction

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⁸⁵ Fuzimiao, 1.

⁸⁶ Tobie Meyer-Fung, *Building Culture in Early Qing Yangzhou*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 54.

⁸⁷ Yingtianfu xiugai gongyuan ji bei.

⁸⁸ Fuzimiao, 2.

⁸⁹ Fuzimiao, 3.

and unrelenting attacks by northern invaders later, the situation culminated, in 1644, with the swift defeat of Ming forces at Beijing and the occupation of the northern administrative provinces. Although Zhu's Chinese empire came to an end with the rise of an ethnically Manchu Qing, the Confucian system of governance that he had brought back to life, remarkably, managed to survive the dynastic transition. In the final phase of China's imperial history, and at the hands of an ambitious alien regime, the civil service examinations finally reached its pinnacle and, ultimately, its demise.

5. CLIMAX AND DECLINE IN THE QING (1644-1911)

From the moment the Manchus took Beijing, they recognized the need to rule over the empire using Chinese means. Initial attempts to impose foreign reign were met with resentment and resistance from the native population and anti-Manchu sentiment continued to grow out of Nanjing, and throughout the south, where Ming loyalist activities were concentrated. Without an overwhelming military advantage, they could not suppress rebellion by force and had to rely, instead, on the acceptance and support of the local elites to sustain their dynastic claim. Promoting themselves as the legitimate successors of the Chinese Empire, the Qing administration chose to continue the Ming structure of government and civil service recruitment, a decision which satisfied Chinese expectations, but more importantly, captured the loyalty of the scholar-official class and bound their existence to that of the imperial court.

Under Manchu governance, the powerful South Zhili Province incorporated into a larger cultural-political region known as the Jiangnan. Meaning south of the Yangtze, the Jiangnan was a center of trade and wealth, famed for its beautiful women, gardens, and cultivated lifestyle. It was ruled over by the Viceroy of Liangjiang, richest of eight regional

administrators appointed throughout the Qing Empire, and controlled from his seat of government in Nanjing. The Kangxi emperor (r. 1661–1722), considered one of the most astute and accomplished rulers in late Chinese history, fully understood the importance of maintaining strong working relationships in the southern provinces, and especially with the highly-educated scholar-officials in the Jiangnan region. He began the practice of making long tours of the realm to learn about his empire and between 1684 and 1707, made six trips through the lower Yangtze River valley, including a personal visit to the testing center at Nanjing. To commemorate his visit, he decreed that a "special examination year" was to be held and that more cycles would be added from time to time in honor of notable events or important dates in the Chinese calendar. These displays of interest and investment in the Chinese system and Chinese elites won him greater personal favor with the public and brought increased distinction to the examinations.90

As the frequency of exams, and the number of applicants, went up, construction, renovation, and repairs also increased. By 1699, the Nanjing compound, renamed Jiangnan Gongyuan, had become the largest testing facility in the empire with over 13,000 cells and under the direction of the regional viceroy, even more were added in 1724, bringing the total up to 17,000.91 Imperial visitations, which became increasingly lavish, ostentatious, and economically draining in later generations, further drove these types of large-scale building initiatives throughout the provinces. Entire towns were sometimes overhauled in advance of a royal arrival and a considerable amount of the money and resources were dedicated specifically to the expansion and maintenance of significant imperial sites, such as the *gongyuan*. Stele records of rebuilding efforts at the Jiangnan compound after the

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⁹⁰ Mote. 869.

⁹¹ Yu zhi chenhan bei, inscription, (Nanjing, 1699), also Zeng xiu gongyuan beiji.

autumn floods of 1845 were especially explicit about the work that was bring done to improve the site. They indicate that over 6,100 waterlogged cells were rebuilt, new drainage systems installed, and surrounding levees raised by two feet to prevent river water from once again overflowing into the compound. In addition, some 500 additional cells were built and a remaining 9,000 plus cells and structures were updated, the cost of which was documented as being 13,600 taels of silver. 92 As the heavy fiscal demands of imperial construction increasingly came under criticism for being wasteful and burdensome, the pace of building slowed, although never ceased entirely. The last phase of expansion to take place on the compound commenced in 1866, when the number of testing cells was increased to 18,900 and then again to a count of of 20,644.93 A plan of the site as it stood in 1873 was recorded by Etienne Zi and published in 1894 as part of a French study on Chinese civil and military examinations.⁹⁴ (Fig. i.4) This detailed illustration remains the most frequently used representation of the site, seen in both scholarly and promotional materials alike. Despite its lack of the surrounding context, the plan effectively conveys the vast size and spatial order of the compound, which occupied a sprawling 75 acres of the Fuzimiao District and contained rows upon rows of unending exam cells and tightly arranged rooms. Unfortunately, the enormity and grandeur of the site belied the true fragile nature of the late Qing Empire. While the adoption of the Ming civil government successfully afforded a measure of stability in Qing society, it was not permanent and by the end of the nineteenth century, the imperial system had become too large and fragmented and too permeated with corruption and bribery to properly function. As the

⁹² Jiangning chongxiu gongyuan ji bei, inscription (Nanjing 1845).

⁹³ Chongxiu Jiangnan gongyuan beiji, inscription (Nanjing, 1871).

⁹⁴ Zhou, 1.

dynasty came to a close, so too ended thirteen hundred years of civil service examinations and architecture.

In a time when modern ideas and foreign institutions were becoming more prominent, traditional Chinese government systems came under increasing attack and Nanjing, a historical breeding ground for unrest and rebellion once again emerged as an epicenter of change. Beginning with the invasion of the city by British forces at the close of the First Opium War, in 1842, a series of unequal treatises and humiliating concessions heavily disrupted the Chinese market economy and weakened the legitimacy of Oing rule. Continued foreign pressure and civil war in the following decades further eroded the power of the central government. Between 1850 and 1864, the Taiping Rebellion, a quasireligious millenarian movement led by a self-proclaimed Christian convert and disillusioned scholar Hong Xiuquan, occupied Nanjing and large parts of southern China. 95 Having failed the examinations four times, Hong condemned the rigid structure and classical nature of the imperial system among the contributing factors in the moral and political decline of the empire. His agenda included rooting out Confucianism and other traditional ideologies and replacing them with Christianity and social reform. Although the rebellion ultimately failed, it fundamentally altered the power structure of the empire and paved the way for revolutionary movements in the following century. One of the major changes to come out of this was educational modernization. Foreign missionaries, now given greater access to Chinese society, set up numerous universities and training schools that offered alternative forms of education from classical Confucian study. Meanwhile, the civil service examination, once a symbol of imperial authority, individual prestige, and

⁹⁵ Stephen R. Platt, *Autumn in the Heavenly Kingdom: China, the West, and the Epic Story of the Taiping Civil War* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2012).

social mobility, was gradually phased out and officially abolished in 1905. While the end of the system represented the termination of a way of life, the fall of the Qing Empire in 1911 and the founding of a modern democratic state, known as the Republic of China in Nanjing was what had a physical impact on the urban landscape. In the new world order, *gongyuan* architecture was regarded as a backwards and shameful symbol of China's past and in the mid-1910s a motion was passed to sweep clean all traces of the institution. (Fig. 1.17) This led to the destruction of nearly all examination compounds throughout the country. The Jiangnan Gongyuan, which closed its doors in 1903, was completely dismantled in 1918, with the exception of a few structures, including the *Mingyuanlou* and a scattering of testing cells and offices. In both a practical and symbolic move, materials salvaged from its ruins were reused in the construction of modern schools, signaling a definitive end to the Confucian state and transition to a new educational and political system.⁹⁶

6. CONCLUSION

What this chapter on the transformation of the examination compound at Nanjing has revealed is that the growth and decline of *gongyuan* architecture was intimately linked with the political, social and cultural atmosphere of imperial China. Through periods of expansion and stagnation, splendor and deep troubles, it was the mechanism by which the power and vitality of the Confucian state could be measured. Today, remnants of examination architecture are few and far between and getting even scarcer by the day as revolution, urbanization, and modernization continue to bulldoze through some of China's largest and busiest cites. In 1985, the Fuzimiao District, in Nanjing, was renovated into a center for shopping, dining, and entertainment. Today, it is a thriving commercial center

⁹⁶ Stover, 155.

and well-known tourist destination centered on the Confucius Temple and Qinhuai River. While the Jiangnan compound no longer stands as it was in its glory days of the Ming and Qing dynasties, its legacy lives on in the area. Streets names, such as Gongyuan Pedestrian Street and Shenjuren Alley, appear throughout the city, a reminder of the culture of learning and examination that once dominated. A more recent addition to this collection of commemorative sites is the Imperial Examinations History Museum, completed in 2014. (Fig. 1.18) Located on a fraction of the original compound, it includes the Mingyuan Tower and a small portion of the surrounding cells. To date, it is the only professional museum, open to the general public, which is dedicated to the study and history of the traditional examination system. Although some forms of Chinese architecture have long received international recognition and scholarship, the physical world of the gongyuan is still relatively unexplored. Certain aspects of the field, including the typology and evolution of the examination compound have been touched upon in this chapter, but its relationship to Confucian thought still needs to be explored. Further investigation of how the parts and functions of *gongyuan* architecture relate to ideas of order and control will be examined in the following chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ARCHITECTURE OF CONFUCIAN THOUGHT

In teaching, there should be no distinction of classes.[Analects 15:39]

The development of the Jiangnan Gongyuan has already been discussed at length in the previous chapter. It is important, however, not only to study the physical evolution of the site over time, but also to explore how the space operated and was understood by those who interacted with it, particularly with respect to the Confucian ideas of order and control in the late Ming and Qing dynasties.

In this chapter, those ideas will be considered from two perspectives—the government and the individual. In the first instance, the examination compound becomes a machine of efficiency and stability; while in the second, it turns into a space of isolation and suppression. How a single site can take on two distinct sets of meanings depending on the audience, and how this can lead to either support or criticism of the system, will be further discussed below.

1. MACHINE OF EFFICIENCY AND STABILITY

From the perspective of the government, the Confucian idea of order referred to the natural harmony between man, nature, and heaven, which allowed all things to function properly and efficiently. Good governance could bring about order, just as respecting order could ensure a harmonious state. Education and examination were the systems that turned men

into participants of that order and *gongyuan* architecture became the machine through which they were transformed.

Cheating and corruption were the bane of orderly societies so the examination compound became the vehicle with which such actions were rooted out. Tall observation decks, high walls, and guard towers allowed administrators to keep a close eye on the candidates from all vantage points, while additional searches of test materials or rooms were conducted to further deter insubordinate behavior. Additionally, after papers were turned in, they were recopied and assigned a secret code to preserve the anonymity of all candidates and thus the fairness of the system. The application of strict regulations, however, did not just affect the candidates; administrators were also expected to adhere to the high standards of their responsibilities. Official overseers and their staff resided in the administrative compound on the site for the three weeks that were needed to grade the exams. Like the candidates, they were not allowed to contact people on the outside to ensure that their actions were unimpeachable. Division of the administrators into two groups, outer and inner, made the process even more regulated and rigorous. Outer overseers handled surveillance while inner overseers supervised grading and ranking. Not only were they separated by duties; they were also separated physically into an inner and outer administrative compound at the northern end of the *gongyuan*. Completely inaccessible from all other directions, the two sections were connected by the *Feihonggiao*, or Rainbow Bridge. During the testing period, no individuals were allowed to cross this threshold and even speaking to each other across the bridge was prohibited. Only when the examinations had been completed and collected, and the answers transcribed was an outer official allowed to pass over to the other side to deliver the materials. In the inner

compound, tests were reviewed and graded in grave secrecy by the inner administrative staff. While stringent order and regulation took a toll on the individual psyche, as will be discussed later, it successfully kept the examination compound running like a well-oiled machine, producing an extremely efficient and objective system of recruitment for the imperial government.

Where as order was about inner function, control was about outer perception and the creation and projection of an indelible imperial image. Ming control started at its city walls, which aside from providing a certain level of defense, also served as a symbol of the imperial authority within. 1 Measuring approximately twenty-four miles in total length, forty feet high, and twenty to forty-feet broad, the massive and austere style of Nanjing's city wall was reflective of Ming founder, Zhu Yuanzhang's autocratic ambitions.² (Fig. 2.1) Inside the city, continued surveillance by city guards from atop the walls further suggested the omnipresence of imperial rule. Double walls surrounding the Nanjing compound, reminded people that this too was an imperial site. In addition to high walls, it was also separated from the urban surroundings by a circle of restricted land. Commoners were forbidden to access or build on the area, known today as Gongyuanjie, or Examination Street and during the examination period, guards were stationed along it for added effect. The inner workings of the compound thus remained hidden from public gaze and, encouraged even greater speculation as to what sort of elite dealings went on within. Consequently, projecting an image of imperial control actually helped perpetuate the myth of examination honor and lured even more men into the system.³

¹ F.W. Mote, *Imperial China*, 900–1800, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 762.

² Mote. 568.

³ John W. Chaffee, *The Thorny Gates of Learning*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 17.

2. ARCHITECTURE OF ISOLATION AND REPRESSION

The effects of the machine of examination were generally favorable to the government, but on the flipside, they were relatively less kind to the individual. Order became dehumanizing and control repressive as the examination compound isolated the scholar, both physically and psychology, and constant surveillance crushed the intellectual spirit.

The structure of the Chinese bureaucracy was one of hierarchy. Each person had a role to play in society, and many believed that civil service was the ultimate contribution. The examinations promoted that idea and the belief that anyone could climb to the top, but the reality was that Confucian order was more limiting than mobile. On the day of the exam, the transition from the city into the compound was jarring for many.⁴ Those conditions that deterred cheating were also the causes of physical and psychological turmoil. Subjected to multiple searches of their person and belongings, the inspection process was sometimes so demoralizing that some candidates immediately left for home.⁵ Subsequent processing further stripped away the identity of the individual. (Fig. 2.2) Ushered into undistinguished cells, they became just one more nameless face in the sea of people. Their examination cells, open from top to bottom for easy surveillance, exposed them to wind, rain, and other uncomfortable conditions. Isolated from the city, from their friends and family, and from other exam-goers for long spans of time, the entire process was harrowing. Long years devoted to study, amplified their fears of failure. Unable handle the stress of the exams, or face their fate, some were driven to take drastic measures.⁷

California Press, 2000),180. ⁵ Elman, 184.

⁴ Benjamin A. Elman, A Cultural History of Civil Examination in Late Imperial China. (Berkeley: University of

⁶ Elman, 182.

⁷ Zhou. Jiangnan Gongyuan, 85.

The troubled beginnings of the Ming dynasty fostered a pattern of imperial rule based on surveillance that was constantly on guard against dysfunction. In Zhu's quest for legitimacy, he demanded absolute authority and unrestricted political power over the state and its people.⁸ This concept of control was reflected in the architecture and functioning of the *gongyuan*. Guards stationed on tall platforms and the *Mingyuanlou*, gave the impression that candidates were carefully monitored and under the watchful supervision of the emperor at all times. In reality, the sites were most likely too large to permit much close supervision, but these structures acted as psychological deterrents. Additionally, demands for unquestioning submission to authority and complete control was increasingly out of touch with the changing realities. The *gongyuan* became a "cultural prison," in which welleducated men were trapped. It was the only course of action to take to achieve success, and yet it was mired in rigid tradition and backwardness that suppressed any change for real growth or advancement. By the late Ming, and early Qing, criticism of the system had begun to surpass support and the call for change was led by the very people it had produced. The following chapter will focus on how a new class of Jiangnan literati, who were transformed by the machine of examination, in turn contributed to creation of "place" and identity at the Jiangnan Gongyuan.

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⁸ Natasha Heller, "From Imperial Glory to Buddhist Piety: The Record of a Ming Ritual in Three Contexts," *History of Religions* 51, no. 1 (2011): 63,

⁹ Miyazaki, Ichisada, *China's Examination Hell*, translated by Conrad Schirokauer, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 41.

CHAPTER THREE

SITUATING THE GONGYUAN IN JIANGNAN'S LITERATI CULTURE

"The noble man is not a utensil."
[Analects 2:12]

In 1600, the Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci wrote of Nanjing:

"This city surpasses all others in the world in beauty and in grandeur, and in this respect there are probably very few others superior or equal to it. It is literally filled with palaces and temples and towers and bridges, and those are scarcely surpassed by similar structures in Europe... there is a gaiety of spirit among the people, who are well-mannered and nicely spoken, and the dense population is made up of all classes, of hoi-polloi, of the lettered aristocracy and the Magistrates."

The administrative and cultural heart of the Yangtze River valley, Nanjing exemplified the aura of refinement and cultivation that was associated with the region. (Fig. 3.1) Site of the provincial examinations in the Jiangnan, the city was place of "crouching tigers and hidden dragons," teeming with talent, where well-educated men dedicated their lives to academic pursuit and government service. The search for status and prestige, however, was more often fruitless than successful and aspirations were quickly crushed by rising expectations, and increased competition in the late imperial period. But, out of that climate of intellectualism and frustration was also birthed a new class of literati. Transformed by

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¹ Ricci interpreted the class of scholar-officials as "lettered aristocracy" in analogy to European ideas. Louis J. Gallagher, *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matthew Ricci, 1583-1610,* (New York: Random House, 1953), 268-269.

their experience in the machine of education and examination their lives and stories are an integral part of the history of the Jiangnan Gongyuan.²

2. THE SEEDS OF CHANGE

Throughout its history, the Jiangnan region produced the largest number of candidates for government positions, but for every scholar awarded a degree and an office, there were thousands more who faced rejection.³ As it happens, one of the most interesting social byproducts of the imperial system was generated from this phenomenon. Men, frustrated by their failures and increasingly dissatisfied with the reality before them, directed their cultivated knowledge and skills towards more recreational pursuits, such as painting, poetry, and literature, and away from a life of civil responsibility.⁴ Scholar-officials turned scholar-artists, well educated in Confucian classics and philosophy, but rejecting of their traditional limitations, these individuals fully embodied the Jiangnan literati culture.

Perhaps the most well known scholar-artist of the late imperial period was Tang Yin (1470–1524), better known by his alias Tang Bohu, a poet, painter, and all around renaissance man, whose extraordinary talent distinguished him as one of "the Four Masters of the Ming Dynasty." Born in 1470, the son of a lowly restaurant owner in Wumen county, east of Nanjing, Tang was a diligent student in his youth and very well regarded in the scholarly circles of the Jiangnan area. In 1498, he sat for the provincial exams at the

² F.W. Mote, *Imperial China*, 900–1800, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 567.

³ At its height in the Qing dynasty, it was estimated that only five percent of students had a chance of passing the provincial exams and even fewer received titles. John King Fairbank and Merle Goldman, *China: A New History*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 101-107.

⁴ W. Scott Morton and Charlton M. Lewis, *China: Its History and Culture,* (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 2005), 121.

⁵ The Renwen Painting style was started by Chinese literati in the Yuan dynasty and used as an expression of political protest against Mongol conquest, it reflected the inner self of the painter rather than the tastes of the imperial court. Edmund Capon and Mae Anna Pang, *Chinese Paintings of the Ming and Qing Dynasties*, (International Cultural Corporation of Australia Ltd., 1981).

Nanjing compound, where he came in first place and was allowed to advance to the metropolitan levels in Beijing. The following year, his campaign for government office was cut short by accusations of bribery and cheating during the final examinations and he was jailed, disgraced, and denied further opportunity for official progress. Without the security of a government career to fall back on, he returned south and began to lead a rather eccentric life, creating works of art in exchange for cash "gifts" or other "traded" goods among an elite and well-educated group of friends. Where earlier academic painters were highly trained craftsmen, concerned mainly with technical skill and realism, literati painters, like Tang, embraced a more Confucian perspective that emphasized art as a vehicle for expressing one's unique self and moral cultivation. Themes of tragic unfulfillment, struggle, and the base elements of society—envy, greed, venality—thus, featured heavily in his work, which, despite a life of diversions and pleasure, reflected Tang's melancholy view of the world.

Ming novelist and poet, Wu Cheng'en (1505–1582), was another individual associated with the Jiangnan literati school of the late imperial period. Born the son of an artisan, in 1505, in a town north of Nanjing, Wu showed an aptitude for study and classical literature at an early age. Despite sitting for the provincial exams several times, however, he never passed and was sixty-three years old when he was given a minor appointment in Nanjing, as consolation. But, having become increasingly unhappy with the political climate and corruption of society, Wu retired from office after only two years, resolved to devote the remainder of his life to literary pursuits. His most famous work, *Journey to the West*, is also considered to be one of the "Four Great Masterpieces of Chinese Literature." Similar to

⁶ Wilt L. Idema, "Prosimetric and verse narrative," in *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature: From 1375*, edited by Kang-I Sun Chang and Stephen Owen, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 379.

literati painting, literati novels of this time were varied, self-conscious, and experimental, manipulating the conventions of popular story telling to hint at themes beyond the surface narrative. In *Journey to the West*, for example, the outwardly serious spiritual quest, undercut with instances of comedy or absurdity, camouflages a satirical critique of Ming bureaucracy. Through Wu's treatment, Monkey's antics symbolized the rebellion of unfettered intellectual spirit against moral corruption and ineptitude, embodied by both the heavenly deities and earthly demons in the novel. In reality, it was an expression of the author's own dissatisfaction with the conditions of Chinese society and government.

Political critiques became even more prominent in literati culture, over the course of the Qing dynasty, as exemplified in the work of eighteenth century literary figure, Wu Jingzi (1701-1754). Born the son of a Qing official in the Jiangnan region, Wu grew up in a well-to-do family but succeeded neither academically nor financially himself. After failing to advance, on multiple occasions, in the provincial exams at Nanjing, he proceeded to squander away his inheritance and did not try again for government office. In 1734, destitute, living off of the charity of friends and family, and dismayed by his many failures, the thirty-two year old Wu began applying his scholarly skills to writing. Like Wu Cheng'en, he expressed his frustrations through satire, but while the former veiled his critiques in allegory, Wu Jingzi was upfront about the subject matter. His principle work, *The Scholars*, also known as *An Unofficial History of the Literati*, completed in 1750, was an anecdotal, biographical, and autobiographical work that, on the one hand, upheld the ideals of Confucian morality, but, on the other hand, criticized the civil service examination system and ridiculed the over-ambitious candidates who took part in it. As similar outcries against

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⁷ Andrew H. Plaks, Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 497-98.

⁸ Hu Shih, Introduction," in *Monkey*, translated by Arthur Waley, (New York: Grove Press, 1942), 1-5.

corrupt bureaucrats, soul-crushing testing conditions, and intellectual suppression grew ever clearer and more distinct, the need for change became increasingly apparent.⁹

Jiangnan literati in the late imperial age emerged from all walks of life, though their disparate paths were connected, through time, by the examinations. While a few obtained status and prestige in the civil service, many others achieved various levels of success, fame, and notoriety, outside the "standard" examination route," as painters, poets, writers, and thinkers. In a world on the brink of collapse, they offered unique and lasting perspectives on the political and social issues of the time and, having passed through the halls of learning in Nanjing, their lives and influence helped solidify a legacy for the Jiangnan Gongyuan in Chinese history.

2. END OF A SYSTEM

Despite growing resistance, the imperial system endured for another two centuries after the late Ming, early Qing period. The encroachment of external influences that ultimately contributed to its fall, however, had already begun generations earlier, when increased trade and exchange with foreign peoples brought new cultures, ideas, and institutions into contact with the Chinese Confucian system. These interactions created a society torn between cultures, traditions, and modernity and left many intellectuals in the late imperial period caught between two shifting worlds.

From the sixteenth to nineteenth century, western missionaries played a crucial role in opening dialogue between China and the outside world. Jesuit priests entering the Ming Empire in 1582 quickly recognized how important Confucianism was to the Chinese people

⁹ I.S. Lisevich, "Wu Ching-Tzu," in *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, (London: Macmillian Publishers, 1979), available online from TheFreeDictionary.com, last updated 2010.

¹⁰ Mote, 770.

and so adopted the mannerisms of the scholar, rather than clergy. Due to their impressive knowledge of science, math, astronomy, and visual arts, in addition to religion, they were accepted in elite Confucian circles as "foreign literati." ¹¹ Many, thus, cultivated long-lasting intellectual relationships with local scholars and imperial officials, a few of whom they also managed to convert to the "holy faith." 12 Active participants in the Ming literati milieu, the Iesuits soon saw their influence become limited by the Manchu conquest in the seventeenth century. Qing rulers, who believed that western perspectives could "shake the foundations of [their empire]," began to distance themselves from all foreigners and their teachings.¹³ Following the death of the Qianlong emperor, in 1796, however, the façade of imperial rule began to crumble, exposing an officialdom that was rife with corruption and ill governance.¹⁴ The Opium Wars (1839–1860) and Taiping Rebellion (1850–1864) further alerted people to the dire consequences of Qing isolationist policies and the need for more proactive understanding regarding inter-cultural affairs and western ideas. 15 Unlike traditional Confucian education, which was slipping further into narrow and esoteric study, western schools, born from the Jesuit China missions, focused on more current topics and were better poised to cater to this new, modern-world problem. (Fig. 3.2)

By the end of the nineteenth century, schools built by missionaries were educating thousands of students and access to foreign ideas and literature was easily gained; culture

¹¹ Patricia Ebrey, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of China*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 212.

¹² Willard J. Peterson, "Learning from Heaven: The Introduction of Christianity and Other Western Ideas into Late Ming China," in *China and Maritime Europe, 1500-1800: Trade, Settlement, Diplomacy, and Missions,* edited by John E. Willis, Jr., (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 80-82, 89.

¹³ Hui Li, "Jesuit Missionaries and the Transmission of Christianity and European Knowledge in China," *Emory Endeavors* 4 (2013): 14.

¹⁴ Zhengyuan Fu, *Autocratic Traditions and Chinese Politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 146.

¹⁵ Ibid.

had begun to change. Perhaps there was no one who understood this transitional period better than Liang Qichao, a traditional Chinese scholar and western-educated reformist of the late Qing dynasty. Born in 1873, Liang was trained in the Confucian classics and passed the provincial level exams, at just sixteen years old. However, during the final exams, he was failed for espousing unorthodox views challenging existing institutions and never received a higher degree. A voracious reader, Liang became extremely interested in foreign affairs and western subjects such as philosophy, history, and politics, for which he developed an even deeper understanding of, during his travels abroad. Influenced by his experience overseas, he participated in the Hundred Days' Reform, in 1898, calling for institutional change, the ridding of corruption, and a remodeling of the imperial examination system. While the movement was short-lived, a few of its measures were successfully put into effect, including the abolition of the civil service examinations in 1905.

Both external and internal factors contributed to the formation of a modern Chinese identity, but it was the founding of the Republic of China, in 1912, by Christianized and western-educated leaders that brought down the old Confucian system.¹⁷ In the aftermath of revolution, many traditional sites associated with the dynastic system were dismantled. *Gongyuan* architecture—if not for their imperial resonance, then for their sheer size—became particular targets and by 1919, only the largest of these exam compounds, in Beijing, Canton, and Nanjing, still stood in any form. (Fig. 3.3) But, even these soon all but disappeared as political and cultural revolutions continued through the mid-twentieth century. Meanwhile, modern educational models, such as universities, medical colleges,

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¹⁶ Sophie Site Jia, "Sun Yatsen, Liang Qichao: Friends, Foes and Nationalism," *Emory Endeavors* 4 (2013).

¹⁷ Fu, 153.

and elementary schools, were established to prepare people for new social and national responsibilities in the global world. 18

3. CONCLUSION

The civil service examination system helped replace the aristocracy of blood with an aristocracy of talent, allowing men from all walks of life to be judged on the equal basis of merit rather than birth. It was the bedrock of imperial government; one of the most distinctive features of the Chinese civilization, and its architecture has been the focus of this study. Although it has not received the same level of international attention as traditional temple or palace architecture, the *gongyuan* is an iconic building typology associated only with China. More indigenous than temple architecture, and a more accessible than palace architecture, it may even be argued that the examination compound better represents traditional Chinese culture than either of the former. A product of Confucian culture, its history was intimately connected with the rise and fall of the Chinese empire. While that imperial system, its examinations, and its architecture are no longer part of modern society, the legacy of the meritocratic principle and values of education still exist in the Chinese university entrance exam, as well as other systems of standardized tests throughout the world.

¹⁸ Stover, 175.

¹⁹ *The History of China*, edited by Kenneth Pletcher, (New York: Rosen Educational Services, 2011), 200, and Leon Stover, *Imperial China and the State Cult of Confucius*, (Jefferson: McFarland, 2005), 164.

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FIGURES

Туре	Xianshi 县试 Prefectural	<i>Shengshi</i> 省试 Provincial	<i>Huishi</i> 会试 Metropolitan	<i>Dianshi</i> 殿试 Palace
Location	Xuegong 学官 Academy	Gongyuan 贡院 Exam Compound	Gongyuan 贡院 Exam Compound	Taihedian 太和殿 (1789, moved to Baohedian 保和殿) Imperial Palace
City	Prefectural city Provincial capital Beijing Nanjing	Provincial capital Beijing Nanjing	Beijing Nanjing	Beijing Nanjing (Ming)
Time	Annual	Triennial Eighth month	Triennial Third month in following year	Triennial Following the metropolitan exam
Degree	Shengyuan 生员 Licentiate	Juren 举人 Recommended Man	Gongshi 贡士 Tribute student	Jinshi 進士 Presented scholar

Table 1: Ming, Qing xamination systems

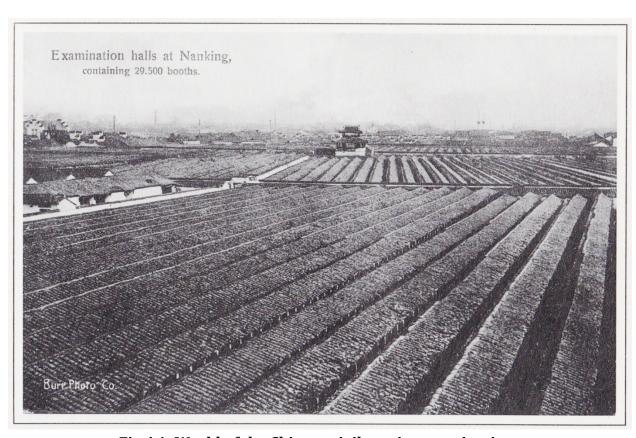


Fig. i.1: World of the Chinese civil service examinations



Fig. i.2: Nanjing on the map

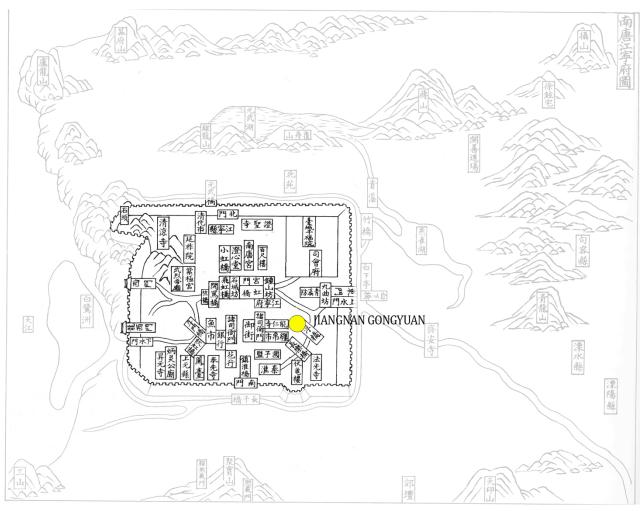


Fig. i.3: Map of Nanjing in Song dynasty (Source: in Steinhardt, *Chinese Imperial City Planning*, 162.)

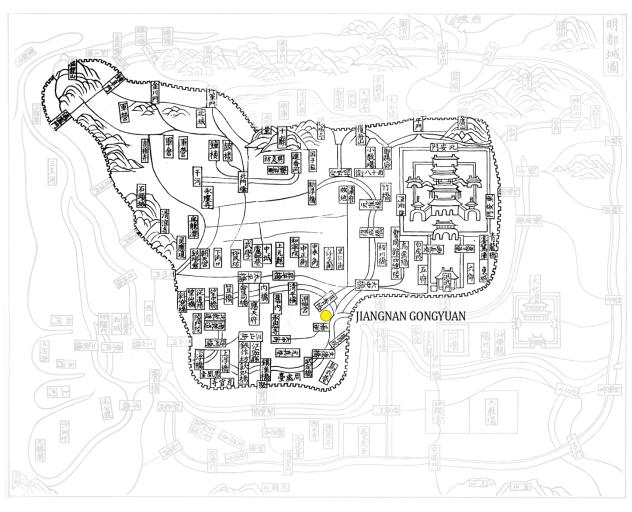


Fig. i.4: Map of Nanjing in Ming dynaty (Source: in Steinhardt, *Chinese Imperial City Planning*, 165.)

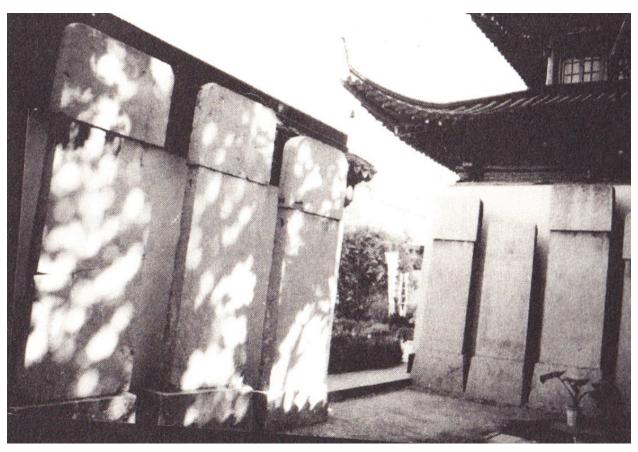


Fig. i.5: Stele inscriptions from Jiangnan Gongyuan (Source: in Zhou, *Jiangnan gongyuan*, 133.)

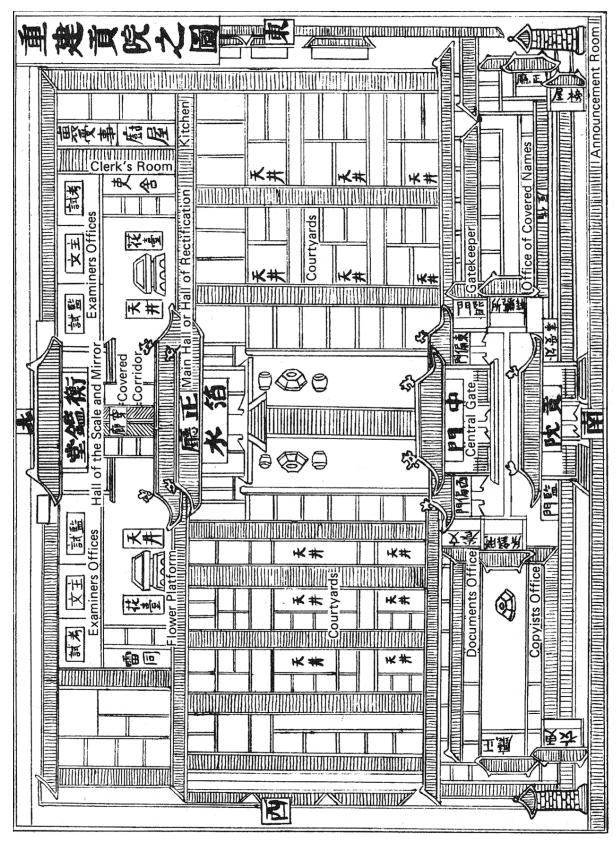


Fig. i.6: Thirteenth century plan of the Nanjing compound

(Source: in Chaffee, *The Thorny Gates of Learning in Sung China*, 165)

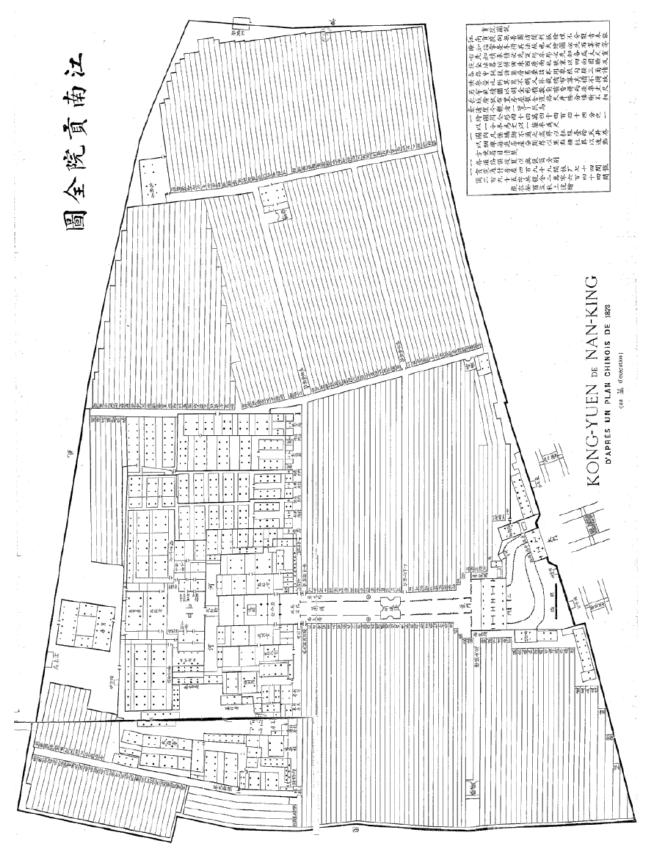


Fig. i.7: Plan of Jiangnan Exam Hall, 1873

(Source: Zi, Pratiques des examens littéraires en Chine, foldout.)

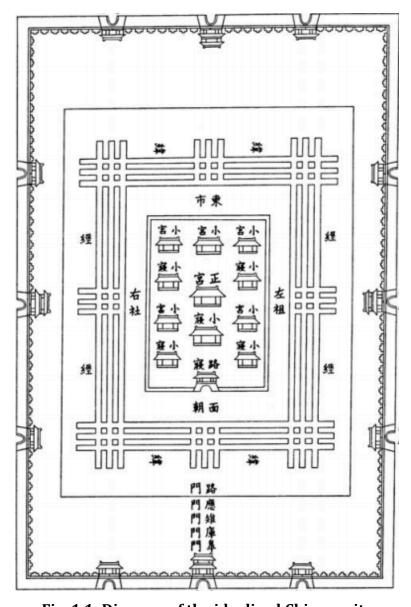


Fig. 1.1: Diagram of the idealized Chinese city

(Source: in Michael E. Smith, "Form and Meaning in the Earliest Cities: A New Approach to Ancient Urban Planning," *Journal of Planning History* 6, no. 1 (2007): 32.)

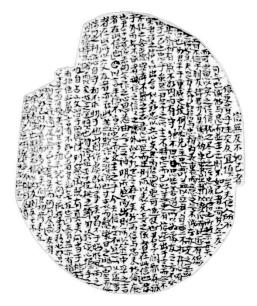


Fig. 1.2: Cheat sheet (Source: Historical Museum of Jiangnan Gongyuan.)

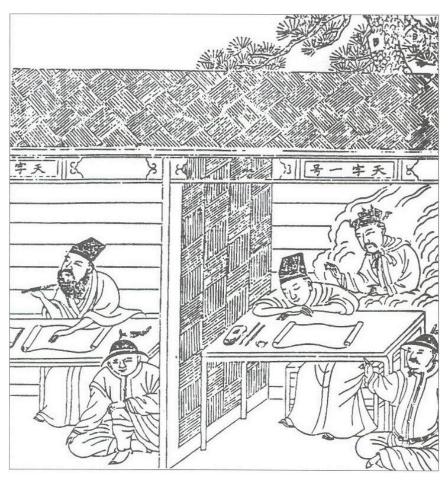


Fig. 1.3: Examination cell of the Ming dynasty (Source: in Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Service Examinations in Late Imperial China*, 178.)

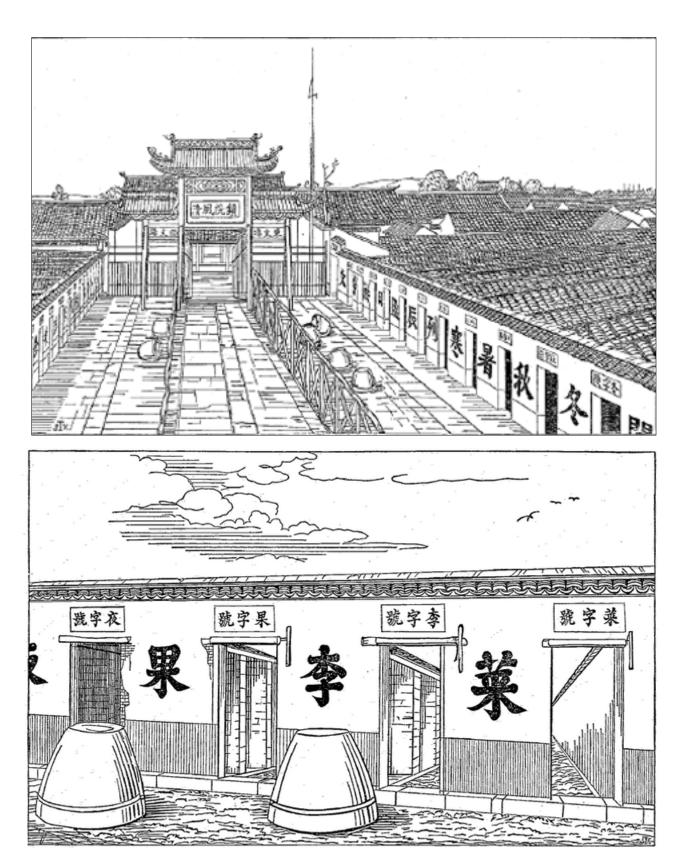


Fig. 1.4: Views looking towards the entrance of test cells (Source: in Zi, *Pratiques des examens littéraires en Chine,* 117, 119.)

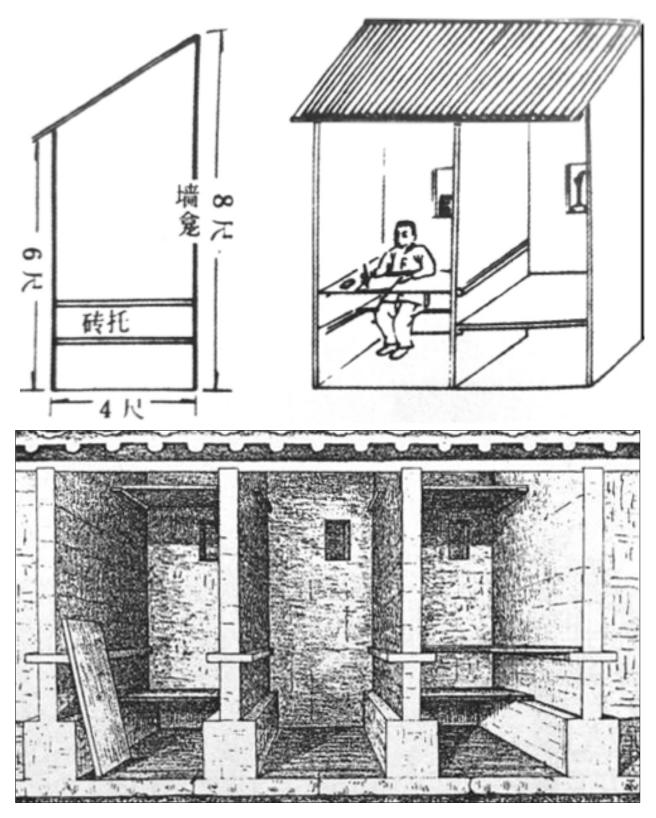


Fig. 1.5: Diagrams of an examination Cell (Source: in Zi, *Pratiques des examens littéraires en Chine,* 117, 119, 141)

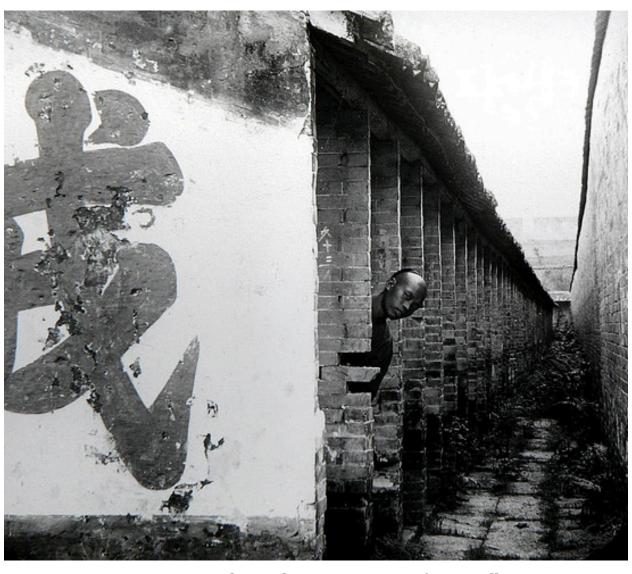


Fig. 1.6: View down a long, narrow row of exam cells

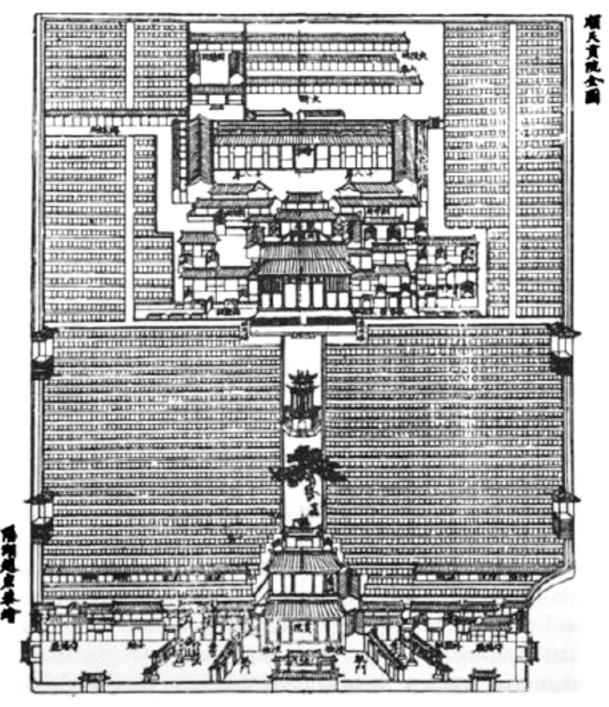


Fig. 1.7: Plan of Beijing compound depicting placement of *liaolou* **along perimeter** (Source: in Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Service Examinations in Late Imperial China*, 182.)

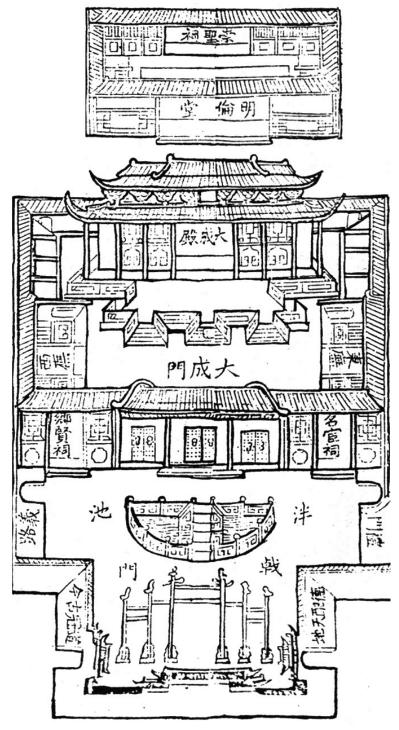


Fig. 1.8: Diagram of a wenmiao complex



Fig. 1.9: Water jars ling the central avenue of the exam compound

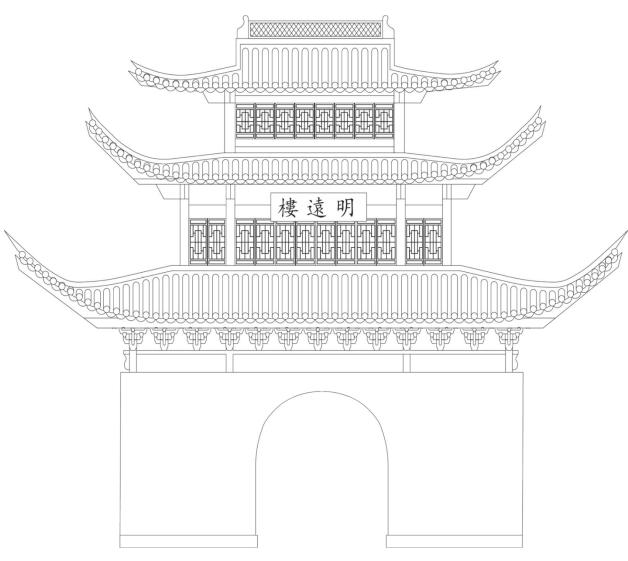


Fig. 1.10: Mingyuan Tower (Source: Illustrated by John Soh, 2015)

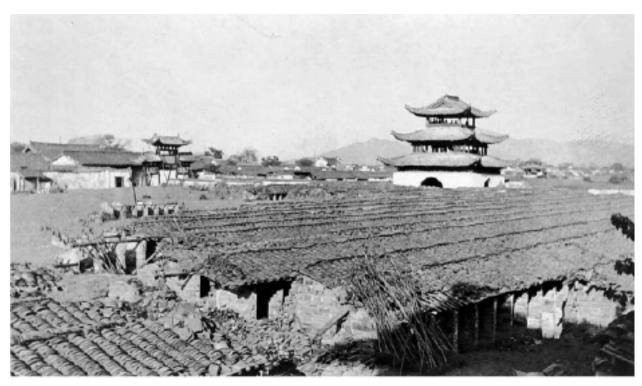


Fig. 1.11: View Mingyuan Tower from across the compound

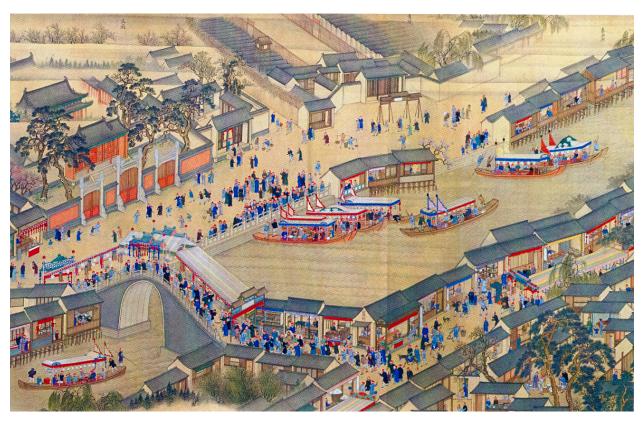


Fig. 1.12: Illustration of stalls along the Qinhuai River, 1689

(Source: Palace Museum, Illustrated Compendium of Qing history, (Beijing: Zijingcheng Chubanshe, 2002), 393.)



Fig. 1.13: Pailou in Fuzimiao (Source: Photo taken by author, Sept 2013.)

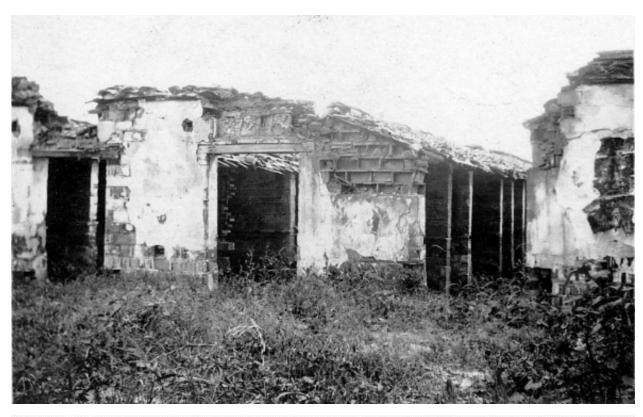




Fig. 1.14: Foreigners tour closed examination compound, 1910



Fig. 1.15: Renovated Mingyuan Tower, 2014
(Source: Wensi Wang, Digital Image, Nanjing, 2014, available from: Flcikr, https://www.flickr.com/photos/wang-wensi/15714176475.)

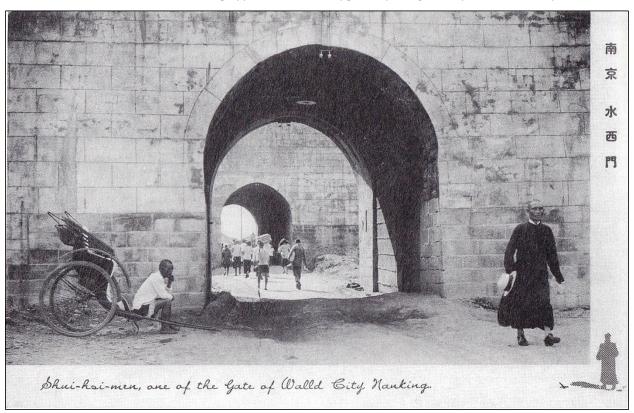


Fig. 2.1: Nanjing city gate



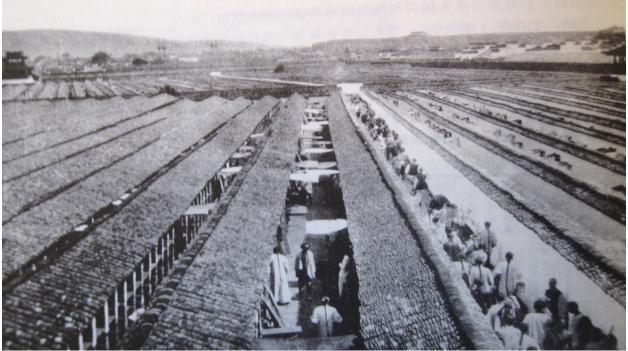


Fig. 2.2: Anonymity among the test cells



Fig. 3.1: Jiangnan regional approximation



Fig. 3.2: Christian mission school (Source: Historical Museum of Jiangnan Gongyuan)



Fig. 3.3: Canton Exam Compound, 1873