
The Civil Service Examinations in the Southern Tang: Regional and Historical Significance

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Using anecdotal information and *guobieshi* 國別史 (lit. “separate histories of [rival] states”), this article aims to elaborate on the efforts made by Xu Zhigao 徐知誥 and his descendants to implement a new practice that recruited local literati to positions of power. The Southern Tang had been known for its enthusiasm to follow in Tang’s footsteps, a way to identify the regime as the continuity of the Tang Dynasty. Adoption of the civil service examinations, particularly the *jinshi* 進士 examinations, manifested the political propaganda engineered by the ruling family of the Southern Tang as the inheritor of the Tang Dynasty. The *jinshi* examinations, initially implemented on an ad hoc basis, had already appeared during the reign of Xu Zhigao. After Li Jing 李璟 came to the throne, he reshaped the examination system by substantially patterning on the Tang system. As a result, the *jinshi* examinations evolved into the most reputable route for enabling educated people to enter the bureaucracy. However, the founding background of the Southern Tang and the issues faced by this regime were different from the Tang. Under the circumstances, parts of the examination system were modified to cater for contemporary needs. Most candidates suffered from misery and disappointment in their pursuit of examination success. As a result, excessive suffering, or even an impasse, drove unsuccessful participants to take drastic actions.

Keywords: Southern Tang, civil service examinations, *jinshi* 進士 examination, Tang-Song Transformation, Tang-Song Interregnum

Introduction

In his *Wenxian tongkao* 文獻通考, Ma Duanlin 馬端臨 (1254–1323) details the system and implementation of the Song civil service examinations but merely briefly discusses those adopted by the Tang 唐 (618–907) and the Five Dynasties 五代 (907–960). In his *Dengkeji kao* 登科記考, Xu Song 徐松 (1781–1848) did painstaking research on the issues neglected by Ma. Ma and Xu, however, committed the same error – specifically, their common neglect of the examination system implemented during the Ten Kingdoms 十國 (907–979). This defect has gradually drawn scholarly attention in recent years, as demonstrated by numerous discussions on the significance of the civil service examinations implemented by some kingdoms. Historical evidence shows that the Southern Tang 南唐 (937–976), Former Shu 前蜀 (907–925), Later Shu 後蜀 (934–965), and Southern Han 南漢 (917–971) all recruited officials by means of the civil service examinations.

To date, no academic work written in Western language appears to exist that specifically discusses the civil service examinations implemented during the Southern Tang era. As such, the primary goal of this article is basic and essential, which is to reconstruct the history of the examination system in as much detail as possible. Comparatively speaking, the examination system of the Southern Tang was implemented far more consistently and thus able to yield better results in the recruitment of officials.¹ The reintroduction of the civil service examinations helped reshape the nature of Xu Wen's 徐溫 (862–927) regime, as witnessed by the establishment of a civil

1 The Southern Tang and Former Shu were comparable in cultural attainment, both worthy of the top rank in the Ten Kingdoms. On the cultural attainments achieved by the Former Shu, consult Wang Hongjie, “The Civil Pursuits of a Military Man in Tenth-Century China,” *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 40 (2010), 7–37. A recruitment system characterized by more effective implementation of the civil service examinations, however, enabled the Southern Tang to gain an advantage. The Southern Han provides another example. Aiming to consolidate the regime by recruiting new talent, the Southern Han implemented the civil service examinations in Tang style. The policy produced unsatisfactory results, as the scale was small and the result was unimpressive. Consult Lan Wu 藍武, “Wudai Shiguo shiqi Lingnan keju kaoshi yanjiu” 五代十國時期嶺南科舉考試研究, *Shehui kexuejia* 社會科學家 (2004.5), 153–55.

administration.² Besides the impact on the Southern Tang itself, the impact could also be observed in the Song dynasty 宋朝 (960–1279). In fact, some scholars believe that the Southern Tang's contribution to the Song civil service examinations, specifically the final imperial examination (*dianshi* 殿試), was of significance.³ Contrarily, the role played by the Five Dynasties is somewhat secondary.⁴

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- 2 The impact of the reintroduction of the examination system on reshaping the nature of Xu Wen's regime is highlighted by Hugh Clark: "The changing character of the Wu kingdom is perhaps most clearly manifested by the reintroduction of civil service examinations in 909, shortly after Hsü Wen had usurped the power, though not the title, of the Wu throne. This development reflects Hsü's emphasis on the demilitarization of administration. Under Hsü Wen, Wu was the first post-T'ang state to revive the examinations." Consult Hugh R. Clark, "The Southern Kingdom between the T'ang and the Sung," in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 5.1, "The Sung Dynasty and Its Precursors," ed. Denis Twitchett and Paul Jakob Smith (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 161. Regarding how the recruited literati facilitated a civil administration for the regime, see Wu Deming 吳德明, "Wu Nan Tang wenzhi mufu yanjiu" 吳南唐文職幕府研究 (Master thesis, Anhui University, 2011). As far as the author understands, there are three more articles with an emphasis on the Southern Tang civil service examinations, which chronologically include Ng Pak-sheung 伍伯常, "Nan Tang jinshike kaoshu" 南唐進士科考述, *Hanxue yanjiu* 漢學研究 15, no. 1 (1997): 133–49; Zhou Lasheng 周臘生, "Nan Tang gongju kaolue" 南唐貢舉考略, *Wenxian* 文獻 (2001.2): 15–24; and Zhao Rongwei 趙榮蔚, "Nan Tang dengkeji kao" 南唐登科記考, *Yancheng shifan xueyuan xuebao (renwen shehui kexue ban)* 鹽城師範學院學報 (人文社會科學版) (2003.2): 91–97.
- 3 The practices adopted by Li Yu 李煜 (Li Houzhu 李後主, r. 961–976), namely assigning topics for examiners and assessing candidates at the final imperial examination on his own, set the trend for the Song emperors to follow. For details, consult Jin Yingkun 金滢坤, "Shiguo keju de tedian yu luanxiang" 十國科舉的特點與亂象, *Kejuxue luncong* 科舉學論叢 1 (2018): 2–20. Besides the systemic change, the cultural aspect such as book collection and textual collation also deserves attention. Consult Su Yongqiang 蘇勇強, "Wudai shiqi Nan Tang jiaokan rencai ji qi yinshua chuantong" 五代時期南唐校勘人才及其印刷傳統, *Shehui kexue* 社會科學 (2007.12): 139–48.
- 4 According to Zhou Lasheng, the civil service examinations adopted during the Five Dynasties did not undergo remarkable changes, except for two minor modifications initiated by the Later Tang 後唐 (923–937). First, instead of making the *wenjie* 文解, an official document authorizing candidates to visit the capital to sit the examination, only valid for one year per tradition, the government intended to certify the document indefinitely. But the new policy was abolished shortly after. Second, the *wenxiyan* 聞喜宴, the banquet granted by the government to celebrate those who succeeded in the examination, was terminated once the late Tang resumed. For details, consult Zhou Lasheng, "Wudai keju gaishu" 五代科舉概述, *Xiaogan zhiye jishu xueyuan xuebao* 孝感職業技術學院學報 (2001.3): 47–48. Zhou may have held

Although the innovative practice created by the Southern Tang and inherited by the Song was confined to the final imperial examination, it did not imply that the examination system implemented by this Southern kingdom had a negligible impact on society. Instead, the system played a vital role in facilitating civil transformation (*wenzhi zhuanhua* 文質轉化) in Jianghuai 江淮⁵ during the Tang-Song Interregnum. Two major factors contributed to such transformation. As discussed in the author's earlier work, based on descendants' careers and major life events, the impact of civil transformation proved particularly significant on families of the meritorious bloc formed during the rise of Yang Xingmi 楊行密 (852–905), which was heavily characterized by militancy; the finding is substantiated by the high percentage of those who later transitioned to civil bureaucratic positions in order to distinguish themselves and honor their families. Consequently, cultural

bias. The major contributions made by the Five Dynasties lay in the area of fraud prevention in examinations as well as regulating interactions between examiner and candidates to ensure fairness. See Wang Zhiyong 王志勇, "Wudai keju zhidu yanjiu" 五代科舉制度研究 (Master thesis, Fujian Normal University, 2010). In addition, in order to avoid illegal communications affecting examination results, the measure of *suoyuan* 鎖院 was taken, which literally means to lock the examination hall after candidate entry. For details, see Jin Yingkun, "Shilun Tang Wudai keju kaoshi de suoyuan zhidu" 試論唐五代科舉考試的鎖院制度, *Xibeishi da xue bao (shehui kexue ban)* 西北師大學報 (社會科學版) (2005.1): 52–56. For comprehensive discussions on how social changes during the mid-late Tang and the Five Dynasties reshaped the civil service examinations, consult Jin Yingkun, *Zhongwan Tang Wudai keju yu shehui bianqian* 中晚唐五代科舉與社會變遷 (Beijing: renmin chubanshe, 2009). As a whole, the Southern Tang together with the Five Dynasties provided useful factors that enabled the Song to refine its examination system.

- 5 In the context of the Jianghuai region during the Tang-Song Interregnum, civil transformation refers to the change of the nature of the regime, namely from military domination to the one with civil officials in authority. Civil administration, in contemporary usage, always refers to an administration established by a foreign country to exercise civil administrative functions, particularly in hostile territory, until a civil government can be established by indigenous people. Unlike contemporary usage of the term, civil administration in the context of Chinese history refers to governance characterized by culture, education, rites, and music as elaborated by the Chinese Classics. Ideal conditions for civil administration could be created through the successful transformation, conducted in a civil way, of a regime accustomed to military domination. The civil way is defined as the administrative pattern in which the components of the mentioned governance played the role of a guiding principle. For details, consult Ng Pak-sheung, "On Civil Transformation of the Southern Tang: Recruitment of Literati and Subsequent Realization of Civil Administration," *Monumenta Serica: Journal of Oriental Studies* (forthcoming).

refinement among descendants of meritorious officials was tremendously strengthened; their lifestyles and behaviors veered far from the brutal pattern that prevailed in the former generation.⁶

Rather than continuing the above discussions, this article intends to explore another dimension in understanding civil transformation in Jianghuai. The issues to be discussed in this article include ways in which the civil service examinations provided a means for those of humble background to achieve upward social mobility and how those means activated their learning enthusiasm, further intensifying the degree of civil transformation of the region. Historical details under examination include the following: under what circumstances was ad hoc recruitment modeled on the civil service examinations administered prior to the Southern Tang? How did the examination system develop over the course of this kingdom's administration? How did cultural disposition and learning institutions in the Jianghuai region help to intensify fierce competition in the examination hall among literati? And finally, how did the examination system impact the kingdom's social and cultural settings? The article also assesses the validity of two conceptual frameworks, namely, Tang-Song Transformation and Tang-Song Interregnum, in evaluating this transitional period from a historical standpoint.

In addition to standard history (*zhengshi* 正史) and annals (*biannianshi* 編年史) such as *Songshi* 宋史 and *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑, this article will quote the sources of *guobieshi* 國別史 (lit. "separate histories of [rival] states"), literally, history that was compiled with an emphasis on a particular state in historical studies.⁷ Standard histories and annals primarily record major events in political, military, social, economic, and cultural domains directly related to legitimate dynasties founded in North China, while the history of regimes identified as usurpation (*jianwei* 僭偽) are generally relegated to

6 Ng Pak-sheung, "The Continuity of China's Cultural Heritage during the Tang-Song Era: The Socio-Political Significance and Cultural Impact of the Civil Administration of the Southern Tang" (Ph.D. diss., University of Arizona, 1997), 152–202; 360–83.

7 *Guoyu* 國語 and *Zhanguoce* 戰國策 have been credited as the masterpieces of *guobieshi* in Chinese historiography. For details on the significance of these two *guobieshi*, consult He Jin 何晉, *Zhanguoce yanjiu* 戰國策研究 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2001); Li Jia 李佳, *Guoyu yanjiu* 國語研究 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2015); Pei Dengfeng 裴登峰, *Zhanguoce yanjiu* 戰國策研究 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2012); idem, *Guoyu yanjiu* 國語研究 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2016).

secondary.⁸ On the other hand, *guobieshi*, particularly *Nan Tangshu* 南唐書, can fill the gap due to its focus on recording historical events. Compiled by Song scholars and historians of the Southern Tang, *guobieshi* concentrates mainly on the lives and achievements of prominent historical figures and their families in their respective regions.⁹

Anecdotal information comprises another major primary source. Anecdotal information in the context of Chinese literary tradition primarily exists in the form of literary sketches (*biji* 筆記) and tales (*xiaoshuo* 小說); the latter has been considered particularly significant in the study of civil service examinations. As explained by Yu Gang 俞綱, the literary aptitude required for sitting the civil service examinations rendered candidates qualified to compose stories, and the process itself of sitting the examinations provided ample subject matter, such as personal aspiration, bitter experiences, as well as self-reflection stemming from repeated failures.¹⁰

8 According to Clark's observation, the southern kingdoms during the interregnum have been among the least appreciated and least studied eras in the long history of East Asia. Long-term neglect is attributable not only to the relative lack of historical documents, but also to historiographical bias. From the perspective of traditional historiographers, only dynasties were valued while separatist regimes were marginalized: "history starts at the political center, and the *dai* 代, no matter how ephemeral or morally questionable, were the center. The *guo* 國 were peripheral and of lesser importance." As such, traditional historiographers surely argued that the era was not an important time and thus merited its neglect. For detailed discussions, consult Hugh R. Clark, "Why Does the Tang-Song Interregnum Matter? A Focus on the Economies of the South," *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 46 (2016): 1–28; "Why Does the Tang-Song Interregnum Matter? Part Two: The Social and Cultural Initiatives of the South," *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 47 (2017–2018): 1–31.

9 Zhang Gang 張剛, "Song ren Nan Tang shi yanjiu" 宋人南唐史研究 (Master thesis: Shanghai Normal University, 2010), 37–62.

10 Yu Gang 俞綱, "Lun Tangdai wenyan xiaoshuo fanrong yu keju zhidu shengxing de guanxi" 論唐代言文小說繁榮與科舉制度盛行的關係, *Shanghai shifan daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 上海師範大學學報 (哲學社會科學版) (2007.3): 111–17. Yu's viewpoint is substantiated. For instance, among the *chuanqi* 傳奇, a form of fictional short story in Classical Chinese composed in Tang China, a substantial portion centers on the civil service examinations. Against this background, the *chuanqi* can serve as a major primary source for related studies. See Liu Beibei 劉貝貝, "Qianxi Zhong Tang danpian chuanqi zuopin zhong de keju miaoxie" 淺析中唐單篇傳奇作品中的科舉描寫, *Tangshan wenxue* 唐山文學 (2016.4): 85–86. Concerning the composition and literary significance of the *chuanqi*, consult Ma Yau-Woon and Lau S. M. Joseph ed., *Traditional Chinese Stories: Themes and Variations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978); Wu Zhida 吳志達, *Tangren chuanqi* 唐人傳奇 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1981); Li Zongwei 李宗為, *Tangren chuanqi* 唐人傳奇

Since anecdotal information is commonly considered limited in value owing to its structural weaknesses, whether or not anecdotal material is worthy of citation always proves controversial.¹¹ Nevertheless, the practice has become prevalent among scholars in recent years.¹² Among the related works, the author wishes to highlight *Rituals of Recruitment in Tang China: Reading an Annual Programme in the Collected Statements by Wang Dingbao (870–940)* written by Oliver J. Moore, which proves that consulting anecdotal information in studying the civil service examinations is not a novel practice. Using *Tangzhiyan* 唐摭言 as a major source, Moore elaborates on the Tang examinations and the derived literary culture that largely shaped the life and mindset of contemporary literati.¹³ Composed by Wang Dingbao 王定保 (870–

(Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2003); William H., Jr. Nienhauser, *Tang Dynasty Tales: A Guided Reader* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2010). In addition, how examination failure embittered the lives of candidates serves as a study topic. Consult Huang Yunhe 黃雲鶴, *Tang Song shiqi luodi shiren qunti yanjiu* 唐宋時期落第士人群體研究 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2020). How to recruit officials also affected the literary standard and reputation of the regime. According to the study of Li Zuixin, instead of adopting the Tang civil service examinations, which required candidates to possess profound literary ability, Wuyue adopted the recommendatory system (*chajuzhi* 察舉制), which was instead based on one's observed personal merits and behaviors. As a result, those recruited to serve Wuyue could not match their counterparts who served in the Former Shu and the Southern Tang in literary ability. For details, consult Li Zuixin 李最欣, "Qianshi Wuyue wenxian wenxue kaolun" 錢氏吳越文獻文學考論 (Ph.D. diss., Fudan University, 2004).

- 11 Anna Shields substantially affirms the practice of quoting anecdote. Focusing on *Guoshi bu* 國史補, Shields describes the importance of anecdotal information in the study of Tang history: "Understanding the organization, underlying themes, and structure of individual anecdotes of the *Guo shi bu* allows us to see the ways that anecdotes and 'miscellaneous' histories ultimately shaped official accounts of the Tang dynasty." For details, consult Anna M. Shields, "The 'Supplementary' Historian? Li Zhao's *Guo shi bu* as Mid-Tang Political and Social Critique," *T'oung Pao* 103-4-5 (2017): 407–47.
- 12 Scholarship on Tang tales in recent years signifies the usefulness of anecdotal information in historical studies. Major works in this regard include Glen Dudbridge, *The Tale of Li Wa: Study and Critical Edition of a Chinese Story from the Tenth Century* (London: Ithaca, 1983); idem, *Religious Experience and Lay Society in T'ang China: A Reading of Tai Fu's Kuangyi Chi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Sarah M. Allen, *Shifting Stories: History, Gossip, and Lore in Narratives from Tang Dynasty China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2014); and Luo Manling, *Literati Storytelling in Late Medieval China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015).
- 13 For details, see Oliver J. Moore, *Rituals of Recruitment in Tang China: Reading an Annual Programme in the Collected Statements by Wang Dingbao (870–940)* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

940) of the late Tang and the Five Dynasties, *Tangzhiyan* was a collection of short stories directly related to the Tang examinations. Inspired by Moore's research, the author also wishes to study the civil service examinations of the Southern Tang by using literary sketches and tales from *Jiangnan yeshi* 江南野史, *Nantang jinshi* 南唐近事, and others.

As this article has intensively quoted anecdotal information, descriptions of its merits and limits are warranted. One of the major advantages enjoyed by anecdotes over standard histories is that anecdotal information covers a wide range of events; substantial portions of which are missing from standard histories. However, anecdotes are generally regarded as largely unreliable or simply hearsay of events unlikely to have occurred. Anecdotes tend to be of obscure origin; real or fictional, such accounts are potentially impossible to authenticate using alternative sources. Also, as anecdotes are presented in a literary form intended to entertain readers, exaggeration and dramatization are structurally inevitable.¹⁴ Another methodological issue is the use of secondary sources. This article is partly based on my earlier work, "Nan Tang jinshike kaoshu" 南唐進士科考述, which has been reorganized and reconceptualized for the benefit of Western readers. Additional significant works of similar nature are incorporated into the present study, with discussions positioned in the context of the Tang-Song era.

Historical Overview of the Civil Service Examinations in the Tang-Song Transformation

As the most important dynastic system designed to recruit talents into bureaucracy, the civil service examinations has been one of the most discussed issues in Chinese studies. Among the various approaches, discussing the topic in the context of the Tang-Song Transformation (or Tang-Song Transition) has been common.¹⁵ Issued by Naitō Konan 內藤湖南 (1866–1934) in 1909, the Tang-Song transformation theory highlights the point that Tang and Song represented the pivotal period of transformation in Chinese history as

14 Ng Pak-sheung, "Cultural Interactions and Competitions: The Case of the Song Dynasty (960–1279) and the Southern Tang (937–965)," *Bulletin of the Jao Tsung-I Academy of Sinology* 7 (2020), 261–65.

15 For literature review on the Tang-Song Transformation and how the concept influences Chinese scholars in their research in this specific era, consult Ng Pak-sheung, "A Regional Cultural Tradition in Song China: The Four Treasures of the Study of the Southern Tang (Nan Tang wenfang sibao)," *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 46 (2016): 59–60.

a watershed between the medieval and late-imperial eras.¹⁶ This academic viewpoint has exerted a profound impact on Chinese study. Zhang Xiqing 張希清, for instance, describes how the political, economic, and cultural differences shaped the examination system in this specific era.¹⁷ Among these components, Zhang substantially elaborates on the political aspect, in which Song emperors strengthened their control over recruitment by applying a series of restrictive measures to the civil service examinations. According to Zhang's findings, the examination underwent a quantitative change in Tang-Song China, while a qualitative change took place between the Southern and Northern dynasties 南北朝 (420–589) and the Sui 隋 (581–619) and Tang dynasties.¹⁸

Since Zhang Xiqing does not exactly define the two forms of change, the author attempts to fill the gap based on major historical events involving the civil service examinations in medieval China: quantitative change might refer to a remarkable increase in the number of educated people who became involved in the civil service examinations as well as other changes caused by

16 For details of the Tang-Song Transformation, see Naitō Konan, “Tō Sō jidai no kenkyū — gaikatsu teki Tō Sō jidaikan” 唐宋時代の研究—概括的唐宋時代観, *Rekishi to chiri* 歴史と地理 9, no. 5 (1922): 1–11. With regard to the impact of Naitō Konan on Chinese studies, see Hisayuki Miyakawa, “An Outline of the Naitō Hypothesis and its Effect on Japanese Studies of China,” *Far Eastern Quarterly* 14, no. 4 (1955): 533–52; Luo Yinan, “A study of the Changes in the Tang-Song Transition Model,” *Journal of Song-Yuan studies* 35 (2005): 99–127; Christian de Pee, “Cycles of Cathay: Sinology, Philology, and Histories of the Song Dynasty (960–1279) in the United States,” *Fragments: Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Study of Ancient and Medieval Pasts* 2 (2012): 35–67; Lau Nap-yin 柳立言, “Hwei ‘Tang Song biange’” 何謂「唐宋變革」, *Zhonghua wenshi luncong* 中華文史論叢 81, no. 1 (2006): 125–71.

17 Comparing how the Tang and the Song differed in the listed aspects has been common in the study of the Tang-Song transformation. For details, consult Qiu Tiansheng 邱添生, *Tang Song biangeqi de zhengjing yu shehui* 唐宋變革期的政經與社會 (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 1999); Lau Nap-yin, “He wei Tang Song biange,” 125–71.

18 For detailed discussions, consult Zhang Xiqing, “Jianlun Tang Song keju zhidu de bianqian (shang)” 簡論唐宋科舉制度的變遷 (上), *Beijing lianhe daxue xuebao (renwen shehui kexue ban)* 北京聯合大學學報 (人文社會科學版) (2010.1): 33–39; “Jianlun Tang Song keju zhidu de bianqian (xia)” 簡論唐宋科舉制度的變遷 (下), *Beijing lianhe daxue xuebao (renwen shehui kexue ban)* (2010.2): 18–23. Based on my observation, Zhang's articles are a relatively comprehensive study of the civil service examination in Tang-Song China. Since parts of Zhang's elaborations may need some more information to serve the purpose as a historical overview, the author will fill the gaps wherever appropriate.

this phenomenon;¹⁹ the qualitative change arose in the Sui dynasty, during which time the local officials' former modes of recruitment had ceased following the abolishment of the Rectifier of the Nine Ranks System (*jiupin zhongzheng zhi* 九品中正制), a change that would interrupt the heyday of aristocratic families.²⁰ Under the new policy, aristocratic families were deprived of their previous advantage in the recruitment process, as the central government had revoked local officials' authority over recommending and appointing local talent. In this sense, home bases and local affinities originally serving as advantages to aristocratic families were no longer relevant to or effective in guaranteeing appointments for their family members. Those who stayed in their hometowns without participating in the examinations, regardless of pedigree and reputation, would be denied entry into officialdom.

In dealing with the challenges and restrictions derived from the new policy, aristocratic families eventually discovered that achieving success in the *jinshi* 進士 (advanced scholar degree) was the way to perpetuate their social and political advantages.²¹ Compared with those who took civil service

19 Zhang Xiqing discusses the principle of fairness including the measures aimed to ensure equitable competition among examination candidates and appointment based on their performance in the examination hall. His study also deals with the emergence of scholar-officials with profound impact on dynastic administration. See his articles previously cited.

20 For details, consult Ng Pak-sheung, "History of Aristocratic Families in Tang China, Part 1: The struggle to Adapt," *Journal of Asian History* 54, no. 2 (2020): 218.

21 Major forms of the examination used in recruiting talented individuals for the Tang bureaucracy included the *jinshi* and the *mingjing* 明經 (examination of the Classics). Besides examinations, the *yin* 蔭 (literally, protection or hereditary privilege in this context) was used to recruit those whose families already had a background of serving as officials. The *mingjing* was of significance in the early period of the Tang, while the *yin* was also used during that time to enable some aristocratic families to continue their power. The *jinshi* and the *mingjing* differed in their criteria for performance assessment, which included literary virtuosity and classical exegesis. The timespan that witnessed the importance of the *mingjing* was quite limited, as this form of examination was overwhelmed by the *jinshi* since the mid-Tang era. Based on the changes, to regard the *jinshi* and the *mingjing* as equally important in Tang China would be a faulty assumption. Similar to the *mingjing*, the *yin* declined in prestige and was not considered adequate in bringing glory to the family. As time went by, particularly during the final phase of the Tang, the *jinshi* was credited as the best way to bestow glory upon aristocratic families. For details, consult Ng Pak-sheung, "History of Aristocratic Families in Tang China, Part 1," 219–20. Also, according to Zhang Xiqing, although those who entered the bureaucracy by means of the *mingjing* examinations were the most numerous, this path to bureaucracy did not render as much profound respect as did the *jinshi* examinations. In this sense, the *mingjing* could never compete with the *jinshi* in terms of prestige and importance. Consult Zhang Xiqing, "Jianlun Tang Song keju zhidu de bianqian (xia)," 18.

examinations administered in the Song dynasty, examination candidates in Tang China had far more opportunities to exert influence on examination results in their own interest; their success not only rested on personal talent, but also on image and literary reputation. As the legacy of the recommendatory system (*chajuzhi* 察舉制) maintained its value in Tang China, when grading a candidate's script, the chief examiner tended to take into account both his written test performance as well as his previously established literary reputation. By tradition in Tang China, the chief examiner usually acquired information about the candidates; likewise candidates could establish their reputations by "submitting their literary credentials" (*xingjuan* 行卷 or *wenjuan* 溫卷) to the chief examiner and other influential officials. If an examination candidate were admired by influential officials, the nourishment and circulation of the reputation necessary in eventually passing the examinations, in most cases, would be achieved.²²

The practice of *xingjuan* subjected the civil service examinations to involvement and intervention from influential political figures, as the power of deciding who was to be included on the list of successful candidates rested in the hands of influential figures. Under these circumstances, the chief examiner would need to consider the social and political networks of candidates when grading examination scripts. Certainly, this subjective approach would not be tolerated by the Song emperors who wanted to have more control on the recruitment process. Another Tang tradition that posed an obstacle to Song imperial control on the examination system was the special connection between *zuoshi* 座師 (or *zuozhu* 座主) and *mensheng* 門生. *Zuoshi* refers to a respectful address to the chief examiner by *mensheng*, which refers to those who succeeded in the civil service examinations.²³

As the Tang aristocratic families met their demise in power during the Five Dynasties, the revised sociopolitical structure greatly facilitated the Song in resetting the rule of the game for the civil service examinations; historical facts reveal that the new dynasty had significantly greater means to regulate the examination procedure. The first major change initiated by the Song was to terminate those special relations between *zuoshi* and *mensheng*: "In 962, to

22 Ng Pak-sheung, "History of Aristocratic Families in Tang China, Part 1," 220–21.

23 Regarding the impact of interconnected relations between *zuoshi* and *mensheng* on factional politics, consult Jin Yingkun, "Zhongwan Tang Wudai zuozhu mensheng yu kechang fengqi" 中晚唐五代座主門生與科場風氣, *Jiaoyu yu kaoshi* 教育與考試 (2008.6): 39–47; Tao Yi 陶易, "Tang Wudai de zuozhu yu mensheng" 唐五代的座主與門生, *Wenshi tiandi* 文史天地 (2016.9): 44–47; Wang Zenghui 王增輝, "Tangdai zuozhu mensheng guanxi yanjiu" 唐代座主門生關係研究 (Master thesis: Liaoning University, 2015).

prevent nepotism, examiners and examinees were forbidden to claim a patron–protégé relationship.”²⁴ The new regulation signified that the emperor, not the chief examiner, would now be the one to grant successful candidates the honor as well as the chance to enter into officialdom.

Among Song emperors, Song Taizong 宋太宗 (Zhao Guangyi 趙光義, r. 976–997) particularly enjoyed flaunting his imperial generosity to those pursuing officialdom by way of civil service examinations; his efforts served as a means of instilling gratitude among them. In a conversation with his intimate officials in 983, the emperor stressed that while no able people remained in the countryside, the court was filled with learned men as the result of his efforts to recruit literati. Moreover, the emperor tried his best to make sure that successful candidates had good careers. The emperor then claimed, “I am nothing but generous to the scholar-officials.”²⁵ His gestures implied an expectation for recruits to offer allegiance to the emperor in return.

However, merely to terminate the connection between the chief examiner and candidates would not suffice to ensure fairness and objectivity. In order to ensure that candidates from wealthy or bureaucratic families could not influence the examiner in his grading process, the measure of *huming* 糊名 (or *mifeng* 彌封), or, pasting a slip of paper to conceal candidates’ names, was reinstated. Originally adopted by Wu Zetian 武則天 (r. 683–705), *huming* was never consistently carried out in the Tang. In the third year of Chunhua 淳化 (992), Song Taizong discussed how examination malpractices could be

24 Lau Nap-yin (柳立言) and Huang K’uang-chung (黃寬重), “Founding and consolidation of the Sung Dynasty under T’ai-tsu (960–976), T’ai-tsung (976–997), and Chen-tsung (997–1022),” in Denis Twitchett and Paul Jakov Smith ed., *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 5.1 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 237–38.

25 Li Tao 李燾 (1115–1184), *Xu zizhi tongjian changbian* 續資治通鑑長編 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 24.547. This book is abbreviated as *Changbian* hereafter. Another event of a similar nature is seen in 988. Song Taizong had a conversation with Zhang Hong 張宏 (939–1001), who served as vice military affairs commissioner. Apart from boasting that his efforts to enlist literati to serve the government had left no qualified people unemployed within the whole territory, the emperor also told Zhang, “You, Lu Mengzheng 呂蒙正 (946–1011) and others, were oppressed by some prominent officials in the past. If it were not for my own discretion, how could you people have reached this stage?” See *Changbian*, 29.654. Also see Lo Winston W 羅文, *An Introduction to the Civil Service of Sung China: with Emphasis on its Personnel Administration* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1987), 91–92; Ng Pak-sheung, “A Path to Civil Administration: The Appointment of the *Peichen* and its Political Significance in the Early Northern Song Era,” *Dongwu lishi xuebao* 東吳歷史學報 22 (2009): 306–7.

eliminated so that the dynasty could efficiently recruit talents to officialdom. In response, an official named Chen Jing 陳靖 suggested following a practice similar to that once adopted by Wu Zetian. The emperor felt the suggestion useful and applied the method to the civil service examinations held in the same year.²⁶ Since then, the civil service examinations, rather than functioning as a means to serve the privileged class, became a system by which Song emperors would hold the exclusive honor of selecting successful candidates.

According to the record of *Changbian*, Song Taizong was very pleased with the effect of *huming*. After the civil service examinations were held in 992, the emperor told his grand councilor (*zaixiang* 宰相) that the empire was so huge that the dynasty should count on outstanding talents to govern; more than one thousand candidates succeeded in passing the civil service examinations, all of whom were selected by the emperor himself.²⁷ Song Taizong came to the throne in 976, and within a sixteen-year span, the emperor managed to increasingly control the examination system while fabricating a positive image for himself. After all, he was solely responsible for having recruited so many qualified, educated people into the bureaucracy.²⁸

However, a loophole for gaining advantage remained: in spite of anonymity measures in place, the examiner could still discern the identity of a candidate by way of handwriting style, and the examiner could accept bribes accordingly. In the fourth year of Dazhong xiangfu 大中祥符 (1011), in addition to *huming*, a second measure was initiated in the examination hall. In order to prevent the examiner from recognizing a candidate by his calligraphy (*tenglu* 騰錄), his text was copied by a third party prior to submission for evaluation.²⁹

26 *Changbian*, 33.734. Regarding scholarship focusing on the institutional development and implementation of the civil service examinations in Song China, see Araki Toshikazu 荒木敏一, *Sodai kakyō seido kenkyū* 宋代科舉制度研究 (Kyoto: Kyoto daigaku bungakubunai Toyoshi kenkyukai, 1969); John W. Chaffee, *The Thorny Gates of Learning in Sung China: A Social History of Examinations* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995); Lee Thomas H.C. 李弘祺, *Government Education and Examinations in Sung China* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 1985).

27 *Changbian*, 33.735.

28 Song Taizong's active role in selecting talents by means of the civil service examinations drew attention from contemporaries. Liu Kai 柳開 (947–1000) expressed deep admiration regarding the emperor's intensive involvement, as all able officials in both civil and military lines were recruited by the emperor. Consult Zhang Xiqing, "Jianlun Tang Song keju zhidu de bianqian (xia)," 21.

29 *Changbian*, 76.1740.

With these preventive measures in place, theoretically the practice of *xingjuan* was rendered futile among candidates. Some scholars assert that the unique Tang protocol met its final end in the Song for this very reason.³⁰ But such a conclusion would be premature, as the practice of *xingjuan* actually persisted in the Song.³¹ At times, the government needed to ban the practice by issuing a formal ordinance. As recorded by *Song huiyao* 宋會要, during the Daguan 大觀 era (1107–1110), *xingjuan* would become fashionable among examination candidates who violated the principle of fairness. As a result, the government promulgated a decree to inhibit the practice.³² Given the measures in place to mitigate the risk of revealing candidates' identities, how, then, could *xingjuan* persist? Some scholars believe that one's writing style might serve as a means for the examiner to identify a candidate. Qian Jianzhuang 錢建狀, for instance, suggests that fluke mentality was one motivation behind candidates' motivation to practice *xingjuan*. By their estimation, if the writing style of their literary works happened to be recognized by the examiner, their chances of success would be accordingly higher. This argument is substantiated

30 Cheng Qianfan 程千帆, *Tangdai jinshi xingjuan yu wenxue* 唐代進士行卷與文學 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1980), 89. Also consult Tan Hao 譚皓, "Tangdai jinshi xingjuan de xingshuai ji qishi" 唐代進士行卷的興衰及啟示, *Kaoshi zhouban* 考試周刊 (2009.10): 45–46; Yang Yili 楊億力, "Songchu jinshi xingjuan yu wenxue" 宋初進士行卷與文學 (960–1040) (Master thesis, Central China Normal University, 2012).

31 Regarding where *xingjuan* was practiced during the Tang, it primarily took place in the capitals; those involved were high ranking officials, particularly those who might handle the examinations held by the Ministry of Rites (*libu* 禮部). In the Song, *xingjuan* often took place in prefectures, and the targets included examiners in charge of the prefectural examination (*jieshi* 解試); these examiners held lower ranks compared with those responsible for the metropolitan examination (*shengshi* 省試) in the capital. For details, see Xu Song 徐松 (1781–1848), *Song huiyao jigao* 宋會要輯稿 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1957), xuanju 選舉 20.18: 4583. Also consult Qian Jianzhuang 錢建狀, "Huming tenglu zhidu xia de Songdai jinshi xingjuan" 糊名謄錄制度下的宋代進士行卷, *Wenxue yichan* 文學遺產 (2012.3): 86–91. Although the prefectural examination was classified as the most basic, it was important; without passing the prefectural examination, candidates would qualify to sit for the metropolitan examination and the palace examination (*dianshi* 殿試 or *yushi* 御試).

32 *Song huiyao jigao*, xuanju 4.6: 4293. The issue of *xingjuan* in Song China draws attention from scholars such as Higashi Hidetoshi 東英壽, Takatsu Takashi 高津孝, and Zhu Shangshu 祝尚書. For literature review in the related domain, consult Qian Jianzhuang, "Huming tenglu zhidu xia de Songdai jinshi xingjuan," 86.

by contemporary observations.³³

While some practiced *xingjuan* out of personal desire to gain the upper hand in the examinations, others were motivated by a goal to promote the Classical Prose Movement (*guwen yundong* 古文運動). Literally practicing *xingjuan* to promote *guwen* (ancient prose style), literati who engaged in this cultural movement aspired to encourage the use of classical prose, instead of rhythmical prose characterized by parallelism and ornateness (*pianwen* 駢文), to compose their literary works.³⁴ Scholar-officials in general welcomed the practice, as this was a way to gather those who appreciated classical prose and upheld the value of primitive simplicity that had been vigorously portrayed by Confucianists as the value prevailing in ancient times. In this sense, *xingjuan* served as a means for reputed scholar-officials to identify young literati with an obvious inclination toward classical prose composition; once identified, those in authority would make efforts to promote those with the same goal to more senior positions at their convenience. Therefore, apart from promoting the trend of writing classical prose in the Song literary circles, *xingjuan* served as a platform for those who cherished the same ideals and followed the same path to communicate; consequently, the practice strengthened the sense of identity

33 The work of Lou Yao 樓顛 (1137–1213) provides a good example. See “Shu Zhang Wuzi shiji hou” 書張武子詩集後, in *Quan Songwen* 全宋文, ed. Zeng Zaozhuang 曾棗莊 and Liu Lin 劉琳 (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2006), 264: 5953.175. For further discussion, see Qian Jianzhuang, “Huming tenglu zhidu xia de Songdai jinshi xingjuan,” 89.

34 Zhu Shangshu 祝尚書, *Bei Song guwen yundong fazhanshi* 北宋古文運動發展史 (Chengdu: Ba Shu shushe, 1995); Zhu Gang 朱剛, *Tang Song guwen yundong yu shidafu wenxue* 唐宋古文運動與士大夫文學 (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2013); Dai Jingxian 戴景賢, “Lun Songdai guwen yundong zhi jueqi jiqi teyou zhi wenhuashi yihan” 論宋代古文運動之崛起及其特有之文化史意涵, *Zhongguo wenxue yanjiu (jikan)* 1 (2017): 25–34. The preference reflected the negative perspective on *pianwen*. From the viewpoint of those who promoted using classical prose, *pianwen* had the defects of being too florid and excessively ornate at the expense of content. Another problem inherent in *pianwen* was its rigid structure that deprived writers of flexibility in their ways of presentation. As a whole, clarity and precision could not be expected from those who wrote in *pianwen* style. Consult Zhou Jianzhi 周劍之, “Songdai pianwen yingyongguan de chengxing yu yanjin” 宋代駢文應用觀的成型與演進, *Huadong shifan daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 華東師範大學學報 (哲學社會科學版) (2017.2): 90–98; Cao Liping 曹麗萍, “Songdai lixuejia de pianwenguan” 宋代理學家的駢文觀, *Jiujiang xueyuan xuebao* 九江學院學報 (2011.1): 37–40.

among group members.³⁵

In his discussions regarding changes on the civil service examinations in the specified timeframe, Zhang Xiqing merely focuses on the imperial government's increasing control on the system on a dynastic basis from the Tang to the Song, but does not even slightly mention the existence of the Southern Tang. Concerning the general neglect of the Tang-Song interregnum, Clark explains, "Whether because they are too difficult or the sources are scarce, historians have too often made the solipsistic yet too often default assumption that it is sufficient to note the roots of change in the Tang and their culmination in the Song."³⁶ Besides the misconception pointed out by Clark, another reason seems equally structural, which is the limited availability of primary sources directly related to the Southern Tang administration of the civil service examinations. As far as I observe, useful primary sources are scattered and in piecemeal style, which accordingly intensifies the difficulty in conducting research on this domain. For instance, Ma Duanlin has been reputed for erudition, but his *Wenxian tongkao* lacks discussion specifically on the topic of civil service examinations implemented by the Southern Tang or any other kingdom during the interregnum as a whole.

Restricted by various limitations mentioned above, Zhang Xiqing's emphasis on the developments of Tang-Song China, and only citing evidence found in these two dynasties, is understandable. This approach reflects how the study focus is profoundly affected by conventional perception and availability of primary sources. Absence of primary sources to prove whether or not the Song rulers had ever considered the usefulness of the Southern Tang legacy might also reflect how they comprehended the origin of their own examination system. It was not a sense of denial that prevented the Song emperors from acknowledging the Southern Tang's cultural contributions, but rather this southern kingdom, at least institutionally, simply did not play an obvious role

35 Ai Bingmei 艾冰梅 and Qian Jianzhuang 錢建狀, "Jinshi xingjuan yu Songchu guwen de fuxing: yi Song Bai wei kaocha zhongxin" 進士行卷與宋初古文的復興——以宋白為考察中心, *Jiaoyu yu kaoshi* 教育與考試 (2017.2): 45–50; Yang Yili 楊億力, "Songchu jinshi xingjuan yu wenxue." Besides Song Bai 宋白 (936–1012), Liu Kai in early Song China also showed much enthusiasm in this endeavor. On Liu Kai's role in the Classical Prose Movement, consult Ng Pak-sheung, "Bei Song chunian de wenshi yu haoxia: yi Liu Kai de zuofeng xingxiang wei zhongxin" 北宋初年的文士與豪俠——以柳開的作風形象為中心, *Qinghua xuebao* 清華學報 36, no. 2 (2006): 296–308.

36 Hugh R. Clark, "Why Does the Tang-Song Interregnum Matter? Part Two: The Social and Cultural Initiatives of the South," *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 47 (2017–2018), 3.

in shaping the civil service examinations implemented in the Song era.³⁷

Regardless, the civil service examinations did take place in the Southern Tang, a truth that brings to light a shortcoming in examining the historical continuity of the Tong–Song era simply from the dynastic-oriented perspective: the limited scope focuses too heavily on events taking place in dynasties founded in the Great Plain. This phenomenon definitely substantiates Luo Yinan’s comment, “When reading Naito and Miyazaki, for example, we notice the topic of their research was China in its entirety, not the different regions.”³⁸ This comment reveals the major defect of their works, namely, focusing on overall dynasties while neglecting regional uniqueness. In response to the shortcoming, some scholars have already based their own studies within regional contexts.³⁹ Hugh R. Clark has gone further by suggesting the Tang–Song Interregnum concept in examining regional transformation in South China: “The interregnum was a century-long interlude between the holistic empires of Tang and Song. Although conventional accounts have emphasized its instability and underlying chaos and tended to regard it as unworthy of much attention, it nevertheless proved to have been a fertile era of innovation.”⁴⁰

The concept of exploring regional significance during the interregnum is indeed useful to overcome the weakness of Naitō’s theory: while serving as the framework to illustrate the change and stability in Tang–Song China, Clark’s concept modifies Naitō’s theory by pointing out the importance of regional studies. In this sense, these two theories are not necessarily exclusive, but are mutually supplementary instead. As an important and under-discussed theme that merits exploration, this article aims to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the Chinese examination system by focusing on the Southern Tang in the context of Tang–Song Interregnum. This study can serve as an

37 As far as the author observes, the Southern Tang had played a significant role in later enriching the Song’s literary and ritual-oriented domain; the contributions had been recognized by the Song emperors on numerous public occasions. For details, see my article “Nan Tang Peichen’s Careers in Early Song Bureaucracy: With an Emphasis on Literary and Ritual-oriented Roles,” *East Asian History* (Forthcoming).

38 Luo Yinan, “A Study of the Changes in the Tang–Song Transition Model,” *Journal of Song–Yuan studies* 35 (2005), 106.

39 For instance, Satake Yasuhiko 佐竹靖彦 has conducted a painstaking study of regional social, political, and military uniqueness and disparities that developed during the chaotic late Tang and the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms 五代十國 (907–960). For details, consult his book, *Tō Sō henkaku no chiikiteki kenkyū* 唐宋變革の地域的研究 (Kyoto: Dōhōsha, 1990).

40 Hugh R. Clark, “Why Does the Tang–Song Interregnum Matter? Part Two,” 30.

addition to the emerging studies of the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms.⁴¹ Certainly, this study alone is not sufficient to inspire a meaningful review on the Tang-Song Transformation framework. As such, more research needs to be conducted to explore the necessity of adopting an approach with an emphasis on regional significance.⁴²

Development of the Civil Service Examinations in the Wu and the Southern Tang

The examination system served as the basis for the government to appoint official positions to those who performed well in the examinations. In this sense, the examination system adopted by the Southern Tang did not differ from that in the Tang in terms of nature, as both regimes were characterized by practices whereby the government arranged examinations for the candidates, and those successful would be appointed official positions. The major difference between regimes was the frequency with which each administered the examination: while the Tang followed an annual test schedule, in its early stage, the Southern Tang adopted a highly flexible approach. As long as literary works were presented, examinations would accordingly be arranged, thus sporadically.

Compared with various Southern Tang methods of recruiting literati, the civil service examinations were credited as the most prestigious. The shaping of the examination system was no expedient matter. In its nascence that dated back to the Wu 吳 (or Yang Wu 楊吳, 902–937), the system was implemented

41 For literature review on the study of the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms, consult Ng Pak-sheung, “On Yang Xingmi’s Bloc — With an Emphasis on Socio-political Setting, Subjugation, and Subordination,” *T’oung Pao* 107 (2021): 40–45.

42 Up to this point, the author has completed a few case studies about how the Southern Tang shaped the Song in cultural and ritual-oriented domains. Consult Ng Pak-sheung 伍伯常, “A Regional Cultural Tradition in Song China: The Four Treasures of the Study of the Southern Tang (Nan Tang Wenfang Sibao),” *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 46 (2016): 57–118; idem, “Cultural Interactions and Competitions: The Case of the Song Dynasty (960–1279) and the Southern Tang (937–965),” *Bulletin of the Jao Tsung-I Academy of Sinology* 7 (2020): 255–319; and idem, “Nan Tang *Peichen*’s Careers in Early Song Bureaucracy: With an emphasis on literary and ritual-oriented roles,” *East Asian History* (Forthcoming). The study of the destiny of Tang aristocratic families also necessitates the adoption of the perspective with regional significance. For details, consult idem, “Aristocratic Families in the Jianghuai Region during the Tang-Song Interregnum,” *Journal of Chinese Humanities* (Forthcoming).

on an ad hoc basis with the particular purpose of addressing a shortage of civil officials at the local administrative level.

General consensus among many recruits of Xu Zhigao 徐知誥 (later renamed as Li Bian 李昇, r. 937–943), together with descendants of meritorious officials who entered the bureaucracy via the *yin* 蔭 (literally protection, or hereditary privilege in the context), included a general disdain for provincial offices and a coveting of central government's positions in the academies and institutes (*guange* 館閣). From their perspectives, they had thrown themselves into Xu Zhigao's bloc in order to prosper themselves and thus cast aside the prospect of local administrative positions, which they believed difficult through which to distinguish themselves.⁴³ This attitude, which initially gained popularity during the Wu, created number of vacancies in the intermediate and minor posts of local administrations.⁴⁴ Complete bureaucratization, upon which civil administration counted, could not be fulfilled if official positions in local administration were not filled by literati.

Addressing the problem, Xu Zhigao forced some officials serving in the central government, particularly those he did not favor or those with lower ability and lesser prestige, to serve in prefectures and counties.⁴⁵ He also recruited literati from the countryside who had no strong political ambitions. *Nan Tang jinshi* records the career of Deng Yawen 鄧亞文: as Deng enjoyed studying the classics, appointing him to take charge of administrative work at Qingyang County 青陽縣 met the purpose of transforming the local administration into one of civil leadership (*difang xingzheng wenzhizhua* 地方行政文職化).⁴⁶ Also, as he lived in the countryside with short-sightedness, Deng found profound dignity and honor in serving an intermediate rank as a magistrate.⁴⁷

43 Chen Pengnian 陳彭年 (961–1017), *Jiangnan bielü* 江南別錄, in *Wudai shishu huibian* 五代史書彙編, ed. Fu Xuancong 傅璇琮 et al. (Hangzhou: Hangzhou chubanshe, 2004), 8.5210.

44 Posts in the local administrations were limited to those of magistrates and commandants. Posts of higher rank, such as prefect and military commissioner, were used to reward meritorious officials and their descendants as well as the newly emerging officials. For details, see Ng Pak-sheung, "Nan Tang jinshike kaoshu," 133–49.

45 Lu You 陸游 (1125–1210), *Lushi Nan Tangshu* 陸氏南唐書, in *Wudai shishu huibian*, 12.5558. The book is abbreviated as *Lushu* hereafter.

46 For details, consult Ng Pak-sheung, "On Civil Transformation of the Southern Tang: Recruitment of Literati and Subsequent Realization of Civil Administration," *Monumenta Serica: Journal of Oriental Studies* (forthcoming).

47 Zheng Wenbao 鄭文寶 (953–1013), *Nan Tang jinshi* 南唐近事, in *Wudai shishu huibian*, 2.5057.

The post of magistrate was categorized not as a low, but as an intermediate position in the Tang bureaucracy.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, one's perception of position was not merely decided by rank itself; personal aspiration always played a more important role. For those eager to prosper themselves through top positions in the central government, a mid-level position in a regional administrative structure was surely not a covetable opportunity. Such a case did not apply to Deng Yawen, as his mindset reflects his self-complacency and lack of ambition for more power and a higher position in the capital.⁴⁹ However, merely counting on recruiting those who lacked bureaucratic ambition would not be reliable; the establishment of the civil service examination system to recruit eligible people who lacked powerful backgrounds to fill local administrative positions was definitely essential for completing bureaucratization.

Establishing the civil service examinations would not have been feasible during the rule of Yang Xingmi. When Yang founded the Wu, he surrounded himself with meritorious officials who had campaigned with him. These were neither literati nor late Tang civil elite; they were military men who had demonstrated loyalty to Yang and whom he rewarded. Yang's heirs followed this model.⁵⁰ Xu Wen, however, made a conscious decision to model his regime on the Tang, which meant finding a way to prioritize civil backgrounds over martial. Xu Wen's son Xu Zhigao enhanced the commitment in this direction.

When Xu Zhigao assumed the Wu administration, he established examinations that patterned on the Tang dynasty, by which successful examination candidates were selected to serve in local administration. Signs of imitation include the adoption of the Confucian apprentice examination (*tongzishi* 童子試) and the examination of the classics (*mingjing* 明經). According to the description of Xia Song 夏竦 (985–1051), Wang Sui 王遂, the great-grandfather of Wang Qinruo 王欽若 (966–1017), sought refuge in Jiangxi 江西 and did not have an official post. Wang Xia 王遐, the son of Wang Sui, served as inspector of the Salt and Iron Monopoly Bureau (*yantie xunguan* 鹽鐵巡官) of Jiangxi. Wang Yu 王郁, Wang Xia's son, took the *tongzishi* examination as a means of entering office when he came of age. The first post Wang Yu received was that of commandant of Xinyu 新喻, his native

48 Lai Ruihe 賴瑞和, *Tang dai zhongceng wenguan* 唐代中層文官, (Taipei: Lianjing chuban, 2008), 235–328.

49 For details, see Ng Pak-sheung, "Nan Tang jinshike kaoshu," 146–47.

50 Ng Pak-sheung, "On Yang Xingmi's bloc," 40–94.

area. Later, he served in various prefectures.⁵¹ Wang Yu took the examinations during the early reign of Shunyi 順義 (921–927), when Xu Zhigao was still in Guangling. Wang Zhonghua 王仲華, son of Wang Yu, began his career by means of the *mingjing* examination.⁵²

The records concerning ancestral activities of Wang Qinruo indicate that some of the Song scholar-officials developed an interest in claiming their ancestors in order to gain success in the civil service examinations or hold official positions during the reign of the Southern Tang.⁵³ The records also reveal at least two kinds of examinations, namely the *tongzi* and the *mingjing*, which comprised the civil service examinations prior to the founding of the Southern Tang. Also, having served minor posts at the local level, Wang Xia and Wang Yu were unable to help their sons attain office through hereditary privilege, nor could their sons expect to be recommended by prominent officials. Had they aspired to secure public careers, taking the civil service examinations was the way to achieve the goal. Since these individuals had no strong political backgrounds from which to negotiate with the government, they had to accept whatever positions were assigned to them.

Another example is provided through Zhang Bin 張彬. Zhang Yi 張翊, Zhang Bin's older brother, served as surveillance circuit administrative

51 Xia Song 夏竦 (985–1051), “Gu shou situ jian menxiashilang tong zhongshu menxia pingzhangshi chong Yuqing Zhaoyingong shi Zhaowenguan daxueshi jianxiu guoshi Jiguogong zeng taishi zhongshuling shi Wenmu Wangong muzhiming bingxu” 故守司徒兼門下侍郎同中書門下平章事充玉清昭應宮使昭文館大學士監修國史冀國公贈太師中書令諡文穆王公墓誌銘并序, in *Quan Songwen*, 17:356.237. Although Wang Yu's official rank was identical to that of assistant in the palace library and editor, he was actually responsible for prefectural affairs.

52 Xia Song, “Zeng taishi zhongshuling Jiguo Wangong xingzhuang” 贈太師中書令冀國王公行狀, in *Quan Songwen*, 17: 355.222.

53 Members of the Zhang 章 clan originating in Pucheng 浦城, for instance, claimed in the genealogy that their ancestor Zhang Wengu 章文谷 was conferred the honor of principal graduate (*zhuangyuan* 狀元). For details, consult Zhou Lasheng, “Zhuangyuan ziliao jikao erti” 狀元資料輯考二題, *Hubei zhiye jishu xueyuan xuebao* 湖北職業技術學院學報 (2004.1): 47–51. The claim was never substantiated by historical records, yet the omission does not render the record worthless, as it indicates the mindset of the Song scholar-officials whose hometown was previously governed by the Southern Tang. From their perspectives, success in the Southern Tang examination system was generally considered a great honor. Another example is seen in Wei Tai 魏泰, who was born to a family originating in Xiangyang 襄陽: the official background of his family could be traced back to the reign of the Southern Tang. See Li Xiaohui 李曉暉, “Wei Tai qiren kaolue” 魏泰其人考略, *Huazhong xueshu* 華中學術 1 (2013): 52–61.

assistant (*guancha panguan* 觀察判官) of Jianzhou and magistrate of Xichang 西昌. Positioned at an intermediate level in the Tang bureaucracy, *guancha panguan* held a considerable degree of power in its own right but lacked the requisite prestige for Zhang Bin to enter bureaucracy by means of hereditary privilege.⁵⁴ Luckily, Zhang Bin was familiar with two of the classics and passed the *tongzi* examination. He was appointed commandant of Huangmei 黃梅 when he came of age.⁵⁵ Based on the cited examples, the civil service examinations seem to have provided Xu Zhigao with the mode by which he recruited literati for staffing the local administrative mechanism.

During the reign of Emperor Yuanzong 元宗 (Li Jing 李璟, r. 943–961), the Southern Tang initiated the Tang method by establishing the *jinshi* examination to recruit literati whose backgrounds lay beneath the categories of political and social elite.⁵⁶ According to the record of *Tongjian*, literary attainment of the Southern Tang was credited as the highest among other regimes, but the civil service examinations had not been institutionalized when the regime was newly founded; bureaucratic recruitment had primarily relied on educated people who submitted written statements to the government for consideration of particular issues. Until then, the government ordered Jiang Wenwei 江文蔚 (901–952), who served as Hanlin academician (*Hanlin xueshi* 翰林學士), to oversee the civil service examinations (*gongju* 貢舉). Under Jiang's leadership, a total of three literati were granted the *jinshi* degree, including contemporary celebrity Wang Kezhen 王克貞.

Compelled by his keen interest in comparing civil service examinations across regimes, Li Jing asked Jiang Wenwei how recruitment compared with that of the dynasty in North China (*Beichao* 北朝). Jiang replied that the civil service examinations implemented by the previous dynasty (*qianchao* 前朝, equivalent to *Beichao* in this context) were characterized by calling upon influential officials (*siye* 私謁), and the *jinshi* degree granted to this group of people comprised half the successful candidate pool; Jiang asserted that he, however, simply relied on fair competition.⁵⁷ Li Jing was pleased with the

54 Concerning the details on the official rank and administrative duties of *guancha panguan*, see Lai Ruihe, *Tang dai zhongceng wenguan*, 423–34.

55 Long Gun 龍袞, *Jiangnan yeshi* 江南野史, in *Wudai shishu huibian*, 9.5219–20.

56 The newly established examination was different from that of the Tang dynasty in some ways. For details, see Ng Pak-sheung, “Nan Tang jinshike kaoshu,” 133–49.

57 Concerning the timeframe of *Beichao*, Jiang Wenwei gained his *jinshi* degree during the reign of Emperor Mingzong of the Later Tang 後唐明宗 (Li Siyuan 李嗣源, r. 926–933). As such, the author believes that *Beichao* refer to the Later Tang.

reply; presumably he took pride in sharing Jiang's view. The reply enraged Zhang Wei 張緯, who had gained his *jinshi* degree in the previous dynasty and currently served as a drafter in the secretariat (*zhongshu sheren* 中書舍人), as the reply seemed to satirize the way in which Zhang had obtained his *jinshi* degree. Also, those in power who did not descend from *jinshi* degree holders tried vigilantly to put an end to the *jinshi* examinations. The examination system was banned in the end.⁵⁸

The previously quoted *Tongjian* has become a basic reference for scholars in their exploration of this issue over the centuries. *Wenxian tongkao*, for instance, primarily refers to this record in its discussion on the examination system implemented during the Southern Tang.⁵⁹ The record of *Tongjian*, however, merely describes the *jinshi* examination, which creates an impression that the civil service examinations were comprised of this single constituent, when in fact other categories existed in the examination system. Besides the previously mentioned *tongzi* and *mingjing*, an additional examination was administered, known as the law graduate (*mingfa* 明法). The implementation of the *mingfa* is substantiated by related primary sources. Zha Tao 查陶, for instance, started his bureaucratic career by success in the *mingfa* examination during the reign of Li Yu.⁶⁰

The third issue associated with the quoted *Tongjian* record concerns whether or not the *jinshi* examination had been implemented prior to the reign of Li Jing; the record of *Jiangnan yeshi* sheds light on this issue:

When abdication (*shandai* 禪代) and restoration of imperial surname of the Tang dynasty took place, there were no official examinations for recruiting bureaucrats. When important ceremonial events were about to happen at *yuanqiu* 圓丘, lit. round mound that refers to the altar at which the emperor held memorial ceremonies for Heaven, Xu Zhigao then summoned the talents from the four corners and ordered each of them to compose supplication dedicated to Heaven (*zhushi zhiwen* 祝史之文). In the end, the work composed by Zhou Bin 周彬 was selected by Xu to be used for the ceremony, Zhou was thus appointed inspector of ceremonial

58 Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086), *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1976), 290.9475.

59 Ma Duanlin 馬端臨 (1254–1323), *Wenxian tongkao* 文獻通考 (Taipei: Xinxing shuju, 1963), 30.281.

60 For details, consult Ng Pak-sheung, “Nan Tang jinshike kaoshu,” 134.

guard (*zhuwei xunguan* 諸衛巡官).⁶¹

Significantly, the quoted text reveals how talents were recruited both before and immediately following the Southern Tang's founding. Based on the textual information, no formal system existed for the sole purpose of recruitment; literary composition upon the ruler's order had provided the path for educated people to start their careers in bureaucracy. The validity of the description is substantiated by the previously quoted record of *Zizhi tongjian*. Xu Zhigao restored his surname in the first lunar month of the third year of shengyuan 昇元 (939), and a grand ceremony of offering a sacrifice to Heaven (*Nanjiao dadian* 南郊大典) was conducted in the fourth month of the same year. In other words, until at least 939, literary composition provided the way for talents to find their places within the bureaucratic structure.

Despite the fact that the examination system was central to the realization of civil administration, interestingly Xu Zhigao did not seem to take any significant measure to replace the ad hoc routes of recruitment by the system on a regular basis. As a result, the sporadically-held examination system lasted for the whole period of Xu Zhigao's reign. According to the record of *Mashu* regarding the career of Zhang Yanhan 張延翰 (884–940), during the early period of the Southern Tang, Zhang was promoted as the attendant gentleman of the Ministry of Rites (*Libu shilang* 禮部侍郎). As an examination hall (*gongyuan* 貢院) had not yet been established, educated people who presented their literary works (*xianwen* 獻書) would receive immediate arrangements to sit the examination. Zhang handled his duty fairly and cautiously and was thus applauded by the literati.⁶² Several points stand out based on this historical record:

First, Zhang Yanhan died in the twelfth lunar month of the fourth year of shengyuan (940).⁶³ The timeframe during which Zhang oversaw recruitment was therefore relatively short. Since no regularly-held examination system existed that was comparable to that implemented during the Tang dynasty, examinations were most likely conducted in a sporadic and ad hoc fashion, indicating that examinations would be arranged for the literati who presented

61 *Jiangnan yeshi*, 7.5204.

62 Ma Ling 馬令 (fl. 1105), *Mashi Nan Tang shu* 馬氏南唐書, in *Wudai shishu huibian*, 10.5332. The *Nan Tang shu* 南唐書 compiled by Ma Ling 馬令 (preface dated 1105; hereafter abbreviated as *Mashu* to differentiate it with the work written by Lu You 陸游 [1125–1210] of the same title). *Lushu* also records the event and specified that Xu Zhigao counted entirely on Zhang Yanhan's service. See *Lushu*, 6.5511. *Shandai* in this context refers to abdication of Yang Pu 楊溥 (900–938) and handing over the crown to Xu Zhigao.

63 *Mashu*, 1.5263.

literary works that ultimately impressed the ruler.

Second, those who passed the ad hoc examinations were appointed bureaucratic positions. A primary source substantiates the argument: Chen Qi 陳起 prospered himself by success in the *jinshi* examination in the mid-period of Shengyuan (*Shengyuan zhong* 昇元中).⁶⁴ Shengyuan spanned a total of seven years, starting from 938 to 943, and *Shengyuan zhong* implies Chen's success roughly happened in the third or the fourth year. That is to say, Chen was among those who obtained the *jinshi* degree during the reign of Xu Zhigao.

During its early stages, the *jinshi* examination was met with sharp criticism. As a substantial number of high-ranking officials did not start their careers by succeeding in the *jinshi* examination and some lacked worthy literary credentials, out of the need to protect their vested interest, officials in authority naturally directed animosity toward those who entered bureaucracy through the examination system; criticizing literati who attended the *jinshi* examination as frivolous or even villainous was a practice commonly adopted to serve the purpose. The alleging officials advocated for the abolition of the *jinshi* examination, a measure they claimed would prevent the regime from negative effects of such purported unhealthy tendencies. To recruit officials for the bureaucracy, the government could count on the *mingjing* and the *mingfa* examinations. While such a background highlights the usefulness of these two examinations, the intentions behind the practice were never truly noble as claimed; the practice was merely a means to prevent those newly appointed officials with the *jinshi* degrees from using their qualifications to gain an advantage over those without the prestigious degree.⁶⁵

Repellence out of self-interest posed obstacles to those who attempted to start their careers through the success in the *jinshi* examination. *Mashu* records that Xu Kai 徐鍇 (920–974), who together with his brother Xu Xuan 徐鉉 (916–991), enjoyed a high literary reputation in Jiangnan 江南, had passed the *jinshi* examination.⁶⁶ *Lushu* offers additional detail on this event. During the period of Shengyuan, a general belief among high-ranking officials held that the knowledge-base possessed by literati bordered on superficial; consequently the government always recruited those who displayed deep knowledge of Confucian classics (*jingyi* 經義) and statute (*falu* 法律) during examinations.

64 *Lushu*, 14.5577. Huang Tingshuo shows reservations about the time for the establishment of the *jinshi* examination in the Southern Tang. See Huang Tingshuo 黃庭碩, "Tang Song zhiji de dongnan shiren yu zhengzhi: yi Yang Wu, Nan Tang wei zhongxin" 唐宋之際的東南士人與政治——以楊吳、南唐為中心 (Master thesis, National Taiwan University, 2013), 137.

65 Ng Pak-sheung, "Nan Tang jinshike kaoshu," 136–37.

66 *Mashu*, 14.5358.

Xu Kai felt ashamed of such arrangements and closed the door on seeking additional opportunities at officialdom. Xu Xuan had been working with Chang Mengxi 常夢錫 (898–958) at the chancellery (*Menxia sheng* 門下省) when he presented Xu Kai's works to Chang. Chang appreciated the works very much and recommended Xu Kai to Xu Zhigao. Xu Zhigao passed away before the appointment was made. When Li Jing ascended the throne, Xu Kai started his career in the capacity of assistant in the palace library (*mishulang* 秘書郎).⁶⁷ *Mashu* and *Lushu* offer disparate takes on whether or not Xu Kai had succeeded in the *jinshi* examination. In Tang China, positions such as *mishulang* and editor (*xiaoshulang* 校書郎) were always assigned to those who had passed the *jinshi* examination, while in the Southern Tang these two positions were granted to those who did not start their careers by means of the examination. Xu Kai was appointed *mishulang* to start his career; as such, he might not have succeeded in the *jinshi* examination.⁶⁸

Despite pleas from high-ranking officials, Xu Zhigao was not prepared to yield to pressure to abolish the *jinshi* examination. From Xu's perspective, the *jinshi* examination could provide a system through which to facilitate the regime's civil transformation. As a result, the *jinshi* examination was not canceled, despite the death of Zhang Yanhan along with widespread resistance from officials. As indicated by historical facts, even at the end of Shengyuan, some educated individuals were appointed due to their success in the *jinshi* examination; Chen Qi and Li Zhenggu 李徵古 (d. 958) were examples.⁶⁹

67 *Lushu*, 5.5500–1.

68 Ng Pak-sheung, "Nan Tang jinshike kaoshu," 136.

69 *Mashu*, 21.5393. Given that influential officials wanted to ban the *jinshi* examination, how could Chen Qi and Li Zhenggu have succeeded in the examination? In the context of a contemporary social and political setting, those in question were not good enough to draw envy and hostility of influential officials in terms of family background and personal reputation; influential officials simply would not identify them as targets. On the other hand, Xu Kai had already earned a high reputation all over the country before he took the *jinshi* examination; his brother Xu Xuan also assumed an official position in the central government. In this case, if Xu Kai could enter the bureaucracy with the qualification of the *jinshi* degree, his future career should be promising. Yet his success would not be met without opposition from influential officials; Xu Zhigao most likely had to patch up a quarrel by forbidding Xu Kai to sit the *jinshi* examination. In order to settle a political disturbance, Xu Kai had to be ousted from the *jinshi* examination. This sort of practice could never be found during the Tang dynasty. This event can certainly serve as an example of how the Southern Tang modified the *jinshi* examination by acquiescing itself to reality. Consult Ng Pak-sheung, "Nan Tang jinshike kaoshu," 136–37.

From the enthronement of Li Jing to the tenth year of Baoda 保大 (953), the examination system implemented during the reign of Xu Zhigao was preserved. Guo Peng 郭鵬, for instance, obtained his *jinshi* degree in the early reign of Baoda.⁷⁰

Besides initially continuing the examination system inherited from Xu Zhigao, it was also during the reign of Li Jing that the civil service examinations patterned in the Tang fashion were restored.⁷¹ Li Jing created the zenith of civil administration during his reign; the practice was assuredly inspired by Li Jing's upbringing. His style differed significantly from that of his father, who was known for military strategy and political manipulation. Li Jing received education and literary training, and a group of scholars surrounded him. Such a background might explain his tendency to value literary attainments so deeply; neglecting the military aspect might not have been deliberate.

Li Jing always enjoyed claiming himself the progeny of the Tang dynasty and identifying restoration of the Tang's prestige as the national mission – in particular, his own obligation. As such, Li Jing deeply realized that if the *jinshi* examination in which the Tang had taken pride could not be restored during his reign, he would fail to fulfill the historical mission.⁷² During an occasion of enlisting talent through the civil service examinations in the tenth year of the Baoda, Li Jing made clear that he intended to adopt the Tang institution.⁷³ The message implies that adopting the Tang *jinshi* examination signified restoring the Tang tradition. As expected, Li Jing's plan met with strong opposition from courtiers, and he was even forced to abolish the system in the same year.

⁷⁰ *Mashu*, 14.5355.

⁷¹ The Southern Tang rulers had repeatedly shown their keen interest in connecting their regime to the Tang. One vivid example is the creation of a fake genealogy. According to Kurz's study, fake genealogy served as a means to link Li Bian to the Tang in order to help establish his claims to Tang heritage. Consult Johannes L. Kurz, "On the Southern Tang imperial genealogy," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 134 (2014): 601–20.

⁷² Restoring the Tang civil service examinations was only one of the honorable missions listed on the agenda. Beguiled with a notion of territorial expansion, Li Jing pursued aggressive expansion to make the Southern Tang comparable to the Tang, unlike his father, who had exercised caution in his own policy. *Lushu* 2.5484. For details, consult Kurz, "On the unification plans of the Southern Tang Dynasty," *Journal of Asian History* 50.1 (2016): 23–45; Huang Beixiang 黄北祥 and Gao Xueqin 高學欽, "Nan Tang de tongyi gouxiang yu shijian" 南唐的統一構想與實踐, *Ningde shizhuan xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 寧德師專學報 (哲學社會科學版) (2008.3): 41–45.

⁷³ *Lushu*, 10.5547.

Nevertheless, political needs eventually urged the ruler to take a stronger stance in dealing with the tough situation. As a result, the Tang-inspired *jinshi* examination was restored and continued to be administered until the collapse of the Southern Tang.

From an institutional standpoint, due to a lack of primary sources, no feasible method exists for determining the extent to which civil service examinations were implemented by the Southern Tang compared with those of the Tang fashion; although every detail of the *jinshi* examination cannot possibly be reconstructed, sources concur that the examination was conducted in the capital in spring; those who served as chief examiners might not necessarily have served as officials at the Ministry of Rites, but this government organization was assigned to conduct the examination. Such details indicate that aspects of the Southern Tang examination system were inherited from the Tang.

With regard to the number of times the *jinshi* examination was administered, besides one occurrence in the tenth year of Baoda recorded by *Tongjian*, *Lushu* records a total of four times:

1. The twelfth year of Baoda (954)

Zhu Gong 朱鞏, who served the position of attendant gentleman of the Ministry of Personnel (*Libu shilang* 吏部侍郎), was appointed examiner of the civil service examinations held by the Ministry of Rite.⁷⁴

2. The second year of *Qiande* 乾德 (964)

Han Xizai 韓熙載, who served the position of attendant gentleman of Ministry of Personnel and concurrently state historiographer (*Libu shilang xiuguoshi* 吏部侍郎修國史), was ordered to oversee the civil service examinations; Wang Chonggu 王崇古 together with other eight candidates were granted the honor of *jinshi* degree.

3. The fifth year of Kaibao 開寶 (972)

Zhang Bi 張泌, who served the position of drafter of princely administration (*neishi sheren* 內史舍人), took charge of the civil service examinations; Yang Sui 楊遂 and two additional candidates obtained the *jinshi* degree.

4. The eighth year of Kaibao 開寶 (975)

Wu Qiao 伍喬, who served the position of vice director of the Ministry of Revenue (*hubu yuanwailang* 戶部員外郎) in Jinling, which was under siege by the Northern Song, was ordered to grant Sun Que 孫確 and twenty-nine

⁷⁴ *Lushu*, 2.5479.

other candidates the *jinshi* degree.⁷⁵

Twenty-four years elapsed between the tenth year of Baoda to the eighth year of Kaibao, when the Southern Tang collapsed. If the total number of *jinshi* examinations conducted by the Southern Tang were just five, the matter would indicate irregular and infrequent administration of the examinations. Historical fact reveals otherwise, as the tenure for some examiners in charge of the civil service examinations was greater than five years. Xu Kai served as chief examiner four times and gained the reputation of recruiting the right people.⁷⁶ Qiao Kuangshun 喬匡舜 (898–972) had also taken charge of the civil service examinations and five candidates, including Yue Shi 樂史 (930–1007), who ultimately passed the examination;⁷⁷ these individuals were not listed in previously quoted primary sources. Primary sources also reveal that some candidates had greater than five attempts at passing the exam. Qiu Xu 丘旭, for instance, attempted nine times and finally succeeded on the tenth time.⁷⁸ Peng Liyong 彭利用 attempted six times during Li Yu's reign but did not succeed.⁷⁹ *Changbian* describes the historical event in the eighth year of Kaibao: from the tenth year of Baoda, when the *jinshi* examination was launched, until the collapse of the Southern Tang, the examination was given seventeen times; ninety-three candidates succeeded.⁸⁰ Compared with all available historical records, *Changbian* seems more reasonable than does *Lushu*.

Although the record of *Changbian* seems more reliable, the interval between examination administrations remains open for debate. *Jiangnan yuzai* 江南餘載, mentions that an elderly person surnamed Zhao 趙 served as the doorman of the examination hall from the early period of Baoda to the end of Kaibao. After the release of examination results every year, Zhao would congratulate those who passed the examination and console those who failed. He Meng 何蒙 (937–1013), who did not pass, presented a poem to Zhao, expressing his wish that they could both convey good words the

75 *Lushu*, 3.5487; 5490; 5493. On the identity of Zhang Bi, consult Gu Jichen 顧吉辰, “Nan Tang Zhang Yuanmi, Zhang Mi, Zhang Bi shiwei yiren kaobu” 南唐張原泌、張泌、張泌實為一人考補, *Anhui shixue* 安徽史學 (2004.4): 93–94.

76 *Lushu*, 5.5501.

77 *Lushu*, 8.5531.

78 *Mashu*, 23.5410.

79 *Mashu*, 25.5421.

80 *Changbian*, 16.336. Regarding the geographical origin of some successful candidates during the reign of Li Jing and Li Yu, consult Huang Tingshuo, “Tang Song zhiji de dongnan shiren yu zhengzhi: yi Yang Wu Nan Tang wei zhongxin,” 198–200.

following year (*xiangchuan haoyu dai lainian* 相傳好語待來年), indicating his intention to re-take the examination.⁸¹ According to *Songshi*, He Meng did not succeed throughout the reign of Li Yu; he was able to serve the position of administrative supervisor (*lushi canjun* 錄事參軍) because of advice he had offered to the government via a written statement.⁸² In other words, He Meng did not obtain the honor as a successful candidate during the reign of the Southern Tang. The description of *Jiangnan yuzai* clearly indicates a similar pattern to that of the Tang dynasty; the *jinshi* examination was also conducted on a yearly basis. With regard to reasons that the examination was not offered up to twenty-four times, most likely factors included opposition from officials, military campaigns, and imperial funerals.

Despite the Southern Tang regime's tendency to demonstrate a desire to inherit Tang legacies, some exceptions stood out, and a disconnect between the civil service examinations and the national educational institution is a good example. Students from government-run schools comprised a source of candidates for the civil service examinations during the Tang dynasty. Those recommended by government schools, whose curriculum was designed to adequately prepare candidates for the civil service examinations, were required to go through the examination with an emphasis on academic evaluation.⁸³ In other words, the educational approach observed by government schools is closely aligned with the content of the civil service examinations. This practice, however, was not inherited by the Southern Tang.

Cultural Dispositions and Learning Institutions in the Jianghuai Region

As time went by, it was commonly believed in the Southern Tang that if a commoner wished to rise to prominence, the best way to launch his career was to succeed in the *jinshi* examinations. Despite the popularity of this belief, exceptional cases did happen. During the reign of the Wu and the Southern Tang, Yao Jing 姚景, a man of humble origin, was possibly the only exception to the rule that the military could be promoted in position and rank, which was

81 Anonymous, *Jiangnan yuzai* 江南餘載, in *Wudai shishu huibian*, a:5111.

82 Tuotuo 脫脫 (1313–1355), *Songshi* 宋史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), 277.9444.

83 Zhuo Zunhong 卓遵宏, *Tangdai jinshi yu zhengzhi* 唐代進士與政治 (Taipei: Guoli bianyiguan, 1987), 165.

sufficient to attract admiration and jealousy of literati. Originally Liu Jin's 劉金 (d. 905) horse trainer, Yao demonstrated not only skill in raising horses, but also sagacity and virtuous behavior that gradually earned him the trust and goodwill of Liu. Yao eventually became his son-in-law. Although he had no particular talents or abilities, Yao's incorruptibility gained him a good reputation. He served up to the rank of commissioner-council (*shixiang* 使相) and died in office at the age of 83. Therefore, Shi Wenying 釋文瑩, the author of *Yuhu qinghua* 玉壺清話, could not help but sigh, "What is the use of studying?"⁸⁴

However, Yao Jing's experience did not reflect the norm for literati; the orthodox method still included taking the civil service examinations. Under the circumstances, competition in the examination hall of the Southern Tang was well-known for its extremely fierce nature, particularly in the *jinshi* examination, which attracted a huge number of participants. Wang Yucheng 王禹偁 (954–1001) offers the rationale behind so many literati in Jiangnan:

During the Tang dynasty, those who served in local governments viewed the Southeast region favorably. Even after they had served in a prefecture or county, they definitely left their children to reside where they had served. This is because they admired the extraordinary landscape. Until now, the literati living in Southeast China had been the descendants of the traditional clans of the Tang.⁸⁵

Wang's observation indicates how the Song scholar-officials comprehended the migration issue and is thus worthy of further elaborations. Admiration of landscape might partly explain why some descendants of aristocratic families remained in Southeast China. Additionally, historical facts reveal that a higher cost of living restricted families from returning to the North, and that some families regarded Jianghuai as an ideal place to acquire knowledge that would eventually enable their descendants to succeed in the civil service examinations.⁸⁶

84 Shi Wenying 釋文瑩, *Yuhu qinghua* 玉壺清話 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), 10.104–5.

85 Wang Yucheng 王禹偁 (954–1001), "Jianxi chushi zeng dali pingshi Liu fujun mujieming bingxu" 建谿處士贈大理評事柳府君慕碣銘並序 in *Quan Songwen*, 8:161.185.

86 Ng Pak-sheung, "Qinggui shenzhou yu suo ye weiguan — lun Tangdai jiazu de qianxi yu shihuan" 「情貴神州」與「所業惟官」——論唐代家族的遷徙與仕宦, *Dongwu lishi xuebao* 20 (2008): 1–74.

Besides the impact of personal reasons, regional disturbances especially in North China accounted for migration trends that deserve further examination. Since the mid-Tang era, the wealthy and stable Southeast region had become a central destination for migration.⁸⁷ Among those who moved to Southeast China were some aristocratic families, literati, and officials. Their immigration enlarged the scale of educated people and facilitated an upgrade to the cultural quality of the region.⁸⁸ As pointed out by Deng Xiaoquan 鄧小泉, the regional distribution of talents in Tang China was correspondingly influenced by the level of local education and literary tradition.⁸⁹ Prior to the Sui–Tang era (581–907), the major source of literati and talents was located in the regions north of the Yangtze River, particularly Guanzhong 關中 and Shandong 山東.⁹⁰ The gradual southward movement of economic gravity as well as local cultural enhancement had a tremendous impact on the geographical distribution of literati and talent, as witnessed by the changes in basin areas of the Yangtze River and the Pearl River. Some regions in South China were not ideal at first, but the situation greatly improved due to massive migration of aristocratic families and literati to South China in the Tang. Jiangxi was a good

87 Concerning how turbulence in North China, such as the An Lushan Rebellion (755–763), drove aristocratic families to South China, consult Wu Songdi 吳松弟, “Tang houqi Wudai Jiangnan diqu de beifang yimin” 唐後期五代江南地區的北方移民, in *Zhongguo Lishi Dili Luncong* 中國歷史地理論叢, vol. 3 (Xi’an: Shaanxi renmin chubanshe, 1996): 59–94.

88 Concerning the widespread migration trend’s profound impact on Southeast China during the late Tang and the Five Dynasties, such as driving local infrastructure development, categorization and organization of migrants, and interactions between new migrants and locals, consult Gu Licheng 顧立誠, *Zouxiang nanfang: Tang Song zhiji zibei xiangnan de yimin yuqi yingxiang* 走向南方：唐宋之際自北向南的移民與其影響 (Taipei: Guoli Taiwan daxue, 2004).

89 Deng Xiaoquan 鄧小泉, “Tangdai keju rencai quyufenbu de jiaoyu yinsu” 唐代科舉人才區域分布的教育因素, *Nandou xuetan (renwen shehui kexue xuebao)* 南都學壇 (人文社會科學學報) (2004.4): 28–30.

90 On the territorial domain of Shandong, consult Xiao Jinhua 蕭錦華, “Sui-Tang shidai ‘Shandong’ yongyu zhi zhengzhi, shehui, jingji, wenhua hanyi” 隋唐時代「山東」用語之政治、社會、經濟、文化涵義, *Zhongguo wenhua yanjiusuo xuebao* 中國文化研究所學報 NS No.12 (2003): 13–67.

example in this regard.⁹¹ Due to stability under Southern Tang rule, literary tradition, together with academics, were well preserved and flourished; these conditions allowed Jiangxi to serve as one of the major sources for literati in Song China.⁹² As such, the Jiangxi region had become the homeland for many scholar-officials in the Song due to its high degree of cultural development.⁹³

Among the various phenomena to substantiate the argument, the private academies built in mountains and jungles (*shanlin jiangxi* 山林講習) prevalent in Southeast China deserve special attention. Since the mid-Tang era, many famous mountains and temples in Southeast China, where the An Lushan Rebellion 安史之亂 (755–763) had not caused significant damage, became

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- 91 Some regions in South China were not ideal at first, but the situation greatly improved due to the massive migration of aristocratic families and literati to South China in the Tang. Before the Sui dynasty, Yuanzhou 袁州 in Jiangxi was still a remote and backward prefecture relying on a primitive farming method known as *huogeng shuinou* 火耕水耨, literally meaning burning straw and weeds and watering the land. Rapid economic, educational, and cultural developments had taken place particularly since the mid-Tang. Consequently, the number of those who succeeded in the civil service examinations ranked the highest in Jiangxi. See Mo Junchang 莫軍昌, “Tangdai Yuanzhou jinshi kaolun” 唐代袁州進士考論 (Master thesis: Guangxi Normal University, 2010); Liu Jianming 劉健明, “Tangdai Jiangxi keju de fazhan ji qi tezheng kaojiu” 唐代江西科舉的發展及其特徵考究, *Mudanjiang shifan xueyuan xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 牡丹江師範學院學報 (哲學社會科學版) (2012.4): 43–47.
- 92 Hu Qing 胡青, “Songdai Jiangxi de shuyuan yu jianghui, huijiang” 宋代江西的書院與講會, 會講, *Wenshi zhishi* 文史知識 (2008.11): 25–29; Yu Wenxia 虞文霞, “Songdai Jiangxi de jiaoyu, keju, wenzue jiazou” 宋代江西的教育、科舉、文學家族, *Wenshi zhishi* 文史知識 (2008.11): 77–83.
- 93 For details, consult Aoyama Sadao 青山定雄, “Godai Sō ni okeru Kōsei no shinkō kanryō” 五代宋に於ける江西新興官僚, in *Wada hakushi kanreki kinen Tōyōshi ronsō* 和田博士還曆記念東洋史論叢, ed. Wada hakushi kanreki kinen Tōyōshi ronsō hensan iinkai 和田博士還曆記念東洋史論叢編纂委員會 (Tōkyō: Kōdansha, 1951), 19–37. Lingnan provides another example: due to substantial cultural enhancements, the number of those who succeeded in the civil service examinations tremendously increased. See Wang Chengwen 王承文, “Tang houqi Lingnan keju jinshi yu wenhua fazhan lunkao” 唐後期嶺南科舉進士與文化發展論考, *Jinan shixue* 暨南史學 1 (2018): 29–60.

ideal places for literati.⁹⁴ Due to its rich literary atmosphere, Southeast China eventually became an ideal place to study. Local literati were active in literary activities; poetic composition provides a good indicator of cultural attainment. As substantiated by the reputation gained by local literati, the Southeast region was a cultural center more or less comparable to the capitals in poetic composition and thus played a significant role in shaping High Tang poetry (*Sheng Tangshi* 盛唐詩).⁹⁵ Surely local contributors also made their mark: as pointed out by Zhao Changping 趙昌平, popular local ballads as well as the distinctive poetic style created during the Southern Dynasties also contributed to the uniqueness of poems composed in the Southeast. Benefitted by such cultural traditions, local literati were able to create a poetic style different from that prevailing in the capitals.⁹⁶

During the late Tang period, there was a new cause for the abundance of literati in Jiangnan: many scholar-officials serving in Southeast China during the late Tang found themselves unable to return to the North due to war and chaos; instead they were forced to remain in the prefectures in which they served. During the Song, when some locals traced their ancestry back to the late Tang and the Five Dynasties, they usually linked their family ties to the North. For example, Liu Shu 劉恕 (1032–1078) claimed Wannien 萬年, a county in Chang'an 長安, as his family's homeland. Liu Du 劉度, his ancestor of the sixth generation who then served as magistrate of Linchuan 臨

94 For details, consult Yan Gengwang 嚴耕望, "Tangren xiye shanlin zhi fengshang" 唐人習業山林之風尚, in *Yan Gengwang shixue lunwen xuanji* 嚴耕望史學論文選集, vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006), 271–316. Based on Yan's study, Gao Mingshi focuses on the development of Buddhism - the destination for disseminating dharma had shifted from North China to the Southeastern area, particularly the Zhejiang region. This might explain Southeast China's increasingly significant role in teaching and spreading Buddhism since the mid-Tang era. See Gao Mingshi 高明士, "Tangdai guanxue de fazhan yu shuailuo" 唐代官學的發展與衰落, *Youshi xuezhishi* 幼獅學誌 9:1(1970): 1–74; idem, "Tangdai sixue de fazhan" 唐代私學的發展, *Guoli Taiwan daxue wenshizhe xuebao* 國立臺灣大學文史哲學報 20 (1971): 219–89. Regarding literature review on such issues, consult Huang Tingshuo, "Tang Song zhiji de dongnan shiren yu zhengzhi: yi Yang Wu Nan Tang wei zhongxin," 17–19.

95 Stephen Owen, *The Great Age of Chinese Poetry: the High Tang* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).

96 Zhao Changping 趙昌平, "Wuzhong shipai yu Zhong Tang shige" 吳中詩派與中唐詩歌, *Zhongguo shehui kexue* 中國社會科學 (1984.4): 191–212. Additional scholars have contributed to this academic issue. Concerning literature review on a related study, refer to Huang Tingshuo, "Tang Song zhiji de dongnan shiren yu zhengzhi — yi Yang Wu Nan Tang wei zhongxin," 17–19.

川, could not return to his native place because of the war. After his death, Liu Du was buried in Junzhou 筠州, a prefecture that the family thereafter claimed as its native place.⁹⁷ The homeland of the family of Liu Yan 劉弇 (1048–1102) was originally in Loyang; one ancestor had served in Jiangxi; the family's native place thus changed to Anfu 安福, a county in Jizhou 吉州.⁹⁸

For various reasons, some descendants of aristocratic families did reside in Southeast China; some of them even grew prosperous in Jiangnan. For instance, the Tang capital was the birthplace of Peng Siyong 彭思永. At the height of Tang rule, one member of the Peng clan served as prefect of Jizhou, and the family stayed in the prefecture after he had completed his service. Members of this clan claimed to be native inhabitants of Luling 廬陵 thereafter.⁹⁹ According to *Xiangshan yelu* 湘山野錄, members of seven clans had lived together for five generations. Xu Zhigao placed a mark of distinction on their houses and excused them from taxation and manual labor. Among the great clans in Jiangnan, the Chen clan 陳氏家族 had been considered the most prominent. Members were descendants of Chen Jing 陳京, who served as supervising secretary (*geishizhong* 給事中) during the reign of Yuanhe 元和 (806–820) in Tang China:

There were seven hundred people in the clan, ranging from young to old. They did not keep concubines or servants, and were thus able to maintain peace and harmony in their clan. They behaved in total compliance with the rules and regulations. The domestic discipline and family traditions of the Chen clan were so great that their livestock were even affected. Not only did all the clan members eat together, but a hundred dogs raised by the clan also complied with the rule of eating together from a large container. If one dog would not come, the others would not start eating. The Chen clan also established a private school, collected books and invited famous scholars to teach there. Many famous literati graduated

97 Fan Zuyu 范祖禹 (1041–1098), “Mishucheng Liu jun mujie” 秘書丞劉君墓碣, in *Quan Songwen*, 98:2149.315. The territory of Junzhou was originally under the jurisdiction of Hongzhou and Yuanzhou 袁州, but was established as a prefecture in 952.

98 Li Yanbi 李彥弼, “Liu Weiming muzhiming” 劉偉明墓誌銘, in the appendix attached to Liu Yan 劉弇 (1048–1102), *Longyun ji* 龍雲集 (Wenyuange Siku quanshu ed.), 4a.

99 Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032–1085), “Gu hubu shilang zhishi Penggong xingzhuang” 故戶部侍郎致仕彭公行狀, in *Quan Songwen*, 79:1736.347. For further information on the migratory movements of aristocratic families in Tang China, see Ng Pak-sheung, “Qinggui shenzhou yu suoeweiguan: lun Tangdai jiazhu de qianxi yu shihuan,” 1–74.

from this school.¹⁰⁰

Although the quoted text might have overglorified the domestic discipline and traditions of the Chen clan due to Wenying's intention to promote family value, this piece of description is useful to explain educational opportunities sponsored by local clans. Limited by the availability of primary sources, total number of local clans involved in providing education is not known. However, taking into consideration private academies built in mountains and jungles along with those sponsored by local clans, one can presume that educational opportunities were plentiful. Given the above background, it is no wonder that contemporaries could find some well-learned scholars even in the countryside of Jiangnan.¹⁰¹ Therefore, Jiangnan's reputation as a source of erudite literati was not unfounded.¹⁰²

Mashu records that when the Southern Tang possessed the Jianghuai region, it managed to promote culture by collecting the *fendian* 墳典, a collective term for Chinese classics, and specifically appointing an education official in charge of government learning institutions. As a result, the Directorate of Education (*Guozijian* 國子監) located on the bank of Qinhuai 秦淮 followed by the National University at Lushan (*Lushan Guoxue* 廬山國

100 Shi Wenying, *Xiangshan yelu* 湘山野錄 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), A:16. Chen Jing 陳京 had no son and so adopted a cousin to continue his lineage. Therefore, those Chen clan members living in Jiangzhou were not Chen Jing's biological descendants. Chen Jing was familiar with the rules of etiquette and ceremony and was included in the "Biography of Confucian Scholars" (*Ruxue chuan* 儒學傳) in Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072) and Song Qi 宋祁 (998–1061), *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 125.5710–16. This might be the reason his "adopted" descendants were celebrated for abiding by rituals.

101 Li Jianxun 李建勳 (872?–952) came across an aged man in the countryside and was greatly impressed by his refinement and erudition. For details, see *Xiangshan yelu*, a.12–13.

102 Zhang Fangping 張方平 (1007–1091), "Song gu taizhong dafu shangshu xingbu langzhong fensi Xijing shangzhuguo ci zijin yudai leizeng mouguan Diaogong muzhiming bing xu" 宋故太中大夫尚書刑部郎中分司西京上柱國賜紫金魚袋累贈某官刁公墓誌銘並序, in *Quan Songwen*, 38:826.277.

學), or, the White Deer Grotto Academy, were founded.¹⁰³ No less than several hundred students were enrolled in each institution. According to records, *Guozijian* predated Lushan *Guoxue*. In addition, schools were commonly established in prefectures and counties.¹⁰⁴ Comparatively, *Guozijian* seemed to have progressed more in the Southern Tang than in the Tang.¹⁰⁵ When Li Yu spoke of *Guozijian*, he claimed,

This was a place for the late emperor (*xiandi* 先帝, which refers to Li

103 Directorate of Education in Tang China was a central government agency headed by a Chancellor (*jijiu* 祭酒) that oversaw several schools in the capital, chiefly the National University (*taixue* 太學), the School for the Sons of the State (*guozi xue* 國子學), and the School of the Four Gates (*simen xue* 四門學). Translation of official titles and institutions is based on Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), 299. On institutional details and cultural impact of *guozijian*, consult Liao Jianqi 廖健琦, “Tangdai guozi jian de xueke shezhi” 唐代國子監的學科設置, *Jimei daxue xuebao (jiaoyu kexue ban)* 集美大學學報 (教育科學版) (2002.1): 70–75; idem, “Shilun Tangdai guozi jian zai guojia wenhua lizhi jianshe zhong de zuoyong” 試論唐代國子監在國家文化禮制建設中的作用, *Henan shifan daxue xuebao (Zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 河南師範大學學報 (哲學社會科學版) (2005.1): 129–32; idem, “Tangdai guozi jian zai duiwai wenhua jiaoyu fangmian de zuoyong” 唐代國子監在對外文化教育方面的作用, *Shanxi shida xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 山西師大學報 (社會科學版) (2006.1): 102–04; Cheng Xiaohong 程曉紅, “Jiyu Tangdai guozi jian jiaoxue guanli zhidu tanxi” 基於唐代國子監教學管理制度探析, *Lantai shijie: xiayun* 蘭臺世界: 下旬 (2013.12): 33–34; Zhang Chuansui 張傳燧 and Zhong Weichun 鍾偉春, “Tangdai guozi jian banxue shengkuang shilu” 唐代國子監辦學盛況實錄, *Daxue jiaoyu kexue* 大學教育科學 (2019.2): 77–125. Similar to the Tang, *Taixue* was only one component of education run by the Southern Tang; other components included *Simenxue* 四門學 and *Suanxue* 算學. See Li Quande 李全德, “Shiguo xuexiao zhidu kao” 十國學校制度考, in *Shiguo dianzhi kao* 十國典制考, ed. Ren Shuang 任爽 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), 140–44.

104 *Mashu*, 23.5406.

105 Before the Kaiyuan 開元 era (713–741), government schools supervised by *Guozijian* functioned reasonably well; they served the purpose of preparing qualified students to sit for the civil service examinations. Students who succeeded in passing the civil service examinations were numerous. During that time, those who passed the examination by routes other than via government schools might have had regrets. Since the Kaiyuan era, however, government schools lost esteem as candidates from this route began to drop, in contrast to those who were from Jingzhao 京兆, and the prefectures in the vicinity of the capital, namely Tong 同 and Hua 華. After the An-Shi Rebellion 安史之亂 (755–763), the situation of government schools declined further, until they became a negligible part of the implementation of the civil service examinations. Consult Zhang Xiqing, “Jianlun Tang Song keju zhidu de bianqian (xia),” 20.

Jing) to educate worthy people (*xiancai* 賢材); I also counted on the collaboration with this group of people to govern the country.¹⁰⁶

This piece of information conveys two messages worth analyzing. First, only those who were considered worthy could be admitted by *Guozijian*. Second, they would be part of the bureaucracy and assist the ruler in facilitating good administration for the Southern Tang. Other information on *Guozijian*, as recorded by *Mashu*, is that students who studied at *Guozijian* prepared for and eventually succeeded in passing the *jinshi* examination.¹⁰⁷ Success in the civil service examinations undeniably served as a stepping stone for future bureaucratic careers. As a whole, Li Yu's comment on the usefulness of *Guozijian* indicates his perspective on how the kingdom could be governed well; only civil officials could be counted on while military officials played no evident role in this endeavor.

Although the Southern Tang demonstrated much enthusiasm in reinstating the Tang system, not all government schools could be restored to their prior eminence; schools founded in prefectures and counties had faded into oblivion. The only school sufficiently documented is White Deer Grotto Academy. According to Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) in his “Bailudong die” 白鹿洞牒, in the mid-Shengyuan era, the Academy was founded, and the government bought fields to support the students. The Academy was less strict in its recruitment, and those recruited were primarily commoners.¹⁰⁸ As an increasing number of scholars gathered at the Academy, the government-appointed Li Shandao 李善道, then teaching Nine Classics (*Jiujing* 九經) at *Guozijian*, as the master of the Academy. Li Yu also called upon Zhu Bi 朱弼, who was renowned for his profound study of the Five Commentaries (*Wuzhuan* 五傳) and Confucian classics as well as first place score on the *mingjing* examination, to take charge of the Academy.¹⁰⁹ Based on the above information, the Academy seemed to focus on the study of Confucian classics and served as the place to foster

106 *Mashu*, 23.5409.

107 *Mashu*, 23.5409.

108 Chen Xiuhong 陳秀宏, “Shiguo keju zhidu kao” 十國科舉制度考, in *Shiguo dianzhi kao*, 177–207; Huang Tingshuo, “Tang Song zhiji de dongnan shiren yu zhengzhi: yi Yang Wu Nan Tang wei zhongxin,” 135–36.

109 *Mashu*, 23.5406; *Lushu*, 15.5584.

scholars.¹¹⁰

How to Succeed the *Jinshi* Examinations and Hardship for Examination Candidates

Before the founding of the White Deer Grotto Academy, the Southern Tang had periodically conducted the *jinshi* examination to recruit talent. The *jinshi* examination adopted before the tenth year of Baoda was designed for those who engaged in offering advice by sending memorials to the government. After the Academy was founded, the government did not seem to have any intention to turn the Academy into a training place for the civil service examinations. Because of such disconnection, the Academy did not schedule its students to sit the civil service examinations.¹¹¹

As recorded by *Mashu*, Mao Bing 毛炳 was too poor to support himself; consequently he followed his fellow villagers to Lushan. Although he received compensation for delivering lectures to students, he would squander his earnings on wine and become intoxicated. At that time, Peng Hui 彭會 was known for his keen interest in tea while Mao Bing in wine; it was said that three catties of tea were for Peng Hui's lectures on verses, and half catty of wine for Mao Bing for his lectures on Confucian classics.¹¹² Mao Bing did not teach at the Academy; instead he secluded himself in Lushan and his only connection with the outside world was through delivering lectures to students.¹¹³ Verse and Confucian classics were subjects of tutoring, implying that students were not just limited to Confucian classics in their studies at the Academy. Since the Academy had no particular affiliation with the civil service examinations, while the curriculum might have contained both verse and Confucian classics, the Academy would not force students to participate in training corresponding to the civil service examinations. Attaching great importance to both verse and Confucian classics, focusing on either one,

110 Huang Gan 黃榦 (1152–1221), “Nankangjun xinxiu Bailudong Shuyuan ji” 南康軍新修白鹿洞書院記, in *Quan Songwen*, 288:6557.393. For further information on the White Deer Grotto Academy, consult Li Caidong 李才棟, *Bailudong shuyuan shilüe* 白鹿洞書院史略 (Beijing: Jiaoyu Kexue chubanshe, 1989); idem, *Jiangxi gudai shuyuan yanjiu* 江西古代書院研究 (Nanchang: Jiangxi Jiaoyu chubanshe, 1993); Chen Shunyu 陳舜俞, *Lushan ji* 廬山記 (Shanghai: Shanghai Jiaotong daxue chubanshe, 2011).

111 Ng Pak-sheung, “Nan Tang jinshike kaoshu,” 139.

112 *Mashu*, 15.5362.

113 *Lushu*, 7.5522.

or even going further by pursuing another topic related to the civil service examinations were matters of personal choice for candidates.

Again recorded by *Mashu*, the life event of Jiang Wei 江為 can show the teaching orientation of the White Deer Grotto Academy. Jiang stayed in Lushan, where the Academy was located, and served Chen Kuang 陳旼 as his teacher for twenty years. Jiang eventually gained a high reputation for his poetic style. At that time, the Tang examination system had been enthusiastically restored by the Southern Tang; recruiting talents via the *jinshi* examination was a shining example. Jiang once composed a poem entitled “Ti Bailusi shi” 題白鹿寺詩, a work praised by Li Jing during the emperor’s temporary stay in that temple in the course of moving the capital to Hongzhou. Jiang became arrogant, realizing he was able to *fushi qingzi* 俯拾青紫, literally to obtain a high official position as easily as picking up something from the floor. He then went to Jinling to sit the *jinshi* examination.¹¹⁴

Referring to historical fact, Li Jing initiated his campaign of moving to the capital in the second year of Jianlong 建隆 (961), about twelve years since the restoration of the *jinshi* examination. For many years, Jiang Wei had practiced diligently to master the skill of poetic composition, yet he did not graduate from the White Deer Grotto Academy with the intent to sit the imperial examinations. He decided to try the *jinshi* examination only after his poem was appreciated by Li Jing, praise he presumed would lead to rapid promotion. That is to say, attending the *jinshi* examination was not a requirement upon completion of his studies at the Academy. *Jiangnan yeshi* records the details of the difficulty Jiang experienced in the examination hall in Jinling: his proficiency proved limited to merely the poetry portion, and not a word could be written in the discourse on policy (*celun* 策論). As a result, he was repeatedly flunked by the officials.¹¹⁵

The bitter experiences Jiang Wei suffered reflect the wide range of topics upon which examination candidates would be tested during the examination; that Jiang Wei could not write a single word in the subject of *celun* also implies that he had not received training in such aspect when he studied at the White Deer Grotto Academy. Unaware of the core competencies for which to prepare, Jiang naturally suffered a great deal in his examination experiences. Jiang’s experiences imply how the *jinshi* examination implemented by the Southern Tang differed from that of the Tang; the official educational institution in Tang China provided mock examinations to candidates in order to ensure better

114 *Mashu*, 14.5353.

115 *Jiangnan yeshi*, 8.5215.

performance on the civil service examinations.¹¹⁶

Another student of the White Deer Grotto Academy, Huang Zai 黃載, demonstrated study inclinations different from those of Jiang Wei, as Huang demonstrated proficiency in the study of classics and history and competency in composing literary works. He had also overestimated the importance of studies in classics and history, while underestimating poetic composition. Consequently he failed the examination.¹¹⁷ How, then, could students of the White Deer Grotto Academy successfully obtain scholarly honors from the civil service examinations? According to the experience of Wu Qiao, the most feasible way was to appreciate the importance of attending to both poetic composition and Confucian classics.¹¹⁸ The expanded scope differed from the Tang fashion, whose examination was characterized by a substantial emphasis on poetic writing.¹¹⁹

Such revisions may have been the product of compromise and expediency. As previously mentioned, a number of officials had relegated the *jinshi* examination to a worthless undertaking that would serve no purpose in managing state affairs, and suggested the examination be replaced by the *mingjing* examination to meet recruitment needs. Li Jing wanted to implement the *jinshi* examination, and he had to soften the resistance of his subordinates; one way out was to make concessions to his subordinates by incorporating Confucian classics argumentation into the *jinshi* examination and elevating its significance to equal that of poetic composition.

Another important issue concerning the examination system implemented by the Southern Tang is about the life of candidates in their endeavors in gaining success of the civil service examination (*changwu shengya* 場屋生涯). Conditions for the taking place of *changwu shengya* included three essential components: that the civil service examinations were held on a regular basis; no limitations could be placed on the number of attempts candidates could make; and the government, except in extreme cases, would not exclude any individual from the opportunity to sit the examinations. Before the tenth year of Baoda, the *jinshi* examination was held inconsistently; those who could sit the examination were the literati who had previously offered advice by sending in memorials to the government. Since the tenth year of the Baoda, the *jinshi* examination had become a system characterized by impersonalization;

¹¹⁶ Zhuo Zunhong, *Tangdai jinshi yu zhengzhi*, 168.

¹¹⁷ *Mashu*, 23.5410.

¹¹⁸ *Mashu*, 14.5356–5357.

¹¹⁹ Zhuo Zunhong, *Tangdai jinshi yu zhengzhi*, 168.

candidates could sit for unlimited attempts without penalty.

Success in the civil service examinations could bring many privileges and benefits, which was the primary motivation for many candidates for themselves, or even for their family members.¹²⁰ Qiu Xu's widowed sister-in-law once claimed that if she could aid in the aspiration for glory, even her only child could be sold.¹²¹ In other words, any means could be attempted in pursuit of success in the civil service examinations. Motivated by benefits, the number of examination candidates tremendously increased, thus intensifying competition. Owing to the large number of literati, even those who came from scholarly families could not be guaranteed a successful outcome.¹²² For example, Zhang Huan 章奐, father of Zhang Dexiang 章得象 (978–1048), was celebrated for Confucian learning. But he did not pass the civil service examinations; instead, he could only attain the “rank of Heaven” (*tianjue* 天爵) by remaining at home for the rest of his life.¹²³

Sometimes, the presiding ruler's perspective on the examination affected its degree of difficulty. Li Yu emphasized recruiting talent, and he thus ordered re-testing of the candidates to avoid losing any potential talent. In the fifth year of kaibao, Zhang Bi 張泌 was appointed chief examiner. Zhang Ji 張洎 (934–997), serving as academician of the Clear Brilliance Hall (*Qinghuidian xueshi* 清輝殿學士), told Li Yu that Zhang would certainly be not able to enlist all of the talents due to mismanagement. As a result, Li Yu ordered to test the unsuccessful participants again. Wang Lun 王倫, together with other four, passed the examination.¹²⁴

Nevertheless, the endeavor to enlist lost talents was not equivalent to indiscriminate conferment of scholarly honor on those who sat the civil service examinations. As a matter of fact, Li Yu was highly aware that fluke and unfairness might take place in the civil service examinations. Liu Chang 劉敞 (1019–1068) claimed that the Southern Tang had inherited the custom handed down from the Tang dynasty; candidates would have great difficulty passing

120 The *jinshi* degree garnered more prestige than the others, but none of the related primary sources has ever directly explained why the *jinshi* degree was particularly valued. The author tends to believe the profound respect for, or sometimes even obsession with the examinations, was a sign of continuity of Tang fashion.

121 *Mashu*, 23.5410.

122 Zheng Xie 鄭獬 (1022–1072), “Shangshu douguan langzhong Wanggong muzhiming” 尚書都官郎中王公墓誌銘, in *Quan Songwen*, 68:1481.195.

123 Song Qi 宋祈 (998–1061), “Wenxian Zhanggong muzhiming” 文憲章公墓誌銘, in *Quan Songwen*, 25:528.127.

124 *Lushu*, 3.5490.

the civil service examinations conducted by the Ministry of Rites.¹²⁵ The degree of difficulty sufficiently prevented those with mediocre ability from distinguishing themselves; even candidates of high literary reputation could not be guaranteed desirable results. According to historical facts, major upsets frequently occurred. Yue Shi 樂史 (930–1007), commonly known as a famous scholar, had long suffered obstruction in his experiences with the civil service examinations.¹²⁶

Han Xizai 韓熙載 (902–970) enjoyed gathering large numbers of Confucian scholars; those who demonstrated aptitude would be invited to serve as his disciples.¹²⁷ Among the group, Shu Ya 舒雅 (d. 1009) was held in particularly high regard. *Mashu* records that upon first meeting with Shu, Han felt as though the two were old friends. Han thus accommodated him and provided him with daily necessities and treated him as a good friend despite the great age difference (*wangnianjiao* 忘年交) between them. It so happened that Han was appointed chief examiner and granted Shu first place in the examination; there was no gossip in the court and among people, as everyone considered Shu worthy of the honor out of his literary ability.¹²⁸ Han Xizai had been highly respected by Li Yu, and Shu Ya's first place was widely recognized by scholar-officials, but Li Yu did not feel comfortable with the result. Li then ordered Xu Xuan, who served as a drafter in the secretariat, to re-test Shu Ya and the other four successful candidates. They strongly objected, so Li Yu handled the case personally by assigning the title for poetic composition and ordered the official serving at the Secretariat to conduct the affair. All five candidates failed.¹²⁹ Likewise, Feng Yanlu's 馮延魯 son Feng Zhuan 馮僕 had acquired an impressive literary reputation; his peers equated his success in the civil service examinations with the ease of picking orange osmanths (*pingzhe dangui* 平折丹桂). He could not, however, escape the fate of being flunked in the examination presided over by the ruler.¹³⁰

To the examination candidates in the Southern Tang, the ability to pass the examination guaranteed inexplicable happiness. *Jiangnan yuzai* records an event that might indicate the great delight of those who passed: In the early

125 Liu Chang 劉敞 (1019–1068), “Xianzu moka fujun jiazhuang” 先祖磨勘府君家傳, in *Quan Songwen*, 59:1295.378.

126 *Lushu*, 8.5531.

127 *Mashu*, 13.5348.

128 *Mashu*, 22.5401.

129 *Lushu*, 13.5652.

130 *Nan Tang jinshi*, 1.5051.

Kaibao era, Qi Yu 齊愈 passed the examination and kept in step with other successful candidates to the White Gate (Baimen 白門). Riding horseback, he spontaneously and uncontrollably burst into laughter and fell from the saddle. The postilion lent an arm to support him and he regained consciousness for a good while, as he was overjoyed at having so achieved his personal fame.¹³¹

Nevertheless, a reaction of overjoy, as Qi Yu exhibited, was certainly atypical among examination candidates. Rather most of the candidates suffered in misery and disappointment in their pursuit of seeking scholarly honor (*keming* 科名). As for the extent of hardship the *changwu shengya* candidates had to suffer during their civil service examination experience, the limited number of successful candidates should not be considered a reliable indicator. First, the timespan for implementation was relatively short, approximately 24 years. Second, the rate of success was remarkably low due to the stringent passing standard held by the authorities, as previously described by Liu Chang. Given the degree of difficulty candidates needed to satisfy on their path to examination success, the author tends to believe the hardships were extreme or even unbearable for those who were determined to prosper themselves through examination success.

Jishen lu 稽神錄 provides a vivid description of the mindset of the unsuccessful participants: There was no place for those who wanted to withdraw and return home for farming, nor for burial after death. Poverty and illness prevailed, and there was no more life and vitality. Therefore the loser prayed for death.¹³² According to the story, Zhao Yu 趙瑜 lived in Lu 魯 and sat the *mingjing* examination; he begged for death at the temple dedicated to the mountain deity in Tai Shan 泰山, information indicating that Zhao was a Northerner. Although Xu did not believe in Buddhism, he had a strong faith in the legend of ghosts and deities.¹³³ When compiling *Jishen lu*, Xu managed to collect stories believed to have taken place in the Southern Tang. The story of Zhao Yu may have previously been spread by word of mouth, and local candidates had a remarkable sense of reciprocity. In this sense, Zhao's suffering might reflect the misery of those who repeatedly failed in their attempts at success in the civil service examinations.

Excessive suffering, or even an impasse, could drive unsuccessful participants to take drastic actions. When a candidate surnamed Wang failed the civil service examinations on his first attempt, he threw the books on the

131 *Jiangnan yuzai*, a.5111.

132 Xu Xuan 徐鉉 (916–997), *Jishen lu* 稽神錄 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1996), 6.95.

133 *Changbian*, 8.193.

ground and announced, “I should not engage in the study of trivial chapters and phrases to ingratiate myself with mediocre people.” Wang then became a Buddhist monk.¹³⁴

In pursuit of scholarly honor, some unsuccessful participants completely ignored all sense of integrity and demeanor expected of intellectuals. To express their grievances in the country, some would stand under the bridge that was exclusively used by the ruler, an act known as *baiqiao* 拜橋, meaning the loser did obeisance when the ruler appeared in order to draw his attention and preferably seek his help. In addition, some unsuccessful participants selected the way of *baidian* 拜殿, meaning entering the palace without permission to request an imperial audience. The most extreme case was to carry a big hatchet to hammer a long nail into the foot (*dingjiao* 釘腳). During the reign of Li Yu, Ceng Yi 曾顛 and Xie Mi 謝泌 (950–1012) failed the examination. In response, Ceng nailed his foot and Xie committed *baidian* to call for justice. As a result, contemporaries criticized that scholarly style was left in the dust.¹³⁵

Ceng Yi’s actions may have paid off: after nailing his foot, he passed the examination in the fifth year of Kaibao. As for Xie Mi, *Songshi* credits him with having high moral principles. But based on his actions following failure on the *jinshi* examination, *Songshi* might contain merely words of fulsome praise. *Songshi* also records that Xie Mi claimed himself the twenty-seventh grandson of Xie An 謝安 (320–385). If Xie Mi’s claim were true, he had committed a shameful act, even though he was the descendant of a well-known historical figure. This event can be interpreted as an example of the desperation unsuccessful participants could experience when they were no longer able to endure the misery in the examination hall anymore; they were then willing to sacrifice integrity and family reputation in order to pass the examination. While Xie Mi had managed to impress the ruler by uttering cries of anguish at the palace, he was never able to pass the civil service examinations during the reign of the Southern Tang. This event reflects how unsuccessful participants reached the end of their rope; their sorrows were really deplorable.

Since competition in the civil service examinations was remarkably fierce in the Southern Tang, some unsuccessful participants managed to try their luck elsewhere. Sneaking out of the country to sit the civil service examinations implemented by other regimes was illegal. Despite this, some unsuccessful participants were willing to take the risk. *Changbian* records that in the eighth year of Kaibao, having failed the examination, two *jinshi* from Jiangnan named

¹³⁴ *Mashu*, 26.5425.

¹³⁵ *Jiangnan Yuzai*, a.5111.

Lin Song 林松 and Lei Shuo 雷說 fled to Song territories. Considering that the pair had come seeking shelter, the Song government granted them *Sanzhuan chushen* 三傳出身, signifying that they could enter the government via status as the passers of *Sanzhuan*.¹³⁶

Besides sitting the civil service examinations in the Southern Tang, some literati traveled to North China to sit the examinations set by the Later Liang, Later Tang, and the Northern Song, respectively.¹³⁷ After repeatedly failing the examinations, Zhao Qi 趙綺 planned to cross the Yangtze River to Bianjing 汴京, capital of the Northern Song, to try his luck. Unfortunately he was captured by patrol agents before he could cross the border and sent to the chamberlain for prosecution (*tingwei* 廷尉). When Zhao was in jail, he sent a memorandum to Li Yu, lamenting that he had come to know how truly “respectable” prison officers were, using sarcasm to convey their formidable and overly authoritative style. Li Yu, upon reading Zhao’s message, reacted with sympathy and replied: “Although Li Ling 李陵 (d. 74 BCE) committed the fault of being ungrateful, the Han dynasty also failed to live up to the principle of virtue.” Li Yu then pardoned Zhao’s wrongdoing simply because he appreciated his literary performance; Li Yu’s decision reflects an exceptional case. Upon his release, Zhao resumed his endeavor and succeeded in winning the honor of principal graduate, a designation for the candidate with first place standing on the final examination.¹³⁸

Those who experienced repeated failure would often harbor resentment for their country – some of whom even developed treasonous tendencies. As *Jiangnan yeshi* records, stemming from repeated rejection by examination officials, Jiang Wei returned to his hometown feeling disgruntled and consequently lost self-control. He conspired with several dozen families to defect to Wu Yue. Just as his confederacy informed the government, local police forces took immediate action and apprehended all conspirators. The government successfully elicited the details of the plot through interrogation and subsequently executed those involved.¹³⁹

136 *Songshi*, 155.3606–7. *Sanzhuan* is short for *Chunqiu Sanzhuan* 春秋三傳, or, *Three Commentaries on the Spring and Autumn Annals*. The term *jinshi* in this context refers to those who sat the *jinshi* examination but had not yet passed. These pair may have realized that they would not find success in the civil service examinations in their home country and thus fled to the Northern Song to try their luck.

137 Huang Tingshuo, “Tang Song zhiji de dongnan shiren yu zhengzhi: yi Yang Wu Nan Tang wei zhongxin,” 300–1.

138 *Jiangnan yuzai*, a.5111.

139 *Jiangnan yeshi*, 8.5215.

Similarly, a turncoat from Jiangnan by the name of Fan Ruoshui 樊若水 (943–994), defected to the Northern Song in response to his grave disappointment with the civil service examinations. Fan came from a family of officials; his father served as magistrate of Hanyang 漢陽 at the end of the Baoda era and died while in office. The family then settled in Chizhou 池州. Fan took the *jinshi* examination many times, but failed every time.¹⁴⁰ In retaliation, he sought every opportunity to destroy his home country. During the operation against the Southern Tang, Fan Ruoshui 樊若水 (943–994) rendered many indispensable services to Song Taizu 宋太祖 (Zhao Kuangyin 趙匡胤, r. 960–976). He not only suggested building a pontoon bridge across the Yangtze River, but, thoroughly dedicated to his duty, showed “no affection for his native place” during the siege of Jinling.¹⁴¹ Following the collapse of the Southern Tang, Fan took revenge on those who had been impolite to him when he lived in poverty.¹⁴² Thus it was no wonder people in Jiangnan, as described in *Yuhu qinghua*, “had the trees planted around the graves of his ancestors cut down completely” and “dug up his ancestral tombs and threw the bones into the river.”¹⁴³ The Northern Song, however, reacted otherwise: the regime considered Fan Ruoshui’s actions of profound significance to the process of national unification and rewarded him handsomely.

Nevertheless, extreme cases were quite rare, as most candidates would do whatever they could to repeat their attempts, thus unyielding efforts were again and again repeated in history. Qiu Xu could still preserve his courage to continue his attempts with excitement and single-hearted devotion, unashamed

140 Chen Pengnian 陳彭年 (961–1017), *Jiangnan biele*, 5139.

141 *Yuhu qinghua*, 8:81. The disaster to the Southern Tang caused by Fan Ruoshui’s hatred was serious. In tracing the activities of his ancestors in the Southern Tang, Lü Nangong 呂南公 (1047–1086) stated that the residence of his ancestors, which was built outside the wall of Jinling, was burned to the ground thanks to Fan’s suggestion to the Northern Song Commander. See Lü Nangong, “Lüshi jiaxi” 呂氏家系, in *Quan Songwen*, 109:2372.309.

142 Wu Zeng 吳曾, *Nenggaizhai manlu* 能改齋漫錄 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1987), 12.351; *Songshi*, 276.9394.

143 *Yuhu qinghua*, 8.81; Shi Xubai 史虛白 (894–961), *Diaoji litan* 釣磯立談, in *Wudai shishu huibian*, 5013. However, Fan Ruoshui’s treachery was an exception; most commoners and officials were loyal to the Li regime during the war against the Northern Song. Following the war, many ex-officials from Jiangnan were not willing to deal with him. In one instance, when Peng Ao 蒯鼈 served the Northern Song as an aide of palace administration (*dianzhong cheng* 殿中丞), Fan recommended Peng Ao to a higher post, but Peng was ashamed to receive his help. Peng immediately asked to resign and went into hiding as a recluse on Lu Mountain. See *Lushu*, 14.5575.

of repeated failures; only after exhausting all his savings did he develop a sense of hopelessness.¹⁴⁴

Some candidates even continued their examination pursuits into the Northern Song. By the time the Southern Tang was annexed by the Northern Song, a commoner (*baiding* 白丁) named Pan Bi 潘賁 had already sat the civil service examinations five times. The vice director of the left (*zuo puye* 左僕射) Shen Yilun 沈義倫 (900–987) was so astonished by Pan's abilities that he recruited him as his disciple. Pan continued his examination endeavors and earned the qualification to attend the palace examination three times. However, each time he was about to attend the examination, he was barred due to eye disease. Still, Shen Yilun managed to recommend Pan right before his own death. By the time Shen's last memorandum reached the emperor, Pan had already fallen sick. Pan lamented his own deplorable destiny: "Spending the whole life in the examination hall even to the time when the hair is sprinkled with gray, but never to pass the examination. Wouldn't it be destiny (*baishou changwu, budeng yidi, qifei ming ye* 白首場屋，不登一第，豈非命耶)!" Pan died before Shen's request was granted imperial approval.¹⁴⁵ The quoted event captures the essence of sorrow the examination endeavors often elicited. *Baishou changwu, budeng yidi* was definitely the common destiny for countless examination candidates; their sorrow could never be uttered enough.

Although the *jinshi* examination was sufficient for attracting scores of candidates, occasionally some sober-minded literati viewed the examination as an inadequate assessment of academic truth. Guo Zhaoqing 郭昭慶 had gained a reputation of profound proficiency in the study of classics and history, and his writings employed anecdotes of the past to allude to the present. When he submitted his writings during the reign of Li Jing, his efforts were thwarted; courtiers advised that he attend the *jinshi* examination. Guo was indignant and sent a message to the court, arguing that his writings embodied essential teachings of the ancient sages, fulfilling the main objective of such works; without this noble intention, all scholarly works were simply literary skills of no higher order. Guo also proudly claimed that even in his youth, he felt ashamed to write something like that.¹⁴⁶

Some candidates took the *jinshi* examination and failed only once. They came to understand their mistakes, which they did not repeat. When Huang Zai failed his first attempt in the civil service examinations he sighed, "Literati

144 *Mashu*, 23.5410.

145 *Mashu*, 23.5408.

146 *Mashu*, 14.5355.

have been trashing themselves for a long time. They have confined themselves to a clumsy and shallow literary style in order to meet the requirements of the examinations and placed their fate of acceptance or rejection in the hands of officials in charge. Is it not just too remote from grasping the truth?" Huang never sat the examination again.¹⁴⁷ However, given that most literati were obsessed with their examination pursuits and determined to stay the course, Huang Zai's words were inconsistent with a popular view among his contemporaries.

Throughout the history of the civil service examinations in imperial China, it is obvious that the system had been characterized by unbearable hardship for examination candidates in all dynasties in which the system was implemented. In this sense, what the examination candidates of the Southern Tang had suffered was not unique in any way. Despite the limitation that nothing unique concerning the hardship for examination candidates during the Southern Tang can be found, the present study argues that reconstructing what had happened in the past is part of the historical study, and this is why related events deserve to be incorporated into the article.

Social and Cultural Impact

Another interesting issue prevails as to whether or not the Southern Tang examination system succeeded in generating any trace of social and cultural impact that would ultimately shape certain historical developments.¹⁴⁸ Below are some arguments aimed to highlight the social and cultural roles played by the Southern Tang in the context of regional significance.

Unlike Tang candidates, those who sat the civil service examinations

¹⁴⁷ *Mashu*, 23.5410.

¹⁴⁸ Social and cultural innovations that took place in South China during the Tang-Song Interregnum have drawn Clark's attention: "But the interregnum was important for more than the consolidation of the southern economies. This was also an era of social and cultural transformation across the south. Much as the economic transformation redefined the relationship between the south and the empire, so innovations in society and culture set the stage for the dramatic changes of the Song and the later imperial period." See Clark, "Why Does the Tang-Song Interregnum Matter? Part Two: The Social and Cultural Initiatives of the South," 1.

in the Southern Tang were primarily of humble background.¹⁴⁹ It has always been an interesting issue concerning how examination candidates could gain access to the resources, particularly education, which enabled them to succeed in the civil service examinations. Assuredly, the wide availability of learning opportunities played an important role in diversifying the talent pool among test-takers. As previously discussed, both the government and private academies fulfilled the goal. Definitely, this topic deserves further examination.

Since the social and cultural backgrounds of candidates in the Tang and the Southern Tang vastly differed, the significance of succeeding in the civil service examinations varied accordingly. In Tang China, the perpetuation of aristocratic families counted on three interconnected components: achieving success in the civil service examinations, securing roles in bureaucracy, and returning deceased family members to the metropolitan areas (*jingji* 京畿) for burial. Since family background alone could no longer guarantee ascent on the ladder of bureaucratic success, aristocratic families, who no longer placed primary importance on nurturing their home base at the local level, began to develop an enthusiasm for obtaining the *jinshi* degree as a way of adjusting to the new environment. Against this background, examination success was only the first step on their path to success; attaining roles in bureaucracy was also vital to the survival and prosperity of aristocratic families. When family members died, their bodies would be transported for burial in ancestral graveyards located in the vicinities of the capitals (*guizang jingji* 歸葬京畿). The practice was conducted not for sentimental reasons, but as a measure aristocratic families commonly equated with success; only prospering aristocratic families could afford such a practice.

When the capitals and their environs plunged into chaos and war, these former methods for aristocratic families to affirm success would dissolve accordingly: without the civil service examinations, which had enabled aristocratic families to distinguish themselves by means of examination success; having relinquished the opportunity to engage in homeland burial

149 Humble background in this context refers to origin not affiliated with aristocratic families. For further details, consult Ng Pak-sheung, "Aristocratic families in the Jianghuai region during the Tang-Song Interregnum," *Journal of Chinese Humanities* (Forthcoming). On the humble origin of those who succeeded in gaining the *jinshi* degree, also consult Huang Tingshuo, "Tang Song zhiji de dongnan shiren yu zhengzhi," 198–202; Idem, Appendix 10: Nan Tang jinshi dengdi renwubiao 南唐進士登第人物表, 302–5.

practices to refresh their sentimental attachment to the *jingji*; and lacking the bureaucratic careers necessary in continuing their superior position, this privileged class could not survive. Facing these simultaneous adversities, the only destiny awaiting was the total elimination of this elite social order.¹⁵⁰ By contrast, Southern Tang candidates in general were from humble backgrounds and did not feel the need to highlight their social status by engaging in gestures such as returning their deceased family members to the capital area for burial. This social difference can definitely explain why candidates in the Tang and the Southern Tang would act differently after they succeeded in the civil service examinations.

Another issue related to social impact concerns whether or not the civil service examinations facilitated upward social mobility. The assumption that examination success equated with upward social mobility has been refuted again and again, evidenced by the dominant position exclusively enjoyed by the Tang aristocratic families, the wealthy, and families of officials in other dynasties founded afterward. However, the situation of the Southern Tang was dramatically different, as candidates of humble backgrounds were competing among themselves while most offspring of officials counted on the practice of *yin* to facilitate their entry into bureaucracy. As such, the civil service examinations implemented by the Southern Tang may be the only exception upon which the assumption of upward social mobility can be validated.

Besides the social aspect, cultural implication is another point worthy of scholarly discussion in the study of the Southern Tang examination system. Institutionally, the Southern Tang may not have directly contributed much towards helping to shape the Song civil service examinations, but if viewed from a regional perspective, its examination system did perform a significant function in culturally transforming the Jianghuai region, which consequently had a remarkable impact on Song China.

When Yang Wu was first founded, the regime was heavily characterized by militancy and disdain for culture, as Yang Xingmi himself and most of

¹⁵⁰ For details, consult Ng Pak-sheung, “History of Aristocratic Families in Tang China: Part 2, The Ultimate Demise,” *Journal of Asian History* 55, no. 2 (2021): 217–50.

his subordinates were intrinsically local hoodlums.¹⁵¹ When Xu Zhigao dominated the Yang Wu administration, he made efforts to transform the nature of the regime by implementing civil transformation based on measures closely associated with civil administration, such as recruitment of literati to officialdom and administration of civil service examinations.¹⁵² As a result, Jianghuai would become a preeminent cultural center in the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms era. The cultural transformation of Jianghuai enabled the region to play a significant role in enriching Song culture, thanks to cultural developments closely connected with the civil service examinations; book collection was a major item in this regard. Book collection created the need for the refinement of both printing methods and textual collation. Such refinement laid a solid foundation for further developments in Song China.¹⁵³

Despite that misery had become an inevitable part of *changwu shengya*, the civil service examinations, after all, provided local literati with ample opportunity to strengthen their skills; the superiority of their examination skills

151 Clark's study on how a widespread social phenomenon, namely *wulai* 無賴 and *renxia* 任俠, vividly demonstrates how the nature of many regimes during the late Tang as well as the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms was shaped. Clark renders *wulai* as "lacking passivity" or "lacking contentment." The term "connotes the very kind of predatory aggressiveness toward others that Mencius defined as *bao* 暴." *Bao* in any occasions means "violent" or "cruel." Interestingly, *renxia*, which is "using authority, strength, or wealth to help the weak," was another concept always instrumental in characterizing how local hoodlums strengthened their power in chaotic periods, even though the two concepts seem contradictory. For details, see Clark, "Scoundrels, Rogues, and Refugees: The Founders of the Ten Kingdoms in the Late Ninth Century," in *Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms*, ed. Peter Lorge (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2011), 48–51. For details of the behavior of Yang Xingmi and his meritorious officials, consult Ng Pak-sheung, "On Yang Xingmi's Bloc," 40–94.

152 The author has written an article specifically discussing the issue. Consult "On Civil Transformation of the Southern Tang" (forthcoming).

153 Su Yongqiang, "Wudai shiqi Nan Tang jiaokan rencai ji qi yinshua chuantong," 139–48.

was well demonstrated in Song China.¹⁵⁴ Also, in contrast to the predominant position formerly enjoyed by Northern aristocratic families in the Tang, literati from the Southeastern region emerged as a powerful contingent in Song China.¹⁵⁵ The geographical preponderance of literati from the territorial domains of the Southern Tang in particular sufficiently marked the completion of a southward movement of the cultural center (*wenhua zhongxin nanyi* 文化重心南移) as well as the group's prominent role in shaping the Song administrative mechanism and politics.¹⁵⁶

As a whole, the cultural impact of the Southern Tang somewhat calls for a reconsideration of the Tang-Song Transformation theory. Scholars

154 Although many reasons might account for such historical phenomenon, the author attributes this trend to the intense difficulty of the civil service examinations that were widely experienced by Southern Tang candidates. See Ng Pak-sheung, "Nan Tang jinshike kaoshu," 141–49. As for scholarship focusing on institutional development and implementation of the civil service examinations, as well as the social and cultural impact on Song China, see Araki Toshikazu, *Sodai kakyo seido kenkyu*; Thomas Lee, *Government Education and Examinations in Sung China*; John W. Chaffee, *The Thorny Gates of Learning in Sung China: A Social History of Examinations*. In addition, Chaffee published a book with a chapter detailing the developments and reforms related to the examination system and recruitment in Song China. Consult "Sung education: schools, academies, and examinations," in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 5.2, "Sung China, 960–1279," ed. Denis Twitchett and John W. Chaffee (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 286–320.

155 Concerning the issue of examination candidates from South China superseding those from the North in terms of success rates, consult Liang Gengyao 梁庚堯, *Zhongguo shehui shi* 中國社會史 (Taipei: National Taiwan University Press, 2014), 194–202.

156 This issue has drawn profound scholarly attention. For details of related discussions, see Robert M. Hartwell, "Demographical, political, and social transformations of China, 750–1550," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 42, no. 2 (1982): 365–442; Ni Shiyi 倪士毅 and Xu Jijun 徐吉軍, "Lun Zhongguo wenhua zhongxin nanyi de yuanyin" 論中國文化重心南移的原因, *Hangzhou daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue Ban)* 杭州大學學報 (哲學社會科學版) (1989.2): 127–33; Cheng Minsheng 程民生, "Luelun Songdai diyu wenhua" 略論宋代地域文化, *Lishi yanjiu* 歷史研究 (1995.1): 55–72; Zhang Quanming 張全明, "Shixi Songdai Zhongguo chuantong wenhua zhongxin de nanyi" 試析宋代中國傳統文化重心的南移, *Jiangnan luntan* 江漢論壇 2 (2002): 67–71. For further discussion on the relations between Northern Chinese cultures and those of the South, also consult Victor H. Mair and Liam C. Kelley, *Imperial China and its Southern Neighbours* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2015). Recently, Clark published two articles with an emphasis on regional transformation in South China during the Tang-Song Interregnum. See "Why Does the Tang-Song Interregnum Matter? A Focus on the Economies of the South," 1–28; idem, "Why Does the Tang-Song Interregnum Matter? Part Two: The Social and Cultural Initiatives of the South," 1–31.

tend to associate the Song dynasty's glorious cultural attainments with the Tang dynasty, and identify both the Tang and the Song as critical periods of transformation. The concept and periodization of the Tang-Song transformation might not suffice to account for the shaping of Song culture. Cultural achievement in Song China did not emerge overnight; rather, it involved a long process of assimilation and accommodation that led to the new alignment. Definitely, the Southern Tang played a significant role in this process.¹⁵⁷

Conclusion

Echoing the aims enumerated in the introduction and the issues discussed in the main body, here are the concluding remarks:

This study attempts to explore the validity of anecdotes and *guobieshi* in historical accounts. In spite of the general consensus that the genre lacks credibility and reliability in substantiating historical events, anecdotes indeed record a substantial number of social and cultural events and can sufficiently supplement standard histories for their inadequacies. The significance of *guobieshi* in regional studies is also highlighted. Without the information recorded by *Mashu*, *Lushu*, and *Jiangnan yeshi*, discussions on historical issues in this article would not have been possible. In this sense, *guobieshi* can be instrumental in preventing the history of regional regimes from sinking into oblivion.

When Xu Zhigao presided over the Wu, the *tongzi* and *mingjing* examinations were in place. When the Southern Tang was founded, Xu Zhigao introduced the *jinshi* examination – a major part of the civil service examinations implemented during the Southern Tang. Although the *jinshi* examination appeared during Xu Zhigao's reign, it was sporadically implemented. Only the *jinshi* examination established during Li Jing's reign would be considered the most comprehensive and similar to the old Tang system, as well as of the most profound social and political significance.

157 Ng Pak-sheung, "Cultural Interactions and Competitions," 255–319. Concerning the significance of South China in shaping Song culture, also consult Clark's following books: *Community, Trade, and Networks: Southern Fujian Province from the Third to the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); *Portrait of a Community: Society, Culture, and the Structures of Kinship in the Mulan River Valley (Fujian) from the Late Tang through the Song* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2007); *The Sinitic Encounter in Southeast China through the First Millennium CE* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016).

The ruling family of the Southern Tang enjoyed boasting itself as the inheritor of the Tang. Due to this mindset, the regime tended to pattern on Tang institutions; implementation of the *jinshi* was among the endeavors. However, the circumstances surrounding its implementation differed greatly from those of the Tang. Since most of the officials in the highest echelon of the central government were not appointed based on exam credentials, their importance would be overshadowed by those who entered the bureaucracy based on their *jinshi* degree if the Southern Tang were to place a high worth on the examination system. In order to protect their vested interest, high-ranking officials tried their best to relegate the *jinshi*-accredited officials as frivolous or even villainous. In order to mitigate the rough situation, the Southern Tang had to modify the system according to contemporary needs; for example, the examination now emphasized the importance of Confucian classics. In brief, the establishment of the examination system and details of implementation serve as an approach to how institutional changes correlated with reality.

Concerning the Southern Tang's role during the Tang-Song transitional period, the civil service examinations can be one of the foci. As competition in the examination hall grew fierce, candidates struggled to distinguish themselves, particularly in the *jinshi* examination. As previously discussed, if one aimed to succeed in the civil service examinations, erudition alone would not suffice; rather a thorough comprehension of the examination requirements was essential. Although the path to success seemed simple and straightforward, countless candidates lived in misery while on their journey. On the other hand, the civil service examinations facilitated upward social mobility, as substantiated by historical facts stating that most of the successful candidates were from humble backgrounds, tremendously different from the situation in Tang China.

Continuity of the advantage possessed by literati in the territorial domain of the Southern Tang can be observed even after the collapse of their home country. The adversity they sustained might have contributed toward their outstanding performance over those from the Northern region in the Song dynasty. As such, this article intends to suggest that the Song cultural and social features did not emerge overnight, nor did they emerge entirely on their own; instead these features were products of a long process of assimilation and accommodation that led to the new alignment. The civil service examinations surely played a role in revitalizing cultural tradition in Jianghuai, which served as a significant region to shape the Song culture.

Echoing the discussion on regional significance, the Tang-Song Transformation theory has an obvious structural defect: the theory focuses on

the overall dynasties while comparatively overlooking regional uniqueness. Regarding the validity of conceptual framework, this study claims that historical issues of regional significance that took place in Tang-Song China can be better comprehended when placed in the Tang-Song Interregnum concept; the role of the Southern Tang in the context of the civil examinations serves as a good example.

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南唐科舉考試——區域和歷史意義

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運用軼事和國別史資料，本文的寫作要旨是闡述徐知誥及其後人推行新法，以招納知識份子進入統治架構。南唐一直標榜繼承唐朝制度，藉以展示與這個朝代的承傳關係。採納科舉制度，尤其是進士科，便成為唐朝制度繼承者的政治宣傳。進士科早在徐知誥時代推行，但當時的性質只屬於臨時安排而不是固定制度。自從李璟繼位，即以唐代舊制作為依據而大幅修改南唐早期所推行的科舉制。影響所及，進士科便成為知識份子入仕政府的最受尊崇途徑。然而，南唐立國環境及所要面對的問題，相較唐代畢竟有很大分別。職是之故，科舉制度部分條文備受修改以迎合時代需要。南唐推行科舉的過程之中，為數不少的考生經歷苦痛失望。極度艱難困境之下，有些考生乃鋌而走險，採取激烈手段作為回應。

關鍵詞：南唐 科舉考試 進士科考試 唐宋變革 唐宋權力空白期

