

# 上升的階梯 清代士人的科考生活

## 一 設科取士

鄉、會試以四書、五經為題，四書為《論語》、《孟子》、《大學》及《中庸》；五經是《詩經》、《尚書》、《禮記》、《易經》和《春秋》。此外也考時務策，題目包含當時民政、經濟、懲弊等各項時務。應試方式有固定制式格套，俗稱「八股文」。

清代「設科取士，文武並重」，武科鄉、會試和文科制度類似，考試分成三場。頭場、二場為外場考試，測試騎馬射箭、定點射箭，還有開弓、舞刀、掇石等技勇。第三場為內場考試，前期考策論，後改為默寫武經，用以揀選出「允文允武」的人才。

## 二 應試生活

清代雖延續明代的科舉制度，然而實質上錄取率已大大降低，讀書人為獲得官身，可能窮其一生都在準備考試。從赴考生活、備考生活及經濟生活三個層面，討論科舉影響下的士人生活與形象。

鄉、會試赴考過程中，考生從家鄉到省城、再到京師應考，路途遙遠艱險，除了開銷甚大，也時而面臨許多問題。科舉考試以四書五經為題，八股文格式應答，考試規範明確，也造就大量的科考用書的出版，除了四書、五經講章外，更出現許多追求速成的經書刪減本、八股文選本。許多讀書人長期備考導致家庭產生沉重的經濟負擔，有的讀書人藉由教書、編書來補貼生計，或擔任幕客。備考生活雖苦，然而一旦獲得功名，即躋身仕紳階級。因此仍有無數家庭、宗族投入大量資源培養子弟參加科考。

## 三 棘闈內外

一座貢院含括「棘場」和「闈場」，棘場是科舉考試的考場，闈場是辦理考試時，供考官命題、印製試題及批改答卷的場所。環繞棘、闈之間，各式作弊方法應運而生。

鄉、會試考試前需嚴格搜檢，以防考生偷偷夾帶巾箱本、小抄，或有槍手頂替、調換考房；闈場為防抽換答卷、考題傳遞等常見的作弊方式，辦理考試時所有試務人員只進不出，食宿皆在此中，直至出榜。每場鄉、會試都有諸多試務人員嚴守貢院，然而從檔案中仍可見到層出不窮的弊案。

## 四 金榜題名

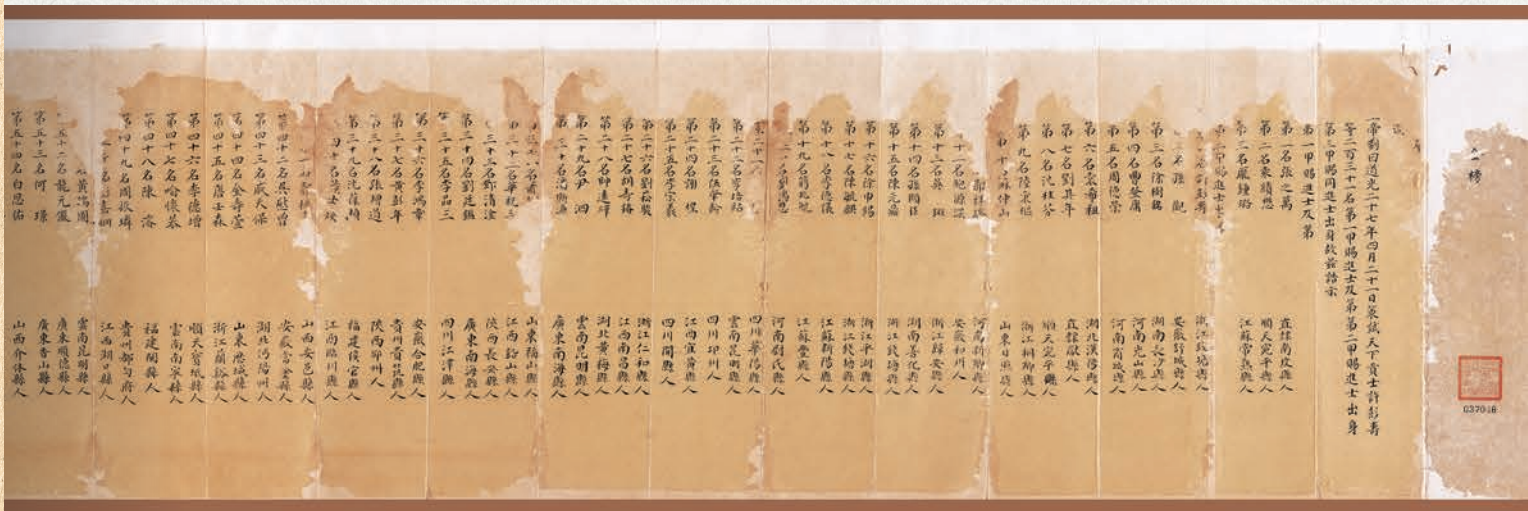
文、武殿試後，將成績分為三甲等第寫於金榜上，懸掛於東、西長安門外三天，對讀書人而言可說是無上的榮耀。然而，通過殿試僅有一甲前三名得以直接授官，二、三甲進士仍須通過朝考，再分任中央、地方各級職官。清代中葉後不但面臨錄取率愈發低落的狀況，且中式後不一定有實缺可直接補授，授官後可能也等不到升遷機會。科考中式雖一舉成名，然而，後續的宦海浮沉，又有誰人知！



# LADDER OF SUCCESS

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道光二十七年文殿試小金榜（局部） Small Golden Placard of the Civil Palace Examination, Twenty-Seventh Year of the Daoguang Emperor (1847)

科舉制度為歷史悠久的國家選官制度，從隋代創立到大清帝國入主中原，已持續了大約一千年。清代為了收攏社會菁英，延續科舉取才的制度，讀書人通過競爭激烈的科舉考試獲取任官資格，然科舉不只是進入官方體制工作，更代表了一個身份上升的社會機制。除了中式者，其家族社會身份、地位也會產生改變。

本展覽環繞士人的科考生活，透過檔案、古籍、小說，讓我們一探清代士人的追求功名的各種心路歷程。

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The imperial civil service examination system, a long-established state institution for the selection of government officials, lasted for a thousand years from the Sui (581–618) to the Qing dynasty (1644–1911). In the Qing Empire, the exam system was continued to recruit talent, and for those able to pass the highly competitive exams, the system provided the opportunity for not only an official posting but also social upward mobility. This “ladder of success” was thus so impactful that the social identity and status of their families, not just the candidates themselves, would be forever changed.

Revolving around the life of the scholars taking part, this exhibition offers a glimpse into their pursuit of fame and fortune—full of both ups and downs—through archival materials, rare texts, and novels.

## 1 A System Designed for the Scholar

The questions of the Qing provincial and metropolitan exams were centered on the Four Books (the *Analects*, *Mencius*, the *Great Learning*, and the *Doctrine of the Mean*) and Five Classics (the *Book of Songs*, the *Book of Documents*, the *Book of Rites*, the *Book of Changes*, and the *Spring and Autumn Annals*). Questions also concerned policies such as civil administration, statecrafts, and judicial views on malpractice; and responses were penned in the designated format commonly known as the “eight-legged essay.”

The Qing system equally stressed the civil and the military, with the military exam system being largely similar to its civil counterpart. Military exams comprised three sections: the first two tested the candidate’s mounted archery, target archery, spanning, sword wielding, and stone lifting (physical fitness). But the third still required essays on policy. The three sections thus worked to select those proficient in both the civil and the martial.

## 2 Life of the Exam Candidate

Although the Qing exam system was largely followed the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), the success rate of candidates was significantly lower. A scholar might thus spend his entire life preparing for the exams to climb the ladder of success. This theme discusses the life and image of scholars from three aspects: travel to exam compounds, preparing for the exams, and financial support.

When traveling to the provincial and metropolitan exam compounds, candidates would set out from their native places to the provincial or state capital, a road which was long, expensive, and fraught with danger. In addition, the exam questions were on the Four Books and Five Classics, responses had to be written as relatively

rigid eight-legged essays. Various reference books for preparing the exams were published in remarkable numbers, including interpretations of the classics, abridged versions and selected essays, which could be memorized, were circulated, promising immediate exam success. The long-term preparation, however, meant a heavy financial burden, and many low-level scholars resorted to teaching, editing, or working as advisors to subsidize their livelihoods. But despite the bitter life, once a scholar attained a degree, they became a member of the gentry class. Clans and families thus poured resources into readying their children for the exams

## 3 The Examination Compound

Qing provincial examination compounds comprised “*jichang*” (lit. site of thorns) and “*weichang*” (examination quarter): the former refers to where the exam was administered and the latter was the place in which officials drafted, printed and graded exam papers.

Before the exam, candidates were thoroughly searched and documented to prevent forms of cheating, such as smuggling in notes, impostures, or changing exam cells with another candidate. Regarding the *weichang*, to curb the exchange of exam papers or passing on of exam questions, officials were prohibited from entering or leaving until the announcement of successful candidates—food and accommodation were provided.

But despite every effort, cheating and malpractice, as seen in the Qing archives, still passed by the watchful eyes of officials.

## 4 The Names on the Golden Placard

After the civil and the military palace exams, the ranks, divided into three categories, were written on the “golden placard,” which was then posted at the West and East Chang’an gates of the Forbidden City—the supreme glory on the ladder of success. But only first-category *jinshi* could be directly appointed as officials, while those below still had to pass the court placement exam to be appointed as officials at various levels of government. From the mid-Qing onwards, the admission rate was falling, and for those who did pass, vacancies and promotions were few and far between. One could make a name for oneself through the imperial examination system, but their fortunes remained uncertain.

