

# The influence of the imperial examination system reform in the Northern Song Dynasty on the scholars

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**Abstract.** The imperial examination system lasted more than 1,300 years from the birth of the Sui Dynasty to the fall of the Qing Dynasty, and had a great influence on Chinese history. The reform of the imperial examination in the Northern Song Dynasty was of great significance in the history of the Chinese imperial examination, and a series of its measures had a great influence on the politics, culture, education and other fields at that time. This paper discusses the influence of the imperial examination reform on the development and prosperity of literature from three aspects of talent guarantee, development environment and cultural environment.

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Research background

The imperial examination system has a history of more than 1,300 years in China, originated in the Sui Dynasty, was completed in the Tang Dynasty, and was reformed in the Song Dynasty. The Song Dynasty selected talents through examinations, with no restrictions. Many children without family background were determined to learn to take exams and get official positions in order to get ahead. Readers, regardless of their origins, had the opportunity to take the imperial examinations to be promoted to officials. With its unique charm, the imperial examination not only initially realized fair competition, but also promoted people's understanding of fair competition, and created countless legendary stories of "the court of the field and the hall of the emperor", which had a profound influence on the ancient Chinese society.

The Chinese imperial examination system was a great invention in ancient China, which effectively removed the disadvantages of the previous system of selecting officials for cronyism, and made the system on a fair and standardized way. The emergence of the imperial examination system in ancient China was the need of the development of specific times. From the historical perspective, in the early years of the Northern Song Dynasty, the rulers attached great importance to the role of the imperial examination system out of the need of political stability. In the Song Dynasty, however, as long as they entered the imperial examination through their own efforts, they could obtain high officials and become the social elite. Northern song dynasty imperial examination system in promoting the role of the class

flow also, the northern song dynasty imperial examination system changed the practice of noble ministers generation power, directly banned list, ordered the public examination at the same time, the general scholar, officials, businessmen have wonders, clan children need to participate in the selection, plus the later temple test institutionalized, visible rulers himself for the imperial selection talent control continuously strengthened. With the continuous improvement and perfection of the imperial examination system, the book entered the officialdom and created a prosperous situation of building the country by culture and governing the world together with the scholar-officials.

In contemporary China, the CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core attaches great importance to personnel and talent work. He pointed out, "Implement the strategy of rejuvenating the country through science and education, and strengthen the talent support of modernization construction."Therefore, this paper to "the northern song dynasty imperial examination system reform on the class " analysis, not only helps us to understand the northern song dynasty imperial examination system and social relevance, grasp the important position in the national society, at the same time, the current our country is speeding up the construction of talent power, will also provide support for talent selection wisdom and historical reference.

### 1.2 The main content of the study

The imperial examination system is initialed in the Sui and Tang Dynasties, which had a tremendous impact on its politics, culture, and education[1]. The imperial examination system, as the system of selecting officials in ancient China, has the features of comparatively justice, guarantee of the circulation of the talents, and having the cohesive force[2]. The research goal is the

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influence of the reform of the imperial examination system in the Northern Song Dynasty on the scholars class. Based on the literature and relevant research reports, the influence of the reform of the imperial examination system in the Northern Song Dynasty on the scholars class is analyzed. First, the reform of the imperial examination system in the Northern Song Dynasty is summarized, then the imperial examination system in the Northern Song Dynasty and the political life of the scholar class are introduced, and finally, the connection between the imperial examination system and the social life of the scholar class is drawn and concluded.

## **2 Overview of the imperial examination system reform in the Northern Song Dynasty**

China's imperial examination for thousands of years, the long history, the great influence, the world is well known. It originated in the Han Dynasty, founded in the Sui Dynasty, established in the Tang Dynasty, the Song Dynasty is the most mature complete development period, the Northern Song Dynasty rulers saw the imperial examination system, in the hereditary, examine, collecting and nine is system, after a series of reforms, established in the Germany, to take the outstanding to take a new system of selecting officials.

### **2.1 The Background of the reform of the imperial examination system in the Northern Song Dynasty**

The reform of the imperial examination system in the Song Dynasty was mainly in the Northern Song Dynasty, and the reform of the imperial examination system made many achievements. The imperial examination reform in the Northern Song Dynasty had a profound historical background. In terms of folk land, during the Northern Song Dynasty government allowed landlords to buy and sell land freely, and small and medium-sized landlords became rich because of the land. In the economic aspect, the national industrial and commercial economy is booming, and the emerging landlord class and some industrial and commercial people are becoming stronger and stronger. They constantly ask for more political rights and are eager to enter the political stage. After the unification of the Song Dynasty, the rulers of the Song Dynasty took a series of measures to strengthen the centralization of the imperial aristocracy in the Tang Dynasty to avoid repeating the same mistakes. After the Tang Dynasty, the imperial examination became an important way to promote officials, but the power of officials was often controlled by the powerful. In order to cooperate with the implementation of various policies and strengthen the centralization of power, the rulers of the Northern Song must firmly grasp the power of official selection, eliminate the power and big bureaucrats, and big landlords can still continue to hold the power of official selection by virtue of their political

and economic advantages and traditional social status. Most of the time the exam form, leading to many talented poor children repeatedly frustrated. The interference of the aristocracy, and widely absorbed the middle and lower landlord class to participate in political power through the imperial examination. The imperial examination system in the Sui and Tang dynasties evolved from the correct system of nine products in the Wei and Jin dynasties. It still retained a strong hierarchy and recommendation system color, hindering the rise of the middle and lower classes of the landlord class. The imperial examination system of the Tang Dynasty was also not perfect, leaving many loopholes for favoritism and fraud. The imperial examination law of the Tang Dynasty could not meet the needs of the social development of the Northern Song Dynasty. Therefore, the rulers of the Northern Song Dynasty reformed the imperial examination system in order to meet the needs of social development. Special attention was paid to the reform of the selection and appointment system. The power of selecting officials was held by the court, providing opportunities for people from all walks of life in the Song Dynasty and attracting people of insight to the court.

### **2.2 Reform of the imperial examination system in the Northern Song Dynasty**

Adopt the policy of rewarding the common people and suppressing the aristocracy. The Song Dynasty imperial examination candidates did not have the qualifications, so, expanded the scope of the examination, the average person can enter for the examination. As long as there is no major fault, not to commit adultery, all can refer to. But those who do not socialize, businessmen and monks who return to the vulgar, are not allowed to take the exam. In the Tang Dynasty, scholars did not ask about their family background, did not recommend, and they could apply freely, but there were certain restrictions in conduct, occupation and other aspects. By the middle of the Northern Song Dynasty, these restrictions were gradually relaxed, so that the average scholar could apply for the examination freely, and the scope of the state selection was further expanded.

Reform the imperial examination content and the change of the examination content. In the early Northern Song Dynasty, the idea of Su Shi's school was adopted, which generally followed the Tang system. Wang Anshi changed the law, opposed the use of poetry, and advocated pragmatism. The examination items of Jinshi cancelled poetry, examined the classics and time policies, and added the Ming law section. During the reign of Zhe Zong Yuanyou, he considered both poetry and classics, including poems and classics jinshi.

Strict legislation to prevent fraud. Since the Song Dynasty, the Northern Song Dynasty has taken some new measures to prevent favoritism and fraud during the imperial examination reform. After the Tang Dynasty, with the establishment of the imperial examination system, the disadvantages existing in the imperial examination were gradually revealed. The rulers of the

Northern Song Dynasty saw many false problems in the previous imperial examinations, and took some corresponding measures in the reform, such as formulating and implementing the two systems of name pasting and copying. The name of the paper to the examinee's name and native place these information paste, also known as "Mi feng", after the evaluation of the open. Taizong, the palace began to implement the name system. However, after pasting the name, the examiner may identify the handwriting, and later asked the examiner to copy the examinee's paper with a pen before marking. In this way, the examiner is not only unable to know the name of the examinee when marking the paper, but also difficult to identify the font of the examinee. This system has a great effect on preventing the examiners from favoritism and malpractice.

### **3 The imperial examination system of the Northern Song Dynasty and the political life of the scholar class**

Ancient Chinese literati are a special social group between the government and the people, without an independent class consciousness. They can only rely on the royal power to participate in the administration of the state. The only way to realize this ideal was to become an official through the imperial examinations. It can be said that in ancient China, the vast majority of students studied just to be an official, changing their living environment and improving their social status while realizing their aspirations. Therefore, entering the government is the primary goal of the world's scholars.

#### **3.1 political environment**

The political environment of the Northern Song scholars was completely different from that of the previous generations. After the establishment of the Song Dynasty, in order to prevent the army of the late Tang Dynasty and the Five Dynasties from emphasizing literature over literature, the state policy of "emphasizing literature over military force" was established after the establishment of the Song Dynasty, which ran through the Song Dynasty. Therefore, the political pattern in which the emperor and the literati jointly ruled the world was gradually formed. The establishment of the governance system of civil officials, the cleansing of the imperial examination system since the late Tang Dynasty and the Five Dynasties, and the purification of thought promoted the development and perfection of the imperial examination system in the Song Dynasty. The rulers of the Song Dynasty broke the previous restrictions of their status and family background, and broadened the channels for becoming officials[3]. No matter scholars, peasants, industry or businessmen, they could pass the imperial examinations and make contributions to their ancestors. Not only that, the Song Dynasty also expanded the number of imperial examinations and gave preferential treatment to scholars. In the Song Dynasty, the number of people taking the imperial examinations was usually

two to three hundred, or five to six hundred, at most. As long as they passed the imperial examinations, they could be granted official positions. Due to the development of the imperial examination system and the implementation of the Song Dynasty, the administrative organs from central to local levels were mostly presided over by literati[4]. It can be said that the development and perfection of the imperial examination system in the Song Dynasty pushed the civil official politics in ancient China to the peak, and the core class of the imperial examination was formed.

#### **3.2 Political mentality**

During the 1,300 years, scholars showed a complex and diverse but relatively uniform mentality. In the unprecedented good political environment, the imperial examination system also affects the mentality of scholars, especially on its political mentality has a great influence. The future is like the bright road, is most of the hearts of students. Generally speaking, the students who took the imperial examination mostly realized two ideals: one is to pass the imperial examination to serve the country. Realize the social value. The purpose of reading sages is to help the world. Such as the famous ministers of the Northern Song Dynasty Fan Zhongyan, Wang Anshi, Wen Tianxiang and so on[6]. The second is to seek fame for themselves through the imperial examinations and realize their personal value. After the reform of the imperial examination system in the Northern Song Dynasty, the family background, and the first step would attract the envy of countless scholars who had not yet passed the examination.

#### **3.3 Political status**

Under the so-called "joint governance" of the emperors of the Han and Tang dynasties, scholar-officials only assisted the government. It was not until the Song Dynasty that scholar-officials became the main force of co-governance. They ruled the country, together with the politicians and monarchs of the state, and the Northern Song let the lower intellectuals into the officialdom, became the main force of a group of researchers, and then played a leading role on the political stage. In the eighth year of Kaibao, Taizu told the students that most of the names of the previous imperial examinations were taken by the powerful people to block the road, which was very meaningless. I am here to do my best to restrain the rich and powerful people from forcing the lonely and poor to enter public office and open the way for them to serve[5]. When the emperor decided the rank of the imperial examination in the imperial examination, he often ranked the descendants of his ministers behind the children of the common people and deliberately chose Han Jun.

### **3.4 Political institutions**

The imperial examination system promoted the class convection and eased the social class contradictions. Dumis, a British visitor to China, argued in his Notes to China that Britain was imitating China's "public office competition examination system" and believed that the long existence of the Chinese national history was entirely for political reasons. Although there are many deficiencies in the imperial examination standard, it can ensure that the quality and knowledge structure of the candidates meet the requirements of the feudal country. Feudal rulers through the imperial examination system to expand the ruling foundation, using Confucius "learn is shi", through the reform of the imperial examination system prompted many talents are reading on the road, makes the literary class and bureaucracy overlap, to consolidate the feudal rule, make the ancient Chinese feudal politics has a strong flexibility.

## **4 The imperial examination system and the social life of the Northern Dynasty**

In order to obtain the official career, the literati of the Northern Song Dynasty studied hard at a cold window and ran to the examination room. Their life and thought always centered around the imperial examination system. The reform of the imperial examination system had an important influence on the social status and marriage life of the scholar-officials who were in the political subjects at that time.

### **4.1 Social class**

After Emperor Taizong ascended to the throne, he began to gradually improve the social status of the first scholar. On the one hand, the family people are respected and trusted by the people, because of their high social status. On the other hand, it is because most of them have real ability and talent. The government has also treated them with great courtesy. Su Zhe, born in the Northern Song Dynasty, said that all the peasants and businessmen did not want to give up the old ones. It can be seen that the emperor of the Song Dynasty gave great preferential treatment to the first scholars, which greatly improved the social status of civil officials, and the policy of civil officials was well implemented.

### **4.2 marital relations**

#### *4.2.1 The imperial examination system and marriage concept*

Ancient scholars in the personal fate, the most concerned about the official and marriage two things. With the change of the social environment in the Song Dynasty, people's concept of marriage also began to change quietly. During the Wei, Jin and Southern and Northern Dynasties, marriage paid attention to family match, and family marriage was popular. In other words, the gentry

and the common people should not intermarry. In the Tang Dynasty, this custom was still universally recognized and observed by the society. Folk marriage, regardless of the official quality and only the family, high men insist on marrying men and women, not mixed with his surname. Since the Five Dynasties, although people's envy of the family has not disappeared, but due to the loss of the family, the phenomenon of "marriage is not good to read" gradually began to appear. After entering the Song Dynasty, on the one hand, people still exist in the psychological worship of the big complex, on the other hand, the rise of the new bureaucracy, so in the concept of marriage, the family was endowed with new connotation, so that the concept of marriage in ancient China began to have new changes.

#### *4.2.2 The imperial examination system and the choice of married objects*

Since the early Song Dynasty, the imperial examination system has been continuously improved and developed. Those who came from the imperial examinations, especially those who came from the Jinshi, were the most prominent and promoted most rapidly. They occupied all kinds of important positions from the central to the local government. In fact, jinshi noble, the character of the virtuous, to see whether jinshi and the first. Once the scholar, the status increased sharply, the in-laws have a greater choice. Song poem has a cloud: " a cloud road really boarded, name ya and other call ancestors. If there is no marriage in the room, there is a beauty for a match."In this way, the young people of the imperial examination, especially the Jinshi, became the primary goal of the big family in the Song Dynasty. In the Tang Dynasty, the emperor's family would only choose their son-in-law when the new scholars had a banquet in Qujiang. However, the Song people always had the tradition of "choosing the husband", especially for the new Jinshi.

## **5 conclusion**

In the eyes of many foreigners, the imperial examination is The world's first major standardized examination system[7]. This paper mainly discusses the influence of the imperial examination reform in the Northern Song Dynasty on the scholars. The imperial examination system of the Northern Song Dynasty provided a fair opportunity for people of all social strata in the Song Dynasty to enter the government. As long as they passed the imperial examination, they could live in the temple, serve the country and admire the family. The reform of the imperial examination system in the Northern Song Dynasty adapted to the political trend of concentrating the power of selecting talents in the hands of the central government. Scholars passed the imperial examinations and entered the official career, which made the Northern Song Dynasty gradually formed the political structure of "governing the world together with scholars and officials". The reform of the imperial

examination system in the Northern Song Dynasty affected all aspects of the political life of the scholars.

Equity was actually highly valued in the Imperial Examination (keju)[8].The Song Dynasty was the period of mature perfection of the imperial examination system. The establishment of a relatively fair imperial examination system and the great expansion of the number of imperial examination admission quota provided a fair competition platform, opportunity and conditions for the majority of poor and talented people with lofty ideals. A large number of diligent intellectuals and ambitious intellectuals entered the official career, which changed the structure of the officials in the Song Dynasty and became the main political force. Therefore, the imperial examination system is the most innovative and equal system for selecting officials in the history of China and the world. Of course, we cannot expect to solve the modernization of the political system only by the imperial examination, but the imperial examination, as an delicate political way, can reduce the corruption of personnel, and its spirit of equal selection has lasting value, which is the practical significance of the imperial examination.

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