

ONE OF THE GREAT Chinese inventions was the civil service system based on merit, with recruitment to the bureaucracy through government schools and an examination system. National Universities and civil service examinations existed during most dynasties, sometimes as two separate routes, but more often as two interrelated routes within one recruitment system for the bureaucracy.

The idea that government officials should be chosen on basis of moral integrity and merit rather than heredity can be dated back to Confucius (551–479 B.C.E.) and to the Warring States period (403–256 B.C.E.), during which the concept of *shi*, “warrior-official,” gradually changed meaning to become “scholar-official.” The *shi* began to emerge as a social class of officials who gained their status from achievement rather than heredity. The Qin (221–206 B.C.E.) and Han (206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.) dynasties built on these ideas and organized bureaucracies of nonfeudal, non-hereditary administrators. Emperor Wu (141–87 B.C.E.) of the Former Han dynasty (206 B.C.E.–9 C.E.), under the influence of Dong Zhongshu, adopted Confucianism as the state ideology, established a National University (Taixue) in 124 B.C.E., and began systematic recruitment of civil servants through recommendations and written examinations. This marked an important turning point in Chinese history, since Confucianism was for the first time made the state ideology and the basis for the school curriculum and the examination system, a role it was to maintain into the twentieth century.

After the fall of the Han, control of the recruitment system largely reverted to the powerful local families until the Sui dynasty (589–618), when a system of examinations based on the Han model was reestablished, made more elaborate, and had a Confucian curriculum as the basis for the examinations. Therefore, the civil service merit system is usually considered to have begun in the Sui and Tang (618–906) dynasties. During the Tang, schools and examinations were further expanded, and a substantial number of the government officials came through the examination system. Recruitment through regular examinations now became an effective means to strengthen and protect the central government against the powers of regionalism and the hereditary aristocracy, and by the middle of the Tang the examination system had produced a large bureaucracy of merit. There were different universities and specialized colleges in the capital, and degrees were awarded in different fields such as classics, letters, law, calligraphy, and mathematics. Of these, the *jinsbi* (Presented Scholar) degree in letters became the most prestigious and chief recruitment route to the bureaucracy.

The examination system further grew in importance during the Song dynasty (960–1279). The *jinsbi* examination, which put more emphasis on reasoning ability than on mere memorization, continued to be the most important. After 1065, until the examination system was finally abolished in 1905, examinations were held every three years, except for the first fifty years of the Yuan dynasty (1260–1368), when examinations were temporarily discontinued in favor of the school system and because of the Mongol rulers’ reluctance to employ Chinese as officials. The subject matter for the examinations was the Four Books and Five Classics as interpreted by Zhu Xi (1130–1200) and Song philosophers of his school. In the Song, Ming, and Qing (1644–1912), the examination system made possible a high degree of upward social mobility into the official class. In the early Ming, the National University was the main recruitment source for the civil service. Over two

hundred men per year entered civil service through the *jinsbi* examination during Northern Song (960–1125) and an average of ninety per year under the Ming (1368–1644). However, provincial examination *juren* (Recommendee) degree holders as well as graduates from the National University were also recruited into the civil service during the Ming.

During many of the major dynasties, such as the Han, Tang, Song, and especially during the Ming, the National University played an important role in the recruitment system for the civil service. After the establishment of the National University in 124 B.C.E., the enrollment grew from originally fifty students to a thousand in 41 B.C.E. By 132 C.E. the University had 240 buildings and 1,850 rooms, and the enrollment was said to have exceeded thirty thousand by the middle of the second century. The enrollment in early Ming was some fifteen thousand students in 1424. During the Tang dynasty there were three universities and several colleges for special subjects in the capital. The three universities were the Guozixue for sons of officials of the third rank and above, the Taixue for sons of officials of the fifth rank and above and members of the upper aristocracy, and the Simenxue for sons of officials of the seventh rank, members of the lower aristocracy, and commoners. The Song dynasty took over this system, but with more commoners and sons of lower-ranking officials admitted. The Yuan established three Guozixue, one each for the study of Mongolian, Muslim languages, and Chinese. All three were open to sons of officials and commoners equally.

In the Ming dynasty there was one National University (Guozijian) in each of the two capitals, Beijing and Nanjing. Although some students were also now admitted because of their fathers' official rank, they never constituted more than a few percent of the whole student body. The large majority of students were recruited from among the examination first-degree holders (*shengyuan*) in the local schools through recommendation and examinations, with quotas set for the number of "tribute students" (*gongsbeng*) each school could recommend. In the Ming, the National University played an unprecedented role as a major recruitment source for the civil service, and university students had to serve on internships in some government office before they could graduate. During the early Ming the overall majority of officials came from the university rather than the examination system, and the university continued to have an important role as recruitment source for the lower bureaucracy throughout the dynasty.

By the middle of the fifteenth century, the examination system and the *jinsbi* degree began to replace the university as the chief recruitment channel for the higher offices in the central government. The ranking system for officials during the Ming and Qing consisted of nine grades, with each grade subdivided into two degrees, a and b. All officials were thus classified into eighteen ranks with 1a being the highest and 9b the lowest. The National University continued throughout the Ming to supply lower-ranking officials for the local governments and teachers for the local government schools, as well as candidates for the examinations. Under the Qing, however, the National University had a rather low enrollment and played an insignificant role as a recruitment source for the civil service.

With the renewed emphasis on the *jinsbi* degree, the private academies (*shuyuan*) became more important as places to prepare for the examinations. The private academies first began to flourish during the eleventh century as centers for higher learning, scholarly debate, and preparation grounds for the candidates in the examination system. By the middle of the sixteenth century, *shuyuan* had begun gradually to take over the government schools' role as centers for preparing for the examinations for the higher degrees, *juren* and *jinsbi*, and maintained this role through the late Ming and the Qing.

Under the Ming, *juren* degree holders had a special advantage as potential official appointees. Candidates who ranked low in the metropolitan examination for the *jinsbi* degree were recorded

on special additional lists known as *fubang* (supplementary list). These so-called *fubang juren* were allowed to enter the National University to continue their studies while waiting for the next metropolitan examination three years later. Both *juren* and regular university graduates (*jiansheng*) could, as mentioned earlier, be directly appointed to official posts, although, after the fifteenth century, most often as lower local government officials or as teachers in the local schools. Since it was possible at times to purchase one's entry into the university, the Ming system of civil service recruitment offered a number of access routes into civil service which was unprecedented and also unsurpassed by the following Qing dynasty.—JLH

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The Chapter on Schools in the *History of the Ming Dynasty (Ming shi)*, *juan* 69, "Treatise on Recruitment for the Civil Service," Chap. 1.

The Recruitment (*xuanju*) System for the Civil Service can be roughly divided into four different methods: (1) recruitment through the school system (*xuexiao*), (2) through the examination system (*kemu*), (3) through special recommendation (*jianju*), and (4) through selection based on qualifications (*quanxuan*). In schools men are educated, through examinations they are promoted, through special recommendations they are summoned from the various corners of the empire, and through selection based on qualifications they are distributed evenly [throughout the bureaucracy]. In this way all talented men in the empire will be recruited.

Under the Ming system it was the civil service examinations in particular that flourished, and the ministers and grand secretaries (*qingxiang*) all came through this route. The schools served to produce talented men to participate in the examinations. [However], those who received official appointment directly through the school route were considered secondary to those who had come through the examination route. [Those who advanced through any] other than these routes were [called] miscellaneous functionaries (*zhalin*). However, the recruitment paths of *jinsbi*,<sup>1</sup> *ju-gong* (i.e., *juren* and *gongsheng*),<sup>2</sup> and *zhalin* were all three employed side by side. Although sometimes one route received more emphasis than the other two, the others were not abandoned. The recommendation route flourished at the beginning of the dynasty but was later discontinued because of the emphasis on the examination system. Selection based on qualifications is at the very core of official service, and without it there would be no route through which to advance. Through a systematic description of the details of these four routes, the causes underlying the merits and faults of the recruitment system during 270 years of its existence can be readily seen.

To participate in the civil service examinations (*keju*),<sup>3</sup> candidates had to advance through the school system. Those, however, who began their official careers directly from the school system need not to have gone through the examination system. There were two types of schools: (1) the National University (*guoxue*), and (2) prefectural (*fuxue*), subprefectural (*zhexue*), and district schools (*xianxue*). Students from the prefectural, subprefectural, and district schools who entered the National University could then become eligible for official appointment. Those who did not enter the university could not get official appointments. Students who entered the National University were all known as *jiansheng* (university students). Students who entered by virtue of their *juren* degree were referred to as *jujian*; those who were *shengyuan* were called *gongjian* (tribute students); sons and younger brothers of ranking officials were called *yingjian* (students through protection); and those who gained admission through financial contributions were referred to as *lijian* (students by precedent [of financial contribution]). Moreover, within the *gongjian* category there were *sui-gong* (annual tribute student), *xuangong* (tribute student by special selection), *en-gong*

(tribute student by imperial grace), and *nagong* (tribute student by financial contribution).<sup>4</sup> Within the *yinjian* category there were *guansheng* (students recommended by officials) and *ensheng* (students by imperial grace).<sup>5</sup>

The National University was founded at the beginning of the Ming, in the year 1365. In 1368, the first year of the Hongwu reign (1368–1398), Emperor Taizu (Zhu Yuanzhang, 1328–1398)<sup>6</sup> ordered that sons and younger brothers of ranking officials (*pinguan zidi*) and [sons of] the common people who were outstanding and mastered the Chinese script should become students at the university.

From among the university students, Guo Qi, Wang Pu, and others, altogether more than ten students, were selected to study with the Heir Apparent in the inner palace. Upon oral examination by the emperor in the Jinshen Pavilion, they all were found to have good appearance and to be both intelligent and refined, and they gave detailed and elegant answers to the questions. Emperor Taizu was pleased and bestowed lavish gifts upon them.

When the empire had been brought to peace, the emperor ordered in a proclamation that students be selected from prefectural, subprefectural, and district schools to enter the national university. Moreover, younger *juren* degree holders, such as Zhao Weiyi, and tribute students, such as Dong Chang and others, were also selected to study at the university and were given clothing and cloth. These students were then ordered to practice clerical work in the various government offices [as preparation for their official careers]. They were then referred to as *lishi jiansheng* (intern students). The most outstanding students in this group, such as Li Kuo and others, were selected to enter the Wenhua Hall and the Wuying Hall<sup>7</sup> to discuss classical texts. They were called junior fellows (*xiao xiucai*). Those scholars who were of outstanding talent and learning and who were both bright and refined in their appearance were assigned to study extensively and thoroughly the encyclopedic literature and the disciplines of ethics and statecraft so as to prepare themselves for service in high positions. They were called senior fellows (*lao xiucai*).<sup>8</sup>

At the beginning of the dynasty the Yingtian Prefectural School was changed into the National University. Later the university was moved to the foot of the Jiming (Cock's Crow) Mountain.<sup>9</sup> At that time the name was changed from Guozixue to Guozijian<sup>10</sup> and the offices of chancellor (*jijiu*) and director of studies (*siye*), as well as those of proctor (*jiancheng*), erudites (*boshi*), lecturers (*zhujiao*), preceptors (*xuezheng*), teaching assistants (*xuelu*), archivist (*dianji*), quartermaster (*zhangzhuann*), and registrar (*dianbu*) were established. The students were enrolled into six different departments (*tang*): the Shuaxing (Following One's True Nature) Department, the Xiudao (Cultivating the Way) Department, the Chengxin (Making the Mind Sincere) Department, the Zhengyi (Defining the Sense of Right) Department, the Chongzhi (Ennobling One's Ambition) Department, and the Guangye (Broadening One's Learning) Department.<sup>11</sup> Next to the school were dormitories to lodge the students. These were known as *haofang* (registered lodgings).

Students received generous stipends in food, and each season they were given cotton and silk cloth and embroidered silk cloth, as well as sets of clothing, headgear, and boots. On all official holidays, such as New Year's Day and the Lantern Festival, students were given holiday money. Empress Xiaozhi (Empress Ma, 1332–1382)<sup>12</sup> ordered that grain be stored inside the university and established more than twenty "Red Granaries" (*bongcang*) to support the wives and children of the students. Students who were not yet married and served on internships were given money to pay for their wedding, and in addition two sets of women's clothing and a monthly stipend of two bushels (*shi*) of rice.<sup>13</sup> Students who had stayed long in the capital and whose parents were still alive, or if their parents were dead, whose grandparents or great-uncles or -aunts were alive, were all sent home to visit their families. Each student was given one set of clothing and five *ding* in paper money toward travel expenses. Such was the generous and kind treatment of the students.

The method of teaching them [was as follows]. Each morning the chancellor and the director

of studies would take their seats in the [Yilun] Hall, while the chief officers from the registrar down, and the subordinate officials from the proctor down, would stand at their assigned places. After the students completed the greeting ceremony, they would be asked questions on the Classics and the Histories and receive instruction standing with their hands folded.

Only the first and the fifteenth of the month were holidays. All other days the students attended the [lecture] hall and took their meals together in the dining hall. Lectures (*buijiang*), student lectures (*fuijiang*),<sup>14</sup> and recitation classes (*beishu*) held on a rotating basis were the standard schedule.

The subjects of study were, in addition to the Four Books and one's Classic of concentration (*benjing*), the *Florilegium of Explanations* (*Shuoyuan*) by Liu Xiang, the *Penal and Administrative Codes of the Ming Dynasty* (*Da Ming li* and *Da Ming ling*), calligraphy, mathematics, and the *Imperial Grand Pronouncement* (*Yuzhi da gao*). Each month students were examined on their interpretation of the Classic [of concentration] and on their interpretation of the [Four] Books,<sup>15</sup> one essay question in each subject, and on their ability to write the following types of documents: proclamation (*zhaobao*), announcement (*gao*), memorial (*biao*), essay (*ce*), free discussion (*lun*), and judgment (*panyu*), two essays in any two formats.<sup>16</sup> Each day they were required to practice more than two hundred characters of calligraphy in the style of one of the following masters: Wang Xizhi, Wang Xianzhi, Zhi Yong, Ouyang Xun, Yu Shinan, Yan Zhenqing, or Liu Gongquan.

In each class one student was selected to serve as student prefect (*zhaizhang*) and oversee the work of the other students. In their dress, pace, and table manners students were required to maintain a serious and appropriate appearance. At night they had to sleep within the university. If a student had legitimate reasons to leave the premises, he had to report this to the teaching officials in charge of his class. The student prefect would then be ordered to accompany the student to file a petition with the chancellor.

The proctor was responsible for keeping a Register of Accumulated Misdemeanors (*jiqian bu*). Students who did not obey the rules were recorded in the register. Second- and third-time offenders were convicted and punished. Fourth-time offenders were punished even with banishment to some distant region (*faqian anzhi*). The articles of the University Regulations were revised many times and maintained a good balance between leniency and strictness. For the various halls and the dormitories, the taking of meals and bathing, in all cases there were prohibitory regulations (*jinli*). As for home leaves for the purpose of visiting one's parents or getting married, there were fixed time limits according to the distance of the journey. Those students who transgressed the time limits were punished to serve as jail wardens (*dianshi*) in some distant region; some were demoted to become clerks (*li*).

The officials in charge of teaching were invariably selected from among senior scholars. Song Na (chancellor 1383–1390), Wu Yong (chancellor 1382–1383), and others were recruited from among the Confucian scholars to become chancellors. Song Na in particular became known as a famous teacher.<sup>17</sup>

Of all candidates who passed the *jinsbi* examination over the years, many came from the National University. In 1388, Ren Hengtai passed as number one in the Palace Examination. Emperor Taizu summoned Song Na, praised and rewarded him, and ordered that the names of the successful candidates be inscribed on a stele to be erected at the university gate. In 1391, when Xu Guan passed as number one, it was also like this. From that time on, steles with the names of the successful *jinsbi* examination candidates were erected for each examination.<sup>18</sup>

Each year the provincial surveillance offices throughout the empire would select *shengyuan* over twenty who were honest and prudent, and dignified and cultivated in their behavior, to be sent to the university for an entrance examination. *Juren* who had failed in the metropolitan examination (*huishi xiadi*) entered the university to complete their studies.

Later, in response to a memorial by Remonstrator Guan Xian, it was stipulated that prefectural, subprefectural, and district schools each should annually send one tribute *shengyuan* (*suigong shengyuan*), and this became established practice. The Hanlin Academy would examine them in their interpretation of the Classics and the Four Books, one essay question each, and on their ability to write a judgment essay (*panyu*), one question. Those who passed the examination with the highest grade were enrolled in the National University [at Nanjing], while those who received the second grade were admitted to the National University at Zhongdu (the “Central Capital,” at Fengyang, Anhui).<sup>19</sup> Those who failed were sent back [to their schools], and [the students and] the responsible officials were punished through the withholding of food stipends and salaries.

As a result young scholars from all provinces gathered like clouds in the capital. From Yunnan and Sichuan came aboriginal official students (*tuguan sheng*). Countries such as Japan, Liuqiu, and Siam also all had official students (*guansheng*) who studied at the National University. These students were often bestowed generous gifts, and those who accompanied them were also presented with gifts. Throughout the Yongle (1403–1425) and Xuande (1426–1436) reigns this practice was continued. By the time of the Chenghua (1465–1487) and Zhengde (1506–1521) reigns, students were still arriving from Liuqiu (the Ryukyus, modern Okinawa).

The establishment of a National University in Zhongdu took place in Hongwu 8 (1375). In the twenty-sixth year (1393) it was abolished, and the teachers and students were all included into the National University in the capital (Nanjing). In Yongle 1 (1403) the Beijing National University was first established. In the eighteenth year (1420), when the capital was moved [from Nanjing to Beijing], what had been the Capital National University changed its name and became Nanjing National University, and for the university students a distinction came to be made between those of the northern national university and those of the southern.<sup>20</sup>

Emperor Taizu was concerned that the sons and younger brothers of the military officials received training only in the military arts and rarely had any experience in the study of letters. He ordered the Chief Military Commission to select students from these young men to enter the National University. Those who resided at Fengyang studied at the Zhongdu National University. The Duke of Han, Li Shanchang (1314–1390), and others were ordered to evaluate the standing of the teachers and the students and rank them into different classes. The Duke of Cao, Li Wenzhong (1339–1384), was put in charge of university affairs to maintain discipline and watch over [the students].

Later many sons and younger brothers of the dignitaries (*xunchen*) also entered the university to study. In Jiajing 1 (1522) it was ordered that those dukes, marquises, and earls who had not yet been appointed to office and were under thirty years of age should study at the university. When shortly thereafter it was ordered that also those who had already been employed should enter, the younger family members of the dignitaries and the imperial inlaws vied to be admitted to the university for its prestige.

The students in the Six Departments were promoted according to a system of credit point accumulation (*jifen zhi fa*). Two directors of studies, one of the left and one of the right, each supervised three departments. Students who had mastered the Four Books but not yet their Classic were registered in the Zhengyi, Chongzhi, and Guangye departments. Those who had spent more than a year and a half in one of these departments and had shown excellence both in their literary style and reasoning ability were advanced to the Xiudao and Chengxin departments. After another year and a half [in one of these departments], those students who had a good command of both classics and history and had shown excellence in both style and reasoning were admitted to the Shuaixing Department.

Only students in the Shuaixing Department could accumulate credit points. The credit-point

system was as follows. In the first month of each quarter students were examined on their interpretation of their Classic of concentration by one essay question. In the second month they were required to write one free discussion (*lun*) and one court document<sup>21</sup> in the style of either a proclamation (*zhaoyao*), announcement (*gao*), or memorial (*biao*). In the third month they would write one essay (*ce*) on subjects from the classics and the histories, and two judgments on given cases (*panyu*).

In each examination, if both the style and reasoning were good, the student would receive one point. If the reasoning was good but the style inferior, he would be given half a point. If [both reasoning and style] were inferior and there were mistakes, no point was given. Those who accumulated eight points in one year were considered to have graduated and were granted status qualifying them for official appointment (*chushen*). Those who did not obtain the required number of credit points had to remain at the university and continue their training. If there were students who displayed particularly outstanding talent and learning, a memorial would be submitted so that the emperor could personally appoint them.

In the year Hongwu 26 (1393), Liu Zheng, Long Tan, and others, altogether some sixty-four university students, were appointed as Administration Commissioners (*buzheng shi*, rank 2b), Surveillance Commissioners (*ancha shi*, 3a), Administration Vice-Commissioners (*cangzheng*, 3b), Assistant Administration Commissioners (*canyi*, 4b), Surveillance Vice-Commissioners (*fushi*, 4a), Assistant Surveillance Commissioners (*qianshi*, 5a), and other officials. Such was the manner in which students were all of a sudden employed in important positions. Those who were appointed as high-ranking officials in various parts of the empire were innumerable.

Li Kuo and others were promoted from the Wenhua and Wuying halls to become censors. Kuo was shortly afterwards transferred to the position of Supervising Secretary (*jishi zhong*) and concurrently Recorder (*lushi*) in the princely establishment of Qi. It would seem then that recruitment for the censorial government positions (*taijian*) was also done from the National University. However, the positions that students were most often appointed to were those of rank six and below in the prefectural, subprefectural, and district administrations.

At first, due to the warfare and destruction that had taken place in the north, people there rarely knew the importance of learning. Therefore, Lin Boyun and others, altogether 366 university students, were dispatched to teach in these various northern localities. Later [teachers] were also sent to the other provinces. Students in the prime of their life who were good at literary composition were selected and appointed as instructors (*jiaoyu*) in district schools or similar officials.

Although Taizu occasionally put into practice the civil service examination system, the majority of officials were recruited from among the university students (*jiansheng*) and from men of outstanding talent promoted through special recommendation (*jianju rencai*). Consequently, at that time, of the men appointed to official posts in the capital and throughout the empire, National University students were the majority.

After two reign changes, the *jinsbi* degree gradually became more important, and the system of special recommendation was abolished. The *juren* and *gongsheng* routes also gradually became less important.<sup>22</sup> Although the original system of credit accumulation and intern service was not formally changed, the chancellors of both the Southern and Northern University, Chen Jingzong, Li Shimian, and others paid much attention to the restoration of the original order. Thus, these institutions had already become different from the time of their first implementation.

The tendency of the public sentiment was to emphasize only the *jinsbi* degree. The promotions and demotions of an official's career were already decided the day he presented himself as a candidate for office. Unless a *jiansheng* could pass the civil service examinations with distinction, he would not succeed [in reaching high office], even though he had come from the school for training government officials. Such were the circumstances of one thing adding on to another.

When the precedent of purchase of studentships (*nasu*, “contributing grain”) had been set, the system of official ranks gradually became mixed. When common people were allowed also to enter the university [simply] by virtue of being holders of the first degree (*shengyuan*)—they were then referred to as *minsheng* (student from the people), or *junxiu* (refined and elegant man)—the status of the university students declined even further.

Thus, although they all came from the National University, *jujian* and *gongsheng* were appointed as assistant prefects (*fu zuoer*) in prefectures and head officials (*zhengguan*) in the subprefectures and districts, while *guansheng* and *ensheng* were selected to serve in lower capital offices: the six ministries (*bu*), the departments (*yuan*), commissions (*fu*), guards (*wei*), bureaus (*si*), and courts (*si*). These were still known as the “regular route” (*zhengtou*).

Students by purchase (*yuanli jiansheng*, “students by set precedent of [financial] contribution”), on the other hand, were only selected to become Vice-Magistrates (*zuoer*) in the subprefectures and districts or subordinate officials (*shouling guan*) in the prefectures. Those who were given posts in the central government were appointed as subordinate officials in such offices as the Court of Imperial Entertainments (Guanglu si) and the Directorate of Imperial Parks (Shanglinyuan jian). Those who wished to serve in distant places were employed in Yunnan, Guizhou, Guangxi, and where vacancies occurred as principal subordinate officials in the Administrative Office of the Guards (Junwei yousi shouling) in the border provinces, and to fill vacancies as instructors (*jiaoshou*) in the guard schools (*weixue*) and in the princely establishments (*wangfu*). For the rest of their careers these men would belong to the “irregular route” (*yitu*).

The practice of admitting *juren* to the National University began during the Yongle reign (1403–1425). Of the candidates who ranked low (and did not pass as *jinsbi*) in the metropolitan examination (*buisbi xiadi*), those who were outstanding were immediately listed by the Hanlin Academy so that they could enter the university and wait for a later examination. They were given a stipend equivalent to the salary of an instructor in a district school (*jiaoyu*). In the metropolitan examinations at this time there were supplementary lists (*fubang*) of successful candidates (who did not pass as *jinsbi*). These *juren* were generally appointed as local teaching officials. Therefore, those who were admitted to the university were also given this salary.

In the year Xuande 8 (1433), Minister of Rites Hu Ying and Grand Secretaries Yang Shiqi and Yang Rong were ordered to select Long Wen and others, altogether twenty-four *fubang juren*, to be sent to the National University to study. Every three months the Hanlin Academy would examine these students on their literary ability. Like the Hanlin bachelors (*shujishi*) they were treated with exceptional favor. Later, no special second examination was given. *Fubang* [*juren*] over twenty-five years of age were appointed to teaching positions, while those under twenty-five could either return home to study (*yiqin*, “to stay close to their parents”) or enter the university to study. Finally, no distinction was made on the basis of seniority, and both those who wished to return home and those who wished to enter the university were allowed to do so.

The term *yiqin* means that the candidate returned to his home town to study, i.e., he studied while being close to his family (*yiqin yiye*). There were also the categories of leave called *dingyou* (mourning for one’s parents), *chenghun* (getting married), *xingqin* (visiting one’s parents), and *song youzi* (accompanying one’s child home), all of which, following the precedent set by the *yiqin* leave, had fixed time limits set for the return to the university.

During the Zhengtong reign (1436–1449), there were many vacant teaching positions in the empire, but *juren* were contemptuous of the low status of these positions and for the most part did not wish to be appointed. In Zhengtong 13 (1448), Censor Wan Jie requested that the Ministry of Rites be ordered to recruit more *fubang* to fill the teaching positions. Officials from the ministry replied that seven out of ten *juren* preferred to study at home or enter the university,



while only three wished to take up teaching positions, and that it was merely appropriate to let each follow his own inclination. As a result the proposal was not implemented.

By the time of Chenghua 13 (1477), Censor Hu Lin submitted a proposal saying, “Of the teaching officials in the empire, very many are *suigong*. Neither in their speech nor conduct, nor in their literary ability are they qualified to serve as the teachers of others. We ask that more *juren* be recruited for employment in these positions and that the appointment of *gongsheng* be discontinued.” After deliberation by the ministry it was decided that *suigong* should be recruited as before (originally stipulated), and teaching officials who held the *juren* degree should still be permitted to participate in the metropolitan examinations. From this time on, the number [of *juren*] who took up teaching positions gradually increased.

During the Jiajing reign (1522–1566), because both National Universities at Nanjing and Beijing had become almost empty of students, it was recommended that *juren* who had failed in the metropolitan examination should all be sent to the universities, and deadlines were set to make them hurry. Yet, in the end, *juren* who did not wish to enroll in the university could not be persuaded by force to do so. Subsequently, in addition to the annual tribute students, from time to time it also became necessary to recommend, “tribute students by special selection” (*xuan gong*) to fill the vacancies in the university.

*Gongsheng* who entered the university were originally *shengyuan* selected from the local schools, and since each school was ordered to annually send up one tribute student, they became known as annual tribute students (*suigong*). The regulations governing this system were changed many times. . . .

(Here follows a long section describing the *gongsheng* system, changes in the annual *suigong* quotas, recommendation standards, other student categories and their status and prospects for official appointment. These regulations were changed many times due to the government’s concern about maintaining a steady flow of students in and out of the university so as to recruit the best talents for the bureaucracy. The system was also, as seen above, influenced by the steadily growing importance of the examination system, especially the *jinshi* degree, from the midfifteenth century on.)

The institution of *lijian*, or university students by purchase, began in Jingtai 1 (1450). Because of the critical situation on the frontier, people throughout the empire who gave contributions of grain (*na su*) or horses (*na ma*) were allowed to enter the university to study. The number of students [admitted in this manner] was limited to one thousand. The system was practiced for four years and then discontinued.

In Chenghua 2 (1466), because of the great famine in Nanjing, the commanding officer [of Nanjing] submitted a proposal asking to let those sons and grandsons of officials, the military, and the common people who gave contributions of grain enter the university. The Minister of Rites, Yao Kui (1414–1473) responded, saying, “The National University is the place for nurturing talent. In recent years the provinces have sent up forty-year-old *shengyuan*, and those who contribute grass or horses begin to count in the tens of thousands. The oversupply of candidates is beyond control. Now, if wealth is taken as a substitute for virtue, the scholarly spirit (*shifeng*) will surely become more vulgar each day.” The emperor agreed and rejected the commanding officer’s proposal.

Nevertheless, later sometimes, in years of famine, or when there were disturbances on the frontier, or when some major construction project was undertaken, the practice was reintroduced following earlier precedent. In the end it could never be prevented.

## Notes

1. During the Ming and Qing dynasties the examination system consisted of three degrees: *shengyuan*, *juren*, and *jinsbi*. The *shengyuan* degree was awarded after a student had passed a series of examinations in the local (prefectural, subprefectural, or district) school, *juren* after examination at the provincial level, and *jinsbi* at the metropolitan examination given at the capital.

2. *Gongsbeng* (tribute students) were *shengyuan* in the local schools who were recommended for study at the National University (Guozijian) in Beijing or Nanjing.

3. *Keju* is the usual term referring to the examination system.

4. *Suigong* (annual tribute students) were recommended, usually each year, according to a special quota set for the different local administrative units. During the first half, at least, of the Ming dynasty the vast majority of university students belonged to this group. *Xuangong* (tribute students by special selection) were from time to time after 1504 selected in addition to the annual quota to increase the number of students in the university. *En'gong* (tribute students by imperial grace) were selected on special occasions, such as the emperor's birthday or other celebrations. *Nagong* (tribute students by financial contribution) was introduced as a new category in 1450, when the government was in need of funds after the military defeat against the Oirats at Tumu and the peasant rebellion of Deng Maoqi. It was later resorted to from time to time when the government was in financial straits, although officials often spoke out against the practice.

5. *Guansheng* were sons of officials of the seventh rank or higher allowed to study at the university because of their father's rank. After 1457 this privilege was restricted to officials of the third rank and up. This category also included sons or relatives of non-Chinese tribal chiefs in the frontier areas (*tuguan xidi*) and foreign students (*waiyi xidi*) from countries like Korea, Japan, Liuqiu (the Ryukyus, modern Okinawa), Vietnam, and Siam. *Ensbeng* (students by imperial grace) are to be distinguished from *en'gong*, who were tribute students added to the regular quota on special occasions. *Ensbeng* were students admitted individually by special imperial orders. They were often sons of officials who had served meritoriously in government or who had died for their country or for remonstrating loyally with the emperor and were honored posthumously this way.

6. For his biography and biographical data on many other persons mentioned in this chapter, see Luther Carrington Goodrich and Chaoying Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography (1368–1644)* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976).

7. These two offices were under the direction of the Hanlin Academy, the highest academic institution in the government, which provided literary and scholarly assistance to the emperor and the court. The Hanlin Academy drafted proclamations and other state documents, compiled imperially sponsored books, and read and explained the Classics and histories to the emperor and to his family.

8. A few decades later, during the Yongle reign (1403–1425), the Grand Secretariat took form, evolving from the Hanlin Academy, and its members came also almost exclusively from within the Hanlin Academy. From the 1420s on, the grand secretaries continued to be the highest officials in the bureaucracy.

9. The university was moved in 1382 to a newly built large campus on the southern slope of Jiming Mountain in the northern part of Nanjing, just south of Xuanwu Lake. It is now roughly the site of Nanjing Institute of Technology.

10. Universities (also referred to as Taixue, Guoxue, or Guozixue) existed during most dynasties, although sometimes only nominally. It was during the Ming that this institution reached its highest point of development and importance as recruitment source for the civil service.

11. The departments or "Halls" are listed here in declining order of difficulty in the Confucian curriculum. The names are taken from various passages in the Classics.

12. See her biography in Goodrich and Fang, *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, 1023–1026.

13. This was a very generous stipend, being in the range of the average salary for an elementary teacher in the seventeenth and early-eighteenth century. Also in the early Ming, the monthly salary of a teacher in a local school was around this level: 2.5 bushels for an instructor in a subprefecture (*xuezheng*) and 2 bushels for an instructor in a district school (*jiaoyu*). Assistant instructors (*xundao*) also received 2 bushels. It seems that teachers also received a monthly stipend in rice of 0.6 bushel, the same amount given to students who received a stipend (*lingsheng*). During the Ming, one bushel of rice equaled approximately one tael (*liang*) of silver. It seems unlikely that university students also received this stipend in later reigns.

14. On days for student lectures, students were asked to give lectures on the topic covered in the teacher's lecture the previous day.

15. The four major Confucian canonical texts: the *Great Learning* (*Daxue*), the *Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhongyong*), *Analects of Confucius* (*Lunyu*), and *Mencius* (*Meng Zi*).

16. There were many similarities between the examinations given in the university and the provincial (*juren*) and metropolitan (*jinsbi*) examinations. In the provincial and metropolitan examinations, which lasted fifteen days, in the first part (nine days) candidates were examined on the interpretation of the Four Books (three questions) and the Classics (four questions). Each essay had to be at least three hundred characters long. In the second part (three days) they were examined on a free discussion (*lun*); one question, judgment (*pan*); five questions; and answer to one question written in the form of either a proclamation (*zhaobao*), announcement (*gao*), or memorial (*biao*). In the third part (three days) the examination consisted of five essays on questions from the Classics and histories and contemporary affairs. The emphasis on the highly sylistic form of presenting the answers, the so-called “eight-legged essay” (*baguwen*), began, according to Gu Yanwu (1613–1682; see selection 83) during the Chinghua reign (1465–1488).

17. Song Na also became famous as one of the most stern disciplinarians in the history of the university.

18. Many of these steles are still standing and can be seen at the site of the National University in Beijing, now the Beijing Municipal Library (Shoudu tushuguan).

19. For a brief period (1375–1393) during the Hongwu reign, a second National University existed at Taizu's home town, Fengyang, which Taizu had designated as the Middle Capital. The National University at Beijing was established 1403 by the Yongle emperor, Taizong.

20. From the time Emperor Taizong made his old seat as prince of Yan, Beijing, an auxiliary capital in 1403, two universities coexisted throughout the rest of the Ming dynasty. After the capital was formally changed to Beijing (1421), the Ming continued to have two capitals, with Nanjing being the auxiliary. Central government agencies were duplicated in the two cities, although in the auxiliary capital these were primarily concerned with administration of the surrounding areas.

21. The term used here is *neike* (literally, “inner subject/branch/department”); now used only in the sense of “internal medicine” (as opposed to *waike* [surgery]), but it is unlikely to have had that meaning in the present context.

22. The *juren* degree holders and the *jiansheng*, however, continued throughout the Ming to serve as the recruitment pool for lower government offices and for many higher and midlevel posts in the local administration. Many became teachers in the local schools. From the late fifteenth century on, higher officials in the central government and at the provincial level, as well as head officials at the local level, almost without exception came from among the *jinsbi* degree holders. The changing emphasis in the recruitment system towards the *jinsbi* degree holders took place gradually over the fifteenth century, until in late Ming and during the Qing it was almost a prerequisite for official appointment.