

The Imperial Examination System and Traditional Culture: Their Dialectical Relationship and Contemporary Inspirations

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Abstract— *Against the backdrop of traditional Chinese culture re-entering public discourse and educational practice in contemporary China, the imperial examination system, as a significant component of this culture, is still often reduced to a negative symbol of "selecting officials through examinations" or "the shackles of the eight-legged essay." This paper, departing from the realistic context of the return of traditional culture, discusses the dialectical relationship between the imperial examination system and traditional culture. The imperial examination was not merely a system for selecting officials in the imperial era; it was also a comprehensive mechanism that long connected state governance, educational operations, social mobility, and cultural transmission. It provided traditional culture with an institutional vehicle for dissemination and social practice, yet simultaneously brought about problems such as utilitarianism, rigidity, and alienation due to its deep embedding in the competition for scholarly honors. At the same time, the open competition, relative fairness, and procedural credibility it embodied have profoundly influenced the modern Chinese understanding of examination systems. This paper argues that the study of the imperial examination not only aids in re-understanding the institutional and cultural structures of traditional China but can also offer inspiration for contemporary cultural and educational promotion—namely, how to transform abstract cultural values into concrete educational practices and establish a relatively balanced connection among cultural inheritance, institutional arrangements, and human development.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, with the rise of China's comprehensive national power and the expansion of its international influence, traditional culture has increasingly received attention in contemporary China's public discourse, educational practice, and external communication. However, in the process of related learning, research, and dissemination, the imperial examination—an important constituent part of traditional Chinese culture—often remains an object both familiar and unfamiliar. On the one hand, as a significant system that persisted for over a

millennium in Chinese history, it has long been deeply embedded in people's overall imagination of traditional society; on the other hand, to this day, the understanding of it held by the vast majority of Chinese people mostly remains at the negative impression of "selecting officials through examinations," "the shackles of the eight-legged essay," or even "stifling human nature and creativity," with little further inquiry into its historical role in political operations, educational forms, social mobility, and cultural transmission. This nearly stereotypical perception largely continues the critical tradition that began with the New

Culture Movement, particularly as exemplified by portrayals such as "the middle school textbook selections Fan Jin Passes the Provincial Examination and Kong Yiji, along with the regional opera stages' The Tale of the Lute and Qin Xianglian, which depict the absurdity and cruelty of the imperial examination system in a way that makes one's heart palpitate" [1], thereby shaping the public's fundamental image of the examination. Precisely for this reason, how to re-understand the imperial examination and, from this, grasp its deeper connection with traditional culture has become an issue worthy of renewed discussion.

This paper does not intend to offer simple praise or condemnation of the imperial examination, nor does it aim to confine itself to the investigation of institutional evolution and detailed historical facts. Rather, building upon existing research, it seeks to contemplate from a more holistic perspective: as a system that has been off the historical stage for two sexagenary cycles, why is the imperial examination still worth studying and discussing today? This is because its historical significance extends far beyond the selection of officials through examinations. With the passage of history, it gradually evolved into a comprehensive mechanism that simultaneously connected state governance, educational operations, social mobility, and cultural transmission. It can be said that "the imperial examination' is not a study concerning a part of traditional Chinese culture, but rather a study concerning its entirety" [2]. Therefore, the imperial examination is not only a crucial entry point for understanding the institutional structure of traditional China but also an important thread for rethinking how Chinese cultural traditions were implemented in society and how they influenced people's values and public life. It is from this perspective that this paper will discuss the dialectical relationship between the imperial examination system and traditional culture, and further reflect on several inspirations it offers for contemporary cultural and educational work.

II. THE SIGNIFICANCE AND DIRECTION OF THE RETURN OF TRADITIONAL CULTURE

Over recent decades, the re-emergence of traditional culture into the public discourse in China has been a rather evident phenomenon. From the "Guoxue (National Studies) fever" since the 1980s, to the academic reflection on radical anti-tradition currents since the 1990s, and to the recent expansion of related topics from academia to wider social levels, all indicate a growing tendency among people to reconsider the position and meaning of tradition in modern life. This return does not signify a simple restoration of tradition, nor an unconditional affirmation of

historical resources. Rather, amidst rapid modernization, when facing the shaking of values, the pressure of social integration, and anxieties over cultural identity, people are conducting a re-examination and renewed understanding of their own cultural resources. In other words, the reason tradition is re-entering contemporary perspectives is not solely due to a need for knowledge supplementation or emotional nostalgia, but more so because if culture is to truly bring peace of mind, it ultimately must be connected to the transformation of one's own national tradition [3].

Delving further, an important reason contemporary society has renewed its emphasis on traditional culture lies precisely in this: culture is not merely an accumulation of knowledge or symbolic decoration; it also relates to how people understand themselves, how they settle their lives, how they form a common language of values, and even how a society maintains basic trust, order, and identity. It is precisely for this reason that the significance of traditional culture should not remain at the level of slogan-like advocacy or the construction of abstract ideals, but must be concretely implemented into specific educational practices, institutional arrangements, and social life in order to truly function. In other words, if culture is to become a living force, it cannot merely be "talked about," but must be capable of being continuously transmitted, learned, internalized, and practiced.

From this perspective, the reason the imperial examination system deserves renewed scrutiny lies precisely in the fact that it was not merely a method of selecting scholars, but one of the few key mechanisms in Chinese history capable of long-term integration of culture, education, and institutions. It not only influenced the dissemination of knowledge content, the formation of scholar-official identity, and the direction of social mobility, but also profoundly participated in the shaping of values and the maintenance of public order in traditional society. Therefore, if one wishes to discuss how traditional culture was institutionalized in history and how it entered broader social life through education, scholarly honors, and the scholar-official group, the imperial examination is undoubtedly a highly representative entry point. This is also the reason this paper links the study of the imperial examination with contemporary discussions on cultural tradition.

III. THE DIALECTICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE IMPERIAL EXAMINATION SYSTEM AND TRADITIONAL CULTURE

The relationship between the imperial examination and traditional culture is first manifested in how it linked together classical learning, the cultivation of scholars,

mobility through scholarly honors, and social order. Although the imperial examination initially served primarily as an institutional arrangement for state recruitment and centralization of power, its historical role, as it continued to develop, far exceeded the narrow scope of "selecting officials through examinations" and profoundly participated in the formation of the cultural structure and public order of late imperial Chinese society. Therefore, the relationship between the imperial examination and traditional culture cannot be viewed solely from the singular perspective of institutional history or intellectual history, but must be grasped within the context of the mutual embedding of institutions, culture, and society.

On the positive side, the imperial examination provided a relatively stable institutional vehicle for traditional culture. It connected classical learning, scholar cultivation, and opportunities for official advancement, allowing culture to be not merely the intellectual cultivation of a few but to continuously enter broader social life through systems of education, examination, and scholarly honors. Especially after the Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, the imperial examination not only shaped the knowledge structure and value orientation of the scholars but also formed a close connection among studying, taking examinations, self-cultivation, and entering officialdom. This means that traditional culture was not an abstract existence floating outside institutions and society, but to a large extent, through the mechanism of the imperial examination, acquired the conditions for continuous transmission, repeated learning, and social practice. In this sense, the imperial examination truly serves as a crucial aperture for understanding how traditional culture was institutionalized and how it entered real life.

It should also be recognized that another extremely important reason why the imperial examination could achieve a considerable degree of legitimacy over the long term in traditional society lies precisely in the fact that it provided, to a large extent, a set of relatively fair, relatively open, and relatively comparable mechanisms for selecting scholars. Traditional Chinese society was profoundly rooted in patriarchal relationships, and human sentiment, solicitation, and personal dependency easily infiltrated social operations; if the selection of scholars relied primarily on family status, recommendation, or personal connections, it would very easily lead to factionalism and cronyism, thereby undermining the public credibility of state talent selection. In contrast, although the imperial examination was never absolutely fair and always had limitations—such as the prevalence of cheating, an overemphasis on literary form, and difficulty

in comprehensively assessing virtue and specialized skills—it nonetheless provided society with a relatively rigid channel for upward mobility through public examinations, unified standards, and layered competition. From this perspective, the imperial examination not only carried traditional culture but also, to some degree, formed an institutional restraint against the tendency of pervasive favoritism and relational penetration in traditional society. It is no wonder that Ouyang Xiu lavishly praised the imperial examination as being "as emotionless as the creative forces of nature, and as impartial as a balance scale" [4]. In other words, it was both a system born from the soil of traditional culture and, in turn, an important "preservative" that prevented the spread of certain maladies within that soil. For this very reason, the high social prestige of examination degrees in traditional society was connected not only to the opportunities for official advancement but also because they were generally regarded as legitimate qualifications obtained through open competition.

More importantly, the imperial examination did not merely shape a number of officials entering service; it also participated on a broader scale in the formation of the gentry class and the functioning of local society, integrating the gentry groups in rural society and the national bureaucratic body into a single political community [5]. Because the imperial examination and its surrounding system of degrees provided scholars with cultural prestige and social authority, a considerable portion of work related to moral edification, mediation, public welfare, and order maintenance in traditional Chinese local society was often undertaken precisely by groups possessing such cultural capital and moral discourse power. In other words, the imperial examination was not only selecting officials for the state but also continuously producing, certifying, and distributing a form of public cultural authority. This authority helped to form an intermediary layer between the state and the localities and also enabled the Confucian classics, moral language, and scholar-official ideals to gain relatively stable bearers and disseminators within local society. If traditional China was, to a considerable extent, a society where "ritual" (li) and "law" (fa) operated in parallel, with the former being more prominent, then the imperial examination undoubtedly played a significant role in shaping shared values, confirming scholar-official identity, and supporting the edifying order of local society.

Furthermore, the imperial examination, with its core content centered on the Confucian classics, allowed certain fundamental cultural languages, value concepts, and historical memories to be repeatedly learned, disseminated, and reproduced across vast spaces. This function does not

necessarily mean that culture was merely "indoctrinated" into society in a unidirectional, top-down manner, but it certainly facilitated the integration of a vast empire, across different regions and levels, into a cultural community with a unified moral identity [6], enabling a certain shareable cultural framework to form among different social strata. It is in this sense that the imperial examination pertained not only to bureaucratic recruitment and educational orientation but also to the maintenance of fundamental cultural identity within a large, unified society. Of course, this does not imply that the continuity and integration of Chinese civilization can be attributed solely to the imperial examination; civilizational continuity in history is always the result of multiple factors acting together. However, if one seeks to understand how traditional Chinese society could, over such a long duration, continuously link together classics, ethics, scholar-official ideals, and local life, the imperial examination is undoubtedly a factor that cannot be ignored.

Nevertheless, the relationship between the imperial examination and traditional culture is not solely positive. Precisely because the examination provided a powerful institutional vehicle for culture, once culture became embedded within a competitive system of degrees and honors, it was inevitably shaped by utilitarian motives and institutional logic. When classical learning was tightly bound to opportunities for official advancement, cultural content that originally held significance for self-cultivation and the propagation of the Way (Dao) was easily transformed into instruments for examination preparation; scholars who originally bore ideals of value could, amidst intense competition, allow their minds seeking the Way to yield to minds seeking profit. As Zhu Xi once criticized: "The Imperial University has merely become a field of fame and profit, and those in charge of education only select those who excel at writing for the civil service examinations" [7]. Yet he also stated: "It is not that the imperial examinations burden people, but that people burden the imperial examinations... Living in the present age, even if Confucius were reborn, he would still have to take the examinations; how could they possibly burden Confucius?" [8]. It is thus evident that what Zhu Xi was truly wary of was not the imperial examination system itself, but the deviation of culture from its original purpose of learning and self-cultivation once it became excessively subordinated to the competition for examination degrees. This duality—in which the system could both sustain and potentially distort culture—is a noteworthy aspect of the relationship between the imperial examination system and traditional culture.

However, the increasing prominence of this distortion in the late imperial period cannot be simply attributed to the moral decay of individual scholars; rather, it should be understood in terms of the dramatic expansion of the system's scale and the structural pressures this brought about. By the mid-to-late Qing dynasty, with significant population growth, the popularization of printing and dissemination, and the expansion of the scope of education, the number of participants in the examinations far exceeded that of earlier periods, and competition for degrees grew ever more intense. For the state, allowing more people the opportunity to sit for the examinations certainly helped to maintain the system's openness and stability; but concurrently, the limited quotas for official advancement, the layer upon layer of qualification screenings, and the constantly lengthening ladder of degrees placed ever greater pressure on the system itself [9]. Many practices originally intended as "remedial measures adapted to the times"—such as increasing the levels of degrees, strengthening examination specifications, and using standardized stylistic forms to maintain fairness in grading—may have, to a certain extent, prolonged the lifespan of the system, but they could also conversely foster new problems of rigidity, vacuity, and utilitarianism. In this sense, the alienation in late imperial examinations was not solely the result of culture being shaped by institutional logic, but also a structural fatigue that appeared after the system had exceeded its original carrying capacity.

Thus, the functions of integration and edification that the imperial examination originally possessed and had long exercised gradually became accompanied by problems such as rigidity, corruption, utilitarianization, and cultural alienation as the system operated in its later stages, amidst population growth, the expansion of the examination scale, deepening worship of examination degrees, and strengthened state control. In other words, the problem lay not merely in "the deterioration of human hearts," but in the fact that when culture, education, and political power were excessively bound together, several dimensions that could originally support each other could, under specific conditions, begin to consume one another. This is why, on the one hand, we can indeed see many scholars of the examination era cultivating their minds and assuming responsibilities through the study of the classics, Neo-Confucianism (Lixue), the School of Mind (Xinxue), and even Buddhism; on the other hand, we cannot ignore phenomena in the late period such as examination fraud, the instrumentalization of the classics, and the subordination of academies to the examination track. The coexistence of these two aspects precisely demonstrates that the imperial examination was both an important

channel for cultural transmission and a field within which culture could be reshaped by institutional logic.

Therefore, from a more macroscopic perspective, the relationship between the imperial examination system and traditional culture is not one of unidirectional support, but a mutually constitutive relationship characterized by inherent tension: culture attained broader institutional dissemination through the examination system, and the examination system gained moral legitimacy and social penetration through culture's participation; but simultaneously, once culture was deeply embedded in institutional competition, it also bore the risks of utilitarianization, rigidity, and absorption by power. This historical experience remains instructive today: it reminds us that if culture is to genuinely exert a positive influence, it certainly cannot be divorced from the support of education and institutions, but it also cannot be completely swallowed by the logic of power or utility. How to maintain the necessary tension and a sense of proportion among cultural transmission, institutional arrangements, and social practice is perhaps the most valuable historical lesson to be drawn from our rethinking of the relationship between the imperial examination and traditional culture today.

IV. THE SIGNIFICANCE AND INSPIRATION OF IMPERIAL EXAMINATION RESEARCH FOR THE PROMOTION OF CULTURE AND EDUCATION

If the preceding discussion focused on revealing how the imperial examination became a crucial mechanism for the institutionalization and socialization of traditional culture, while simultaneously generating tensions of utilitarianization and alienation in its operation, then what inspirations this historical experience holds for today's cultural and educational promotion is the question to be explored next. In the author's view, the significance of studying the imperial examination does not lie in restoring the old system, nor in unconditionally defending tradition, but rather in its ability to help us understand more concretely how culture is transmitted through education, institutions, and social life, and how it faces deformation, competition, and adjustment in the course of history. In this regard, although the imperial examination long ago exited the historical stage, the various issues revolving around it still possess considerable realistic relevance today.

First, the study of the imperial examination helps to transform the relatively abstract concept of "traditional culture" into concretely understandable historical experience. Today, discussions of cultural inheritance

often tend to remain at the level of value declarations or slogan-like advocacy, but the imperial examination reminds us that culture's ability to function continuously is not merely because it possesses certain lofty ideals, but because it once entered people's lives and the workings of society through specific channels such as educational content, examination systems, scholar cultivation, and local edification. Therefore, by studying figures of the imperial examination, examination lineages, family precepts and regulations, as well as local documents related to examination degrees, daily edification materials, and so on, one can not only gain a more vivid understanding of how traditional culture was passed down, studied, and practiced, but also further reflect on how, in today's education and cultural promotion, values should be concretely implemented, and how cultural resources can avoid remaining as abstract slogans and truly transform into living public content. From this angle, the study of the imperial examination itself can provide a historical reference for contemporary cultural and educational work.

Going further, the particular value of imperial examination studies for contemporary cultural and educational promotion lies in the fact that it itself embodies an integrative research orientation. According to the modern approach of dividing academic disciplines, fields such as politics, society, education, culture, literature, and law are often segmented into mutually independent departments of knowledge; however, the imperial examination, as a significant system that ran through the late imperial period of China, inherently transcends these different levels. This is precisely why the significance of so-called "Examination Studies" (Keju Xue) or a "comprehensive view of the imperial examination" lies not merely in adding another specialized field of study, but more so in reminding us that understanding traditional Chinese society often cannot be limited to the partial analysis of a single discipline, but must grasp the connection among its institutional operations, cultural forms, and social effects within a larger civilizational structure. "Through studying the imperial examination, one can bring together the political, social, cultural, literary, and various other facets of traditional China" [10]. For today's cultural and educational promotion, the value of imperial examination studies lies not only in providing knowledge content, but also in its ability to train the capacity to understand institutional, cultural, and social issues within the same field of vision. This point forms a certain resonance with the contemporary educational demand for "cross-disciplinary integration" and "comprehensive thinking" abilities. From this perspective, imperial examination studies are not just a supplementary body of knowledge;

they can further serve as a vital thread for understanding the overall structure of Chinese cultural tradition and help people break through fragmentary knowledge understanding, re-establishing a mode of cultural cognition that possesses both historical depth and holistic vision.

Moreover, the reason why imperial examination studies deserve to be included in the scope of contemporary cultural and educational promotion is also that it can help us re-understand how traditional society viewed "talent" and designed "methods of selecting talent." Today, when people mention the imperial examination, they often immediately associate it with the eight-legged essay, procedural uniformity, and the stifling of creativity. However, returning to the historical context reveals that the reason the imperial examination could serve as the primary method of selecting scholars over such a long period was not merely because it served the state's need to select officials, but more so because it responded, under the conditions of that time, to a highly realistic and persistent problem: how to select talent in a manner that was as open and fair as possible within a society that heavily valued human relationships, connections, and deeply rooted patriarchal networks. That is to say, what the imperial examination sought was not only the issue of efficiency in identifying talent, but also the problem of maintaining procedural credibility and order. It needed to identify, through large-scale competition, individuals with a certain level of comprehension, expressive ability, and thinking capacity, while simultaneously attempting, through unified examinations, open competition, and relatively objective evaluation methods, to minimize the infiltration of nepotism, solicitation, and personal relationships into the selection process. In this sense, certain procedural principles embodied by the imperial examination—such as open competition, relatively uniform standards, and the requirement that results be acceptable—indeed possess a kind of universal significance that transcends the imperial era. Even today, the reason Chinese people attach particular importance to the National College Entrance Examination (Gaokao) is not merely its connection to advancement to higher education and social mobility, but also, in the general social psyche, because examinations are still regarded as an institutional arrangement relatively capable of resisting manipulation through personal connections and maintaining a basic level of fairness. Of course, the fairness of the imperial examination was never absolute and was always conditioned by factors such as geography, resources, stylistic form, and institutional constraints; but precisely because of this, re-understanding the imperial examination helps us to see more clearly that, within Chinese historical experience, the intense

expectation for examination fairness is itself a modern continuation with deep cultural and institutional roots.

If the preceding discussion mostly concerned the inspiration brought by the imperial examination as a system and examination mechanism, then from a deeper layer, the imperial examination also profoundly intervened in the spiritual life of traditional society. Around the activities of preparing for the examinations, failing, passing, pursuing official careers, and retiring from them, generations of scholars and folk society formed a rich body of cultural resources related to self-cultivation, resolve, accepting fate, accumulating virtue, and mental and spiritual adjustment. Whether it was Neo-Confucian scholars attempting to unify the study for examinations with the learning of virtue, or the permeation of Buddhist and Daoist thought into scholars' mentalities and daily lives, all indicate that the cultural life within the examination society was not solely external competition and the pursuit of fame and gain, but also contained more internal themes such as how to find peace within oneself, how to face success and failure, and how to seek meaning within an institutionalized life. These resources certainly cannot be romanticized, but from the perspective of modern people's spiritual situation, they can still offer an observational angle: if cultural education focuses only on knowledge and competition while neglecting the cultivation of personality, mind-heart nature, and life experience, it will ultimately be difficult to build a lasting and profound spiritual world. In this sense, the study of the imperial examination helps us not only to understand the institution, but also to rethink the deeper connection between education and culture.

Furthermore, adopting a more rational and balanced understanding of the imperial examination also contributes to forming a more mature view of tradition. For a long time, many people have held a strong negative impression of the imperial examination, tending to reduce it simply to a historical symbol of rigidity, conservatism, and the stifling of creativity; yet with a slightly deeper look, one finds that the imperial examination indeed played a historical role in institutional integration, educational popularization, and cultural dissemination, while also truly exhibiting aspects of utilitarianization, instrumentalization, and late-stage rigidity. What is truly important is not to replace analysis with simple praise or condemnation, but to learn to grasp its complexity within its historical context. This mode of understanding itself offers inspiration for today's cultural education: it reminds us that when facing our own tradition, we should neither lapse into blind praise nor rest on vague negation, but rather form more balanced and measured judgments based on an understanding of its historical conditions, operational

mechanisms, and inherent limitations. True understanding of tradition has never been about choosing between praise and negation, but about re-establishing the capacity for judgment on the premise of acknowledging its historical complexity.

Finally, the study of the imperial examination can also enhance people's sensitivity to and ability to interpret Chinese cultural heritage today. Whether it be cultural relics related to the imperial examination, steles, memorial archways, ancestral temples, or the literary writings, local memories, and artistic expressions formed around it, all constitute an important part of Chinese cultural memory. If one lacks a basic understanding of the imperial examination system, its cultural significance, and "examination society," these historical remnants are easily perceived merely as scattered objects or hollow symbols; yet once placed within the historical context of the interaction between the imperial examination and traditional culture, these materials will again reveal their rich implications on institutional, social, and spiritual levels. Therefore, the study of the imperial examination not only aids intellectual understanding but also contributes to emotional and perceptual appreciation, enabling a deeper cognition of the concrete forms of Chinese cultural tradition. From the perspective of modern cultural and educational promotion, this cultural sensibility extending from intellectual understanding is perhaps a crucial condition for making tradition truly approachable, tangible, and worthy of contemplation.

In sum, the value of imperial examination studies for contemporary cultural and educational promotion does not lie in directly applying it as a ready-made answer, but in its provision of a historical perspective for re-understanding traditional culture: on the one hand, it shows how culture enters social life through institutions and education; on the other hand, it also reminds us to be vigilant against the possible distortions that culture may undergo amidst institutional competition and the logic of power. Precisely for this reason, the imperial examination is not only a historical subject worthy of study but can also serve as an important reference point for thinking about cultural inheritance, educational practice, and the construction of public values today.

V. CONCLUSION

In summary, if the imperial examination is understood merely as a system of selecting officials through examinations that has long been abolished, it becomes very difficult to grasp its true place in Chinese history. The importance of the imperial examination lies precisely in the fact that it long stood at the intersection of institutions,

culture, education, and society: on the one hand, it provided the conditions for the institutional transmission and social practice of traditional culture, creating stable bonds among classical learning, scholar cultivation, local edification, and state governance; on the other hand, because it was deeply embedded in a competitive system of degrees and honors, it inevitably brought about problems of utilitarianism, rigidity, and alienation. It is within this relationship of mutual support and mutual constraint that the imperial examination and traditional culture constituted a historical interaction charged with inherent tension.

It is precisely for this reason that rethinking the imperial examination today is not aimed at restoring the old system, nor at simply rehabilitating it from contemporary value standpoints, but rather hopes to use this opportunity to re-understand a more fundamental problem: how can culture avoid remaining only at the conceptual level and truly enter public life through education, institutions, and social practice; and simultaneously, how does institutionalization, while providing the power of dissemination, also exert pressure on and shape culture itself. In this sense, the modern significance of studying the imperial examination lies not in its belonging to the past, but in the fact that the issues it presents concerning culture, education, power, competition, and social integration have not yet lost their relevance today.

For contemporary China, the re-entry of traditional culture into the public view is both a historical phenomenon and a practical task. If one is to prevent traditional culture from degenerating into empty slogans, superficial symbols, or unidirectional propaganda, one must return to history and examine how it was once transmitted, how it was institutionally sustained, how it entered social life, and how it generated deviations and underwent corrections in concrete operation. The imperial examination provides exactly such a highly representative sample. Through its study, one can not only deepen the understanding of the overall structure of traditional China but also rethink how today's cultural and educational promotion can achieve a better balance among cultural inheritance, institutional arrangements, and human life development. This is perhaps the reason why the study of the imperial examination remains meaningful to us today.

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