

# The Special Examinations (*pyŏlsi*) in Early Chosŏn\*

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The triennial civil service examination was instituted right after the foundation of the Chosŏn state. However, special examinations (*pyŏlsi*) were held frequently alongside triennial examinations by royal order. The frequency of special examinations gradually increased as the Chosŏn period progressed and by the late fifteenth century special examinations were held even more often than the regular examinations. In this paper, I will trace the occasions for special examinations in early Chosŏn to examine why they were held so frequently. Special examinations began with the royal examination administered directly by the king while more and more occasions were created to hold special examinations. They were held as exhortations to learning, and on the occasion of state rituals and state celebrations, which led to the emergence of the state celebration special examination. The state celebration examinations, having initially taken the form of the royal visitation examination, were conducted separately later in the dynasty. As state celebration examinations emerged, the admission criteria were relaxed in order to attract the greatest possible number of scholars. The fashioning of the special examination alongside the regular triennial examination can be explained by the fact that it became part of the education policy and state celebrations of Chosŏn.

**Keywords:** civil service examination, special examination (*pyŏlsi* 別試), Confucian Academy (Sŏnggyun'gwan 成均館), royal visitation examination (*alsŏngsi* 謁聖試), state rituals, state celebration examination (*kyŏngkwa* 慶科)

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