

The State Celebration Examination and the Civil Service Examination System in the Late Chosŏn Period

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The implementation of a regularly scheduled civil service examination every three years was a common feature of the civil service examination systems in Chosŏn Korea, Ming and Qing China, and Lê and Nguyễn Vietnam. In Chosŏn, however, the custom of implementing the civil service examination as an element of the rites marking the observance of “joyous occasions” (*kyŏngsa* 慶事) emerged in the fifteenth century. This particular type of examination was known as the “state celebration examination” (*kyŏngkwa* 慶科). As justifications for its implementation proliferated in the late Chosŏn period, the state celebration became the linchpin of the civil service examination system. While there emerged in China and Vietnam in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the “grace examination” (Ch. *enke* 恩科), a conceivable counterpart to the Korean state celebration examination, the justifications for and frequency of this examination were comparatively restricted. The centrality of the state celebration examination could thus be described as an important and unique characteristic of the civil service examination system in Korea. This article investigates the question of why state celebration examinations were held in Chosŏn. It focuses on the process by which the state celebration examination became so frequent in the late Chosŏn period in terms of the increasingly diverse justifications for its implementation.

Keywords: civil service examination (*kwagŏ* 科擧), literary examination (*munkwa* 文科), special examination (*pyŏlsi* 別試), state celebration examination ” (*kyŏngkwa* 慶科), celebratory rite (*ch’inggyŏng ŭrye* 稱慶儀禮), congratulatory rite (*chinharye* 陳賀禮)

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Seoul Journal of Korean Studies 34, no. 1 (June 2021): 53–86.
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