

## Examinations

### ON BEING INADMISSIBLE TO THE EXAMINATIONS BECAUSE ONE'S NATIVE PLACE IS IN DOUBT<sup>14</sup>

author: Hu Shih-pi

---

During the Sung the competitive civil service examinations were the most prestigious method of achieving the most desired status in the society, a ranked position with the government. During the course of the dynasty the general increase in population, combined with the spread of education and literacy, had created a growing pool of men qualified by education to participate in the examinations. Thus, competition within the examinations became increasingly fierce. One way to lessen competition on the local, preliminary level, was to limit who could participate. Certain categories of persons were excluded. Furthermore, a man had to compete (in general) in the examinations given at his family home. Candidates reacted violently to attempts by anyone considered unqualified to enter the exams. Hu Shih-pi offered the candidate whose qualifications were being challenged a means and an opportunity to prove his place of origin. However, the candidate did not take advantage of this opportunity and so was disqualified.

---

On the eighteenth day of the sixth month, I, the prefect, received a petition from Teng Chieh 鄧杰, asking that he be admitted as an examination candidate, on the grounds that his family for three generations had lived at Three Streams in Shao-yang District 邵陽 [present-day Shao-yang in Hu-nan]. Since I was suspicious, in my decision I raised a question: If the family had lived in this region for three generations, some family members ought to have taken examinations before this. Why had there been no petitions till today? Later, Teng Chieh, in his testimony, said that since his ancestors had engaged only in farming, until his father's generation no one studied for the examinations. During the Chia-t'ai 嘉泰 reign period (1201-4) when he had tried to take the examinations other scholars attacked him as unqualified. Appeal to the fiscal commissioner led to the present pre-

fectural office granting him permission to take the examinations. But this was followed one after another by illnesses, deaths, and periods of mourning in the family, which explained the delay until now. In response, my second decision says: the long period of forty odd years cannot all have been taken up by mourning and recuperation. Furthermore, his numerous cousins cannot all be in the same situation [preventing them from having taken examinations]. As his assertion did not stand to reason, I sent him to the official school to secure some guarantee there.

A short time later various students at the school and some scholars of both districts simultaneously sent in their complaints, attacking Teng's claim to be eligible for candidacy as false. Yet Teng continued unceasingly to repeat his pleas. I consider the matter of examinations to be a serious one. If I do not admit him to it, his avenue to a government career will be cut off. This seems pitiable. If I admit him, how can I be sure whether his qualifications are true or false? If I admit him to candidacy, I fear that this might incite a riot at the examination hall. Therefore, I explained the situation to him in detail and told him to go the fiscal commissioner again and have the commissioner ask T'an Prefecture to ascertain whether he had ever applied to take any examinations [in Hsiang-hsiang], on the basis that his household resided in Hsiang-hsiang District [present-day Hsiang-hsiang in Hu-nan] and that his family hearth was there. If it had been ascertained [through such an investigation] that he was not a native of Hsiang-hsiang, the commissioner could have sent the order down for him to be admitted to the examinations here. If this procedure had been followed, no one could have opposed him anymore.

That was my decision made on the twenty-sixth day of the sixth month. If Teng had had enough sense, he could, upon hearing this order, have proceeded in haste, even at night, to present his petition. From the commissioner to the prefect, and from the prefect to the magistrate, it would not have taken more than twenty days to take care of this matter. But, according to his statement as checked by the commissioner, his petition was submitted on the sixth day of the eighth month. One wonders what Teng did in those forty days.

Moreover, his petition did not contain the phrase about having T'an Prefecture and Hsiang-hsiang District investigate. It merely asked them to tell the prefectural officials to have the district officials, with the superior guard leader and township scribes, investigate in order to admit him to the examinations. There is something suspicious about

this. Did Teng deliberately delay action so that by the time the commissioner acted it would already be close to the examination time and I, and the prefect, would have no choice but to comply?

Teng should not fail to realize that with the location of his native place in doubt, I cannot admit him in contravention to the regulations. Nor would other candidates at the examination hall tolerate his presence. To be guilty of causing resentment among a multitude just to fulfill one's own desires would be profitless. Moreover, I have taken note of the age of his younger brothers, who are just past the age of capping [i.e., slightly over sixteen years old, so that they will have chances in the future]. Skipping one examination will not mean a long delay. My refusal to allow Teng to participate in the examinations really expresses my concern for his own welfare. This explanation is to be posted on the gate. The documents submitted by other scholars are to be sent to the fiscal commissioner.