

# The Content and Composition of Dataset of Wei, Chun and Wei, Tingzhang's Imperial Examination Papers Archived by Luoyang Indenture Documents Museum

Xu, N. H.

Luoyang Folk Museum, Luoyang 471000, China

**Abstract:** The dataset of Wei, Chun and Wei, Tingzhang's Imperial Examination papers archived by Luoyang Indenture Documents Museum included 74 Imperial Examination papers of Wei, Chun and Wei, Tingzhang in Luoyang county, Henan prefecture in the late Qing dynasty. These examination papers were from Daliang Academy, Luoyang County Academy and Zhounan Academy. The examination places were mainly in Luoyang county, Henan Prefecture in the Qing dynasty. The examination content was a typical traditional formation called eight-part essay. The dataset was developed based on the datasets of the Luoyang Indenture Documents Museum. The dataset includes: (1) digital pictures of 74 Imperial Examination papers in the late Qing dynasty (including 13 Wei, Chun's and 61 Wei, Tingzhang's test papers), and each file was named after the archive code; (2) the statistics of the Imperial Examination papers, including ID, title, tile source, archive code, size, material, dynasty, number, style and ranking. The dataset is archived in .jpg and .xls data formats, and consists of 75 data files with data size of 340 MB (compressed into one file with 335 MB).

**Keywords:** Wei, Chun; Wei, Tingzhang; Imperial Examination papers; Imperial Examination System; late Qing dynasty

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.3974/geodp.2021.04.09>

**CSTR:** <https://cstr.escience.org.cn/CSTR:20146.14.2021.04.09>

## Dataset Availability Statement:

The dataset supporting this paper was published and is accessible through the *Digital Journal of Global Change Data Repository* at: <https://doi.org/10.3974/geodb.2021.07.02.V1> or <https://cstr.escience.org.cn/CSTR:20146.11.2021.07.02.V1>.

## 1 Introduction

The Luoyang Folk Museum features a dataset of Imperial Examination papers archived by Luoyang Indenture Documents Museum in the late Qing dynasty, which number 74 authored

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**Author Information:** Xu, N. H., Staff of Luoyang Folk Museum, 496034994@qq.com.

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[2] Xu, N. H. The dataset of Wei, Chun and Wei, Tingzhang's Imperial Examination papers archived by Luoyang Indenture Documents Museum [J/DB/OL]. *Digital Journal of Global Change Data Repository*, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.3974/geodb.2021.07.02.V1>. <https://cstr.escience.org.cn/CSTR:20146.11.2021.07.02.V1>.

by Wei, C. and Wei, T. Z. in Luoyang county, Henan province. Written in the typical style of Baguwen or the eight-part essay, these papers are so rare that they are of good use for studying the Imperial Examination and even the education system in the middle and late Qing dynasty.

These papers had been collected by a local before 2010 who resided in Laocheng of Luoyang. According to the collector's research, Wei, C. and Wei, T. Z. were father and son. As the rare historical documents, they have provided us with the historical evidence for getting insight into the Imperial Examination and education system in the late Qing dynasty.

## 2 Metadata of the Dataset

The metadata of the dataset of Wei, Chun and Wei, Tingzhang's Imperial Examination papers archived by Luoyang Indenture Documents Museum<sup>[1]</sup> is summarized in Table 1. It includes the dataset full name, short name, author, year of the dataset, data format, data size, data files, data publisher, and data sharing policy, etc.

**Table 1** Metadata summary of the Dataset of Wei, Chun and Wei, Tingzhang's Imperial Examination papers archived by Luoyang Indenture Documents Museum

Items	Description
Dataset full name	The dataset of Wei, Chun and Wei, Tingzhang's Imperial Examination Papers Archived by Luoyang Indenture Documents Museum
Dataset short name	WeiChun&WeiTingzhang_Papers
Author	Xu, N. H., Luoyang Folk Museum, 496034994@qq.com
Geographical region	Luoyang of Henan province; Kaifeng prefecture
Year	Qing dynasty (1636–1912); Tongzhi period of Qing dynasty
Data format	.jpg, .xls
Data files	75
Data size	340 MB (Compressed to 1 file, 335 MB)
Data publisher	Global Change Research Data Publishing & Repository, <a href="http://www.geodoi.ac.cn">http://www.geodoi.ac.cn</a>
Address	No. 11A, Datun Road, Chaoyang District, Beijing 100101, China
Data sharing policy	<b>Data</b> from the Global Change Research Data Publishing & Repository includes dataset, datasets (in the <i>Digital Journal of Global Change Data Repository</i> ), and publications (in the <i>Journal of Global Change Data &amp; Discovery</i> ). <b>Data</b> sharing policy includes: (1) <b>Data</b> are openly available and can be free downloaded via the Internet; (2) End users are encouraged to use <b>Data</b> subject to citation; (3) Users, who are by definition also value-added service providers, are welcome to redistribute <b>Data</b> subject to written permission from the GCdataPR Editorial Office and the issuance of a <b>Data</b> redistribution license; and (4) If <b>Data</b> are used to compile new datasets, the 'ten per cent principal' should be followed such that <b>Data</b> records utilized should not surpass 10% of the new dataset contents, while sources should be clearly noted in suitable places in the new dataset <sup>[2]</sup>
Communication and searchable system	DOI, CSTR, Crossref, DCI, CSCD, CNKI, SciEngine, WDS/ISC, GEOSS

## 3 Contents of the Dataset

The dataset was developed based on the collections of the Luoyang Indenture Documents Museum, a collection of Imperial Examination papers in the late Qing dynasty, which number 74 authored by Wei, C. and Wei, T. Z. in Luoyang county, Henan province. The Dataset includes: ID; name; picture; title source; archive coding; size; material; dynasty; number; style; the imperfect of paper; ranking. In view that some papers are incomplete, we can't specify the exact time, rankings and some others. However, due to the father-son relationship between Wei, C. and Wei, T. Z., it can be concluded that the papers were dated around the late Qing dynasty (Tongzhi period of Qing dynasty) due to what were written on some papers including Baguwen or the eight-part essay, and examination poem.

The answer sheet of Wei, C. and Wei, T. Z. in the late Qing dynasty filed in Luoyang Museum of Contract Documents is made in Chinese art paper or Xuan paper, with some printed with small square lattices which will avail the examinees of brush writing in regular script. The exam papers are officially stamped with the seal engraved in Manchu and Chinese in red script character. Most of the examination papers are used for the preliminary model tests either held in schools or organized by the government in preparation for the province-level examination.

### 3.1 Official and Unofficial Schooling

Most papers archived in this dataset are used for the official and unofficial simulated examinations, and some are papers for the province-level examination. The official schooling and unofficial schooling, supplementary to each other, both played an important role in the Qing dynasty when the Imperial Examination System prevailed. The official schooling refers to the teachings of textbooks approved by the imperial court including “Four Books and Five Classics”, which look unchanged in terms of the contents. In particular, the Four Books must be compulsory for every student since they entered school. However, the unofficial schooling offered by the academy of classical learning may differ from one to another, mainly including the mainstream knowledge of philosophical writings and miscellaneous works, the textual research, rhetoric and craftsmanship. The official schooling serves the purposes of training local students to pass the province-level examination while the academy of classical learning mainly focuses on training academic talents but not on providing some exam-oriented training. The state-run school is fully funded by the government while the income of classical learning academy mainly comes from government grants, donations from gentry and self-management income.

In the late Qing dynasty, most academies of classical learning became examination-oriented, aiming at passing the Imperial Examinations by improving students' performance in writing Baguwen. The model examinations organized by these academies are always held on a regular basis and strictly carried out in accordance with the requirements of the Imperial Examination, with a set of procedures such as exam question preparing, testing, examination monitoring, grading, rewarding, punishing and so on. The examination either supervised by local governmental official or the academy president, is generally based on Baguwen or the eight-part essay. The model testing would be conducted for several times every month in the exam-oriented academy rather than teaching and grading students. Those who excel in the examination will be rewarded, while those who poorly performed will be criticized. It should be pointed out that students in exam-oriented academy are generally graduates of government-run schools who are always very capable of passing the examination.

These exam papers of Wei, C. and Wei, T. Z. come from the educational institutions, including Daliang Academy, Luoyang County School and Zhounan Academy. Located in Daliang (today's Kaifeng), the capital of Henan province, Daliang Academy was the highest-level institution in Henan, and one of the top in the country. Many students felt honored to study in Daliang Academy and became closer to their officialdom if they won the title of Jinshi, the successful candidate in the highest-level civil servant examinations. Situated in Luoyang county, Zhounan Academy had a better education resources and performance than other preliminary academy in that period. Most of Wei, C.'s papers come from Daliang Academy while Wei, T. Z.'s are mostly from Luoyang County School and a few from Zhounan Academy. The father Wei, C. performed better than his son Wei, T. Z. in terms of schools where they studied (Daliang Academy out-ranked Luoyang County School and Zhounan Academy).

### 3.2 Most Archived Papers for the Preliminary Imperial Examination

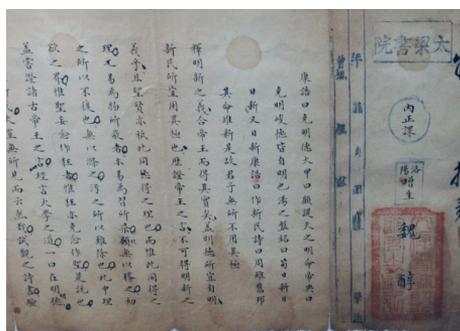
To pass the preliminary examination can only help the attendees to obtain the qualification for the Imperial Examination. In the literature of Qing dynasty, those disciplines which were not marked as martial arts all referred to the liberal arts, the mainstream subject for selecting candidates for officialdom. Once the attendees passed the preliminary examination, they can go further to attend the province-level examination, ministry-level examination and the emperor until their names were put on the published list of successful candidates<sup>[3]</sup>. The preliminary examination in Qing dynasty was held twice in three years, further classified into county-level test, prefecture-level test and the test under the supervision of provincial education commissioner. Most of Qing dynasty papers filed by Luoyang Contract Documents Museum are for the preliminary examination, which can be demonstrated by the many terms just like candidates' identities (students for major and minor courses), rankings (top-grade class, super-class and first-class).

An Imperial Examination paper from right to left are in order as follows, exam time, ranking (top-grade class, super-class and first-class, major courses), candidates' status (birthplace, name), comments, title and body (prose and poetry). The test paper No.029792 is exemplified below.

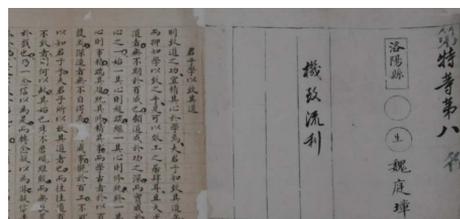
In the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of the Sexagenary Cycle, Wei, T. Z., a local of Luoyang county, ranked 16<sup>th</sup> among all Zhengke students. He did well in reasoning to the point and being good at planning and able to complete tasks with prudence; main body.

As for Zhengke, it is pointed out in history of ancient Chinese education that Zhengke students refer to undergraduates who study courses in the academy of classical learning and generally fall into Zhengke, Fuke, in-class Neike and other categories based on their test scores or whether they live in school or not. In rules of Yanping Academy selected from volume 12 of Changping state records write "there are students of top-grade class, super-class and first-class while the students that passed the preliminary exam should be classified into excellent, superior and secondary ones...In the very beginning of the academic year, we would examine and decide on who would be granted the top-grade status of Zhengke, Fuke and Waike, with the subsidies ranging from 1,200 to 600 and to none per person; the excellence status of Zhengke, Fuke and Waike, with the subsidies ranging from 600 to 300 and to none per person"<sup>[4]</sup>. Such subsidies can rise and fall according to whether the students should take the test or not and whether their grades are good or bad.

From the examination papers of Wei, C. and Wei, T. Z. who won the Zhengke status, there are a variety of status, including the top-grade class, super-class and first-class as well as other rankings. From the writing of Zengsheng in the test paper and the classification of the status, it can be seen that Wei, C. was a Zengsheng while Wei, T. Z. was a Shengyuan, a student who has the qualification to participate in the province-level examination. Therefore, these documents of Wei, T. Z. must be test papers for the preliminary examination.



**Figure 1** The province-level examination of Wei, C. (part of 024620)



**Figure 2** The province-level examination of Wei, T. Z. (part of 028946)

Therefore, these documents of Wei, T. Z. must be test papers for the preliminary examination.

### 3.3 Baguwen or the Eight-part Essay and Test Poem

Wei, T. Z.'s papers in the dataset are typical of Baguwen or eight-part essay. The titles are always originated from the Four Books of the Great Learning, with more than thirty selected from the Analects of Confucius, about ten from Mencius, three from the Doctrine of the Mean and three from the Great Learning. Generally speaking, these test questions from these papers are written in the person of Confucius, Mencius and other saints through the full text, composed of eight parts, namely, Poti, Chengti, Qijiang, Ruti, Qigu, Zhonggu, Hougu, Shugu. Discourse on politics is followed by test poem in the form of “ode to..., then to”, mostly with five words and eight rhymes, and a few with five words and six rhymes.

Baguwen or the eight-part essay is always composed of 800 words in discussion of current politics, government affairs and other related issues. The examinee's personal opinions on the topic should be explained on the basis of theories in the Four Books, with the small characters written in regular script. For example, the test paper numbered 028923 is the only answer sheet which contains “one essay, one ode and one poem”. The title is “Distinguishing and Practice Earnestly”, which comes from “Book of Rites-Doctrine of the Mean”, and the body begins with:

Distinguishing the right from the wrong can help one to seek for the merits while one's practice would finally work. With no distinguishing the right from wrong, one can't be knowledgeable, let practice alone. If one distinguishes well, he can find the essence at the beginning and practice much better in the end (i.e., Poti, opening the topic).

The following is the expression of the examinee's personal opinions:

According to the words of Confucian scholar, to seek for earnest practice lies in choosing good deeds and doing them persistently. However, there is understandings and misinterpretation even for the immortal. To choose good deeds and persist in doing is undoubtedly the point (with no marks punctuated in the examination papers).

The title of Fu literature is ode to the inauguration of exam courtyard pleasing the come-down scholars, with the writing more than 600 words done in antithesis sentences. The examinees should tell what good it will bring to them and express their gratitude after the completion of the courtyard.

At the beginning of the paper is a comment, saying the writing is natural in the style and rich in the structural expressions while the deficiencies lie in the conclusion and poem. It is an overall evaluation of the whole article in terms of its writing, Fu literature and poem, pointing out the merits like the sense of hierarchy, and demerits such as the lack in the warning strategies and the improper composition of the poem.

This is a relatively complete test paper, which explores the relationship between learning and practice, and how to use the knowledge in practice. Except this test paper, other papers are provided with one article and one poem but no Fu literature, which may be related to the directions of the examination in terms of the content or the examination level.

Secondly, most of these papers (except for incomplete papers) have exam poems written in the ending. As a poetic style, the exam poem is also called Fude style in Fu literature (it has its fixed format: Fude...De...), mainly used in Imperial Examination. The poem always has the title selected from the verses of famous

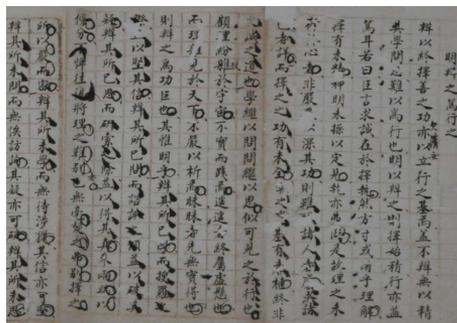


Figure 3 The examination of Wei, T. Z. (part of 028923)

poets or idioms and in Fude style, with each line written in five words and six rhymes or eight rhymes. The strict requirements rest in the exact number of rhymes and the relevance to the title. In the exam poem of Wei, T. Z.'s paper filed in the museum is posted with many lines of ancient poets.

Composing poem as one part of Imperial Examinations did not begin in Qing dynasty but originated in Tang dynasty. In the Imperial Examinations in Tang and Song dynasties, the exam poem is also called Tang Rhyme, in which the four rhymes and six rhymes but not eight rhymes are generally used. It is one of the important part for Imperial Examination from Tang dynasty to the early Song dynasty until Wang, Anshi ordered to call off the exam poem in Imperial Examination during the Songshenzong period, so did in Yuan and Ming dynasties. Since the Qianlong period of Qing dynasty, the use of exam poem was gradually restored, with five-character and eight-rhyme poem required for province-level and ministry-level exams. However, it has such an increasingly strict restriction in the form just as the fixed format in Baguwen or the eight-part essay. The titles always selected from the philosophical writings and miscellaneous works of the Confucian school, the verses of famous poets or idioms, the poem is required to be written in Fude style and ended with praising the merits and virtues of the emperor. Each line of Wei, T. Z.'s exam poem was mostly written in five words and in six rhymes or eight rhymes, with a few lines in five words and six rhymes.

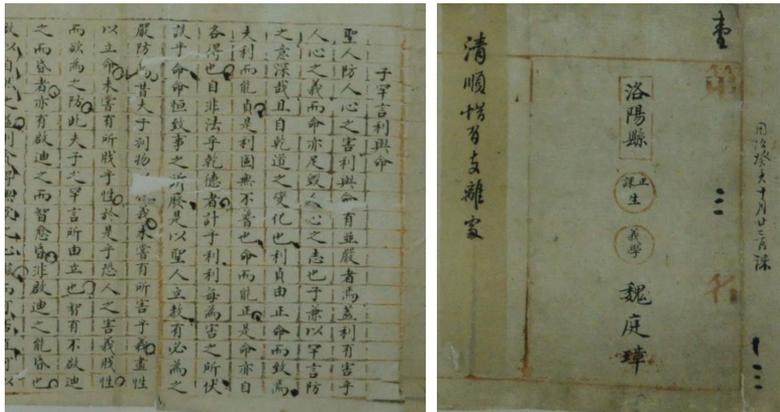
### **3.4 Difficulty in Passing the Imperial Examination Evidenced by Wei, T. Z.'s Examination Papers**

Among the archived Imperial Examination papers, there are 62 papers belonging to Wei, T. Z., ranking the top-grade class, the super-class and the first-class respectively. In spite of no known information of Wei, T. Z.'s lifetime, it can be seen that he has participated in the examination many times from the second year to the tenth year of emperor Tongzhi and provided dozens of exam papers, which tell us how difficult to pass the Imperial Examination.

During the Ming and Qing dynasties, candidates who passed the county-level and the prefecture-level examination in the preliminary examination could win the title of Tongsheng, which can prove that the winner is capable of reading, examining and writing. However, many a scholar was still a Tongsheng when their hair turned pale. For example, according to Unofficial history of officialdom authored by Wu, Jingzi, Fan, Jin sat for exam for Juren at the age of 20, and succeeded at 54, which proved to be a happy ending. However, most scholars, spending life time on the exam, even failed in winning the title of Xiucai.

Seen from the test paper No.029791 issued in the 12<sup>th</sup> year of emperor Tongzhi, with the title of Fortunate and Destiny in Zihan' View, it is known that Wei, T. Z., a scholar in Luoyang county, had participated in the preliminary test for at least 10 years, finally ranking third in the first class in the exam.

The province-level examination in Ming and Qing dynasties was held once every three years in the provincial capitals (including Beijing). All the scholars including Jiansheng, Yinsheng, Guansheng, Gongsheng and so on, who passed the preliminary examination were entitled to sit for the province-level examination. In principle, the candidate who passed the exam would be qualified to secure the official position and take the ministry-level exam held in the capital the following year. Wei, T. Z. would be very unlikely to fail in the exam at the thirty-fifth place<sup>[5]</sup>.



**Figure 4** The examination of Wei, T. Z. (part of 029791)

The exam papers of Wei, C. and Wei, T. Z. filed in the museum are just the tip of the iceberg. Only those who won the title of Juren would be qualified to secure the official position. As for whether Wei, T. Z. himself was admitted to an official or not, there are no supporting documents. His efforts for the Imperial Examination for many years have finally achieved the penetrating effect of his literary works, which tell us how difficult to pass the civil servant exam in Qing dynasty.

### **Acknowledgements**

The physical materials and pictures of the test papers contained in the file are all from Luoyang Folk Museum. I would like to express my deep gratitude to honorary director of Luoyang Folk Museum and senior research fellow Wang Zhiyuan, who gave me guidance that finally helped to complete the analysis of this data.

### **Conflicts of Interest**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

### **References**

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