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The Family Inheritance and Educational Practice of Imperial Examination Talents in Hainan from the Perspective of Immigrant Culture

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Abstract: This study examines the family inheritance and educational practices of imperial examination talents in Hainan through an immigrant cultural lens. By analyzing historical and cultural records from the Hainan region, it explores how immigrant culture influences family education philosophies and imperial examination training models. The research highlights the crucial role of family inheritance in cultivating scholars through imperial examinations, supported by empirical case studies that reveal unique patterns of talent development under immigrant cultural contexts. These findings provide valuable historical insights for contemporary educational reforms.

Keywords: immigrant culture; Hainan imperial examination talents; family inheritance; educational practice

1. Introduction

As a vital island province in China, Hainan's historical development has been deeply intertwined with immigration. Since ancient times, successive waves of migrants have brought diverse cultural and educational traditions from various regions. Against this backdrop of multicultural integration, the cultivation of imperial examination talents in Hainan has developed a distinctive trajectory. Examining family inheritance and educational practices of these scholars through the lens of immigrant culture not only sheds light on the evolution of Hainan's historical legacy but also provides valuable insights for modern educational reforms and talent development strategies.

2. The Influence of Immigrant Culture on Family Education Concepts in Hainan

2.1. Multicultural Integration Shapes an Open and Inclusive Educational Concept

The continuous influx of immigrants facilitated the gradual convergence of Central Plains ritual systems, Min-Yue academic traditions, and Hainan's indigenous culture within rural schools. As intellectual frameworks from different regions permeated clan-based education, Fujian gentry families brought *Zhu Xi's Family Rituals* to southern Hainan, implanting Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism into Qiongzhou courtyards. Meanwhile, the Li ethnic groups preserved their collective memory through oral teachings in remote villages. These forces created tension and adaptation dynamics within frontier cultural-educational spheres. At Wenchang's Zhang Clan Ancestral Hall, children recited Confucian classics while learning local dialect songs. In Danzhou's Wang Family Schoolhouse, scholarly lectures balanced agricultural practices with seasonal rituals, demonstrating localized strategies for knowledge integration. Family guidance shifted from exam-focused memorization to practical, application-oriented cultivation. Scholarly family instructions

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often emphasized "passing down farming and reading" and "inheriting poetry and propriety," subtly incorporating multicultural elements. This flexible educational framework allowed Hainan's scholar-gentry to maintain Confucian orthodoxy while embracing regional knowledge, establishing an adaptive pedagogical system that balanced cultural adaptability with academic continuity [1]. Through ritualized education, families transformed cross-cultural capital into technological competitiveness, providing deep cognitive frameworks and resource networks for talent development.

2.2. Survival Pressure Promotes the Awareness of Paying Attention to Education

After relocating to Hainan, immigrant families faced dual challenges of geographical isolation and resource scarcity, gradually shifting their survival strategies from land development to cultural capital accumulation. In coastal villages of northern Hainan, it was common to see plaques hanging in ancestral halls reading "A chest full of gold leaves to your descendants is not as valuable as a single classic," reflecting the scholarly class's deep-seated anxiety about acquiring knowledge and their strategic shift [2]. During year-end ancestral worship ceremonies, elders would often admonish younger generations with stories of ancestors who suffered oppression by wealthy households due to a lack of official titles, their words interwoven with eager anticipation for academic advancement. To recruit scholars from Fucheng to teach at family schools, a Lin clan from Wenchang sold three mu of sloped land, with all proceeds used as tuition fees. The Chen family in Dan'er established regulations requiring the clan to collectively fund travel expenses and accommodations for examination-bound youths heading to provincial capitals, with no evasion allowed. Such investments were not isolated cases but institutionalized practices embedded in clan governance mechanisms. A fixed percentage of clan-owned land rents was designated as "education funds" exclusively for educational expenditures, forming a stable resource redistribution model. Once a descendant passed the imperial examinations, their name would be immediately engraved on ancestral steles, becoming a spiritual symbol to inspire younger generations. This logic of closely tying educational investment to clan survival transformed knowledge acquisition into a cultural reproduction process that sustained family status rather than merely influencing individual futures [3]. In peripheral regions' social mobility channels, the imperial examinations became not only a path to official careers but also a crucial route for immigrant families to reconstruct social networks and achieve identity legitimization.

3. The Way and Characteristics of Family Inheritance of Imperial Examination Talents in Hainan

3.1. Family Cultural Heritage

In the spiritual lineage of Hainan's imperial examination families, cultural inheritance is not abstract admonition but practical education deeply embedded in daily rituals and spatial symbolism. Within ancestral halls, clan members perform morning and evening incense offerings while reciting "Ten Family Rules" with solemn tones and respectful postures, each word etched into memory. During genealogical compilation, elders line up before the hall as the presiding official marks names with vermilion ink-achievers receive red annotations of scholarly titles, while those who fail only record birth years. This silent incentive mechanism contrasts honor with disgrace. At a Wenchang scholar's residence, a horizontal plaque reads "Literature Continues Through Generations," flanked by couplets: "One classic passes to descendants; A hundred virtues harmonize with neighbors." On moonlit nights, elders gather under eaves, recalling how ancestor Wu Gong once lit pine torches to study ancient texts during his youth, inspiring younger generations. Family precepts transcend written records through seasonal rituals- During Mid-Autumn Moon Worship, examinees must publicly recite "Encouragement of Learning" -those trembling in voice receive reprimands, while those with proper pronunciation receive rewards, blending emotional intensity with moral instruction. Such cultural practices transform

imperial examination aspirations into collective family memory, granting intellectual pursuits ethical legitimacy and emotional belonging [4]. What descendants inherit extends beyond classical interpretations-it embodies a value system centered on scholarly achievements, reflecting deeper strategies for maintaining clan prestige and expanding social capital in peripheral regions. Knowledge acquisition thus transcends individual endeavor, becoming a moral mission to perpetuate family traditions and honor ancestral spirits.

3.2. Academic Resource Sharing

The scholarly dominance of Hainan's imperial examination families formed an implicit structure that sustained their talent pipeline. Their ancestral libraries, typically located in clan temples with blue-brick walls and camphor wood shelves, systematically organized classics into four categories: Classics, Histories, Philosophical Works, and Literary Collections. A designated librarian managed access through registration slips, requiring students to return books daily with annotated returns for academic assessment. Nine months before the spring imperial exams, families would invite retired Hanlin scholars or second-place laureates to teach at "Jingye Hall," where students recited the Five Classics in the morning, practiced essay writing afternoon, and studied model essays in the evening. The clan provided all writing materials [5]. Elderly tutors often lectured under lamplight, dissecting exam strategies and emphasizing logical reasoning in current affairs essays. Nephew and nephew shared inkstones, critiquing each other's work through endless debates, forming a closed yet efficient academic community. During a provincial exam, three Li family members from Chengmai passed simultaneously. Their schoolhouse housed 37 copies of imperial examination papers since the Jiajing era (1522-1566), all meticulously annotated, demonstrating systematic study. Knowledge in such families wasn't static possession but transformed through institutionalized instruction, contextualized practice, and intergenerational inheritance-creating replicable exam skills that perpetuated academic capital within kinship networks.

3.3. Social Network Support

The scholarly clans, adept at navigating the implicit dynamics of relational capital in power structures, frequently forged intergenerational alliances among literati through ritual bonds. As annual imperial examinations approached, the Qiongzhou Prefecture government compound would be crowded with carriages and horses. Clan elders would visit the educational commissioner with gifts-handwritten manuscripts from ancient masters or lavish banquets at their southern retreat-while subtly entrusting young talents with mentorship. Young members of these families often attended refined literary gatherings, where they penned congratulatory addresses to showcase their talents and earn praise. Genealogies frequently recorded "forming lifelong friendships with officials" or "being favored by judicial magistrates to join prestigious schools," serving as crucial stepping stones for official careers. When clan members took provincial exams, they typically lodged in capital guildhalls, where they received recommendations to meet examiners, preview unpublished test papers, and anticipate question trends. The Zhang family of Chengmai produced three successive Jinshi scholars during the Guangxu era (1875-1898), with over twenty surviving letters revealing phrases like "the vice-minister has approved my candidacy" and "potential for selection, supported secretly by senior officials," exposing the intricate web of personal connections behind academic honors. This dual-layered social capital-rooted in geographical and kinship networks-has not remained static. Through sustained emotional exchanges, academic collaboration, and moral recognition, it formed a regenerative network of patronage and loyalty that created upward mobility pathways for family descendants beyond individual talent, operating within institutional gaps.

4. Specific Case Analysis of the Family Education Practice of Imperial Examination Talents in Hainan

4.1. Qiongzhou Wu Family

Since the Ming Dynasty, the Wu clan of Qiongzhou has maintained a prominent position in Qiongzhou's cultural lineage. Their successive academic triumphs stemmed from a robust educational system and profound cultural heritage. The clan established a study hall named "Lixuezhai" (Study of Diligent Learning) in the eastern wing of their ancestral temple, where renowned scholars lectured on Confucian classics. Academic rigor demanded morning recitations and evening examinations, with late-night sessions becoming particularly intense before annual exams. Students entering the hall had to memorize the complete text of *The Five Classics with Commentaries*. Teachers tested their writing skills using Cheng Wenba's model essays, with top performers recorded in clan archives as role models. During provincial examination years, elders gathered at the ancestral hall to review students' records and award the Four Treasures of the Study as encouragement. Wu Dian gained fame for his quick wit: On the eve of autumn examinations, he wrote an essay on Mencius' "The People Are Most Valuable", then threw his brush into the lamp, splattering ink onto the flame. His teacher praised it as "dragon-carving energy and bamboo-breaking momentum." Later, achieving the jinshi degree (metropolitan graduate), Wu became a compiler at the Hanlin Academy, frequently citing Qiongzhou's local culture to validate governance strategies, embodying the family's commitment to practical scholarship. The Wu clan's prosperity stemmed not merely from talent but from institutionalized education and cultural traditions, forming a scholarly reproduction mechanism centered on imperial examinations that allowed academic capital to accumulate and transform within Confucian frameworks.

4.2. The Han Family of Wenchang

The Han clan of Wenchang rose to prominence during the Ming and Qing dynasties, maintaining an unbroken scholarly lineage that owed much to their family school's educational philosophy of "applying Dao to benefit society." Their ancestral academy at Wenchang Pavilion in the village's northern area featured two ancient osmanthus trees symbolizing "the fragrance of twin osmanthus blossoms." Each morning, students would recite excerpts from *The Book of Rites: The Great Learning* and *Yan Family Instructions*. Teachers often reminded students with the maxim "scholars must be broad-minded and resolute," emphasizing that classical knowledge should align with governance principles and literary works should address public grievances. During the annual announcement of examination results, elders gathered in the hall to review essays on taxation, water management, and educational policies, carefully annotating and selecting exemplary works for inclusion in *The Essential Works of Han Clan Education*. Among them, Han Jinyun, who attained the prestigious title of Xianshu (scholar) in his twenties, submitted a policy proposal that exposed mismanagement within Qiongzhou's salt administration. Drawing on Han and Tang dynasty salt-treatment reforms and considering Li Dong's local conditions, his analysis earned praise as "practical yet preserving classical spirit." After entering officialdom, he governed Danzhou by constructing irrigation systems and fostering harmony between Li and Han communities. He prioritized community education through personally authored *Encouragement of Learning* inscribed on the walls of the Confucian temple. These actions epitomized the essence of Han clan education: transforming imperial examination achievements into ethical practice and civic responsibility, thereby extending Confucian values in frontier societies and forming a tripartite model of gentry cultivation integrating knowledge, virtue, and governance skills.

5. Contemporary Implications of Family Inheritance and Educational Practice of Imperial Examination Talents in Hainan from the Perspective of Immigrant Culture

5.1. Emphasis on Multicultural Education

The developmental trajectory of Hainan's imperial examination talents profoundly reveals that cultural diversity serves as the fundamental catalyst for talent cultivation. Within the coexisting space of Qiongzhou Prefecture School and Li Village Dongtu, Confucian classics and folk oral traditions thrived in parallel. Scholars studied both the Four Books with their commentaries and ancient ballads passed down orally by local elders, creating a dynamic interplay of cognitive frameworks. This cross-cultural immersion freed scholars from rigid interpretations of classical texts, enabling them to synthesize frontier customs with Central Plains governance strategies in policy essays. As documented in Han Shi's Collected Academic Works from Wenchang, discussions on taxation invariably referenced historical Li tax systems, while water management proposals frequently referenced indigenous weir-building techniques-clear evidence of knowledge emerging at cultural convergence points. Modern education confined to singular value systems risks narrowing intellectual horizons. The urgent task lies in reconstructing curriculum cultural dimensions: allowing students to perceive civilizational differences through classical studies and experience pluralistic coexistence via fieldwork, thereby nurturing new generations of intellectuals equipped with cultural awareness and critical thinking.

5.2. Strengthen the Combination of Family Education and School Education

As the foundational arena for cultural inheritance, family education's role in moral cultivation cannot be entirely replaced by institutionalized schooling. In Hainan's imperial examination scholar narratives, scenes of strict family discipline, fathers and brothers supervising studies, and ancestral teachings inscribed on walls are common: late-night bamboo dormitory sessions echoing with reading voices, fathers and sons consulting each other over scrolls, disciples kneeling to receive teachings, elders modeling conduct through classical wisdom-all collectively shaping scholars' spiritual character through subtle influence. Such educational practices were not isolated ethical codes but embedded Confucian values into daily ethics and local traditions, forming a stable system of meaning generation. In contrast, contemporary educational environments often suffer structural disconnections between home and school. Family education has become emotionally driven and utilitarian, weakening the depth and continuity of value transmission. By drawing lessons from Qiong Island's scholarly tradition of "establishing families through rituals and extending legacy through learning," we could reconstruct mechanisms linking family precepts, cultural heritage, and modern educational goals. This would transform households into practical spaces for virtue cultivation, potentially compensating for the structural shortcomings of institutional education in personality development.

5.3. Cultivate Students' Sense of Social Responsibility

In Hainan's imperial examination aristocracy, family education emphasized cultivating responsibility through ancestral examples. Families would have younger generations transcribe their ancestors' deeds and notable actions, bridge construction, and educational establishment, while students studied under ancestral hall lamps at night, listening to elders recount how forebears single-handedly sustained local cultural heritage and ethical order. This education wasn't mere preaching-it embedded the principle "scholars must embody perseverance" into historical contexts and familial memory, allowing responsibility to naturally develop through emotional resonance and identity. Scholar families in Qiongzhou maintained charitable fields and schools, where youths began auditing accounts and mediating village disputes by their twenties, learning resource allocation challenges and public governance essentials through hands-on experience. In contrast, mod-

ern education often reduces social responsibility to empty slogans and superficial curricula, lacking institutionalized implementation pathways. Only when social responsibility becomes a tangible daily practice-transformed into participatory, reflective routines rather than external discipline-can character development achieve genuine grounding.

6. Conclusions

The family inheritance and educational practices of imperial examination scholars in Hainan from the perspective of immigrant culture not only reflect the historical trajectory of cultural education in frontier regions evolving from marginal to central, but also reveal the deep interaction between value systems and local social reconstruction during cultural migration. The ritual traditions and Confucian concepts brought by southern migrations of Central Plains scholar-gentry evolved into a locally vibrant educational model amidst geographical isolation and ethnic integration on Qiong Island. Through genealogical documentation, ancestral hall lectures, and management of charitable estates, families transformed imperial examination achievements into moral capital and social authority, internalizing the mission of literati through the interplay of identity recognition and ethical responsibility. This family-centered educational mechanism that inherits Dao through learning transcends mere knowledge transmission, forming a growth path integrating ethical practice and public engagement. Compared with the current educational dilemma of weakened value rationality and diluted character cultivation, the traditional model of Hainan scholar-gentry integrating academic pursuits with local responsibilities provides a historical reference for reconstructing the practical dimension of moral education. Future educational development urgently needs to break down barriers between family and school, activate the modern transformation capabilities of traditional resources through multicultural interaction, promote collaborative coexistence between institutionalized education and family ethics education, and cultivate new talents with both cultural subjectivity and public responsibility.

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