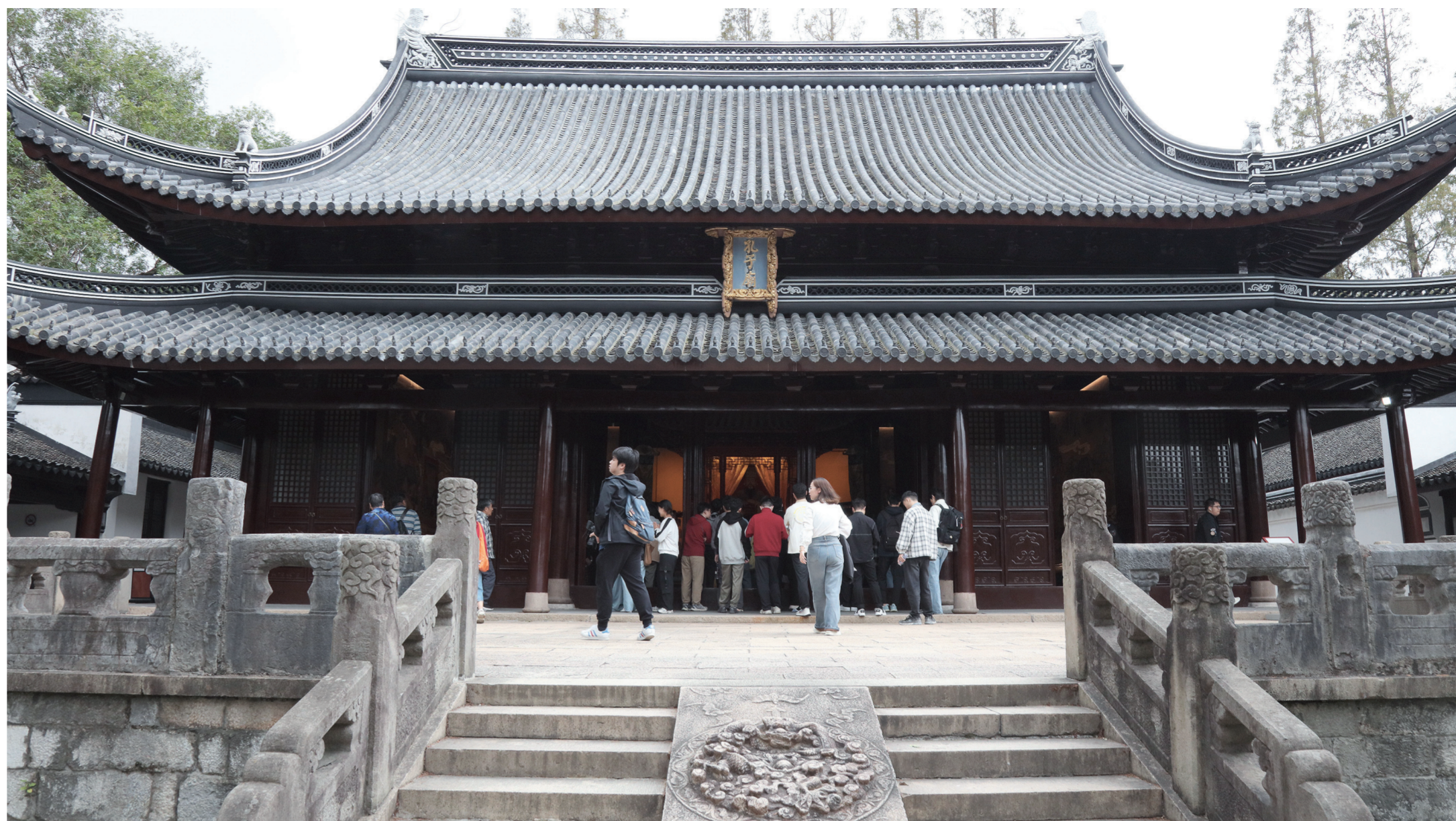




Tourists listen attentively during a guided tour in the west gallery, where they receive a brief introduction to the evolution of the Chinese imperial examination system. — Photos by Yang Yujie



The Dacheng Hall, the main structure of Jiading Confucius Temple, not only showcases the image and life story of Confucius but also includes a space for blessing activities.

Renovated Jiading Confucius Temple reopens to the public

Yang Yujie and Yang Yang

Jiading's Confucius Temple dates back 800 years. It was originally built in 1219 during the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279). The temple is Shanghai's largest antique architecture complex.

The temple underwent a new round of maintenance and renovations beginning in May of last year, and it reopened to the public on September 22 after 167 days.

The renovated venue preserved its historic appearance while incorporating more modern exhibition layouts. The Chinese Imperial Examination Museum, located inside the temple, has also expanded its exhibits and provides a more immersive experience for visitors interested in learning about the impact of Confucianism and the imperial exam system on ancient Chinese culture.

The first county magistrate of Jiading, Gao Yansun, oversaw the building of the temple which started in 1219. From 1249 to the end of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), the temple underwent more than 70 rounds of maintenance, enlargement and restoration, eventually becoming a well-known Confucius Temple in the Jiangan area, with functions including Confucius worship and classics learning and schooling.

In its 800-year history, Jiading Confucius Temple has educated over 7,000 *xiucai*, or entry-level scholars who passed the initial level of the imperial exam; over 500 *juren*, or successful candidates in the imperial

exam at the provincial level; 192 *jinshi*, or advanced scholars through the highest imperial exam; and three *zhuangyuan* — scholars who ranked first in the highest imperial exam.

The temple established Jiading as a place that values education, recognizing "The Six Classics," a new curriculum system with poetry, books, rituals and music.

"We followed rules for relic preservation," said Wang Xinyu, curator of Jiading Museum. "During the maintenance this time, we renovated as minimum as possible to preserve the original state of the cultural relics first."

Notably, the restoration of the Confucius Temple involved several intangible cultural heritage techniques. These included the preservation of stone artifacts, the repair of wooden structures, the restoration of clay sculptures, and the application of varnish in key areas.

During the restoration process, painting was involved throughout, encountering various weather conditions such as high temperatures, high humidity and cold.

Therefore, the project team developed a detailed varnish application plan and dynamically controlled the varnish mixture ratios. They also strictly controlled the purchase quantity of each batch of materials.

"On one hand, this ensures the progress of the construction; on the other hand, it prevents the quality of the varnish from deteriorating due to prolonged storage and climate changes, which could affect the construction quality," Wang explained.

Displays in the exhibition halls were

also updated. It was a full restructuring since 2006 when the exhibition was first unveiled, according to Wang.

The Chinese Imperial Examination Museum, the country's first museum to introduce imperial exams and display its prized treasures, has a floor area of 2,270 square meters and more than 300 cultural relics.

The exhibition, based on Jiading Confucius Temple and incorporating regional characteristics, vividly showcases the evolution of the Chinese imperial examination system.

It explores various perspectives, including its development, flourishing and eventual abolition, as well as its relationship with social civilization, its connection to Shanghai and its implementation, highlighting the profound impact the system had on the East Asian cultures.

The temple's *xiwu* (西虎, West Gallery), *dongwu* (东虎, East Gallery) and Minglun Hall are the main exhibition locations on the imperial exam system. Its Dacheng Hall houses a statue of Confucius and commemorates his key life events. A dedicated area has been designated for the public to worship Confucius.

Danghu Academy functions as an experiential hall, utilizing digital technologies to offer smart displays. The temple also has a souvenir shop, a tourist service center, VIP rooms and a nursing room.

The renovated museum is both entertaining and informative.

In the temple's *xiwu*, visitors can find unique applications from the old imperial exam age, including *mifeng* (弥封, sealing),



Above: An exam paper written in black ink from Qing Dynasty

Left: A stone screen adorned with a carving of "Carp Leaping Over the Dragon Gate" symbolizes triumph.

zhujuan (朱卷, red-ink scroll), and *mojuan* (墨卷, black-ink scroll).

"In the Tang Dynasty (AD 618-907) and the earlier Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127), it was common among scholars to recommend themselves to exam officials, therefore causing malpractice and corruption," Wang explained.

"A *mifeng* concealed a scholar's name, age and birthplace with a seal. To prevent an exam official from identifying a scholar's handwriting style, a professional scribe would copy the exam paper in red ink. Those red-ink copies were called *zhujuan*, and the original black-ink scrolls were called *mojuan*."

The exhibition boards at the temple's *dongwu* tell the stories of notable ancient intellectuals from Shanghai, including Qian Daxin (1728-1804) and Wang

Mingsheng (1722-1797).

A linen garment draws the attention of visitors to the temple's Minglun Hall. Previously, an examiner used it as a cheating tool.

"The traditional Chinese Qing Dynasty linen vest was transcribed densely with little Chinese characters, the size of which was about Font Size Six in Microsoft Word," Wang said. "The vest was packed with 62 stereotyped essays with a total of more than 40,000 words."

There is a copy of a Jiangnan village test paper from the late Qing Dynasty. The exam consisted of three sections: questions on the Four Books, questions on the Five Classics, and an essay assignment on military affairs, agriculture, rites, or laws and punishments of the time.

How were a *wu zhuangyuan* (Martial

Champion) and a *wen zhuangyuan* (Civil Champion) selected? Would a man with exceptional martial arts skills always be chosen as a *wu zhuangyuan*? The answer is no, because he also had to pass written examinations.

The revamped exhibition features a new cultural artifact: an exam paper from the Martial Champion selection process.

Beginning with the Song Dynasty, martial champions were selected based on more than just their martial arts abilities. They would also be examined on military strategy. Wang said that towering figures and righteous looks were also prerequisite.

Audio and lighting technologies, scenario restoration, and immersive experience are deployed to simulate an imperial exam so as to allow visitors a deeper understanding of the ancient system.



A traditional Chinese Qing Dynasty linen vest is on display in Minglun Hall. Used as a cheating tool, the vest had 62 stereotyped essays with a total of more than 40,000 Chinese characters transcribed on it.