

## Rise 149

### Chapter 149: A Banquet and the Flowered Hairpin

When the official delivering the good news finally arrived at the right door, the new students in the Ming Southern Jiangnan Examination Hall's Mingyuan Building finally awaited the arrival of the academic supervisor.

Zhu Ping'an first saw the academic supervisor when entering the first round of the entrance exam. He only had a brief glance, and he thought the man looked like a serious elder in his fifties. At this moment, Zhu Ping'an had the chance to observe the academic supervisor up close.

The academic supervisor was around fifty years old, but looked not a bit old, full of energy. He was considered a handsome man in the elderly category, appearing as serious as ever. Even when he ascended the stairs, he didn't chat with the accompanying officials, still exuding a strong aura, likely a natural result of having held a high position for so long.

The academic supervisor was the provincial-level educational administrator in the Ming Dynasty, appointed by the imperial court. Alongside him came officials from the educational sector of Southern Jiangsu.

"Good, good, a gathering of talents," the academic supervisor said as he arrived at the top of the stairs, looking around at everyone and nodding in satisfaction.

"Junior pays respects to the academic supervisor."

Zhu Ping'an, along with the other new students, respectfully bowed to welcome the arrival of the academic supervisor.

"Don't, don't. Today, you all are the priority. I will step aside," the academic supervisor waved his hand, signaling for everyone not to be overly formal.

Although he said so, Zhu Ping'an and the other new students did not dare to act presumptuously, still showing respect and politeness without overstepping.

"Majestic China, the fragrance of history wafts through the air, thanks to the inheritance of scholars. The elegance of the classics, the Chu Ci, Han Fu, Tang poetry, and Song lyrics—all the world's literature is produced by the scholars. Those who step in and out of the world, hermits rise from the wilderness, talented individuals are plucked from the streets, rare flowers and bright pearls, although they may wish to take the path to Mount Zhongshan, cannot, so they enter the world as officials to work for the welfare of the country. This results in the promotion of the virtuous and the well-being of the people, flourishing in literature, poetry, and prosperity. Today, the fortune of the scholarly world welcomes you, and your fortune is entering our scholarly world. I hope you will continue to strive forward..."

After the academic supervisor took his seat, he began his lecture to the new students, essentially stating that the scholarly world is powerful and that they were excellent, encouraging them to keep up the good work.

Throughout history, after the leaders finish their speeches, other leaders usually step in to summarize, and today was no different. After the academic supervisor finished speaking, an elderly official with graying hair stood up and summarized the exam for this year, saying it was a successful, united, and satisfying exam, followed by some empty words.

Once all the speeches were made, it was time for the day's highlight—the awarding of the flower pin.

After acknowledging everyone, the academic supervisor began the ceremony. The "flower pin ceremony" did not involve pinning a flower to your head, but rather presenting a red flower, which was a reward of money. The reward was not much—just two taels of silver and a red flower—but the symbolic meaning was great. This was the honor that many scholars dreamed of. It meant that the scholarly world had opened its arms to you. From today onward, you were not alone; you were part of an organization.

After the flower pin ceremony, the academic supervisor and other educational officials were supposed to lead the new students to the Confucius Temple to pay their respects to Confucius, much like meeting the founding ancestors in martial arts or fantasy novels.

However, after the flower pin ceremony, there was a small twist. The academic supervisor asked the surrounding officials something, and after receiving an answer, he looked at the new students and asked, "Among you, who is Zhu Ping'an?"

Uh, could it be that what happened yesterday has been revealed? Despite feeling surprised, Zhu Ping'an stood up, bowed, and said, "I pay my respects to the academic supervisor. I am indeed Zhu Ping'an."

"Come forward," the academic supervisor waved his hand.

What was happening? Why did he want him to step forward?

So, Zhu Ping'an walked forward under the curious gazes of everyone.

Soon, everyone's curiosity turned into envy.

After Zhu Ping'an stepped forward, the academic supervisor stroked his long beard and said, "You are the youngest, yet your writing is excellent, rhythmic and full of talent. You must continue to work hard in the future, and one day you will achieve great success. However, do not become complacent and forget your place, and do not imitate the likes of Zhong Yong from the past. Let this be a lesson for you."

I see, the Head of the Education Department has put a lot of thought into it.

"The students must remember the teachings," Zhu Ping'an pretended to look deeply moved, then bowed deeply.

The Head of the Education Department was very satisfied with this response.

After the exchange, the academic supervisor granted a cup of wine as a reward.

It was supposed to be a vow to abstain from alcohol.

It seems plans can't keep up with changes. Since the academic supervisor offered the wine, Zhu Ping'an dared not refuse and had no choice but to accept and drink it.

After the interlude, the Confucius ceremony began.

The academic supervisor led the way, followed by other officials from South Jiangsu. Then came the newly admitted students, forming a grand procession toward the Confucius Temple.

The road from the Jiangnan Examination Hall to the Confucius Temple was blocked by the yamen officers, only allowing the officials and newly admitted students to pass. At this time, the pedestrians on both sides of the street pointed at and envied the new students walking in an orderly procession.

The ceremony of worshipping Confucius was like the opening ceremony for the newly admitted students, the so-called "Entering the school, leaving the government academy, ascending the path to success."

"Ritual and propriety begin with proper appearance, neat clothing, and proper words." — The Book of Rites, Chapter of the Crown. The first step in the Confucius ceremony was to "adjust the attire and crown." The academic supervisor and other officials stopped in front of the Confucius Temple to adjust their attire, and the newly admitted students, including Zhu Ping'an, did the same. After standing respectfully for a moment, they were led by the officials into the Confucius Temple.

After passing through the Lingxing Gate of the Confucius Temple, they saw a Panchi (pond) in the shape of a semicircle. "Pan" means half water, which is why the pond is semi-circular. In the pond, there were several golden fish, and in the distance, they saw a plaque hanging above the Dacheng Hall with four large, eye-catching characters: "Wan Shi Shi Biao" ("Teacher for Ten Thousand Generations").

Walking further was the Dacheng Hall, where five statues were seated. The most prominent was Confucius, with his most favored disciples on either side: Yan Hui, the diligent and studious Zeng Shen, Confucius' grandson Kong Ji, and the great ancient thinker Meng Ke. In front of Confucius' statue were offerings of meat and five other items for sacrificial purposes. The ceremonial rites were carried out by the academic supervisor and other officials. Then, Zhu Ping'an and the other new students knelt in a line, bowing nine times to the statue of the Sage Confucius. Everyone's expressions were solemn, yet there was a hint of excitement. From then on, their status would be very different.

After worshipping Confucius, Zhu Ping'an felt his knees aching and couldn't help but miss the modern world, where equality and democracy meant no kneeling.

Once the Confucius worship ceremony was over, only the Flower Pinning Banquet remained. The academic supervisor hosted a banquet to entertain the new students. Zhu Ping'an, along with the others, headed to the banquet site, which was still in the Jiangnan Examination Hall. The efficiency of the government was impressive. By the time they returned to the Jiangnan Examination Hall after paying respects to Confucius, the banquet had already been set up.

Due to the large number of people, the Flower Pinning Banquet was held outdoors, set up in a spacious area of the Jiangnan Examination Hall.

The banquet was filled with a dazzling array of food and wine, making it hard not to feel hungry.

