

## Rise 200

### Chapter 200: Another Twist and Turn

#### Appointing the Top Scholar!

The title of "Jieyuan" was an ancient Chinese designation for the top scorer in the provincial examination. During the Tang Dynasty, candidates who passed the imperial examinations were sent from local regions to take the next level of tests, hence the tradition of calling the provincial exam's top scorer "Jieyuan."

At this moment, our assistant examiner, Song Tongkao, was fully immersed in grading the examination papers. Every cell in his body was focused on the scripts before him. He was so absorbed that he didn't even notice the chief examiner pushing open the door and entering the room, nor did he notice the paper he had discarded in disgust being picked up by the chief examiner. Naturally, he also failed to see how the chief examiner trembled nonstop while reading Zhu Ping'an's script...

So when the chief examiner pressed the discarded paper onto his desk and solemnly declared, "This must be the top scholar, Jieyuan," our Song Tongkao was startled. He didn't immediately comprehend what was happening. But when he did, he was utterly dumbfounded.

Song Tongkao took a second look at the script the chief examiner had placed before him. No mistake—it was the very same paper that had made him feel as if he had swallowed something foul!

At that moment, our righteous and justice-driven Song Tongkao completely disregarded the chief examiner's rank. Rising from his chair, he felt his chest swell with the weight of his duty to the nation.

"Lord Zhang, did you actually read this paper?" Song Tongkao pressed his hands on the desk and questioned sternly.

Chief Examiner Zhang nodded.

Seeing this, Song Tongkao's chest heaved like a bellows. He questioned again, "Then how could you still say what you just did?"

At this moment, another assistant examiner beside Song Tongkao gently tugged at his sleeve, whispering some words of caution. However, our Song Tongkao firmly shook his head.

In his province, he was known for his serious and responsible nature. He dared to fight, was willing to fight, and was skilled at fighting—regardless of who stood in his way. Rank and status meant nothing; if he believed something was wrong, he would charge forward fearlessly. Today would be no exception.

"If this paper is not awarded the top rank, I would be ashamed before the Emperor!"

Chief Examiner Zhang was not displeased with Song Tongkao's reaction. On the contrary, he even admired his integrity. But admiration was one thing—principles were another. If Song Tongkao had his own principles, then Zhang certainly had his as well.

So, Chief Examiner Zhang nodded once more.

"Forgive my rudeness!"

Song Tongkao bowed slightly and clasped his hands in respect. Then, he picked up the script that Zhang had pressed onto the table, flipped it open, and pointed at a passage with righteous indignation.

"Lord Zhang, this essay titled 'The Gentleman Detests Dying Without a Name' begins with the argument 'To die without a legacy is the worry of the sages.' Is this appropriate?"

"And here, this passage states: 'Heaven does not speak, the earth remains silent. It is mankind who establishes moral principles.' Such arrogance! The moral order was established by the sages!"

"This author is utterly reckless! My lord, please reconsider!"

Holding the script, Song Tongkao argued with unwavering conviction.

"Indeed. And yet, not at all!"

Chief Examiner Zhang shook his head. "Sages are human, too. The opening argument in 'The Gentleman Detests Dying Without a Name' is brilliant, and the development is even more profound: 'A fleeting name in one's lifetime is not necessary, but a lasting name in history is indispensable.' The other essay is even more extraordinary. This author is no reckless fool—he is a true child of wisdom!"

One examiner was adamant about failing the candidate, while the other was determined to award him the top honor. Their perspectives were as far apart as the depths of the underworld and the heights of the celestial heavens.

Neither was willing to back down.

Though Song Tongkao's rank was low, he stood by his principles. Chief Examiner Zhang held a high position, but he did not use his authority to suppress others.

They were at an impasse.

At this moment, the door was pushed open once again, and another chief examiner, Lord Wang, entered.

He had been drawn by the commotion. Even from the adjacent room, he could hear the heated argument.

"My esteemed colleagues, what is happening here?" Lord Wang rubbed his hands together and walked over, asking curiously.

Soon, someone explained the situation to him.

"Oh, I see. Let me take a look." Lord Wang shook his head slightly, walked to the center of the dispute, and took the examination paper to read.

As Lord Wang read, he nodded repeatedly. After about ten minutes, he had made his decision. However, being a seasoned veteran of the officialdom, he did not express his opinion directly. Instead, he summoned the attendant scribe and instructed:

"You, bring me this candidate's second and third examination papers."

"As you command." The scribe bowed and withdrew. Moments later, he returned with the two requested examination papers and handed them to Lord Wang.

After receiving the examination papers, Lord Wang waved his hand, dismissing the scribe. Then, he handed one paper to Chief Examiner Zhang and the other to Deputy Examiner Song.

Chief Examiner Zhang received the second examination paper, which consisted of formal official documents such as memorials and edicts. This section did not require literary talent but rather adherence to the official document format. Zhang, who already favored Zhu Ping'an, found his second examination paper well-structured and satisfying.

Deputy Examiner Song received the third examination paper, which was an essay on policy. This section required not only literary skill but also substantial knowledge.

Song examined it carefully. The first policy essay was well-written but not particularly remarkable. However, when he read the second essay, titled "The Seventy-Two Worthies of Confucianism: What Makes the Worthy Worthy?", he lingered on it for a long time and nodded approvingly.

Then, as he continued reading—"Not bad, not bad"—his nods became more frequent. Upon reaching the Policy on Suppressing Japanese Pirates, he nodded repeatedly, finally lifting his head after a long while to look at the two chief examiners.

"I nearly destroyed a future pillar of the state," Deputy Examiner Song said with a sigh, bowing in salute.

Chief Examiner Zhang helped him up and reassured him, "Deputy Examiner Song was merely fulfilling his duty to His Majesty. There is no need for regret."

Lord Wang stroked his beard as he watched the scene unfold. Then, he set Zhu Ping'an's three examination papers aside and picked up a brush. With a firm stroke, he wrote a large "Pass" on the top of the paper.

After that, the examination hall resumed its usual bustle. The examiners continued reading, recommending, and grading papers in an orderly manner.

Several days later, when the grading was complete and the draft ranking list was being compiled, the two chief examiners finally realized that the much-debated and highly praised examination paper belonged to a thirteen-year-old boy.

"If I had known earlier that this candidate was only thirteen, I would not have passed him," Chief Examiner Zhang sighed with deep regret.

"Why? Is he not talented?" Chief Examiner Wang asked curiously.

"He is indeed exceptionally talented, and there is no issue with him passing this examination. However, I believe it would be better for him to wait a few years before earning this title. A young man, full of vigor and ambition, may become too arrogant too soon, which could be harmful to his development. If he waits a few more years, he will become more seasoned, and it will be better for his future," Chief Examiner Zhang stroked his beard and sighed.

Although Chief Examiner Zhang greatly admired Zhu Ping'an's literary talent, he worried that a boy of just thirteen attaining such high honors might become conceited, lose his drive, and ultimately fail to fulfill his potential.

Chief Examiner Wang glanced at Zhang and shook his head. "Once the decision is made, it cannot be changed."

"Brother Zhang, are you aware that sixty years ago, there was another thirteen-year-old who passed this very examination in one attempt?" Wang asked.

Zhang pondered for a moment.

"That boy later shook three dynasties and held power over the empire—Lord Yang Tinghe," Wang said with a complicated expression. Then, in a warning tone, he added, "Brother Zhang, how can you predict how great this child will become in the future?"

"Precisely because of that, I must take responsibility for him. He needs to understand that the pursuit of knowledge is endless and that becoming an official is not so simple. I want to ensure he never forgets the value of diligent study," Zhang replied earnestly.

"But we have already approved his passing, and it cannot be undone," Wang shook his head.

"I know. That is why I lament," Zhang nodded and sighed.