

Rise 305

Chapter 305: To Have Such a Talented Man Is Truly Worthy of Praise

“Silence! State your reason clearly and hand it over to the clerks beside you for submission. If this happens again, you will be severely punished!”

Hearing this rebuke from Xu Jie, the fellow examiner’s surging passion finally cooled down, and his usual composure and calmness regained control of his body. Right, he had almost forgotten about the procedure for grading papers. Recommending a paper, especially a high recommendation, followed a specific process.

Really, he had almost caused trouble. Being reprimanded himself was no big deal, but if this test paper was affected because of him, that would be a grave sin.

Calm down. I must stay calm.

The fellow examiner took a deep breath, adjusted himself to his best state, nodded firmly, then sat upright, opened the exam paper once more, and focused his attention back on it. Since he wanted to give it a high recommendation, he needed to write out the reason clearly—not just based on this one Eight-Legged Essay, but after thoroughly reading the entire paper.

After reading the first essay, he found it extraordinarily brilliant, standing out like a crane among chickens, like a dragon soaring through the fields.

He continued to the second essay. “Only in the bitter cold do we see that the pine and cypress are the last to wither.” This piece used objects to express ambition, hitting the core—it was also a rare, excellent essay.

Then came the third piece. Like the first one, the examiner only needed to read the opening line: “The Way of the Sage is great and has its roots; the scholar must reach it step by step.” This opening line hit the mark with stunning precision, like a meteor streaking across the sky. The examiner’s blood, just cooled down, was nearly boiling again. If Xu Jie’s scolding hadn’t still echoed in his ears, he would have slapped the table and praised it aloud.

Forcing himself to be patient, the examiner read the entire test paper from beginning to end, then let out a heavy sigh.

If this paper isn’t highly recommended, I would be failing the Emperor!

“Our dynasty established the Northern and Southern Capitals, implementing the grand design of the world. The virtue of successive emperors has laid the foundation for ten thousand years. This essay speaks of these matters and has captured the people’s hearts. To rectify the ruler’s heart according to the teachings of Confucius and Mencius—this shows insight. To obtain such a scholar—this can be reported to His Majesty.”

The examiner wrote out the high recommendation in one go, then carefully handed it to the clerk who had been waiting beside him. The clerk then passed it on to the Deputy Chief Examiner, Yan Maoqing.

This was the grading procedure: papers recommended by fellow examiners were reviewed in turn by the Deputy Chief Examiner and the Chief Examiner. In fact, the fate of the paper ultimately rested with the Deputy and Chief Examiners. The Deputy Examiner would first review the recommended papers, and if approved, he would write the character “取” (accepted) on the paper with a black brush. The Chief Examiner would then review it. If he also approved, he would write “中” (passed), and the paper would be considered selected.

Of course, if the Deputy Examiner disapproved, he could reject the recommendation, and the paper would be discarded. At that point, the Chief Examiner had the right to override and accept the paper. However, the Chief Examiner usually did not exercise this power, as it would embarrass the Deputy Examiner.

The paper reached Yan Maoqing's hands. He opened the highly recommended paper and glanced at the comment written by the fellow examiner.

It's just a test paper. Why get so emotional? Even writing "To obtain such a scholar—this can be reported to His Majesty"—is that really necessary? Yan Maoqing held clear disdain for the over-the-top reaction.

However, when Yan Maoqing opened the paper and began reading the main text, he could no longer remain calm.

If the paper were merely excellent, it could be accepted—nothing more. But the problem was, it was too excellent. So excellent that it could contend for the top scorer of the examination! From the beginning of grading until now, there were few papers that could compare.

No—if this paper is selected, what about Elder Yan's nephew, the eldest son of his sister?

But if it isn't selected, wouldn't that be blatant favoritism? Moreover, Xu Jie kept glancing at the paper—it was clear he was paying close attention. Damn it! It was that fellow examiner's overly excited reaction that drew so much attention to this paper—now it's hard to sabotage it discreetly!

Who cares about the fellow examiner or Xu Jie? Clinging to Elder Yan's leg is the real way forward!

No. I can't let it pass.

But I need a reason. That's not hard. I'm good at nitpicking.

Just because you did well in the first round doesn't mean your other answers are good too.

So, Yan Maoqing flipped to the second section of the paper. The official writing here was also very polished, even sophisticated—he couldn't find fault for now. He kept reading, moving to the key part of the paper: the "Qingci" poem. Qingci wasn't something the average person could write well. Back in the day, Yan Maoqing himself had diligently practiced Qingci, hoping to win imperial favor like Elder Yan and rise to power, but it had been useless. Even he couldn't stand his own writing—how could he dare to submit it?

Yan Maoqing firmly believed he could find fault in this candidate's Qingci.

However, things did not go as Yan Maoqing expected. When his eyes landed on the Qingci section, his expression instantly changed.

“Heaven’s Command Revives the Vitality of the Nine Provinces”

Heaven’s command revives the vitality of the Nine Provinces,

A thousand horses gallop—how splendid a sight!

We respectfully admire Heaven’s great vigor,

Bestowing talents without constraint from all directions.

“Bestowing talents without constraint”—if that flattery doesn’t please the Emperor, nothing will!

Forget it. This paper must be selected. The top scorer won’t be decided until the last two days of grading. I can still push Elder Yan’s nephew later. Yan Maoqing believed he could sway Xu Jie eventually.

With that thought, and under everyone's watchful eyes, Yan Maoqing smiled slightly, then wrote the character “取” (accepted) on the paper and passed it to Xu Jie.

The fellow examiner who had been paying attention saw this and was overjoyed. From the brushstrokes alone, he could tell Yan Maoqing had written “accepted.”

Xu Jie, always the smiling, good-natured man, now beamed even more as he read the paper. He nodded repeatedly, very pleased. Xu Jie was the Chief Examiner for this exam, and many of the questions were written by him. The literary quality of the paper aside, the structure and arguments aligned perfectly with his intentions when designing the questions—that was especially valuable.

And the Qingci—truly unique, a shining star among the rest!

Indeed, the fellow examiner's line “To obtain such a scholar—this can be reported to His Majesty” was a bit much, but Xu Jie himself could not be more satisfied!

Xu Jie read much more efficiently than Yan Maoqing. After reading, he immediately wrote the character “中” (passed) and placed this paper together with the one Yan Maoqing had previously backed, along with two others.

These separately placed papers were the candidates eligible to compete for the top scorer of this examination.