

Week 26: *The Scholars*

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION TO AN 18TH CENTURY NOVEL: THE SCHOLARS

Why are we doing this sequence, a sequence that involves looking at a scroll and reading a novel? Well, in part, it's just to give you some relief, to do something fun. And you'll see that the scroll and novel go together to some extent. Both of them come from the mid 18th century in the Qing dynasty.

The scroll is from around 1751. It was of the city of Suzhou. It was around 12 meters long. In fact, it's known as Prosperous Suzhou, and that's a good name for it because the city is prosperous. It was the most cultured and most prosperous city in the southeast. And the scroll is certainly showing you everything you would want to know about that prosperous city.

It was done for a particular reason. The emperor had traveled south on his southern tour in 1751, and he was so impressed by the city of Suzhou that he ordered up a scroll showing the city. And this scroll you're going to be looking at was the result of that. It's a very intensive scroll, that is, it's filled with detail. There're around 4,800 people in the scroll. I didn't do the counting, by the way. 2,000 architectural attributes, or 2,000 buildings.

The novel, which is commonly known as *The Scholars*, might more properly be called *The Unofficial History of the Confucians*, or *Rulin Waishi*. It was set not so far away, in the city of Nanjing, formerly the southern capital of the Ming dynasty along the Yangtze River.

It was written just a decade before the scroll was done, and it was done by a literatus himself who set the story in the Ming dynasty rather than the Qing dynasty. That sort of thing was fairly common, to take a story and put it in an earlier period so one avoided offending one's own times, perhaps. And it had its own focus, the literati and the examination system, or how literati lives evolved around the examination system.

Now there's a reason for us putting these two works together besides that we want you to have fun. They come from the same period. They're from somewhat proximate places. We want you to look at them also because both of them claim-- the painting and the novel-- claim to be windows on social life. And they persuade us, when we look at them, when we read them, that this is how life was in the middle of the 18th century.

In fact, and this is something to keep in mind as you look at them, they're interpretations. There's one man's view of what the city ought to look like, and one man's view of what society should be understood to be like.

Still, these interpretations contain lots that had to be recognizable to the audience. And in that sense, because the audience can see them as real, can be persuaded by them, they do serve to some extent as a window on their times.

Now, at this point we're going to turn to the scroll, Prosperous Suzhou, and ask you to do a few things that will help you see more deeply into that scroll.

SECTION 2: THE RISE OF THE NOVEL

You've been looking at a man named Xu Yang. When he finished the scroll and presented it to the emperor, the emperor gave him a reward. It was a reward that didn't cost the emperor anything, but it was tremendously valuable to Xu Yang. What did Mr. Xu get?

He was given the rank of a provincial graduate. What does that mean? It means that he was able to say that I'm the equivalent of somebody who has passed the provincial level of the civil service examinations and I have the right to go to the capital to compete for the very highest level. Now, even though he didn't go on to compete at the highest level, the fact that he had a provincial degree meant that he was eligible for appointment to certain offices.

It did more than that. It gave him access to the elite of Suzhou. He now had entree with local officials. He could talk to all the literati in the Suzhou area. It freed him from a whole set of tax obligations. And, as I mentioned before, it made him eligible for appointment to certain offices.

What happened to Mr. Xu brings us to our main topic now, the novel *The Scholars*. The author of *The Scholars*, Wu Jingzi, took the exams but he never got beyond the county level. He was thus at the lower end of the literati spectrum, poor and humble, perhaps, but highly educated and, as you'll see, idealistic in his own way. And he moves at some point in his life to Nanjing, and that's where the novel takes place. Although it's set in the Ming dynasty temporally, the location is Nanjing in which he lived.

Now, before turning to the novel itself, I should say something about the novel as part of Chinese literature. By 1740, the novel was already at least 100 years old. The first novels had appeared in the late Ming period. They found an audience among the growing number of readers with purchasing power. Remember that the late Ming was a period of great economic expansion-- people with purchasing power and a desire for entertainment. Again, recall our discussion of the consequences, the cultural consequences, of all the new wealth that was pouring into Ming.

As you read the novel, you'll see that, in many ways, it's a series of acts. And that's not by accident. The novel form grows out of the play or the drama, really, an opera. And, by the late Ming, operas were being written that had 40 or 50 acts in them. They were really meant to be read. Although, in principle, you could sing parts of them as well.

The novel thus is a series of acts but all in narrative form. No singing involved. Interestingly, in China, the novel in this long form-- I believe *The Scholars* has 60 chapters, 60 acts, one might say-- the novel comes before the short story.

SECTION 2: FOUR GREAT NOVELS

When the novel emerges, very quickly, probably within a century-- we're not sure of the exact dates when they were written-- four great novels appear. Now let me say something about each one of them, because they'll give you a sense not only of just the richness of this form, but also ways in which they're not unlike novels, popular novels we might read today.

One is called *The Three Kingdoms*, or *The Tale of the Three Kingdoms*, [sanguo yanyi]. For those who like stories about battles and power struggles, fans of the *Game of Thrones*, for example, this is the book you want to read.

If you like the martial arts, if you like novels about heroic men who are driven to be outlaws and live on the fringes of society, but are always righteous and saving the downtrodden, then you want to read *The Water Margin*, a tale of heroes.

If you're into fantasy, if you want to have things go on that are somewhat fantastic, beyond normal life, then you want to read *The Journey to The West*, the story of a Buddhist monk who travels to the west, meaning the Western region, India, in search of the dharma, the Buddhist dharma, with a pig, a horse, and a monkey. That monkey is one of the most popular characters in Chinese comics till today. The monkey has magical powers.

And for those who like steamy romances and a bit of soft core pornography, then we have *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, the story of Ximen Qing and his seven wives, a corrupt and corrupting merchant.

One of the facets of these novels is that they include conversations among characters. And conversations that are not conducted in high literary language, but are written in a language that comes much closer to daily speech.

So the novels are still meant to appeal to a very literate literati readership, to be sure, but they're trying to capture something about life and daily life that earlier writing, and even the dramas, had not necessarily been able to do. In doing this, they're also drawing on another tradition, what might be called the minor tale tradition, the *xiaoshuo*. That word, *xiaoshuo*, minor tale, *xiaoshuo*, comes to mean, in fact, novels.

But the minor tale tradition doesn't begin as an idea of fiction, rather it begins as the idea of recording gossip, the true story behind the scenes that no one wants to talk about publicly, things like that. And so the novel is also an heir to that, as well.

One last point. Another novel appeared very soon after *The Scholars* was written. And that's a novel that, in fact, is probably the single most famous novel in Chinese history. It's known in Chinese as [hong lou meng, or *The Dream of Red Chambers*.

It's also been translated, in a wonderful translation by David Hawkes and John Minford called *The Story of the Stone*. It's the tale of a family, of a very elite family in decline. The family is going downhill. And the children, who grow up in a garden, live their lives there as the family slides down.

It's a novel that is tremendously cultured. It assumes that you have, yourself as a reader, a vast, erudite knowledge of Chinese literature. And we, in fact, are not going to cover it in this course, because it's too difficult for us to do. But we hope you will find a reason to read it.

Now when you start reading *The Scholars*, you'll see that it revolves around examinations. The next section, you want to explain how the examination system worked. But before we take you to that, we want to pause now and ask you to read the preface that was written to *The Scholars* when it was first written. And see what you can learn from that about how the author and his readers, or his friends, thought about this new book that had just been produced.

SECTION 2: INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR WAI-YEE LI ON THE DREAM OF THE RED CHAMBER

We're here together with Professor Li Wai Yee. She is a professor of Chinese literature here at Harvard. She works particularly on the literature of the Ming and Qing periods, as well as having written on early historical writing-- the writings of the Shiji by Sima Tan, the Han dynasty, and the Zuo zhuan.

But we're here to talk about literature, and particularly novels. And we've been reading *The Scholars* and talking about *The Scholars*, from the mid-18th century. There was another novel that appeared in the mid-18th century called *Hong Lou Meng*-- "*Dream of Red Chambers*"-- translated also in the Penguin series as "*The Story of the Stone*." And I thought we might ask Professor Li, who's an expert on this, something about that novel, which is, still today, one of the greatest novels in Chinese history.

So what is *Story of the Stone* about? I mean, if I talk about *The Scholars*, I'd say it's about scholars and the examination system, and he's very unhappy-- the author is-- with the way things are going. But how about *Story of the Stone*?

Well, the plot is really about this family. The surname of the family is Jia, which, in Chinese, is homophonic with "friction" or "force." So a family that you're going to find out all the details about this family, and live the reality of this family, but the name of that family is fictive-- elusive.

So anyway, it's this family, and you're particularly invited to look at the inner life of this protagonist, who's a young man. You understand-- you get to find out that, in his previous existence, he is a rock.

What?

[BOTH LAUGH]

What do you mean?

A stone. It so happens that in the beginning, there is a hole in heaven. The hole in heaven comes about because there are two titans who fight a battle and break the pillar supporting heaven and earth, and, as a result, there's a hole in heaven. And because of the hole in heaven, it has to be patched up.

And there's a goddess who refines 36,501 stones to repair this hole, and all she needs is 36,500, so there's one that is left over. The leftover one, because he has been refined by the goddess-- he's refined into sentience, and has all these emotional powers, intellectual powers, of the human-- only that he's not human, he's just a rock. So he's lamenting his fate at the bottom of a mountain. Until one day, a monk and a Taoist takes him to the human world.

So he becomes our protagonist, the stone. And of course, he doesn't remember this previous life when he's born into this family. And for most part of the story, we don't get to remember this prehistory at all. We follow his life and, eventually, his loves.

So sorry-- this happened to me. When I started to read this novel, then there's all this stuff about the stone. And I couldn't figure out why this mattered. But once we got to the boy, himself-- right? Then it sort of became sort of more like a normal story. But there's this weird backstory that you have to get through.

Right. You have to be very patient in the first five chapters, because it's as if the story begins again and again. And every time, really, it's as if you're dealing with a new set of premises on how to understand the novel. So in some ways, the mythic background is also a kind of indication of how you should read this book.

Mhm. So we have this story; it's being set up for us in all these ways. Then we have the boy and others in the garden.

And then you get into this family. And at the beginning, you're not sure how old he is, when you first meet him. He's about, perhaps, 11 or 12-- maybe a bit younger. And then you follow him to age 19, when he will leave the world and become a monk. I mean, I'm sorry to give away the end.

Oh! Yes, you did.

But-- all right. So let's excise that. But you really follow the intricacies of his family life. You understand the bumps and battles in the family, the power relations in the family. And eventually, you get so immersed in the life of this family, as if it were a microcosm of the whole world.

Mhm. And so that garden, in the novel-- what's it called, the Dague Yuan? How do you understand-- what's that-- the title of the story, to me, if I sort of look at it as an intellectual story, it means "having a broad view." But is that sort of this notion of the microcosm as macrocosm, as well? That the garden itself is the world?

I think, eventually, you do get that sense. It's a very peculiar kind of world, where it's a world free of adult responsibilities and free of a lot of the sociopolitical constraints that an average Chinese person in the 18th century would have to deal with. So in many ways, it's an ideal world.

This garden gets to be built around chapter 17 or 18, so if you're a patient reader, you will almost get through the first volume of the Hawkes translation before it's built. And then the good news is that you get to live there for about another 60 chapters or so, because, really, they leave the garden in about chapter 77 or 78.

How many chapters are there in this novel?

Well, 120, in the present version, although it's widely accepted that Cao Xueqin wrote only the first 80 chapters. And then another person wrote the last 40. And a lot of people think the last 40 chapters are not as good. I also think that it's not as good.

But it's interesting for a whole variety of reasons. It really gives you an understanding of how-- I kind of-- it gives you a reader's response to Cao Xueqin, in a sense, because, in many ways, I think Cao Xueqin was ahead of his times in his thinking about many subjects. And the last 40 chapters was a much more average Chinese scholar trying to understand that and giving his answers to a lot of the questions posed in the first 80 chapters. So even though it's not the first-- I mean, even though it's two authors, I think it's interesting enough.

Mhm. One of the things that strikes me, about this, in contrast to *The Scholars*-- *The Scholars* has lots of references to literature and literary writing and literary composition for the examinations. But it doesn't take them seriously, in some sense, or it sees them as becoming false and stale. And it strikes me that in the *Hong Lou Meng*-- or the "*Dream of the Red Chamber*," "*Story of the Stone*"-- we're actually seeing a-- it's a very cultured book. It's a very literary novel, where you really-- you have to know as much as the protagonists do, in order to appreciate the novel. But can you read it without a whole background in Chinese literary studies?

It's better if you know something, but, in fact, you can reverse the cost and consequence and say that this is how you know something in the first place. Because it's so all-encompassing, really, so it's, like, repeating. It gives you the fundamentals, you know-- probably the kind of things you talk about at the beginning of your class, about Confucianism and Buddhism and Taoism. You get to know all those things. And you get to know, also, all the ornaments of literati culture, right? Poetry, painting--

So if you were interested in what Chinese-- the life of the Chinese cultural elite in the 18th century at its best, this would be the place to turn.

That's right. This can be a portal to understand those things. So you consider, having understood all those things, you now can read the book better. But that's why I said you can look at the cost and consequence in two different ways.

It's quite different from *The Scholars*-- from that novel, *Scholars*-- in the sense that it's-- well, as you said, *The Scholars* is often quite critical of many aspects of that culture. This book is bathed in the warm glow of nostalgia. And part of it is the fact that our author-- Cao Xueqin-- by the time he was writing this book, his family had become quite poor. They started out being powerful and rich, but by the time he was in his teens, the family's quite poor.

So when he looked back on that world, he's also, himself, nostalgic about [? world ?] that is lost in him. Now for the modern reader to translate into the modern reader's nostalgic retrospection on *The Story of the Stone*-- *Dream of the Red Chamber*-- and that in part accounts for the popularity of the book.

So you know, when we talk about the popularity of [INAUDIBLE], there are lots of famous novels from the 18th century-- well, I don't know how many famous novels are from the 18th century, still. But it seems to me that, by and large, these are things we have to read in high school and college. Is *Hong Lou Meng*-- is *The Dream of Red Chambers* a novel that you have to read in college? Or does it have more general popularity?

It definitely has more general popularity. First of all, everybody knows this story. They may not have read it, but they would have seen operatic versions of it, more likely TV soap opera versions of it.

Do they have comic books, too, of them?

There are comic books, yeah.

So it's cross-media.

It's multimedia. And you can say, of course, that all those other versions-- they don't get the book, sometimes, but still, that, you know, there are many different ways of understanding it. And this gets to all levels of culture. It becomes-- you know, if you meet someone, and you say that you are like that character in the book, they will know what you're talking about. They will know whether you're paying them a compliment or not.

Oh, really?

Or insulting them, as the case may be.

So you mean that the novel, because it becomes this sort of shared cultural property, is a way in which people can understand the world, right?

It's like a repertoire of images and stories and themes that one can refer to. I always tell my students it's great cultural capital, if you go to China to work or study, and you show your knowledge of this book, then it's a great plus.

[LAUGHING] OK.

Trying to entice them to read it.

We actually want you to find the time to go out and get this story. It's been translated in a wonderful translation by David Hawkes and John Minford. It's six volumes, however; it is, after all, 120 chapters.

Only five volumes.

Only five volumes, right. I misspoke. Five volumes. But if students here you do-- and of course, for students in China, reading it in Chinese is a given. But for those who don't read Chinese, as they read it, is there any general advice you want to give them, about how to read it?

I have to confess I actually never read the translation. When I have to teach it, all I did is find a page number. So I never read through it.

But I very much admire Hawkes. And I was so moved when, at the end of his introduction, he said something like, if I can convey to you how much pleasure this novel has given me, I will not have lived in vain, or something. I said-- [GASP] wow. I was so [SPEAKING CHINESE], you know, so moved.

And I think his English is very good. He tries to-- as far as I can tell, he's sometimes a little bit free with the Chinese, but that's all for the better. I think it probably makes for better English reading.

I myself read so much literature in translation-- actually a lot of, even, English novels I read in Chinese before I read them in English. So I always believe in translation. I think this is one way to get to understand something-- understand the culture.

We hope, too, that if you go and read this, that you will feel that your time was not spent in vain. And so, thank you very much.

Thank you.

SECTION 3: THE RISE OF THE MERITOCRACY

Let's take a look at what the examinations were supposed to accomplish. It really depends upon whose point of view we're talking about. So let's begin with the government's point of view. Why does the government want to have examinations?

Well, its argument is it wants to recruit talent to serve in government offices. Civil government has to be managed by civil officials, and those officials need to have civil talents. What does that mean? It means, at least for China, it comes to mean that they have to have learning, their talent is a test of their learning, and their learning is going to be checked by seeing how they write, by seeing their composition. We'll come back to that in a second.

It's highly competitive. The tests involve learning from the classics but also learning history, learning proper literary forms, thinking about the political dilemmas that a country faces, thinking about questions of philosophy, and so on. Now, the examinations are very old. We can find them already in the Han dynasty and the Tang dynasty. But in fact, it's not really until the very end of the 10th century and the beginning of the 11th century under the Song dynasty that the court decides to use these civil service examinations as the primary means by which you recruit officials for civil government.

In deciding to do that, they were giving up on two other possibilities. They were giving up on selecting people through personal connection and they were giving up on the idea that government could be staffed simply by hiring the sons and grandsons of serving officials. In other words, they were giving up on simply having a connection to somebody powerful and giving up on the idea that families had the right to secure

offices for their sons and grandsons and, thus, that the government would be a self-perpetuating group of families.

This choice had a lot to do with the fact that the great clans that had dominated the Tang dynasty had disappeared. But it went together with the belief, too, that we all could learn. We all have the ability to learn and thus we all have the ability to serve, and that those who were good at learning should hold political power.

In the 11th century, new laws were made to ensure that the examinations would be fair. For example, they took off the names of the examinees and replaced them with a code number. Then, because they were afraid that examiners might recognize the calligraphy-- and you've learned something at this point about Chinese calligraphy and its distinctiveness-- they decided that all the exam papers would be re-copied and re-copied by clerks so that they would be truly a blind test, fair and blind.

Examinations set up like this not only recruited officials. They also served to legitimate the government. True, the emperor held his position by hereditary right, and the dynasty, after all, lasted as long as that one family controlled the throne. But everyone else in government, in principle, was selected on the basis of merit. And the government would be staffed by people from all over the country who had risen on the basis of their talent and learning. In that sense, the government was a government that was representative of the very best of the country.

SECTION 4: MING AND QING CIVIL EXAM

[MUSIC PLAYING]

One result of having a fair test that could lead to appointment to office-- and all the wealth and power that followed from that-- was an explosion in the number of candidates. By 1250, when scholars estimated there were 450,000 people participating at all levels in the examination system, of whom 600-- every three years 600 only-- were able to get the highest degree-- What's called the jinshi or Presented Scholar, Presented Literatus degree.

By 1600, there were probably about 800,000 people that had some kind of examination status-- and we'll talk about the different kinds of statuses that had come into being by that point later-- of whom only 300 earned an examination degree once every three years. And by 1850 there were something like 1.4 million people who had some sort of status in the system. They still were only granting around 300 of the highest degrees-- once every three years.

If the number of degrees granted at the highest level was so small relative to the total number of competitors, why would people ever continue to take the examinations? Why not just give up? From a literati point of view, from the point of view of literati families, why would you invest in having your sons study for the exam-- something that might take them decades-- it would be like going to college and graduate school-- people generally, if they passed the highest level of exam, passed when they were around 30 years old. What would make it worthwhile to take the effort if your chance of really succeeding was between 1 in 2,000 to 5,000.

To understand why this wasn't a waste of time, we have to understand something about the structure of the examination system. Namely, it was far less restrictive than the number of highest level degrees would suggest. This is because at the beginning of the Ming dynasty, the government made-- which in some ways was a wise decision-- it decided to recognize people at the prefectural level and at the provincial level, as well as at the capital level. That is, it gave examination statuses at these different levels. So there were

licentiates-- or, in Chinese, "shengyuan"-- who had privileges at the local level where they went to school, and who then went on to the province where they took another exam. And if they passed that, then they went on to the capital to try for the highest-level exam.

Over time, the number of different examination statuses grew, and they became the single most important marker of social status in the Ming and Qing dynasties. Being an official was unquestionably a marker of the highest status. But all these other people-- remember, by 1850, 1.4 million-- had some sort of legitimate status, and it brought certain privileges.

Well, what kinds of privileges? It brought, for some people, a stipend. Not much of a stipend, but it didn't hurt. It brought freedom from labor service. So you did not have to get your hands dirty and provide service to the government.

Now some people have argued that the reason people took the exams was because it was like a lottery. You sort of know that you're not likely to win, but if you go in and spend a couple of dollars a week, you have the chance of making a million. And somebody has to win some time.

Now I think actually this explanation is wrong. A lottery is not much money, but your chances are very very small. What I'm trying to say is that your chances of getting something out of the system were not bad at all. You might not get much, but you got something that made you different from other people. So even the lowest-level degree holder, the licentiate, the shengyuan, had something-- had a tax break, no labor service, and had a status that set him apart from the vast majority of people where he lived.

SECTION 4: SOCIAL MOBILITY VS. SOCIAL ROTATION

Now, I'll tell you one story now to give you a sense of how strong the weight was of this kind of status. It's a story that comes up in the novel *The Scholars*. It's about Fan Jin. And Fan Jin was a poor young scholar who had the dream of passing examinations, was always unsuccessful. And his wife's father, his, father-in-law was a butcher. And he lived with his wife's family.

And his father was a nasty cuss. He slapped Fan Jin around. He thought he was a fool. He thought he had no good sense at all. Well, Fan Jin gets the right to go to the provincial capital to take the examinations. And lo and behold, he passes. And when he passes, he's so shocked that he collapses, goes unconscious, falls down on the floor.

And the neighbors all think he's going to die. And the neighbors say to his father-in-law, well, slap him a little bit, try to wake him up, get him-- And his father said, no, no, no. He's now going to be official. An official. I dare not. I dare not touch him. He is like one of the stars in heaven who has come to life and been reborn here. This man is now my son-in-law, who I used to beat up all the time, has now become a man of such grace and great talent, great standard and great promise that I dare not do anything except be obsequious to him.

This was meant to be funny. But it also makes a claim. It makes the claim that examinations allowed for social mobility, that they were more important, in fact, than kinship-- that you could transcend your circumstances by passing exams. This idea that the examinations were China's great mechanism for social mobility, that after the end of the aristocracy that examinations allowed for a more modern, socially mobile society of upwardly mobile people-- We ought to sometimes think about downwardly mobile, too. But we'll talk about that in another occasion.

This idea that made people at the lower levels of society able to rise to higher levels, the marginal to become central, to go from poverty to wealth, was very, very appealing. But in fact, it's been very sharply criticized. It's been criticized by scholars today, who point out that the way in which upward mobility has been measured does not necessarily hold water.

In brief, the way in which it's been measured typically is to look at who passes the examinations, and then to look at the record of their father, grandfather and great grandfather. If none of those people passed the examinations, then we say, aha, that's a new man. New blood coming into the system. That is mobility.

Well, when we look more closely at these new men, however. What we tend to discover is that they're deeply embedded in local kinship groups, or lineages, that they have relatives who have passed the examinations, or hold offices or so on. And in fact, some would even argue that when families established themselves as local literati elites, beginning in South China in the 12th century, they are remarkably stable. And many of them last from the 12th century into the present day.

But if this is so, what did examinations do? Well, if they're not a mechanism of social mobility, what could they be? I think what they might be is in fact a mechanism of social rotation. That is, we have existing, educated, people who are going to school, who are competing for the exams in very large numbers. Who come from families where most of the boys are involved in the same kind of education. And what they're trying to do is make sure that those families all have an equal chance to send somebody into government.

I'm going to turn you over now to some people who are going to tell you about how the examination system in the Ming and Qing dynasties worked in greater detail. And when they're done, I'd like you to think about what surprised you most and why it surprised you.

SECTION 4: A SHORT ON THE CIVIL EXAM

In this short, we will briefly go over the basic structure of the exam system and gain a basic understanding of the government bureaucracy and late Qing and Ming. First we will go over the basic structure of the exam system.

Overall, there are three formal academic degrees, at the local level, the provincial level, and the national level. Then we will go over the basic structure of the bureaucracy. There are a total of nine ranks in the government bureaucracy divided into three stratum. First there are the tong sheng or Apprentice students who study at home. Then if they pass the local prefectural exam, they become juren or licentiate. As a licentiate or juren, they're entitled to certain privileges, such as exemption from corvee duty. Some were given a stipend and room and board. And the late Ming and Qing, the government also sold this degree to raise money. Juren were considered scholar commoners, and were addressed as Mr. Or xiansheng. They had no opportunity for official employment and were considered part of the common class. They were not considered local elite. This is aptly illustrated by Professor Bol's story of Fan Chin

Fan Chin was treated horribly by his butcher father-in-law, even though he was a licentiate, and he was not respected in the least. Those who passed the ke shi became a gongsheng or tribute Student. However, there were many other ways you could become a gongsheng other than passing the exam.

Some Juren we're able to purchase the gongsheng degree. They were considered the regular Gong Sheng. The [? Shui ?] Gong Sheng were chosen in a fixed manner, one annually from the prefecture school. Two, every school department county school tri-annually, and one, every county school biannually. The bagongsheng were chosen every 12 years and we're eligible for seventh and eighth make.

The en gong sheng are attribute student by Imperial Grace, who are chosen when the regular quotas were doubled due to imperial celebrations, et cetera. The you gong sheng were chosen for their literary talent.

The jian sheng or state student were students in the Imperial Academy. They had access to the best libraries and tutorial facilities. They were considered a privilege group among the commoners, and were not eligible for government positions.

The Ju Ren could also purchase this degree. When the Mongols invaded in 1451, the government was in need of cash so they sold this degree even to men who did not have any academic degree, creating a channel of social mobility for rich men. The lijian sheng, zenjian sheng, and fujian sheng were all purchased degrees.

The you jian sheng was based on a literary talent. If the gong sheng and the jiansheng passed the tri-annual provincial exam or zhishengxiangshi, they became a juren. Becoming a juren or elevating man meant you are eligible for official positions of the ninth and eighth rank. This means you are part of the scholar class. As the Fan Chin illustrates, this is a very big deal.

When Fan Chin becomes a juren or "elevated man", his bullying father-in-law no longer dares to touch him. If you passed a huishi or metropolitan exam, you become a huigongsheng and you are eligible to take the Dianshi or the highest examination, the highest level of exam in the system. If you pass that, you become a jinshi or literatus. And if you have the highest marks, you become a zhuangyuan

Now that you have a better understanding of the exam structure, let's go back and understand what you can achieve with a degree. If you become a juren, that is a raised candidate degree, then you are eligible for positions in the lower stratum. That is the eighth and ninth ranks. This means that you can become an Assistant Magistrate, Deputy Magistrate, County Police Master, or Jail Warden to name a few positions.

These positions are all at the local level. If you pass the palace exam or dianshi and become a Jingshi or become a Literatus, you are then considered a pair other people, and are eligible for Male Stratum official positions in the fourth to seventh ranks. This means you are gonna become a sensor, secretary of very essential organs to intendants. Pre-fact, magistrate of Departmental and Ordinary counties, or head of a gene or central court or bail, et cetera.

The highest level of bureaucracy are first and third ranks include: Grand Secretaries and Associate Grand Secretaries, or Prime Ministers during the Qing Period. President and Vice-President of the six boards.

Presidents, Associate Presidents, and Vice-Presidents of the Sensor It, and other senior officials in the Central Government. You can also become Governor Generals. Governor's, Financial Commissioners, Judicial Commissioners, of the provinces. These positions have the power to recommend their subordinate officials, And they also have hereditary privileges for two to three generations. For example, their sons can become yinjiansheng or state students by inheritance. Now I hope you've gained a better understanding of the basic structure of the exam system and a basic understanding of the structure of the government bureaucracy during the Ming and Qing Period.

SECTION 7: CONCLUSION

We hope you enjoyed looking at Prosperous Suzhou and reading The Scholars. I want to conclude with some reflections on the two of them together.

The idyllic landscape of the scroll contains lots of elements that you found in The Scholars. There are government offices and officials. There are stores and shops and merchants. There are fields and farmers. There are boats and boatmen, family with kinfolk. There are schools and literati.

But the novel tells us something about what's underneath those outward appearances. It tells us-- in fact, it asserts-- that rot is setting in to society.

Let me read you what one modern authority on the novel *The Scholars* has written. "Wu Jingzi's novel traverses a broad range of subjects. The functions of the civil service examination and the lineage system of local society, the rise of the merchant class, the decline of the literati's moral prestige and personal integrity, degraded by hypocrisy, bad faith, unrestrained competition for fame and status, and the permanent discrepancy between word and deed, name and morality, appearance and substance in the literati's social and political lives."

Well, if that is what Wu Jingzi thinks, who does he think is responsible for that state of affairs? Well, he thinks the literati are. He thinks he and his fellows are. He thinks the literati, the scholars, the Confucians-- for our author, they're the ones who are to blame.

So this is a literati novel that's by a literatus, for the literati, and it's about the literati. But it makes a claim that, in fact, the fate of China, the fate of society, lies in the hands of people like him-- that they are responsible, ultimately, for the moral values of society.

This is probably the first great satirical novel in Chinese history. And it is a crushing condemnation of Chinese society, or at least of the elite of Chinese society. But was Wu Jingzi right? And does he have a solution to the problems he thinks he sees?