

The Scholar's Dreams

Retold by Michael Tse

名正言順

"Correct Name -
Everything is Smooth"

A long time ago in China lived a scholar who was going to the capital, which back then was the city of Chang An. He was going to take part in the Imperial examinations which only came round every four years. Passing the Imperial examinations meant you might be promoted to be a government official so this was a very good opportunity since government officials were well respected by their family and all the people of their home villages, towns or cities. However, the main purpose of an official was to serve the people and to be a good person who could help the country. This is a very old and traditional Chinese Rujia ethic (Confucianism). Some scholars tried many times to pass the examination, some even trying until they were older to the age of 60. So many scholars came to Chang An from all over China and from many different villages, towns and cities, regardless of whether they were rich or poor.

This particular scholar stayed at a hotel near the examination hall. As it generally it took many months for many people to travel to the examination hall, most would therefore get there early and stay in the nearby hotels and wait for the examination day. One night just before the exams were about to begin, the scholar had some unusual dreams while he was sleeping. Next morning, when he woke up and was very confused and disturbed by his dreams so he went to a temple to find a dream interpreter to interpret them and tell him what they meant.

Finally, he found a dream interpreter who was a Daoist monk at a nearby temple and he told him all about his dream. "In the first dream I had, I saw a Pak Choi (which is a Chinese vegetable, we commonly eat for dinner), which was growing on top of a wall. Can you explain what this means?" the scholar asked.

The dream interpreter thought for while and then answered with frown, " It means, 'impossible.' Think about it. How can a Pak Choi grow on top of a wall? It should grow in a field." The scholar nodded his head in agreement. He then carried on to tell the dream interpreter about his second dream. " In my second dream it was raining. I was wearing my raincoat and was holding up my umbrella. Can you explain to me what this means?"

Again the dream interpreter thought a little and then said, "That means you are over the top when you do things. This is no good either." The scholar felt very disappointed on hearing this. He then carried on to tell the dream interpreter the last dream. "In my third dream I was naked on my bed with my fiancé', however, we were not facing each other but lying back against back. What does this mean? Can you tell me?" This time the scholar was more eager to know the answer. The dream interpreter sighed and said, "That is also no good. How can you and your fiancé' be in bed naked and not face each other? It must mean something is not good and that

there is a problem between you. I think that your dreams are telling you that you will the Imperial Examination this time. The best is that you had better go home wait for next examination. That is my advice."

The scholar was very depressed by the results of his dreams. He knew the dreams were unusual, but he had not understood them. Now after the dream interpreter had explained them, everything seemed to make sense. He thanked the monk, paid him and then went back to his hotel to pack.

After he packed his bag he went down to the landlord to pay his bill. The boss of the inn was very curious to see the scholar leaving. He asked him, "Why are you leaving? Is anything wrong? I thought you are staying for Imperial Examination?" The scholar sighed and replied, "It is no use. I have been told that I will not pass the examination."

"Really? Who told you this?" the landlord of the inn asked. The scholar went on to tell him of his dreams and how he had gone to the temple to ask for them to be interpreted.

The landlord was curious and so he asked the scholar to tell of him of these dreams. "No problem," replied the scholar, "In my first dream, I saw a Pak Choi was growing on top of a wall. Then I dreamed it was pouring with rain and I was wearing my rain coat, while at the same time holding up my umbrella. And then finally, I dreamed that I was lying in bed naked with my fiancée' but we were not facing each other but lying back against back."

"The Daoist at the temple said these are all very unlucky dreams and said they mean I will not pass the examination."

The landlord listened to every single word the scholar said. Then, after a moment's thought he said to the scholar. "I don't know much about dream interpretation but I think differently from the dream interpreter. I think the first dream, the Pak Choi growing on top of a wall means you will be above everybody else. In the second dream, where you are wearing raincoat and have your umbrella, this means you have prepared twice as much so this means you have fully prepared for the exam. And in the last one in which you are naked with your fiancée', this means that something will change to be better. So although you are back to back, the next thing is to turn and so things will improve. So I think this means your situation after the examination will be better. That is what I think."

The scholar started to smile and his sadness began to lift. Then the landlord carried on and said "Anyway, you are here now, why not take the examination and see how it goes? You have nothing to lose." That made the scholar even happier because the landlord was right, he had nothing to lose. So the scholar took part in the examination. When the results of the examination were released, he was the third out of the many hundreds who took part.



In our lives we are very easily affected by other people, but sometimes things are not what we think and are not that bad. Often with positive thinking and faith in ourselves can make things turn and get a better result. I have some students who sometimes think they are not that good and could quite easily give up on things. I try to encourage them and after encouragement they feel better, but after a while they become depressed again. I hope people can think positively even when they have difficulties. Positive thinking is a good start and we should remember that we can interpret many things wrongly. Who really knows what will happen?