

一. 寓言選(上)

(乙) 濫竽充數¹



課文 (Text)

齊宣王使人吹竽，² 必三百人。³ 南郭處士請為王吹竽，⁴ 宣王說之，⁵ 廩食以數百人。⁶ 宣王死，湣王立，⁷ 好一一聽之，⁸ 處士逃。

《韓非子·內儲說上》⁹

註釋 (Annotations)

1. 乙 yǐ second of the Heavenly Stems.
 濫 làn to handle improperly; to misuse.
 竽 yú a kind of pipe-like musical instrument popular in ancient China.
- 充數 chōng shù to make up the numbers, i.e., to fill a vacancy in a team (in the derogatory sense of "as a dummy").
2. 齊 Qí a state during the Zhou Dynasty, located on the Shāndōng 山東 peninsula.
 宣王 Xuānwáng King Xuan, a king of Qi.
 吹 chuī to blow; to play (a wind instrument).
3. 必 bì must; always. (An adverb.)
4. 南郭 Nánguō a family name.
 處士 chǔ shì a scholar in retirement; a private individual; a gentleman.
 請 qǐng to ask; to beg for permission.
 為 wèi for. (A preposition.)
5. 說 yuè to be delighted with. (Written as 悅 in later times.)

I 濫竽充

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II 必三百

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sentence 齊宣

- ④ 廩食 lǐn sì to give (someone) grain from the government granary. When 食 means “to feed”, it is pronounced sì.
- ⑤ 湣王 Mǐnwáng King Min, the son of King Xuan.
- 立 lì to be enthroned; become established.
- ⑥ 好 hào to like. (A verb.)
- 一一 yī yī one by one.
- ⑦ 韓非子 Hán Fēizi title of a work collecting the writings of the Warring States period thinker Han Fei.
- 內儲說 Nèi chǔ shuō “Inner Collected Sayings”. Title of a chapter from the *Han Feizi*.

文法闡釋 (Grammar Notes)

I. 濫竽充數

This is a four-character idiomatic expression still frequently used in Modern Chinese. Grammatically, this VO + VO construction is a condensed form of 濫竽以充數 which means literally “to pretend to play the *yu* so as to make up the requisite numbers”. Figuratively, it is now used to criticize a person for occupying a certain position without the necessary qualifications. However, in a typically Asian way, it is also often used as a humble expression for oneself, meaning “being a stand-in for the lack of a more qualified person”.

II. 必三百人

This is a sentence without a subject. Unlike English in which sentences like this often have “it”, or “there”, as their subject, Chinese simply leaves such sentences with no subject. Adverbs like 必 can also be used without a verb (or function as a verb, comparable to 會 in Modern Chinese, as in 他會中文). The sentence means, therefore, “there must be three hundred people”, or “it always required three hundred people”. This sentence serves as the main clause for the compound sentence, while its preceding sentence 齊宣王使人吹竽 serves as the subordinate clause.

III. 廩食以數百人

廩 “government granary” functions here as an adverb modifying the verb 食 “to feed”. The phrase means, therefore, “to let (someone) receive food from the government”, or in modern terminology, “to put him on the government payroll”. The minimum amount of grain paid to one worker was counted as one unit, and higher officials were paid more on that basis. So 以數百人 means “with several hundred (basic) units”. The understood (“omitted”) subject of the sentence is the king. So a fairly close translation of the sentence is “(the king) paid him several hundred units (of grain)”.