

I. Dynasty 109

Chapter 109: The Will of the People

“Your Highness, this commoner will comply.”

Qin Chuanyun felt a deep sense of sorrow but had no choice. Private armies were the primary reason powerful families could dominate the countryside.

Now that these private armies were to be disbanded, they would lose their status as powerful families and could no longer act with impunity.

Pang Yukun then said, “Qin Chuanyun, overall, you have done much for His Highness, and he still trusts you. We hope the Qin family can set an example in this matter. Soon, Qingzhou will issue a decree prohibiting any form of private militia among the people.”

These words brought Qin Chuanyun some comfort. Survival or destruction—this was the choice he now had to make.

With the Wang family’s fate fresh in his mind, he said, “Thank you for Your Highness’s great kindness. This commoner guarantees that the Qin family will henceforth serve Your Highness dutifully.”

Xiao Ming waved his hand, signaling that Qin Chuanyun and his son could leave.

After they left the main hall, Xiao Ming said, "I will have Li San's men keep an eye on them to see if the Qin family is being duplicitous. If Qin Chuanyun is sensible, the Qin family could be a valuable local merchant to support. After all, outside merchants will never be fully loyal to me. We need local merchants to keep them in check."

"Qin Chuanyun is not as resourceful or decisive as Wang Chengchou, and he is also more timid. Otherwise, he wouldn't have been suppressed by the Wang family for so many years," Pang Yukun said. "Let's hope Qin Chuanyun follows through. If he does, the Sun and Wei families will naturally follow suit."

"Exactly. By the way, a significant portion of the Wang family's land was seized illegally, and many of their slaves were forced into servitude. You need to identify these people, grant them their freedom, and return their land to them."

Pang Yukun smiled. "Your Highness, rest assured. While other matters can wait, this one will be handled swiftly."

After sending Pang Yukun away, Xiao Ming summoned Fan Zeng.

The campaign to redistribute land from the wealthy to the poor needed to be publicized widely to win the hearts of the people.

Throughout history, uprisings have always been about land, and this was no different.

In addition to the Wang family's land, Xiao Ming planned to issue decrees ordering the return of illegally seized land to the people, compelling the powerful families in his fiefdom to comply.

The next day, Fan Zeng published these policies in the newspaper. As the papers were distributed across the six states, they caused an uproar among the populace.

The first topic was naturally the fall of the Wang family, but what the people cared about most was the decision to return the land seized by the powerful families.

“This is truly satisfying. The Wang family took so much of our fertile land along the Tuo River. Now we can finally get it back,” one villager said.

In Zhujia Village, the villagers gathered around the reporter who arrived punctually every noon. Since the establishment of the newspaper, the paperboys had been replaced by these scholars who roamed the streets with newspapers, earning a more dignified title.

“Exactly. My family’s five acres of good land were seized by the Wang family. When I went to demand it back, I was beaten by their thugs. Heh, heaven has eyes. The Prince of Qi is becoming wiser by the day. If I can get my land back, I’ll lead my goat to His Highness as a token of gratitude,” another villager said.

Zhu Wuliu was also in the crowd, grinning foolishly. With the Wang family gone, he had lost his job as a cowherd, but his family’s land had also been seized by the Wang family. If he could get it back, he would have land to farm.

In a couple of years, life would be comfortable again.

“Long live the Prince of Qi!” Thinking of this, Zhu Wuliu felt a surge of joy and suddenly shouted.

Instantly, the threshing ground fell silent, and all the villagers of Zhujia Village turned to look at Zhu Wuliu.

Zhu Wuliu suddenly felt nervous, looking around fearfully.

“Long live the Prince of Qi! Long live, long live, long live!” Just as he was about to panic, the crowd erupted in enthusiastic cheers.

The scholar in the middle of the threshing ground, witnessing the excitement of the villagers, was also moved and joined in the cheers.

The policies outlined in the newspaper were clear: to crack down on the powerful families in the fiefdom.

For many commoners, they understood the harm these powerful families inflicted on the Great Yu Empire. Unfortunately, the empire was ruled by them, and in every region, the government always protected their interests.

Only here, only under the Prince of Qi, was someone willing to take the first step to suppress these families and eliminate the parasites infesting the fiefdom.

The scholar shared the same hopes as the villagers. The people wanted to live in peace, free from the oppression of the powerful families, with enough to eat, clothes to wear, the ability to marry, and the means to raise their children.

As a commoner, he wanted fair treatment in the imperial examinations, to be judged by his talent rather than his family background.

In other parts of the Great Yu Empire, he saw no hope. But as he read the newspapers daily and collected public opinion, he gradually felt that perhaps only the Prince of Qi could make this a reality.

For that day to come, he was willing to work tirelessly to spread the news to every corner of the fiefdom.

The news in the newspapers also reached the powerful families in Qingzhou. Unlike the excitement of the commoners, they were thrown into panic.

The fate of the Wang family served as a stark warning, conveying a clear message: the Prince of Qi's fiefdom would no longer be a place where they could act with impunity.

To continue living here, they would have to abide by Qingzhou's laws.

In the following days, an even more shocking piece of news spread through the newspapers. The Qin family published an article in the newspaper, declaring their decision to return all seized land and restore the status of commoners who had been forced into servitude after losing their land.

Additionally, the Qin family's fortresses in the six states would be taken over by the Qingzhou army, and their private soldiers would be disbanded and incorporated into the Qingzhou army.

The fall of one of Qingzhou's top families and the voluntary compliance of another sent shockwaves through the powerful families of the six states.

An unusual atmosphere began to permeate the region.

In the Qingzhou Governor's Office, Xiao Ming had been handling administrative affairs for the past half-month.

Since the decrees were issued, the Governor's Office had been closely monitoring the situation in the six states. While the Qin family had chosen to comply, Xiao Ming didn't believe everyone would follow suit.

There would always be a few who were unafraid of death, especially since the decrees amounted to a declaration of war against all the powerful families in the fiefdom.

"Your Highness, Master Qin has sent an invitation, inviting you, me, General Lu Fei, and others to a banquet at the Qin residence. He says he has invited many families closely associated with the Qin family, and they are willing to comply with Your Highness's decrees as he has," Pang Yukun said, presenting an invitation.

Qin Chuanyun's prompt compliance had improved Xiao Ming's impression of the Qin family, and he felt the man was teachable.

Opening the invitation, Xiao Ming smiled. "Qin Chuanyun is certainly being very attentive this time."

“Indeed, he is. But this banquet might well be a trap,” a cold voice suddenly came from outside the door.