

I. Dynasty 119

Chapter 119: Zhan Xingchang

Governor's Mansion.

Pang Yukun was reviewing reports submitted from various prefectures.

The Sun family's militia had been annihilated, and the next day, at the eastern market of Qingzhou, all participants in the incident were publicly executed. The crowd that gathered to witness the event was so large that the execution ground was completely packed. People came to see this extraordinary event with their own eyes.

Having been oppressed by the nobility for many years, the common folk now saw the downfall of the noble clans. When Sun Yuanzhi was brought to the execution ground, countless people threw stones and rotten vegetables at him, a clear reflection of the deep resentment the people held against the oppression they had endured.

However, while Xiao Ming was now recuperating from his injuries, Pang Yukun found no time to rest. On one hand, he had to deal with the problem of the noble families' dependents, and on the other, there was the matter of the Bowen Academy.

After assigning these two tasks to him, Xiao Ming seemed to have washed his hands of the matter, leaving Pang Yukun to handle everything while he went off to compete with Medical Officer Sun in medical skills.

Looking at the pile of official documents on his desk, Pang Yukun couldn't help but feel a headache coming on. The Prince of Qi could be so serious at times, yet at other times, he seemed completely unserious.

"Chief Secretary Pang, here is the registration list for the Bowen Academy."

A fair-skinned, tall young man walked in. The young man wore a green official robe, a stark contrast to Pang Yukun's purple one.

In the Great Yu Empire, the color of an official's robe indicated their rank. Officials of the third rank and above wore purple robes, those of the fourth and fifth ranks wore vermilion, sixth and seventh ranks wore green, and eighth and ninth ranks wore blue.

Additionally, the ornaments on their belts were made of jade, gold, silver, or copper, further distinguishing their ranks.

Pang Yukun glanced at the young man and smiled, asking, "Xingchang, it's been a month since you arrived in Qingzhou. How do you find it?"

The young man, named Zhan Xingchang, was from Chang'an. Pang Yukun had noticed his talent back when he was in Chang'an.

After Qingzhou needed a large number of talented individuals to fill official positions, Pang Yukun had written to Chang'an, and a month ago, Zhan Xingchang arrived in Qingzhou. Pang Yukun appointed him as the Sima (a mid-level official) of Qingzhou.

"Qingzhou is indeed different from other places, and the Prince of Qi is also unlike other princes," Zhan Xingchang said after a moment of thought.

Pang Yukun seemed intent on testing Zhan Xingchang, so he asked, "What exactly is different? Tell me."

"Since ancient times, the foundation of a nation has always been agriculture. Although His Highness also values agricultural production, he seems to place even greater emphasis on the profits of commerce. While commercial profits can bring sudden wealth, they are like rootless duckweed. If war breaks out and supplies run short, trade routes will be cut off, and the people of the fiefdom will ultimately rely on grain to survive," Zhan Xingchang explained.

"Moreover, merchants chase profits, much like how barbarians follow water and grass. Wherever the profit lies, the merchants will go, never staying in one place for long. They lack a sense of responsibility toward their nation and people. Some even bribe officials for personal gain, harming the country and its people. While merchants are not yet a significant force and can be suppressed, if they grow too powerful in the future, their harm could rival that of the noble clans," Zhan Xingchang added calmly.

Pang Yukun looked surprised, his eyes filled with delight as he gazed at Zhan Xingchang.

"Your views are quite similar to His Highness's," Pang Yukun said.

"His Highness said the same thing?" Zhan Xingchang asked in surprise.

Pang Yukun nodded. "His Highness said that agriculture is the foundation of the nation, commerce is the foundation of wealth, and industry is the foundation of strength. None of the three can be neglected. While merchants do chase profits, as long as the state controls the businesses that are vital to the nation's survival, they won't be able to cause trouble."

Zhan Xingchang said, "Since His Highness has such foresight, I need not worry."

Pang Yukun laughed heartily. "Xingchang, having you travel thousands of miles to Qingzhou only to appoint you as the Sima of Qingzhou—isn't that too demeaning for you?"

Zhan Xingchang bowed and clasped his hands. "How could I dare to complain? I was merely waiting at home for an official position. Now that I have a post and can serve His Highness, I am already satisfied."

"Good. Your ability to remain calm in the face of honor or disgrace is one of the reasons I value you. I have been serving as the Governor of Qingzhou concurrently, and the position of Sima is meant to assist the Governor in handling administrative affairs. When the time comes and you are capable, I will recommend you to His Highness to be appointed as the Governor."

Zhan Xingchang's expression remained unchanged, showing no trace of excitement. He said, "If I were to become the Governor of Qingzhou based solely on your recommendation, how many officials in Qingzhou would truly respect me? I only wish to prove myself through my abilities."

Pang Yukun's smile grew wider. "I know your temperament, but even a talented individual needs a discerning patron. How about this: I currently have a task that I cannot handle alone, and I have never been fond of the business of confiscating properties and exterminating families. I will leave the problem of the remaining noble clans to you. This will also give His Highness a chance to see your capabilities."

"Chief Secretary Pang, this matter is of great importance. I..." Zhan Xingchang hesitated.

"If it were a trivial matter, I wouldn't have assigned it to you," Pang Yukun said seriously. "Consider it part of your official duties. You must complete it!"

Seeing Pang Yukun's firm expression, Zhan Xingchang had no choice but to nod in agreement.

After discussing this matter, the two turned their attention to the Bowen Academy. Both of them had anticipated the rush of scholars from the six prefectures to apply for the political history category.

"It's a pity that His Highness's efforts are being misunderstood. Isn't the purpose of studying to pass the imperial exams and achieve success?" Pang Yukun's thoughts were no different from those of the scholars.

Zhan Xingchang remained silent. After arriving in Qingzhou, he had carefully observed the local customs and thoroughly investigated the Prince of Qi's various unusual decrees. In the end, he reached a conclusion that even he found hard to believe.

That is, the Prince of Qi did not believe that the purpose of studying was solely to become an official. Since ancient times, the hierarchy of scholars, farmers, artisans, and merchants placed scholars at the top. A single step into officialdom could elevate one above ten thousand others.

Moreover, the Prince of Qi seemed to hold Confucian teachings in low regard, as there was not a single Confucian scholar among his subordinates.

The ancient lands of Qi and Lu were the hometown of Confucius, and the Kong family of Qufu had been revered for generations, admired by scholars.

Yet, despite the many vacancies in the six prefectures, the Prince of Qi seemed to have no intention of considering the Kong family of Qufu.

Instead, he established his own academy to select officials, a truly unique approach.

“This Prince’s way of doing things is different from ordinary people. If he were like everyone else, he wouldn’t be the Prince of Qi, and the six prefectures would still be in the hands of the noble clans,” Zhan Xingchang said with a faint smile.

Pang Yukun was momentarily stunned, then chuckled wryly.

Zhan Xingchang was right. If the Prince of Qi had followed the old ways, Qingzhou would not have undergone such changes.

Times create heroes, and perhaps this Prince of Qi was an eccentric genius.

At that moment, in the medical hall, Xiao Ming, who was discussing medical techniques with Medical Officer Sun, sneezed.

Medical Officer Sun joked, “Your Highness, is someone speaking ill of you behind your back?”

“Perhaps it’s Chief Secretary Pang. He’s always been sharp-tongued. Whenever I see him, I feel like avoiding him,” Xiao Ming said.

Medical Officer Sun, nearing seventy, had a keen eye for people. He said, “Chief Secretary Pang may be quick-tempered, but the common folk in the city have a good impression of him. However, the new Sima in the Qingzhou government office also seems quite capable.”