

I. Dynasty 197

Chapter 197: Prosperous Chang'an

"Your Highness, Cui Hao holds the position of Guanglu Dafu in the court. He is responsible for advising and responding to imperial commands but does not have a fixed official duty," said Pang Yukun.

Having worked in the official circles of Chang'an, he knew Cui Hao very well.

"Also, this Cui Hao comes from the Cui family and has always been close with Prince Yan. He is also a renowned Confucian scholar, highly respected in the court, and has founded the Zhengdong Academy in Chang'an where he gives lectures. Many officials in the Great Yu court have attended his lectures."

Zhan Xingchang nodded, "The reason Cui Hao became the leader of the peace faction is because of the support from many officials who studied at Zhengdong Academy. These officials follow him closely and have considerable influence in the court."

"So, you're saying Cui Hao is forming a faction for his own benefit?" Xiao Ming asked.

"Exactly. These officials, along with Cui Hao, are privately referred to as the Zhengdong Faction," said Pang Yukun.

"Then why does Father Emperor..."

Xiao Ming originally wanted to ask why Emperor Xiao Wenxuan didn't crack down on Cui Hao and his Zhengdong Faction, but after a bit of thought, he understood—this was the typical strategy of emperors throughout history.

When the emperor wants to go to war with the barbarians, he needs the pro-war faction to suppress the peace faction. When he wants peace, he uses the peace faction to suppress the pro-war faction.

This way, the emperor can manage them with ease and won't be controlled by any one side.

Pang Yukun continued, "Your Highness, you don't need to worry too much about this. Even before you arrived in Chang'an, these rumors started spreading, yet His Majesty has done nothing. Don't you find that odd?"

"Afraid of my achievements overshadowing his?"

Xiao Ming gave a bitter smile. It was all part of political games. In his past life at the research institute, every time he achieved something, the leader would praise him first, then pick on some small faults, and finally say, 'you still need to work harder.'

"Exactly. Even if Cui Hao tries to accuse you, Your Highness will be fine. But now that you're heading to Chang'an, it's a good opportunity to connect with some pro-war generals. These people have a very good impression of you now," said Pang Yukun.

Zhan Xingchang then handed over a piece of paper, saying, "Your Highness, Pang Yukun and I have listed the officials you may want to approach—both civil and military."

Xiao Ming glanced at the list. Luo Quan was at the top, followed by Fei Ji, along with several commanders of the imperial guards and high-ranking officials.

“Alright then. Since that’s the case, I’ll go meet these court officials,” Xiao Ming said.

Being in Qingzhou, while Chang’an’s political scene was ever-changing, he understood this was not the time to act on impulse. He needed basic diplomatic skills.

Otherwise, if something happened in Chang’an, he might not even be able to safely rescue Consort Zhen.

Moreover, he also needed Li San to set up an intelligence network in Chang’an so he could get timely information and respond accordingly.

At the same time, he wanted to send a message to the court officials: he, Xiao Ming, is a major supporter of the royal family. Anyone wanting to stir chaos in Great Yu must consider his presence.

This was part of Xiao Ming’s strategic plan.

It was obvious now that the barbarians were the true threat to Great Yu. The next war would only be more brutal.

At this moment, he couldn't afford internal strife in Great Yu. He needed a stable environment to develop, otherwise it would severely impact Qingzhou's economic growth.

After all, he couldn't expect to produce and sell all his industrial goods just within six prefecture.

As for foreign markets, there would be strong competitors, and he had no real advantage there. Only by first monopolizing Great Yu's market could Qingzhou accumulate enough capital.

So, for this purpose, Xiao Ming decided he must try to help stabilize the imperial power during this trip to Chang'an.

After discussing the matter, he sent Pang Yukun and Zhan Xingchang away.

Then, he asked Ziyuan to prepare everything he would need for the journey, and told Niu Ben to select an elite guard team.

After two days of preparation, on the third day, Xiao Ming set out for Chang'an with Feng Deshui.

This time, Lu Fei and Luo Xin accompanied him. Ziyuan and Lü lüo also came along to take care of his daily needs.

After traveling for seven or eight days, the group finally arrived in Chang'an.

“Your Highness, that gate ahead is Zhengde Gate. We’ve arrived,” Feng Deshui said with a smile.

Looking at the tall gate in the distance, with the characters “Zhengde Gate” written above, Xiao Ming felt overwhelmed with emotions.

This was his first long journey since coming to this world. Along the way, he had passed through many cities and seen many different sceneries. The natural beauty lifted his spirits.

And Chang’an—the most prosperous city in Great Yu—held all the childhood memories of his former self.

“They say Chang’an is rich beyond measure. Now I can see it’s true. Even the common people here dress better than those in Qingzhou,” Lu Fei muttered.

Luo Xin said proudly, “Of course. Otherwise, how could it be called Chang’an?”

Ignoring their banter, Xiao Ming and Feng Deshui continued riding forward. Behind them, a thousand elite cavalry rode in neat columns of four. The lead rider carried a flag with the character “Qi” on it—Xiao Ming’s royal banner.

Seeing the banner, the people along the road began whispering, likely guessing Xiao Ming’s identity.

At the city gate, the soldiers immediately lined up and crossed their spears.

A man who looked like an officer stepped forward and asked, "Who goes there?"

"Are you blind? Don't you recognize Prince Qi?" Feng Deshui shouted angrily.

Upon hearing the title "Prince Qi," the officer's face changed and he hurriedly said, "So it's Prince Qi! I deserve to die! Quickly, make way for His Highness!"

Feng Deshui nodded in satisfaction and said to Xiao Ming, "Your Highness, please. His Majesty is waiting for you at the palace."

Xiao Ming nodded and rode into Chang'an City. Ahead of him was the wide, straight Zhuque Avenue, fifty meters wide and leading directly to the imperial palace.

As he rode, Xiao Ming observed Chang'an.

The city was still as prosperous as ever. The wars in the northern frontier mostly involved Prince Zhao, Prince Liang, and others, so most of Great Yu had remained peaceful.

Because of this, royal territories and southern regions ruled by princes had time to develop and were far more prosperous than Qingzhou.

From the moment they entered Chang'an, Lu Fei hadn't been able to close his mouth. The city was packed with people—commoners, merchants, scholars, and nobles.

The streets were bustling with traffic. Luxurious carriages came one after another, each followed by servants and maids.