

## Rise 174

### Chapter 174: Bestowing a Name

When Zhu Ping'an came out of the room again, he had already taken off his deep robe and changed into a round-collared blue robe. He walked to the courtyard, waiting for Old Master Sun's next actions.

"With the correctness of the year and the decree of the month, you are fully clothed. Your brothers are all present to complete your virtue. May the elders enjoy endless longevity and receive the blessings of heaven."

Old Master Sun recited another passage, then removed the hat from Zhu Ping'an's head and replaced it with a square, flat-topped ceremonial cap. He then signaled Zhu Ping'an to pour wine for Liu Chuanwen, Zhang Fangweng, and the others.

In ancient times, pouring wine was a formal affair. Zhu Ping'an walked to Liu Chuanwen's table, bowed with hands clasped, and began pouring wine, starting with the eldest, Liu Chuanwen. He stood to the right, holding the wine pot in his right hand and the cup in his left. After filling the cup, he slightly raised the pot and gently turned it backward to prevent any spillage onto the table or the guests.

While pouring, Zhu Ping'an also smiled sincerely and expressed his gratitude, saying words of thanks for their presence at the ceremony.

Once the wine was poured, Liu Chuanwen lifted his cup, stepped out from his seat, and stood before Zhu Ping'an. He looked at him with satisfaction, nodded, and then turned northward to recite a blessing:

"The fine wine is clear, the noble son is worthy. Accept this offering to establish your fortune, receive the blessings of heaven, and enjoy longevity without end."

Zhu Ping'an bowed deeply, then straightened up and accepted the cup with both hands. After expressing his thanks, he took a small sip and placed the cup on another table.

One by one, the other guests also stepped forward, offering their toasts and blessings. Zhu Ping'an bowed deeply in gratitude to each of them and repeated the same process.

Once these rituals were completed, the solemn atmosphere in the courtyard dissipated instantly. Zhang Fangweng and the others started joking with Old Master Sun.

"Haha, Brother Sun, to have such an outstanding student truly makes us envious," Liu Chuanwen said with a smile, stroking his long beard.

"Indeed! Brother Sun, you were really secretive. Before the Tongsheng examination, you downplayed it, saying it was just for experience. But what happened? From the county exam to the prefectural and provincial exams, he passed through every stage as if there were no obstacles, claiming the top spot in Anqing Prefecture right before all the other candidates! You're quite the strategist..."

"Such talent should be shared!"

Their lighthearted teasing made Old Master Sun beam with pride. He could not stop smiling as he waved his hand, saying, "You jest, my friends. I would never deliberately keep such talent hidden. At first, I truly only wanted Ping'an to gain some experience, but even I was greatly surprised by his results."

"Brother Sun, you're being too modest. A penalty drink for you!" Liu Chuanwen shook his head, pretending not to believe him.

Old Master Sun could only smile bitterly. He had explained himself more than once before, but no one believed him. Helpless, he accepted the wine cup and drank it in one gulp.

"Brother Sun, have you decided on Ping'an's courtesy name?" Zhang Fangweng asked after Master Sun finished his drink.

Before Old Master Sun could answer, Liu Chuanwen laughed and said, "Brother Zhang, that question is unnecessary. If the courtesy name hadn't been decided, would Brother Sun have invited us here to witness the ceremony?"

"Oh, true! Haha, I was just so impressed upon seeing such a brilliant young man that I got ahead of myself," Zhang Fangweng chuckled, shaking his head. He looked at Old Master Sun with a bit of envy. "But if the courtesy name isn't well chosen, we certainly won't sit idly by."

Master Sun stroked his beard and smiled without saying a word.

Under the eager urging of Liu Chuanwen and the others, Old Master Sun finally announced Zhu Ping'an's courtesy name.

"The rites are complete, and on this auspicious day, your courtesy name is proclaimed. It is most fitting for a refined gentleman, suitable for good fortune, and shall be yours to cherish forever."

Master Sun waved Zhu Ping'an forward and, following the traditional capping ceremony, gave him words of encouragement.

Master Sun's words generally mean this: The capping ceremony has been fully carried out, and on this auspicious day of goodness, your courtesy name is hereby announced. The courtesy name is very beautiful and perfectly matches a distinguished gentleman. The selection of a courtesy name should be appropriate above all, and once bestowed, it shall be yours forever.

It sounds somewhat like what a priest says at a wedding in a foreign church: "XXX, do you take this beautiful lady beside you as your wife, to love her, comfort her, respect her, and protect her as you love yourself? In the days to come, whether she is rich or poor, sick or healthy, will you always remain loyal to her...?"

"Although I may not be quick-witted, I dare not slack off in my diligence from dawn till dusk." Zhu Ping'an respectfully said.

Old Master Sun nodded in satisfaction, then continued, "Though you are still young, you have a steady and reliable nature, simple yet sincere, intelligent but not cunning. I bestow upon you the character 'Hou' (厚), hoping that you will remain true to your nature."

After a slight pause, Old Master Sun continued, "However, while possessing 'thickness' (厚 in virtue, one must not forget to strive for progress. Confucius said, 'He who excels in learning should pursue officialdom.' According to the 'Rites of Zhou,' nobility is divided into five ranks: Duke (公), Marquis (侯), Count (伯), Viscount (子), and Baron (男). The lowest rank, 'Baron,' is not a suitable choice for a courtesy name, while the highest, 'Duke,' carries too much ambition. Thus, I choose 'Zi' (子) as your courtesy name, hoping you will always remember to strive forward. Think of historical figures such as Sima Qian of the Han Dynasty, whose courtesy name was 'Zichang' (子长); Du Fu of the Tang Dynasty, known as 'Zimei' (子美); and Su Shi of the Song Dynasty, called 'Zizhan' (子瞻). Let them serve as your models, and seek to emulate their virtues."

"Therefore, I now grant you the courtesy name 'Zi Hou' (子厚), hoping you will live up to its meaning." Old Master Sun's expression was solemn and serious, his gaze filled with high expectations for Zhu Ping'an.

Zhu Zi Hou. From now on, this would be his customary name. Zhu Ping'an bowed deeply to express his gratitude to his esteemed teacher for bestowing him with a courtesy name.

In ancient times, choosing a courtesy name was not only a matter of practicality but also required careful consideration to avoid any tabooed names. Fortunately, Old Master Sun's choice of "Zi Hou" did not violate any naming taboos.

The Ming Dynasty's naming taboos were quite peculiar—sometimes inexplicably strict and other times so lenient that it was hard to believe. The dynasty's founder, Zhu Yuanzhang, had the courtesy name "Guorui" (国瑞), making him the only Ming emperor with a courtesy name. Both characters in his courtesy name were considered taboo for commoners. After him, the emperors' name taboos were usually limited to the last

character of their given names. For example, the second emperor, Zhu Yunwen, required avoidance of "Wen" (文); the third emperor, Zhu Di, required avoidance of "Di" (嫡); the fourth emperor, Zhu Gaochi, required avoidance of "Chi" (炽); the fifth emperor, Zhu Zhanji, required avoidance of "Ji" (基); and so on. By the tenth emperor, Zhu Houzhao, "Zhao" (照) became a taboo, and the current eleventh emperor, Zhu Houcong, required avoidance of "Cong" (聰). Given this context, Old Master Sun's selection of "Zi Hou" for Zhu Ping'an did not breach any taboos.

"Zi Hou—what a fine name! Brother Sun truly has high expectations for his student." Liu Chuan gently stroked his beard and remarked to Old Master Sun with admiration. Then he turned to Zhang Fangweng and asked, "Brother Zhang, what do you think of this name?"

"Excellent!" Zhang Fangweng lightly tapped the table and praised it repeatedly.

"Zi Hou, you must continue striving forward. Do not let momentary success blind you, and do not fail your teacher's sincere expectations." Another person advised Zhu Ping'an.

"I will certainly work even harder and live up to my teacher's hopes." Zhu Ping'an bowed deeply once more.

At some point, Old Master Sun's wife had finished preparing the meal and stepped out of the room, calling everyone inside to dine. Zhu Ping'an waited until Old Master Sun and his friends had entered before he followed them in, taking the lowest seat at the table.

Looking at the table full of dishes, Zhu Ping'an couldn't help but feel a deep sense of gratitude toward Old Master Sun and his wife.

This imperial examination—he must achieve success and bring honor to his teacher and teacher's wife.