

## Rise 186

### Chapter 186: People Fear Fame, Pigs Fear Being Hit

It was still early, and out of curiosity, Zhu Ping'an leaned against a rock, took out the two newly acquired books, and began flipping through them casually.

The Book of Taoist Incantations could be considered an encyclopedia of Qingci (Daoist hymns). It was thick, and after flipping through it for a while, although the content seemed vague and obscure, he gained a general understanding of Qingci. Zhu Ping'an curled his lips in disdain—he really didn't understand what Emperor Jiajing found so meaningful about writing these cryptic texts every day. Shaking his head, he stuffed The Book of Taoist Incantations into his bag and took out another book, The Record of Learning and Practice.

This book was rather esoteric. The average person would have a hard time understanding it. However, Zhu Ping'an had an advantage that many in this era lacked—the accumulated wisdom of centuries of historical study. Wang Yangming's philosophy had been analyzed by countless scholars for hundreds of years, and standing on the shoulders of these predecessors, Zhu Ping'an found it much easier to grasp.

"The mind, in its essence, is neither good nor evil. The movement of intention brings good and evil. To know good and evil is conscience. To act upon that knowledge is self-cultivation."

Leaning against the rock, Zhu Ping'an read The Record of Learning and Practice aloud in a low voice.

These words formed the Four Maxims of Mind Learning. To fully understand Wang Yangming's teachings, one had to combine them with the four maxims he left at Tianquan Bridge. In this era, only a select few of Wang

Yangming's direct disciples knew of these four phrases. But Zhu Ping'an was an exception—he had studied them long ago.

As he read *The Record of Learning and Practice*, he became completely absorbed. The book felt like a gateway to another world—a world where Wang Yangming had left behind the key to resisting the trials of life. Different people might interpret his philosophy in different ways, gaining various insights and skills. But only those who truly comprehended this hidden code could acquire the ability to face and overcome the challenges of the world.

The autumn wind swept through the forest, sending leaves dancing in its wake.

By the time Zhu Ping'an snapped out of his immersion in the book, the entire grove had become a swirling spectacle of wind and falling leaves.

Brushing off the leaves that had landed on him and pulling one off his face, Zhu Ping'an got up from the rock. He flicked away the leaves at his feet, tucked the book into his satchel, and, carrying his black writing board, started walking toward the inn.

The streets were bustling with people coming and going. Zhu Ping'an strolled through the crowd at a leisurely pace, still savoring his thoughts on Yangming's philosophy. Compared to those around him, he looked like a complete bookworm, entirely out of place.

As he walked on, lost in his own world, a horse-drawn carriage rumbled up from behind. The pedestrians on the road quickly stepped aside to avoid it. However, Zhu Ping'an, absorbed in thought, failed to notice the approaching carriage.

"Hey, hey, hey! You there, poor scholar! Get out of the way! If you get run over, we won't be held responsible!"

The carriage was lavishly decorated and even bore an insignia. The driver was a burly man with a face full of flesh, dressed in clothing marked with a family crest. Holding the reins in one hand and a whip in the other, he yelled insults at Zhu Ping'an.

Poor scholar?

Is he talking about me?

Zhu Ping'an stopped and turned around, spotting the carriage in the distance as the driver pulled the reins to slow it down. The burly man continued waving his whip, shouting at him.

"You damn scholar! Are you looking for death? Don't you see this is the carriage of Lord Zhao's household? You must have a death wish!"

The man's face twisted with arrogance as he raised his whip, threatening to lash out.

"Young man, a wise man knows when to yield. Just step aside quickly," some bystanders urged Zhu Ping'an, seemingly fearful of the carriage and its owner.

Zhu Ping'an cupped his hands in gratitude toward the crowd but made no move to step aside. After acknowledging their concerns, he turned back to the bullying driver and said in a calm voice, "I think, sir, that you should be more careful when traveling. Watch both sides of the road—lest you be the one who gets run over."

"Why? What do you mean?" The chubby coachman asked with a fierce expression.

"It's very simple. A man fears fame, just as a pig fears being hit!" Zhu Ping'an curled his lips and said calmly.

A pig fears being hit!

The surrounding crowd caught the emphasis in Zhu Ping'an's words and immediately burst into laughter.

The chubby coachman was stunned for a long time before realizing that Zhu Ping'an was mocking him, comparing him to a pig. Enraged, he jumped off the carriage, rolled up his sleeves, revealing arms as thick as Zhu Ping'an's thighs, and looked ready to teach him the hard lesson that scholars are helpless against brute force.

"Volume 4 of the Criminal Code of the Great Ming Law: Insulting others. A commoner who insults a scholar is guilty of disrespecting the literary class and shall be punished with ten strokes of the cane and a fine of three qian of silver."

"Volume 9 of the Criminal Code of the Great Ming Law: Miscellaneous offenses. A commoner who humiliates a scholar is guilty of showing disrespect and shall be punished with thirty strokes of the cane, three days in the stocks, and a fine of one tael of silver."

"The decree of the twenty-fifth year of the Hongwu reign: It is strictly forbidden for commoners, merchants, artisans, foot soldiers, auxiliary personnel, and other miscellaneous workers to wear boots. They may only wear leather sandals, except in the freezing northern regions where cowhide-stitched boots are permitted. Violators shall face the ultimate punishment."

"You, sir, are neither a noble nor a degree-holder, yet you wear leather boots—oh, and they're made of cowhide. Hmm... let me think. What is the punishment for illegally destroying a plowing ox again...?"

Zhu Ping'an looked at the chubby coachman, who was charging toward him with a menacing aura, completely unshaken. For every step the coachman took, Zhu Ping'an recited a law. By the time he reached the last one, the coachman's aggression had already fizzled out, replaced by cold sweat forming on his forehead.

"Consider yourself lucky today!"

The coachman blustered, but his voice lacked confidence. He climbed back onto the carriage and drove off hastily, avoiding Zhu Ping'an as the wheels clattered away.

As the coachman left in embarrassment, Zhu Ping'an shook his head slightly, tucked his black wooden board under his arm, and leisurely continued walking toward the inn.

"Oh my, that young man is really something..."

"Isn't he? I was holding my breath for him just now. That was Liu'er from Lord Zhao's estate. He's used to throwing his weight around, but this time he learned a lesson."

"What's so impressive about that? He's just a bookworm who's read himself silly..."

After Zhu Ping'an and the coachman had left, the people murmured among themselves, discussing the event.

Fragments of their conversations reached Zhu Ping'an's ears, and he slowly curled his lips into a smile. If he hadn't seen that the carriage had already stopped far away, he wouldn't have stood still. If he hadn't noticed that the coachman was so fat that he wouldn't be able to outrun him in the crowded street, and that he wouldn't dare abandon his carriage to chase him, Zhu Ping'an wouldn't have foolishly stood there lecturing about law and reason.

Upon returning to the inn, Zhu Ping'an found that there were more people than yesterday. They were likely scholars who had arrived for the imperial examination. Each of them wore the scholar's uniform and carried an air of superiority, looking down at others with condescending gazes.

"All professions are inferior, only scholarship is noble," they believed. Moreover, being xiucai (scholars who passed the county-level exam) meant they had finally reaped the rewards of years of diligent study and were now stepping toward the ruling class. Their attitudes were understandable.

When Zhu Ping'an entered, these scholars noticed his youthful appearance and the scholar's robe he wore. Seeing his simple attire, they immediately recognized him as a student from a poor background and were somewhat surprised.

Zhu Ping'an cupped his hands in greeting from a distance but did not stop. He continued walking with his black wooden board, briefly exchanging pleasantries with the innkeeper at the counter before leisurely heading upstairs to his room.

"Why show courtesy to such a money-grubbing man? It's a disgrace to the literary class."

The scholars seated in the distance frowned and shook their heads upon seeing Zhu Ping'an greet the innkeeper. Their initial respect for him faded, and they now viewed him as petty and unambitious.