

## I. Dynasty 19

### Chapter 19: Silver! Silver!

Winter had arrived, and the sky darkened early. By now, it was roughly equivalent to 8 PM in modern times.

For Xiao Ming, who had never slept before midnight in his previous life, this was prime time for leisure. However, tonight, he had kept Qian Dafu back for an important matter—mineral exploration.

The development of his fief required multiple aspects to progress simultaneously: industrial foundations, agricultural foundations, mining, and chemistry. None of these could be neglected, as they were all interdependent.

In particular, chemistry and industry had to advance together. If one lagged behind, certain industrial progressions would be impossible.

“Your Highness means for this old servant to personally search for mines?” Qian Dafu asked.

Xiao Ming nodded. “That’s right. The fief’s mines are practically monopolized by the Wang family. Even the ones they are mining only produce coal and iron. I need you to locate various mineral deposits. Once discovered, the government will fund and manage the extraction, keeping the mines firmly under our control.”

Xiao Ming’s earlier words about reform had merely been a surface-level act. Now, he was taking real action.

Qian Dafu bowed deeply and said, "Your Highness, rest assured. This old servant will not disappoint you."

Xiao Ming nodded. "What I'm about to tell you tonight must be kept secret. You are not to disclose it to anyone in advance."

Qian Dafu solemnly agreed.

With a mere thought, Xiao Ming activated the vast technological database stored in his mind. Precise locations of mineral deposits across the region appeared before him, along with detailed methods for prospecting each type of ore.

Using a brush, he began explaining while sketching maps, marking out the entire Shandong region with potential mining sites.

Though the locations were only rough estimates, careful searching would yield results.

Qian Dafu listened intently. As Xiao Ming spoke, it was as if clear maps were unfolding in his mind, along with vivid descriptions of each mineral's color and the geological features surrounding them.

One candle burned down, and another was lit.

They worked through the night, stopping only when Wang Shijie from the Wang residence arrived the next morning, requesting an audience.

“How much do you remember?” Xiao Ming asked.

Qian Dafu seemed dazed, still processing all the information. “Your Highness, I’ve never learned something so quickly before in my life.”

Xiao Ming nodded. “Good. Then let’s put this mining project into action. If you have any questions, come ask me.”

With that, Xiao Ming left for the front hall, where Wang Shijie was waiting.

Qian Dafu scratched his head, a puzzled look on his face. “Strange... how does His Highness know all this? Heh, doesn’t matter. As long as our prince is making progress, that’s all that counts.”

In the front hall, Wang Shijie sat restlessly on a redwood chair, shifting around as if suffering from hemorrhoids.

His father’s words from last night had opened his eyes—here was a golden opportunity for the Wang family to make a fortune.

“Brother Wang, why so early?” Xiao Ming yawned, feeling the effects of his sleepless night.

Wang Shijie grinned cheekily. “Your Highness looks exhausted. Did something pleasant keep you up last night?”

“Heh, you already know the answer to that,” Xiao Ming played along, deliberately being vague. “But why have you come alone today?”

Wang Shijie cupped his hands. “Your Highness, I came early because I have a request to make.”

“A request? Brother Wang, no need for such formality. Just say it,” Xiao Ming replied, glancing at him. Wang Shijie seemed anxious, which meant the matter was important to him.

After ensuring no one else was around, Wang Shijie leaned in and said, “Your Highness, my request concerns the method for producing your coal briquettes.”

Xiao Ming’s expression turned serious. “Brother Wang, don’t underestimate the coal briquette stove—it may seem innovative, but the real key is the coal briquettes themselves. If you’re asking for this method now, does that mean...”

Wang Shijie chuckled. “No need to rush, Your Highness.”

At that moment, he pulled ten banknotes from his sleeve and handed them over.

Xiao Ming feigned ignorance. “Brother Wang, what is this?”

Yesterday, Wang Shijie had feigned disinterest in the coal stove. Now, he was suddenly so eager. There could only be one explanation—his father, Wang Chengchou, had realized the true value of coal briquettes.

After all, Wang Shijie was only clever enough to deceive the old Xiao Ming.

“Your Highness, this is payment for the coal briquette production method. My father has also agreed that aside from this sum, Your Highness will receive 40% of the future profits.”

Xiao Ming rubbed the banknotes between his fingers—ten notes, each worth 500 taels, totaling 5,000 taels of silver.

With 5,000 taels, he could equip ten cavalymen with horses and gear. It wasn’t that he didn’t recognize the importance of cavalry, but his fief simply couldn’t afford them—not to mention the costs of retainers, maintenance, and supplies.

“Hmm...” Xiao Ming furrowed his brows. Giving in this easily? Not a chance.

Business negotiations often started with a test offer. He was certain this was just the Wang family’s opening bid—the real deal was yet to come.

Wang Shijie watched Xiao Ming closely. Seeing his hesitation, he forced a smile and said, “Ah! I nearly forgot—there’s more.”

With that, he reached into his other sleeve and pulled out another ten banknotes—another 5,000 taels.

What a wealthy family, Xiao Ming mused. Clearly, Wang Chengchou had amassed quite a fortune over the years.

To Xiao Ming, the coal briquette manufacturing process was simple—it was just a matter of using the right mold.

The Engineering Department had already produced the necessary molds. He had merely been waiting for the Wang family to show up and hand him money. To him, the coal briquette business was just a small side project.

His real focus was on industrial development.

Why was he so confident the Wang family would pay rather than attempt to replicate the process themselves?

Simple—if he were an ordinary commoner, the Wang family could steal the method with impunity.

But he was a prince. If he decided to throw a royal tantrum over this, the Wang family would be in serious trouble.

For now, neither side wanted to disrupt the balance.

“Since Brother Wang and your father are so generous, and for the sake of our long-standing friendship, I will sell you the coal briquette production method,” Xiao Ming finally said.

“Many thanks, Your Highness!” Wang Shijie beamed with joy.

Xiao Ming smiled as well. What he had just earned was purely a technology fee—the ancient equivalent of a modern patent licensing fee.

After this deal, he planned to formally incorporate technology patents into governmental policy.

That way, in the future, he could simply sell patents and make a fortune while letting merchants handle the hard labor.

Of course, truly lucrative businesses—those, he would keep for himself.

Both parties got what they wanted and continued chatting casually.

Just then, a series of reports came from outside the prince's residence.

It seemed the remaining three families had arrived.

Xiao Ming's eyes gleamed with excitement.

More silver was on its way!