

## I. Dynasty 250

### Chapter 250: Return to Cangzhou

As the number of mirrors left decreased, the auction atmosphere only grew more intense.

Voices calling out bids echoed one after another. All 500 mirrors were auctioned off one by one. Each successful bidder received a small wooden token, which they could later use to pay at the Chamber of Commerce and collect their mirror.

“Sixteen thousand taels!”

“Sixteen thousand five hundred!”

“...”

The auction continued from morning into the afternoon. When it came down to the final mirror, the bidding became even fiercer.

“Seventeen thousand taels!”

“Eighteen thousand!”

“Twenty thousand taels!”

With that last call, the auction hammer came down, and the crowd fell silent—every last mirror had been sold.

Li Kaiyuan was grinning so wide his eyes practically disappeared. The sale of 500 mirrors brought in at least six to seven million taels of silver for the Chamber of Commerce. He knew the production cost of the mirrors inside and out—and of all products in Qingzhou, these mirrors had the highest profit margin by far.

As the event wrapped up, the crowd began to disperse. Some left satisfied, others disappointed.

Those who successfully won a mirror stayed behind to exchange their tokens for their purchases.

Because each mirror cost only tens of thousands of taels, most merchants paid in silver notes, bullion, or gold directly. Few offered goods in trade, as this wasn't a bulk transaction.

With the bidding done, the Chamber of Commerce staff got to work—counting silver, carrying it in, and handing out mirrors to the buyers.

The whole process went on until nightfall before it was finally completed.

Only then did Xiao Ming and Pang Yukun appear. They looked at the piles of gold, silver, and notes with satisfied smiles.

The treasury was flush again.

“Your Highness, the final tally is ready. Here’s the record book,” Li Kaiyuan said, handing Xiao Ming a thick ledger.

Xiao Ming flipped through it. Each auction result was recorded—500 entries in total. At the end, a total sum: 7.2 million taels.

“Seven point two million...” Pang Yukun’s beard quivered in excitement. That amount would be enough to fund several large-scale projects.

Xiao Ming nodded with satisfaction and said, “Send it all to the treasury for centralized allocation.”

“Yes, Your Highness.” Li San acknowledged the order and called soldiers to escort the funds to the Qingzhou Government Treasury.

All taxes collected in Qingzhou went to this treasury. The Chamber’s profits, after keeping a portion for operations, were also sent here. The government then distributed funds across the six prefectures as needed.

With the auction complete, Xiao Ming finally felt relaxed. Seven million taels—enough to build 20 or 30 galleons.

But, of course, he couldn't pour all that money into the military. A large portion had to go toward improving public welfare across the six prefectures—using money to generate more money.

The larger his territory grew, the more expenses piled up.

Take the Bowen Academy, for instance—every student there received free food and housing. That was how he ensured even poor students could study without worries.

After all, the academy was the future talent hub that would fuel Qingzhou's growth.

Leaving the Chamber of Commerce, Xiao Ming didn't return through the main gates of the royal residence. He took the side entrance instead.

He knew full well there'd be a line of people at the front gate, hoping to speak to him about the mirror business.

But he had already made up his mind—unlike soap and perfume, he would not sell distribution rights for the mirrors. Back then, he earned some fast money doing so, but for a monopoly product like this, it had been a loss in the long run.

The mirror craze in Qingzhou lasted more than ten days before it began to calm down.

That's when the Chamber of Commerce began officially selling mirrors.

The merchants who had stayed behind rushed to the Chamber—but many were turned away.

“Chamber members only get priority,” Li Kaiyuan explained.

The membership system had been in place for some time, and the number of members had now exceeded a thousand. Members enjoyed faster service and better prices when purchasing goods.

Some were even considering relocating permanently to Qingzhou. After all, having direct access to Chamber news was worth it—like now, when members had already seen the mirrors before the public showcase.

The many perks were convincing more and more merchants to accept their new status as members.

As Li Kaiyuan spoke, many of those members stood tall with pride, feeling a cut above the rest.

Meanwhile, those who weren’t members began seriously thinking about joining.

Li Kaiyuan saw it all and smirked inwardly. This was exactly as Xiao Ming had planned. The commercial heart of Great Yu was slowly shifting toward Qingzhou.

Back at the Royal Residence, Xiao Ming wasn't even thinking about the 7 million taels anymore.

In his eyes, these mirrors and similar products were low-end goods. The only one with real technical value was the mirror, and even that wasn't enough.

Qingzhou's industrial development was still in its early stages. Soon, products with much higher technical content would start rolling out—thanks to the talents trained at Bowen Academy.

Now, Xiao Ming was setting his sights on several major projects. First up: the new reinforced concrete city wall in Cangzhou.

During this time, Zhan Xingchang had been gathering materials in Cangzhou. The steel workshop had been working full steam producing rebar. All that was left was to begin construction.

Wang Xuan's report about the barbarians developing cannons had deeply unsettled Xiao Ming.

Before Shanhaiguan fell, Cangzhou had just been a small town. Once the barbarians attacked, Niu Ben and his men rushed to build a makeshift wall. But that wall wasn't very sturdy.

Even after Zhan Xingchang reinforced it, the improvements were mostly for cannon positioning—not real defense.

If the barbarians really came with artillery, that wall would be in serious danger, especially the city gates.

Now that funds were available, Xiao Ming was sending over 10,000 laborers, plus hiring locals from Cangzhou to help build the new wall.

Time was of the essence. If the barbarians managed to capture a skilled craftsman who knew how to make cannons, it would only be a matter of time before they produced their own.

Because of this urgency, Xiao Ming decided to personally head to Cangzhou to oversee the wall's construction. Zhan Xingchang just wasn't up to his standards when it came to infrastructure.

Outside the palace, Ziyuan had already prepared the carriage.

At the gate, Xiao Ming instructed, "Don't slack off at the textile workshop. I want to see finished sails when I return."

Ziyuan nodded and replied, "Please be careful, Your Highness."

She glanced toward Niu Ben, Lu Fei, Luo Xin, and the two thousand cavalymen behind them. After capturing so many warhorses from the barbarians, Qingzhou's cavalry had expanded significantly.

But Ziyuan wasn't thinking about the military escort. She had a feeling this trip to Cangzhou wasn't just about building walls...