

I. Dynasty 263

Chapter 263: Cotton-Padded Jacket

“Your Highness, does it feel colder this winter than before?”

Inside the sleeping quarters, Luluo held a dark-colored, round-collared robe lined with blue floral silk. Inside the robe was a layer of cotton, making it feel a bit heavy.

In Great Yu, nobles usually wore fur in winter. Cotton clothes like this were mostly worn by merchants and commoners.

Luluo’s casual comment made Xiao Ming frown slightly. Though it sounded like small talk, it actually pointed to a historical truth: the Little Ice Age was starting.

According to history, the Little Ice Age lasted from 1350 to 1850. The coldest period came in the 1600s. During that time, many bad things happened—food shortages, uprisings, and people struggling to survive.

For example, the Manchus invaded the Ming Dynasty not only because of hatred, but also because they lacked food and clothes.

A similar thing happened earlier between the Yuan and Song dynasties. At first, warm weather allowed the Mongols to grow in number. Later, when it became cold again and grasslands shrank, they started to fight over resources. That’s when Temujin united the Mongol tribes and moved south to conquer.

Xiao Ming believed that while many things cause wars, climate had a huge impact on ancient people who relied on farming.

Last year, many animals on the grasslands froze to death. Now, another cold winter was coming. If the barbarians faced a big famine, they would likely resort to raiding to get food.

If the cold continued, the situation would become worse next year—and the year after.

Thinking about this made Xiao Ming worried. When a people are fighting to survive, war becomes a matter of life or death—not just about territory or power.

The first battle at Cangzhou was more luck than anything. The second one, where they held the city wall, only happened because Taiji Beishan wanted to save his strength.

Xiao Ming knew clearly: gunpowder and cannons alone couldn't stop the barbarians forever. In the end, his soldiers would have to retreat behind the walls and defend.

And in those two battles, the barbarians didn't lose much. Most of their dead were slave soldiers, not true barbarian warriors. The barbarians didn't care—they had plenty of slaves.

The western regions were all under their control now, and they could easily catch more slaves. Even the people of Youzhou were being used as slave soldiers.

So far, Xiao Ming hadn't really fought the barbarians' main forces. And that was what worried him the most.

If it came to a real open battle, could his army win?

“Your Highness, how is it? Does the cotton robe fit well?”

Luluo’s gentle voice pulled Xiao Ming out of his deep thoughts.

He shook his head to clear his mind. Looking into the mirror, he saw himself in a long robe. He looked a little bulkier now—thanks to the thick cotton inside.

“It’s great. You and Ziyuan did a wonderful job,” Xiao Ming said with a smile.

Luluo’s eyes curved like crescent moons from happiness. As she helped adjust his robe, she whispered, “My sister and I were worried Your Highness wouldn’t like it. After all, you’re a noble prince. We were afraid it seemed too common.”

“How could I dislike it? I’m just like the common folk—made of flesh and blood. If they can wear cotton, why can’t I? In fact, I plan to promote cotton clothes in my territory. We can’t let the people freeze every winter.”

Even though there had been two good harvests this year, other supplies in the six provinces were still low.

It had only been a year—Xiao Ming couldn't change everything so fast. Most of his focus had gone into keeping the land stable and building industries like the ironworks, military factories, machinery department, cement plant, printing press, glassworks, wine and soap production.

Some were for fighting barbarians, some for trade and profit, and others for construction.

But in truth, he hadn't done much yet for the daily lives of the people.

His thinking was clear: if the territory couldn't defend itself, there'd be no point in building schools or services. First, protect the land—then improve people's lives.

The textile workshop was his first big effort to help the common people.

If they could start producing lots of cheap fabric, people's lives would slowly improve. Once they weren't struggling just to eat and stay warm, they'd send their children to school.

Otherwise, trying to promote education now would only be met with resistance. People couldn't afford to lose helping hands at home when they were barely surviving.

Even today, in remote villages in modern times, many people still couldn't read. His own lands were probably worse.

Wearing the long padded robe, Xiao Ming turned in a circle. Feeling proud, he walked out of the palace wearing it.

The palace staff saw him and smiled warmly. Their prince seemed more down-to-earth than ever.

“What are you all smiling at? Doesn’t this jacket look good?” Xiao Ming asked.

One servant carefully glanced at Ziyuan, who was glaring at him fiercely, and quickly said, “Your Highness, it looks great! Really great!”

Ziyuan smiled proudly. Her dimples appeared as she beamed with satisfaction.

Xiao Ming stood outside in the cold wind for a moment. The jacket was thick and warm. In no time, his body felt toasty.

He was more satisfied than ever. He asked Ziyuan, “How many of these jackets can the workshop make per day?”

Ziyuan answered, “If it’s a fancy cotton robe like this one, maybe 10 a day. But if it’s a plain one made from rough cotton, we can make 30 a day.”

“Thirty per day? Still too few,” Xiao Ming said. “Right now, the textile workshop handles both weaving cloth and sewing the jackets. You should split the work—some focus on weaving, others on sewing. It’s

winter now. Many women are at home with nothing to do. Recruit more female workers, and pay them better.”

Xiao Ming had big plans. He wanted textile production to be a main industry in Qingzhou. It was light industry, clean, and good for development.

In 17th and 18th century Britain, the textile industry had made them rich.

Xiao Ming was ambitious. He didn't just want to supply Great Yu—he wanted to sell cotton clothes overseas too.

But to do that, he would need a lot more female workers.

Ziyuan nodded and said, “That won't be a problem. But Your Highness, we'll need help from your newspaper. Otherwise, not many people will know about the textile workshop. Also, some women asked if they could sew from home. They're afraid of gossip if they work outside.”