

## **I. Dynasty 371**

### Chapter 371: The Ambition of Youzhou

The sunset hung in the sky like a beautiful dancing gown.

In the red glow, Qingzhou City looked unusually beautiful. After enjoying a hearty dinner in the palace, Xiao Ming returned to his bedroom and immediately fell asleep.

He didn't wake up until noon the next day.

The days of struggle still had to continue, but now that the barbarians were gone from the city, Xiao Ming felt much more relaxed.

With this new calm, he could finally focus on developing his land without the constant pressure of threats from the barbarians. And, of course, his territory now included Youzhou as well.

After getting cleaned up, Xiao Ming was informed that Pang Yukun was waiting for him in the main hall.

Xiao Ming was a bit surprised. In the past, Pang Yukun would have woken him up outside the door, but now he was being so considerate. It felt like the sun was rising from the west.

"Your Highness," Pang Yukun greeted, smiling faintly. When Xiao Ming entered, he respectfully bowed.

Today, he had intentionally not disturbed Xiao Ming's rest. The past three months of war had left Xiao Ming constantly on the move, so Pang Yukun didn't want to add to his exhaustion.

Pang Yukun had followed Xiao Ming every step of the way, watching him go from a carefree prince to someone who had successfully driven the barbarians out of the empire. This transformation had made Pang Yukun truly admire Xiao Ming. Over time, he had also stopped being as cynical and bitter as before.

Now, what he wanted was finally becoming a reality. Xiao Ming was no longer someone who needed his supervision.

"You came at the perfect time. I was about to come find you," Xiao Ming said as he sat down in a chair, and a maid placed a cup of tea in front of him.

"I'm sure you're talking about Youzhou," Pang Yukun replied. He already knew about the commotion outside the palace, with the merchants waiting for Xiao Ming.

Xiao Ming nodded. "The battle in Jizhou was the first step, and now we've reclaimed Youzhou. During this time, many merchants provided supplies for the northern campaign. It's time to repay them. If I want to gather more funds for the next battle, I can't go back on my word. Without trust, no one will stand by me."

Pang Yukun, who had been awake for several nights due to the conquest of the Sixteen Prefectures, said, "Your Highness, I've been thinking about this since you left for Shanhai Pass. The spoils of war—such as war horses, cattle, and the captured barbarian goods—shouldn't go to the merchants. These things are too valuable for us. Instead, I think we should give them grasslands and require them to raise horses there."

He paused before continuing, “The barbarians have conquered the world with their cavalry, something the Great Yu Empire has always struggled with. After losing the Sixteen Prefectures, we no longer have enough good horses. This is because we lack quality grasslands. Your Highness, this is the perfect opportunity to develop Youzhou into a major horse-breeding region. The barbarians have been driven out, but their power remains strong. We can’t let our guard down.”

Xiao Ming nodded slowly. Pang Yukun’s words had hit the mark.

“You’re right. The Silk Road is still in the hands of the barbarians, and we’re stuck inside the Great Wall. Without enough cavalry, it’s hard to completely defeat the barbarians. As long as they remain, the north will remain a constant threat.”

“Exactly,” Pang Yukun smiled. “Besides the grasslands, Your Highness can also move some disaster victims to Youzhou to grow potatoes, peanuts, corn, and chili peppers. The people of Qingzhou don’t want to grow potatoes, but the displaced people have no land. They’ll definitely agree to farm if they get land.”

“People refuse to grow potatoes?” Xiao Ming was surprised and suddenly remembered that it was indeed time to plant potatoes.

Pang Yukun nodded. “I was planning to force the people to set aside some land for potatoes, since potatoes are so high-yielding. They could feed even more people. But now that we have over 500,000 displaced people from Jizhou and a vast land in Youzhou, we can give them the land to farm. Otherwise, we could force the people to grow potatoes, but that might cause some unrest.”

Xiao Ming chuckled.

It reminded him of when potatoes were first introduced to Europe and were initially rejected. They were considered an unlucky crop, and farmers were unwilling to risk planting them. But during a great famine in France, a doctor who loved potatoes promoted them as highly productive and delicious, which led to the French eventually embracing them, saving many lives.

Xiao Ming now faced a similar challenge. But since he came from the future, he knew the importance of potatoes to his land.

“Alright, let’s send some of the displaced people to Youzhou to clear the land. Youzhou itself has 200,000 residents, so we’ll have enough people. Once the first crop of potatoes is ready, I’ll make sure the people will eagerly plant them next year.”

“Youzhou still has 200,000 displaced people?” Pang Yukun asked in surprise.

“Exactly. So I want you to go to Youzhou, set up the government office, and distribute the land to the people.”

Now that Youzhou was his, Xiao Ming intended to extend his control there.

“Understood, Your Highness. This is my specialty,” Pang Yukun said with a smile.

Now that Xiao Ming’s territory had doubled in size, it was no surprise that Pang Yukun was thrilled.

“Since you’ll be handling the displaced people and Youzhou’s affairs, I’ll gather the merchants tomorrow to discuss the grasslands,” Xiao Ming said.

He then asked, “By the way, how is the situation with the displaced soldiers who were captured in the war?”

Pang Yukun’s expression became serious. “Those who broke the law have been executed. The rest are innocent civilians with families.”

Xiao Ming nodded. “The King of the Azure Dragon is still on the run, so we must ensure these displaced people are properly managed. We can’t let any loyalists to the King of the Azure Dragon stir up trouble.”

Xiao Ming wasn’t being cold-hearted; after all, this matter involved the safety of his territory. If anyone with bad intentions caused chaos, it would be the innocent people who suffered.

Pang Yukun nodded solemnly.

The two of them discussed Youzhou and the displaced people, as well as some other affairs concerning the territory, before Pang Yukun finally left, satisfied.

Xiao Ming, meanwhile, was already planning his discussion with the merchants about Youzhou’s grasslands.

The grasslands in Youzhou were vast. Not only would he provide land to the merchants, but he also planned to sell some of it to them. He had a rough idea to focus on developing agricultural and pastoral industries there.

Just as he was thinking, Ziyuan suddenly entered, saying, "Your Highness, someone from Bowen Academy is here. They say they've created a hydrogen balloon."