

I. Dynasty 374

Chapter 374: Dividing the Cake

In the Chamber of Commerce, the merchants were all excited, their faces flushed red after hearing Xiao Ming's words.

When the map was spread out before them, they stood up, their eyes greedily fixed on the vast lands of Youzhou.

"Everyone, according to the agreement I made with you, now you can acquire three times the value in grasslands in Youzhou. Such high-quality land for raising horses is a first in the Great Yu Empire," Xiao Ming said, pointing at the map.

The merchants nodded. After entering the Chamber of Commerce, they had already learned that what they would receive was grassland, and that they could only engage in pastoral activities there.

They weren't disappointed by this; in fact, they were excited. Even if they didn't directly manage the grasslands, they could sell it to others.

Raising horses was a highly profitable business, and many merchants would eagerly jump in.

"Thank you, Your Highness. Your words are indeed golden."

Cao Zhengyang looked overjoyed. His gaze was already roaming over the grasslands of Youzhou, and he had already come up with his own horse-raising plan.

“Indeed, Your Highness, your words are as reliable as ever. If it were Prince Yong, he would have probably reneged by now.”

“Exactly, not to mention Prince Yong, how many of the other vassal kings would treat us merchants like this?”

“Only Your Highness values us merchants like this. We will certainly contribute all our efforts for you.”

“...”

After Cao Zhengyang, the other merchants also began flattering Xiao Ming.

Xiao Ming smiled, but he didn’t pay much attention to their flattery. Merchants always chased profit, and since he was giving them benefits, it was natural for them to show their loyalty.

If he hadn’t given them these benefits, they’d probably be cursing him behind his back. But despite understanding their nature, he still knew how to use this “capital beast” to push Qingzhou forward.

“Thank you for the praise. I’m just fulfilling my promise,” Xiao Ming said. “Now, everyone, choose the grassland you need. Of course, if you find your allocated land too small, I can sell you more.”

The merchants became even more excited. Some of the merchants who had contributed less money were worried that they would only receive small grasslands, but now that problem was solved.

Without hesitation, they picked up pens and started marking their areas on the large map of Youzhou.

Before long, 103 blocks appeared on the map.

Xiao Ming glanced at the map. The locations of the grasslands were mostly concentrated around Cangzhou and Youzhou, with some near Shanhai Pass.

The merchants were clever; the closer their grassland was to the city, the safer it would be.

Looking at the areas marked on the map, Xiao Ming asked Li Kaiyuan to take a ruler and start measuring.

The map had been drawn to scale, and the merchants had already been briefed about it. Now, Xiao Ming asked Li Kaiyuan to record the measurements and convert them into actual sizes.

Then, the actual amount of compensation for their support of the northern campaign would be calculated, and any adjustments would be made accordingly.

Soon, Li Kaiyuan handed Xiao Ming the data.

“Cao Zhengyang, your family is quite bold. You’ve marked such a large area, and the silver you need to make up for it is quite a lot,” Xiao Ming said, seeing the data for Cao Zhengyang.

According to the figures, Cao Zhengyang had marked off a 60-li by 60-li area of grassland, but the 100,000 taels he contributed could only cover a 10-li by 10-li area.

“Your Highness, what can you do with just a 10-li by 10-li plot? Since we’re raising horses, the more land, the better. Our Cao family is thinking of providing Your Highness with a steady supply of warhorses and cattle,” Cao Zhengyang said with a big smile.

Xiao Ming smirked internally. The Cao family was indeed incredibly wealthy.

Ever since Cao Zhengyang had settled in Qingzhou, his family had continuously shown off their immense financial power. At least now Xiao Ming could be sure that he didn’t have as much money as the Cao family.

In fact, the gap was substantial.

Xiao Ming suddenly thought of Shen Wansan from the Ming Dynasty. When Zhu Yuanzhang was building the walls of Nanjing, Shen Wansan had shown off his wealth, which ultimately led to his downfall.

If this were someone else, they might be thinking of making a move on the Cao family, as the family was like a fat lamb. No wonder King Chu was sharpening his knives.

Although Xiao Ming felt a bit envious of the Cao family's vast wealth, his main plan now was to attract capital to help Qingzhou grow wealthier.

And the Cao family, this capital giant, had come at the right time. So now, Xiao Ming not only couldn't scare the Cao family away, but he also needed to trap them in Qingzhou to make them work for him.

So he smiled and said, "Alright, I didn't make a mistake about your Cao family. In that case, I'll give you a 100-li by 100-li area of grassland. However, I want to cooperate with you on the remaining land. That means I'll take 40% of the profits from the grassland. What do you think?"

Cao Zhengyang was momentarily stunned, but quickly understood and smiled, "Your Highness, that's exactly what I was hoping for. With Your Highness backing us, we can confidently manage the grassland."

Xiao Ming nodded. He turned to Li Kaiyuan and said, "Discuss this matter with the Cao family. Set it up."

Li Kaiyuan nodded with a smile. Xiao Ming certainly wouldn't feel at ease with such a large force as the Cao family, so a cooperation now would also serve to monitor them.

After all, warhorses were a serious matter. It was well known that the southern regions lacked horses, and a batch of warhorses moved from the grasslands to King Chu's territory could easily triple in price.

Such huge profits would tempt many smugglers to take risks, and Xiao Ming naturally wanted to control the production of these warhorses since they were a strategic resource.

Aside from his own 10-li by 10-li plot, Cao Zhengyang also paid 150 taels of silver to buy the remaining 50-li grassland.

Afterward, Xiao Ming looked over the data from the other merchants. However, what surprised him was that, in the end, the grasslands were mostly controlled by three people.

Some of the merchants, after receiving small plots, immediately sold them to Ding Wu, Cao Zhengyang, and Dai Zixing.

As a result, Cao Zhengyang took control of a large part of the grassland in Cangzhou, Ding Wu took control of a large portion in Youzhou, and Dai Zixing took the grassland near Shanhai Pass, forming a three-way power structure.

Xiao Ming couldn't help but feel frustrated. The game of big capital devouring small capital was happening right before his eyes.

But there was nothing he could do. The ultimate goal of capital was always monopoly. However, he wouldn't give them that opportunity, because the largest grassland would still be his own.

This grassland would be controlled by the Qingzhou Chamber of Commerce.

To prevent the future growth of capital, he wouldn't give up the state-run capital part.

After dividing the grasslands, Xiao Ming made 2 million taels from Cao Zhengyang, Ding Wu, and Dai Zixing by selling the remaining grasslands. Overall, he was very satisfied with the outcome. This northern campaign had been a huge profit from war.