

I. Dynasty 380

Chapter 380: Slave Trade

Xiao Ming gave out a series of orders, assigning all the responsibilities related to the land grants. This was to make sure nothing would go wrong during his trip to Chang'an.

He also instructed Pang Yukun to record everything he said. That way, if anyone failed to complete their task, they could be held accountable and punished.

Finally, he said, "Don't think that just because you've received a noble title, you can now sit back and relax. If you stop trying and waste the honor I gave you, I will take it back."

At that, all the officials and generals suddenly grew serious. They had no intention of losing such a great honor.

Each of them secretly promised to work even harder in the future.

The meeting lasted until evening. Xiao Ming finally let out a long breath—his work was done. He could now prepare for his trip to Chang'an in peace.

Of course, there were still a few people who hadn't been named at the meeting—not because they weren't getting titles, but because they weren't currently in Qingzhou.

Like Liang Dahai, a slave trader; Qian Dafu, a mine owner; and Yue Yun, who was now at the shipyard in Dengzhou.

Yue Yun was overseeing the construction of the Galleon-class ships, while also recruiting students to expand the navy.

After the meeting ended, Xiao Ming returned directly to the royal residence, feeling much lighter now that everything was assigned.

Meanwhile, Pang Yukun and Niu Ben walked out of the Governor's Office with the others.

Everyone was basking in the glory of their newly awarded titles.

Lu Fei grinned and said first, "Wow, 2,000 taels of silver and 600 acres of land—what am I going to do with all this?"

Luo Xin scoffed, "What do you mean what? Just buy a few slaves to farm it for you. I've got way more land than that."

"That land belongs to your dad, General Luo. What's that got to do with you? You're no better than me," Lu Fei said with annoyance.

Niu Ben sighed, "I honestly don't know how I'm going to use this 10,000 taels of silver. His Highness is just too generous."

Lu Fei laughed awkwardly. “Governor, if you don’t know how to spend it, I can help. I know Liang Dahai—when he gets back, we can use the money to buy some slaves and set up a plantation. You’ll never have to worry about food again.”

This was exactly what many of the newly rewarded officials were thinking.

Most already had land. Now with even more land and money, they were all planning to buy slaves to work their new estates.

Pang Yukun shook his head, but he too faced the same issue.

He said, “We’ve worked hard to follow His Highness because we believe he’ll lead us to glory. Now that he’s rewarded us, there’s no need to hold back. I think Lu Fei is right—buying some slaves to farm the land is a good idea. After all, food is everything.”

“But didn’t Liang Dahai’s slaves all belong to His Highness?” Li Kaiyuan pointed out. “Where else can we get slaves?”

“Surely Liang Dahai isn’t the only one who trades slaves?” Lu Fei asked.

“There are others, but not many,” Pang Yukun replied, frowning. “Qingzhou lacks population. His Highness is already worried about that, so he’s not likely to hand over his slaves. But Li Kaiyuan, don’t any of the merchants you work with do slave trading?”

Li Kaiyuan thought for a moment. “Some do, but their scale is small and unstable. The real problem is His Highness hasn’t given permission for private merchants to sell slaves here.”

“You fool!” Lu Fei snapped playfully. “If His Highness didn’t mention it, maybe he just forgot. Why didn’t you ask? This is your job now. If I can’t buy slaves, I’m blaming you!”

He and Li Kaiyuan often teased each other.

“You’re unbelievable, Captain Lu,” Li Kaiyuan muttered, then noticed that everyone was now staring at him hopefully.

Sighing, he said, “Fine, fine. I’ll go ask His Highness if we can open up slave trading to private merchants.”

With that, he headed off toward King Qi’s residence.

Pang Yukun and the others burst into laughter. He turned to Niu Ben and said, “I think His Highness values the slave plantations a lot. And potatoes and chili peppers—those crops have a big future. If you listen to me, grow those instead of grain. They might make you more money in the long run.”

Niu Ben shrugged. He had already seen all the highs and lows of life and only wanted to live out his days with honor.

“Whatever Secretary Pang grows, we’ll grow too. We trust your judgment.”

Everyone nodded in agreement.

After all, Pang Yukun was the closest person to Xiao Ming. He understood His Highness better than anyone.

After chatting a while at the office, the group went home, eager to share their good news with their families.

By that time, Li Kaiyuan had arrived at King Qi’s residence. Though nervous, he entered bravely.

“Li Kaiyuan? What’s wrong? Are you not satisfied with your reward?” Xiao Ming asked, surprised.

“No, no, Your Highness. I wouldn’t dare question your generosity. But the others, especially Secretary Pang, pressured me to ask if you’d allow private merchants to engage in slave trading. That way, they can buy slaves to work their land.”

“Private slave trading?” Xiao Ming’s eyes lit up.

Until now, slave trading in Qingzhou had been monopolized by Liang Dahai, whom Xiao Ming had put in charge. But clearly, the current situation needed a change.

Besides Qingzhou, there was also Youzhou—vast lands that needed a large labor force. Xiao Ming couldn't handle it all alone. He had to get others involved to buy land and start plantations too. That was the only way to speed up economic growth in Qingzhou.

The more people joined, the stronger the foundation. Xiao Ming needed to be a leader—not someone who hoarded all the benefits and held everyone back.

He nodded and said, "They're right. Let's take this chance to open up the slave trade completely. Encourage merchants in the chamber of commerce to get involved. Also, allow them to set up official slave markets in Qingzhou."

"Yes, Your Highness!" Li Kaiyuan said excitedly.

Xiao Ming nodded again. He knew that in the West, the slave trade was already booming. He couldn't afford to fall behind.

From a modern perspective, slave trading was inhumane. But he wasn't living in a modern world—this was a time when human rights didn't exist. There was no point in acting like a saint.

In the grand scheme of national power and economic strength, such moral debates seemed almost insignificant.