

I. Dynasty 392

Chapter 392: Trade Agreement

Steam slowly rose from the teacup.

Prince Wei's eyes kept darting around — clearly, he was calculating the purpose behind these demands.

After a long pause, he hesitantly asked, “Is that the only condition?”

“Yes, only that. But not just you, Third Uncle — no one in Wei Region may block Qingzhou goods,” Xiao Ming said calmly. His only goal was to make sure Qingzhou goods could enter Wei Region freely and that Prince Wei couldn't collect any taxes from the Qingzhou Chamber of Commerce.

Prince Wei nodded. The truth was, he had been placing tax checkpoints all along the route of Qingzhou goods, which made cheap products become very expensive by the time they reached their destination.

But this wasn't something he did only to Xiao Ming — throughout the Great Yu Empire, taxing merchants like this was standard. After all, why not grab money from businessmen if you could?

Now that Xiao Ming had proposed this condition, it meant Prince Wei could no longer charge any tax on Qingzhou goods. He would lose a huge amount of silver, and the more goods Xiao Ming sent, the bigger the loss.

After thinking for a while, Prince Wei said, “Dear nephew, you're really ruthless with this. Isn't this just letting you earn all the money in Wei Region?”

“Since this is compensation, do you expect me to pay you instead, Uncle? Think it over. If you agree, we’ll draft the agreement. If not, we’ll settle it in court,” Xiao Ming replied.

Prince Wei grew anxious. “Nephew, can’t the condition be changed? I’ll pay you three million taels of silver — how about that?”

Xiao Ming shook his head.

“Five million taels!” Prince Wei raised five fingers.

Xiao Ming still shook his head.

Biting his teeth, Prince Wei finally shouted, “Ten million taels worth of goods!”

Hearing that number, Xiao Ming lifted his eyes slightly — a bit surprised. Yet he still shook his head. What surprised him most was that Prince Wei actually understood how damaging this agreement would be to his territory — enough that he would rather pay ten million in goods than sign it.

“Third Uncle, I only have this one condition. It’s up to you whether to accept it,” Xiao Ming said, drawing the line.

Prince Wei was completely deflated now. His expression kept changing. Finally, he said, “Nephew, can you give me two days to think?”

“Of course. Please, take your time. I won’t see you off,” Xiao Ming said coolly.

Prince Wei stood up, gave Xiao Ming a complicated look, and then walked out.

Watching him leave, a cold smile appeared at the corner of Xiao Ming’s mouth.

He had thought this through before even arriving in Chang’an. This trade agreement was his strategic economic weapon.

Over the past two years, Qingzhou’s products had become popular across the Great Yu Empire. But one thing that annoyed him was how heavily they were taxed every time they crossed a region.

These high taxes forced the Chamber of Commerce to raise prices — or face losses.

Under such targeted treatment, Qingzhou’s foreign trade income from taxes alone was enormous, but the high prices reduced customer demand.

When Xiao Ming added it all up, it was as if all these regional lords were sucking his blood like mosquitoes. Worst of all, this behavior seriously harmed the development of Qingzhou’s local industry.

That's why, after identifying the problem, he created this agreement — with the goal of spreading it.

Forget the other royal lords for now. His immediate neighbors — Prince Wei and Prince Yong — needed to be locked into this agreement first. The others he would deal with one by one.

He admitted that when he learned Prince Wei had sent the useless Mountain Camp troops, he actually felt a bit happy. It meant Prince Wei had delivered himself on a silver platter. The only part Xiao Ming miscalculated was just how useless those troops were.

“Next will be Prince Yong.”

Xiao Ming pulled out a stack of documents from his coat. These were the trade agreements he had written up — filled with dozens of clauses. Once signed, it would mean that Wei Region's markets would be completely open to him. With Qingzhou's high-quality and low-priced goods, it wouldn't take long to completely crush Wei Region's low-level trade system.

Eventually, Wei Region would become just a supplier of raw materials to him. This was a classic example of unfair trade — selling rice to get cannons.

Outside the mansion, Prince Wei's carriage slowly rolled away.

Inside the carriage, Prince Wei looked furious. His fists were clenched like a beast ready to bite.

After some distance, he finally couldn't hold it in anymore and shouted, "Xiao Ming, you've gone too far!"

Then he turned to look at a young man inside the carriage — Xiao Qi. He had stayed in the carriage the whole time.

Seeing Prince Wei's dark expression, Xiao Qi had wisely said nothing earlier. Now that Prince Wei had exploded, he sighed and said, "Third Uncle, I told you not to send the Mountain Camp. I said you should've helped Xiao Ming defeat the Khan's tribes, but you didn't listen. Now you've given him leverage, and he's squeezing us for it."

Prince Wei deeply regretted it. "If I'd known it would turn out like this... I just wanted Xiao Ming to fight to the death with the tribes while we profited from the sidelines."

Xiao Qi sighed again. Back then, Prince Wei had mobilized 150,000 troops, just waiting for the tribes to invade Qingzhou and capture Xiao Ming. Then, he could march in and defeat the tired enemy.

Not only would he get credit for defeating the Khan, but if Xiao Ming were killed, he could take over Qingzhou — and the fortress-like Cangzhou City that Xiao Ming had built.

But all those plans had failed.

"So what's the condition Xiao Ming offered?" Xiao Qi asked.

Prince Wei explained the terms of the agreement. Xiao Qi was stunned. “Third Uncle, that agreement is really vicious.”

Prince Wei gave a bitter laugh. “Of course I know that. Even our local goods are taxed — but Xiao Ming wants to earn without paying a single coin.”

Xiao Qi sighed again. “What do we do then?”

“I’m still troubled about it. Most of Wei Region’s tax income comes from farming, but this is a huge risk. Still, if we don’t agree, this might become an all-out war. Now that the Khan threat in Youzhou is gone, I fear Xiao Ming may soon have free time to come for us.”

Xiao Qi’s eyes flickered. He said, “Third Uncle, either way it’s a blade to the neck. We may not be able to avoid signing this agreement. But since it’s a negotiation, even if we sign, we shouldn’t lose everything. What about the weapons Xiao Ming used against the Khan — the guns and hot air balloons?”

Prince Wei’s eyes lit up, and he looked at Xiao Qi with admiration. “Yes! You really think things through.”