

## I. Dynasty 56

### Chapter 56: Dividing the Spoils

After the auction for the agency rights of various prefectures and counties concluded, the merchants dispersed.

At this moment, Pang Yukun stood before Xiao Ming, a rare smile on his face, and said, "Congratulations, Your Highness. This time, Your Highness has collected seven million taels of silver. Truly a cause for celebration."

Qian Dafu and Li Kaiyuan also wore expressions of wild joy. When had Qingzhou ever seen so much silver? Qian Dafu said, "Your Highness, with this sum of silver, our mines, workshops, and estates can all start operating simultaneously."

"Exactly, and the shipyard too. Zhang Liang is in desperate need of silver to build ships. The merchant fleet urgently needs large vessels," Li Kaiyuan added.

From struggling to scrape together a few thousand taels of silver to suddenly having seven million taels in hand, Xiao Ming felt like a nouveau riche.

However, recalling that even a single merchant under Prince Wei was wealthier than him, he quickly deflated. If a mere merchant was this wealthy, one could only imagine the prosperity of Prince Wei's fiefdom.

He said, "The road ahead is long and arduous, but I will strive tirelessly. This is just the beginning. As long as we work together, I believe our fiefdom will not lose to Prince Wei's!"

Pang Yukun gave Xiao Ming a surprised look. Xiao Ming's previous poem, A Guest's Song, had already left Pang Yukun in awe. Now, Xiao Ming's casual remark, "The road ahead is long and arduous, but I will strive tirelessly," carried a unique charm. Pang Yukun's perception of the Prince of Qi shifted slightly.

To him, Xiao Ming could now be considered a scholar, a kindred spirit, which naturally increased his sense of camaraderie.

However, camaraderie aside, business had to be taken care of. Pang Yukun said, "Your Highness, spring is just a month away. The production teams are still short on plow oxen and farming tools, and the Qingzhou treasury is running out of silver..."

"Your Highness, my mines are in the same situation. One hundred thousand taels for purchasing slaves and building the mining area will soon be insufficient," Qian Dafu sighed.

Chen Wenlong and Li Kaiyuan simultaneously clasped their hands. Xiao Ming raised his hand to stop them. "No need, I understand. No wonder you're all grinning from ear to ear. You've got your eyes on my silver."

The four of them laughed. Pang Yukun said, "Your Highness, without silver, nothing can be accomplished. Now that Your Highness has demonstrated great talent and earned a substantial amount of silver, we naturally admire you. However, for the sake of long-term planning, this silver should be used for the fiefdom."

Xiao Ming smiled wryly. It seemed the silver wouldn't even have time to warm his hands before it was gone. He said, "Fine, fine. Tell me how much each of you needs."

The four of them were delighted. After some discussion and calculations, Pang Yukun took one million taels to replenish the Qingzhou treasury, Qian Dafu took one and a half million taels to develop the mines, and the Machinery Department took two million taels for the construction of the workshop district and production procurement.

The remaining two and a half million taels, plus the one million taels sent by Xiao Wenxuan, totaled three million taels. With a flourish of his brush, Xiao Ming allocated two million taels to the shipyard.

As the saying goes, “It takes ten years to build an army, but a hundred years to build a navy.” Xiao Ming didn’t hesitate to spend money on maritime transport. The Great Yu Empire was just one market, and the Great Yu Empire itself was only a small part of the world. The real market was overseas, and only by dominating the overseas market could one control wealth.

After the “division of spoils,” the four of them returned to their respective tasks. With silver in hand, they were no longer hesitant and prepared to forge ahead boldly.

For Xiao Ming, he wasn’t heartbroken over the silver. From a modern economic perspective, spending large sums of silver in his fiefdom could stimulate economic growth, boosting domestic demand. The benefits would ultimately fall on the common people.

Pocketing the remaining silver notes, Xiao Ming happily headed back to the prince’s residence. This auction had finally given him some financial breathing room. Now, should he consider improving his personal life? Perhaps visiting a brothel and chatting with a courtesan for some entertainment?

As he fantasized about whether the courtesans of the Great Yu Empire were as beautiful as movie stars, a sudden clatter of hooves interrupted his thoughts.

Xiao Ming turned around to see Lu Fei riding toward him at full speed.

His heart tightened. In such a situation, Xiao Ming couldn't help but worry. Although Lu Fei was now one of his close ministers, aside from Qian Dafu, Xiao Ming couldn't fully trust anyone else.

After all, to him, these people were outsiders, and trust would take time to build.

As Lu Fei charged toward him, Xiao Ming couldn't help but feel nervous. The shadow of the assassin still lingered in his mind.

"Your Highness!" Lu Fei reined in his horse just in front of Xiao Ming. Dismounting, Lu Fei looked aggrieved. "On my way here, I heard from Chief Secretary Pang that Your Highness has earned a substantial amount of silver, a staggering seven million taels. The Governor's Office, the Machinery Department, and the shipyard have all received large sums. Why did Your Highness forget about the Qingzhou Army? Are we not your own flesh and blood?"

Xiao Ming now wanted to slap Pang Yukun. No wonder Pang Yukun had left with that enigmatic smile. He had been setting Xiao Ming up, ensuring not a single tael of silver would be left for himself.

With a heavy heart, Xiao Ming pulled out the remaining silver notes from his pocket and handed them to Lu Fei. "Who said that? I was just planning to personally deliver this to you, Commander Lu. Here's the remaining one million taels. It's all yours. The Qingzhou Army has always been my top priority."

Lu Fei was overjoyed. Since he had joined the Qingzhou Army, they had never been truly wealthy. He grinned foolishly. “Thank you, Your Highness.”

Xiao Ming waved his hand, and Lu Fei mounted his horse, happily riding off.

“Sigh, decades of hard work, gone in an instant,” Xiao Ming muttered dejectedly as he returned to the prince’s residence.

In the residence, Ziyuan was directing the servants to tidy up the empty rooms and store the gifts sent by the merchants. Seeing this, his mood improved.

For the past two months, he had been living frugally. Now, at least he could improve his diet, as he saw plenty of cooking oil, beef, venison, and other delicacies among the gifts. There were also luxury items like ginseng, snow lotus, fine silks, writing materials, jade, porcelain, and gold and silverware.

Seeing Xiao Ming return, Lü Luo happily approached. “Your Highness, the gifts you received this time are truly abundant. They’ll keep our residence well-supplied for a while.”

“Indeed, and some merchants even hid silver within their gifts,” Ziyuan said gracefully as she walked over, handing Xiao Ming a stack of silver notes.

Xiao Ming took them and looked. They totaled two hundred thousand taels, each note stamped with the character “Cao,” just like the others.

“Hehe, Pang Yukun, Pang Yukun, man proposes, but heaven disposes. Keep this silver safe, and make sure Chief Secretary Pang doesn’t find out,” Xiao Ming reminded.

Ziyuan understood and chuckled softly. “Your Highness’s silver must have all been taken by Chief Secretary Pang, right?”

Xiao Ming nodded. In truth, he understood Pang Yukun’s intentions. Pang Yukun wanted Xiao Ming to spend the silver on proper causes, so he didn’t blame him.

However, stashing away some private funds wasn’t against the rules, and improving his quality of life was necessary.