

I. Dynasty 58

Chapter 58: The Work Points System

Five days later, a finely crafted ox-powered chain waterwheel was completed by the Machinery Department.

Pang Yukun stared in shock at the waterwheel that Xiao Ming had described. At this moment, the waterwheel, driven by three differently sized gears and pulled by an ox, continuously transported water from the Xiaoqing River onto the shore.

Moreover, since the contraption was powered by two oxen, the tracks Xiao Ming mentioned were quite wide, and the water troughs on the tracks were deep. Each lift could bring up a large volume of river water—several times more efficient than any waterwheel Pang Yukun had ever seen.

Pang Yukun was born into a scholarly family. His ancestors served as minor officials in the county, far from the ranks of aristocratic clans.

From a young age, he diligently studied the classics, following his family's ancestral teachings—to assist a wise ruler and bring stability to the nation as his lifelong duty.

However, after serving for ten years as a censor in Chang'an, that hope gradually turned into disappointment.

The current officialdom of the Great Yu Empire was controlled by noble clans. Officials without powerful backers had no chance of rising unless they attached themselves to influential families. Even those with talent for governing were often relegated to insignificant posts.

Although successive emperors had upheld the tradition of not executing censors, the position's influence had waned significantly. Over ten years, Pang Yukun had painstakingly reported hundreds of corrupt practices, only to be blocked by court officials or simply ignored by Xiao Wenxuan.

The collusion among court factions and the weakening of imperial authority made him realize that the Great Yu Empire was rapidly decaying under the parasitic grip of the noble clans.

To maintain a fragile peace, the court advocated for appeasement policies as northern barbarians grew increasingly aggressive, paying higher annual tributes in exchange for temporary stability.

Yet even so, the barbarians—though refraining from large-scale invasions—still conducted regular raids along the borders.

All these factors, combined with the intensifying struggle between the imperial princes, painted a grim picture in Pang Yukun's mind. He foresaw the Great Yu Empire splintering into chaos, much like the fallen Dai Empire, with fires of war engulfing the land.

By then, the rising barbarian tribes would likely march south, crushing the Han people's millennia-old legacy under iron hooves and flames.

Five years ago, risking his life, Pang Yukun had passionately denounced the court's complacency in hopes of awakening the drunken ruler and his ministers—only to receive a transfer order, assigning him to follow Prince Qi to his fief.

Five years in Qingzhou had numbed his heart. He resigned himself to serving a dissolute prince, waiting for the day he could retire to the countryside.

But now, the long-extinguished flame of hope in his heart flickered faintly.

“Even if Dayu cannot be saved... perhaps this corner of Qingzhou can be.”

Pang Yukun gazed at Xiao Ming. Over the past two months, the prince’s transformation had not escaped his notice. If this change was real, Prince Qi might truly become a wise ruler.

The thought made Pang Yukun nod slightly, a rare smile appearing at the corners of his mouth.

“Chief Historian Pang, do you believe me now?”

Xiao Ming turned his head, noticing Pang Yukun grinning at him—like an old glass bead merchant eyeing a prized gemstone. A chill crept down Xiao Ming’s spine.

Pang Yukun snapped out of his thoughts and chuckled, “Your Highness is indeed talented. I concede. If this ox-powered waterwheel is promoted across the fief, it will greatly benefit agricultural recovery.”

To see the novel contraption, Ziyuan and Lülüo had also tagged along.

The two girls watched with fascination. Lülüo whispered to Ziwan, “Sister, Chief Historian Pang seems to smile much more often now.”

Ziyuan’s eyes flicked around, then she smiled. “That’s a good thing. Better than his usual grim face. Haven’t you noticed? He’s much more lenient toward His Highness lately—and fully devoted to assisting him with the fief’s affairs.”

“It does seem that way.” Lülüo tilted her head, not entirely understanding Pang Yukun’s change.

But her childlike curiosity soon won out, and she dragged Ziyuan along to examine the waterwheel.

After regaining his composure, Pang Yukun listened as Xiao Ming said, “Next, the Machinery Department will focus on mass-producing these ox-powered waterwheels, aiming to supply every county. But the limited number of craftsmen is a major issue.”

Xiao Ming’s words addressed a very real problem. He possessed many technologies, but starting from scratch meant countless limitations—most critically, the lack of skilled craftsmen. Without automated machinery, the only way to scale up production was with manpower.

And skilled labor was his scarcest resource.

“Your Highness,” Pang Yukun spoke up, “I have a suggestion. You rely too heavily on the craftsmen in your own workshops. But don’t forget the common people of the fief. Why not delegate waterwheel

construction to each county—even down to production teams? Within days, these waterwheels could be everywhere.”

Xiao Ming’s eyes lit up.

He had been making a crucial mistake—trying to do everything himself while overlooking the labor force of the common people.

As the highest authority in the fief, he could organize the population for infrastructure projects. Though he had established production teams, he’d forgotten one key incentive: work points.

However, his version of the work points system differed from the modern collectivist model. Here, every peasant still had their own fields under a cooperative structure.

The work points he proposed would be rewards for extra labor. These points would be recorded by the production teams and exchanged at the year’s end for grain, cloth, and other goods.

Discussing this idea with Pang Yukun, Xiao Ming saw its greater potential.

To appease the people, he had already exempted them from three years of tax. But outside of the busy farming seasons, most peasants were idle. The work points system would offer them a chance to earn extra income—mobilizing the entire population at minimal cost.

Participation in infrastructure projects would earn work points—effectively transforming the fief’s labor force into a cheap yet motivated workforce.

Pang Yukun nodded repeatedly. Forced labor bred resentment, but this work points system would undoubtedly win popular support.

“If Your Highness implements this system, the people will surely be deeply grateful,” Pang Yukun remarked.

“I can only hope so.” Xiao Ming knew that to secure his position, he had to win the people’s hearts. Only by uniting them could he firmly hold his fief.

As for the silver to pay for work points, Xiao Ming never intended to squeeze the people. From the moment he founded the merchants’ guild, he had set a course of commerce and industry to enrich the state.

The common people only needed to focus on farming and assisting with infrastructure—while, of course, loyally supporting him.

After finalizing the plan to delegate waterwheel production, with craftsmen dispatched to each county to train others, the matter was settled.

However, Xiao Ming never missed an opportunity to monopolize technology for profit. He had deliberately designed the ox-powered waterwheel with added complexity.

Every waterwheel required a critical component: metal rolling bearings—a part only his Machinery Department could produce.