

I. Dynasty 62

Chapter 62: Bowen Academy

After settling the two hundred or so individuals, Xiao Ming had Chen Wenlong register Lu Tong and the others the next day, officially enrolling them into the Equipment Department.

Out of the 231 strong and young individuals who stayed, most were between the ages of thirteen and twenty. The older ones, likely having families, had chosen to leave.

“Does anyone here know how to read?” Xiao Ming asked, wanting to assess their literacy levels.

The room fell silent.

Xiao Ming immediately understood—none of the two hundred or so individuals were literate. This was expected, as this was an era with an extremely low literacy rate.

This also meant that training these individuals would be a long process. Teaching them overly complex techniques now would be futile, as they wouldn’t be able to comprehend them.

Although the technology crystal could transmit knowledge, presenting technical steps in their minds through images and other forms, the application of this knowledge required real-world practice.

For example, blast furnace iron smelting and coke production were skills that Chen Qi had mastered only after many failures. Xiao Ming had only provided the technical knowledge, and it was through practice that Chen Qi truly understood and mastered the techniques.

However, there was one comforting aspect of the technology crystal: it allowed the recipients to easily remember the knowledge Xiao Ming imparted. While it didn't grant photographic memory, it enabled them to retain about 80% of the information after a single session, greatly enhancing the efficiency of teaching.

"Since that's the case, the first thing I'll teach you is how to read," Xiao Ming declared.

These individuals would become the core technical backbone of Qingzhou in the future, and illiteracy was not an option. However, Xiao Ming didn't plan to teach them traditional characters. Instead, he would teach them simplified characters.

From now on, all technical documents in Qingzhou would use simplified characters. This was also to maintain the confidentiality of the technology and materials. Of course, even with simplified characters, people from the Great Yu Empire would still recognize some of them, but as long as 50% remained unintelligible, it would suffice.

To speed up Lu Tong and the others' learning, Xiao Ming adopted modern pinyin teaching methods, starting with the most basic characters.

In the morning, he taught them the entire pinyin system and checked their progress. The results were satisfying—they had memorized more than half of the phonetic alphabet.

In the afternoon, Xiao Ming shifted to teaching them mathematics, starting with Arabic numerals and simple addition and subtraction within ten.

Overall, the pace of his teaching was much faster than that of a typical elementary school curriculum. This was partly because they were older and more disciplined than children, and partly because they were highly motivated to learn.

In this era, being able to read was considered a prestigious skill, and people naturally yearned for what they lacked. At least for today, Lu Tong and the others were fully focused during the lessons.

In the evening, Chen Wenlong brought a plaque inscribed with the words “Bowen Academy.” This was the official designation for the courtyard, which would now serve as Qingzhou’s educational base.

“Lu Tong, review the lessons with them tonight. For now, you won’t be assigned any other tasks. Your food, clothing, and daily needs will be taken care of by servants.”

Lu Tong, the most active among the youths, quickly ran over to help hang the plaque when Chen Wenlong arrived.

“Your Highness, how can we be worthy of such preferential treatment? How can we ever repay your great kindness?” Lu Tong was still unaccustomed to the drastic change from being a slave, ordered around by others, to becoming a scholar who could read and write.

Xiao Ming smiled. “This is only temporary. Once you’ve mastered real skills, you’ll need to serve me. That will be your way of repaying me. For now, simply learning what I teach you is repayment enough.”

“Yes, Your Highness,” Lu Tong replied.

Given that the two hundred or so individuals were all youths, Xiao Ming was concerned that Lu Tong might not be able to manage his peers. He addressed the group, "From today onward, this place will be known as Bowen Academy. More people will come here to study in the future. I hope you cherish this opportunity. If anyone among you shows no desire to improve, I will have no choice but to give them some silver and let them fend for themselves. Don't blame me for being harsh. The reason I selected you is to revitalize your homeland, and there's no room for error. From now on, I appoint Lu Tong as your head student. All of you must obey his commands."

The youths bowed and replied in unison, "Yes, Your Highness."

Xiao Ming nodded. In the Great Yu Empire, the term "head student" referred to someone responsible for ensuring that students adhered to the academy's rules and assisted the instructors in educating the students. Now that he had established an academy, it was important to formalize the structure and assign the necessary roles.

After giving Lu Tong a few more instructions, Xiao Ming and Chen Wenlong left the academy. The guards at the entrance closed the gates behind them.

Xiao Ming had decreed that the students would be allowed to leave the academy for one day every seven days. The rest of the time, they were to remain within the academy to study.

"Your Highness, may I also have my son attend this academy and receive your teachings?" Chen Wenlong suddenly asked as they entered the prince's residence through a side alley.

Xiao Ming chuckled. "Why the sudden request, Commander Chen?"

“Your Highness, my son is of mediocre talent, with only a bit of cleverness. If he continues to idle away his days, he will never amount to much in the future,” Chen Wenlong replied.

“A parent’s love for their child is always forward-thinking. Though you are strict with Chen Qi, it is out of deep concern for his future. Rest assured, Commander Chen, there will be a place for Chen Qi in Bowen Academy,” Xiao Ming said.

Chen Wenlong’s face lit up with joy. “Thank you for your kindness, Your Highness.”

Xiao Ming waved his hand. “You are all my trusted ministers. This is only natural.”

Chen Wenlong’s body trembled slightly. Being called a “trusted minister” deeply moved him.

After expressing his gratitude, Chen Wenlong left to share the news with Chen Qi.

Lüluo, who had been following Xiao Ming all day, finally couldn’t hold back her curiosity. “Your Highness, what you taught today was all so strange. Why have I never heard of such things before?”

Both Lüluo and Ziwan were literate, so they naturally noticed that what Xiao Ming had taught Lu Tong and the others were not standard characters but rather something they found peculiar.

“This is my secret. Don’t speak of it to others,” Xiao Ming said with a smile.

Lüluo nodded, not daring to ask further.

By now, dinner was ready in the prince’s residence. Unlike the meager meals of two months ago, the food was now more abundant, with not only pastries but also stir-fried dishes.

This was partly because the prince’s treasury now had silver, and partly because merchants had flocked to Qingzhou, bringing a variety of goods.

A few days ago, Xiao Ming had the Machinery Department specially craft an iron wok for the residence, along with a coal stove. With these cooking tools, the kitchen was now well-equipped.

“Your Highness, here is the braised chicken you requested,” the cook said as he placed the iron wok on the table. The aroma of the dish filled the air, making Xiao Ming’s mouth water.