

## I. Dynasty 64

### Chapter 64: Progress on All Fronts

The delicious braised chicken from the previous night had satisfied everyone in the prince's residence.

When Xiao Ming allowed the servants to eat his leftovers, it wasn't out of disrespect. In this era, resources were scarce, and eating leftovers was a common practice. Even he occasionally ate leftovers, and since the braised chicken was served in a large iron pot, it wasn't much different from sharing a meal at the same table.

Moreover, braised chicken was a unique delicacy in the Great Yu Empire. Thinking of the countless gourmet dishes stored in the technology library, Xiao Ming felt a sense of pride. There was still a long way to go, and he had plenty of time to introduce more exquisite dishes.

However, now was not the time to indulge in luxury. The most important task was still making money.

After Ding Wanquan, over the next few days, more people came to the prince's residence to visit Xiao Ming, all inquiring about the ox-powered waterwheel. Xiao Ming handled them all by quoting a price of three hundred taels of silver.

Some wealthy merchants, unbothered by the cost, readily agreed to purchase the bearings. Others hesitated, and some outright gave up, choosing to stick with their old waterwheels.

During this time, Wang Shijie and others had been studying the ox-powered waterwheel, but in the end, they also brought silver to purchase the bearings.

By this point, Xiao Ming had a good understanding of the current technological level of the Great Yu Empire. It seemed they were unable to replicate his rolling bearings.

“Your Highness, over the past few days, we’ve received orders for about five thousand sets of rolling bearings. The Machinery Department simply can’t handle such a large volume. I suggest building another hydraulic lathe workshop, but if we do that, we won’t have enough craftsmen to spare.”

After Chen Wenlong returned, Chen Qi began attending classes at Bowen Academy regularly.

That day, just after Xiao Ming finished his lecture, Chen Qi approached him with this suggestion.

Xiao Ming frowned. The Machinery Department was already handling a lot of tasks—producing coal stoves, providing parts for Zhang Liang’s shipyard to build galleons, manufacturing steel and coke, and producing waterwheel components. With the sudden influx of bearing orders, it was no wonder Chen Qi was feeling overwhelmed.

Over the past few days, while teaching, Xiao Ming had also been pondering this issue. He realized that low-end technologies shouldn’t consume too many resources. For example, producing coal stoves, while profitable, wasn’t highly lucrative and still required a significant number of craftsmen, which wasn’t cost-effective.

Moreover, it interfered with the layout of the industrial foundation. The current focus should be on steel production. In modern times, a nation’s strength was often measured by its steel output.

Now, he had to make some tough decisions.

“How many craftsmen are currently working on coal stove production?” Xiao Ming asked.

“We need to produce at least three hundred coal stoves a day, and about fifty craftsmen are dedicated to this task,” Chen Qi replied.

Xiao Ming nodded. “From now on, reassign all fifty craftsmen to producing hydraulic lathes, milling machines, drilling machines, and other machine tools. Also, out of the two thousand newly purchased slaves, half should be assigned to steel production. Commandant Lu, now that he has silver to spare, has been boasting about buying a new set of armor from me. I’ve promised to produce a brand-new set for him, and in a couple of days, I’ll personally teach the craftsmen how to make it.”

“New armor?” Chen Qi’s interest was piqued. “Your Highness, I know how to make scale armor.”

“It’s not scale armor. You’ll see when the time comes,” Xiao Ming said with a smile.

Chen Qi scratched his head, clearly eager to learn more.

Lu Tong, standing nearby, looked on with envy. Chen Qi was about the same age as him, but he was already capable of handling major responsibilities on his own.

Noticing Lu Tong’s expression, Xiao Ming said, “Don’t worry. I’ll have tasks for you too. Consider it practical training.”

“Really, Your Highness?” Lu Tong immediately perked up.

He knew that only by proving himself useful to the Prince of Qi, like Chen Qi, could he earn a place of importance.

Xiao Ming nodded. His approach to training Chen Qi and Lu Tong was different. Chen Qi’s focus was on mechanics and physics, while Lu Tong’s was on chemistry.

Over the past few days, Xiao Ming had been teaching the youths how to read and write. Now, it was time to introduce them to chemistry.

This way, chemistry and physics could progress simultaneously. After all, rare metals and alloys required chemical methods for extraction and synthesis, and future advancements in gunpowder would also rely on a solid foundation in chemistry.

For Xiao Ming, the most critical area was materials science. Only with high-quality materials could high-quality products be produced. From now on, these two hundred individuals would be responsible for research in chemistry and materials.

“Of course. Tomorrow, I’ll teach you how to produce alkali. This will be your first project,” Xiao Ming said.

Lu Tong nodded, though he was still confused, as he didn’t yet understand what “alkali” was.

With the Machinery Department relieved of some of its burdens, Chen Qi was naturally thrilled. He said, "Your Highness, I'll go back and make the arrangements. But what about the Wang family?"

"I'll handle the Wang family," Xiao Ming replied. He planned to sell the coal stove production technology to them. Since he had already given them the coal briquette technology, adding the coal stove wouldn't be a problem.

After the day's lessons, Xiao Ming checked on Lu Tong and the others' progress. They had already mastered over three hundred common characters.

Xiao Ming was pleased with their progress. His basic requirement was for them to become literate and learn basic chemical symbols. After that, he would take them to the workshop area to start building the chemical industry.

The workshop area was now divided into two parts: one half belonged to Chen Qi, and the other was reserved for Lu Tong.

In the evening, Xiao Ming summoned Wang Shijie to discuss the coal stove matter. The Wang family was more than happy to take over the production of coal stoves, especially since Xiao Ming's asking price was only fifty thousand taels of silver.

This way, they would effectively control the entire coal stove industry chain within the six prefectures.

“Your Highness, there’s one more thing I need to report. Recently, our merchants in Cangzhou have noticed that some out-of-town merchants are smuggling horses. These horses only pass through Your Highness’s fiefdom briefly before heading to the Prince of Wei’s territory,” Wang Shijie said.

“Smuggling horses?” Xiao Ming frowned. He looked at Wang Shijie. “Since when has the Wang family been concerned about such matters?”

Wang Shijie replied, “Your Highness, the merchants flooding into Qingzhou are a mixed bunch, and not all of them have good intentions. I’m only looking out for Your Highness’s interests by keeping an eye on these merchants.”

Xiao Ming had long anticipated that local powerful families would resent outside merchants. Wang Shijie’s words sounded noble, but they also revealed the mindset of the local families in Qingzhou.

“How are they smuggling the horses? Why hasn’t anyone in Cangzhou reported this to me?” Xiao Ming’s voice carried a hint of anger.