

I. Dynasty 70

Chapter 70: A Small Harvest

Qingzhou.

A gentle spring rain marked the end of the long, harsh winter. Spring had arrived once again, and the February breeze felt like a pair of scissors, cutting through the remnants of the cold.

The arrival of spring was good news for Xiao Ming, but it wasn't the only good news. The praise for the ox-powered waterwheel from the entire court had also reached Qingzhou, carried by the spring breeze.

Following this, eight hundred thousand taels of silver arrived in Qingzhou. However, this was just the appetizer. Along with it came a massive order from the imperial court.

"Your Highness, this plan is truly brilliant. Now that the ox-powered waterwheel has gained the Emperor's approval, it is required to be used in all imperial estates and government-owned fields across the Great Yu Empire. Even the feudal lords have been stirred and have sent officials to place orders. Currently, the orders for the waterwheel's rollers have reached thirty thousand sets, amounting to nine million taels of silver. After deducting costs, we stand to make a profit of six million taels."

Li Kaiyuan was ecstatic. The Qingzhou Trading Company was now the sole official trading company in Qingzhou, responsible for distributing all goods produced in the industrial district to every corner of the empire.

At the same time, the Qingzhou Trading Company also handled external communications, such as securing orders. This time, in addition to the orders from Chang'an, there were also numerous orders from various feudal lords.

However, fulfilling these orders would take time. The silver wouldn't flow into Xiao Ming's hands immediately.

"Ah, cursed productivity," Xiao Ming sighed bitterly. If not for the limitations of productivity, he could have earned even more silver.

Still, he was satisfied with the current situation. Perfume, soap, and "Drunken Qingzhou" were highly popular across the Great Yu Empire, bringing in a steady stream of silver. Just from these three products alone, the prince's residence was now earning three million taels of silver each month.

However, while this amount seemed substantial, when spread across the various construction projects in Qingzhou, Xiao Ming was left with little surplus each month.

The only consolation was that the silver spent was finally showing some results.

Qian Dafu had successfully established limestone, coal, iron, and graphite mines. Each mine employed a thousand slave laborers, essentially meeting the production needs of the industrial district.

The transportation of these minerals had also forced Qian Dafu to form a transportation team.

This team used horse-drawn flatbed carts, with three hundred carts in total, effectively solving the transportation issues within the territory.

As for the Salt Transport Bureau that Xiao Ming had initially proposed, it was officially established under Pang Yukun's urging. Taking advantage of Qingzhou's coastal location, the bureau had set up numerous salt fields in the Dengzhou area. Now, the fiefdom no longer needed to purchase salt from outside to meet its needs.

The most significant progress, of course, was in the Machinery Department. While Chang'an was marveling at the ox-powered waterwheel, the Machinery Department had birthed another groundbreaking invention—one that would revolutionize the long-stagnant forging industry.

After a month of反复推敲 (repeated deliberation) between Chen Qi and Xiao Ming, and with the help of precision parts produced by the lathes, the hydraulic forging press was finally completed.

To this end, Xiao Ming decisively reorganized the Machinery Department, establishing the first specialized steel workshop in the industrial district. The craftsmen in this workshop would focus solely on steel production and forging.

Various water-powered lathes and manual lathes were grouped into the Lathe Workshop, while other workshops were established for cement, bricks, alcohol, and perfume.

All workshops were placed under the unified management of the Machinery Department.

After muttering to himself, Xiao Ming felt a slight sense of satisfaction when he thought about his achievements over the past four or five months. Seeing Li Kaiyuan grinning from ear to ear, he said, "Don't celebrate too soon. These orders are just trial purchases. Your tasks ahead are still heavy."

Over the past month, while assisting Chen Qi in producing the hydraulic forging press, Xiao Ming had also been busy with Bowen Academy. He had called all his key personnel to the academy for training.

For Li Kaiyuan, he taught modern business knowledge.

“Your Highness, don’t worry. To take, one must first give. Tomorrow, I will visit the fiefdoms of the various feudal lords to persuade them to encourage their local wealthy families to purchase the ox-powered waterwheel,” Li Kaiyuan said.

Xiao Ming nodded. This was a business tactic he had taught Li Kaiyuan—public relations.

“Remember, a truly excellent merchant can sell a comb to a monk,” Xiao Ming said.

“Product sales depend on promotion,” Li Kaiyuan replied smoothly.

Xiao Ming nodded. Li Kaiyuan had quickly grasped the basics of business knowledge, but there was still much Xiao Ming hadn’t taught him—things that weren’t immediately necessary. When the time came, it would be Xiao Ming’s turn to “shear the wool” from everyone.

For Xiao Ming, human history was not only a history of war but also a history of economics. War was fought for economic gain, and economics was pursued to fund war.

“Understanding this is good. Spending silver doesn’t matter. Your task now is promotion—promote until noble ladies feel ashamed to go out without using soap or perfume, promote until the elite feel embarrassed to serve any wine other than ‘Drunken Qingzhou,’” Xiao Ming said emphatically.

If the merchants of the Great Yu Empire thought he only had products to offer, they were sorely mistaken. His plans were just beginning, and his methods of amassing wealth were only starting to unfold.

While sending Li Kaiyuan to promote Qingzhou’s goods across the empire, Xiao Ming also allocated a million taels of silver for public relations.

These funds were, of course, meant to grease the palms of local officials. After all, the Great Yu Empire was still an official-centric society. By winning over the officials, his goods could flow unimpeded, and the officials would assist in promoting them.

After discussing some details with Li Kaiyuan, the latter left with great enthusiasm. Xiao Ming sat at the desk in the main hall and began drafting a series of business strategies.

According to his plan, once soap became ubiquitous among the elite and known throughout the empire, it would be time to categorize perfume, soap, and “Drunken Qingzhou” into different grades. At that point, slightly lower-quality soap would enter the lives of commoners.

Since this was business, every consumer class had to be considered. Xiao Ming’s principle was always to take things to the extreme.

After finalizing the sales strategy for Qingzhou's products, Xiao Ming left the main hall and looked out at the bright sunlight.

Bathed in the golden light, Xiao Ming seemed to be enveloped in a faint, radiant glow.

The planting season was approaching. Agriculture was the foundation of the fiefdom, as the amount of grain produced would determine how many people he could support and how large an army he could raise.

As he pondered this, Pang Yukun approached with a young scholar.

This was the candidate Pang Yukun had recommended for the position of Cangzhou's governor. Once this person was in place, Xiao Ming could finally deal with the current governor, Chai Lingwu.

"Your humble servant, Chang Yuchun, pays his respects to Your Highness!" The young scholar bowed deeply.

"At ease," Xiao Ming said, gesturing for him to rise.

Pang Yukun then said, "Your Highness, regardless of who bribed Chai Lingwu, the evidence of his involvement in smuggling warhorses is irrefutable. According to the law, he should be executed."

Xiao Ming's gaze grew distant. It was time to gradually take control of his fiefdom.

