

I. Dynasty 80

Chapter 80: A Small Leap Forward

“It has long been said that Wei’s territory is prosperous, but now it seems we have severely underestimated Prince Wei.”

Pang Yukun stood beside Xiao Ming, his eyes reflecting the shadows of the sailing warships, a faint trace of worry in his expression.

“Not just Prince Wei. None of the other feudal lords are as destitute as I am. But we shouldn’t belittle ourselves. As long as we stay grounded, surpassing them is only a matter of time,” Xiao Ming said confidently.

One hundred thousand slaves and three million bushels of grain—this was another catalyst for him, enough to rapidly advance his plans.

Pang Yukun opened his mouth, wanting to say that what they lacked most was time, but he held back. The future was unpredictable, and who could say what would happen?

If heaven favored Prince Qi, the road ahead would be smooth.

This time, both Chen Qi and Chen Wenlong had come, along with Zhang Liang. Zhang Liang said, “These warships were all built by the Ding family shipyard in Jinling City. When my father was still alive, we visited there. It’s indeed larger than our shipyard, and they have many skilled craftsmen specializing in warship construction.”

“Don’t boost their morale while dampening our own. The warship blueprints I gave you are no less impressive,” Xiao Ming said.

“Your Highness is right about that,” Zhang Liang said, still in awe of the warship blueprints Xiao Ming had provided. “With the ten thousand slaves Your Highness has allocated to the shipyard, we’ll have enough manpower. I guarantee we can launch five galleons this year.”

Xiao Ming nodded. “That’s good.”

When the shipyard was being restored, Xiao Ming hadn’t allocated too many slaves to it. Instead, he had sent most of the slaves to the industrial district. In his view, only by increasing the production capacity of the industrial district could they provide sufficient parts for the shipyard later on.

Now that one hundred thousand slaves had arrived in Qingzhou, Xiao Ming had ample labor. He immediately allocated a portion to the shipyard. During this time, Zhang Liang had nearly completed the research and development of the galleon. With the technical backbone in place, the next step was construction.

Ten thousand people building five galleons in a year, with the support of the industrial district, was entirely feasible.

After receiving the first batch of supplies and slaves, Xiao Ming went with Zhang Liang to the shipyard. Over the past months, Zhang Liang and his team had been restoring the shipyard’s facilities, and now it was almost fully operational.

At the shipyard downstream of the Tuo River, Xiao Ming saw craftsmen working on the keel of a galleon. The keel was the main supporting structure of the ship, similar to the beams of a house.

Watching the busy craftsmen on the riverbank, Xiao Ming suddenly remembered something. He said, "There's one thing I forgot. Our shipyard is still missing something."

"Please enlighten me, Your Highness," Zhang Liang said, puzzled.

Xiao Ming explained, "A dry dock."

"A dry dock?" Zhang Liang was stunned.

Xiao Ming didn't expect Zhang Liang to understand immediately, so he elaborated. A dry dock was essentially a production facility, similar to a workshop, but designed for building sailing warships. It was enclosed on three sides and open to the water on one side. Ships could be built and repaired in the dry dock, with various construction tools set up on both sides for convenient work. Even in modern times, dry docks were essential for shipbuilding.

Xiao Ming didn't expect to build a dry dock to modern standards, but a rudimentary one was feasible. This would help standardize shipbuilding in the Great Yu Empire and significantly speed up the production of galleons.

Coming from a family of shipbuilders, Zhang Liang quickly grasped the concept. Excited, he said, "Your Highness, if we can build this dry dock, we can standardize and mass-produce galleons."

"Exactly. Each tonnage of sailing warship requires a different dry dock. When you have free time, come to me, and I'll teach you more about shipbuilding," Xiao Ming said.

Zhang Liang nodded, his face filled with excitement. Xiao Ming had shown him unprecedented shipbuilding techniques, opening a new chapter in the history of shipbuilding.

The shipyards in the Great Yu Empire were essentially crude sheds with some woodworking equipment. Xiao Ming had little interest in such primitive facilities.

After a brief inspection, Xiao Ming left, instructing Zhang Liang to attend the Bowen Academy for further studies. With ample manpower now available, Xiao Ming could finally implement his various plans. Otherwise, projects like the galleons would continue to be delayed.

Back at the palace, Xiao Ming didn't rest. Instead, he began writing down the knowledge in his mind, turning it into textbooks.

These textbooks covered mathematics, chemistry, physics, and various technical materials.

He planned to use these materials to transform the Bowen Academy into the first modern comprehensive institution in the Great Yu Empire, providing Qingzhou with a steady stream of talent.

Xiao Ming wrote all these materials in vernacular Chinese. Students at the Bowen Academy would need to understand both classical Chinese and vernacular Chinese. In fact, once they mastered vernacular Chinese, classical Chinese would naturally follow. Therefore, Xiao Ming focused primarily on teaching vernacular Chinese.

Over the next few days, the slaves promised by Prince Wei arrived in batches. Xiao Ming allocated seventy thousand to the industrial district and the remaining twenty thousand to the mines.

With the arrival of one hundred thousand slaves, plus the slaves continuously sold by Liang Dahai, the industrial district, now flush with labor, began to expand under Xiao Ming's direction.

First, the steel workshop increased its production scale. Xiao Ming raised the number of workers in the steel workshop to thirty thousand, equivalent to the workforce of a large modern steel plant.

However, in this era, the output of thirty thousand workers was only comparable to that of a small steel plant. But for Xiao Ming, this was sufficient for now.

The remaining forty thousand slaves were mostly assigned to the lathe workshop, with the rest going to the distillery, perfume workshop, cement workshop, and others.

With the allocation of one hundred thousand slaves complete, the industrial district, led by Chen Wenlong, began its expansion. A large industrial zone would gradually rise in the north of Qingzhou.

"Your Highness, these slaves are a mixed bunch, and they were sent by Prince Wei. It's inevitable that some troublemakers might be among them," Pang Yukun said, watching the bustling construction in the industrial district.

This was a rare sight, and even Pang Yukun, who usually had little interest in the industrial district, had come to see it.

"I'm well aware of that," Xiao Ming said, watching the slaves pushing sand and cement to build the workshops. "The Left and Right Secret Guards have already been tasked with monitoring these slaves. Anyone who causes trouble will be dealt with immediately. They won't make it out of the industrial district."

Pang Yukun nodded. Xiao Ming's methods were becoming increasingly ruthless, but this was the quality a true leader needed—kindness to his own people and ruthlessness to his enemies.

"By the way, Your Highness, I've found a location for the Bowen Academy. The only suitable place in Qingzhou City is the Liuyun District in the west. There are only a few households there. We can relocate them with some silver," Pang Yukun said.