

I. Dynasty 82

Chapter 82: The Newspaper

“Paper? That’s right. With this printing technology, we’ll also need paper. I believe Your Highness already has a plan in mind.”

Compared to lathes and hydraulic hammers, printing and paper-making were relatively simpler. Xiao Ming said, “What you see here is prepared for the paper-making and printing workshops.”

As he spoke, Xiao Ming led Pang Yukun to see the pulp beaters and pressure screens used for paper-making. With these tools, the efficiency of the paper-making workshop would be greatly improved.

Next, Xiao Ming took Pang Yukun to a pre-arranged printing plate.

Pang Yukun stood in front of the plate and examined it, exclaiming in surprise, “Your Highness, this contains the land reclamation decree and the conscription order, as well as recent events in Qingzhou. Are you planning to print this into a booklet?”

“No, this is a newspaper,” Xiao Ming said with a smile.

What followed was an important task: propaganda. The purpose of propaganda was to spread his own glorious and righteous image while conveying various policies to the people.

At the same time, it would allow the people to stay informed about current events, making them aware of the efforts their feudal lord was making on their behalf. This would strengthen their support for him.

In Xiao Ming's view, controlling public opinion was crucial in any era. If he didn't seize control of the narrative, others would, and enemies could exploit this to spread chaos in what should be a peaceful and prosperous society.

Once newspapers were widely distributed in his fief, he could promptly debunk rumors and guide public opinion.

"Please enlighten me, Your Highness," Pang Yukun said humbly, as did everyone else in Qingzhou when speaking to Xiao Ming.

He had come to realize that this Prince Qi seemed to know everything.

Xiao Ming then explained the purpose of the newspaper to Pang Yukun.

Pang Yukun was even more astonished than when he had seen the printing technology. He said, "With such a national treasure, there's no need to worry about the people not recognizing Your Highness's achievements."

Xiao Ming smiled. "This newspaper isn't meant to boast about my accomplishments. Look at the bottom of this page. It covers the smuggling case in Cangzhou and the massacre of the seventy-two households in Dengzhou."

"If these stories spread among the people, they will surely despise the local powerful families and praise Your Highness's achievements. This is truly brilliant. Over time, as long as Your Highness governs diligently, the people will naturally support you," Pang Yukun said, growing more excited.

While he hadn't understood the machinery Xiao Ming had introduced earlier, when it came to governance, Pang Yukun immediately grasped the significance.

Xiao Ming nodded. This was indeed his goal. However, he added, "It's a pity that so few people in the fief are literate. The newspaper can only be circulated among government officials for now."

"That's not a problem, Your Highness. Among the six prefectures, there are many impoverished scholars who make a living by selling calligraphy and paintings or copying books for others. Why not give the newspapers to them and have them read them aloud to the people in various towns and counties? We can pay them a small fee."

"That's an excellent idea," Xiao Ming said with delight. Pang Yukun, being more familiar with the local conditions, had pointed out something he had overlooked: there were indeed many scholars in his fief.

Both of them grew excited about the newspaper project. Taking advantage of the moment, Xiao Ming said, "By the way, Chief Secretary Pang, there's something I've been meaning to discuss with you. It's about the military."

At the mention of the military, Pang Yukun's expression turned serious, as the military was always a sensitive topic.

"Your Highness, the military is under Captain Lu's command. Is there something you're concerned about?" Pang Yukun asked cautiously.

Xiao Ming replied, “Now that the steel workshop has thirty thousand workers, it’s time to equip the army. Once the army is fully equipped, the Qingzhou army will become a tiger with sharp teeth. This tiger must be firmly under my control. Therefore, I want to strengthen the authority of the Chief Secretary within the military.”

The Chief Secretary was originally a civilian position within the military command structure, but only the command headquarters had one Chief Secretary.

For Xiao Ming, this was far from sufficient. Due to the lack of information flow in this era, the risk of military mutiny was very high.

Thus, entrusting an army entirely to simple-minded, easily provoked military officers was dangerous. He intended to replicate the modern military’s political commissar system, with the Chief Secretary serving as the commissar.

He wanted to embed Chief Secretaries at every level of the military, responsible for ideological education and discipline.

This way, the army would function as a single body with one mind. The commanding officers would lead military operations, while the Chief Secretaries would ensure ideological discipline and absolute loyalty to Xiao Ming. In critical moments, if a commanding officer showed signs of rebellion, the Chief Secretary could remove them from their position.

In the Machinery Department, Xiao Ming explained this to Pang Yukun, who nodded frequently. Whether it was the newspaper or the Chief Secretary system, both demonstrated Xiao Ming’s intention to maintain absolute control over his fief.

In Pang Yukun's view, this was a case of preparing for the worst and preventing problems before they arose.

"Your Highness, but this would require a large number of scholars," Pang Yukun said.

"Isn't the purpose of education to serve the nation? Now I'm giving them an opportunity. They don't need to pass the imperial exams; they just need to undergo training and compete for positions. Isn't that a good thing?"

Although Pang Yukun didn't fully understand the concepts of "training" and "competing for positions," he understood that Xiao Ming was recruiting talent.

He said, "In that case, the command headquarters will issue a notice summoning scholars from across the fief, regardless of whether they hold any official titles. How does that sound?"

"Good, let's do that," Xiao Ming said.

With their discussion concluded, Pang Yukun hurried off. Embedding Chief Secretaries in the military would elevate their status, which was why Pang Yukun didn't object.

After all, this was beneficial to him as well, and he fully agreed with the approach. The military was a double-edged sword; it could harm others as well as oneself, so it had to be strictly controlled.

Pang Yukun would handle the recruitment of Chief Secretaries and newspaper distributors, while Xiao Ming focused on the production of the printing and paper-making workshops.

He was eager to see what impact the first newspaper in the Great Yu Empire would have on his fief.

The next day, a notice was posted in the eastern and western markets of Qingzhou City, causing an uproar among the local scholars.

“We know what a Chief Secretary is, but what’s a newspaper distributor? Does anyone here understand?” a group of scholars gathered around the notice.

A scholar at the front read the notice aloud, shaking his head as he did so. The surrounding commoners shook their heads and left; this matter didn’t concern them.

“A newspaper distributor, a newspaper distributor... Could it be a scout reporting military intelligence?” one scholar said, puffing out his chest with pride.

Scholars with official titles were respected, while those without were often mocked as “useless scholars” by the common people.

Among the scholars gathered, many wore patched clothing. They were from poor families and had repeatedly failed the imperial exams.

These scholars lived in hardship and were often ridiculed.

Now, with this notice posted, they felt a renewed sense of pride as scholars.