

## I. Dynasty 86

### Chapter 86: Propaganda Campaign

Zhu Wuliu was fifteen years old and lived in Zhujia Village, Taiping County, Qingzhou.

From the time he could remember, his father had been a tenant farmer for the Wang family, one of the powerful local clans in Qingzhou. Every year, seventy percent of their harvest had to be handed over to the Wang family.

He had two older brothers, Zhu Yier and Zhu Sansi. Both of them worked as cowherds for the Wang family. When Zhu Wuliu was nine, he too had to join his brothers in working for the Wang family, all for the sake of a single black steamed bun each day.

Zhu Wuliu hated the black steamed buns. They were made from chaff mixed with moldy wheat and were nearly impossible to swallow.

But he had no choice but to eat them. The thirty percent of the harvest that remained for his family was barely enough to feed the seven members of his household, which included his younger sister.

Almost every day, Zhu Wuliu went hungry. Only during festivals would his parents sell some of their wheat to buy a few pounds of white flour to make pancakes and steamed buns.

In his memory, those were the happiest times.

However, this year was different from previous ones. His father, who had been renting land from the Wang family, suddenly called all three brothers back home. The entire family of seven went to reclaim wasteland along the riverbanks outside the village.

According to his parents, Prince Qi had issued a land reclamation decree. Any family that reclaimed land would own it from then on, and the land could be passed down through generations.

Later, the village head came to their house and told them to join a production team.

He remembered how excited his parents were. All the families who had reclaimed land near theirs were grouped into a production team, and soon, oxen and farming tools were distributed to each team from the county.

After spring, the villagers would be able to farm the land together, and for the next three years, the government would not collect any taxes.

According to the land reclamation law, Zhu Wuliu could cultivate thirty mu of land, but he couldn't manage it all by himself.

However, his parents said that once this year's harvest was sold, they would prepare a dowry for him to find a wife. Then, they could farm the land together. Thinking of this, Zhu Wuliu blushed. What would it be like to have a wife?

He was standing in the field, staring at the rotating waterwheel, when his second brother, Zhu Sansi, ran over and said, "Wuliu, Prince Qi's newspaper delivery boys have come to Qingzhou City. The village head wants everyone to gather at the threshing ground east of the village."

"What's a newspaper delivery boy?" Zhu Wuliu asked, confused.

“Don’t worry about what it is. Just come with me.”

Zhu Sansi dragged Zhu Wuliu to the threshing ground, where almost the entire village had already gathered.

In the middle of the threshing ground stood an old man holding something that looked like a notice. Behind him stood Zhu Ziyou, the respected village head of Zhujia Village, who was carefully accompanying the old man.

This old man was Fan Zeng, who was on his first trip to the countryside. He held the newspaper and asked Zhu Ziyou, “Is everyone in the village here?”

“Zhu Wuliu is here too. Everyone’s present,” Zhu Ziyou replied.

Fan Zeng nodded. In the Great Yu Empire, whether in towns, counties, or villages, the people lived together, and villages were often surrounded by earthen walls to protect against wild animals. This made it easy to gather everyone.

He then said, “First, let me explain what a newspaper delivery boy is...”

Fan Zeng went on to explain the concept of newspapers, as instructed by Prince Qi. One of his tasks was to popularize newspapers and establish them as an authoritative source of information for the government.

After his explanation, the villagers had a rough understanding. Fan Zeng then began reading the contents of the newspaper.

This was the first edition of the Great Yu Empire's newspaper, which covered important events that had recently occurred in Qingzhou.

The first article clarified the amount of land each person could claim under the land reclamation decree, preventing powerful families from taking more than their share.

The second article was about conscription, encouraging young men to join the army. It specified that soldiers would receive additional land and a monthly salary, and their families would be subsidized with grain and meat at the end of the year.

The third article was about reviving the horse administration and encouraging animal husbandry. The fourth article encouraged commerce and handicrafts, aiming to improve the low status of merchants and artisans. It also stated that migrants could work in the city and, after three years, obtain local residency, enjoying all the benefits of the fief.

Due to limited space in the newspaper, only these policies were included. The rest of the paper covered several major cases in the fief, including the Cangzhou incident and the Dengzhou incident.

"Ugh, these Wang and Qin families are truly despicable," one villager cursed after the newspaper was read.

“Exactly, especially the Wang family. To kill seventy-two people for their own gain—they deserve to be executed a thousand times over,” another villager said.

“These local powerful families are nothing but trouble. We work ourselves to the bone, and they take seventy percent of our harvest. How much land have they stolen from us?”

“ ... ”

When Fan Zeng read about the new policies, the villagers cheered and celebrated. But when it came to the local powerful families, the villagers seethed with anger.

Fan Zeng carefully observed the villagers’ reactions. Later that night, he would need to report the details to Prince Qi’s palace.

Zhu Wuliu also listened intently, especially when Fan Zeng mentioned how Commander Lu had executed the two villains in Cangzhou and how the Qingzhou army had captured the Dengzhou governor. It made his blood boil. He had a vague feeling that Prince Qi was on the side of the common people.

“Prince Qi cares deeply for the people. He is a rare and wise ruler. All his policies are designed to benefit the people. We should be grateful for his benevolent governance,” Fan Zeng said.

His task wasn’t just to read the newspaper; it was also to establish Prince Qi and the government as trustworthy figures in the hearts of the people.

After Fan Zeng's words, the villagers whispered among themselves, many nodding in agreement. The common people had sharp eyes and could distinguish right from wrong.

However, they still lacked organized guidance. By using the newspaper as a tool for propaganda, Xiao Ming aimed to ensure that when the time came, the people would stand by his side.

But this was no easy task. The local powerful families were deeply entrenched, and Fan Zeng could still see fear in the villagers' eyes when they talked about these families.

After venting their frustrations, they still cowered under the shadow of the powerful families.

Fan Zeng quietly noted the villagers' reactions and handed the newspaper to Zhu Ziyou. He had another village to visit, so after a short rest, he left.

The newspaper was a novel concept for the villagers. After Fan Zeng left, the villagers dispersed, but they continued to excitedly discuss the news from the paper.

Village Head Zhu Ziyou watched the departing villagers, his expression gradually darkening.

He glanced at the newspaper and said, "I need to inform the landlord about this. The newspaper has really tarnished the Wang family's reputation."

As Zhu Ziyou pondered this, Xiao Ming was contemplating the issue of his current adversaries.

Based on recent reports from several counties, he realized he had overlooked a crucial point in identifying his true opponents: the village elites who were subordinate to the local powerful families. Although they didn't belong to the powerful clans themselves, they enjoyed a life of luxury by aligning with them.