

I. Dynasty 92

Chapter 92: The Exhibition

The emergence of glass in this era was undoubtedly a highly profitable industry, and its potential for immense profit made even Xiao Ming unable to remain calm.

For this reason, he entrusted the management rights of glass to his Qingzhou Chamber of Commerce.

However, if Xiao Ming monopolized the glass trade, merchants from other regions would naturally be displeased. They might cause trouble when operating in their own territories. Therefore, Xiao Ming proposed a plan to auction off the sales rights for glass after six months.

This way, he could not only secure the first wave of profits but also appease these merchants.

A few days later, the glass exhibition Xiao Ming had promised officially took place in the East Market. All the glass produced by the workers in recent days was put on display.

Xiao Ming even dispatched soldiers from the Qingzhou army to maintain order at the event.

Merchants were already accustomed to the new terminology emerging in Qingzhou. Once they understood the meaning of the exhibition, they flocked to the event.

“Is this glass?”

Merchants whispered among themselves. Like Wang Shijie and Qin Mu, they were deeply震撼ed by this unfamiliar material the moment they saw it.

“Transparent, cool to the touch, smooth as skin—this is truly a divine creation.”

At the exhibition, merchants were allowed to pick up and examine the glass. After inspecting it, some exclaimed in awe.

“Brother Han, how do you think this glass compares to porcelain?” one merchant asked his companion.

“Porcelain is exquisite, but glass is prized for its transparency and rarity. Its value is immeasurable. If this were to be sold, it would undoubtedly be adored by the nobility,” the merchant surnamed Han replied.

“I agree. In my opinion, glass could be even more profitable than soap or fine wine. However, the auction for its distribution rights will likely be exorbitantly expensive.”

“That’s true, but the returns would come quickly. As merchants, we must be willing to take risks.”

“Brother Han is absolutely right.”

“...”

The exhibition was held in a circular area, cordoned off with ropes. Inside, glass items were displayed on wooden benches, and merchants walked around, admiring the various shapes and forms of glass.

As time passed, more and more merchants arrived, and their anticipation grew for how Prince Qi would auction off the distribution rights for glass.

However, their excitement was dampened when Li Kaiyuan arrived, bringing with him Xiao Ming's sales plan for glass.

"Six months?" a merchant asked.

Li Kaiyuan nodded. "Yes, six months. And after six months, only merchants who have joined the chamber of commerce will be eligible to participate in the auction."

Many of the merchants were newcomers from other regions and were unfamiliar with the chamber of commerce. Li Kaiyuan's announcement made them realize the importance of joining the chamber.

They decided to pay the membership fee and join the chamber after the exhibition.

Initially, joining the chamber was free, but as the number of merchants grew, Xiao Ming added this requirement.

“What a pity. Waiting six months will cost us so much potential profit.”

Ding Wanquan, a prominent merchant favored by Prince Wei, stood among the crowd. Although he was influential, Li Kaiyuan, as the vice president of the chamber of commerce, held significant authority under Xiao Ming.

Since Li Kaiyuan was making the announcement, it was clear that this was Prince Qi’s decision.

The shrewd merchants quickly understood the reasoning behind this arrangement, which also highlighted the immense profitability of glass—enough to make even Prince Qi uneasy.

Some of the major merchants affiliated with other feudal lords remained silent. Openly opposing the decision would be disrespectful to Prince Qi. Instead, they planned to visit him privately.

The public exhibition lasted an entire day, and the name “glass” spread rapidly among the merchants. The common people of Qingzhou also buzzed with excitement.

Prince Qi had created yet another miraculous item.

After the exhibition, the merchants dispersed, each returning to devise their own strategies. Some prepared lavish gifts and headed directly to Xiao Ming’s palace.

“Prince Wei, Prince Yan, Prince Chu, Prince Zhao, Prince Huainan, Prince Liang, Prince Runan, Princess Pingyang, Third Prince, Crown Prince...” In the main hall of the palace, Xiao Ming read through the stack of name cards, his 苦笑 growing deeper.

Zihuan stood beside Xiao Ming. She was the one who had delivered these name cards. She said, “Your Highness, you are truly the most sought-after person in the Great Yu Empire now. Everyone from feudal lords to princesses and princes is coming to seek your favor.”

“Hmph, a name card is just a formality. It doesn’t mean they’re begging. I could write three hundred of these in a day without breaking a sweat,” Xiao Ming said, handing the stack of name cards to Luluo. “Take these and use them as kindling for the coal stove.”

Luluo glanced at Zihuan, thinking Xiao Ming was being unreasonable again. Seeing Zihuan nod, she took the name cards and left.

“Your Highness, this is still a good thing. At least they now have to consider your position and can’t afford to slight you,” Zihuan said.

Zihuan’s intention was to persuade Xiao Ming to meet with these merchants. Empress Zhen had sent her here not only to assist Xiao Ming but also to act as his confidante, offering advice when he made impulsive decisions.

She believed that now was the time for Xiao Ming to rebuild relationships with other feudal lords, princes, and princesses, and that this would not be a bad thing for him.

After a moment of thought, Xiao Ming said, “I will meet them, but since their masters treated me with such disdain in the past, I must return the favor. Tell them I am bathing and changing clothes, and they will have to wait a little longer.”

Zihuan nodded and withdrew from the main hall.

Xiao Ming sat down, tapping the table lightly with his fingers as he pondered how to deal with these merchants.

When he announced the six-month delay for glass sales, he had anticipated that some major merchants would grow impatient. He knew exactly who they were.

Their purpose was undoubtedly to seek special privileges, which was normal in an era like the Great Yu Empire, where the nobility enjoyed extensive privileges.

It was all about exchanging interests—either cooperation or mutual sabotage.

Therefore, if he couldn’t avoid granting them some privileges, Xiao Ming needed to secure what he wanted in return.

At the moment, what he needed most was silver and skilled craftsmen—the fundamental elements of industrial development. These were the only things that could make him relent.

With this in mind, he thought over his approach and then instructed Zihuan to invite the merchants in.

The first to enter the main hall was Ding Wanquan, followed by the Han merchant affiliated with Prince Yan, the Lü merchant from Prince Liang's domain, and others—a total of twenty-five merchants.

These merchants came from the domains of both non-imperial and imperial feudal lords, as well as from the entourages of princes and princesses. They represented the highest echelons of power in the Great Yu Empire.

“Please, have a seat,” Xiao Ming said with a smile. “I understand why you’ve come to visit me so late. However, the matter of glass concerns the interests of Qingzhou, and I cannot easily make concessions to you.”