

I. Dynasty 93

Chapter 93: Membership System

The merchants stared at Xiao Ming, and after his words fell, there was a brief silence.

Finally, Ding Wanquan was the first to speak. He said, "Your Highness said that you cannot easily agree, which means there is still a chance for us. We hope Your Highness can clarify."

"Please clarify, Your Highness," the other merchants echoed in unison.

Xiao Ming glanced at Ding Wanquan. This old man was indeed good at reading people, which was why he had amassed such a fortune. However, Xiao Ming wasn't someone who could be easily fooled.

"You've all seen the glass. Its value is immeasurable, and I'm sure you've already formed your own estimates. If it were to be sold, it would undoubtedly cause a sensation across the Great Yu Empire and amass a vast fortune," Xiao Ming said.

The merchants exchanged glances and nodded in agreement.

Xiao Ming continued, "The production cost of glass is extremely high. Handing it over to you now would result in significant losses for me."

The statement about the high cost of glass was a lie, but it was easy for those unfamiliar with the process to believe, as glass seemed so extraordinary to them.

Seeing Xiao Ming's troubled expression, Ding Wanquan said, "Your Highness, if you allow us to sell it, we will certainly not let you suffer losses. We can purchase the distribution rights."

"That's right, Your Highness. As long as you say the word, we have the silver," the merchants chimed in.

Xiao Ming nodded at this point. "Even so, I'm afraid I won't be able to provide so much glass at once. To be honest, my fief lacks skilled craftsmen, which is why glass production is slow."

"Is that so? Your Highness, my Zhou family has many skilled slave craftsmen. If you need them, I can send them to you," a merchant from Prince Liang's fief offered.

Another merchant added, "I can report this to Prince Huainan and have him allocate some slave craftsmen."

"..."

The merchants vied with each other to offer their assistance to Xiao Ming.

They all spoke of slave craftsmen because it was clear that free craftsmen would not be as reliable.

Xiao Ming pretended to ponder deeply for a moment, then said, "Since you are all so sincere, I can agree to open glass sales to you five months earlier. However, this will inevitably upset other merchants. How about you all upgrade to become members of the chamber of commerce?"

"Members?" The merchants looked puzzled.

Xiao Ming smiled. "This is a policy the chamber of commerce is preparing to implement. I will categorize merchants in the chamber based on their contributions into ordinary members, intermediate members, advanced members, bronze members, silver members, gold members, stewards, elders, and vice presidents."

"What do these contributions refer to?" a merchant asked.

Xiao Ming explained, "This chamber of commerce was created by me to promote the prosperity of my fief and build a free commercial city. Contributions naturally refer to contributions to the construction of this commercial city. There are many types of contributions, such as the total amount of silver traded within the chamber, providing craftsmen, grain, ore, and so on. Once the contribution value reaches a certain level, you can be promoted to a higher-level member and enjoy more benefits from the chamber."

Upon hearing this, the merchants fell into deep thought.

Xiao Ming continued, "Vice presidents, elders, and stewards will have priority access to all goods from Qingzhou, enjoy maximum discounts, and even have partial management rights within the chamber. Specific policies will be handed over to Li Kaiyuan."

The membership system was a highly profitable modern model designed to maximize profits while attracting high-quality consumers.

Xiao Ming was applying this method now. Given his current capabilities, he couldn't cater to every merchant, as the cost would be too high. Instead, he needed to focus on a group of high-quality merchants who would then collaborate with smaller merchants.

Moreover, the introduction of the membership system would drive these major merchants to climb the ranks desperately to secure greater profit margins. However, the contribution values required to move up the ranks would be substantial.

By the time they climbed to the top, Xiao Ming would have already reaped enormous profits.

Furthermore, once they were "in," these merchants would be tied to the chamber of commerce, effectively using the entire merchant class of the Great Yu Empire to work for him.

"Immediate access?" Some merchants were already tempted.

Xiao Ming continued to sweeten the deal. "Not only will you have first access to goods, but in the future, certain technical processes will also be sold based on membership levels."

This temptation was too much for the seated merchants to resist.

The sale of technology meant that higher-ranking merchants would gain access to technology first, leaving lower-ranking merchants to envy them.

Xiao Ming calmly observed the merchants, waiting for them to “recharge.”

After a while, Ding Wanquan suddenly stood up and said, “Your Highness, I am willing to donate two million taels of silver, one hundred thousand bushels of grain, and five thousand skilled slave craftsmen to the chamber.”

“Impressive, Manager Ding! Such generosity! Based on your contribution, you will be directly promoted to an advanced member. This means you can access the glass in two months,” Xiao Ming said, giving Ding Wanquan a thumbs-up. Ding Wanquan was essentially buying his way up the membership ranks rather than climbing step by step through chamber transactions.

Xiao Ming hadn’t expected Ding Wanquan to be so impatient.

“Two months?!” The other merchants were in an uproar. They were not yet members and would have to wait six months to access the glass.

Ding Wanquan was delighted and glanced smugly at the other merchants.

“I’ll also donate two million taels of silver!” one merchant shouted, standing up.

“I’ll donate ten thousand craftsmen!”

“I’ll donate one hundred thousand catties of iron ore!”

“...”

One by one, the merchants stood up, vying to donate their most valuable resources to the chamber in exchange for higher membership levels.

Xiao Ming maintained a calm exterior, but inside, he was laughing maniacally. The modern membership strategy was indeed effective. Driven by the desire for special status and greater benefits within the chamber, the merchants were thoroughly ensnared.

“One at a time, please. No need to rush. Luluo, take notes on what each merchant is donating and hand them over to Li Kaiyuan,” Xiao Ming instructed.

Luluo picked up a brush and began recording beside Xiao Ming. She was still somewhat confused, not understanding what method Xiao Ming had used to make these merchants so eager to donate money and resources.

After the commotion died down, Luluo had recorded all the donations from the seated merchants. Xiao Ming tallied them up and was shocked.

All of them had reached the advanced membership level, which meant he would have to open glass sales to them in two months.

However, for Xiao Ming, the resources he had gained were more than enough to offset his losses. Nine million taels of silver, five hundred thousand bushels of grain, a considerable amount of wrought iron, thirty thousand skilled slave craftsmen, one hundred thousand labor slaves, five thousand bolts of silk, one thousand horses, and various other items—he had struck gold.