

I. Dynasty 124

Chapter 124: Analysis

“Fire tubes? What are those?”

Pang Yukun looked puzzled. As a civil official, he had little knowledge of military weapons, so he asked.

Fire tubes were the local term for cannons in the Great Yu Empire. The earliest cannons came in various shapes, with tube-like designs being the most common, hence the name “fire tubes.”

In Xiao Ming’s previous world, fire tubes were also known as fire lances.

Back then, the use of fire lances began in the Song Dynasty and matured during the Yuan and Ming Dynasties. By the late Ming Dynasty, the Ming army was heavily equipped with firearms.

However, even with firearms more advanced than those of the Qing army, the Ming Dynasty still met its downfall.

Therefore, Xiao Ming did not believe in the supremacy of weapons, as it was the people who wielded them that determined the outcome of wars.

Over the past few months, Xiao Ming had deeply realized that the core of governance was to unite the people of his fiefdom around him. Only when his commands were followed by all could he achieve true stability.

Of course, under this premise, equipping the army with more advanced weapons would make it invincible.

“As for fire tubes, Chief Secretary Pang will soon find out what they are,” Xiao Ming said, exchanging a glance with Zhan Xingchang before smiling.

Then he added, “But the name ‘fire tube’ is too crude. Let’s call them cannons instead.”

“Cannons?” Zhan Xingchang was momentarily stunned. “That name does have a ring to it.”

Zhan Xingchang had brought up the idea of using cannons for defense, indicating that he had some understanding of them. Xiao Ming then asked, “Since you mentioned cannons, do you know how to cast them?”

“I’m afraid not,” Zhan Xingchang admitted. “But I have seen the power of fire tubes—no, cannons. A single shot can reach about three hundred meters. If filled with stone pellets, they can cause widespread damage to the enemy.”

Pang Yukun chuckled upon hearing this. “After all that talk, you don’t even know how to make cannons. How can we achieve strong city walls and powerful cannons?”

Zhan Xingchang looked embarrassed. He had forgotten that this was not Cháng’ān.

“Zhan Xingchang may not know, but I do,” Xiao Ming said with a faint smile. He had only wanted to find out if the Great Yu Empire’s cannon-making techniques were similar to those of his previous world.

Since Zhan Xingchang didn’t know, he decided not to press further.

“Your Highness knows?” Pang Yukun and Zhan Xingchang were both surprised.

Xiao Ming nodded. “Without some trump cards, how could I dare to boast about defending Cāngzhōu?”

Zhan Xingchang’s face lit up with excitement. “If we place a hundred cannons on the gates of Cāngzhōu and command them effectively, the city will be impregnable.”

Xiao Ming gave a bitter smile. A hundred cannons sounded easy, but it was incredibly difficult. Cannons were not like plate armor; they weighed several tons each.

After all, when materials were not up to standard, the only solution was to make the cannon barrels thicker and sturdier to reduce the risk of explosions.

Although Qingzhou’s steel industry had advanced, casting cannons was still a highly technical task. The first challenge was the material.

The cannons Xiao Ming planned to produce would not be comparable to the crude fire tubes of the Great Yu Empire, which Zhan Xingchang had marveled at for their three-hundred-meter range. Those were practically garbage.

Without knowing the technological levels of the West, Japan, or the barbarians, Xiao Ming could only rely on his knowledge to improve the performance of the cannons as much as possible.

Even so, he estimated that the best he could achieve was the level of the late Ming Dynasty, with performance comparable to the Red Coat Cannons.

The technology database contained various methods for manufacturing cannons, but even the most skilled chef couldn't cook without ingredients. More advanced cannons required materials and boring techniques that Qingzhou did not yet possess. It would take time to explore and develop these.

If they were to produce Red Coat Cannons now, whether made of bronze or iron, the cannons would have to be cast, which required molds.

Creating these molds was no simpler than producing the cannons themselves.

"A hundred cannons? I'd be satisfied with ten," Xiao Ming sighed.

Casting cannons from scratch was a daunting task. The experimental phase alone would likely take several months.

Moreover, cannons required trained operators, and training artillerymen was another challenge.

Zhan Xingchang did not argue with Xiao Ming. He understood that even the Artillery Bureau in Cháng'ān found it difficult to produce cannons, let alone Qingzhou.

Setting aside the matter of cannons, Xiao Ming changed the subject. "You may not know about cannons, but do you know how to build fortresses?"

"I have some knowledge in that area," Zhan Xingchang replied confidently.

Xiao Ming nodded. Ancient scholars were often modest, and "some knowledge" usually meant expertise. He said, "In that case, go to Cāngzhōu and conduct a field survey. When you return, submit a plan for how to improve the city's defenses."

Zhan Xingchang had traveled thousands of miles to Qingzhou to fulfill his ambitions and put his knowledge to use. Now was his chance to prove himself in front of Xiao Ming. He solemnly said, "Yes, Your Highness."

Pang Yukun nodded slightly beside him and said to Xiao Ming, "By the way, Your Highness, I've also assigned Zhan Xingchang to handle the problem of the remaining noble clans. He'll have his hands full with so much work."

"Oh? Is that so? It seems Chief Secretary Pang holds you in high regard. Tell me, how do you plan to deal with the remnants of the noble clans?" Zhan Xingchang was about the same age as Xiao Ming had been in his previous life, so their mental ages were similar.

Faced with Pang Yukun, an old stick-in-the-mud, Xiao Ming preferred interacting with people like Zhan Xingchang.

“Your Highness, Qingzhou is in a state of recovery. Taking drastic measures would harm us as much as the enemy. The rise of the noble clans began with large families relying on their numbers and influence, gradually growing into the unmanageable situation we see today. Therefore, in dealing with these remnants, I believe the ringleaders should be executed as a warning, the secondary leaders enslaved, and the rest—numbering in the thousands or even tens of thousands—should not be punished too harshly. Instead, they should be dispersed to other prefectures. This way, they can no longer form a cohesive force in their new locations,” Zhan Xingchang explained.

“You’re right. The Sun family, including its main and branch lineages, numbers over ten thousand members. With Sun Yuanzhi dead, these people can no longer remain in Qingzhou. By splitting them up and relocating them to other counties and prefectures, large clans will become small, and small clans will become ordinary families, never to reunite. From then on, the six prefectures will no longer have noble clans.”

After a brief exchange, Xiao Ming left the Governor’s Office. Zhan Xingchang had left a good impression on him, but whether he was truly capable remained to be seen.

For now, Xiao Ming’s most important task was figuring out how to produce cannons as quickly as possible.

With Qingzhou’s limited troops, he couldn’t afford a war of attrition with the barbarians, especially with King Wei lurking in the shadows with ill intentions.