

I. Dynasty 235

Chapter 235: The Difficulties of Teaching

Inside an empty classroom at Bowen Academy, Luo Xin, Yue Yun, and their men had all taken their seats.

Standing at the lectern, Xiao Ming surveyed the group before him and realized his future would likely resemble that of a schoolteacher. For him, spreading scientific knowledge as widely as possible was now his greatest advantage.

“From now on, this classroom will belong to the Naval Academy. Whenever you’re summoned for lessons, assemble here,” Xiao Ming announced to Yue Yun and the others.

“Yes, Your Highness!” Yue Yun and his men replied with palpable excitement, their voices ringing loud and clear. As fishermen’s sons who had spent their lives at sea, they had never imagined they would one day have the privilege of sitting in a classroom.

As children, they had envied those who could attend private schools, knowing that education was the path to becoming officials. Without it, their fate would be the same as their ancestors’—generation after generation of nothing but fishermen.

“Naval Academy? Your Highness, does that mean we artillerymen should have an Artillery Academy too?” Luo Xin chimed in, half-joking.

Xiao Ming smiled. “Of course. The empty room next door is reserved for the Artillery Academy. Once I teach you the cannon-aiming method, you’ll be responsible for instructing the artillerymen.”

“Wait, seriously?” Luo Xin grinned.

To outsiders, Bowen Academy was a mysterious place. Despite being an educational institution, it was guarded like a military camp, with strict security.

Unlike the cramped quarters of traditional private schools, Bowen Academy was expansive, with numerous classrooms—some already in use, others still under construction. Earlier, while passing by one of the classrooms, Luo Xin had been stunned to see Lu Tong lecturing a group of scholars on what seemed like bizarre, unfamiliar knowledge.

Xiao Ming nodded. For convenience, he intended to develop Bowen Academy into a comprehensive institution. Otherwise, shuttling between multiple locations would be exhausting.

Even with many scholars admitted, the total number of students—including those from Qingzhou, as well as technical personnel from the Machinery Department, mines, and military workshops—barely exceeded two thousand. By modern standards, it was little more than a high school.

Thus, each specialty currently had only one dedicated classroom.

After designating the room as the Naval Academy’s classroom, Xiao Ming turned to Yue Yun. “You claim sailing is simple? Then tell me, how do you navigate at sea?”

“By following the coastline, of course,” Yue Yun replied matter-of-factly, a hint of pride in his voice. It seemed even Xiao Ming had gaps in his knowledge.

Xiao Ming smirked.

The classroom, built with brick-and-concrete construction (essentially a modern tiled structure), featured a blackboard at the front—a concept the craftsmen had initially struggled to grasp until Xiao Ming personally guided them.

The blackboard itself was simple: a smooth cement slab painted black.

Now, in front of Xiao Ming lay a stick of chalk, made from limestone and gypsum. To facilitate teaching, he had specifically ordered its production—a straightforward process that piggybacked on cement manufacturing.

Picking up the chalk, Xiao Ming drew a large oval on the blackboard, then meticulously filled in the details. Twenty minutes later, an accurate world map stared back at the audience.

“Your Highness, what is this? A map? Of where?” Luo Xin recognized it as a map but couldn’t identify the region.

“This is a world map. This entire shape is called the Earth, and we currently live on it. Now, another question: Do you believe the saying ‘Heaven is round, Earth is square’ is correct?”

Luo Xin, raised in a Confucian scholarly environment, replied confidently, “Your Highness, you jest. The Book of Rites records: ‘Single Residence Li asked Zengzi: Is it true that Heaven is round and Earth square? Zengzi replied: If Heaven were round and Earth square, then the four corners would not be covered.’ Clearly, the principle is indisputable.”

Yue Yun, however, fell silent. Uneducated and illiterate like most in his fishing village, he had never engaged with such debates. Suddenly, he said, “Your Highness, this commoner knows nothing of classics or philosophy. But whenever I watch ships return, we always see the sails first, then the hull. If the Earth were flat, why would that happen?”

Xiao Ming smiled approvingly. Luo Xin’s beliefs were deeply ingrained, while Yue Yun’s lack of education made him more open to questioning.

“The reason you observe this phenomenon,” Xiao Ming declared, “is because we live on a spherical world.”

Luo Xin burst into laughter as if hearing a great joke. “Your Highness, I believe you on many things, but this—forgive my bluntness—contradicts our ancestors’ teachings. You can’t just say such things lightly.”

Xiao Ming had anticipated resistance. Changing an era’s entrenched beliefs would be far harder than establishing an industrial system.

Thus, he had never planned to widely disseminate such knowledge—only to introduce it gradually within Bowen Academy.

Yet Luo Xin’s reaction made it clear what he was up against. And Luo Xin was just a military officer. If he voiced these ideas to the more rigid scholars, the backlash would be explosive.

Suppressing a sigh, Xiao Ming reminded himself that spreading scientific knowledge was a marathon, not a sprint. He would need patience—and thick skin.

“Luo Xin, you seem quite knowledgeable,” Xiao Ming said dryly. “Then tell me: Why is it that when you aim a cannon at a target, the projectile never lands exactly where intended?”

Luo Xin hesitated. “Your Highness, it’s like archery. An arrow always drops in flight—cannonballs are no different. With enough practice, skill will follow.”

“You know the what but not the why,” Xiao Ming said, amused.

Luo Xin scratched his head. “There’s a why?”

Though Luo Xin had once studied diligently, in Xiao Ming’s eyes, his decade of learning amounted to little more than literature. It was no wonder ancient scholars surpassed modern ones in prose—but when it came to physics and mathematics, Luo Xin might as well have been clueless.

Cannon aiming involved the principles of projectile motion. Currently, their cannons relied on a simple three-point alignment system, with front and rear sights.

But these sights were crude stopgaps, often inaccurate. The reason Xiao Ming had summoned Luo Xin was to teach him parabolic calculations and sight adjustments—ensuring that where the sights pointed, the projectile would land.