

I. Dynasty 286

Chapter 286: Greater Cause

The cold sea breeze, heavy with the scent of salt, brushed against everyone.

Meng Youliang's intelligence left everyone in a heavy silence.

In the end, Yue Yun broke the stillness. "Your Highness, Meng Youliang is a traitor. His words cannot be trusted. Maybe he just brought this nonsense to deceive you in order to save his life."

"Yue Yun, you fool! Do you know where I was hiding from Yamada Ichiro's men? It was in your family's cellar! Your mother realized how important this information was and chose to hide me!" Meng Youliang shouted.

Two soldiers from Dengzhou nodded. "Your Highness, we found him in the cellar."

"Impossible! My mother would never save a heartless traitor like you!" Yue Yun roared in fury.

Xiao Ming also felt uncertain. He said, "Meng Youliang, I cannot trust you yet. We will detain you until the information on this scroll is verified. Ye Qing, take him to the Qingzhou prison and await my orders."

"Yes, Your Highness," Ye Qing responded with a bow.

Storing away the scroll, Xiao Ming looked at the devastated Yutai Village and said, "Yue Yun, let's bury the villagers first. If Meng Youliang truly betrayed us to the wokou, I'll leave him to you."

Yue Yun nodded, tears flowing once again as he looked at his mother's body.

Xiao Ming's heart was heavy. He ordered Ye Qing's soldiers to assist Yue Yun in burying the villagers.

Meanwhile, he stepped aside, deep in thought. According to the historical data in the technology crystal, Japan once fought the Ming Dynasty during the Imjin War.

Although the situation now was different, the pattern was the same: internal problems in Japan were leading them to external aggression to resolve domestic conflicts.

Historically, every time Japan faced internal turmoil, it shifted the problem onto neighboring countries—and the target was always the Central Plains dynasty.

The plan outlined in the scroll detailed Japan's shipbuilding schedule. It would take three years, after which they would have enough ships to transport a 200,000-man army across the sea to seize land from the Great Yu Empire.

Just as Meng Youliang said, Japan had only recently unified, but dissatisfaction among the daimyos over land distribution was brewing, and they were eager for more.

Naturally, the weakened and fractured Great Yu Empire became their target.

Japan was also aware of the northern barbarians' strength and didn't want to provoke them. According to the scroll, Japan had sent envoys to Goryeo and even contacted the barbarians.

What Xiao Ming couldn't determine was whether this attack plan was solely Japan's idea or part of some dirty deal between Japan and the barbarians.

Regardless, one thing was certain: in three years, he needed to have a navy strong enough to annihilate the Japanese fleet at sea—and ideally, the strength to invade Japan itself.

Historically, island nations like Japan had a natural geographical advantage. They focused on building strong navies, freely attacking others, while continental empires, weakened at sea, could only defend themselves.

In all of history, only the Yuan Dynasty had tried to cross the sea to attack Japan, but they ultimately lost to the ocean.

Because of that advantage, Japan later became a major player in the Age of Exploration, and in modern times, America still benefited greatly from its geography.

Thus, in Xiao Ming's mind, the only way to crush an island nation's will was to develop the power to attack their homeland. Otherwise, they would forever stand behind continental nations, stabbing them in the back.

He realized he would have to strengthen both his northern defenses against the barbarians and invest heavily in building a navy. Perhaps, in three years, he would have to fight on two fronts.

The bodies of the Yutai villagers were finally gathered. Yue Yun buried them by the sea.

For the people of Yutai, they were born by the sea—and now, they would rest by it.

The grief over their families' deaths weighed heavily on the sailors, but beneath it all, a burning hatred was growing.

To help them regain stability, Xiao Ming had initially planned to give Yue Yun a month to rest before setting out again.

"No need, Your Highness. We are ready to depart now," Yue Yun said.

After burying his mother and resting for half a month, Yue Yun rejected the idea of more delay.

"Are you sure you're ready to sail?" Xiao Ming asked with concern. He was afraid Yue Yun, in his anger, might recklessly sail the three galleons straight to Japan.

Although the galleons were powerful, they could still be overwhelmed by smaller ships using wolf pack tactics.

“Your Highness, we know what’s important. Revenge cannot be achieved by a few brave souls. Only by making you stronger, Your Highness, can we truly avenge our people. We’ll follow the original plan—sailing to collect potatoes, corn, and gather intelligence,” Yue Yun said firmly.

Xiao Ming felt relieved. Yue Yun’s response showed he truly understood the greater cause.

He said, “Good. I was right to believe in you. From the moment you risked your life to smuggle salt for your village, I knew you were a man who understood righteousness. I won’t break the promise I made to you.”

Yue Yun nodded and said, “I’ll gather the sailors now and prepare to set sail.”

The ship’s cabin was dimly lit, as Yue Yun and the others had been living aboard.

After stepping off the ship, Yue Yun called the sailors back. This time, Xiao Ming wouldn’t accompany them—the rest of the journey was theirs to make.

One by one, the sailors boarded the ships. Yue Yun turned to Xiao Ming, placed his right hand on his chest, and shouted, “My honor is loyalty!”

“My honor is loyalty!” the sailors echoed loudly.

Xiao Ming placed his hand over his chest too. As the sails dropped, the three galleons lifted their anchors and set off with the sea wind.

At that moment, Xiao Ming silently prayed in his heart, hoping Yue Yun and his men would return safely.

Watching the three ships slowly disappear over the horizon, Xiao Ming turned and left.

At Dengzhou City, Ye Qing was waiting with Meng Youliang, ready to return to Qingzhou with Xiao Ming.

Xiao Ming had kept Meng Youliang alive for two reasons: to verify the authenticity of his information and to gather more intelligence about Japan—know the enemy, and you would never be defeated.

Three days later, Xiao Ming's group returned to Qingzhou.

The snow had melted, and the temperature had begun to rise. Xiao Ming ordered Ye Qing to lock Meng Youliang in the Qingzhou prison, then, exhausted, he returned to the royal palace.

Suddenly, a figure dashed out to greet him—it was Qian Dafu.

Qian Dafu looked unusually excited. Before Xiao Ming could even ask, Qian Dafu said, "Your Highness! I've been waiting these two days to tell you—we've found the tungsten mine!"

