

## **I. Dynasty 481**

### Chapter 481: Tongzhou Dock

A huge fleet sailed on the sea, ships connected one after another, stretching for miles.

It had been three days since they left Dengzhou. They arrived at the first port, the only one within the territory of King Wei—Tongzhou Port.

Before the fleet reached Tongzhou, Xiao Ming had already sent scouts to notify King Wei.

When the warships docked at Tongzhou dock, King Wei appeared on the dock right on time.

“Respected nephew, your uncle has been waiting here for you all day,” King Wei laughed heartily as he looked at Xiao Ming stepping down from the warship.

As soon as one foot touched the ground, Xiao Ming finally felt at ease. Sailing on the sea continuously for three days was truly grueling. In those three days, he finally understood the hardships of naval soldiers.

He had already seen King Wei on the ship, who also smiled, “Your uncle feels honored that you personally came to Tongzhou.”

“Uncle, you are too polite. Now your nephew depends on you,” Xiao Ming said.

King Wei’s eyes scanned the large warship, filled with strong envy and surprise.

Xiao Ming smiled, noticing the look in King Wei's eyes—a greedy expression. It seemed King Wei immediately valued his warships. He said, "Your uncle is powerful. Your nephew should be the one relying on you. This stop at Tongzhou really needs your help," Xiao Ming said calmly.

King Wei was momentarily stunned. He recalled what the scout had said: Xiao Ming's fleet stopped at Tongzhou to resupply, not just a simple stopover. The list of needed supplies was also recorded by the scout.

"Hahaha, right, right! Your uncle remembers now. Nephew, rest assured, the supplies are all prepared. You can start resupplying now," King Wei said.

Xiao Ming felt relieved but still worried a little. He hoped King Wei wouldn't cause him trouble, or else he would make King Wei's days difficult.

After ordering the fleet to resupply immediately, Xiao Ming followed King Wei into Tongzhou city. Under King Wei's warm invitation, he had no choice but to play along.

After several rounds of wine, King Wei said, "Nephew, your uncle truly underestimated you. I didn't expect you to have such a powerful fleet. This fleet could probably hold even against the Dutch."

King Wei spoke with envy. He knew about the Dutch and the strength of their warships. From what he heard, Xiao Ming's warships were very similar to the Dutch ones.

Now, suddenly leading such a powerful fleet here, how could he not be envious?

“Uncle flatters me. These warships are only my nephew’s escorts for merchant ships. I dare not say they could fight the Dutch,” Xiao Ming smiled.

King Wei was very jealous. He tried to ask, “Nephew, how did you build these warships? Oh, I remember, it must be the credit of the missionaries. Ah, why didn’t your uncle have that luck? But nephew, could you build some warships like these for your uncle?”

Xiao Ming’s expression changed slightly. He did not expect King Wei to make such a request. He might give King Wei cannons and muskets, but warships—definitely not.

After all, in this era, a warship equipped with cannons was a huge threat to sea routes, and hard to capture.

“Uncle, building these warships is complicated. In three years, I only made about ten or so. Besides, these warships are very expensive, each costing over a million taels of silver.”

“A million taels!” King Wei’s face turned pale.

“Of course. Even the smallest warship has about sixty cannons, and just the cannons cost 1.2 million taels, not including the warship itself.”

King Wei nodded, understanding these cannons were naval cannons, more expensive than regular ones.

“This is indeed quite expensive,” King Wei stroked his chin. He already knew that King Chu bought thousands of naval cannons from Xiao Ming and planned to build a fleet.

His territory bordered King Chu’s by a river. King Chu was gaining an advantage. After hesitating, he said, “Since that is the case, your uncle doesn’t want to trouble you. Nephew, why don’t you sell me some cannons then?”

Xiao Ming immediately smiled. Now that the steam engine had officially entered production, Qingzhou’s industrial power would change drastically, and cannon forging would speed up.

King Wei’s request to buy cannons meant silver money was coming his way. He said, “Uncle, that’s no problem, but the silver...”

According to Xiao Ming’s words, a thousand cannons meant 20 million taels of silver. This was a huge sum. But to avoid falling behind King Chu, he gritted his teeth and said, “No problem, at worst I’ll just rob a few rich merchants’ homes.”

Xiao Ming suddenly felt sorry for those merchants. No wonder many merchants were trying hard to stay in Qingzhou; elsewhere they had no rights at all.

But he did not care about merchants in Wei’s land. What he wanted was the 20 million taels of silver in supplies.

“Uncle is straightforward. How many cannons do you need?” Xiao Ming asked.

“A thousand,” King Wei said.

Xiao Ming understood this was King Wei competing with King Chu. He asked, “How do you plan to pay this silver?”

“Hehe, nephew, your uncle isn’t stingy. In business, one is one, two is two. Since you want to use Tongzhou as a supply point, the supply costs should be counted as silver. The warships docking at the dock also cost silver,” King Wei said with a cunning smile.

There is no free lunch in the world. Xiao Ming naturally knew King Wei would not give him Tongzhou as a supply base for free. So he said, “Your uncle makes a good point. Then all Qingzhou official ships’ supplies will be deducted from this fee. But even so, there is still a lot of silver to be paid.”

“Certainly. Let’s temporarily set the supply fees at Tongzhou dock at 2 million taels. After all, this resupply has already cost 20,000 taels. If it happens often in the future, the silver will be more. When this silver runs out, we’ll talk again,” King Wei’s eyes flashed with shrewdness.

Xiao Ming nodded in agreement. He raised the price of the naval cannons by double—it was already quite a rip-off, but at least it would give King Wei some psychological comfort.

Then King Wei said, "There's still 18 million taels left. To be honest, your uncle also has some large merchant ships. I'm willing to trade 100 large merchant ships for 10 million taels. The remaining 8 million, I'll pay you 400,000 taels in gold and 4 million taels in silver. How about that?"

Xiao Ming sighed inside. Wei's land was really rich. King Wei was indeed a tycoon.

"Deal," Xiao Ming nodded heavily. This was a very good deal. He got Tongzhou as a supply point and made an arms deal at the same time.

After a short one-day stay in Tongzhou, the next day Xiao Ming led the fleet to continue sailing. The next place he would reach was King Chu's Ningzhou.

Chapter 482: Fort Zeelandia

At Tongzhou dock, King Wei watched the warships slowly sail away with a complicated expression.

"Third Imperial Uncle, Xiao Ming is becoming more and more unpredictable," Xiao Qi appeared behind King Wei.

He had come to Tongzhou with King Wei but did not meet Xiao Ming. Instead, he secretly observed Xiao Ming's fleet.

"What do you think Xiao Ming is doing leading such a large fleet?" King Wei asked, confused.

Xiao Qi thought for a moment and said, "I sent people to observe. Xiao Ming's fleet carries more than ten thousand soldiers, each armed with the firearms Xiao Ming mentioned. Such a large army going to sea must be for conquest. He obviously wouldn't dare move against the Great Yu Empire, so his only destination is Ryukyu."

"Ryukyu? You mean Xiao Ming is going to war with the Dutch?" King Wei was shocked.

"That's possible. Besides the fleet comparable to the Dutch, plus ten thousand firearm soldiers, only the Dutch can match him," Xiao Qi said confidently.

King Wei was delighted. "Haha, this is great. If Xiao Ming fights the Dutch, we can benefit from their conflict and maybe sea trade will restart."

"Third Imperial Uncle, you are celebrating too soon. If Xiao Ming defeats the Dutch, he will control the sea trade from then on. Do you think he will let us easily trade by sea?"

King Wei thought for a moment. "Better than the Dutch controlling it. Xiao Ming is at least a royal relative and can speak at court. Now that he has set up a supply point in Tongzhou, it's thanks to me. Overall, he's much stronger than the Dutch."

Xiao Qi nodded, feeling reassured. King Wei seemed to bury his rebellious thoughts deep inside, because as long as Xiao Ming lived, he had some concerns.

While they spoke, the Qingzhou warships disappeared over the horizon.

On the deck of the Qi Wang, Xiao Ming reclined in a lounge chair, enjoying the sun and sea breeze comfortably.

At Tongzhou dock, they replenished a large supply of fresh water, vegetables, grains, daily necessities, and other materials. For him, this meeting with King Wei was basically a success.

As for the next supply point, Ningzhou, he was full of confidence since he was now doing business with King Chu, and King Chu dared not refuse.

Just as he expected, two days later they arrived at Ningzhou. There, they resupplied smoothly. King Chu ordered local officials to cooperate with Xiao Ming's fleet for supplies and promised continued support.

After Ningzhou, the fleet sailed south. After seven full days, they reached Fort Zeelandia.

"Your Highness, ahead is Fort Zeelandia," Rhodes said excitedly.

Xiao Ming nodded. In the golden sunlight, Fort Zeelandia shone like a pearl on the sea. Through his telescope, he saw typical European-style buildings with red tiles and white walls, like a fairyland.

While Rhodes was excited, Dutch warships appeared in Xiao Ming's telescope view. Xiao Ming said, "Don't celebrate yet. Tell your fleet we are not enemies."

Rhodes immediately reacted, raised flags to send signals to the Dutch fleet. Soon, the Dutch warships responded with flag signals. He said, "Your Highness, your fleet can now safely dock at the harbor."



Xiao Ming observed the harbor and called for Yue Yun. "Enter the harbor, but stay alert."

Yue Yun understood and ordered the signalers to send flags. He then led the Qi Wang Warship slowly into the dock.

At the same time, Lu Fei and Luo Xin came over. They had the soldiers sound the assembly horn. Qingzhou soldiers immediately came out of the ship cabins and lined up neatly on the deck.

With careful navigation, the fleet safely stopped at the harbor. After more than ten thousand Qingzhou soldiers disembarked, Xiao Ming breathed a heavy sigh of relief. It seemed the Dutch were truly facing a crisis.

"Greetings, honorable Qi Wang Highness," Claire appeared first on the dock. His first words were in broken Great Yu language, then he switched to Dutch with Rod translating.

"Thank you for coming, Qi Wang Highness. Your arrival proves you are a qualified ally. Perhaps from today, we can build a firm friendship," Claire said excitedly.

These soldiers from Qingzhou were well equipped and equal in number to the Japanese pirates, giving him confidence for the war.

"No need for thanks. As the Count said, we are allies at sea, and there will be more cooperation in the future," Xiao Ming smiled.

Claire was even happier. Pointing to Fort Zeelandia, he said, “Your Highness, this is Fort Zeelandia. Let me show you around. Tonight, you will spend a beautiful night here.”

Lu Fei and Luo Xin looked at the small island surrounded by sea with surprise but quickly got distracted by Dutch soldiers.

“Luo Xin, did you see that soldier’s uniform? Especially his leather boots. When can we wear leather shoes? I feel wearing this uniform with cloth shoes looks off,” Lu Fei said.

Luo Xin’s attention had long been caught by the cannons on Fort Zeelandia. When he saw two field cannons at the gate, his eyes widened. “Leather boots or cloth shoes don’t matter. The Dutch equipment is good, almost on par with our Qingzhou army. I wonder how effective their weapons are?”

“That’s simple. We are helping them this time. Using their weapons should be fine. Just tell Your Highness later. It won’t be a problem,” Lu Fei said.

While they talked, Xiao Ming and Claire had already entered the city and quickly followed.

At the same time, Qingzhou soldiers spread throughout Fort Zeelandia. The small fort suddenly became crowded.

At the official residence, Claire brought Xiao Ming to the window. Opposite was Michilalang Fort. From the tallest building in Fort Zeelandia, you could clearly see Michira Castle.

“Your Highness, the Japanese pirates have been reinforcing the fort recently. There are now over ten thousand pirates in the city. I believe these pirates are ordered by Yamada Nobunaga to occupy the Ryukyu main island. After all, it’s close to Japan. Once they seize it, they control the sea route,” Claire said seriously.

Xiao Ming raised his telescope to look. The Japanese pirates’ expansion plan was no longer a secret. Xiao Ming was very interested in any action that troubled Japan. He asked, “Do you have any attack plans?”

#### Chapter 483: Firearms Competition

The setting sun dyed the sea red like blood. Claire looked solemnly into the distance.

In his view, these two East Asian countries were destined to be natural enemies because both had ambitions to dominate East Asia. But only one could be the overlord in the same region.

When he made the choice between the two, he was prepared to face retaliation from the other side.

“Your Highness, I have no offensive plan yet. Without knowing if you would come for aid, I could only focus on defense,” Claire said.

“Then now you can consider it. Do you plan to let us face the Japanese pirates alone?” Xiao Ming frowned. He was unwilling to sacrifice himself for the Dutch and, more importantly, Claire understood the combat strength of these Japanese.

Claire smiled bitterly. This Qi Wang was not easy to deal with. He had wanted to avoid deploying troops, but now it seemed impossible.

After some thought, he said, "With the strength of our fleet, these sea pirates are no match for us. So we can land ten miles outside Michira Castle at White Seagull Beach, then attack Michira Castle from there."

While they talked, Claire led Xiao Ming to a map of the Ryukyu main island, showing colonial areas, population, and crops.

Claire picked up a quill and marked White Seagull Beach and the attack route on the map.

"Michira Castle stands on high ground, easy to defend but hard to attack. Around it is a large open area, perfect for artillery fire from the fort," Claire explained.

Xiao Ming frowned, "If Michira Castle is so easy to defend, how did the Japanese pirates so easily capture it?"

"The collapse of an empire usually comes from within. Even a strong fortress is the same. We made a foolish mistake relying too much on the Japanese to help manage Michira Castle," Claire said.

After a pause, he continued, "Fortunately, the artillery on Michira Castle is decades old and not numerous."

"What is the exact range?" Xiao Ming asked with an interrogative tone.

The Dutch now used cast iron cannons and were equipped with flintlock guns. This wasn't obvious on the surface, but with data, he could compare.

Claire shared Xiao Ming's thoughts and said, "The fort has 120 cannons in total, 30 on each side. Their range is about 1,000 meters. I wonder if Your Highness's cannons can suppress these."

"You really bring me big trouble," Xiao Ming said with some displeasure. A reckless attack on the fort might send over ten thousand Qingzhou soldiers to their deaths.

"Sorry, so I don't recommend a direct assault on the fort. Instead, we should first cut off the Japanese pirate reinforcements, then lay siege to force them out. The food inside Michira Castle only lasts for one month," Claire explained.

This news eased Xiao Ming's mind. Michira Castle itself wasn't so hard to attack, but with over ten thousand Japanese pirates inside, it had become a fortress. At the same time, their food consumption sped up.

"If so, a siege is the most suitable method," Xiao Ming said thoughtfully.

Claire nodded, "Our forces alone cannot besiege Michira Castle, but with Your Highness's soldiers, this plan becomes easy."

The two agreed that waiting a month to reduce casualties was worthwhile.

After discussing, they left the official residence. Lu Fei and Luo Xin waited outside. Seeing Xiao Ming come out, Lu Fei said, "Your Highness, can we test weapons against the Dutch?"

When Claire mentioned the cannons from decades ago having a 1,000-meter range, Xiao Ming had doubts. He wanted to verify if the Dutch equipment had been upgraded, so he nodded and politely said to Claire, “Count Claire, our generals would like to test weapons with yours. Could you fulfill their wish?”

“Of course. I want to see Your Highness’s army as well. This will build trust for our joint battles,” Claire also wanted to investigate.

“Hahaha, then let’s go watch together,” Xiao Ming said.

They went to the Dutch army training ground in Fort Zeelandia. Claire and Xiao Ming each selected 100 soldiers and two artillery groups from their armies.

“Your Highness, who goes first?” Claire was confident in his army. Though the fort’s cannons were old, he brought a batch of new weapons upon arrival in Ryukyu.

These weapons were not the most advanced in Europe but were the main equipment in the Netherlands currently.

“We Great Yu always let guests go first,” Xiao Ming’s words had double meaning: letting Claire start and reminding him that even after taking Fort Zeelandia, they were still guests.

After taking Michira, these Qingzhou soldiers would stay temporarily to fulfill the contract until the naval marines arrived to replace them.

Claire nodded and signaled the officers to show the power of the flintlock guns.

Under the Dutch officer's command, 100 Dutch musketeers skillfully unpacked paper-wrapped ammunition and loaded their guns. They fired at targets about 150 meters away.

Gunshots rang out, hitting many targets at 150 meters.

"Is this the maximum range?" Xiao Ming asked.

Claire nodded, "Yes. The flintlock gun's accurate range is within 90 meters. Beyond that, it's mostly luck. Still, it can kill enemies within that range."

This result relieved Xiao Ming. The limitations of the flintlock gun were not easily overcome.

Just as he was relieved, Claire changed the subject, "But we have a more advanced rifle that will surprise Your Highness."

He gestured to two groups of twelve soldiers who came forward.

"These soldiers carry rifles with a range of about 400 meters."

Xiao Ming and Lu Fei exchanged surprised looks. As he suspected, rifled guns were already in limited use in European armies.

But Xiao Ming was not behind. Rifled guns were now in production, and with steam engines, production would become easier.

Chapter 484: The Samurai

Bang bang...

Gunshots rang out as rifled guns hit targets 400 meters away. At this moment, twelve Dutch soldiers put away their flintlock muskets.

Claire looked proud and said to Xiao Ming, "Your Highness, now it's your turn."

"This is surprising. I have to admit we are a bit behind in firearms. We don't have guns that can shoot 400 meters," Xiao Ming said.

Out of sincerity, Xiao Ming had Lu Fei and his soldiers perform a demonstration. The results were no different from the Dutch soldiers', which already shocked Claire.

In Europe, a ten-thousand-man musketeer unit could easily take a rich colony. And now, the Qi Wang faced who knows how many such armies.



“Your Highness, don’t be discouraged. These rifled guns cannot offset the flintlock muskets’ battlefield advantage. For now, they are only a surprise weapon. If you wish, I can sell you the manufacturing method for these rifled guns,” Claire said with a sharp look.

Xiao Ming chuckled. Claire was quite the clever man, already trying to squeeze profit from him. He casually asked, “How much are you asking for?”

“Following Great Yu’s trade style, how about five million taels of silver? Of course, this silver can be replaced with tea, porcelain, or raw silk,” Claire said.

Xiao Ming laughed silently. These three were extremely popular luxury goods in Europe. Shipping a full cargo of these meant huge profits. This was why the Cao family and King Chu had accumulated massive wealth over the years.

To pay for these goods, the Dutch brought large amounts of silver from Europe in exchange. That was how the Cao family could establish a money house spanning Great Yu.

This money house was built on a foundation of vast silver reserves.

Looking northeast toward King Chu’s territory, Xiao Ming couldn’t help but drool. When docking at Ningzhou, he saw the bustling scene at the dock. Compared to Qingzhou, Chu’s land was still a gathering place for merchants—much stronger than Qingzhou. These merchants mostly traded overseas as maritime merchants.

But because King Chu provoked the Dutch, these merchants lost their sea trade routes. For Xiao Ming, once he reopened sea trade routes, this group would be the first fat sheep to slaughter.

“No need,” Xiao Ming said after thinking for a while, giving Claire a disappointing answer. Buying military technology from Europe? What a joke. But he noted Claire’s price; it wouldn’t be long before Claire begged him to buy military weapons.

Claire’s disappointment was obvious. He believed that handing flintlock manufacturing to Japan would have them pay millions of taels of silver, yet Xiao Ming showed no interest in this higher-level firearms technology.

Looking at Xiao Ming’s calm face, Claire’s joy from winning earlier faded. He began to suspect Xiao Ming already possessed this technology.

Sighing, he said, “Alright then, let’s start the artillery demonstration.”

Xiao Ming nodded. Next was the field artillery shooting. Like flintlock muskets, Qingzhou’s field artillery and Dutch field artillery were evenly matched.

This gave both sides a clear understanding of each other’s weapons.

However, Xiao Ming thought Dutch weapons didn’t represent Europe’s highest level. By the eighteenth century, the Netherlands had declined. The main European powers—England, France, Prussia, and Austria—represented the highest standards.

After the brief test, Xiao Ming and Claire discussed troop arrangements. According to the agreement, Xiao Ming would leave two thousand soldiers in Fort Zeelandia to maintain order with the Dutch soldiers.

Claire accepted this calmly and decided to hand over the western barracks of Fort Zeelandia to the Qingzhou soldiers.

After settling this, they decided to rest locally for two days.

On the third day, Xiao Ming and Claire's fleets began blockading the Ryukyu main island. Some warships patrolled around the island to prevent Japanese pirate reinforcements to Michira Castle.

Their army also started landing on the island. Along with Dutch troops, the landing force totaled twelve thousand musketeers and seventy-two field cannons.

"Your Highness, our soldiers have completed the siege of Michira Castle," Lu Fei reported half a day after landing.

Claire looked relaxed. He believed that unless something unexpected happened, the Japanese forces could only fight them after running out of food.

"Stay alert. Prevent any Japanese pirates from sneaking in for surprise attacks," Xiao Ming ordered. In this era, relying only on sight for observation, every defense had gaps.

Though they patrolled the sea, they couldn't guarantee no enemy slipped through.

While Xiao Ming arranged the siege, Sakai inside Michira Castle observed everything on the island.

When a fleet entered Fort Zeelandia's harbor, they realized trouble had come. They hadn't expected the Dutch to bring reinforcements, especially Great Yu's Qi Wang, because they had seen these warships in Dengzhou.

But even after seeing the fleet, Sakai wasn't panicked. Michira Castle was not easily taken, especially with over ten thousand soldiers inside.

However, after the siege circle was completed, his confidence disappeared. He realized they faced a long siege.

"Lord Sakai, the Dutch and Great Yu people plan to besiege us. Should we just wait here? Food is running low and won't last long. Their fleet blocks the coast, so no resupply from the sea," a pirate leader told Sakai.

Oda Nobunaga's rise was bloody. These pirates were his wandering samurai, sent to plunder merchant ships and build war capital.

Now Nobunaga could unify Japan after defeating other daimyo, thanks in no small part to these pirates.

"We samurai will not starve in the castle. That would shame our honor. Lord Sakai, for us samurai, it's better to die fighting than starve. Let us leave the castle and kill these miserable weaklings. Our samurai swords will cut them in half," one samurai said.

“Right! For Lord Nobunaga, we can die without hesitation, without regret, without doubt,” another samurai said.

“Fight! Fight!” the other samurai shouted.

Looking at the furious samurai, a ruthless gleam flashed in Sakai’s eyes.

Chapter 485: Reinforcements

“You are all brave samurai, but now is not the time,” Sakai said, his eyes burning with fanaticism.

However, he understood that war could not be won by courage alone, especially against the Dutch army. He clearly knew that the matchlock musket was no match for the flintlock musket on the battlefield. To win, they had to rely on numbers.

But now, with Great Yu soldiers arriving, even that advantage was lost. To increase their chances, he could only hope for more reinforcements.

“When will they arrive?” a samurai asked.

After a pause, Sakai said, “When Makino Haruaki’s men arrive, we will come out to fight.”

“Makino Haruaki?”

The samurai fell silent. Among the pirates, Makino Haruaki’s name was known by all.

Under his command, his pirates raided many coastal cities of Great Yu, accumulating the richest loot among all pirates. His samurai were notorious for their ferocity.

In every raid, these samurai inflicted heavy casualties on Great Yu soldiers, striking fear in them. Most importantly, Makino Haruaki commanded a 5,000-strong musketeer unit, giving them a numerical advantage.

Mentioning Makino Haruaki, the samurai no longer objected, as he was one of the country’s finest warriors, and they all held him in respect.

“Five days ago, Makino Haruaki sent me word. According to his plan, they should reach the Ryukyu main island in the next two days,” Sakai said, his gaze toward the eastern sea.

Just as expected, a fleet of thirty Atake ships sailed toward the Ryukyu main island. Standing on the lead ship was a middle-aged samurai in armor—Makino Haruaki himself.

After receiving the order to capture the Ryukyu main island, he led the warships to join Sakai.

“Lord Makino, the Ryukyu coast is ahead,” a soldier pointed toward the visible shore.

Makino Haruaki smiled arrogantly. “Ryukyu will soon be ours.”

Just then, a soldier pointed south, "Lord Makino, Dutch warships!"

"What!" Makino Haruaki turned to look south. Indeed, three warships approached them, indistinguishable from Dutch ships. But upon seeing their flags, he shook his head, "These aren't Dutch ships. They are Great Yu ships."

Sakai had already told him about Qingzhou's Qi Wang, so he immediately recognized the flags.

"Do not engage them. Speed up and head for shore. At sea, we can't match their power," Makino Haruaki ordered.

Following his command, the Atake ships accelerated toward the Ryukyu coast.

On the opposing three warships, Yue Yun ordered to stop these ships from landing on Ryukyu.

Though combined with the Dutch fleet, they had over twenty ships, these were scattered on patrol, usually in groups of three near the area. But Yue Yun soon discovered a group of Japanese pirates trying to reinforce the Ryukyu main island.

"Destroy them!" Yue Yun commanded.

The three third-rate warships sped toward the pirate ships. Surprisingly, these pirates seemed unwilling to fight but rushed straight for shore.

The lead pirate ship was less than a mile from shore, which made Yue Yun anxious. Three warships obviously couldn't destroy such a large pirate fleet at once.

The pirate ships recklessly rushed shoreward, closing distance with Yue Yun's fleet. Suddenly, six pirate ships broke off and headed straight for Yue Yun's ships.

"General, ships are approaching!" a lookout shouted.

"Ignore them. Fire on the ships heading for shore," Yue Yun said, observing with his telescope.

These six ships were escorts, lightly crewed, unlike the other Atake ships loaded with soldiers. The pirates sent these to block attacks on the leading ships.

Seeing through their purpose, Yue Yun ordered his fleet closer to shore. The first pirate ship had landed, and pirates were rushing into the island.

Growing anxious, Yue Yun knew more pirates on the island meant worse conditions for Qingzhou troops. When in range, he ordered the warships to open fire.



Boom boom boom...

Cannonballs flew toward the landing ships, causing screams and chaos.

Many pirates were blasted off their ships into the sea. The three warships fired continuously, each volley shooting over a hundred cannonballs.

The pirates on the ships could not resist. They desperately pushed the ships toward shore; some even jumped into the sea to swim.

As bombardment continued, more pirate ships landed, flooding the island with pirates. They suffered heavy casualties—hundreds died on the ships under the continuous fire.

Seeing most pirates had landed, Yue Yun grew frustrated. They discovered the landing too late; otherwise, so many pirates wouldn't have made it ashore.

But fate was set. Yue Yun decided to return and inform the Prince Qi

Watching six landing ships still approaching, Yue Yun ordered a retreat. Though not afraid, it would be troublesome to fight so close to shore. He needed to lead more warships back and deliver the news.

As the bell tolled, the three warships sailed toward Fort Zeelandia. After an hour, they reached White Seagull Beach, where Yue Yun sent men ashore to notify Xiao Ming of about five thousand pirates landing.

Then he regrouped with other warships and headed back the way they came. Since the pirates were here, they would not be allowed to leave.

Outside Michira Castle, Xiao Ming and Claire quickly received Yue Yun's report.

"Five thousand," Claire's expression turned serious. The number of pirates had increased, meaning a higher price to take Michira Castle.

Most importantly, they didn't know where these pirates had scattered or when and where they would strike.

"Lu Fei, send scouts immediately to patrol and prevent ambushes," Xiao Ming ordered.

The war had begun!

Chapter 486: Lined Up for Execution

Makino Haruaki was leading the musketeer unit advancing toward Michira Castle.

The earlier bombardment from the fleet caused some casualties, but those losses were insignificant to him. As long as they captured Ryukyu main island, it would become an unsinkable warship. Compared to that, losing a few warships was nothing.

Many years ago, he had suggested to Yamada Nobunaga to take over Ryukyu Island, using it as a base to control the coastal shipping routes of the Great Yu Empire and raid its coastal cities. But his suggestion was rejected.

At that time, the Dutch were still regarded as honorable guests by Yamada. But now everything had changed, and the Dutch betrayal proved he had been right. THIS CHAPTER IS UPDATE BY Novel-Fire.Net

For him, it was not too late now. Capturing Ryukyu Island was still a brilliant plan.

Moving through the forests along the coast, when he saw Michira Castle atop the high mountain in the distance, he ordered a messenger pigeon released.

The trained pigeon immediately flew toward Michira Castle, carrying a message.

Inside Michira Castle, Sakai was waiting for news from Makino Haruaki. When he saw the white pigeon land, he was overjoyed.

“Makino Haruaki has arrived. Now is the time to show the Dutch and the Great Yu Empire our strength,” Sakai shouted excitedly.

The soldiers inside cheered loudly, “Prepare to fight! Prepare to fight!”

Caught up in the excitement, the soldiers quickly assembled outside the castle gate. Over ten thousand musketeers lined up outside, ready for battle.

Outside the bastion, Xiao Ming and Claire noticed something unusual about the Wokou. All the pirates inside the castle had gathered outside, forming neat ranks.

Seeing this, Xiao Ming asked, "Don't tell me you Dutch trained the Wokou to fight with matchlock guns?"

"I'm sorry, it's true. We did train the Wokou to use firearms," Claire said with regret.

Xiao Ming had the urge to strike Claire down. Japan was being supported by the West like this even now.

But it was not the time to dwell on that. Xiao Ming said, "The Wokou have reinforcements landing, and now some have come out of the bastion. They are preparing to trap us from inside and outside."

"Sakai is a cunning enemy, always waiting for reinforcements," Claire said. "We can deal with the landing reinforcements, but I doubt if Your Highness's army can handle the Wokou inside the bastion. I really doubt you can defeat these fierce pirates."

"Count Claire, are you insulting my army?" Xiao Ming felt anger rising. He knew Claire was either deliberately provoking or warning him.

"Sorry, I don't mean to insult Your Highness's army. But according to Sakai, the Wokou often defeat the Great Yu Empire's troops. So I'm worried. After all, if the battle fails, we will lose Ryukyu," Claire said seriously. Now she was starting to regret her earlier gamble because the Wokou's strength was formidable.

“Better worry about yourself,” Xiao Ming sneered. Losing to anyone was fine, but losing to the Wokou was unacceptable. Then he said, “We leave our rear to you.”

With that, Xiao Ming immediately ordered Lu Fei to gather the troops.

The Wokou gathered outside the bastion, and Xiao Ming’s troops, spread out in a siege, also needed to regroup. Both sides were racing against time to prepare.

The battle was about to begin. Luo Xin immediately led the artillery to find high ground to set up their artillery position. Half an hour later, both armies had assembled before the bastion. War was about to break out.

If the war with the barbarians was a fight between hot and cold weapons, now Xiao Ming faced a battle between hot weapons on both sides. Although the Wokou used matchlock guns, they were not to be underestimated.

After all, matchlock guns and flintlock guns only differed in firing mechanisms.

At this time, under Lu Fei’s command, the Qingzhou army also formed into lines, with units of two hundred soldiers ready to attack.

“Your Highness, the Wokou are moving this way,” after the troops assembled, the Wokou ranks began moving toward Xiao Ming. Meanwhile, the sound of cannon fire came from the Wokou’s side.

Xiao Ming looked toward the direction of the cannon fire and saw the Wokou had removed the cannons from the castle to use in their current attack.

At this moment, the distance between the two sides was about 700 meters. The cannonballs had lost much power after flying, rolling along the ground and causing little damage.

As Claire said, these cannons were very old, with limited range and power.

“Your Highness, shall we return fire and destroy their artillery?” Luo Xin asked.

“The field cannons don’t have much range. At this distance, we don’t have much advantage. Wait until they get closer to fire. Their cannons are awkward and no match for ours,” Xiao Ming said, standing with Luo Xin at the artillery position, from which the entire battlefield was clearly visible.

Boom, boom...

The drum sounded. Under Lu Fei’s command, the Qingzhou soldiers advanced toward the Wokou ranks in tight formation, moving steadily.

As the two sides closed the distance, their cannons began firing at each other.

“Six-pounders fire at the Wokou infantry. Twelve-pounders fire at the Wokou artillery,” he ordered when the armies were only 300 meters apart.

Immediately, twelve six-pound field cannons fired at the dense Wokou ranks. Black cannonballs smashed into the Wokou, knocking down a whole line.

But after the gap appeared, the Wokou soldiers quickly filled it.

Seeing this, Xiao Ming frowned. This showed the Wokou soldiers were well trained, but he wasn’t worried because they had the advantage in weapons.

Compared to the Wokou’s old cannons, their field cannons with sights were much more accurate. The Wokou artillery moving with the ranks was smashed by the twelve-pounders, their gun carriages broken and gunners killed or wounded.

The six-pounders did not stop. Their cannonballs bounced along the ground, hitting Wokou soldiers in the ranks. Soldiers in the front row were hit hard, breaking arms and legs, falling down groaning in pain.

250 meters... 200 meters... 100 meters...

Despite the continuous cannon fire, the Wokou did not retreat. Both armies got closer and closer. At 100 meters, Lu Fei ordered the soldiers to stop and shouted, “Fire!”

The soldiers raised their flintlock guns, firing in unison. Flames and white smoke burst forth, and the Wokou ranks in front immediately fell.

“Reload!” Lu Fei shouted again.

After enduring the first volley, the Wokou continued advancing. At this moment, Sakai’s face darkened. The matchlock guns the Dutch had given them could only fire effectively at fifty meters. He could only let his soldiers keep moving forward into the firing zone.

Chapter 487: The Soul of a Nation

“Fire!”

On the wide open plain, the Great Yu Empire’s army and the Wokou soldiers were steadily closing in on each other.

Lu Fei’s expression was serious and calm as he commanded the troops to carry out the second round of firing. Once again, the Wokou soldiers in the front line fell, but the ones behind immediately moved up to fill the gaps.

At the artillery position, Xiao Ming watched coldly as the Wokou ranks held firm. Now on the vast open ground, the two armies faced off like two vertical lines.

After Luo Xin had almost completely destroyed the Wokou artillery, his own artillery began fiercely shelling the Wokou lines. After every bombardment, gaps opened in the Wokou ranks, but these soldiers were very tenacious and quickly filled every gap.



This scene made the generals of the Qingzhou army stop underestimating the enemy, and Xiao Ming himself no longer took them lightly.

According to intelligence from Wang Xuan, a samurai spirit was currently being promoted throughout Wokou territory. From the technology crystal data, Xiao Ming learned that this samurai spirit had existed since ancient times, but later it had been exploited by those with ulterior motives.

Even today, Yamada Nobunaga promoted this spirit vigorously so his samurai and soldiers would sacrifice themselves for him.

So in Xiao Ming's view, what made Wokou dangerous now was not their matchlock guns, but this aggressive and dangerous ideology.

This kind of thinking could turn a flock of sheep into fierce beasts. In fact, the Wokou were developing in exactly that direction.

Enduring round after round of attacks, Sakai led three ranks of soldiers advancing into matchlock firing range. Then he shouted, "Fire!"

Suddenly, he was filled with confidence. He believed that if the Great Yu Empire suffered the same losses, their army would collapse. In fact, during coastal raids, the Great Yu army usually fled after losing a tenth of their troops.

Bang bang...

Flames and white smoke rose. The Qingzhou soldiers at the front bore the brunt of the Wokou's first volley. Bullets exploded on flesh, spraying blood, and many soldiers groaned and fell.

Soldiers behind immediately stepped forward to fill the gaps. Others did not forget to reload their guns.

"Fire!"

"Fire!"

...

On the battlefield, the two armies exchanged fire nonstop. Cannons roared without pause. Lu Fei's eyes reddened as he watched soldiers fall, but he knew they could not retreat. This was the spirit of the Qingzhou army — the dignity of a nation.

When these soldiers raised their steel rifles, they knew what they were fighting for.

The Qingzhou soldiers did not panic. Death was an honor for them. The Hall of Heroes outside the city gate constantly reminded them of the soldier's rightful place.

Bang bang...

Gunshots continued. The advantage of the flintlock was clear now. The Qingzhou army fired more often and with greater power than the Wokou soldiers.

At the same time, the Qingzhou troops maintained tight formations and orderly commands. Artillery support inflicted constant casualties on the Wokou, whose rank replenishment began to falter.

Seizing this opportunity, after another volley of coordinated fire, Lu Fei suddenly drew his saber and shouted, "Charge!"

With his roar, a charge sounded through the ranks. Qingzhou soldiers fixed bayonets and collectively charged the Wokou.

"How is this possible!"

Sakai stared in disbelief at the Great Yu soldiers charging like a flood. Weren't Great Yu soldiers supposed to be numb and indifferent? Weren't they cowards? Weren't they supposed to break at the slightest touch?

Why were these soldiers so fearless? Why was their morale so high?

But there was no time for such thoughts. He shouted sharply, and the samurai hiding behind the lines surged forward. These samurai were all well-versed in philosophy and spirit. Their katanas cut through the swords and blades of the Great Yu soldiers.

With the sharpness of their katanas and their skill, these samurai became a terror for the coastal troops.

On the high ground, Luo Xin aimed the artillery at the Wokou rear ranks and continued shelling. Watching the whole battle, he said, "Your Highness, these Wokou are indeed tough fighters. No wonder the Chu and Wei princes are so troubled by them."

"That's true. Despite such heavy losses, they have not broken. The Wokou are truly difficult to deal with," Xiao Ming mused.

However, he was not worried about samurai spirit or militarism. Experience showed that technological superiority could not be overcome by spirit alone.

In this battle, the Wokou's weapons, training, and formations were all inferior to the Qingzhou army.

If the Qingzhou troops were as solid as rock in a shootout, the Wokou soldiers could only be as steady as pine trees. But pine trees were no match for rocks.

The many Wokou corpses on the field proved that the Wokou had lost the firefight. Now, what held them up was only their confidence in their samurai.

But that confidence quickly vanished when faced with the Qingzhou army's bayonet charge.

When a samurai swung his katana with all his might against a Qingzhou bayonet, he found it did not cut the thin weapon in two.

This stunned him. Before he could react, the dense Qingzhou bayonets thrust forward simultaneously, piercing his body.

At the same time, many samurai had no chance to show their skill before being killed by the bayonets.

The Qingzhou soldiers were bloodthirsty now. Watching their comrades fall around them, their hatred for the enemy burned into rage.

They had long suffered from northern barbarian oppression. Now, these small barbarian states on the eastern sea raised their slaughter knives against them. Under the guidance of the chancellor, they had come to understand what a country and a nation really meant.

Now, they were no longer ignorant or numb in the face of national crisis. They would say “No” to foreign insults against their people.

“Kill!”

The Qingzhou soldiers’ morale was still high. They surged forward continuously against the already collapsing Wokou ranks.

At this moment, the Wokou samurai broke under heavy casualties, and right after, the musketeers collapsed and fled.

“No retreat! No retreat!” Sakai’s face twisted. He swung his katana wildly, killing fleeing soldiers, but he still could not stop the rout.

Seeing more and more soldiers flee, Sakai grew desperate. Ignoring the artillery position on the high ground, he mixed into the fleeing soldiers and escaped.

Watching the battlefield through his telescope, Xiao Ming felt a weight lifted from his heart. But he was not proud, because in his eyes, these Wokou were nothing but irregular troops.

Chapter 488: Contempt

“It’s a pity the cavalry didn’t come this time, otherwise none of these Wokou would have escaped,” Lu Fei said, covered in blood, walking up the high ground. “These Wokou think they can test their skills against this commander. They’re just asking for death.”

Saying that, Lu Fei threw three katanas on the ground and continued, “Your Highness, these Wokou katanas are really good. If it were old weapons, they wouldn’t hold up against these katanas.”

Historically, the quality of Wokou katanas was indeed good. But Xiao Ming cared little for these now. The Wokou’s silver, gold, and sulfur were what he really wanted.

The war was still ongoing, and Lu Fei had come to ask Xiao Ming for the next orders.

“Luo Xin, coordinate with Lu Fei immediately to capture Michira Castle. Also send four thousand troops to support Claire. Their situation seems bad,” Xiao Ming said.

From his vantage point, Xiao Ming could also see Claire commanding troops fighting Wokou reinforcements. Despite the Wokou’s overwhelming numbers, the Dutch were holding their ground.

“Yes, Your Highness!” Lu Fei and Luo Xin answered together.

Luo Xin immediately ordered soldiers to use horses to pull the field cannons toward Michira Castle, while Lu Fei gathered four thousand men and headed toward Claire. Xiao Ming led the remaining soldiers toward Michira Castle.

With Qingzhou army support, the Wokou reinforcements near Claire were soon crushed. Taking advantage of the chaos, Luo Xin and Lu Fei also successfully captured Michira Castle.

After the victory, the Dutch troops and Xiao Ming continued to send soldiers to eliminate the remaining Wokou, while most soldiers stationed inside Michira Castle.

The war lasted from noon until dusk. When night fell, Lu Fei handed over the battle data to Xiao Ming.

“Your Highness, we eliminated six thousand Wokou this time, captured over one thousand prisoners, and the rest fled. We found no bodies of Sakai or Makino Haruaki,” Lu Fei reported. Follow current novels on novelfire(.)net

“What a pity. That villain Sakai escaped again,” Rhodes said angrily.

Claire still mourned the loss of over seven hundred soldiers. After this Wokou uprising, their strength in Ryukyu was further weakened.

Through this battle, Claire also understood the power of the Qingzhou army. This was no weak force.

In her view, this army was already very close to their European musketeer units.

“Sakai is no longer important. We have retaken Michira Castle, and the Wokou have no foothold on the island,” Claire said.

Xiao Ming nodded. The Wokou were crushed and basically lost their fighting ability. They could not resist him holding Michira Castle. He now officially controlled Ryukyu main island and the sea routes.

Because at this time, all merchant ships heading south had to pass through the strait west of Ryukyu. Now he could directly cut off trade from Korea and the Wokou going south, including the Chu and Wei princes.

“Count Claire, this battle proves my loyalty to the treaty. I hope you will faithfully fulfill your part. From now on, you must cease all trade with the Wokou.”

To Xiao Ming, this battle was the best warning to Claire. If she wasn’t stupid, she would understand what to do next.



Sighing inwardly, Claire knew she had no choice. The Netherlands was thousands of miles away. It was impossible to send tens of thousands of troops to East Asia. In fact, as their national power declined, even maintaining existing colonies was difficult. Besides, the British were eyeing their colonies greedily.

“As you wish, Your Highness. From today, the treaty takes effect. I will honor it. Ryukyu main island and Michira bastion are officially handed over to you. I also hope you will station two thousand troops permanently in Fort Zeelandia.”

Claire felt a wave of shame. This was one nation bowing to another.

Now European thought claimed “White supremacy, all others inferior,” because in a century of colonization, there had never been a case where Europeans lost to people of color and were forced to sign humiliating treaties.

So Claire was extremely unwilling. Though he submitted for the company’s benefit, he shared the mainstream European disdain for people of color.

In his view, these people of color were only fit to be their slaves and servants.

Xiao Ming noticed the fleeting arrogance in Claire’s eyes. He also understood Claire’s unwillingness. But compared to Claire’s restraint, the emotions of Dutch soldiers were more direct and clear.

Still, Xiao Ming enjoyed this feeling, because he wanted to prove they lost because of technology, not skin color. In the future, he would make more Europeans understand this and put away their arrogance.

In the silence, Claire and Rhodes led the Dutch soldiers away from Michira Castle.

Watching the Dutch leave, a faint smile appeared on Xiao Ming's lips. He had to admit that in the modern age of ocean navigation, Europe held the stage. But here, he would not miss this feast.

"Your Highness, these red-haired devils don't look very happy," Lu Fei scratched his head and said.

Luo Xin sneered, "Of course not. Now Fort Zeelandia and Ryukyu Island are under our control. They can only be our vassals."

Xiao Ming nodded at Luo Xin's words. "Luo Xin is right. We and the Dutch only use each other and can never fully trust one another. After all, they are Europeans, and they are wary of everyone outside Europe."

Lu Fei and Luo Xin both nodded.

After a pause, Xiao Ming continued, "Are the wounded soldiers properly taken care of?"

"Yes, they are receiving treatment inside the castle by Dutch medical officers," Lu Fei said.

Compared to the heavy losses of the Wokou, the Qingzhou army performed excellently. The flintlock rifle's range advantage showed in this battle, and Qingzhou's losses were relatively small.

"Your Highness, what about the captured Wokou prisoners?" Lu Fei asked.

Xiao Ming walked to a table with a map showing the details of Ryukyu main island. He said, "Keep them on the island as slaves for labor. There is plenty of sugarcane here but not enough people to load ships."

"Sugarcane?" Luo Xin's mouth watered. "Do they grow sugarcane on Ryukyu Island? That's really sweet stuff."

Lu Fei had never eaten sugarcane and looked puzzled.

The Dutch had mainly planted sugarcane and rice on Ryukyu during their occupation. It was now the season for a bumper sugarcane harvest. Most importantly, the Dutch had built white sugar workshops on the island.

Chapter 489: To Destroy a People, First Destroy Their History

The sound of the waves was the main tone of the island's night.

After resting one night in Michira Castle, the next day Xiao Ming took the map provided by Claire and began officially taking over Ryukyu main island and Fort Zeelandia.

He ordered Luo Xin to lead two thousand soldiers to station at Fort Zeelandia. Xiao Ming and Lu Fei took two thousand men to the sugarcane plantation marked on the map. The remaining soldiers stayed in Michira Castle to defend the castle.

“Your Highness, where are you preparing to go?”

As the army gathered and Xiao Ming and Lu Fei prepared to depart, a voice came.

Xiao Ming looked over to see Claire and Rodhes approaching. He said, “Count Claire, I was just about to send someone to inform you that we are ready to receive Ryukyu main island.”

“Your Highness, we have come for this matter,” Claire said. After a night of painful inner struggle, he chose to further smooth relations with Prince Qi.

“Is that so? What a coincidence! I was planning to inspect the sugarcane plantation and taste the white sugar here,” Xiao Ming said.

At this, Claire’s face twitched painfully.

For over forty years, they had painstakingly run this large sugarcane plantation. Now the nearly ripe sugarcane would soon belong to Xiao Ming.

Besides the sugarcane plantation, there were vast rice paddies on the island. These paddies yielded three crops per year, providing ample grain. This grain was even sold to the British, Spanish, and French in exchange for money.

Forcing a faint smile, Claire said, “Then allow me to lead Your Highness there so we can formally conduct the handover. The natives here do not recognize Your Highness, and I fear conflicts might arise.”

“That is good. But from now on, they are citizens of the Great Yu Empire, no longer natives,” Xiao Ming deliberately emphasized the words “natives,” as those words carried much discrimination.

Claire was stunned, his expression darkening. To him, this was a dangerous sign—he saw in Xiao Ming the beginning of a national awakening.

“Very well.” Claire’s smile was awkward. He exchanged a glance with Rhodes, and they walked into the island.

Xiao Ming and Lu Fei followed the two along a path extending from Michira Castle, heading northeast. After about twenty li, a vast sugarcane field appeared before them.

The sugarcane was dense, about three meters high, blocking the view. From the edge, one could not see the boundary.

“Your Highness, this is our sugarcane field. We plant one crop per year here. This place is very suitable for sugarcane. Every stalk is very sweet,” Claire introduced to Xiao Ming.

He paused, then pointed to a large rice paddy across the sugarcane and said, “This area is for rice, with three harvests per year.”

“Three harvests per year!” Lu Fei’s mouth opened wide. He said to Xiao Ming, “Your Highness, this is a great profit! Three rice crops a year—how much rice is that?”

Zhao Long and Zhao Hu followed behind Xiao Ming, equally excited.

“How many people on the island are responsible for planting sugarcane and rice?” Xiao Ming asked.

Claire said, “The locals—no, the people—number thirty thousand. Ten thousand are responsible for the sugarcane fields, the remaining twenty thousand for rice cultivation. The sugarcane fields cover about fifty thousand mu, and the rice paddies about one hundred fifty thousand mu.”

“That is quite a fortune,” Xiao Ming said excitedly, his face brightening. Taking Ryukyu was like gaining a new granary.

If he had Xiao Wenxuan relocate fifty or sixty thousand people to clear land on Ryukyu, the island’s value would increase even more.

Claire nodded. “Indeed, Your Highness. This proves our sincerity. I hope Your Highness will also show your sincerity.”

“Isn’t my leading a large army here enough to show my sincerity? Oh, of course, I won’t let you lose out in trade,” Xiao Ming said lightly.

After speaking, the group toured the plantations under Claire’s guidance. Most importantly, Claire introduced the supervisors of the plantations and rice fields to Xiao Ming.

“Lin Fu greets Your Highness,” a thin, dark-skinned young man bowed, speaking with a strong Fuzhou accent.

Hearing this dialect, Xiao Ming knew he was not from Ryukyu island but had migrated from across the sea. He said, “Claire was clear. From now on, this island belongs to me, and the people you govern belong to me as well. Understand?”

Lin Fu looked at the soldiers behind Xiao Ming carrying muskets, fear in his face, and said flatteringly, “Yes, Your Highness. From now on, I obey you. Whatever orders you have, just say the word.”

Xiao Ming nodded lightly. He and Claire walked further and found a village with many villagers. In the middle of the village stood a blackboard with Dutch writing.

The Dutch words roughly said Ryukyu Island was Dutch territory, and the island’s residents belonged to the Dutch, serving them for life.

Seeing the blackboard and the empty bench in front of it, Xiao Ming realized the Dutch were conducting slavery education on Ryukyu.

He snorted softly and erased all the writing on the blackboard, then carefully wrote the five characters “Qingzhou’s territory” stroke by stroke.

Claire's eyes showed deep sorrow. Most island residents now spoke Dutch, but this situation would soon change. All traces of the Dutch would be erased.

Xiao Ming's action further proved how different he was from the princes of the Great Yu Empire. Only those who cared about their nation's honor would be so angry.

If not for considering the big picture, he would want to completely wipe out the Dutch, just like other colonizers. These colonizers assimilated the land, and that was the scariest thing.

"To destroy a people, first destroy their history!"

When the first generation of people on this land died out, and the second generation was assimilated, they would no longer identify with their ancestors and would become a completely different nation.

This was the evil of rewriting history. To Xiao Ming, it was even more terrifying than a nuclear bomb. That was why he was so furious seeing the Dutch erase all traces of Ryukyu's original rulers.

The villagers watching this had complicated expressions. For the first time, the blackboard displayed strong, bold characters of the Great Yu Empire. Deep memories flooded their minds. Some elders who had migrated from across the sea had tears in their eyes.

Dropping the chalk, Xiao Ming looked toward three workshops in the village. Some sugarcane was stacked outside, and villagers were moving some brown granules out.

Chapter 490: White Sugar



“Is this your white sugar?”

“Yes, this is the specialty of Ryukyu Island.”

In front of the workshop, Xiao Ming showed a look of surprise, while Claire wore an expression of pride.

This white sugar process was the most advanced sugar-making technique in Europe today, something they took great pride in.

Xiao Ming frowned deeply. He picked up a handful of white sugar. Overall, the sugar met the white sugar standard; the granules were as fine as sand. The only flaw was that the color was not pure enough—some brown impurities remained in the granules.

One or two grains might not be noticeable, but in large amounts, it was clearly heavier.

“This white sugar quality is somewhat poor,” Xiao Ming said, rubbing the sugar between his fingers. His hopes were dashed. He had thought he could just eat ready-made sugar but now had to get involved himself.

“Poor?” Claire looked at Xiao Ming with shocked eyes and emphasized, “Your Highness, this white sugar is made with the most advanced Dutch sugar-making process. It is very popular in Wokou territory, and it is a hundred times better than your Great Yu Empire’s bitter brown sugar.”

Xiao Ming sneered, “It was poor to begin with. The white sugar I want is crystal clear, like white snow from afar.”

“That’s impossible. There is no such sugar,” Claire said firmly. “Your Highness, forgive me, but even Great Yu Empire doesn’t have such sugar. The refining process for white sugar is not something anyone can master.”

Xiao Ming coldly laughed and looked at another pile of white powder beside the workshop. He said, “Count Claire, if I’m not mistaken, your method uses the lime purification process, right?”

Upon hearing this, Claire was immediately shocked and speechless.

Xiao Ming continued, “Actually, making white sugar is simple. It just involves cutting and shredding sugarcane to fully break it up, then multiple pressing and soaking steps to extract the sugar. After pressing, the cane juice and residue are transported separately. The mixed cane juice is a dark green muddy liquid. Then it is boiled and purified. The purification process determines how pure the white sugar is.”

By the time Xiao Ming finished explaining, Claire’s shock turned to disbelief.

To him, Great Yu’s elites only mastered political scheming and paid no attention to such crafts. Now, Xiao Ming, a prince, could detail the sugar-making process.

Most importantly, sugar-making techniques were closely guarded trade secrets in Europe. That Xiao Ming knew them shattered Claire’s plan to sell the sugar-making technology for profit.

But from Xiao Ming’s tone, Claire sensed he might know an even more advanced refining method. Claire casually asked, “Your Highness, can you make this white sugar as white as snow?”

“Of course,” Xiao Ming said openly. Though the workshop’s white sugar didn’t meet his standards, it already mastered part of the sugar-making process.

Moreover, the Dutch had provided sugar-making equipment to the workshop, saving him much trouble.

“So, what is that method?” Claire smiled warmly, looking very friendly.

Xiao Ming laughed loudly, “Count Claire, that is a secret. But I can promise you can sell the white sugar in Europe.”

Claire’s face fell. If he could master that technology, he was confident he could make a fortune in Europe. After all, the European demand for white sugar was huge.

They needed white sugar for bread, desserts, and so on.

Ignoring Claire, Xiao Ming went straight into the workshop. Inside, he observed the sugar-making process. Since he already understood the process, Claire had no reason to stop him and followed with a defeated look.

“Very sweet.”

While Xiao Ming observed, Lu Fei grabbed some sugar and popped it into his mouth, tasting the flavor. “Your Highness, this is much sweeter than maltose. If sold in Great Yu Empire, this would make a lot of silver.”

Lu Fei’s thoughts matched Xiao Ming’s. He had invested a lot in seizing Ryukyu and had to make this war profitable.

Now he had to find ways to make money from the sea.

“Selling it is certain, but we will sell better sugar,” Xiao Ming said confidently.

Currently, three main sugar-making methods existed: lime, sulfite, and carbonate methods. The lime and carbonate methods were unsatisfactory, and only the sulfite method could produce modern edible white sugar.

This sugar was called sulfited sugar. Xiao Ming had already produced sulfuric acid two years ago. Though not in large scale, small-scale production existed.

The processes for making sulfite and sulfuric acid were basically similar. So this time, Xiao Ming planned to have Lu Tong produce sulfite to establish the sugar industry. The fifty thousand mu of sugarcane on Ryukyu could be fully utilized.

After visiting the sugar workshop, Xiao Ming inspected the grain warehouses on the island. However, there wasn’t much grain stored; most had been sold. Xiao Ming didn’t mind; he wanted the land itself. The rest was secondary.

Having officially taken over the Dutch industry on Ryukyu Island, Xiao Ming and Claire returned to Michira Castle.

Now Claire looked forward to cooperating more with Xiao Ming. To him, this Prince Qi might bring miracles. The current losses could surely be recovered.

Back at the castle, Claire suddenly spoke up, “Your Highness, the Wokou suffered a great defeat. Many wokou pirates fled north of Ryukyu Island. That area used to be a Wokou hiding place, since we never developed it. Now that Your Highness occupies Ryukyu main island, you should consider completely eliminating their influence there.”

Xiao Ming nodded. The Dutch only controlled a small area in southern Ryukyu. Most of the island was still undeveloped.

To Xiao Ming, he planned to build two bases on Ryukyu: Michira Castle and a northern base. After all, the north had a world-class deepwater port—an excellent place to establish a naval base.

That way, he could control northern Ryukyu and prevent Wokou from sailing south along the island’s eastern route.

“Thanks for the reminder, Count. I’m considering this issue. But before that, let’s talk about the upcoming trade matters,” Xiao Ming said with the look of a sly wolf.

The moment to monopolize maritime trade was coming. He planned to convert Great Yu Empire's goods into vast amounts of silver, since Europe was getting huge silver from America at this time.