

## I. Dynasty 731

### Chapter 731

Gusts of sea wind blew across Yue Yun and his generals. The sailing warships were neatly moored in Haigucheng harbor, a visually stunning sight.

Liu Chen's words made Yue Yun frown. "War is no child's play. How can one act out of momentary anger? The river outside Ryukyo City is called the Taedong River. Compared to the Yangtze River and Yellow River in the Great Yu Empire, this inland river is very narrow, and its depth is not suitable for our warships to navigate. Otherwise, if the flagship runs aground, the consequences would be unimaginable."

Li Cheng-jae, looking at the giant warships on the sea, nodded and said, "General, you have keen insight. The Taedong River is indeed not suitable for these warships to navigate. Moreover, the Golden Tent Khanate has gifted many cannons to the King of Goryeo. If they use cannons to sink your lead and rear ships, you will be like turtles in a jar then."

Liu Chen's old face flushed. Like Lu Fei, he was also a short-tempered martial general, sometimes speaking without thinking.

"General, I was thinking too simply. But what should we do now? We can't have come all this way for nothing."

Yue Yun's gaze was deep. Years of practical experience at sea, coupled with the knowledge he gained at Bowen Academy, meant he was no longer the crude fisherman he once was, relying solely on brute force.

After a moment of contemplation, he said, "Of course we can't have come for nothing. At the very least, we must hold Haigucheng in our hands. Additionally, from now on, we will blockade the Goryeo coast, prohibiting any Goryeo merchant ships or fishing boats from going out to sea. Goryeo's land is barren, and many things need to be purchased from Japan and the Great Yu Empire. Cutting off their sea transport will cause them to fall into disarray."

"Yes, General," Liu Chen responded.

Li Cheng-jae's heart skipped a beat. This Yue Yun, in his opinion, was not simple. At the very least, he had a very clear understanding of Goryeo's current situation.

Before Japan's invasion, Goryeo's situation was still manageable. But after Japan ceded half its territory and lost a large amount of money and provisions in the war, Goryeo's days became difficult.

So, compared to before, Goryeo had many more merchant ships going out to sea this year. Yue Yun directly cutting off Goryeo's maritime trade route would undoubtedly make Goryeo's days even harder.

After discussing this matter, Yue Yun looked at Li Cheng-jae. When Li Cheng-jae went to Ryukyo City, he suddenly had an idea to control Goryeo.

After observing Li Cheng-jae carefully for a while, Yue Yun said, "Li Cheng-jae, I know that you came to pledge allegiance to me because you want to make a name for yourself. Now, I will give you this opportunity. I only ask you now, do you dare or not?"

"General, I have no retreat now. All the ministers in the Goryeo court want to kill me," Li Cheng-jae said, gritting his teeth as he recalled his experience in Ryukyo City.

The hierarchy of Goryeo was even stricter than that of the Great Yu Empire. His status as an illegitimate son would be a lifelong stain, and this stain would leave him with no hope in officialdom.

It was precisely for this reason that he would make a desperate gamble and entrust his life to Yue Yun.

Yue Yun nodded. He had sent Li Cheng-jae to Ryukyo City precisely to push him to a dead end. With a smile on his face, he said, "Then, do you want to be the King of Goryeo?"

"King of Goryeo?" Li Cheng-jae was startled.

"That's right, the King of Goryeo. However, I have a condition: if you become the King of Goryeo someday, you must incorporate Goryeo into the Great Yu Empire," Yue Yun said loudly. This was currently the Emperor's strategy.

Li Cheng-jae had no choice now. He didn't care whether Goryeo was incorporated into the Golden Tent Khanate or the Great Yu Empire. All he wanted now was to live a glorious life. So he immediately said, "I agree to everything the General says."

Yue Yun showed a satisfied smile. He said, "If that's the case, I will provide you with firearms and help you train an army. You will lead this army south to drive away the Japanese, and from then on, the southern lands will be yours."

Li Cheng-jae's heart beat uncontrollably. Yue Yun's words were a huge temptation to him; he had dreamed of having his own army.

If Yue Yun could truly train an army for him and provide firearms now, he might genuinely be able to achieve something in the south.

“Thank you for your kindness, General.” Li Cheng-jae suddenly knelt before Yue Yun, his body trembling slightly with excitement.

Yue Yun helped Li Cheng-jae up. He said sincerely, “Therefore, Haigucheng is especially important; it cannot be lost. Before that, you need to properly handle the affairs here for me.”

Li Cheng-jae understood. Although the Great Yu Empire people had captured Haigucheng, the common people in the city were still wary and resentful towards them. It could be said that the Great Yu Empire people had only occupied the city but could not manage Haigucheng.

Yue Yun’s words now were meant to have him stabilize the people’s hearts and train an army with Haigucheng as its base.

He said, “General, I have already asked many common people. They personally saw that most of the officials in Haigucheng fled, so as long as the General supports me, I can take on this responsibility.”

“Hmm, in that case, you will be responsible for the governance of Haigucheng,” Yue Yun and the generals exchanged glances.

Rather than having soldiers brutally suppress the people of Haigucheng, they preferred to choose an agent to manage the city, because this would greatly reduce the cost of controlling Haigucheng.

After all, in the military academy, Xiao Ming had once told them very clearly, “The lowest cost of colonization is not to interfere in the internal affairs of the colonized country.”

Having assigned this task, Yue Yun had Li Cheng-jae temporarily return.

At this moment, Xie Yuan, who had been holding back a belly full of words, said anxiously, “General, are you really going to train an army for this Li Cheng-jae? These people are untrustworthy. Wouldn’t it be a loss if they used the weapons we provided to fight us in the future?”

Yue Yun said calmly, “I will only provide them with matchlock guns and export-model cannons, so you need not worry. Even if this Li Cheng-jae betrays us in the future, he won’t pose any threat to us. The true enemies of the Great Yu Empire now are the barbarians and Japan. If we can, without losing a single soldier, make the barbarians and Japan fall into the quagmire of the Goryeo war, then we have won half the battle.”

Xie Yuan didn’t think as deeply as Yue Yun. He said, “But matchlock guns and cannons also cost silver. Giving them to Li Cheng-jae for free is too wasteful, after all, we don’t know when he’ll actually become capable.”

Hearing this, Yue Yun laughed heartily. He said, “Who said I’m giving this Li Cheng-jae anything for free? Now, the six prefectures need quite a few laborers for laying railways and for plantations, and Goryeo happens to have many refugees. So, having Liang Dahai bring some refugees back is certainly feasible.”

Liu Chen and Xie Yuan nodded. They knew very well who Liang Dahai was: he was the slave trader personally appointed by the Emperor.

No one knew how long Haigucheng could be held, so it was always good to seize the opportunity to capture some refugees to take back and build railways.

Chapter 732

Qingzhou Province.

Branden was still making his final efforts to purchase the steam engine. If he failed this time, he would have no choice but to return to the Netherlands with regret.

So, after imploring Pang Yukun for an entire day, he finally obtained an audience with the Emperor of the Great Yu Empire in the imperial study.

That morning, Branden rose and put on his most luxurious silk formal attire, sprayed on perfume, and then headed to the imperial study.

At this moment, Xiao Ming was already waiting for Branden in the imperial study. The Dutch envoy's persistence truly left him somewhat exasperated.

"Your Majesty, Branden has arrived," Qian Dafu's voice rang out.

Xiao Ming was sketching on a piece of paper. At this point, he said, "Let him in."

Responding with a “Yes,” Qian Dafu turned and left. A short while later, Branden appeared in the imperial study.

Glancing at Branden, Xiao Ming spoke directly without waiting for him to talk, “Envoy Branden, you are truly persistent about the steam engine.”

“Esteemed Emperor, this steam engine is simply too captivating. Not just me, but every European would go mad for it,” Branden said.

Europe was currently swept by a wave of technological fervor. Even kings and nobles were very concerned about it, so the appearance of any new technology would lead to their eager pursuit.

Xiao Ming raised his eyelids, “But that is not my reason for selling the steam engine to you.”

Branden fell silent. After hesitating for a long time, he said, “Esteemed Emperor, we in Europe now have something that you will certainly be very interested in. Perhaps we can exchange it for this item.”

“Oh?” Xiao Ming raised his eyebrows. He said, “I hope your words can change my mind.”

Branden said seriously, “Rubber. This is a marvelous material discovered by Europe in South America. Perhaps Your Majesty will be interested.”

Xiao Ming’s hand holding the pen paused. Branden keenly observed this, which gave him confidence. He then continued, “I wonder if Your Majesty knows that in the distant southern seas, there is a wondrous continent called South America. The common people in that place use rubber balls for games and as offerings. Two hundred years ago, when a European navigator arrived in America, he saw the local

natives playing with a black ball. This ball bounced very high when it fell to the ground. It was made from the sap extracted from trees. Since then, Spain and Portugal, during their conquest of Mexico and South America, gradually brought rubber to Europe. Now, many miraculous items are being manufactured from rubber in Europe.”

“Rubber.” Xiao Ming was indeed tempted. In fact, rubber played a very important role in the Second Industrial Revolution.

Without rubber, there would be no tires, seals, and a series of other products.

In the history of human technological development, technology constantly updated with the discovery of materials. Without coal, there would be no steam engine; without oil, there would be no internal combustion engine.

Although Xiao Ming now possessed a large amount of technology, he was, it must be said, confined to an island of civilization. Without rubber, many things with mature technology could not be realized.

“Rubber is indeed a wondrous thing.” Xiao Ming made no secret of his knowledge of rubber. “So, Earl Branden, can you provide rubber to the Great Yu Empire?”

During his trade with Claire, he had brought up the issue of rubber more than once, but Claire always refused, citing rubber’s scarcity and his inability to provide it.

Now that Branden proactively brought up the matter, he naturally didn’t want to miss this opportunity, because for a long time, Europe had blockaded rubber.



This was also why Europe was able to maintain its technological lead in modern times. By controlling a crucial material in the technology tree, they could naturally operate with ease.

“Yes,” Branden nodded. “We Dutch have our own colonies in South America, and our own rubber plantations.”

Xiao Ming nodded. Compared to the steam engine, rubber was clearly more important now. With the technology crystal, he could quickly elevate the steam engine’s performance to another level.

However, rubber was a critical item because for a long time, it was only available in South America.

So, it was genuinely not easy for Xiao Ming to obtain rubber.

“Alright, I must say I am very interested in this item. However, I want not only rubber but also rubber tree seeds,” Xiao Ming said.

It must be said that the Americas were very far. With the Great Yu Empire’s current technological level, fighting Western powers in the Americas would be very strenuous, and the supply lines would also be stretched too long.

Therefore, to prevent the West from imposing a rubber blockade on him, he felt it necessary to obtain some rubber seeds and plant them on Hainan Island.

Branden immediately smiled, “Esteemed Emperor, this is truly a wise decision! So, the trade for steam engines and rubber is settled then?”

“Of course, but on the condition that I need to see these items before I give you the steam engine,” Xiao Ming said.

Even if the deal was struck this time, it would take Branden more than half a year for the round trip. This half a year would be enough time for him to upgrade the steam engine.

Moreover, for him, the steam engine was nothing. After all, he knew everything about things like internal combustion engines, so in comparison, it was a mere trifle.

Although Branden wanted to take the steam engine back now, it was clearly impossible from the Great Yu Empire Emperor’s expression.

So he said, “I hope this trade can come true.”

Having settled this matter, Branden’s knot in his heart finally untied. Although rubber was precious in Europe, in his opinion, it could not compare to the steam engine.

Each believing they had taken advantage of the other, both Xiao Ming and Branden were delighted. After seeing Branden off, Xiao Ming could even imagine a series of modern industrial products like bicycles, tricycles, and rickshaws.

After a moment of imagining, Xiao Ming gradually calmed his mood. At this point, he looked at what was written on the paper.

After the New Year, the weather gradually warmed, and spring plowing would begin in another month.

Since introducing potatoes and sweet potatoes, Xiao Ming had utilized tuber seedling technology to have Kui Wu establish a large seedling base in the past two years.

Now, the seedlings planted by the common people each year were purchased from the seedling base. And with the successful promotion of potatoes and sweet potatoes in the six prefectures, the number of common people planting these two crops each year was continuously increasing.

However, despite this, the yield of potatoes and sweet potatoes in each common person's household varied due to soil fertility issues.

So, after the New Year, Xiao Ming specifically reviewed the knowledge in the technology crystal, finding methods for manufacturing organic fertilizer and preparing to promote them.

After becoming Emperor, he increasingly valued the development of agriculture. After all, the Great Yu Empire's food and clothing problems had not yet been fully resolved, and he had to prioritize this issue.

Food is paramount to the people. Industry is important, but food is equally important. After all, transportation was troublesome in this era, and purchasing food from outside was unreliable.

## Chapter 733

“Fertilizer?”

In the imperial study, Pang Yukun and Fei Ji simultaneously felt a hint of confusion.

Yesterday, he had reached an agreement with Branden to exchange rubber for steam engines. The next morning, Pang Yukun and Fei Ji sent Branden off in a drizzling rain.

This visit by the Dutch delegation was also a diplomatic event. He also had to receive them with appropriate courtesy. At the same time, he returned some gifts to Branden.

Of course, Xiao Ming was unwilling to suffer a loss. Branden brought a pile of industrial goods, and he returned a pile of industrial goods, including perfume, white sugar, silk, tea, pendulum clocks, and a series of other items.

The reason for choosing these was very simple: he wanted the Dutch Parliament to clearly understand the Great Yu Empire’s strength.

Branden’s arrival was merely a diplomatic event. After sending Branden off, he still faced the problem of the Great Yu Empire’s development.

Now that industry was flourishing and could provide some materials for chemical fertilizers, he summoned Pang Yukun and Fei Ji precisely for this matter of fertilizers.

“Your Majesty, what is this ‘fertilizer’?” Pang Yukun asked directly.

After a moment of contemplation, Xiao Ming said, “This ‘fertilizer’ is a type of fertilizer that can increase grain production.”

“So it’s fertilizer,” Fei Ji nodded. “The common people often collect manure to ferment it; presumably, this is that.”

“Elder Fei is absolutely right, but that is just ‘fertilizer,’ not ‘chemical fertilizer,’” Xiao Ming said with a faint smile. “This ‘chemical fertilizer’ refers to fertilizer produced by chemical methods or processed from mined ore, also known as inorganic fertilizer, while what Elder Fei spoke of is organic fertilizer.”

“Organic? Inorganic?”

Fei Ji and Pang Yukun were confused again. With the development of industry, new terms were appearing one after another, leaving them overwhelmed.

So much so that speaking with Xiao Ming now put both of them under great pressure, as this Emperor would occasionally blurt out unfamiliar words.

At the same time, to understand what Xiao Ming was saying, the two often had to go to Qingzhou University to intensively study some knowledge.

Xiao Ming nodded, acting as a teacher on the spot to explain to the two what organic and inorganic meant.

After the two understood, Pang Yukun said, “Does Your Majesty mean that chemical fertilizer is more potent than fertilizer, and can lead to higher crop yields?”

“Yes, that’s also why I summoned you two. Previously, Qingzhou Province did not have the industrial foundation to produce chemical fertilizers, but the steam engine has made this possible. And most importantly, phosphate rock is scarce in Qingzhou Province, preventing the mass production of chemical fertilizers, but now, the world is vast and all is royal land; I can easily obtain them,” Xiao Ming said, feeling pleased. Having reached his current position, he increasingly felt that sometimes developing a nation was like playing a strategy game.

To push the industry technology tree forward, various ore smelting plants must be established to develop corresponding industries, otherwise everything would be in vain.

So he had not mentioned chemical fertilizers before simply because the conditions were not present to implement it.

Because according to the information in the technology crystal, the Great Yu Empire was one of the world’s main producers of phosphate rock, with abundant phosphate resources. The total resources approached 50 billion tons, ranking second in the world.

Moreover, the Great Yu Empire’s phosphate rock was concentrated in five provinces: Yunnan, Guizhou, Sichuan, Hubei, and Hunan. The phosphate rock in these places was not only abundant but also of the best quality. It could be said that the Great Yu Empire’s phosphate rock was mainly distributed in the southwestern region, just as the Great Yu Empire’s coal mines were mainly concentrated in Shanxi.

Precisely because of this, even if Xiao Ming had wanted to produce chemical fertilizers back then, he would have been powerless. But after this northern war, it was different.

Now, these southwestern territories were basically under his control.

“So that’s it.” Pang Yukun and Fei Ji immediately understood.

Xiao Ming continued, “Simply put, as long as there is phosphate rock, chemical fertilizer can be produced. So, this chemical fertilizer workshop must be built in a place rich in phosphate rock. In my view, let’s establish the chemical fertilizer workshop in Yizhou. After they produce chemical fertilizers, they can then be transported to various parts of the country.”

“Yes, Your Majesty.” Pang Yukun nodded. He then said, “Is this chemical fertilizer workshop allowed to be built by private workshops?”

“Phosphate rock mining can be allowed privately, but the chemical fertilizer workshop must be state-owned. When this chemical fertilizer is used on the land, you will understand that if the common people don’t have chemical fertilizer, they will cause trouble. I cannot trust it to profit-driven merchants.”

Fei Ji and Pang Yukun responded in unison.

After giving instructions regarding the chemical fertilizer industry, Xiao Ming suddenly recalled something and said, “I have heard rumors recently that quite a number of powerful families have flocked to Qingzhou Province, transforming themselves into merchants.”

The matter of powerful families had always been overseen by Fei Ji. Hearing this, he said, "Yes, Your Majesty, that is indeed true. As Your Majesty said, land is the foundation of powerful families. Now that Your Majesty is reclaiming illegally occupied land from powerful families in various provinces and redistributing it, these powerful families have no choice but to find other means of livelihood. So, relying on their abundant family assets, they have become merchants. In my humble opinion, this is a good thing."

"Your Majesty, Elder Fei's words are absolutely right. Powerful families originally relied on local clans and land. Now that they have become merchants, they are rootless wanderers, easier to control than when they were local powers."

Xiao Ming frowned. His easy conquest of the north was largely due to his tolerant attitude towards the powerful families, but this did not mean that Xiao Ming would compromise with the powerful families and revert to the Great Yu Empire's old ways.

In fact, he had always harbored a wary attitude towards these powerful families. Even if these powerful families engaged in commerce, he believed that deep down, they still hated him.

After all, he had ruined the leisurely lives they had enjoyed as local tyrants.

So he said, "Even so, you must remain somewhat vigilant against them. Merchants can sometimes be very dangerous."

Fei Ji and Pang Yukun exchanged glances. The two knew what Xiao Ming was worried about. They both said in unison, "Yes, Your Majesty, we will remember."



No longer mentioning this matter, Xiao Ming asked the two about some other aspects of the reforms. When he learned that both private and official workshops were flourishing, he was slightly satisfied.

At this point, he spoke to the two again about the industrial system.

For Xiao Ming, his development of industry this time was not blind but based on his own set of plans. The source of this plan was the contemporary international industry classification from the technology crystal.

This classification standard was all-encompassing, with over a thousand categories, ranging from agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry, and fishing to mining, manufacturing, electrical, gas, construction, transportation, information industries, and more.

As long as these industries were all established according to this standard, the Great Yu Empire could reach the level of the twentieth century.

And this would constitute a complete national industry system, including the industrial system itself.

Of course, Xiao Ming had only completed about a dozen of these items so far, with the vast majority yet to be realized. After all, some things required continued technological progress to achieve, and he still had a long and arduous journey ahead.

Chapter 734

“You are to focus on these, one by one, and ensure no oversight.”

In the imperial study, Xiao Ming handed Pang Yukun a black booklet, which contained the industries he had asked Pang Yukun and Fei Ji to establish.

Pang Yukun took the booklet and merely glanced at it, but his face lit up with joy. It listed the industries that the Great Yu Empire currently lacked and those that needed improvement. Besides industry, animal husbandry was also heavily emphasized.

“Your Majesty, with this, I can follow the script,” Pang Yukun said happily.

Xiao Ming nodded. He had said what needed to be said. At this point, he dismissed the two, telling them to strictly follow the industrial plan he provided to build the Great Yu Empire’s own industrial system.

After seeing them off, Xiao Ming stretched. Although Pang Yukun and Fei Ji had handled a large amount of state affairs for him during this period, he worried even more than before.

As various industries flourished across the Great Yu Empire, he had to personally take charge and impart more knowledge to the students of Bowen Academy.

Although the technology crystal was in his mind, he could not achieve the rise of civilization alone. Only by cultivating more and more talents like Lin Wentao and Lu Tong could a complete industrial system be realized in the Great Yu Empire.

As he was thinking, Qian Dafu walked over, somewhat displeased, and immediately complained, “Your Majesty is already very tired. Why must Your Majesty personally attend to the Great Yu Empire’s trivial matters?”

Xiao Ming immediately smiled. This Qian Dafu truly cared for him as Emperor. After all, strictly speaking, he had watched the owner of this body grow up.

“Speak, who is seeking an audience outside?” Every time Qian Dafu complained like this, it was always about matters that were neither too big nor too small.

Sighing, Qian Dafu said, “It’s Zhang Liang and his daughter seeking an audience. They’re talking about the steamship. In your old servant’s opinion, why bother Your Majesty with such a small matter?”

If it had been before, Xiao Ming might not have seen the two, but now he was personally involved in technological matters, all to help the Great Yu Empire catch up with Europe as quickly as possible.

After all, he was progressing, and European technology was also progressing. Moreover, Europe in this era clearly seemed to be “cheating” more than contemporary Europe.

In a similar historical period, Europe’s technological level at this time had already surpassed contemporary Europe by half a century or more. Most importantly, such Europe had already extended its reach to Asia.

So, he needed a weapon even more to defeat them at sea, and that was the steam warship.

“This is no small matter. Let them in.” Qian Dafu might complain, but there were some things he dared not refuse on his own authority.

Saying yes, Qian Dafu turned and left. A short while later, he led Zhang Liang and his daughter into the imperial study.

“Your humble servant, commoner, greets Your Majesty,” Zhang Liang and Zhang Qiyun said in unison.

“Dispense with the formalities.” Xiao Ming looked at the two. “Did you encounter difficulties with the steamship?”

Zhang Qiyun was a quiet person and didn’t like to talk much on normal days. Zhang Liang knew his daughter well, so he proactively said, “Your Majesty, after I returned from Dengzhou, my daughter and I tried to build a steam warship at the Qingzhou shipyard. We have made some progress, but we are currently troubled by what kind of power to use, so we have specifically come to consult Your Majesty.”

“Tell me,” Xiao Ming said with a serious expression. Whenever he discussed technical issues, he always presented himself as a technician.

Zhang Liang cleared his throat, organized his words, and said, “After my experiments, it is true that a steam engine combined with a propeller can make a warship sail. However, I am not entirely at ease with the steam engine. If the coal on the warship runs out, or the steam engine breaks down, then the steamship would become a dead ship. Therefore, I believe we cannot solely rely on steam power; we must also retain the masts of sailing warships.”

After a pause, Zhang Liang said, “However, this is just my idea, while my daughter insists on completely changing the structure of the warship. For this matter, this girl has been arguing with me for several days, relying on Your Majesty’s decree. I was forced to come to Your Majesty.”

As Zhang Liang's words fell, Zhang Qiyun said, "Your Majesty, a steam engine warship has its own suitable hull structure. Now, to build a steam warship, we must naturally discard all previous hull designs."

"But how many cannons does your hull have?" Zhang Liang shook his head. "You're like a half-empty bottle making the most noise."

Xiao Ming chuckled. Zhang Liang was implying that Zhang Qiyun hadn't fully grasped the concept. He then looked at Zhang Qiyun and said, "The main purpose of a warship is to fight. So, often, sailing warships would rather sacrifice speed to ensure firepower. You've now built over my cannon positions; how is my warship supposed to fight?"

Zhang Qiyun frowned, stunned for a moment. She truly hadn't considered that.

Zhang Liang now showed a triumphant smile, clearly pleased that "ginger gets spicier with age." He had to admit that when his daughter first proposed steam power, he was so shocked his eyes almost popped out.

For this matter, he specifically returned from Dengzhou to Qingzhou Province to attempt to produce a steam-powered ship. Now, after initial trials, he and Zhang Qiyun had completed the experiment of a steam engine driving a propeller to make a ship advance. Next, they would formally begin the construction of a prototype ship.

"Your Majesty, my suggestion is to temporarily adopt a hybrid power system, retaining the power of sailing warships and using the steam engine as auxiliary power. After all, in my humble opinion, the current steam engine makes it very difficult to propel a large warship on a long voyage, and without coal resupply, the warship would be useless," Zhang Liang finally said.

Xiao Ming nodded. What Zhang Liang said was indeed true. Steam engines were constantly being improved. The steam engine in this steam warship was no ordinary steam engine; it was a high-temperature, high-pressure steam engine.

Compared to ordinary steam engines, this type of steam engine was more efficient and more powerful.

It was precisely with such a steam engine as assurance that Lin Wentao dared to produce steam locomotives. Now, this type of steam engine was also being used on warships.

However, as Zhang Liang worried, his warships would eventually undertake long voyages. For this reason, a purely steam-powered warship would need to be resupplied with coal and fresh water at every supply point.

Currently, this was not an issue within the Great Yu Empire's waters, but outside this range, he would be helpless. Therefore, at this time, sails were needed to ensure the warship could still move.

Zhang Qiyun was initially very stubborn, but after Zhang Liang and Xiao Ming's analysis, she gradually came to her senses, though she was still a bit unwilling. "So, the steam warship will just be a joke then?"

"Not at all. Once the artillery issues of the steam warship are resolved, armored warships can be formally built. At least they can be used in the surrounding areas," Xiao Ming said with a smile. He currently did not have the capability to manufacture rotating gun turrets for steam warships.

Liang Dahai's face was stern.

Not long after Yue Yun sent back intelligence from Haigucheng, news about capturing slaves in Goryeo spread like wildfire in Qingzhou City.

Some merchants had even gone to Dengzhou, preparing to head to Goryeo to enjoy the war's profits.

All of this naturally made Liang Dahai, the Great Yu Empire's number one human trafficker, extremely displeased, because he had regarded Goryeo as his personal ground the moment he received the news.

But amidst his anger, he also felt something peculiar, because such confidential intelligence would generally not be spread so easily.

It was this doubt that prompted him to go to the temporary palace to inquire thoroughly.

"This news was released by me through Senior Grand Secretary Pang."

In the imperial study, Xiao Ming gave Liang Dahai the precise answer, which made Liang Dahai's eyes widen.

"Your Majesty, why hand over the slave-catching business to these merchants? They didn't even contribute silver to this war," Liang Dahai asked, puzzled.

Xiao Ming rubbed his brows. Two days ago, he had just dealt with the matter of the steamship, and then Yue Yun's battle report arrived from Haigucheng.

In the battle report, Yue Yun revealed his entire plan, also mentioning the plan to seize the opportunity to capture slaves.

He approved of Yue Yun's approach of supporting Li Cheng-jae as a puppet to manage Haigucheng. Countless historical examples proved that the simplest way to rule an unfamiliar country was to use native to control natives; otherwise, it would come at a huge cost of war.

As for the matter of refuge-catching, he also approved of it. After all, there was no justice to speak of in this bloody era. When Europeans continuously eliminated indigenous people, there was only profit, no mercy.

However, for him, slave-catching was merely the lowest-level means of acquiring slaves. This method was most suitable for merchants to use.

From a national level, refuge-catching was naturally not very glorious. Hence, there was the concept of overseas laborers. So he said, "Any merchant can do this refuge-catching business. Why should you, Liang Dahai, personally handle it? I now have a more important matter to entrust to you."

Liang Dahai scratched his head. Xiao Ming's words left him a bit bewildered, because he had been in this line of work for years, but now Xiao Ming's meaning was that he should change.

"Please enlighten me, Your Majesty." Liang Dahai felt a sense of crisis that his livelihood was about to be lost.



After a moment of contemplation, he said, “Goryeo is currently experiencing frequent wars, and its common people are displaced. Many are starving and struggling to survive. If, at this time, they are given an opportunity for guaranteed food and lodging, to travel to the Great Yu Empire to build railways, do you think they would be willing?”

“They would certainly be willing,” Liang Dahai said without hesitation. “In chaotic times, people are worse off than dogs. As long as they agree, at least they won’t die of hunger.”

“That’s right, I think so too. Therefore, this time I am asking you to withdraw from the slave-catching business and go to Haigucheng to recruit a batch of Goryeo people for the Great Yu Empire to lay railways here,” Xiao Ming said.

Building railways in this era was a very arduous task. It could be said that every railway line was built with blood and tears.

Now that the six prefectures were to build railways, manpower was one of the problems. However, relying solely on the Great Yu Empire’s own labor to build railways would be much slower.

That was why he came up with the idea of conscripting Goryeo common people to build railways in the Great Yu Empire. He would give the Goryeo common people food, and they would be responsible for building railways. This was a very fair exchange.

Relatively speaking, the chance of dying on the railway line was much lower than the chance of dying in Goryeo now.

Liang Dahai suddenly understood. He immediately smiled and said, “Your Majesty, this is a great business

Xiao Ming gently tapped the table with his left hand. “It seems you are still intelligent. If this matter succeeds, it will be much more useful than those few refuge-catching ships.”

“Yes, Your Majesty, I understand. I will set off for Haigucheng now,” Liang Dahai said excitedly.

In fact, compared to the shadowy role of a slave catcher, he also longed for a more respectable status. The method Xiao Ming offered him now undoubtedly provided him with a change in identity.

Nodding, Xiao Ming gave Liang Dahai a few more instructions before dismissing him. This time, with Liang Dahai in the open and the merchants’ refuge-catching ships in the shadows, he would surely extract the greatest benefits from Goryeo.

And these benefits would accelerate the Great Yu Empire’s progress on the path of the industrial revolution.

...

Shengdu, Golden Tent.

The Goryeo envoys knelt on the ground. Before them was Dolgor, the Khan of the Golden Tent Khanate. Also present in the tent were Beshan, Wuzhugu, Anba, Bodo, and Erhe, all Golden Tent Khanate princes.

“Khan, the Great Yu Empire is too deceitful! Now they have not only occupied Haigucheng but also threatened to attack Ryukyo City! We implore the Khan to send troops to punish them!”

The Goryeo envoy, Ryu Shi-gyeong, cried to Dolgor, his face streaming with tears and snot, like a bullied woman.

A burst of laughter erupted in the tent. Beshan and the others were not angered; instead, they were amused by the Goryeo envoy’s humble demeanor.

Ryu Shi-gyeong looked up. The happier these princes laughed, the more miserably he cried.

Dolgor then stopped the laughter of the princes. His face was stern. “The Great Yu Empire is pressing closer step by step, and you can still laugh! If Goryeo is occupied by the Great Yu Empire, we will be attacked from the flank. From then on, it will not be us attacking the Great Yu Empire, but the Great Yu Empire being able to attack the Khanate at any time.”

“Father Khan is wise.” Beshan might be laughing, but he understood the current crisis. For him, Goryeo was indeed a dog, but if this dog was killed by the enemy, they would have no dog to guard the gate.

“The Great Yu Empire is now incomparable to its past with its firearms. Their taking Ryukyo City is definitely not a joke. Father Khan, it is indeed necessary now to dispatch the Khanate army to help Goryeo retake Haigucheng,” Beshan said.

After the New Year, the atmosphere in the Golden Tent Khanate grew heavier. Those living on the grasslands and in the Changbai Mountain region keenly sensed that a protracted war was imminent.

Because during the more than ten years that the Golden Tent Khanate had been at war with the Ottoman Empire, they had also experienced such an atmosphere.

And the recent order that all males aged thirteen and above must join the army further confirmed their suspicions.

Wuzhugu then said, "According to the information I've received, the Great Yu Empire's siege tactics are nothing more than that one trick: relying on artillery to bombard city gates. This is something we can also do, but it requires ensuring our cannons are not destroyed by the Great Yu Empire's cannons."

As his words fell, the Third Prince, Anba, cruelly said, "That's easy enough! This time, let Goryeo drive its common people to walk in front of our cannons. Then, when the cannons get close to the city gate, we fire. This way, we can breach Haigucheng's city gate in one fell swoop. Once the city gate is breached, the few Great Yu Empire soldiers in Haigucheng will be no match for us."

The Fourth Prince, Bodo, nodded and said, "If this method can conquer Haigucheng, it will surely be able to conquer the passes of the Great Yu Empire as well. Perhaps this year, we will be able to ride our horses all the way through the Great Yu Empire."

Chapter 736

"Hahaha..."

A burst of laughter erupted in the tent, and a hint of a smile appeared on Dolgor's face.

Now, their westward path was blocked by the Ottoman Empire, and their plan for recuperation became impossible due to the increasingly cold climate.

Now, they had only one path left: southward. This was not just a war of ancient enmity between the Golden Tent Khanate and the Great Yu Empire; it was also a war for the Golden Tent Khanate's survival.

If this war, fought with the strength of the entire tribe, was lost, the Golden Tent Khanate would henceforth be defeated by cold and scarcity of food, disappearing into the long river of history.

If they won, he would become the second nomadic people to rule the Great Yu Empire.

Therefore, now they had no retreat. Attacking the Great Yu Empire became the only choice for every citizen of the Golden Tent Khanate.

Beishan and Wuzhugu were laughing, while Ryu Shi-gyeong trembled. These beast-like people actually intended to use Goryeo people as human shields.

Although he thought this, Ryu Shi-gyeong dared not show it at all. Now, the Golden Tent Khanate was Goryeo's suzerain, and even held the power of life and death over the King of Goryeo. What was he, a mere envoy, worth?

"If that is the case, who among you is willing to lead the troops into battle this time?" Dolgor looked at his sons.

He had lost count of how many sons he had throughout his life, but those who had survived to this point must be the most excellent generals, for this was the rule of the Golden Tent Khanate: only the strongest princes were qualified to inherit the position of Khan.

“Father Khan, this time, let me lead the troops,” Bodo said loudly.

Beishan frowned. “This Goryeo is within my jurisdiction, Bodo. When is it your turn to interfere?”

Bodo showed no fear and said with a hint of sarcasm, “Second Brother fought in Goryeo and Japan for a year, and in the end, he ceded half of Goryeo to Japan. Isn’t that shameful enough?”

Beshan’s face was very grim. He said, “Foolish! Do you think I truly couldn’t defeat Japan in that war? All I truly wanted was Japan’s firearm technology.”

“Bodo, Beishan is right. Although he ceded half of Goryeo this time, he obtained firearm manufacturing technology from Japan. Now we already have a contingent of slave musketeers,” Dolgor defended Beshan, though for him, this price was indeed somewhat heavy.

However, Goryeo was merely Goryeo after all. The lost territory was ultimately not the Golden Tent Khanate’s.

Wuzhugu then said, “Bodo has always been stationed in the Western Regions, so it’s understandable that he doesn’t understand the situation here.”

Dolgor nodded upon hearing this. “You are my most excellent sons. Now, the Golden Tent Khanate is at a critical juncture of life and death. You must unite.”

“Yes, Father Khan,” Beishan and the others said.

After a satisfied scan of his sons, Dolgor directly said, “This time, let Beishan go. At the same time, we shall test the power of these firearms.”

Beishan was also eager. The Golden Tent Khanate was not an ordinary nomadic tribe, but a state with a complete system.

In this country, there were many officials who were well-versed in literature, so the Golden Tent Khanate was not rigid or unyielding. They were willing to imitate both cannons and firearms.

Their only purpose was to defeat their enemies with these weapons.

“Thank you, Father Khan,” Beishan said excitedly. The humiliation of the Battle of Jizhou still lingered in his mind. Every time he went to sleep, he would kill the Great Yu Empire’s prince hundreds of times in his dreams.

Having settled this matter, Dolgor said to Ryu Shi-gyeong, “This time, the Khanate will dispatch fifty thousand men to Haigucheng to help you retake it in one fell swoop.”

Ryu Shi-gyeong immediately knelt deeply before Dolgor. The next day, he advanced towards Goryeo with Beishan.

Five days later, they arrived in Goryeo, and the large army prepared to advance towards Haigucheng.

At the same time, while Beishan was deploying troops, Haigucheng also became busy. When the barbarian army moved out, the secret guards quickly conveyed the news to Yue Yun.

In occupying Haigucheng this time, he had already taken into account the possibility of barbarian intervention, so both he and Liu Chen were mentally prepared.

“General, the barbarian army has reached Ryukyo City. They have now joined with Goryeo’s army and are heading towards Haigucheng.”

Liu Chen breathlessly relayed the newly acquired intelligence to Yue Yun.

“Who is the general leading the troops this time?” Yue Yun asked.

“Beishan.”

Yue Yun frowned, “Is that the Beishan who was defeated in Jizhou?”



“That’s right. This time, he is coming with resentment, and it is said he also brought his own cannons and firearms,” Liu Chen said seriously.

“Firearms? Since when did the barbarians have firearms?” Yue Yun’s heart jolted.

Liu Chen said, “Matchlock gun technology is no longer a secret. Whether it’s Prince Zhao, Prince Yan, or others, they have all mastered firearm craftsmanship. It’s not strange for the barbarians to have it, especially since they suffered from a lack of firearms when fighting Japan.”

“Fortunately, all we brought this time are rifled muskets, with a range four or five times that of matchlock guns.” Yue Yun felt a surge of relief. Otherwise, if they had only ordinary flintlock guns, they would have suffered greatly.

“Even so, I’m afraid this battle won’t be easy. This time, he brought a full fifty thousand men. Coupled with Goryeo’s army, we might not be able to hold out,” Liu Chen said worriedly.

As the two were speaking, Li Cheng-jae suddenly appeared before them. Upon approaching, Li Cheng-jae said, “General, the barbarians are attacking!”

Li Cheng-jae’s face at this moment clearly showed worry. Now, he had no way back. If Haigucheng was breached, his fate would be death; the King of Goryeo and those officials would not spare him.

So now, he could only ally with Yue Yun and the others, for only then could his life have some guarantee.

"I am already aware of this. How are the trenches outside the city dug now?" Yue Yun asked.

Upon receiving the news, he had Li Cheng-jae dig trenches outside the city gate. These trenches would act as a moat, slowing down the enemy's advance.

He was not at all panicked by this barbarian attack, because the Great Yu Empire's current strategy was to bring the war to Goryeo.

Simply put, their purpose was to fight the barbarians on Goryeo's territory, exhausting the barbarians' strength. If the barbarians lost this battle, it would mean they had withdrawn from Goryeo's sphere of influence, and Goryeo would henceforth live under the shadow of the Great Yu Empire.

"Replying to the General, the trenches have been completed and are ready for use at any time," Li Cheng-jae truthfully told Yue Yun about the situation outside the city.

Nodding, Yue Yun had Li Cheng-jae return first. He then said to Liu Chen, "Haigucheng is not our ultimate objective. Bisa Castle is the barbarian's flank. While the barbarians and Goryeo are launching a major attack, you lead a portion of the warships to seize Bisa Castle."

"General, what about here then?" Liu Chen asked worriedly.

Yue Yun said confidently, "Reinforcements will arrive soon."

## Chapter 737

Beishan rode his horse to the gates of Ryukyo City.

Outside the city, the King of Goryeo, leading Goryeo's officials of all ranks, waited to receive him.

Beshan's eyes first fell upon the King of Goryeo, who wore a bright yellow robe, but his gaze lingered only briefly before shifting to the Goryeo Queen beside the King of Goryeo.

Immediately, a smile played on Beishan's lips, and his mind began to savor the memory of this woman's charm in bed.

The King of Goryeo felt Beshan's gaze, and a strong sense of humiliation surged in his heart.

When the Golden Tent Khanate helped Goryeo attack Japan, Beishan had been staying in Ryukyo City. At that time, Ryukyo City could be said to be Beishan's royal capital rather than his own.

During this period, Beishan ran rampant, even having affairs with his Queen.

This matter naturally did not escape his eyes, but even so, what could he do? He could not resist, nor was he willing to let the scandal spread throughout Ryukyo City.

Because either way, it would harm his authority, and what were women compared to power?

“Prince Beishan, I have prepared a banquet in the palace and your favorite seafood. Please grace us with your presence,” the King of Goryeo said with a fawning expression.

Now, Goryeo was in turmoil, with the wolf of Japan in front and the tiger of the Great Yu Empire behind. If he still wanted to maintain his current position, he could only rely on the Golden Tent Khanate.

“Thank you, King of Goryeo.”

Beishan gave a lukewarm smile. In his heart, this Goryeo was merely a slave of the Golden Tent Khanate; there was no need for respect.

After saying this, Beishan suddenly embraced the Goryeo Queen around her waist, lifted her onto his horse, and rode off, regardless of the King of Goryeo’s and the officials’ horrified expressions.

The barbarian cavalry, seeing this, burst into wild and unrestrained laughter, urging their warhorses to follow Beishan towards the Goryeo royal palace.

The Queen, held by Beishan on the horse, showed no fear. Instead, she let out a peal of bell-like laughter. The King of Goryeo’s face was extremely mortified, but he forcibly suppressed his anger.

The ministers looked at each other, but no one dared to say another word.

In fact, they had grown accustomed to the Golden Tent Khanate's barbaric ways. Every time the Golden Tent Khanate's cavalry took up residence in Ryukyo City, some Goryeo women would commit suicide out of shame and indignation. As for why, many knew full well.

Taking a deep breath, the King of Goryeo ignored the officials and went directly to the royal palace. He knew very well that this time would surely be the same as the previous defense against Japan.

During the war, Beishan would be stationed in Ryukyo City, while his army would be responsible for attacking Haigucheng. He only hoped that this alliance could retake Haigucheng in one fell swoop.

However, this time his idea was wrong. After Beishan enjoyed the beauty and delicacies in the royal palace, he left Ryukyo City and headed towards Haigucheng.

For Beishan, he had never considered Japan a true enemy, but the Great Yu Empire was different.

In recent years, the humiliation of defeat had always lingered in his mind, making him unable to hold his head high among the princes.

Now that the Great Yu Empire's army had appeared on Goryeo's territory, this was an opportunity for him to wash away his shame.

Leaving the city, Beishan followed the large army grandly towards Haigucheng. This time, with Goryeo's thirty thousand men added, he had a total of eighty thousand men to attack Haigucheng.

Moreover, this time, to take Haigucheng, he had specifically mobilized a large number of cannons. It could be said that he approached this battle with absolute confidence in victory.

...

Haigucheng, Yue Yun waited anxiously throughout the night. In the early morning of the next day, he stood on the pier with dark circles under his eyes.

According to the movements of the barbarian army, the main army would arrive at Haigucheng this afternoon. By then, his six thousand musketeers would be unable to defend Haigucheng.

He admitted that firearms were powerful, but based on his experience fighting pirates at sea over the years, firearms were merely an advantage.

In certain situations, firearm units could still be defeated, as his warships had nearly been captured by pirates many times.

So, in his opinion, it was the same on land, and the risks were even greater than at sea.

“General, the barbarian army is about to arrive. Do we really have to defend Haigucheng?” Xie Yuan came up behind Yue Yun, a hint of worry on his face.

Yue Yun nodded, "Haigucheng must be defended. Otherwise, all our efforts to open up a trade port with Goryeo this time will be in vain."

Xie Yuan said no more, but followed Yue Yun's gaze towards the sea. It was empty, nothing there.

Yesterday, Yue Yun had told them about the reinforcements. Upon learning that the barbarians were reinforcing Goryeo, Ye Qingyun also received orders to lead over twenty thousand men towards Haigucheng.

Haigucheng in Goryeo had high walls and thick defenses. With Ye Qingyun's forces added, there was hope of blocking the barbarian attack.

However, the barbarians were about to reach the city walls, and their reinforcements were nowhere in sight.

Just as the two were feeling anxious, a mast suddenly appeared on the sea, followed by a merchant ship.

Seeing this, Yue Yun immediately picked up his telescope and looked into the distance. On the leading merchant ship, he saw Ye Qingyun.

"Finally, they're here." A weight lifted from Yue Yun's heart.

Xie Yuan let out a slight breath. "General, we can hold Haigucheng now." To be honest, he had been very worried about the impending battle just now, as the numerical disparity was too great. But now that reinforcements had arrived, he suddenly felt confident.

The elite force led by Ye Qingyun had fought from south to north, and from east to west; they could be said to be battle-hardened veterans.

"Hehe, there's no problem with Haigucheng this time. We must also seize the opportunity to take Bisa Castle again, and let the King of Goryeo and the barbarians taste our might," Xie Yuan said loudly.

At this moment, on the leading merchant ship, Ye Qingyun's expression was somewhat strange.

The reason for this strangeness was not because they were on a merchant ship, but rather because of the slave-catching ships that accompanied them on this journey.

When they set off, Liang Dahai ships had followed them closely, seemingly wanting to gain protection from their ships.

And what surprised him most was that. Liang Dahai, who had previously been actively catching slave, was now on the same ship as him, dressed like a merchant, not a slave trafficker.

"General Ye, this time His Majesty has ordered me to recruit Goryeo people from Haigucheng to work as laborers in the Great Yu Empire. Whether I can recruit them this time depends on the General." Liang Dahai said, grinning.



Ye Qingyun rolled his eyes. Although they both served Xiao Ming, Ye Qingyun still looked down on Liang Dahai, the slave trafficker.

He snorted and said, "My fighting skills are as high as your refuge-catching skills. You should worry about how to recruit fifty thousand Goryeo laborers."

Liang Dahai was already accustomed to being looked down upon. He also knew very well that his refuge-catching was a disreputable business. but its all in the past.

Chuckling twice, Liang Dahai looked ahead. In a blink of an eye, Haigucheng was upon them.

Chapter 738

"General Ye."

Then, he looked at the merchants glancing around the harbor and asked, "What are these people doing?"

Before Ye Qingyun could speak, Liang Dahai added, "These are refuge-catchers from Qingzhou Province. They all want to take this opportunity to capture some refuge in Goryeo and bring them back."

This refuge-catching plan was originally proposed by him. His original intention was to have Liang Dahai come to Goryeo to participate in refuge-catching, but the current situation clearly surprised him.

Seeing Yue Yun's confused expression, Liang Dahai explained to Yue Yun about Xiao Ming's allowing private refuge-catching, and Yue Yun then understood.

"What a pity. Now, the price of a young, strong slave in Qingzhou Province is at least around thirty taels of silver. If a slave-catching ship captures just a hundred people at a time, the profit upon return would be three thousand taels," Yue Yun said thoughtfully.

Liang Dahai nodded, "Even so, supply cannot meet demand. Now, it's not just merchants and nobles in Qingzhou Province who keep slaves; it's said that wealthy common people have also started keeping slaves to cultivate land. Perhaps it's for this reason that His Majesty has allowed private refuge-catching this time."

Ye Qingyun then looked at those refuge-catchers. Each of them wore armor and held gleaming weapons, looking like a small army.

Slave-catching was a dangerous job, so many merchants would hire ruthless individuals to do it, and they only needed to provide the ships and weapons.

While talking about the slave, the group walked towards Haigucheng.

At Haigucheng harbor, Yue Yun and Ye Qingyun exchanged military salutes.

Looking at the soldiers disembarking from the merchant ship, Yue Yun let out a heavy sigh. He said, "General Ye, the barbarian army is estimated to arrive this afternoon. Whether Haigucheng can be held depends on you."

"Rest assured, General Yue. I have an imperial decree to do my utmost to defend Haigucheng," Ye Qingyun said.

Hearing this, Yue Yun's expression relaxed.

Upon entering the city, Yue Yun introduced Haigucheng and the current situation in Goryeo to Ye Qingyun.

"It's this Beishan again! He truly haunts us. It's a shame that cannon in Jizhou didn't kill him," Ye Qingyun said regretfully.

"Indeed! This Beishan harbors the deepest hatred for the Great Yu Empire. Now, to exact his revenge, he'll do anything," Yue Yun said. "There's a man in Haigucheng named Li Cheng-jae. He told us that the reason for the truce between the barbarians and Japan this time is that Beshan wanted Japan's matchlock gun technology."

"Li Cheng-jae is that Goryeo man who surrendered to you?" Ye Qingyun asked. He had also read a lot of intelligence before coming.

Yue Yun nodded, "That's right, it's him. His father holds an important position in Ryukyo City, so what he said should be true."

"It's shocking that the secret guards didn't know anything about such an important matter. It seems even the secret guards have their limitations," Ye Qingyun said with a wry smile, shaking his head.

"It would be truly terrifying if they knew everything," Yue Yun said, seeing things very clearly.

Ye Qingyun chuckled. He said, "So what if the barbarians have matchlock guns? I've encountered them on the battlefield before. Prince Yan, Prince Zhao, and Prince Liang all had firearm armies, and they were still beaten so badly they scrambled for cover. Moreover, this time we also brought some heavy smoothbore guns that the military workshop just manufactured to Haigucheng."

Yue Yun showed an interested expression. Now, both the army and navy were very sensitive to new equipment, as the war advantages brought by weapons made them stronger with each battle.

He couldn't help but say eagerly, "Let me see what this heavy smoothbore gun is!"

Ye Qingyun was like a mischievous child eager to show off. He led Yue Yun outside, then called a soldier and had him bring over a heavy smoothbore gun.

Soon, two soldiers ran towards them. One soldier carried a massive flintlock gun, while the other carried a wooden box.

The two stopped in front of Yue Yun. At this point, Ye Qingyun said to Yue Yun, "This is the heavy smoothbore gun. For this battle, His Majesty personally allocated one hundred of these heavy smoothbore guns from the military workshop."

Yue Yun's gaze was blank. In his opinion, what was before him was an enlarged flintlock gun. However, besides being large, the heavy smoothbore gun had one other difference: a support in the middle.

The heavy smoothbore gun could rotate up, down, left, and right using this support, allowing it to strike in any direction.

“What about its power?” Yue Yun sighed in admiration.

“Its power is greater than that of a smoothbore gun. It’s excellent for dealing with both cavalry and infantry. Setting this thing up on the city walls and at the city gates is enough to cause heavy casualties to the enemy,” Ye Qingyun said confidently.

As the two were speaking, a scout suddenly came to report, saying to Yue Yun, “General, the barbarian vanguard has reached Haigucheng. They are currently waiting for the follow-up troops to arrive.”

Upon hearing this, Yue Yun and Ye Qingyun exchanged glances, their expressions becoming more solemn.

At this moment, Ye Qingyun said to Yue Yun, “General Yue, leave the defense of the city to us. This time, I will make Beishan leave his life here.”

With that, Ye Qingyun, without looking back, led his soldiers to the North Gate. Upon reaching the city wall, he took out his telescope and looked at the surroundings of Haigucheng. A sense of relief immediately washed over him.

Haigucheng faced the sea on one side, and on its east and west, mountains overlapped. The barbarians could only launch a frontal assault to capture Haigucheng.

Discovering this characteristic of Haigucheng, he decisively deployed his soldiers and weapons on the North City wall. At the same time, he transported the heavy smoothbore guns and field cannons onto the city wall.

While Ye Qingyun was making preparations, the barbarian army gradually arrived at Haigucheng. The vast barbarian army stretched across the land like a long black dragon.

By evening, the entire barbarian army seemed to have arrived. At this time, Ye Qingyun had also completed his war preparations, waiting only for the barbarians to attack the city.

“This time, the barbarians have brought many cannons. It seems they are preparing to use our methods to open the city gate.”

Under the dim light of dusk, Yue Yun saw the cannons within the barbarian army. There were a hundred of these cannons, which immediately put pressure on him.

For cannons, the city gate was essentially useless. Once the city gate was breached, the barbarians would drive their slave soldiers into the city and defeat them with their numerical advantage.

So, after some hesitation, he said to Yue Yun, “You immediately have Li Cheng-jae find some sand to fill bags and pile them up at the city gate. As for how to pile them, I will send someone to personally tell him.”

Yue Yun's face was grim. Ye Qingyun's expression made him understand that this battle would not be easy. He nodded and personally went down the city wall to find Li Cheng-jae.

At sea, he was much stronger than Yue Yun, but when it came to defending a city, he had to listen to this battle-hardened veteran. He only hoped that he could hold Haigucheng.

#### Chapter 739

The moon shone brightly. Haigucheng in the dark was devoid of any light, its massive, dark silhouette like a monstrous beast in the night.

Beishan suddenly felt a pang of fear as he gazed at Haigucheng before him. The brutal scene of the Battle of Jizhou once again appeared in his mind.

The former Blood Wolf Guard was almost annihilated in that battle, and his status in the Golden Tent Khanate plummeted. The once invincible general had now become a laughingstock in the eyes of the princes.

Clenching his fist tightly, Beishan punched the cannon beside him. The Great Yu Empire had ruined him with cannons; he would also use cannons to ruin the Great Yu Empire.

The next day, a loud bugle call broke the original tranquility of Haigucheng. After preparing their meals, the barbarians launched an attack on Haigucheng.

Ye Qingyun stood on the city wall, watching all this with cold eyes. After a night of preparation, Haigucheng had been deployed by him as a solid fortress.

Especially the city gate, which after a night's arrangement, was now fortified with sandbag trenches. If the city gate were breached, this would become the second line of defense against the barbarians.

"General, General Yue has already gone to Bisa Castle." While Ye Qingyun was observing the battlefield, a soldier came to report.

Ye Qingyun nodded. The barbarians aiding Goryeo was already expected by the Emperor. This battle was to defend Haigucheng and also to attract the attention of the barbarians and Goryeo, seizing the opportunity to take Bisa Castle.

Once that city, which could directly reach the barbarian heartland, was controlled, the Great Yu Empire would no longer be merely defensive against the barbarians, but would shift to the offensive.

Thinking of this, Ye Qingyun felt a surge of excitement. The Great Yu Empire had been bullied too much by the barbarians over the years, and now every general harbored a suppressed anger, wanting to wash away the Great Yu Empire's humiliation.

Moreover, the barbarians constantly threatened the Great Yu Empire's security in the north. Without completely destroying the barbarians, the Great Yu Empire would have an additional security threat on land.

"Prepare for battle!"

Ye Qingyun calmly uttered four words. Yue Yun was originally a naval general, and they each had their respective duties this time. If Yue Yun stayed here, he would feel somewhat constrained.



Upon receiving his order, the soldiers on the city wall immediately aimed their firearms at the approaching barbarian slave soldiers outside the city.

The artillerymen also loaded shells, ready to bombard the barbarian artillery positions at any moment.

But then, a horrifying scene appeared before them. Just as the barbarian slave soldiers were carrying ladders towards the city gate, a group of unarmed Goryeo common people, driven by the barbarians, stood in front of the cannons.

Every step the barbarian artillerymen approached the city wall, they would move forward a step, blocking the barbarian cannons.

“General, the barbarian cannons are blocked!” Artillery Captain Zou Cheng said anxiously. He was once a capable officer under Luo Xin, and after the army reform, he was transferred from Luo Xin’s command to Ye Qingyun’s army.

Ye Qingyun also saw this scene. He was not surprised; this was a common trick used by the barbarians in warfare. For the barbarians, anyone outside their own kind was merely like pigs or dogs, worthless.

“Fire!” Ye Qingyun uttered a single word.

A general must be merciless. After experiencing so many battles, he deeply understood this principle. Mercy towards the enemy was cruelty towards one’s own soldiers.

As for these Goryeo common people, one could only say they brought it upon themselves. Since they abandoned the Great Yu Empire as their suzerain and then joined in to add insult to injury all these years, they had to bear the consequences.

“Yes, General,” Zou Cheng replied, then shouted, “Open fire!”

“Boom, boom, boom...”

Cannons roared. Ninety-six cannons spewed smoke and flames at this moment. Black cannonballs shot straight towards the barbarian artillery’s direction.

A chorus of screams rang out as the Goryeo common people blocking the barbarian cannons fell one after another. Blood and severed limbs lay scattered across the ground.

In such a terrifying scene, the Goryeo common people were horrified. They scattered and fled backward, but what awaited them were the barbarians’ butcher knives.

All Goryeo common people who attempted to flee were killed by the barbarians’ scimitars.

Li Cheng-jae was also on the city wall. Seeing this scene, he gritted his teeth, his palms sweating cold. At the same time, a strong surge of anger burned within him.

The barbarians had never treated the Goryeo common people as human. In Ryukyo City, he had personally witnessed the barbarians' atrocities in the city. This scene was not the first time it had appeared on Goryeo's land.

When fighting Japan, the barbarians had treated Japan in the same way.

A wave of sadness swept through Li Cheng-jae's heart as he looked at the Great Yu Empire soldiers, who were disciplined and well-organized. Although the Great Yu Empire was also an invader, it at least did not drive its own common people as human shields.

The roar of cannons continued. The barbarian cannons finally entered firing range under the protection of human shields.

At this moment, Ye Qingyun's heart clenched. This battle would probably be even more difficult than he imagined.

Below the city wall, the barbarian slave soldiers continued to charge despite the muskets' fire, leaving behind large numbers of corpses on the ground.

Watching the barbarian cannons approach from five hundred meters to four hundred, then to three hundred meters, a sneer appeared on Ye Qingyun's lips.

Clearly, the barbarians' cannons had not improved at all over the years; their range was still around five hundred meters. To ensure the cannonballs were powerful enough to damage the city wall, they had to bring the cannons closer to the wall.

However, doing so would bring them within range of the rifled muskets, and the artillerymen would become targets at that moment.

So he said to a general, "Have the rifled musket team fire at the cannons."

Upon receiving the order, the rifled musket team immediately fired towards the barbarian cannons. The barbarian cannons had now entered the firing range of the rifled muskets.

"Bang, bang, bang..."

On the city wall, the rifled musketeers formed a line and opened fire on the barbarian cannons. The dense volley of bullets immediately felled a large number of Goryeo common people who were blocking the barbarian cannons.

Then the first row of soldiers knelt, and the second row continued to fire.

At this moment, the barbarian soldiers had no time to drive the common people to fill the gaps immediately. Under the second round of firing, barbarian artillerymen fell one after another.

Dense volleys of bullets continuously struck the barbarian cannons, making "clanking" sounds as metal hit metal.

Beishan was greatly surprised by this scene. He looked at the white smoke and fire constantly rising from the city wall. Since when could the Great Yu Empire's firearms hit people from two or three hundred paces away?

Seeing that the cannons were about to blast open the city gate, Beshan hysterically shouted, "Drive all the Goryeo people forward! No matter what, blast open the city gate of Haigucheng!"

Under his command, the barbarian generals once again blew their melodious horns. At this time, barbarian cavalry, holding their sabers, herded thousands of Goryeo people towards the cannons like sheep.

A dense human shield once again blocked the cannons. Seizing this opportunity, the barbarian artillerymen immediately loaded their shells and bombarded the main gate of Haigucheng.

"Boom, boom, boom..."

From the hundred cannons, over sixty surviving ones poured their shells onto the city gate of Haigucheng. In an instant, the city gate collapsed with a roar.

Ye Qingyun almost ground his teeth. The Haigucheng gate had finally fallen.

Chapter 740

"Kill!"

The smoke and dust from the collapsed Haigucheng gate were observed by Beishan.

A surge of wild joy filled his heart. For him, the opportunity to wash away his humiliation was at hand. At this moment, he let out a roar, ordering his army to charge towards the city gate.

Ye Qingyun's expression was grim, but he remained calm and composed. The characteristic of a general's coolheadedness was evident in him at this moment.

After the city gate collapsed, a portion of the barbarian slave soldiers and Goryeo soldiers attempting to climb with ladders began to pour through the city gate.

At the same time, the majority of the soldiers were still carrying ladders and assaulting the city walls. This was to tie down the forces on the city walls.

At this moment, Ye Qingyun said to his deputy general, "The city wall is yours."

"Yes, General." The deputy general's expression was firm. Relatively speaking, the city wall was much safer now; few enemies could climb up under the fire of firearms and bayonets.

Ye Qingyun descended to the base of the city wall. At this moment, a sound, deeper than artillery but brighter than firearms, suddenly rang out, and the barbarian slave soldiers pouring through the city gate immediately fell in swathes.

Ye Qingyun had already anticipated this situation last night. So, he had placed fifty of the one hundred heavy smoothbore guns at the city gate and built the sandbag trenches he had learned about at the Army Academy there.

These sandbag trenches could, firstly, protect the soldiers, reducing their exposure to arrows and enemy firearms. Secondly, the layered trenches could also impede the movement of enemy soldiers.

At this time, the barbarian soldiers rushing into the city gate saw a strange sight before their eyes.

Before them lay a wall constructed from rows of sackcloth bags. Behind this wall stood a dense array of Great Yu Empire soldiers.

Among them, some massive firearms extended from the wall, and these firearms would cause widespread casualties with each shot.

“Soldiers, the dignity of the Great Yu Empire must not be lost in our hands today. Even if we fight to the last man, we must hold Haigucheng. Kill!”

Ye Qingyun personally oversaw the battle. The morale of the soldiers in front of the city gate soared. They fixed bayonets onto their firearms, ready to engage in close combat with the barbarian soldiers at any moment.

At this moment, they fought for the glory of the Great Yu Empire.

“Bang, bang, bang...”

The heavy smoothbore guns and rifled muskets furiously spewed flames. To defend the city gate, Ye Qingyun had also deployed rifled musketeers at the city gate.

Under the fierce barrage, the barbarian soldiers entering the city gate fell one after another. The area in front of the city gate was soon covered with corpses.

Time gradually passed. From early morning until noon, the barbarians made no progress under the fierce firepower.

With a light bugle call, the barbarian siege army, having left eight thousand corpses behind, began to retreat.

In the barbarian camp, Beshan's face was so grim it could drip water. He had thought that once the city gate was breached, they could charge into the city and fight a decisive battle with the Great Yu Empire army.

But he was wrong. So far, he had only left a pile of corpses at the city gate, and the attacking army was beginning to scatter due to the desperate assault. In desperation, he had no choice but to order a temporary halt to the attack.

"Prince, the Great Yu Empire's firearms shoot too far. Many soldiers were killed from two hundred paces away, and our artillerymen also suffered heavy casualties," Guduo said.



Beishan's knuckles cracked as he squeezed them. He angrily said, "Why does the Great Yu Empire have so many strange firearms?"

Guduo's eyes dimmed. He said, "That's not even the most terrifying firearm behind the city gate. The soldiers who escaped said there's also a large firearm there that can kill over a dozen people with each shot."

Beishan's face turned ashen. The slave soldiers and Goryeo soldiers were diminishing. Yet, Haigucheng had not been breached at all. If this continued, their Golden Tent Khanate soldiers would have to go in themselves.

Although the Golden Tent Khanate soldiers fought fearlessly, if losses were too high, he would still face ridicule from other princes.

After all, over the years, the Golden Tent Khanate had suffered heavy losses of its people in battles against enemies.

At this moment, Beishan suddenly regretted his persistence. If he lost again this time, his hope for the Khanate's throne would be completely gone.

While Beishan was anxious, the Great Yu Empire soldiers in Haigucheng breathed a sigh of relief. They immediately ate and replenished their strength during the midday truce.

"General, this heavy smoothbore gun is formidable! This thing fires faster than artillery, and two people can carry it around easily, making support very convenient. The barbarians must have suffered enough this time."

Ye Qingyun and the soldiers sat together, eating scallion pancakes.

These were the rations they brought from Dengzhou. The ingredients were flour, oil, salt, and scallions. It was said that the Emperor himself had taught the Qingzhou army's commissary how to make them.

These pancakes were very fragrant and soft when just out of the pan, but they would become very hard when cold. When the weather was not yet hot, they wouldn't mold even if carried for a month, greatly reducing the pressure on logistics. This time, they had each soldier carry enough scallion pancakes for half a month's consumption for the trip to Haigucheng.

It was for this reason that now, flatbreads and scallion pancakes had become the staple food for troops fighting far from home.

"This is due to His Majesty's foresight. This item is specifically designed to deal with the barbarians," Ye Qingyun said, his demeanor relaxed.

Based on his observations, the Goryeo soldiers had essentially been terrified all morning. In the upcoming battles, they would certainly not fight desperately to breach the city.

And the barbarian cannons had largely been rendered useless by them. The barbarians would next have to fill this gap with human lives.

As they were eating, Liang Dahai suddenly appeared with a group of merchants. Each of these merchants was followed by seven or eight servants.

Each of these servants carried a basket, from which steam was rising.

Seeing Liang Dahai, Ye Qingyun frowned. "Liang Dahai, there's a battle going on right now. What is the meaning of this?"

Liang Dahai was not angry. He said with a smile, "General, this is a kind gesture from the merchants. This time, coming from Dengzhou, their merchant ships are filled with potatoes, chickens, ducks, fish, and meat. Now, to reward the soldiers, they have specially steamed some and brought them to you."

The merchants' faces were adorned with smiles. They unveiled the cloth covering the baskets, revealing indeed a sumptuous meal: boiled potatoes, boiled chicken, pork, and various other dishes.

The soldiers' eyes immediately widened with longing. Looking at these delicacies, the scallion pancakes in their hands lost their flavor.

Zou Cheng licked his lips and said to Ye Qingyun, "General, there are still tough battles to be fought in the next few days. The soldiers will only have strength if they are full."

Ye Qingyun glared fiercely at Zou Cheng. He did not relent, but instead said, "No good deed comes without a motive. Speak, what do you want to do?"

A merchant eagerly said, "It's actually very simple. We hope the General can allow us to take away the injured barbarian and Goryeo soldiers."

Ye Qingyun immediately understood the merchants' intention. Now, outside the city gate, there were injured barbarian and Goryeo soldiers everywhere. Some of them were not seriously wounded and could recover with rest.

After these people recovered, they could be sold, and that would be thirty taels of silver.

\*TN: Some readers might find certain parts of this novel unsettling, for example, when Xiao Ming allows merchants to capture and sell refugees as slaves. I just want to state that my intention is to translate this work true to the original, without leaving out any context. And please keep in mind, this novel takes place during the Age of Exploration, where acts like that were a common practice for colonizing nations. It's like the old saying, 'When in Rome, do as the Romans do.'