

## **I. Dynasty 741**

### Chapter 741

“You are quite clever.”

Ye Qingyun said calmly. In his opinion, these wounded barbarian and Goryeo soldiers were also doomed in the upcoming battle.

After all, the trampling by the assaulting soldiers would be enough to kill them. Rather than that, giving them to these merchants was nothing.

After a moment of thought, he said, “I grant this request. However, the soldiers will not provide you with protection. How many wounded soldiers you can bring back is entirely up to you.”

Ye Qingyun’s words filled the merchants with wild joy. They distributed food to the soldiers and then rushed towards the city gate.

While the two sides were in truce, they could make a huge profit. After all, slave-catching was a highly lucrative business, enough for merchants to risk their lives to collect wounded soldiers.

However, the truce only lasted for one hour. In the afternoon, the barbarians launched an even fiercer assault.

The Great Yu Empire soldiers, having eaten a full meal, now returned to their positions.

Throughout the entire afternoon, Haigucheng witnessed barbarian charges, with cannons and firearms roaring on the city walls, barbarian soldiers retreating, then charging again, and retreating again. In this tug-of-war, the barbarian army suffered more and more casualties.

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Bisa Castle.

Yue Yun, leading his warships, had already rendezvoused with Liu Chen and the others. At this moment, he frowned as he looked at Bisa Castle on the mountains.

This city, like Haigucheng, was also a difficult place to defend and attack. If Haigucheng hadn't been attacked from the sea, it would have been hard to take so easily.

And this Bisa Castle was even more of a headache.

"General, this Bisa Castle is also known as the Daeheuksan Mountain Fortress. The entire city is located on the two southern peaks and adjacent ridges of Daeheuksan in the Great Yu Empire's former territory of Liaocheng Province, extending for over ten li."

"According to historical records, this city was a mountain fortress built by Goryeo people on Daeheuksan a hundred years ago. It has cliffs on all four sides and faces the sea on three sides, making it extremely difficult to defend and attack," Liu Chen explained to Yue Yun.

Hearing this, Yue Yun nodded. He picked up his telescope and looked at Daeheuksan, five li away. Bisa Castle was situated on top of this mountain. According to his estimation, the highest point of Daeheuksan was over six hundred meters, from which one could clearly see the surrounding sea.

“Truly a city of formidable terrain.”

At this moment, Yue Yun also had to praise the Goryeo people for choosing such a location.

If they took this city, with the Great Yu Empire’s sturdy ships and powerful cannons, the barbarians would be helpless against Bisa Castle.

He hadn’t understood it before, but now he finally understood the Emperor’s decree. With such a fortress, it was like thrusting a sharp blade into the heart of the barbarians.

However, this also meant that it would be extremely difficult for them to attack this city.

“Prepare the mortars.”

Yue Yun said at this moment. For him, no matter how tough the bone, he had to gnaw it down. The Emperor entrusting him with this heavy responsibility was a sign of his trust.

Upon receiving the order, the accompanying marines immediately brought out the mortars. These cannons were most suitable for mountain warfare.

The fleet anchored in the waters on the east side of Bisa Castle. The marines traveled by small boats to the shore. Between the coast and Bisa Castle lay a vast, barren tidal flat, completely devoid of people.

Leaving Haigucheng this time, he took all the marines with him. After leaving a small number of soldiers to guard the fleet, he and Liu Chen led five thousand men towards Bisa Castle.

When the Great Yu Empire warships gathered at sea, the Goryeo generals in Bisa Castle had already spotted them.

“These few men wanting to conquer Bisa Castle are simply daydreaming.”

Kim Dong, the defender of Bisa Castle, looked contemptuously at the Great Yu Empire soldiers who had already landed. Standing on Daeheuksan at this moment, he could clearly see every move of the Great Yu Empire army.

“General Kim, Haigucheng has fallen. We must not be careless at this time,” Park Jeong-ho advised.

Kim Dong glanced indifferently at Park Jeong-ho. Last time when Beshan was in Bisa Castle, Park Jeong-ho didn’t manage to get any abalone, but instead lost several warships.

For this matter, the King of Goryeo was greatly displeased and demoted Park Jeong-ho to deputy general, while making him the main general of Bisa Castle.

“This Bisa Castle is not Haigucheng. The Great Yu Empire’s army can enter Haigucheng directly from the sea, but Bisa Castle is built on Daeheuksan. They have no way to fly up here,” Kim Dong said confidently.

Not to mention that Bisa Castle was very treacherous, there were already twenty thousand troops stationed within the city. During the war with Japan, the King of Goryeo had repeatedly tried to move the capital here. If not for the King of Goryeo’s infatuation with the prosperity of Ryukyo City, this would have already happened.

Park Jeong-ho frowned. For an ordinary army, Bisa Castle would naturally be easy to defend and difficult to attack. Even with a hundred thousand men, it would be hard to breach it with ladders and swords.

But the Great Yu Empire people used firearms, so everything could not be inferred by conventional wisdom.

He opened his mouth but ultimately said nothing. Kim Dong had always been prejudiced against him, and he knew that the commander of Bisa Castle would not listen to him.

Moreover, he currently had no solution. The Great Yu Empire’s army had already attacked, and there was no time for any preparations.

Below Daeheuksan, Yue Yun and Liu Chen walked up the winding mountain path. Soldiers, with firearms slung behind their backs, followed closely.

Witnessing the treacherousness of Bisa Castle firsthand, he increasingly understood why they had to use mortars that two men could carry, instead of field cannons, because a field cannon weighing several hundred jin would be very difficult to transport up.

After walking along the mountain path for half an hour, the city gate of Bisa Castle soon appeared before them.

The city gate of Bisa Castle was five meters high and about twenty meters long, built of stone. On both sides were vertical cliffs.

The moment they saw the city gate of Bisa Castle, Yue Yun and Liu Chen's expressions changed.

This was the only mountain path leading to Bisa Castle. They could only capture Bisa Castle by breaking through here.

"General, what should we do now?" Liu Chen looked at the Goryeo soldiers on the city gate and frowned.

Yue Yun's brows furrowed. In this situation, no strategy could be used; the only way was a direct assault.

Thinking of this, Yue Yun said, "We don't have much time. Once Beshan knows we are in Bisa Castle, he will surely rush here to reinforce. The only option now is a direct assault!"

“Yes, General.” Liu Chen’s expression was solemn. He immediately ordered the soldiers to bring the mortars forward. “Load the lime bombs.”

Under his command, the soldiers loaded the lime bombs into the mortars and fired them towards the city gate of Bisa Castle.

“Boom, boom, boom...”

With a few explosions, white lime powder enveloped the city gate of Bisa Castle. At this point, Liu Chen immediately called two soldiers and had them carry gunpowder barrels to the city gate.

While the Goryeo soldiers had lost their vision, they lit the gunpowder barrels.

“Boom!”

With a deafening roar, the stone-built city gate of Bisa Castle was directly blown away. Rocks fell from the sky, scattering everywhere.

When the lime powder dispersed, Yue Yun and the others saw clearly the scene behind the city gate: the narrow passage behind the city gate was packed with Goryeo soldiers holding swords.

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“Kill!”

In the narrow valley, soldiers from both sides almost simultaneously erupted in shouts of “kill” after a brief standoff.

The marines immediately formed ranks on the twenty-meter-wide mountain road. Their rifled muskets belched smoke and fire, and in an instant, the charging Goryeo soldiers fell one after another into pools of blood.

Encountering such a dangerous situation, Liu Chen immediately ordered his soldiers to protect Yue Yun and retreat, while also having his mortar operators continuously launch lime bombs into the Goryeo army.

In this situation, lime bombs were the most suitable type of projectile.

White lime powder exploded among the Goryeo troops. Goryeo soldiers, their eyes burned by the lime, stumbled around in the narrow valley, covering their faces.

Their originally orderly formation was suddenly jammed in the narrow passage due to the soldiers’ confusion.

“Bang, bang, bang...”

The marines, each with a grim face, continuously shot down Goryeo soldiers with their three-stage firing technique.



The Goryeo soldiers at the front had never seen firearms before. Seeing their comrades fall to the ground just a few steps after charging, they instinctively wanted to avoid the danger, but it was too late. They felt a sharp pain and then fell, their consciousness gradually fading.

As the soldiers at the front fell, the Goryeo soldiers behind, unaware of what was happening, continued to push and surge forward. However, due to the corpses on the ground and the effects of the lime bombs, the entire Goryeo army appeared somewhat disorganized.

A distance of several hundred meters quickly vanished. The Goryeo soldiers, having suffered heavy casualties, now picked up their swords and slashed at the Great Yu Empire soldiers.

This time, in attacking Bisa Castle, the marines were prepared for a tough fight. They fixed bayonets onto their muskets, and with a loud shout of “Kill,” charged towards the Goryeo forces.

The soldiers’ faces were resolute and courageous. They intended to make these Goryeo people understand that the Great Yu Empire soldiers relied not only on firearms, but even in close combat, they could still rout them.

The Goryeo general, who had thought they could defeat the Great Yu Empire army with sheer numbers, was instantly dumbfounded. The Great Yu Empire soldiers, brandishing gleaming bayonets, were like tigers entering a flock of sheep.

They used their skilled bayonet techniques to fight the Goryeo soldiers, and each thrust of a bayonet took a Goryeo soldier’s life.

The Goryeo soldiers despaired at this moment. The soldiers behind couldn't keep up due to the chaos, and they also had to face the Great Yu Empire's disciplined bayonet charge.

Leaving behind a pile of corpses, the Goryeo soldiers desperately retreated backward, while the soldiers behind them continued to push forward, making the narrow valley battle even more chaotic.

Liu Chen decisively seized this opportunity. He simultaneously had the mortar operators fire at the Goryeo army while commanding the marines to continue their charge.

Corpses piled up in the valley. The marines bypassed the city gate and began to charge towards the inner side of the valley.

The fierce fighting had by now broken the will of the Goryeo soldiers, who finally dispersed towards Bisa Castle.

Liu Chen was panting. The battle had lasted for over two hours, and he and many soldiers were exhausted, but looking at the fallen marines on the ground, his eyes reddened, and he shouted, "Kill! For our fallen brothers!"

As his voice fell, the sound of the charge bugle rang out. The soldiers, filled with fervent emotion, rushed out of the narrow valley and into Bisa Castle.

Yue Yun, who was with the army, felt a surge of energy upon hearing this news. He no longer cared for his own safety and, breaking through the obstruction of two soldiers, also headed towards Bisa Castle.

When the soldiers routed and scattered, Kim Dong fell into despair. At this moment, no matter how much he shouted, the fleeing soldiers only cared about saving their own lives, and no one obeyed his orders.

Around Bisa Castle was a low city wall. Goryeo soldiers climbed over the wall and fled west. The Great Yu Empire soldiers came from the East Gate, and this West Gate also had a path leading down the mountain.

The Goryeo soldiers, having lost over four thousand men in the valley, were utterly terrified. Using swords against the Great Yu Empire army, which was armed with firearms, was no longer a question of bravery. The sorrow of dying without even touching the enemy was something not everyone could bear.

“General Kim.” At this moment, Park Jeong-ho appeared behind Kim Dong.

Kim Dong, who was gathering gold and silver treasures, preparing to flee, turned around and saw Park Jeong-ho staring intently at him.

“This great defeat was caused by your incompetent command as deputy general!” Kim Dong instinctively shifted the blame. He knew very well that the blame for losing Bisa Castle was far more severe than Park Jeong-ho losing a few ships.

However, his voice abruptly stopped. Park Jeong-ho, with a grim face, drew his ceremonial sword and directly stabbed it into Kim Dong’s chest. “Do you think I would let you frame me again?”

Kim Dong looked at the sharp sword in his chest in disbelief. He wanted to say something, but his vision went black, and he completely lost his life.

Pulling out his ceremonial sword, Park Jeong-ho fled down the mountain. He had grown tired of the dark rule of the King of Goryeo and had no desire to remain loyal to him. For him, Goryeo's current internal and external troubles were all caused by the King of Goryeo himself.

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Haigucheng.

The battle here was equally fierce. Beishan's siege had lasted for over three days.

Within three days, Beshan continuously dispatched soldiers to assault the city. Now, the area around the city gate and outside the city was littered with the corpses of barbarian soldiers.

"This is the fourth day."

Ye Qingyun was somewhat tired, and the soldiers were equally fatigued, but Beishan seemed to have no intention of stopping the assault.

"This Beishan is truly persistent." Zou Cheng frowned. He continued, "But since yesterday, he has been using barbarian soldiers to attack the city, right?"

“That’s right. These barbarian soldiers fight fearlessly and are clearly not slave soldiers or Goryeo soldiers.” Ye Qingyun’s mood improved somewhat. At least this meant Beishan was also at the end of his rope.

Zou Cheng said, “If that’s the case, Beishan won’t last much longer. Haigucheng is still strong; he won’t win.”

“Indeed. However, he has kept the city under siege, which means the Emperor’s plan to force the King of Goryeo to sign a treaty and open trade ports will be continuously delayed. This time, we must make the King of Goryeo understand that the barbarians cannot protect them!”

Zou Cheng sensed a hint of gunpowder in Ye Qingyun’s words. He said, “General, do you intend to go out and meet them in battle?”

“Only by doing so can we defeat Beishan. Rest for half a day, then launch an attack on the barbarian camp this afternoon.” Ye Qingyun said. The current situation was a test of both sides’ endurance.

He wouldn’t have dared to do this before, but now he had confidence because the army’s provisions had been very good these past two years.

The soldiers serving in the army were all well-fed and strong. With regular training, their bodies were even more robust, no longer skinny like before.

Noon arrived in an instant. Amidst the melodious sound of flutes, the soldiers assembled outside the city, marching to the rhythm of military music.

Ye Qingyun, on horseback, stood on the left flank of the formation. When the formation was complete, he ordered the soldiers to advance towards the barbarian camp.

“Thump, thump, thump... thump, thump, thump...”

As the soldiers advanced, the sound of drums and flutes rang out simultaneously. Soldiers, arranged in formations of two hundred men, marched steadily forward with their flintlock guns.

Melodious music reverberated in front of Haigucheng.

For Beishan, this was not enjoyment, but despair.

Four consecutive days of siege had decimated more than half of his army. The Goryeo army was directly crushed. Now, he was isolated and helpless, facing the Great Yu Empire's army alone.

“Prince, let's retreat.” Guduo glanced at the Great Yu Empire army continuously approaching their camp.

If it had been before, they would surely have led the cavalry in a charge. But after experiencing the hollow square formation deployed by the Great Yu Empire army, they no longer had absolute confidence. Moreover, his current soldiers were very tired after four days of fierce fighting, and he no longer held a numerical advantage.

The marching music of the Great Yu Empire army grew closer and closer. Beishan's brows furrowed deeper and deeper. He truly could not understand why an army on the march for battle would beat gongs and drums.

However, he understood that this was a dangerous signal.

Glancing at the twenty thousand cavalry behind him, a fierce glint flashed in Beishan's eyes. He said to Guduo, "If I retreat, I will never again be able to hold my head high before my Father Khan. The other princes will also mock me. Only the heads of the Great Yu Empire generals can wash away my shame."

With that, he shouted loudly, "Kill these Great Yu Empire bastards!"

Under his command, the bugle call suddenly blared. The barbarian cavalry furiously spurred their warhorses, charging towards the Great Yu Empire army in front of Haigucheng.

Ye Qingyun, seeing this, looked grim. He ordered the army to switch to a hollow square formation.

Previously, the Great Yu Empire army had never directly clashed with barbarian cavalry in open ground. If anything, they had only relied on the advantage of chariots to offset the cavalry's advantage.

This time, he very boldly chose to rely solely on the hollow square formation against the barbarian cavalry. This was not Ye Qingyun being reckless, but his trust in the current Great Yu Empire army.

Excellent training, good provisions, and battle-hardened experience—all of this gradually transformed the Great Yu Empire army from a weak force into a formidable, wolf-like army.

Under Ye Qingyun's command, the marching formation suddenly shifted rapidly. In a very short time, the soldiers formed five hollow square formations.

And at the front of each hollow square formation were twenty heavy smoothbore guns. They now aimed their muzzles at the charging cavalry.

Amidst the rumbling of hooves, dust swirled up from the ground. Barbarian cavalry, clad in silver armor, brandished their sabers high. Under the golden sunlight, a cold glint flashed.

The Great Yu Empire soldiers held their breath at this moment. The front-rank soldiers tightly gripped their flintlock guns as if holding onto their lives.

This was their first direct confrontation with barbarian cavalry. Amidst their nervousness, a sense of heroic pride also swelled within them.

"Boom, boom, boom..."

Before the barbarian cavalry could approach the hollow square formations, the artillery on both sides of the hollow square formations began to unleash cannon fire.



As the soldiers advanced, the artillerymen also pushed their six-pound field cannons, following the soldiers forward. These six-pound field cannons were light, and three men could push them forward.

And while the field cannons bombarded the barbarian cavalry, the soldiers carrying mortars also shelled the barbarian cavalry with lime bombs.

Under the artillery's attack, barbarian cavalry began suffering casualties four hundred meters away.

This time, to assault the open square formation of the Great Yu Empire, Beishan chose a dense charge, because only this way could he break through such a formation in one fell swoop.

And once the formation was broken, what followed would be their massacre of the Great Yu Empire soldiers.

However, the dense formation immediately became a target for artillery fire at this moment. Solid shot, like skewered gourds, instantly took the lives of over a dozen barbarian cavalymen.

These cavalymen fell to the ground, impeding the actions of the cavalry behind them. Some cavalymen, unable to dodge in time, were tripped by the fallen cavalry, causing them to fall with their horses.

And those cavalymen who managed to dodge immediately fell into disarray.

Even more terrifying than live ammunition were the lime bombs. These shells had little lethality but were enough to blind cavalry.

Blind barbarian cavalymen and horses crashed around like headless flies. The formation Beishan had organized quickly fell into confusion and was utterly disrupted.

Ye Qingyun watched this scene with satisfaction. The purpose of artillery was to disrupt the enemy's formation.

Engaging cavalry on such open ground was terrifying, but if the cavalry became chaotic, they would be easy to deal with.

However, despite the confusion, the barbarian cavalry continued to charge towards the hollow square formation. At two hundred meters, the heavy smoothbore guns in front of the hollow square formation opened fire on the barbarian cavalry.

Clusters of steel balls rushed towards the barbarian cavalry from the muzzles, and instantly, another horse fell, further disrupting their formation.

Two hundred meters was but an instant for cavalry. The heavy smoothbore guns had one more chance to fire.

The soldiers immediately reloaded and fired a second volley.

After firing, the heavy smoothbore gunners retreated to the inner side of the hollow square formation.

While the heavy smoothbore guns fired, the rifled musketeers also fired simultaneously. Using their range advantage, they fired from over two hundred meters away.

Under successive volleys, the barbarian cavalry charging towards the hollow square formation were in utter chaos. As they entered the one hundred-meter range, the flintlock guns fired their last volley.

Immediately after, the first rank of soldiers in the hollow square formation quickly knelt down, tilting their flintlock guns towards the direction from which the cavalry came. The second rank of soldiers continued to fire, followed by the third rank.

Under the fierce firepower, the barbarian cavalry left a trail of corpses. The remaining scattered cavalry charged towards the hollow square formation like moths to a flame.

Warhorses were impaled by bayonets. Barbarian cavalry slammed directly into the Great Yu Empire soldiers. Under the immense impact, the Great Yu Empire soldiers immediately staggered backward, and a slight disarray appeared where they were hit.

But the soldiers behind immediately braced against the cavalry's impact, preventing them from breaking through the formation.

Under the continuous assault of firearms, the charging barbarian cavalry were merely splashes of water hitting a rock. The hollow square formation remained as stable as a rock.

The first wave of five thousand men failed. Beishan's face turned ashen. The Great Yu Empire soldiers before them seemed to have become an insurmountable obstacle.

He was shocked. When did the Great Yu Empire's army become so refined?

"Prince, let's retreat. Our tribesmen are not afraid of death, but they shouldn't throw away their lives for Goryeo," Guduo said anxiously.

Beishan's eyes dimmed. The Great Yu Empire army then advanced again. As they passed by each wounded cavalryman, the Great Yu Empire soldiers would end the Golden Tent Khanate soldier's life with a bayonet.

This round of assault made Beishan realize that he could not easily break the formation as he had defeated the Great Yu Empire army before.

Turning his horse around, Beishan headed in the direction of Ryukyo City. At this moment, he suddenly realized that the Golden Tent Khanate needed time to train a firearm army, otherwise, they would never be able to defeat the Great Yu Empire.

Perhaps he should heed the Japanese's suggestion and meet that British man.

On the smoke-filled battlefield, the Great Yu Empire soldiers cheered for victory.

After the barbarian cavalry retreated, they successfully occupied the barbarian camp. The Battle of Haigucheng finally ended in a hard-won victory.

Ye Qingyun smiled broadly. For him, this was more worthy of pride than defeating the Princes of Wei, Yan, and Zhao.

Decades of humiliation were fully vented in this battle.

“What a pity. If Qi Guangyi were here, Beshan and his men wouldn’t have escaped,” Ye Qingyun surveyed the battlefield, feeling a touch of regret.

Zou Cheng heard this and said, “The Emperor’s decree is for us to force the King of Goryeo to comply. Beishan is secondary.”

Ye Qingyun nodded. Regardless, Haigucheng was defended. Their purpose for coming to Haigucheng this time had been achieved.

Then he asked, “Oh, by the way, where is Li Cheng-jae?”

“General, I’m here,” Li Cheng-jae’s voice rang out.

At this moment, Li Cheng-jae's eyes held a hint of awe. For these four days, he and the Great Yu Empire soldiers had experienced this battle together.

He had personally witnessed how the Great Yu Empire had repelled the barbarian attacks step by step, finally defeating the barbarian cavalry outside the city in one fell swoop.

This shocking experience made him feel humbled. The Great Yu Empire was no longer the Great Yu Empire of the past; it was a rising, powerful nation.

This further solidified his intention to follow the Great Yu Empire's path. Perhaps the next King of Goryeo would be him. At this moment, his ambition expanded infinitely.

Ye Qingyun scrutinized Li Cheng-jae. He said, "You go to Ryukyo City. This King of Goryeo should also understand what he needs to do now."

"Yes, General." Li Cheng-jae felt a surge of excitement.

The first time he went, he was nervous, but now he was full of confidence. The barbarians were defeated; what else could the King of Goryeo rely on?

At the same time, as Haigucheng achieved victory, Yue Yun gained control of Bisa Castle.

After the rout, Goryeo soldiers scattered and fled, no longer able to launch attacks on the marines. He also discovered Kim Dong's body in a residence in Bisa Castle.

According to the confessions of Goryeo soldiers, this Kim Dong was the commanding general of Bisa Castle.

"I didn't expect them to start fighting among themselves before we even broke in," Liu Chen said, his demeanor relaxed. After the Goryeo soldiers' rout, the battle became much easier.

Yue Yun glanced at Kim Dong's corpse, then looked at the gold and silver jewelry beside him, saying disdainfully, "He must have deserted and been killed by other generals. That general was a true man."

Liu Chen didn't care what happened to Kim Dong. He suddenly looked at a transparent stone in Liu Chen's box.

He picked it up and said to Yue Yun, "General, what is this?"

Yue Yun looked at the transparent stone in Liu Chen's hand. It resembled glass. He then suddenly remembered something and said, "Oh, by the way, didn't the Mining Department send someone here this time?"

Liu Chen also recalled it. He said, "That's right. The person from the Mining Department might recognize this. He specifically followed us to Bisa Castle."

With that, Liu Chen immediately sent for the person from the Mining Department.

Soon, a young man dressed in the Mining Department's attire arrived in the room. Yue Yun handed the item to him.

"This is a diamond," Li Tai said. He was the person dispatched by the Mining Department this time.

Yue Yun and Liu Chen immediately smiled upon hearing this. They had never heard of such a thing. He said, "What kind of stone is this that it can be worthy of the word 'diamond'?"

Li Tai said matter-of-factly, "Because this stone is very hard. It can even be used to cut glass and as tools. It is clearly recorded in the books of Bowen Academy that there are many of these near Bisa Castle, which is why the Mining Department dispatched me to search for them on site. It seems this place indeed has them."

Yue Yun and Liu Chen were only responsible for fighting. Although they couldn't understand things like tools, they felt this item was very impressive.

"So this Bisa Castle is indeed a treasure trove," Yue Yun said with a sigh.

Li Tai's face was somewhat excited. He listed them off, as if counting his family treasures, "That's not all. Near Bisa Castle, there are also deposits of limestone, silica, asbestos, magnesite, talc, and also large iron mines and placer deposits. There are also some copper and lead-zinc mines, but in smaller quantities."



Liu Chen was dumbfounded. He felt a bit jealous. After all, soldiers and scholars usually didn't get along. He said, "You haven't even gone to look, so how do you know everything?"

"Everything is in the books," Li Tai said, completely unconcerned by Liu Chen's attitude.

Yue Yun smiled. He used to never read books, but ever since he joined Xiao Ming's command, he first learned to read under Xiao Ming's guidance, and then began reading various military treatises. Because of this, he no longer had the same prejudice against scholars as before.

He said, "Since that is the case, you will spend these days finding these mines. Since the Emperor dispatched you here, it must be for these mineral resources."

Li Tai nodded. The Mining Department naturally had a plan for Bisa Castle, provided Yue Yun could capture it.

"That's natural, but General Yue also needs to cooperate with our Mining Department to establish imperial mines here," Li Tai said.

Yue Yun was a bit surprised. He said, "How can I help you?"

"It's simple. The Emperor will not allow the Mining Department to recruit artisans from the Great Yu Empire to come here. So, we can only have the Goryeo people of Bisa Castle mine the ore and transport it back to the Great Yu Empire."

Yue Yun nodded. This was the current strategy of the Great Yu Empire. Their purpose this time was to make Goryeo a supply base for materials and a market for goods for the Great Yu Empire.

Liu Chen felt a sense of exhilaration upon hearing this. He said, "These Goryeo people used to send Great Yu Empire fishermen they caught to forced labor in the mines. Now, we can finally exact our revenge."

Yue Yun also had no pity for the Goryeo people. Decades of bullying by the barbarians, Goryeo people, and Japanese people against the Great Yu Empire had taught them that cheap sympathy for enemies would only lead to all kinds of humiliation once the enemy grew strong.

For him, what they needed to do now was to make the Great Yu Empire strong at all costs. Only then could the Great Yu Empire avoid returning to the era of being bullied.

"We will cooperate with the Mining Department on this matter, Liu Chen. You now go and count the number of Goryeo people in Bisa Castle and register the strong ones for future needs."

"Yes, General," Liu Chen nodded. He then said, "What about the remaining Goryeo people?"

Yue Yun pondered for a moment. He said, "Although we need these Goryeo people to mine for the Great Yu Empire this time, we don't need to overly coerce them. At least let them have enough to eat, otherwise, if they are driven to desperation, it will not be good."

"General Yue is a reasonable man. That's indeed true. What the Great Yu Empire needs is ore. As long as they can peacefully mine, that's enough," Li Tai said with a smile.

Liu Chen understood and turned to leave. The two meant that there was no need to escalate conflicts with the Goryeo common people.

Chapter 744

Ryukyo City.

The barbarian cavalry returned in disarray, and news of the defeat at Haigucheng spread through the city like wildfire.

The King of Goryeo cautiously watched Beishan, who was completely drunk. He felt remorse but dared not question the outcome of the battle's failure.

Haigucheng was only two days away from Ryukyo City. The Great Yu Empire had defeated the barbarians, and he could imagine how the Great Yu Empire would retaliate for this attack on Haigucheng.

Thinking of this, the King of Goryeo felt a chill run down his spine.

As he was in a state of indecision, a general rushed into the palace and whispered a few words to him.

"What! Bisa Castle has been breached by the Great Yu Empire's army!" The King of Goryeo's heart trembled.

Bisa Castle was easy to defend but difficult to attack. It had historically resisted several expeditions from the Central Plains dynasties against Goryeo. He had always regarded Bisa Castle as his last refuge.

But now, this refuge had also fallen. Thus, besides Ryukyo City, he would have nowhere else to go.

The drunken Beishan, hearing this, immediately sobered up considerably. After returning from Haigucheng to Ryukyo City, he had indulged in wine and women.

“Bisa Castle is lost!” Beishan abruptly stood up and grabbed the King of Goryeo’s collar. “You Goryeo people are all useless! Haigucheng routed, and Bisa Castle couldn’t be held either! Now the Great Yu Empire occupies Bisa Castle. They can attack the Golden Tent Khanate from the north and sweep across all of Goryeo from the south! How could you lose such an important city?”

The King of Goryeo’s face turned beet red. Caught by Beishan’s collar, he struggled to breathe. “Prince Beishan, the Great Yu Empire’s army came from the sea. We had no time to send reinforcements. Bisa Castle only had twenty thousand men; how could it be a match for the Great Yu Empire’s army? Now, why don’t Prince Beishan and I go together to retake Bisa Castle?”

Hearing this, Beishan became even more enraged. Decades ago, when Goryeo had not yet submitted to the Golden Tent Khanate, his father had personally led over two hundred thousand men in a fierce assault on Bisa Castle to conquer it.

Even so, Bisa Castle, with only fifty thousand men, had held back the two hundred thousand strong army outside its walls for half a year.

Ultimately, it was the King of Goryeo who offered a letter of surrender, and only then did they retreat down the mountain.

Because of this, they were all well aware of the strategic importance of Bisa Castle. Now that the Great Yu Empire occupied it, with its firearms, it would become an even more formidable fortress. From now on, the Great Yu Empire would be like a nail driven into the flank of the Golden Tent Khanate.

Thinking of this, he violently pushed the King of Goryeo to the ground and angrily said, "Dream on! From today onwards, the Golden Tent Khanate will not lose another man for you Goryeo, unless you yourselves retake Bisa Castle!"

Beishan's intense savagery terrified the King of Goryeo, who soiled himself. His face was ashen, and he trembled, not daring to speak.

The Goryeo officials also lowered their heads, appearing obsequious. The barbarian cavalry was in the city. Perhaps they couldn't defeat the Great Yu Empire's army, but they were certainly enough to deal with them.

Beishan's anger had not yet fully vented. As he was about to continue scolding the King of Goryeo, Guduo entered from outside and suddenly stopped him. "Prince, the King of Goryeo is still the King of Goryeo, after all."

Anger seemed to bring back Beishan's drunkenness. He said, "What if he is the King of Goryeo? Now they are merely a feudal state of the Golden Tent Khanate, and they cannot escape our grasp."

The King of Goryeo lay on the ground. At this moment, all of Beishan's humiliations festered within him.

Because of the vast disparity in strength, he was so humble before the Golden Tent Khanate. But he was, after all, the King of Goryeo, the highest power holder on this land.

Guduo looked worriedly at the King of Goryeo. At this point, he said to Beishan, “The Great Yu Empire’s army is advancing towards Ryukyo City. Prince, this is not the time to vent anger. We should return to the grasslands.”

Beishan opened his mouth upon hearing this. Rather than saying he resented the King of Goryeo, it was more accurate to say he resented himself. Picking up the wine cup on the table, Beishan drained it and said to the King of Goryeo, “Remember, Goryeo is a feudal state of the Golden Tent Khanate. If you betray us, the Golden Tent Khanate’s cavalry will raze Goryeo to the ground.”

With that, Beishan followed Guduo out.

The King of Goryeo slowly rose as Beishan’s figure disappeared through the palace gate. At this moment, his eyes were filled with venom.

“Too deceitful! For these past few years in Goryeo, I have been as flattering as possible, yet he still treats me like a dog!” The King of Goryeo clenched his fists tightly.

The officials were silent, no one dared to utter a word.

The King of Goryeo swept his gaze across the ministers. He suddenly drew his ceremonial sword and pointed it at a minister who had his head bowed. “All of you call me ‘Your Majesty,’ but do you truly hold me, your king, in your hearts? When Beishan humiliated me, why did none of you speak up?”

The ministers trembled. One minister cried, "Your Majesty, please calm your anger. The Golden Tent Khanate is powerful; Goryeo cannot afford to provoke them. Although the Great Yu Empire has taken two cities, they have no intention of occupying Goryeo."

"That's right, Your Majesty. Although Beishan was defeated this time, the Golden Tent Khanate is still not someone we can afford to provoke. Your Majesty, please reconsider," a minister said.

The King of Goryeo roared in anger, "The Golden Tent Khanate cannot be provoked, and now is the Great Yu Empire someone Goryeo can provoke? Now Bisa Castle and Haigucheng are both occupied, and the Goryeo waters are blockaded by the Great Yu Empire's navy. What do you say we should do now?"

The officials looked at each other. At this point, an official said, "Does Your Majesty remember Li Cheng-jae, who entered the palace a few days ago?"

"I naturally remember him," the King of Goryeo snorted. Although he was extremely annoyed, Beishan had simply left, and he had to clean up this mess.

The official said, "This Li Cheng-jae once spoke of the Great Yu Empire's conditions in the palace. If we agree to them, they will cease military action."

The King of Goryeo frowned. At that time, officials in the palace had even humiliated this Li Cheng-jae, but he never expected that in just a few days, he would have to turn around and beg Li Cheng-jae.

“But where is this Li Cheng-jae now?” the King of Goryeo asked.

The official said, “Your Majesty, this Li Cheng-jae is none other than Li Hyuk-jae’s illegitimate son. Entrusting this matter to him will be sufficient.”

“Li Hyuk-jae.” The King of Goryeo looked at Li Hyuk-jae, who had almost shrunk his head into his official robes. “Your good son. I now order you to immediately invite Li Cheng-jae into the palace, otherwise, I will kill you.”

Li Hyuk-jae’s forehead was covered in cold sweat. He quickly knelt and said, “Your Majesty, I will go find him now.”

With that, Li Hyuk-jae repeatedly kowtowed, secretly lamenting his fate.

Now, he deeply regretted how he had treated Li Cheng-jae back then. Now, he had to beg this rebellious son.

As he was thinking, a soldier suddenly entered the great hall and said to the King of Goryeo, “Your Majesty, Li Cheng-jae has arrived outside the city.”

The King of Goryeo rejoiced. He said to Li Hyuk-jae, “Then hurry and invite him into the palace!”

Chapter 745

Li Cheng-jae rode on horseback, his head held high.



In Ryukyo City, he had never felt as imposing as he did today. Of course, he knew very well that everything he had now was given by the Great Yu Empire.

If the Great Yu Empire had not defeated Goryeo, he would probably be decapitated by now.

So, from the beginning, he had gambled like a gambler, and the result was that he won.

Now, he not only received preferential treatment from the King of Goryeo, but his beastly father also groveled before him, now leading his horse.

Upon reaching the palace gate, Li Cheng-jae saw the King of Goryeo already waiting there, and all the Goryeo officials looked respectful.

At this moment, Li Cheng-jae's gaze lingered on Kim Chang-seo, who was in the crowd. This person, who used to mock him, now had his head bowed, not daring to meet his gaze.

Seeing this scene, Li Cheng-jae couldn't help but sneer.

However, he did not forget his mission. He was not here for revenge but for the trade ports.

“Li Cheng-jae, I have been waiting for your arrival these past few days,” the King of Goryeo said with a smile, appearing very intimate with Li Cheng-jae.

Li Cheng-jae also smiled, bowing slightly as he said, “Your Majesty.”

The King of Goryeo nodded in satisfaction and pulled Li Cheng-jae into the palace. Li Cheng-jae’s arrival was timely; the barbarians had already withdrawn from Ryukyo City.

Now, without the barbarians, Ryukyo City was his domain again.

Seated in the palace, Li Cheng-jae did not talk much with the King of Goryeo. The Great Yu Empire was now awaiting his news, so he directly stated all of the Great Yu Empire’s conditions.

“General Ye said that besides ceding Haigucheng and Bisa Castle, from now on, Great Yu Empire goods shall circulate freely in Goryeo, Goryeo shall not levy any taxes on Great Yu Empire goods, and at the same time, Great Yu Empire merchants shall possess extraterritoriality in Goryeo.”

“Extraterritoriality? What is that?” the King of Goryeo asked, puzzled.

Li Cheng-jae was also a bit confused when he first heard this term. After an explanation, he understood. So he said, “This extraterritoriality means that if Great Yu Empire citizens violate the law in Goryeo, Goryeo cannot punish them according to Goryeo law. Instead, the merchants must be handed over to the Great Yu Empire for punishment.”

The Goryeo officials’ faces grew uglier and uglier as they listened, because this meant that Great Yu Empire citizens would become superior in Goryeo, while they would become inferior.

The King of Goryeo's smile faded. He said, "If that's the case, wouldn't Great Yu Empire citizens be able to violate laws freely in Goryeo?"

"Not at all. The Great Yu Empire's laws are strict. This measure is only to prevent Goryeo officials from deliberately making things difficult for Great Yu Empire citizens," Li Cheng-jae already had an excuse.

"Is there more?" The King of Goryeo's heart bled. If he agreed to these conditions, it would mean Goryeo losing part of its sovereignty.

Li Cheng-jae nodded and continued, "After Haigucheng and Bisa Castle are ceded, they will become Great Yu Empire territory. Invading Haigucheng and Bisa Castle will be considered an act of war against the Great Yu Empire."

With that, Li Cheng-jae took out a treaty. He said, "The Great Yu Empire's demands are all in this treaty. As long as Your Majesty signs it, the Great Yu Empire will withdraw its troops."

The King of Goryeo took the written document, his body trembling slightly. It contained six articles. The first article: the Great Yu Empire and Goryeo would jointly declare an end to the war and a formal truce.

The second article: the four coastal cities of Goryeo – Daehaengseong, Jeongcheonseong, Baekjeongseong, and Ryukyo City – would all become trade ports, permitting the Great Yu Empire to dispatch permanent consuls and allowing Great Yu Empire merchants and their families to reside freely.

The third article: territorial cession, Goryeo would cede Haigucheng and Bisa Castle to the Great Yu Empire.

The fourth article: reparations, Goryeo would pay the Great Yu Empire three million taels of silver for war expenses. If there was no silver, it could be offset by ore, grain, or slaves.

The fifth article: allowing Great Yu Empire merchants and Goryeo merchants to trade freely, exempting all goods from taxes, and at the same time, Great Yu Empire citizens would possess extraterritoriality.

Having read these five conditions one by one, the King of Goryeo could barely breathe. The Great Yu Empire was essentially putting him on a hot stove. Once he signed this treaty, he would be cursed for all eternity.

“Your Majesty, the Great Yu Empire has not given us much time. Annihilation or treaty, Your Majesty can only choose one,” Li Cheng-jae noted the King of Goryeo’s hesitation.

Taking a deep breath, the King of Goryeo asked, “If that’s the case, does the Great Yu Empire’s promise to deal with the Japanese still hold true?”

“General Ye said that if Japan dares to advance north, they will blockade Japan’s shipping routes,” Li Cheng-jae said.

The King of Goryeo nodded. He sighed. Now, his biggest worry was Japan continuing its advance northward. The Great Yu Empire had given them this promise, so signing this treaty seemed to pose no problem.

More importantly, through this matter, he gradually realized that he couldn't solely rely on the Golden Tent Khanate. He had to maintain a balance between the Great Yu Empire and the Golden Tent Khanate.

"Bring the royal seal," the King of Goryeo said in a deep voice.

At this, an official respectfully presented the jade-carved royal seal. The royal seal was then stamped on the document titled "Haigucheng Treaty."

Li Cheng-jae, seeing this, showed a profound smile. He said, "Your Majesty is wise. Actually, the Great Yu Empire people only wish to conduct commerce in Goryeo. The purpose of taking Bisa Castle is to deal with the Golden Tent Khanate. The Great Yu Empire and the Golden Tent Khanate are ancient enemies. Goryeo need not get involved."

"Cheng-jae's words make sense. I was indeed reckless," the King of Goryeo said, looking fatigued. Being caught between the Golden Tent Khanate, Japan, and the Great Yu Empire was truly difficult.

Li Cheng-jae nodded. He then put away the treaty and said, "Your Majesty, I must now return to Haigucheng to report. I hope Your Majesty remembers these conditions. If violated, the fires of war will surely rekindle. I bid you farewell."

With that, Li Cheng-jae turned and left, leaving behind a stunned King of Goryeo.

The officials, seeing Li Cheng-jae's figure disappear, then began to clamor. "This Li Cheng-jae is nothing but a lowly commoner, yet now, having turned traitor and sold out our country, he's acting arrogant!"

"Exactly! Li Hyuk-jae, you truly raised a fine son!"

"..."

The officials argued and cursed, unsure whether it was out of hatred for Li Cheng-jae or simply envy. After all, the current Li Cheng-jae was truly in a superior position, not even needing to show deference to the King of Goryeo.

Meanwhile, Li Cheng-jae rode his horse towards Haigucheng. He arrived at Haigucheng by noon the next day.

Meeting Ye Qingyun, he presented the "Haigucheng Treaty" bearing the King of Goryeo's royal seal.

"Hmm, very good."

Ye Qingyun rejoiced. Their purpose in coming to Goryeo this time had been achieved. From now on, the Great Yu Empire's goods would freely enter Goryeo, and this place would become a dumping ground for industrial products.

Putting away the treaty, Ye Qingyun called a personal guard and said to him, "You are to immediately take this treaty to Qingzhou Province."

Responding with a "Yes," the personal guard took the treaty and turned towards the harbor. After two days adrift at sea and three days traveling by land, the treaty arrived in Qingzhou Province.

Chapter 746

Fei Ji's hand trembled slightly as he held the "Haigucheng Treaty."

After the morning court session today, he and Pang Yukun were summoned by Xiao Ming to the imperial study. Xiao Ming then produced this treaty, bearing the royal seal of the King of Goryeo.

"How many years has it been? The Great Yu Empire has finally held its head high," Fei Ji said, tears streaming down his face.

Throughout his life assisting Xiao Wenxuan, he had endured the suffering of being bullied by the barbarians, Goryeo, and Japan. Whenever a battle occurred at the border, he and all the civil and military officials in the court would be terrified, swallowing their anger.

Sometimes it wasn't that they lacked backbone, but that the national strength was insufficient.

But now, under Xiao Ming's rule, the Great Yu Empire was different from the past. The Golden Tent Khanate was no longer so formidable. Although it still posed a threat to the Great Yu Empire, it was not enough to make all the civil and military officials blanch.

Pang Yukun's expression was excited. His lifelong ambition was to serve the nation and leave his name in history. Now that such an opportunity was before him, how could he give it up?

Fei Ji's gaze was deep. When Xiao Ming first ascended the throne, he had once looked down on this monarch, thinking that he was young and incapable of leading the ministers, and that state affairs would still have to rely on experienced officials like them.

But now, Xiao Ming had proven with one achievement after another that under his rule, the Great Yu Empire would only grow stronger.

"Senior Grand Secretary Pang's words are truly in line with my heart, Your Majesty. As the saying goes, 'learn literary and martial arts, sell your wares to the imperial family.' I, your old servant, will henceforth be at Your Majesty's disposal," Fei Ji said with emotion.

Seeing this, Xiao Ming smiled slightly. This "Haigucheng Treaty" was a victory outwardly, and also a victory inwardly.

During his reign, there had been resistance within the Great Yu Empire. At such a moment, one way to enhance his imperial prestige was through conquest.

Now he had achieved it. This would surely be a slap in the face to those who secretly opposed the reforms. Following the old system, the Great Yu Empire suffered all sorts of humiliations. Removing the old and embracing the new, the Great Yu Empire now commanded awe within the seas.

"With your words, I am relieved. You are my trusted ministers. Only when you and I are of one heart will the Great Yu Empire prosper, and these reforms can continue to deepen," Xiao Ming said calmly.

The two nodded simultaneously.



At this point, Xiao Ming retrieved the treaty from Fei Ji. He said, "When you return, focus on publicizing this matter in the newspapers. It's time for the common people to vent their frustrations."

Pang Yukun understood. Now, every major breakthrough achieved by the Great Yu Empire was published in the newspapers for merchants and common people to know.

For him, this was also a way to strengthen the common people's sense of identity.

The two agreed to the task and turned to leave.

The next day, the "Qingzhou Daily" was published with "The Haigucheng Treaty" as its headline, creating a ripple effect.

"Bisa Castle and Haigucheng ceded to our Great Yu Empire! This can be called expanding our territory! Our Great Yu Empire's army is mighty!"

Inside a restaurant, four students from different academies sat around a table. They were all descendants of Chang'an nobles, now studying in various academies in Qingzhou Province.

The student who spoke wore a green robe, clearly a student from the military academy. As his words fell, the student beside him, wearing a silver robe, said, "You blockhead only understands fighting! The most important part of this Haigucheng Treaty is the trade clauses below. With this, Great Yu Empire goods can circulate freely in Goryeo, and the merchants must be overjoyed now."

The other two students nodded. The student from the political affairs academy said, "Now that Bisa Castle and Haigucheng have become our Great Yu Empire's territory, it's time to assign officials, isn't it?"

"Indeed, officials must be dispatched. Look, doesn't it say 'consul' here? But the two cities are isolated overseas; wouldn't going there be a hardship?" The remaining student shook his head.

"Suffering hardships is much better than doing nothing in Qingzhou City. Now, we, the descendants of former Chang'an officials, have no reliance. We can only seek jobs alongside commoner students. If you don't go, they will take those positions. You shouldn't live in the past anymore."

The student from the political affairs academy reminded him.

His words made the atmosphere a bit heavy. Since they came to Qingzhou Province, everything had changed. Overnight, the privileges they enjoyed seemed to have slipped away.

Now, all he had left were memories of looking down on poor scholars.

As they sighed, a table of newly seated guests next to them suddenly burst into laughter.

A young man sitting facing west, holding a newspaper, said, "Our Emperor is truly brilliant and mighty! Goryeo has lost two cities in one go!"

“Brother Wuliu, that’s not all! Now we should be thinking about how to sell our cloth to Goryeo. So many textile workshops have sprung up in Qingzhou Province, and the price of cloth keeps dropping. If this continues, we’ll lose money,” Shangguan Yong complained.

The young man was Zhu Wuliu. His business had been good since the textile workshop started production, and his silver reserves were once again abundant.

Being wealthy, he often brought Shangguan Yong and others to restaurants for drinks. Of course, he couldn’t afford the Wei Family Restaurant, but the small taverns in the commoner districts were quite casual.

Zhu Wuliu sighed. Shangguan Yong was speaking the truth. With more textile workshops, the price of cloth was falling, but cotton was rising due to high demand. He was now even thinking of planting cotton.

However, Shangguan Yong’s words still reminded him. The current Zhu Wuliu had the keen insight of a merchant. Goryeo was a market that Great Yu Empire merchants had never entered before. The Great Yu Empire’s high-quality and inexpensive cloth would surely sell well there.

And most importantly, it seemed from this “Haigucheng Treaty” that Great Yu Empire merchants would enjoy various preferential treatments in Goryeo.

Chapter 747

The fragrance of stir-fried dishes filled the restaurant.

After the stir-fried dishes at Wei Family Restaurant became popular, stir-fried dishes also appeared in other restaurants in Qingzhou Province.

Although the taste of these stir-fried dishes was not as good as those at Wei Family Restaurant, they were still much more delicious than before.

When the food arrived, Shangguan Yong continued to press, "Brother Wuliu, what do you say?"

After some thought, Zhu Wuliu said, "It's just that we don't have ships, so we can't transport the cloth to Goryeo at all. Even if we could, we're not familiar with Goryeo, so we must find Goryeo merchants to cooperate with."

"Alas, so the profits from Goryeo this time will once again be taken by those big merchants. They have ships and can go directly to Goryeo," Shangguan Yong sighed.

As the two were speaking, a tall, thin young man from among the four academy students came up to them.

With a smile, the young man cupped his hands and said, "Are you two discussing trade in Goryeo?"

Zhu Wuliu and Shangguan Yong glanced at the student's attire. Zhu Wuliu said, "Precisely. May I ask what advice you have, my friend?"

"I dare not offer advice. My name is Lu Yichen. My father was formerly the county magistrate of Wannian County in Chang'an. He has now resigned from his official post and is engaged in trade in

Qingzhou Province, specifically in water transport. Just now, I overheard that you two need merchant ships to transport cloth to Goryeo, so I came to inform you,” Lu Yichen said.

“Your water transport merchant ships can also go to Goryeo?” Zhu Wuliu asked, puzzled. “Not all water transport ships can travel on the sea.”

Lu Yichen said, “Since I dare to say so, I can naturally transport your cloth to Goryeo. If you need, you can inquire at Lu Ji Shipping.”

Zhu Wuliu and Shangguan Yong exchanged glances. There were many merchants in Qingzhou City, and quite a few unscrupulous ones among them. They had a lot of cloth that they sold but couldn’t collect the silver for.

Therefore, they were wary of traveling merchants. Shangguan Yong then deliberately bluffed, “I’m not afraid to tell you, this Zhu Wuliu’s elder brother is Zhu Sansi, a captain in the Qingzhou army. If you dare to deceive us, we won’t let you off.”

Lu Yichen said, “I naturally wouldn’t dare.”

Zhu Wuliu nodded. The merchant ships of large merchants were expensive, and their business already had thin profits. If they used those ships, there wouldn’t be much to gain.

So they could only use the merchant ships of these smaller merchants. However, he wouldn’t believe Lu Yichen based on just a few words. He would compare prices and services from three different providers; he always had to find the right merchant ship.

Ding Mansion.

Ding Wanqian and his son, Ding Wu, also received the news immediately.

The sharp-sighted Ding Wanqian said, "This matter should be dealt with sooner rather than later. You should go and inventory the merchant ships now and see how many can set sail for Goryeo."

"Yes, Father," Ding Wu said, his face excited. He also clearly saw the business opportunity.

Before Ding Wu could leave, Ding Wanqian continued, "Wait. Also, send someone immediately to purchase goods like cloth, white sugar, and perfume. This time, we're going to make a fortune in Goryeo. The Emperor has now made this public, and other merchants must surely know about it, especially the Cao family. They must be overjoyed."

"Father is absolutely right. Now, a large number of merchants have gathered around the Cao family. It's said they are even going to establish the Cao Family Trading Company. The commotion is quite significant. Now that this news is out, they will surely band together to snatch this business," Ding Wu said.

Ding Wanqian was also a weathered figure. He said calmly, "This Cao Zhengyang's tail is wagging now. He has forgotten whose Great Yu Empire this is, and who gave us merchants our current status. He has also forgotten how people like Prince Wei, Prince Yan, and Prince Zhao died. Ding Wu, remember, no matter what the Cao family does, we must not overstep. Merchants are merchants, after all; dealing with money is enough. Power is poison to merchants; one must not touch it."

Ding Wu nodded. "My son has always kept Father's teachings in mind and dares not harbor any extravagant thoughts."

"Hmm, that's good. I'm old. I've thought long and hard about the Ding family, and I believe only you are suitable to inherit my position. However, your two older brothers probably won't agree. But don't be impatient. Just diligently manage the Ding family's business. At the appropriate time, I will settle this matter."

"Yes, Father," Ding Wu secretly rejoiced.

From being an illegitimate son to now a prominent figure in the Ding family, his journey had not been easy. Now, he had finally gained his father's appreciation.

At the same time, dozens of merchants gathered at the Cao Mansion, which was Cao Zhengyang's residence.

"Mr. Cao, this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for us. We should immediately set sail and transport goods to Goryeo."

A pot-bellied merchant said.

"That's right. Didn't we gather together precisely to break free from the Qingzhou Chamber of Commerce and gain greater profits? We cannot miss this opportunity now."

Another person said.

“...”

Merchants chattered, one after another, while Cao Zhengyang watched the newspaper and listened.

After a long time, he slowly said, “What business is most profitable? Cloth? White sugar? Neither. The highest profits come from monopolies. No matter what it is, as long as you can monopolize it, you can arbitrarily acquire silver.”

“Do you mean for us to monopolize trade with Goryeo? But is that possible? All merchants are aware of this matter now,” a merchant said.

Cao Zhengyang said with a smile, “Nothing is impossible, as long as we find a way.”

After a pause, he said meaningfully, “Actually, the sea is not safe at all. Pirates are rampant. If goods are plundered, merchants will lose everything. We can spread this news. Merchants who are timid will naturally not dare to give their goods to those small merchants.”

“That’s right! Our merchant ships have guards!” A merchant was overjoyed. He said, “Mr. Cao’s idea is brilliant! We can really make something of this!”



Cao Zhengyang nodded proudly, his eyes flickering. The Cao family's rise to prominence had involved many unscrupulous methods.

As a core member of the Cao family, he naturally understood this clearly. He knew very well that to expand a business, one had to use any means necessary.

The Goryeo affair made him see the future direction of the Great Yu Empire's commerce. Now there was only Goryeo. If Japan were added later, the profits would be even more substantial. He had to plan ahead and find ways to extract the maximum benefit.

While the merchants were scheming against each other over this matter, Li Kaiyuan was summoned by Xiao Ming to the imperial study.

With countless knowledge accumulated in his mind, no one understood the nature of merchants better than Xiao Ming. So, from the very beginning, Xiao Ming had no intention of letting merchants extend their reach indiscriminately into Goryeo.

After all, once commercial trade spun out of control, monopolies and commercial giants would emerge. He had long had his own plan in mind. This time, merchants traveling to Goryeo must obtain a travel permit from the Qingzhou Chamber of Commerce.

Chapter 748

"Travel permit?."

In the imperial study, Li Kaiyuan nodded repeatedly in agreement.

With a bitter expression, Li Kaiyuan continued, "Your Majesty, these merchants indeed cannot be indulged too much. Merchants seek profit, and some unscrupulous ones dare to do anything. I believe this travel permit system should be used to rectify some ill-intentioned merchants."

"Ill-intentioned merchants?" Xiao Ming smiled, "Are you referring to the Cao family?"

Li Kaiyuan seemed to have endured the Cao family for a long time. At this moment, his resentment seemed to burst forth. "Your Majesty, it's that Cao family! Now, Cao Zhengyang actually wants to gather over a hundred merchants to establish a trading company. This is clearly a challenge to the Chamber of Commerce."

"Li San has already informed me of this matter," Xiao Ming said calmly.

Seeing Xiao Ming's composed expression, he said, "Your Majesty, Cao Zhengyang's actions are ill-intentioned. Does the imperial court still have to tolerate him?"

Xiao Ming's gaze grew somewhat grim. He then rose and looked at the blooming peach blossoms outside the window. He said, "Cao Zhengyang's actions do not appear to violate the Great Yu Empire's laws. If he has not violated the law, how can he be punished?"

Li Kaiyuan was stunned for a moment. He said, "As long as Your Majesty gives the word..." At this, Li Kaiyuan trailed off.

Xiao Ming smiled upon seeing this. "You mean I can kill arbitrarily? If that's the case, how would all the civil and military officials, merchants, and common people view me?"

Li Kaiyuan scratched his head. He said, "Indeed, such an act would cause widespread panic."

"Exactly. There's no need for killing. It's easy for me to ruin the Cao family. I know the Cao family better than you, and I also know that the Cao family is now honored as guests by the Prince of Chu. However, for me, now is not the time to deal with the Cao family. This pig is not yet fat enough," Xiao Ming said very calmly.

The Cao family was financially powerful. Under his rule, they had established seven mines, three textile workshops, and a maritime fleet. The Cao Family Bank was even more renowned.

He was not moving against the Cao family now, partly because he wanted the Cao family to establish more workshops in the six prefectures, and partly because Li San had discovered that the Cao family seemed to have dealings with missionaries, which made him extremely vigilant.

Because he knew very well that the missionaries of this era played a far from simple role. Therefore, he planned to "give them rope to hang themselves," waiting for Li San to collect all the evidence before wiping out the Cao family.

At that time, merchants would understand that while he gave them things, he could also take them back. It was fine to conduct business peacefully, but some things were best not to contemplate.

After explaining his thoughts to Li Kaiyuan, Li Kaiyuan felt relieved.

Having said this, Xiao Ming continued, "However, even if we don't rectify the Cao family now, we can appropriately suppress them in trade, lest they mess up the commerce of Qingzhou Province."

“Yes, Your Majesty. This time, I will support the merchants of the six prefectures and tighten the reins on people like Cao Zhengyang, lest they become too arrogant,” Li Kaiyuan said.

Xiao Ming nodded. This was his purpose in having Li Kaiyuan come. Overall, he wanted to maintain a “struggle without breaking” relationship with the merchants led by Cao Zhengyang. This way, he could give them some lessons without affecting the development of industry and commerce in the six prefectures.

After seeing off Li Kaiyuan, a spring thunder suddenly boomed outside, and a light drizzle began to fall from the overcast sky.

In the blink of an eye, Qingzhou Province transitioned from winter to spring.

Qian Dafu then held an umbrella for Xiao Ming, and the two returned from the imperial study to the bedchamber.

In the bedchamber at this time, Lu Luo was pacing, holding the crying Xiao Yi. Ziyuan and Fei Yuer sat on chairs, chatting and laughing while watching Lu Luo holding Xiao Yi.

“Everyone’s here today.”

Before even reaching the bedchamber, Xiao Ming chuckled. He rarely saw the three of them playing together.

However, when he entered the bedchamber, he discovered that Cui Xue'er was also sitting behind the door.

"Your Majesty."

Seeing Xiao Ming, four crisp voices rang out. Cui Xue'er, having entered the palace late, seemed a bit uncomfortable, her face flushing.

Lu Luo and Ziyuan, since being bestowed the title of "Lady," had become even closer to Xiao Ming than before. After all, they had become Xiao Ming's concubines in practice.

However, both were very aware of their place. They never gossiped or sought favor, and never spoke ill of anyone in front of him.

This greatly pleased Xiao Ming.

In this era, sometimes he had no choice, but since it was a fait accompli, he could only accept his own inner court.

Entering the bedchamber, Lu Luo proactively brought Xiao Yi to Xiao Ming. At this moment, the rosy-cheeked Xiao Yi was looking at him with wide eyes, his pure gaze free of any impurities.

Seeing Xiao Ming, the little fellow stretched his tiny legs and arms, smiling, and drool poured out. Lu Luo, seeing this, immediately took a handkerchief to wipe it.

Looking at his son, Xiao Ming felt a warmth in his heart. An emperor was also human, with his own emotions and desires. Now, he suddenly understood Xiao Wenxuan somewhat.

They were all his sons. Although he had his favorites, he also did not wish to see them fight each other.

Xiao Yi was his first son, and would not be his last. He did not want to see his sons continue to fight for the throne.

So he secretly made a decision, a decision that would not allow the feudal dynasty to continue its cycle.

“Your Majesty, what are you thinking about?” Fei Yuer suddenly asked, seeing Xiao Ming in a daze.

Snapping back to reality, Xiao Ming smiled, “Just some state affairs.” After a pause, he continued, “Oh, by the way, why are all of you in this bedchamber today?”

Fei Yuer said, “It’s always a bit boring being cooped up in the temporary palace all day, so I had them come over to chat.”

Xiao Ming nodded. At this point, he suddenly remembered that he seemed to have never added any entertainment to this era since coming to the Great Yu Empire.

Now that Fei Yuer mentioned it, he suddenly felt that he should introduce some entertainment activities. After all, industry and commerce needed to develop, and culture and entertainment also needed to develop, so that they could complement each other.

Moreover, a few days ago, Yang Chengye reported that foreign merchants in Dengzhou often gathered in Dengzhou City to gamble, which also touched him somewhat.

The silver of these foreign merchants was free money to be earned. If he introduced some novel games, it would surely attract more merchants to Dengzhou to have fun.

After all, gambling was not illegal in this era. Rather than letting private individuals haphazardly open gambling dens, it was better to have the prefectural office standardize them.

Thinking of this, he said to Fei Yuer, "If that's the case, I will give you something interesting, which will guarantee that you won't be bored for a while."

"Really? If so, I must see it," Fei Yuer smiled.

Ziyuan said, "His Majesty is probably exaggerating. Over the years, we haven't seen His Majesty teach us anything fun."

The continuous drizzle moistened the grass and the bluestone path. The gentle pitter-patter sounded like the earth's soft hum.

Experiencing this tranquil feeling, Xiao Ming's heart suddenly found peace.

For these five or six years, he had been busy with state affairs, rarely having such relaxed moments. Now, with his interest piqued, he couldn't resist. So he said, "This is simple. I will teach you a game that four people can play. This way, you can amuse yourselves in your leisure time."

Ziyuan, who loved lively activities, clapped her hands and cheered, "What is Your Majesty going to teach us?"

After a moment of thought, Xiao Ming said, "There's no such thing yet. I will immediately have someone go to the ceramics workshop."

With that, he summoned Qian Dafu, and then found paper and pen to draw many patterns. Then he had Qian Dafu take these to the ceramics workshop, instructing them to deliver the items.

The next day, the ceramics workshop delivered the items. These were small square tiles, imprinted with various patterns. They were none other than contemporary mahjong tiles.

After breakfast, Lu Luo, Ziyuan, and Cui Xue'er arrived in the bedchamber as arranged. By this time, Xiao Ming had already explained the rules of mahjong to Fei Yuer.



When the three arrived, Xiao Ming introduced the rules to them as well. This time, Xiao Ming used the technology crystal, so the four quickly memorized the rules.

“This is fun!” Ziyuan’s eyes sparkled. She had always loved playing games, and she immediately became deeply engrossed in this one.

Xiao Ming chuckled at this point, “Come, come, come, I’ll play a few rounds with you today. In the future, when you have nothing to do, you can also bring the Empress Dowager along, to keep her from being bored.”

“Your Majesty is absolutely right. One must always seek some entertainment, otherwise, one will always be lost in thought.”

Fei Yuer, Cui Xue’er, and Ziyuan sat down at the table, while Lu Luo stood obediently behind Xiao Ming, kneading his shoulders.

Ziyuan had a mischievous grin. “So, what are you lost in thought about every night?”

Lu Luo’s face immediately flushed crimson. “Sister Ziyuan, you’re bullying me again!”

Fei Yuer pursed her lips and smiled. She looked at Cui Xue’er, who was the most unfamiliar among them. So she said, “Xue’er, Ziyuan is just a feisty one. The two of them are used to playing around. If they accidentally say something wrong, please don’t take it to heart.”

Cui Xue’er nodded gently. She secretly envied the playful banter of Fei Yuer and the other two. At this moment, she also wanted to join in, so she said, “Don’t worry, Empress. We are all sisters. I won’t be angry because of this.”

For a man, the greatest fear was trouble in the inner court. Although he found palace intrigues in modern times interesting, he certainly didn't want any messy affairs in his own palace.

But seeing Fei Yuer acting like an older sister now, he felt relieved. As long as Fei Yuer could consider the bigger picture, the imperial harem would not be in chaos.

With mahjong in hand, Xiao Ming and the four played, forgetting the time, until Qian Dafu reminded them of lunch. It was then that the five recovered from the fun of playing mahjong.

Because they had just started playing mahjong, the four were somewhat addicted. After lunch, they gathered around the table again to continue their battle. Xiao Ming, being an experienced player, was not particularly disheartened by this.

Leaving the four to play in the bedchamber, he and Qian Dafu went to the Qingzhou shipyard. Now that he was expanding his influence overseas, maintaining maritime hegemony had become extremely important.

If he didn't have more advanced warships, his maritime rights and interests might suffer challenges from European countries. Therefore, developing more advanced warships was very necessary for him.

Leaving Qingzhou City, Xiao Ming followed the Xiaoqing River to the Qingzhou shipyard. At this moment, a ship belching black smoke in the river attracted Xiao Ming's attention.

This was a fifth-rate galleon warship. From the center of the warship, a towering column extended, and it was from this column that black smoke continuously billowed.

Zhang Liang and Lin Wentao were both on the galleon, discussing something.

Seeing Xiao Ming arrive, the two disembarked and came before him.

“Your Majesty.”

Zhang Liang and Lin Wentao said simultaneously.

Nodding, Xiao Ming asked, “Is this not one of the earliest galleon warships?”

“Yes, Your Majesty,” Zhang Liang responded. He said, “After I saw this steam engine, I felt that we could completely convert the old galleons into warships equipped with both sail for long voyages and steam engine power. Otherwise, building new ones would cost a fortune.”

Xiao Ming nodded. Zhang Liang’s words resonated with him.

In fact, Xiao Ming had been troubled by the constant upgrading of weapons during this period. In just six years, Qingzhou Province’s firearms had evolved from flintlock guns to rifled muskets, and were now about to be upgraded to percussion cap guns.

Such continuous re-equipping had strained the imperial treasury somewhat. However, the upgrading of firearms was one thing, but the re-equipping of warships was a major issue.

A single galleon warship cost hundreds of thousands of taels of silver. He simply could not afford such continuous upgrading.

“Excellent. I came to the shipyard the day before yesterday precisely for this matter. Now that you can convert galleons into steamships, I am relieved,” Xiao Ming said.

Being praised by Xiao Ming, Zhang Liang smiled. He said, “This is simply my duty.”

Nodding, Xiao Ming continued to ask, “Now, how fast can this galleon travel in the water without relying on wind?”

“About eleven knots,” Zhang Liang said.

Lin Wentao said, “Your Majesty, this ship’s speed is already faster than warships that rely solely on wind power.”

“Hmm, that’s good. This will greatly reduce the travel time from Dengzhou to Goryeo, and also give us an advantage in naval battles.”

Xiao Ming said. The ship's speed was expressed in knots. One knot represented 1.852 kilometers, so eleven knots was 20.372 kilometers, basically twenty kilometers per hour.

Compared to steamships, sailing warships were very dependent on wind speed. Three or four knots was common when the wind was light, but they could also reach eleven or twelve knots when the wind was strong.

However, overall, they were not as stable as steamships, which was why sailing warships were quickly phased out after steamships emerged.

After all, if two such warships met on a calm day, the sailing warship would be utterly defeated.

With an excited expression, he continued, "If this warship conversion is successful, this year you will focus your main efforts on converting warships."

"Yes, Your Majesty," Zhang Liang responded. He then said, "However, this also depends on Lin Wentao being able to provide steam engines in sufficient quantity."

Lin Wentao immediately made a bitter face. "Now, everyone who sees me asks for a steam engine. Your Majesty, I am truly suffering now."

As his words fell, the three laughed in unison. Xiao Ming said, "I was just about to look for you to talk about this. Now you can hand over the steam engines to your subordinates. Your most important task now is to continue researching new types of steam engines."

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A gentle river breeze carried a hint of a watery, grassy scent.

The three admired the bustling merchant ships coming and going on the Xiaoqing River, while discussing steamships and steam engines.

After discussing the steamship and steam engine, Lin Wentao suddenly remembered something. He said to Xiao Ming, “Your Majesty, two days ago, a close friend of mine from Bowen Academy approached me. He said he was preparing to apply for an electricity experiment, but he suffered from a lack of sufficient copper wire and magnets, making it impossible to proceed.”

“Electricity experiment.” Xiao Ming’s brows furrowed.

To promote the development of technology in the Great Yu Empire, Xiao Ming had put in great effort. Especially after Bowen Academy was established, he promised that any student could apply for silver to set up their own research laboratory and seek collaborating students to conduct relevant research.

After this policy was introduced, it was very popular among the students. Soon, the imperial court received over thirty applications for establishing research laboratories, and the amount of silver requested by these students varied.

However, for Xiao Ming, this silver could not be given out indiscriminately. There were countless examples of fraudulent research to swindle money in contemporary times.

Perhaps these students could fool the officials, but they could not fool him. So, after review, he directly rejected over twenty of the applications.

“It’s an electricity experiment. After Your Majesty rejected many research applications last time, many students became much more cautious. This close friend of mine was afraid that he would be rejected by Your Majesty this time, so he came to consult with me,” Lin Wentao said.

After a moment of contemplation, Xiao Ming said, “What he says is indeed true. Copper wire is easy to find now, but strong magnets are not. However, fortunately, there are magnets within Qingzhou Province. Once the Mining Department finds them, I will send them to him. Tell him to apply for it.”

In fact, the interval between the First Industrial Revolution and the Second Industrial Revolution was not very long. The accumulation of the First Industrial Revolution quickly led to the Second Industrial Revolution.

Now that the Great Yu Empire had fully entered the age of steam, it was already laying the foundation for the Second Industrial Revolution. And electricity, as the cornerstone of the Second Industrial Revolution, should now be put on the agenda.

European countries took a hundred years of self-exploration to achieve widespread electrification, but for him, it wouldn’t take that long. After all, he possessed mature technology, which could save many detours.

“Yes, Your Majesty.”

Lin Wentao said happily. He and this close friend had always admired each other. While he was tinkering with steam engines, this friend had been diligently studying in the academy, and now it was finally time for him to show his skills.

Xiao Ming was also in a good mood. He asked, "What is this person's name?"

"Su Liangcai."

Zhang Liang couldn't help but smile upon hearing this. "This person's name is interesting. I only hope he is truly a capable person."

"Capable people often have capable friends. I trust Lin Wentao's judgment," Xiao Ming said.

After chatting with the two for a while longer, Xiao Ming and Qian Dafu returned to the temporary palace. This matter with Su Liangcai proved that the seeds he had sown were now bearing fruit.

Besides Lin Wentao, students from Bowen Academy, one after another, who had achieved academic success, began to emerge, applying their knowledge to various industries.

When the youth is strong, the nation is strong. Now, more and more scholars were abandoning stale Confucian texts and picking up books representing science. This in itself was proof that the Great Yu Empire was changing.

However, for him, this was not enough. He wanted this change not to be limited to Qingzhou Province. To accelerate this process, he would also have to lead by example and participate.



He had already given instructions that a large lecture hall was to be built at Bowen Academy, and he would take one day every seven days to personally give lectures at Bowen Academy.

For him, this was not just to impart knowledge, but also to show the scholars of the world how much he, the Emperor, valued them, and to give each of them the honor of being a disciple of the Son of Heaven.

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Yingzhou, a city in the northwest of Goryeo.

After retreating from Ryukyo City, Beishan did not rush back to Shengdu but instead led his troops to this small border city of the Golden Tent Khanate.

"Prince, the guests have arrived," Guduo's voice sounded from outside the room.

Beishan's spirit lifted. He said, "Let them in."

When he left Ryukyo City this time, he had sent someone to a Goryeo city occupied by Japan.

Soon, he received a reply: the British were about to return from Japan and could meet him before they left.

So the British directly sailed their warships from Japan, anchoring in the waters of Yingzhou, to meet Beishan.

A short while later, Guduo led two fair-haired, blue-eyed individuals into the room. Beishan was somewhat surprised; he had never seen such people, and his heart was filled with a sense of awe.

Accompanying the two British men were four Japanese samurai, their two swords hanging at their waists, seemingly there specifically to protect the two.

“Esteemed Prince Beishan, I am Earl Carey from Britain,” Carey said with a friendly expression.

This trip to Japan, he successfully met with Yamada Nobunaga and reached agreements on many aspects. He called this the “Nagasaki Agreement.”

The contents of the agreement had been drafted before he came to Japan. From the date of signing, Britain would provide Japan with higher quality firearms, cannons, and warships, and send military personnel to train Japanese soldiers.

Moreover, Japan could send personnel to study in Britain, and at the same time, Britain would help Japan establish an industrial system and provide steam engines.

In return, Japan would open its market to Britain, allowing British merchants to conduct business in Japan, and both countries had an obligation to jointly address the threats facing Asia.

Carey was somewhat surprised by how easily this agreement was signed, but he thanked the rise of the Great Yu Empire, as it made Japan feel threatened.

That was why Yamada Nobunaga had signed this friendly treaty with them, overcoming all objections.

However, for Carey, his mission was far from over. The Great Yu Empire caused them too much concern, and from what he understood, this Emperor of the Great Yu Empire was extremely ambitious.

He was very worried that this unique Emperor would constantly expand in Asia, and his worries were exacerbated after the two Goryeo cities were captured.

It was precisely for this reason that he insisted on coming to meet Prince Beishan.

Although he knew very well that the Great Yu Empire, this northern nomadic empire, was even more barbaric, the British were not afraid of barbaric tribes, only empires more civilized than themselves.

To curb the Great Yu Empire's expansion, he felt it necessary to create an encirclement in Asia, like a cage, to trap the soon-to-awaken lion that was the Great Yu Empire. At that time, even if this encirclement didn't work, it would be enough to delay the Great Yu Empire's rise.

During this period, British industry would surge forward, continuously leaving the Great Yu Empire behind.

So, no matter what, this was beneficial to the British Empire with no harm.