

I. Dynasty 771

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Qingzhou Province.

After waiting for almost a month and a half, Xiao Ming finally saw Luo Quan leading his troops back.

During this time, intelligence continuously flowed from Bashu, but he knew very well that these were delayed battle reports. For the first time, he deeply missed the telephones and telegrams of contemporary times.

If he had those things, he wouldn't be so in the dark.

"Your Majesty, now less than ten thousand barbarian cavalry remain roaming within the Great Yu Empire's territory. Qi Guangyi is leading the cuirassiers in continued pursuit. It is estimated that within a month, this invading enemy force will be completely annihilated."

In the council hall, Luo Quan said loudly.

On the third day after Achige fled towards Chang'an, he led a portion of his soldiers back to Qingzhou Province. After ten days of marching, he finally returned to Qingzhou Province.

On the way, he learned that Qi Guangyi had already found a route of barbarian cavalry. After a fierce battle, half of the ten thousand barbarian cavalry were killed, and half were captured.

So upon returning to Qingzhou Province, he immediately reported this to Xiao Ming.

The ministers in the council hall all breathed a sigh of relief. They had been worried during this period and yet felt powerless.

Fei Ji said, "Your Majesty, Bodo has been killed, and the main force of the barbarians has been completely wiped out. The remaining ten thousand barbarian cavalry are unfamiliar with the Great Yu Empire's territory and people. They can probably be eliminated within a few days. The crisis in Bashu has been resolved."

"Elder Fei is absolutely right. I hope Your Majesty will not worry too much and affect your imperial health," Pang Yukun said.

Xiao Ming had been worried about this matter. Sometimes he was even listless in the council hall. The ministers, seeing this, worried and naturally offered their advice.

His brows relaxed somewhat. Xiao Ming said, "Even so, during the barbarians' rampage, Bashu suffered heavy losses. Hundreds of thousands of common people tragically died, and over a million common people were displaced. This event is undoubtedly a severe blow to the Great Yu Empire's reforms. A 'Land of Abundance' that could originally provide a large amount of tax revenue to the imperial court now has to receive grain for disaster relief."

The ministers in the council hall fell silent.

Not a word of what Xiao Ming said was exaggerated. The barbarians' purpose this time was extremely sinister. While plundering, they also burned everything they could.

This left a large number of common people homeless, and the grain that was soon to be harvested was also burned, making the common people's lives even harder.

"Your Majesty, at least the nascent production teams in Bashu played a significant role. Many common people fled into the deep mountains to avoid the barbarians' massacre. The lost wealth can still be recovered, but the common people are Bashu's most precious asset," Fei Ji said.

Luo Quan echoed, "Your Majesty, indeed. The barbarian massacres mainly occurred in Songzhou, Yazhou, and the cities on the route to Yizhou. Although villagers also suffered casualties, most were spared. Moreover, all the goods plundered by the barbarians have been recaptured by us. Returning these items to the common people can help them get through the winter."

Xiao Ming nodded. This was good news amidst bad news for him. The relief effort was very timely, otherwise, Bashu would have suffered even greater losses.

After briefly discussing the situation in Bashu, a hint of sternness suddenly flashed in Xiao Ming's eyes. He said, "The barbarians' ambition to destroy my Great Yu Empire is unyielding. As long as the barbarians are not eliminated, the Great Yu Empire will not know peace for a day. For the safety of the Great Yu Empire, we must counterattack the barbarians and not allow them to continue acting so brazenly."

Pang Yukun, hearing this, said with a solemn expression, "Your Majesty, please reconsider. Do not fall into the enemy's trap. The intelligence from the secret guards is very suspicious. This time, the barbarians' passage through Tibet was instigated by others."

"Precisely because someone is instigating trouble, I must deal with the barbarians. Otherwise, once the barbarians grow strong, they will be even more difficult to handle," Xiao Ming said.

During the Bashu Rebellion, Wang Xuan sent someone back with a piece of intelligence. At that time, Pang Yukun and Fei Ji were both present, and he casually told the two.

Wang Xuan's intelligence clearly mentioned the appearance of fair-haired, blue-eyed Westerners in Shengdu, the capital of the Golden Tent Khanate, and that this Westerner was even with Beishan.

Based on this intelligence, he easily concluded that this was another British conspiracy after the one involving Japan.

The British, accustomed to using balance-of-power policies in Europe, had brought this approach to Asia.

Their purpose in first going to Japan, and then to the Golden Tent Khanate, was very clear: to simultaneously restrict the Great Yu Empire's development on land and at sea.

Europe in this timeline, in terms of both technology and politics, was clearly more mature earlier than the Europe of his own time.

However, this also brought him trouble.

In his opinion, perhaps the Great Yu Empire's technological development had alerted the British, or perhaps his cooperation with the Dutch had angered them.

Either way, the British were now unfriendly towards him.

So, he now had to find a way to thwart the British strategy, and not give the British any more time to foster the Golden Tent Khanate and Japan.

“Senior Grand Secretary Pang worries unnecessarily. The Great Yu Empire’s army is no longer what it once was. This time, in suppressing the Bashu rebellion, the power of firearms was evident,” Luo Quan said confidently.

Xiao Ming nodded. His confidence came precisely from the equipping of the Conqueror Musket.

It could be said that the current Great Yu Empire army was a standard firearm unit. Its equipment and training levels were no less than those of Western armies.

The barbarians, however, were merely a nomadic empire still in the feudal era. They would find it difficult to contend with the Great Yu Empire’s advanced firearms and tactics.

If it weren’t for the barbarians living on the grasslands, possessing strong mobility with their horses, he would have already launched an attack on the barbarians.

However, he still could not go to the grasslands now; the number of Great Yu Empire cavalry was still too small. But he could go to the barbarian settlements.

Besides Shengdu, six barbarian cities were distributed from Shanhai Pass to the foot of Changbai Mountain. These six cities stretched in a straight line.

For a long time, the barbarians had relied on these six cities for supplies to occupy the Yan-Yun Sixteen Prefectures. Now, he wanted to capture these six cities and plunder people and livestock from the barbarians.

For him, the days of the Great Yu Empire becoming poorer with each war were over. Now, he too would become richer with each plunder, just like them.

At the same time, this would be the best tribute to the fallen common people of Bashu.

“Your Majesty, even if we are to fight, it cannot be in winter. The north is bitter and cold, and the soldiers’ clothes are thin. At that time, perhaps the war won’t even begin, and many soldiers will suffer frostbite.”

Seeing that Xiao Ming seemed to have made up his mind, Fei Ji reminded him.

“Elder Fei, rest assured. Although I am very angry, I have not lost my head.” Xiao Ming said. He understood the severity of winter far better than these ministers and would not foolishly fight the Golden Tent Khanate in winter.

Niu Ben and Luo Quan were both veteran generals and naturally understood the reasons.

Having roughly understood Xiao Ming's current thoughts, Luo Quan said, "Your Majesty, if that is the case, how should we deal with the barbarian generals who have been escorted to Qingzhou Province this time?"

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"Kill them and hang them outside the Shanhai Pass city gate."

In the council hall, Xiao Ming's cold voice was like the biting wind of winter.

As his voice fell, a brief silence descended upon the court. The ministers exchanged glances, then a resounding "Long live!" rang out.

Xiao Ming looked down at his ministers. He mused for a moment and then understood why the officials reacted in such a way.

Just six years ago, the Great Yu Empire was still in a subservient position, pledging allegiance to the Golden Tent Khanate. Any matter involving the Great Yu Empire and the Golden Tent Khanate was considered an extremely important national affair.

Especially for something like capturing Golden Tent Khanate generals, often, to avoid escalating conflicts, they would send all the Golden Tent Khanate generals back.

But now, he was treating the barbarians just as the Golden Tent Khanate had treated Great Yu Empire captured generals back then, showing absolutely no respect to the Golden Tent Khanate.

After all, dying in battle was still understandable, but he was directly executing captives.

Such an action was a blatant humiliation to the Golden Tent Khanate and would certainly provoke their wrath.

However, if it had been before, there might have been dissenting opinions in the court, but in the two years since his ascension, he had established his absolute authority in the Great Yu Empire and in the court through continuous victories in foreign wars.

Because in the hearts of the ministers, he was now the guiding star of the Great Yu Empire. As long as they diligently carried out any order he issued, they would be able to achieve revival.

It was precisely because of this slight collision between two mindsets that the ministers, after a moment of hesitation, let out a deafening cheer.

A smile appeared on his face as Xiao Ming looked at his ministers.

As an emperor, one must firmly hold power in one's own hands. Moreover, he came from modern times, possessing a far more long-term vision than the Great Yu Empire or even the West.

He knew very well what was in line with the times and what was going against the tide.

Having settled the matter of the barbarian captives, Xiao Ming had Qian Dafu announce the adjournment of court, but kept Niu Ben and Luo Quan behind.

After the ministers dispersed, Xiao Ming said to the two, “You two generals were once vital ministers of the Great Yu Empire, and you remain my left and right arms. I hope you two generals can assist me in eliminating this great northern threat.”

Niu Ben and Luo Quan, hearing this, bowed simultaneously and said, “It is our duty to pacify the northern threat for the Great Yu Empire.”

Hearing this, Xiao Ming nodded.

In fact, he had brought the two over this time for the final step of the military reform. Now, the British and French were interfering in the internal affairs of the Great Yu Empire.

For him, it might not be long before he went to war with these Western powers. Therefore, the most crucial step to achieving victory now was to implement the reform of the modern army.

After a moment of thought, he said, “Today I kept you two generals behind for the matter of military reform. In my opinion, the current military system of the Great Yu Empire can no longer adapt to the command of firearm troops. So, before the war, I plan to implement a new military system...”

Then, Xiao Ming elaborated on his ideas to the two.

Combining the modern army system, Xiao Ming planned to establish corps, armies, divisions, brigades, regiments, battalions, and companies within the infantry.

One corps would consist of two armies, and one army would consist of four infantry divisions and two cavalry regiments, with one commander for each army.

A division would have two or three brigades, a brigade would have two regiments, each regiment would have three battalions, and each battalion would have nine companies.

A company would have one hundred and twenty men, and these one hundred and twenty men were precisely the standard complement for a musket formation. This would ensure coordination from top to bottom, allowing firearm units to be commanded effectively.

His old organizational structure was sufficient for use within the Great Yu Empire. There was no need for anything more. But now, the Great Yu Empire was about to embark on the path of overseas colonization, and he did not want to be at a disadvantage in any aspect.

Besides the army, the cavalry also adhered to the army-division-brigade-regiment-company system, and the artillery's system was also changed accordingly.

This meant equipping different levels of armies with different numbers of cannons. According to his idea, a battalion would be equipped with eight field cannons, a regiment with twenty-four field cannons, a division with seventy-two field cannons, and an army with two hundred and eighty-eight field cannons.

While Xiao Ming explained, the effect of the technology crystal allowed the two to understand this structure more clearly, and even explained the advantages of this structure.

Niu Ben and Luo Quan felt strange, but they deeply agreed. Previously, the Great Yu Empire's military system was designed for cold weapon warfare.

Because both sides needed large formations for battle.

However, with the equipping of the Conqueror Musket, such a flexible organization was more suitable for the flexible application of tactics on the battlefield.

"Your Majesty, if that's the case, what will be the official ranks of Lu Fei, Luo Hong, and others?" Niu Ben asked.

Xiao Ming took a sip of tea and said slowly, "Corps commander is a position established only during wartime. As for Lu Fei, Ye Qingyun, and Luo Hong, they are now equivalent to army commanders, and the number of soldiers under their command is roughly equivalent. As for any shortages, they will be supplemented during this conscription."

Luo Quan said, "Thus, the generals under their command will be given official ranks according to division, regiment, battalion, and company."

"Precisely," Xiao Ming said.

Niu Ben and Luo Quan exchanged glances. In fact, after the Great Yu Empire army's innovation in weaponry, they were already mentally prepared for other changes in the army.

Moreover, in the military academy, they had also learned about the organization of Western armies, and the organization Xiao Ming now proposed had little difference from Western armies in general.

“Your Majesty, I will return to the Grand Council and begin preparing for this matter,” Niu Ben said.

Xiao Ming nodded. At this point, he looked at Luo Quan. Luo Quan had just been brought back into service, and his status was still somewhat awkward.

Promoting him to the Grand Council now would probably draw objections from some, after all, Luo Quan had not participated in the wars of the past few years.

So he said, “There is one more matter. Besides the need for military reform, another office needs to be added under the Grand Council, named the General Staff Department.”

“General Staff Department?” Niu Ben looked puzzled.

In fact, the prototype of the General Staff Department appeared in Prussia in the mid-17th century.

At that time, the Swedish army in Europe was highly regarded by various countries. So, when Prussia formed its troops, it emulated them and established a Quartermaster General’s Department, which was the earliest form of the General Staff.

At that time, the Quartermaster General's Department's main duties were to handle engineering services, select marching routes and campsites, construct defensive positions, and so on.

By the era of Frederick the Great, the Quartermaster General's Department also added the tasks of relaying orders, guiding marching troops, and drafting reports and documents for generals and marshals.

In the first partition of Poland and the War of the Bavarian Succession in 1778, the Quartermaster General's Department also undertook the planning and leadership of reserve forces. It wasn't until 1817 that Prussia's Quartermaster General's Department was officially renamed the General Staff.

Although Xiao Ming was now in the 18th century, Europe at this time was far ahead in terms of culture and military affairs. So, in his opinion, it was necessary to establish this General Staff Department to coordinate the army's actions.

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Time passed from sunrise to noon.

In the council hall, Xiao Ming spoke in detail about the General Staff Department with Niu Ben and Luo Quan. Under his explanation, the two highly approved of establishing this institution to formulate war plans and coordinate logistics.

They were both seasoned veterans of the battlefield and could naturally see the profound implications, and it would also serve to restrain the generals, preventing them from acting recklessly on the battlefield.

And after deciding to establish this institution, Xiao Ming placed Luo Quan in it. Niu Ben was the chief official of the Grand Council, and Luo Quan was responsible for the General Staff Department. The two complemented each other and their cooperation would be sufficient.

Of course, their final decisions still had to go through him; only military plans approved by him could be implemented.

Truth be told, this military reform made him grasp the army even tighter.

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Lin'an, the Prince of Chu had learned of the barbarians' defeat in Bashu. Sitting in the pavilion and drinking tea with Richard, he was quite displeased.

Richard noticed the Prince of Chu's expression. He picked up his tea and took a slow sip. This tea, which only the wealthy could afford in Europe, he could drink daily here.

"Your Highness, are you still thinking about the Golden Tent Khanate?" Richard asked.

The Prince of Chu stood up and said angrily, "This Golden Tent Khanate is truly useless! How could they be defeated so quickly? Weren't they very powerful before?"

Richard suddenly laughed, "Your Highness, before, the Golden Tent Khanate had never encountered firearms and cannons. If we French had sixty thousand men in Bashu, we could also easily defeat the Golden Tent Khanate's cavalry."

“So the Golden Tent Khanate is finished?” The Prince of Chu asked nervously. What he most liked to see now was the Golden Tent Khanate annihilating Xiao Ming, so he could securely rule the southern part of the empire.

Frowning, Richard said, “Your Highness is overthinking it. The Great Yu Empire’s north has vast grasslands. It won’t be that easy for Xiao Ming to destroy them in a short time. However, if they start fighting, that is what we would be happy to see. This will give Your Highness more time to prepare.”

The Prince of Chu nodded upon hearing this. In fact, he had lived in fear ever since Xiao Ming ascended the throne, because he knew that once Xiao Ming was free, he would be the next feudal lord to die.

So, during this time, he placed all his trust in the French, just to survive and preserve his ancestors’ legacy.

He had even begun to consider the French ideas Richard propagated. As long as he could grow strong enough to ultimately defeat Xiao Ming, he was willing to share power with merchants and establish a constitutional monarchy.

And precisely by following Richard’s advice, many merchants had now gathered under his banner, contributing money and effort for him.

While the north was embroiled in continuous warfare, his feudal state was subtly changing.

“You’re right. I just hope the Golden Tent Khanate can keep Xiao Ming thoroughly entangled. That way, it will become increasingly advantageous for us.” The Prince of Chu’s mood improved somewhat.

Richard smugly blew on his tea. They had once worried when they learned that the Great Yu Empire Emperor in the north possessed flintlock guns and cannons.

But from the current chaotic situation, this Great Yu Empire Emperor seemed to be in deep trouble. Now, coupled with the British's balancing strategy, the Great Yu Empire resembled a trapped beast.

Although this Emperor possessed a considerable number of troops and advanced firearms, the French, who had been framed countless times by the British, understood that when a land-based country became entangled in wars with surrounding nations, the speed of that country's rise would be greatly diminished.

And that way, they would have the opportunity to turn East Asia into their sphere of influence as well.

"So, taking advantage of the present, Your Highness must seize the opportunity to grow stronger. We hope Your Highness will no longer conceal anything from us regarding trade with France," Richard's words carried a hint of threat.

He knew that the Prince of Chu's weakness was firmly in their grasp, so he no longer maintained a humble demeanor in front of the Prince of Chu.

An unnatural flicker passed through the Prince of Chu's eyes. He was a cunning individual, like a monkey, and having suffered before, he did not want to put all his eggs in one basket again.

Secretly, he had already sent merchants to contact other Western countries. It was impossible for France to dominate alone.

Moreover, his fear of Xiao Ming also gave him a wild idea: even if he died, he would drag Xiao Ming into the war with these Western countries.

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Qingzhou Province.

Prison carts carrying barbarian generals departed from Qingzhou City towards Shanhai Pass.

The common people along the roads, knowing these were barbarian generals, picked up whatever they could find and threw it at these barbarians.

Born and raised in Qingzhou Province, they deeply hated the barbarians. Now, they wished they could throw these barbarians into a cauldron of oil, to let them experience the taste of being fried.

When the barbarians invaded Qingzhou Province, the common people of Qingzhou Province had been tormented by the barbarians in such a way for amusement.

The barbarian generals on horseback still retained their fierce demeanor. They glared angrily at the common people on the streets, occasionally letting out threatening roars.

But all they received in return was a whipping from the guards and even more violent retaliation from the common people.

This chaos continued until this group of barbarian generals was transported out of Qingzhou City.

Then, the convoy jolted along the road for seven days until it reached Shanhai Pass. The guards responsible for the prisoners handed them over to Lei Ming.

Along with these captives came Xiao Ming's oral decree. After reading the decree, Lei Ming breathed a sigh of relief.

He had originally worried that Xiao Ming would return these people to the barbarians, but the decree put his mind at ease.

So he instructed his personal guard, "Prepare thirty-six wooden stakes. Erect these thirty-six three-meter-high wooden stakes along both sides of the road outside Shanhai Pass city gate."

Receiving the order, the personal guard led the soldiers to carry it out.

Within an hour, thirty-six three-meter-high wooden stakes were erected outside the customs gate. At this point, Lei Ming said, "Hang all the barbarian captives on the wooden stakes. Let the barbarians see the consequences of their invasion of the Great Yu Empire."

While saying this, he actually thought Xiao Ming was too merciful. If it were him, he would have had these people cut into a thousand pieces. When they killed the people of the Great Yu Empire, they were never soft-hearted.

However, an explanation from a personal guard suddenly made him understand. It turned out the method Xiao Ming chose was the truly ruthless one.

The barbarians had worshipped Everlasting Hate Heaven for generations. In their shamans' view, every fallen tribesman could ascend to Everlasting Hate Heaven and attain eternal joy.

It was precisely because of this that barbarian soldiers fought so fiercely; death was not terrible for them.

However, there was one condition: if they were killed by weapons stained with crow's blood, they would be unable to ascend to Everlasting Hate Heaven, because in the barbarians' view, crows were unclean creatures.

In Xiao Ming's oral decree, he precisely ordered Lei Ming to hang these generals on wooden stakes, and then kill these barbarian generals using weapons stained with crow's blood. This would undoubtedly terrify them greatly.

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The cold wind from the north swept across the grasslands.

On the road outside Shanhai Pass, the barbarian generals were firmly bound to stakes. At this moment, the arrogance they displayed in Qingzhou Province was gone; all that remained was fear.

Lei Ming's gaze swept across the faces of these barbarian generals, noting each of their expressions.

He knew very well that the hands of these barbarian generals were stained with the countless blood of the Great Yu Empire's common people. Whether men, old people, women, or children, they spared no one.

Because he had personally witnessed how the barbarian cavalry treated the people of Youzhou. If the barbarians didn't still need people to provide them with grain, fodder, and labor, the people of Youzhou would have long been slaughtered by them.

For him, he wished that such a cruel nomadic people would be exterminated sooner rather than later.

"Execution!"

Lei Ming said coldly. The barbarian merchants on the road at this moment couldn't help but close their eyes.

Despite the continuous friction between the two sides, the private trade between the Great Yu Empire and the barbarians had not ceased.

The Great Yu Empire mainly purchased furs and animal fats from the grasslands, while barbarian merchants purchased daily necessities such as white sugar, clothes, and spirits from the Great Yu Empire.

It was particularly worth mentioning that the Golden Tent Khanate nobles also seemed very interested in the Great Yu Empire's luxury goods. Perfume, pendulum clocks, glass, and mirrors were all highly sought after in the Golden Tent Khanate.

Thus, there was the strange phenomenon of deadly combat coexisting with very busy smuggling trade.

Xiao Ming turned a blind eye to this private trade. Evidently, this trade was very beneficial to him. The barbarians needed to exchange large quantities of furs for daily necessities from the Great Yu Empire, which in one aspect also stimulated the development of the Great Yu Empire's industry.

However, in terms of strategic resources, Xiao Ming maintained very strict control. Especially saltpeter and iron were strictly prohibited from being sold to the barbarians. Lei Ming was stationed at Shanhai Pass and was also responsible for supervising merchants' trade activities on weekdays, preventing some merchants from taking risks for high profits.

As Lei Ming gave the order, the soldiers standing before the captive generals dipped lead bullets into bowls filled with crow's blood.

Then they loaded the bullets into their firearms and aimed at these generals.

With the actions of the Great Yu Empire soldiers, the barbarian generals finally lost control. Now, their only hope for death was also destroyed by the Great Yu Empire. All that remained in their hearts was fear.

The barbarian merchants' faces were pale. This method of executing their tribesmen had never appeared in the Great Yu Empire. If this matter were to spread back to the grasslands, it would surely provoke the wrath of the Great Khan.

But now everything had changed. Today, the Great Yu Empire was no longer afraid of them. And when they saw these generals, they understood that this time, the Khanate's invasion of Bashu had suffered a disastrous defeat.

Lei Ming's lips curled into a smile. This was the outcome he desired.

It was time for the Golden Tent Khanate to recall the fear of being dominated!

"Fire!"

With a single command, the soldiers holding firearms aimed their muzzles at the barbarian generals' chests. As the sounds of "bang, bang, bang" rang out, the barbarian generals slumped one by one, and those who were not yet dead were directly stabbed to death by soldiers wielding bayonets.

After executing all the barbarian generals, Lei Ming looked at the barbarian merchants on the road. He said, "You needn't worry. I will not harm you. These individuals committed heinous crimes in Bashu, massacring hundreds of thousands of my Great Yu Empire citizens. Such sins cannot be atoned for even by killing them ten thousand times over. Please convey what you have seen to your Great Khan, and tell him that the Emperor of the Great Yu Empire says: if he wants war, the Great Yu Empire will fight to the very end!"

After a pause, he added, “Additionally, the body of your Prince Bodo is also here. You may transport it back to your Great Khan.”

With that, Lei Ming gestured, and two soldiers immediately carried Bodo’s corpse out and threw it in front of the barbarian merchants.

The barbarian merchants dared not speak. They did not want to be killed by unclean things. Carrying Bodo’s corpse onto a wagon, they urged their horses and hurried towards the grasslands.

Watching the barbarian merchants depart, Lei Ming said to the generals of Shanhai Pass, “This humiliation of the barbarians will surely enrage the Great Khan of the Golden Tent Khanate. Now, you must immediately prepare your army for war, to prevent a large-scale barbarian invasion.”

“Yes, General!” The generals returned to the pass upon hearing this.

At this moment, Lei Ming took out the map he carried. The oral decree this time also contained operational orders targeting the barbarians.

In the coming period, they would likely seize six barbarian cities: Pingzhou, Jinzhou, Liaozhou, Yingzhou, Jianzhou, and Raozhou.

These six cities were arranged in a column from south to north, in the northeast direction of the Great Yu Empire. These cities were inhabited by the Golden Tent Khanate’s semi-agricultural, semi-pastoral tribesmen and the slaves they plundered from various places.

These six cities had now become important food supply points for the Golden Tent Khanate. It was precisely because of this that the Golden Tent Khanate felt so confident in fighting the Great Yu Empire.

Looking at the six cities on the map, Lei Ming clenched his fists. At this moment, he was excited.

For him, he had finally waited for this day. After all, the land outside the pass was once part of the Great Yu Empire's territory, only lost due to continuous encroachment by the barbarians.

And these six cities were also originally built by the Great Yu Empire. The Golden Tent Khanate simply took what was already there.

After confirming the locations of these six cities, he put away the map. Besides preparing for war, he had another very important matter.

Along with the oral decree for the generals came the order for military structural reform from the Grand Council. From now on, his military rank was no longer Governor-General, but Army Commander.

This winter, they were destined not to launch an offensive. However, during this period, they could implement the military structure and conduct some corresponding reorganization training.

While Lei Ming was executing the barbarian generals, Qi Guangyi, with Luo Hong's cooperation, finally tracked down the remaining barbarian cavalry.

After nearly a month of fleeing, Achige and the cavalry he led were in a desperate situation.

Due to a lack of fodder and logistical support, they could only rely on raiding villages for supplies. As for prefectures and counties, they were helpless, as these had tall city walls.

But even so, what was in the villages was not enough to feed them, because many of the common people there had fled into the fortified villages, leaving little behind.

“Achige, if you let your soldiers surrender, I can spare your life. Otherwise, today will be your death day!”

Along the way, Qi Guangyi had been relentlessly pursuing Achige’s army. Wherever he went, the common people would tell him Achige’s direction.

“The descendants of the Golden Tent Khanate will not surrender to you Great Yu Empire fools!” Achige roared, leading his remaining eight thousand men to charge at Qi Guangyi.

Qi Guangyi’s gaze was icy. He drew his saber and shouted, “Soldiers, send these beasts of the Golden Tent Khanate to hell! Charge!”

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8,000 men against over 20,000 elite cuirassiers.

This war was destined to be a massacre. The densely charging cuirassiers spurred their warhorses, charging towards the barbarian cavalry like a mighty wave.

Just before the two sides collided, the cuirassiers collectively drew their crossbows and fired, then threw the crossbows as weapons at the remaining barbarian soldiers.

In the instant of collision, the barbarian cavalry fell one after another, causing their formation to fall into disarray.

Qi Guangyi, seeing this, immediately commanded his cavalry to flank and envelop the barbarian cavalry. After an hour of fierce fighting, the barbarian cavalry was completely annihilated. Only roaming warhorses remained on the battlefield.

“Clean up the battlefield. Gather all the warhorses.” Qi Guangyi was covered in blood. Achige’s body was nowhere to be found, having died at the hands of some soldier, but he was too lazy to search for it.

What he needed now were just the barbarians’ warhorses. As far as he knew, a total of 63,000 barbarians had entered Bashu this time.

Among them, 3,000 either died or fell behind after entering Tibet, leaving only 60,000 who entered Bashu.

But even so, the complete annihilation of 60,000 barbarian cavalry this time was a huge victory.

Because in previous wars, mainly barbarian slave soldiers were eliminated, while very few actual barbarian soldiers died.

Therefore, the failure of such wars had little impact on the Golden Tent Khanate.

For the barbarians, who were currently facing food shortages, it didn't matter how many slave soldiers died. In their eyes, slaves were not people at all, but goods.

But this time, the barbarians, having lost 60,000 cavalry, would surely feel the pain.

In contrast, the current Qi Guangyi would probably wake up laughing in his dreams.

After accounting for losses, the warhorses from these 60,000 cavalry would allow him to form at least another 40,000 cavalry. This way, every army in the Great Yu Empire would be able to be equipped with a sufficient number of cavalry.

Smiling as he surveyed the horses on the battlefield, Qi Guangyi suddenly remembered something. He immediately called a soldier and had him relay the good news of Achige's execution back to Qingzhou Province.

Thus, this Bashu rebellion was completely pacified.

Five days later, the news reached Qingzhou Province.

Xiao Ming finally breathed a sigh of relief after reading the news sent by Qi Guangyi. What he worried about most was the continued destruction caused by this group of cavalry in the Great Yu Empire.

Now that these people had all been cleared out, the Great Yu Empire was stable again domestically.

“Your Majesty, you must be relieved now. No one expected this matter,” Qian Dafu said with a smile.

Xiao Ming nodded. The Great Yu Empire was vast, which was why there were so many loopholes to exploit. Previously, he had not paid enough attention to Bashu, and his precautions against Tibet were also too low.

Now he had to raise his vigilance and stabilize the southwestern territory, because besides being the Land of Abundance for the Great Yu Empire, it was also the region with the highest chromium reserves within the Great Yu Empire, and especially the location of Tibet was where rich mineral deposits were found.

And the reason he needed chromium was very simple.

Because the development of firearms in the Great Yu Empire had now reached a bottleneck. According to the test data provided by Song Changping, these percussion cap guns, after using smokeless gunpowder, showed a low probability of barrel explosion.

This phenomenon had never occurred before. Xiao Ming had actually anticipated this problem, so he had Song Changping strictly limit the dosage of smokeless gunpowder and produce a small quantity of smokeless gunpowder paper cartridges, while still largely using black powder paper cartridges.

The reason was simple: he anticipated that the quality of the gun barrels would not be able to withstand the dosage of the gunpowder explosion. After all, with the advent of smokeless powder bullets, firearms began to use barrel materials like chrome-molybdenum steel, and this material was currently beyond his production capabilities.

Therefore, as long as they could not produce this alloy suitable for gun barrels, the Great Yu Empire's firearms would probably have to stop at this point.

Technologically, they could only develop towards breech-loading, which still required precision parts to achieve.

Having thought through these problems, Xiao Ming felt that now was the time for strategic planning. The southwestern region of the Great Yu Empire was also a rich area for various rare metals in contemporary times. He wanted to firmly control this place.

To do so, he had to deal with the enemy in the southwest: Tibet. This time, Tibet allowing the Golden Tent Khanate to pass into Bashu gave him a pretext for war.

Once he had time to spare for an expedition against Tibet, he could always bring it out.

"Although this Bashu rebellion has been quelled, the culprits are still at large. I will deal with them one by one," Xiao Ming said in a deep voice.

After a pause, he continued, “Oh, by the way, Qi Guangyi captured sixty thousand barbarian slave soldiers this time. These slave soldiers are precisely the strong laborers needed by the mines. You go and tell the Mining Department to send someone to Bashu and Tibet to secretly search for chromium ore.”

Qian Dafu was proficient in prospecting and naturally understood this. He said, “Yes, Your Majesty. I will go to the Mining Department later. These sixty thousand people cannot be wasted. Slaves are very scarce in the Great Yu Empire right now.”

Having settled the matter of prospecting, Xiao Ming felt he still needed to visit Lu Tong. After the chromium ore was found, the related smelting would need their expertise.

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Vast grasslands, merchants departing from Shanhai Pass had already reached Shengdu. Along the way, they also spread the news of the Great Yu Empire executing the barbarian generals.

“Khan, these are the bones of Prince Bodo.” The merchant prostrated himself and wailed.

In front of the Golden Tent, Dolgor’s face was ashen, while Bodo’s birth mother, who had rushed over upon hearing the news, was weeping uncontrollably. At the same time, many Golden Tent Khanate nobles also cried sorrowfully.

This was the first prince of the Golden Tent Khanate to die in the Great Yu Empire since the war with the Great Yu Empire began.

Wuzhugu, Beishan, Anba, and other princes were all present. They stood in silence, looking at Bodo in the shroud.

Bodo had been dead for a month, and his body had already deformed, but they still recognized him as Bodo at first glance.

“Khan, Bodo died for the Khanate! You must avenge Bodo!” Bodo’s mother cried out, embracing Dolgor’s leg.

Dolgor had always been very fond of Bodo, which was why he had dispatched him to Bashu this time. He had thought this matter would be easy, but he hadn’t expected such a blunder to occur.

At this moment, he looked at Beishan, who showed no sign of guilt.

He knew he couldn’t blame him, because it was Bodo’s own greed that delayed the withdrawal this time.

Because according to the agreed time, Bodo should have already led his army out of Songzhou City, but the soldiers outside did not see them emerge at the appointed time.

“My son, Father Khan will personally slaughter the Great Yu Empire’s Emperor as a sacrifice for you.” Dolgor’s fingernails dug into his flesh from gripping too hard. Intense rage festered in his heart.

Since ascending to the position of Khan, all the humiliations he had suffered were brought by this Emperor of the Great Yu Empire. Now, he would lead his empire to destroy this enemy who had killed his son!

Chapter 776

Best kept his composure as he watched the gathered nobles of the Golden Tent Khanate.

His purpose in being dispatched to Beishan was to escalate the relationship between this nomadic empire and the Great Yu Empire.

Just as in Europe, they were implementing a balance of power here between nations, so that they, the British, could become regional coordinators and obtain the greatest benefits.

Although Bodo's death was unexpected, it now seemed to have produced an unforeseen effect. From the expressions of these Golden Tent Khanate nobles, one could see how angry they were.

After the mournful cries of grief, Bodo's corpse was carried away. Beishan then walked from the crowd towards Best.

"You almost got me killed!" Beishan's deep voice was filled with anger.

The moment his father looked at him, he could feel the rage, and he thought that Dolgor must have been blaming him for advocating this plan at that moment.

Best gently shook his head, "This was a perfect plan. Your father knows that in his heart. It's just that he chose the wrong person to execute it, which made you waste an important opportunity. If there was a mistake, it was his mistake."

"Shut up!"

Beishan looked around in alarm. Finding no one paying attention to their conversation, he breathed a sigh of relief.

In the Golden Tent Khanate, the Great Khan's status was supreme. He warned, "Never question the Great Khan in front of anyone."

Best spread his hands helplessly. He glanced at the departing Golden Tent Khanate nobles and said, "With all due respect, does the Prince not wish to become the next Great Khan? Based on my observation, no one in your country possesses a more far-sighted vision than the Prince. If this continues, you will not be a match for the Great Yu Empire."

At the mention of this, Beishan's eyes suddenly darkened. The reason he led troops south from Jizhou and then to Goryeo was to prove himself in front of his Father Khan.

However, each time he thought victory would be easily achieved, he was always defeated by the Great Yu Empire, which also caused his father to grow disappointed in him.

In contrast, the Elder Prince Wuzhugu had always remained on the sidelines. He had no achievements but also committed no mistakes, which actually garnered him more support.

Moreover, he understood that his father dispatching Bodo instead of him this time was also due to his gradual fall from favor.

“The position of Great Khan requires military merit and tribal support, not foresight,” Beishan did not want to speak too much with Best.

While using the British, he had always been wary of them. A country so distant coming here to stir up trouble must surely bear ill will.

If not for their shared interests, he would have long since thrown them into the valley to feed the wolves.

Best wisely shut his mouth. He slipped into his tent with his translator, complaining, “I hate this primitive place.”

On the other side, Dolgor, in his sorrow, gave instructions for Bodo to be given a sky burial.

Six tens of thousands of cavalry and eighty thousand slave soldiers had marched out. They brought no abundant supplies, but instead, they lost their lives in the Great Yu Empire.

For him, this was a humiliation. Since he ascended the position of Khan, the Golden Tent Khanate had never suffered such heavy losses.

Wuzhugu followed Dolgor into the Golden Tent. He said, "Father Khan, the merchants say that our captured generals were all killed with weapons dipped in crow's blood!"

"What!" Dolgor suddenly turned around, staring fiercely at Wuzhugu like an enraged beast.

Wuzhugu's heart trembled. He cautiously said, "This is what Lei Ming, the commander of Shanhai Pass, had the merchants convey."

Dolgor's chest heaved violently. He almost gritted his teeth as he said, "They actually dared to humiliate me like this!"

"Father Khan, the Great Yu Empire's action is a provocation against our Golden Tent Khanate. Furthermore, I have received news that the Great Yu Empire is currently building Juehua Island and seems prepared to station troops there," Wuzhugu said in a deep voice.

Dolgor's eyes narrowed. He said, "It seems this Emperor of the Great Yu Empire has no small ambition. He is preparing to destroy our Golden Tent Khanate."

"I feel the same way. The current Emperor of the Great Yu Empire, Xiao Ming, is rumored to be a very ambitious monarch. The loss of Haigucheng and Bisa Castle in Goryeo alone is enough to show his ambition for land."

"So, it seems there will inevitably be a war of national destiny between the Golden Tent Khanate and the Great Yu Empire. If we win, the Golden Tent Khanate will henceforth rule the Central Plains. If we

lose, we can only retreat to the vast desert.” Dolgor clenched his fists and slammed them hard on the table.

Wuzhugu nodded. He said, “Therefore, I hope Father Khan spares the lives of those two British men. At least they still have some use.”

Dolgor smiled wryly. His eldest son understood him best. With Bodo’s death in the Great Yu Empire, he had long harbored resentment towards the British.

“You have a point. In that case, spare their wretched lives. If they can’t help us win, it won’t be too late to kill them later,” Dolgor snorted.

After a pause, his gaze suddenly sharpened. He asked, “Do you think Father Khan can still use Beishan?”

Although Wuzhugu had always disliked his second brother, now that it concerned the fate of the Golden Tent Khanate, he had to set aside his personal prejudices.

So he said, “Beishan was too eager to prove himself before Father Khan, which led to two consecutive defeats at the hands of the Great Yu Empire. However, judging from Bodo’s situation, Beishan’s loss was not due to his incompetence, but because the Great Yu Empire’s firearms were indeed unexpected. I believe that Beishan, having suffered from firearms, will understand the Great Yu Empire’s way of fighting.”

Dolgor looked at Wuzhugu with satisfaction. He had always favored this son because Wuzhugu could set aside personal grudges when faced with major issues, which was an excellent quality for a Great Khan ruling a tribe.

“Beishan has a narrow mind, but he does possess some capability and a long-term vision. Now that the Great Yu Empire is pressing closer step by step, you must unite to deal with the Great Yu Empire.”

“Yes, Father Khan,” Wuzhugu said.

Nodding, Dolgor asked, “Then what is your plan now?”

Wuzhugu mused for a moment. He said, “The most important thing now is to forge more cannons. The Great Yu Empire wins with firearms, so we will emulate them. At the same time, we must strengthen the defenses of the six cities like Pingzhou, to prevent a surprise attack from the Great Yu Empire!”

Dolgor sighed. If it had been before, the Golden Tent Khanate would not have needed to meticulously defend the cities within the passes. But now, the balance of power had clearly shifted between offense and defense, and they had to make full preparations.

Stepping out of the large tent, looking at the boundless grasslands and the sky as blue as a gemstone, he said, “Be bold and act! Destroy the Great Yu Empire at all costs!”

“Your son will do his utmost!” Wuzhugu placed one hand on his chest and bowed to Dolgor.

His father’s meaning was very clear, from now on, he would be in charge of the war against the Great Yu Empire.

Chapter 777

In the early morning, Xiao Ming was awakened by Xiao Yi's crying.

The little fellow was now over a year old and could walk by himself. Although he still couldn't speak, he could utter a few simple words.

"You naughty boy, see, you've woken your imperial father," Fei Yuer had already gotten up and was gently chiding Xiao Yi with a touch of indulgence.

Stretching, Xiao Ming got out of bed. With a fatherly smile on his face, he walked over to Xiao Yi.

Despite being an emperor, an emperor was also human, with his own emotions and desires. It was just that sometimes, they were better at hiding them than ordinary people.

Whenever he was in the bedchamber, Xiao Ming would shed his disguise and become a true father. Xiao Yi was his son, and he would impart all that he could teach him, so that his son would not be swayed by this barbaric and ignorant era.

"What's wrong? Come, let imperial father hold you."

Xiao Ming picked up Xiao Yi, who was sitting on the ground crying. It was then that he noticed Xiao Yi was tightly clutching a piece of candy in his hand.

Fei Yuer looked particularly happy at this moment. This scene was truly a family. She said, "It's Lu Luo. She brought a handful of candy yesterday when she came, and Xiao Yi loved it after eating it. He started crying for candy as soon as he woke up this morning."

Xiao Ming couldn't help but smile upon hearing this. He said, "He should eat less of this candy, otherwise he'll be calling about toothaches every three days like Lu Luo."

"Indeed. Your Majesty specifically warned about this. Lu Luo can't resist, but we can't let her lead Yi'er astray," Fei Yuer said with a smile.

Xiao Yi lay on Xiao Ming's shoulder. Taking advantage of their conversation, he picked up the candy in his hand and licked it.

Xiao Ming chuckled mischievously and took the candy from Xiao Yi's hand. The little fellow was first stunned, then burst into tears.

Fei Yuer helplessly shook her head. While feeling bad for Xiao Yi, she also knew she couldn't spoil him. She didn't want to spoil Xiao Yi into becoming the next former crown prince.

The two understood each other. After coaxing Xiao Yi for a while, the little fellow, after his crying fit, actually fell asleep on Xiao Ming's body.

At this point, Xiao Ming placed Xiao Yi on the bed, and taking the candy, he and Fei Yuer left the bedchamber.

Playing with the round, pale yellow, translucent candy in his hand, Xiao Ming suddenly recalled the penny hard candies of his childhood.

He never expected that in the blink of an eye, Qingzhou Province could also produce this kind of candy.

“How is this candy selling in Qingzhou Province now?” Xiao Ming asked. Although he had spread the method, he had never paid attention to candy production. After all, compared to matters of state, this was merely a triviality.

“Lu Luo says this candy is very popular in Qingzhou Province. Eight candy workshops have been built. Now, this candy is not only sold in Qingzhou province but also in other prefectures and counties, and even in the Prince of Chu’s feudal state. It has indeed made these merchants a lot of silver.”

Xiao Ming nodded. The ultimate manifestation of industry was to make materials abundant. And he was also using the technology and materials at hand to increase the quantity of goods for the Great Yu Empire as much as possible.

This way, not only would the common people’s clothing, food, housing, and transportation become abundant, but the emergence of candy workshops would also provide job opportunities for some common people entering Qingzhou Province.

After chatting a few words with Fei Yuer, Xiao Ming had breakfast and then left the temporary palace, heading south of the city.

Unbeknownst to him, the construction of the imperial palace in the south of the city had also been ongoing for almost two years. At the current pace, it would be ready for occupancy in another month.

Today, he was going to see if the imperial palace was prepared.

Leaving the temporary palace, Qian Dafu was already waiting at the gate. He boarded the carriage, and under the protection of guards, they traveled all the way to the imperial palace in Qingzhou Province.

Actually, for Xiao Ming, the ideal capital was still Youzhou, but considering the development of Qingzhou Province, he still built the imperial palace here.

The reason was simple: many merchants in the Great Yu Empire came here precisely because it was the capital. If he moved to Youzhou, merchants would surely relocate en masse, which would definitely deal a major blow to the still-developing Qingzhou Province.

Therefore, he would not move the capital to Youzhou until Qingzhou Province's industry and commerce were mature. Only then would he establish his imperial palace in Youzhou, and at the same time, due to the capital effect, Youzhou's industry and commerce would also develop.

Twenty minutes later, the carriage stopped in the south of the city. The first thing Xiao Ming saw upon descending from the carriage was the red walls of the outer palace.

This city wall was five hundred meters long from east to west and one thousand meters long from north to south, enclosing the entire imperial city. Symbolic cannons had already been placed on the city wall.

Caressing the surface of the city wall, Xiao Ming could feel the grains of sand on it. The outer palace wall was built of red bricks, plastered with a layer of cement on the outside, and finally painted red. These grains of sand were precisely the texture of cement.

Walking through the palace gate, one entered the imperial city.

There was still a space between the outer palace and the imperial palace, and many courtyards had been built within this distance, numbering at least over a hundred from south to north, and west to east.

These courtyards would be the official residences of the capital's officials. From now on, officials would work under Xiao Ming's watchful eye.

After walking two hundred meters, they reached the imperial palace. At this point, before Xiao Ming lay a stone bridge. The top of each pillar on the stone bridge was sculpted with a qilin, and its surface was paved with bluestone slabs.

Beyond the stone bridge was a spacious square. At the end of the square, a building with red tiles and yellow walls rose from the ground, which was the Zhengda Guangming Hall, where imperial court sessions would be held in the future.

At this time, Fei Ji was in the Zhengda Guangming Hall, directing eunuchs and palace maids in arranging the hall.

"Your Majesty, the imperial palace will be ready in about ten days. Then Your Majesty and the Empress will no longer have to squeeze into the temporary palace," Fei Ji said with a smile.

Xiao Ming glanced at the Zhengda Guangming Hall and nodded in satisfaction. Now, everything needed inside was complete, and the dragon throne was also set high above.

“Elder Fei has gone to great lengths. The arrangement of this imperial palace still requires Elder Fei’s personal attention,” Xiao Ming said with a smile. Traditionally, the arrangement of the Great Yu Empire’s imperial palace had strict rules.

Now, only Fei Ji was proficient in this, so he had Fei Ji preside over it, to avoid being criticized later. He saw no need to be innovative on trivial matters.

“This is my duty as your humble servant,” Fei Ji bowed.

Xiao Ming showed a slight smile. As he walked towards the inner palace with Fei Ji, he asked, “Oh, by the way, have you conveyed the Great Yu Empire’s household registration system reforms to the other prefectures and counties?”

“Reporting to Your Majesty, it has already been conveyed. From now on, the common people of the Great Yu Empire only need to hold their household registration to freely settle in any prefecture or county within the Great Yu Empire,” Fei Ji said.

After a pause, he said, “Ever since this decree was issued, quite a number of common people from outside have entered Qingzhou Province. Now, the workshops will not have trouble recruiting people.”

“That is precisely my purpose. If people are tied down to one place, the Great Yu Empire’s industry and commerce cannot develop.”

Chapter 778

Along the stone path, Xiao Ming and Fei Ji arrived at the imperial harem.

This was where he and his consorts lived. To the right of the imperial harem was the Imperial Household Department, where the eunuchs handled palace affairs.

Fei Ji followed behind Xiao Ming, a hint of worry in his eyes. “I just worry that this will cause common people to neglect farming, after all, agriculture is the foundation of the nation.”

Xiao Ming chuckled upon hearing this. He said to Fei Ji, “Elder Fei worries unnecessarily. The Great Yu Empire’s grain production will not decrease. These common people heading to Qingzhou Province are those who dislike farming; otherwise, why would they abandon their land and go to Qingzhou Province? As for the common people rooted in the land, they will not leave.”

After a moment of thought, he continued, “Moreover, the Great Yu Empire now possesses three territories overseas: Ryukyu, the Sanshan Kingdom, and the two cities in Goryeo. Now, these three places can provide the Great Yu Empire with a good deal of grain every year. The only problem is how to enable them to produce more grain with less manpower.”

“Your Majesty is absolutely right. The Sanshan Kingdom recently transported five hundred thousand shi of grain, and Ryukyu brought two hundred thousand shi of grain. This has indeed alleviated the current grain shortage. According to Li Kaiyuan, he is also preparing to exchange industrial products for grain in Goryeo. If that is the case, the grain supply will be continuous,” Fei Ji said, suddenly becoming happy as he spoke.

The two walked along the stone path to the imperial garden, stopping to rest at a pavilion. Xiao Ming said, "My purpose is to exchange the Great Yu Empire's industrial products for grain and other raw materials. Otherwise, what is the meaning of the Great Yu Empire developing industry? However, I also understand that the Great Yu Empire has a large population and needs a lot of grain. The grain obtained through exchange is always insufficient, so I plan to promote plantations in Qingzhou Province."

Fei Ji naturally understood what a plantation was. He said, "Plantations require a large number of slaves. Where will these slaves come from?"

"Naturally, from war."

Xiao Ming's expression was serious. One of the current contradictions in the development of industry and commerce was how to transform the Great Yu Empire from an agrarian society to an industrial society.

Britain back then achieved this through the Enclosure Movement, causing farmers to lose their land and thus being forced to enter cities and become workers.

However, while this method worked in Britain, it could not be used in the Great Yu Empire, because the common people of the Great Yu Empire had too strong a connection to their land. If he acted recklessly, it would surely lead to chaos.

Moreover, the Great Yu Empire was not like Britain, with a dense population and scarce land, making it easy to successfully enclose land. On the contrary, because merchants had too many choices of barren land, they would not enclose the common people's land but would only choose inexpensive barren land.

Therefore, in his view, the Great Yu Empire needed a development path suitable for itself, rather than emulating Britain.

Precisely because of this, there was the policy of free population movement. He intended to use the wages from workshops to attract the common people from the land to the workshops.

And to compensate for the agricultural losses caused by common people entering workshops, he would encourage common people to lease, or even purchase, others' abandoned land for cultivation. This way, a large amount of idle land could form small slave plantations.

"No wonder Your Majesty wants to attack the Golden Tent Khanate. When it comes to slaves, no country's slaves can compare to the Golden Tent Khanate's," Fei Ji said.

The Golden Tent Khanate, through years of warfare, had acquired a large number of slaves from conquered nations. These slaves continuously multiplied within the Golden Tent Khanate, providing a constant supply of slaves.

Some officials even jokingly referred to the Golden Tent Khanate's Great Khan as the largest slave owner.

"The Golden Tent Khanate is only one of them. Goryeo and Japan can also provide slaves to the Great Yu Empire in the future, but only if I can make them submit to the Great Yu Empire's feet," Xiao Ming said calmly.

Fei Ji looked at Xiao Ming. In Xiao Ming's eyes, he saw grand ambition. In the history of the Great Yu Empire, no emperor had ever thought of conquering Japan.

Even Great Ancestor Xiao Yuanzhi once designated Japan as a country not to be conquered. This was not because Xiao Yuanzhi feared Japan, but because he truly looked down on Japan's barren land, feeling that conquering such a country held no real benefit.

After casually chatting with Fei Ji about the state affairs the Great Yu Empire would need to implement in the future, he rose and continued to stroll through the imperial palace for a while.

Behind the imperial garden were the consorts' residences. Unlike the grandeur of the front, this area emphasized delicacy and tranquility. Ponds, rockeries, plants, and so on formed beautiful gardens.

After a general tour of his imperial palace, he and Fei Ji left the imperial palace together.

There were still many things to do today. This inspection of the imperial palace was merely a momentary whim. The fundamental matters were what he discussed with Fei Ji.

In addition to this, he also discussed with Fei Ji the decree to encourage childbirth on the way.

In fact, after a long period of internal strife, the Great Yu Empire's population was probably less than one hundred million, after all, this number was the official figure from the Great Yu Empire's prosperous era.

And after experiencing the loss of the Yan-Yun Sixteen Prefectures, the rebellion of the feudal lords, the Jizhou drought, and the Bashu massacres, he believed that a population of around eighty million for the

Great Yu Empire would be good, and this population was mainly concentrated south of the Yangtze River.

In this era lacking machinery, population was labor. Large populations were needed to accomplish great things. And most importantly, he needed population for immigration to colonies.

Only in this way could he truly control the colonies. Otherwise, colonies with only armies and no immigrants would sooner or later gain independence due to national revival movements. After all, that's how history unfolded.

Discussing these long-term strategies, Fei Ji always gave a wry smile. Now, he found Xiao Ming's bizarre ideas increasingly unfathomable.

The time spent inspecting the imperial palace did not delay the morning court session. Xiao Ming and Fei Ji arrived in the council hall before the scheduled time.

Seated on the dragon throne, Xiao Ming directly informed the ministers of the content he had discussed with Fei Ji.

"Exemption from taxes for having more children?" Pang Yukun was also greatly surprised.

Fei Ji had already been persuaded by Xiao Ming in the carriage. At this point, he said, "Your Majesty is far-sighted. Encouraging the common people to have more children is a century-long plan. There is strength in numbers."

Pang Yukun looked at Fei Ji suspiciously. If it had been before, Fei Ji would surely have been the first to object. Now, he was strongly supportive.

Thinking of this, he did not rush to object, but instead waited for Xiao Ming's explanation.

"Senior Grand Secretary Pang, rest assured. This tax exemption is not a complete exemption, but a partial one, merely to encourage childbirth," Xiao Ming said with a smile.

Then he elaborated on his ideas to the ministers. The ministers listened and gradually understood.

Simply put, the world now had few people and much land. Not taking advantage of this to seize more land would be too much of a disservice to his knowledge from later generations.

It was precisely because of Europe's expansion during the Age of Exploration that there were so many white countries in modern times. He did not want history to repeat itself.

Chapter 779

After autumn set in, the air gradually became tinged with coolness.

The ministers in the council hall also put on slightly thicker robes.

Under the effect of the technology crystal, he explained in detail the decrees he intended to implement, which the officials then understood.

“Your Majesty is truly far-sighted and makes us admire you,” Pang Yukun said, bowing, his voice filled with excitement.

Because Xiao Ming’s words hit the nail on the head, which reminded him of how Shanhai Pass was lost. It was precisely because the Great Yu Empire had a sparse population outside the pass that the Golden Tent Khanate gradually grew strong.

Otherwise, if the Great Yu Empire people had occupied the majority, how could they have caused such chaos? This was precisely the problem Xiao Ming spoke of: being able to conquer, but not to defend.

“Long live Your Majesty!” After Pang Yukun, the ministers all shouted loudly.

Xiao Ming showed a slight smile. This matter had been officially passed in the council hall. Next was the promulgation of the birth policy.

As long as he had enough population, he would not fear being unable to defend the conquered territories.

Having finished this matter, Xiao Ming suddenly noticed that Wang Xuan was also in the council hall today. Previously, Wang Xuan was always traveling around and rarely attended court.

Noticing Xiao Ming’s gaze, Wang Xuan proactively stepped forward. He said, “Your Majesty, I have something to report.”

“Speak.”

Xiao Ming frowned. From Wang Xuan’s expression, it did not seem to be good news.

After a moment of thought, Wang Xuan said, “I wish to speak of the Prince of Chu. Currently, the Prince of Chu is collaborating too closely with the French. According to the information I have obtained, five days ago, a French warship docked at Lin’an harbor. This ship was loaded with flintlock guns and cannons. When this warship returned, it was loaded with porcelain, tea, and silk, and also some scholars preparing to study in France.”

“This Prince of Chu indeed has wolfish ambitions! Your Majesty, this Prince of Chu is a major threat and cannot be ignored. You must not be deceived by him!” Zhan Xingchang said angrily.

Fei Ji agreed, “The Prince of Chu is treacherous and cruel. He even sent his eldest son to Qingzhou Province as a hostage, which shows his ambition is not small. It is just a pity that the major northern threat has not been eliminated, making it impossible to withdraw troops to the south.”

“Elder Fei is absolutely right.” Pang Yukun frowned. “But simply watching the Prince of Chu grow stronger is not an option. Your Majesty, we must find a way to curb the Prince of Chu.”

Wang Xuan stopped speaking after relaying the intelligence.

Xiao Ming's eyes shifted among the agitated ministers. The intelligence Wang Xuan brought back indicated that the cooperation between the Prince of Chu and the French was becoming increasingly close.

Especially the dispatch of scholars to France, this was a dangerous move, because it meant that the Prince of Chu fully accepted the French ideas.

Presumably, it was precisely for this reason that the French spared no effort in supporting the Prince of Chu.

Clearing his throat, he said, "All you beloved ministers, please calm yourselves. The Prince of Chu is in the south. As long as my warships patrol the middle reaches of the Yangtze River, he cannot launch an attack. Moreover, the most important thing back then was to eliminate the northern threat, only then can we spare forces for the south. If we put the cart before the horse, it will only benefit the barbarians," Xiao Ming said loudly.

After a moment of contemplation, he continued, "Therefore, for now, we still need to pretend to cooperate with the Prince of Chu and avoid fighting in both the north and south simultaneously. And the Prince of Chu is currently focused on developing his feudal state and will certainly not initiate an attack."

The ministers all quieted down upon hearing this.

At this point, Fei Ji said, "Your Majesty, I do have a plan that can make the Prince of Chu suffer a loss, yet leave him helpless."

"Elder Fei, please speak," Xiao Ming said with a smile.

“Your Majesty once said that Ryukyu and the Sanshan Kingdom are suitable for agriculture, with rice harvested three times a year. If so, why not migrate common people to these places to settle? This way, it can also provide a large amount of grain and fodder for the Great Yu Empire. In my humble opinion, this population migration should start with the Prince of Chu,” Fei Ji said.

Pang Yukun understood. He said, “During the northern war, the Prince of Chu encroached upon a large number of imperial prefectures and counties. After Your Majesty unified the north, the Prince of Chu nominally acknowledged these prefectures and counties as imperial, but in reality, he secretly controls them. Therefore, rather than letting the common people remain under the Prince of Chu’s rule, it is better to migrate them to Ryukyu and the Sanshan Kingdom.”

Xiao Ming nodded slightly. This was truly a case of great minds thinking alike. In fact, he had long coveted the population of the south and had been trying to figure out how to transfer people from the densely populated south to the north.

So he said, “All you beloved ministers and I are truly of one mind. Since this matter has been brought up, today I will speak my thoughts. Firstly, I highly agree with Elder Fei’s idea. After occupying Ryukyu, I already intended to migrate people to Ryukyu. It’s just that due to the late Emperor’s passing, this matter had to be suspended. Now is the time to continue promoting the migration policy.”

After a pause, he continued, “However, besides this, I have another plan: the Equal Field System. And to implement the Equal Field System, it is necessary to migrate people from densely populated areas to sparsely populated areas. Currently, the south has a large population but little cultivated land, while the north has few people but much cultivated land. We can use this reason to migrate common people from the south to the north.”

“Excellent,” Fei Ji laughed heartily upon hearing this. Zhan Xingchang and other capital officials also showed expressions of admiration.

Pang Yukun said, "Your Majesty's plan precisely rectifies the Prince of Chu and gains the support of the common people. If this is the case, then we, your humble servants, will draft the decree and send it to various prefectures and counties, preparing for this migration."

"Hmm, this matter should be done sooner rather than later. We cannot let the Prince of Chu have his way so easily," Xiao Ming said.

Having settled this matter, Xiao Ming had now dealt with all of today's state affairs. At this point, he was preparing to have Qian Dafu announce the adjournment of court.

Just then, Lu Tong suddenly said, "Your Majesty, I have one more piece of good news to share."

The matter of the Prince of Chu had ultimately left Xiao Ming somewhat depressed. Lu Tong's words, however, lifted his spirits slightly. He said, "I hope what you say is truly good news."

Lu Tong, hearing this, said with a smile, "Your Majesty, I have led the students in establishing the Great Yu Empire's first industrial sulfuric acid workshop. The lead chamber process for preparing sulfuric acid has been successful!"

"It's truly successful!" Xiao Ming, who had been feeling lethargic, instantly became energized.

"Absolutely true. I was just about to invite Your Majesty to observe," Lu Tong said, looking smug.

Looking at Lu Tong, Xiao Ming showed a slight smile. This was indeed good news. Chemistry and chemical industry were different. It only made sense to industrialize the production of things that could be made in a laboratory.

This lead chamber process for preparing sulfuric acid was precisely the method for large-scale industrial production of sulfuric acid, invented by the Briton Roebuck in contemporary times.

He established the world's first factory for manufacturing sulfuric acid using the lead chamber process in 746 AD. This method was perfected until the 1850s, influencing a century.

Now, Lu Tong had also established a sulfuric acid factory in the Great Yu Empire, which was undoubtedly a breakthrough in the chemical industry.

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The solemn atmosphere in the council hall relaxed due to the progress made by Lu Tong.

While industry and commerce developed in the Great Yu Empire, officials in Qingzhou Province also gradually began to accept the reforms that were taking place. Moreover, to keep up with Xiao Ming's pace, many officials would regularly go to Bowen Academy to study and learn about the various new things appearing in Qingzhou Province.

This subtle change pleased Xiao Ming, but it was not yet entirely satisfactory, because the Great Yu Empire still had a force that was preventing the wheel of history from rolling forward: Confucianism.

Therefore, after the reform decrees were perfected, he was contemplating how to transform this stagnant force of Confucianism into a driving force for the Great Yu Empire's progress.

This thought flashed through Xiao Ming's mind. He still focused his attention on the current chemical industry.

He said to his ministers, "Since Lu Tong has finally built the Great Yu Empire's first sulfuric acid workshop, why don't all of us go and see it with me?"

"Yes, Your Majesty." The ministers bowed in response. They were already accustomed to this. Now, with any technological breakthrough in the Great Yu Empire, their Emperor would lead them to observe it.

"Lead the way!" Xiao Ming said to Lu Tong.

With that, he and Qian Dafu rose and walked out. The ministers followed him in a grand procession out of the council hall.

Under Lu Tong's guidance, they left Qingzhou City and headed towards the industrial zone. In the chemical area of the industrial zone, they saw the completed sulfuric acid workshop.

Along the way, Lu Tong did not forget to explain to the officials what sulfuric acid was and its uses.

In contemporary times, many people knew that sulfuric acid had a disfiguring effect, but they did not know that sulfuric acid had very wide industrial applications.

Firstly, sulfuric acid could be used to produce chemical fertilizers. The ammonium sulfate in chemical fertilizers required sulfuric acid to react, and phosphate rock reacting with sulfuric acid could also produce a fertilizer called calcium superphosphate, but producing both these types of fertilizers required consuming a large amount of sulfuric acid.

Precisely because of this, Xiao Ming had no choice but to use indigenous fertilizers. Now that sulfuric acid was industrialized, he could try industrial fertilizers.

Besides producing chemical fertilizers, sulfuric acid played a huge role in the metallurgical industry. Many metals needed sulfuric acid for refining and dissolution. Especially before cold rolling, cold drawing, and stamping processes in industry, sulfuric acid was needed to clean rust from the steel surface.

Furthermore, sulfuric acid was also used in the rubber production industry. Now, Lu Tong industrializing sulfuric acid was tantamount to opening the doors to many industries, enabling their realization.

The ministers were only half-understanding, but they were quite shocked, because from Lu Tong's animated explanation, they could tell the importance of this matter.

While the ministers listened to Lu Tong's explanation, Xiao Ming had already toured the lead chamber.

Overall, the lead chamber process involved passing a mixed gas containing sulfur dioxide, oxygen, and water vapor through several lead chambers at a temperature of three hundred to five hundred degrees Celsius, where the sulfur dioxide would be fully oxidized into sulfuric acid.

The reason lead chambers were used was because diluted sulfuric acid was highly corrosive, so the equipment needed to be made of lead.

The source of sulfur dioxide, meanwhile, was the calcination of pyrite ore, or the direct use of sulfur.

Xiao Ming came not just to observe, but also to check if Lu Tong was doing it correctly. Now it seemed Lu Tong had successfully mastered the lead chamber process.

He said to Lu Tong, "Since sulfuric acid can be industrialized, then industrial nitric acid should also follow suit, correct?"

"Your Majesty, that is what I plan to do next," Lu Tong said. In five or six years of study, Lu Tong had become increasingly proficient in chemistry, integrating much knowledge.

Now that sulfuric acid was industrialized, he could use sulfuric acid and saltpeter to industrialize the production of nitric acid.

Xiao Ming nodded. Everything he experienced was actually the process of a national industrial system emerging from nothing. Once the industrial foundation was firmly established, technology could advance rapidly.

Otherwise, all knowledge and theories would be useless, even if laid out before them.

Now, the breakthrough in the chemical industry would further boost the Great Yu Empire's industry, especially in the rubber industry. After all, according to the agreed time, Branden should also be transporting rubber to the Great Yu Empire.

Once he had rubber, he could produce some incredible things.

After observing the sulfuric acid workshop with the ministers, Xiao Ming commended the students who participated in the construction of the sulfuric acid workshop.

The current prosperity of the Great Yu Empire's industry was often related to his initial incentive policies. Now, more and more scholars were entering Bowen Academy, hoping to gain titles and land by achieving success in science.

Of course, the ministers had also worried that it would eventually lead to the Great Yu Empire running out of land to grant, but this was precisely Xiao Ming's purpose.

Because he could logically grant them conquered land, allowing them to build colonies.

For example, the land of the Golden Tent Khanate now was even vaster than the Great Yu Empire's territory. In the far north, there was also the Siberian snowfield.

Through the Bering Strait, one could even enter Alaska, and then the fertile lands of North America. So, he wasn't worried about running out of land to grant, only worried about not having enough people to grant it to.

“You must not relax. I am waiting for you to establish a complete chemical industry system!”

Xiao Ming patted Lu Tong’s shoulder. As the saying goes, “the revolution has not yet succeeded; comrades still need to work hard.”

Lu Tong’s eyes gleamed with excitement. The success of the sulfuric acid industry gave him immense confidence. He said, “I will certainly not fail Your Majesty’s trust.”

Nodding, Xiao Ming and the ministers left the industrial zone. They still had many things to do.

The Golden Tent Khanate, household registration system, encouraging childbirth, population migration—each of these four policies was no easy task.

Returning to Qingzhou City, Xiao Ming and the officials dispersed.

Upon returning to the temporary palace, he specifically summoned Wang Xuan. Some matters were inconvenient to discuss in the council hall, so he needed to talk to Wang Xuan privately.

“Your Majesty, with the Prince of Chu acting this way, why does Your Majesty not lead an army south? Is this not ‘raising a tiger to cause trouble,’ as the saying goes, ‘to resist foreign aggression, one must first pacify internal strife’?” Wang Xuan asked, somewhat perplexed.

Xiao Ming chuckled upon hearing this. “Even if France gives him all its knowledge, the Prince of Chu cannot catch up with the development of Qingzhou province. Moreover, as time passes, the gap between them will only widen. And according to the account books provided by Li Kaiyuan, eighty percent of Qingzhou Province’s goods were sold to the south this year.”

“Eighty percent!” Wang Xuan was surprised.

Xiao Ming nodded, “I was also a bit incredulous, but it’s true. The north has been devastated, and the common people’s livelihoods have not yet recovered. If the south is also devastated, where will these goods be sold? Goryeo is a market, but how can it compare to the wealthy south?”

“So that’s how it is. No wonder Your Majesty has tolerated the Prince of Chu all this time,” Wang Xuan sighed.